People are not aware of their right to education, and beyond this they are unaware of the right to participate, to monitor government and hold them to account, or to influence policy and practice. If the right to education is going to be secured for all, the relationship between government and its citizens needs to be transformed.
Contents

Citizen Participation in Education

Introduction 119

Work at local level 120
School management committees 121
– Understanding the mandate and role of the SMC 122
– Representation 124
– Functioning as a democratic group 126
– Linking to other education stakeholders 127
– Federating SMCs 129
Working with children 130
– Children’s rights clubs 130
– Student councils 132
– Involving children in education campaigning and action 132
Working with other groups 134
– Strengthening SMCs, or creating alternative committees? 134
– Creating groups 135
– Identifying other groups 135
– Working with teachers’ unions locally 135

District level 138

National level 140
Education coalitions 141
Lobbying, awareness-raising and influencing 145
– Using mass mobilisation 146
– Working with the media 146
– Using round table discussions 147
– Using academic conferences 147
Working with teachers’ unions 148
Working with social movements 149

Linking regionally and internationally 150
Mobilisation in the northern hemisphere 151
Human rights, including the right to education, are denied to many because of structural power relations which exclude many groups of people from engaging in civil life. In many places, citizen structures are weak or non-existent. There is no strong voice from civil society to counterbalance political decision-making. People are not aware of their right to education, and beyond this they are unaware of the right to participate, to monitor government and hold them to account, or to influence policy and practice. If the right to education is going to be secured for all, the relationship between government and its citizens needs to be transformed.

This involves working to transform power relations, and includes working with both the government and citizen groups. The government needs to be supported to develop open and transparent systems, which actively engage the poorest parts of the population. And people need to be empowered, to have the confidence, skills and capacity to fill these spaces, and to be informed, no matter who they are, where they live or what their educational background. It is also important for civil society (organisations and individuals) to create its own independent spaces for analysis and engagement. And a stronger relationship between government and its citizens will mean that the education system is well governed, transparent and accountable. It will also ensure that different perspectives inform how education is conceived and delivered. In fact, citizen participation is a crucial pre-requisite for all the other areas of work covered in this pack.

Work in this area includes supporting and developing groups at the local level, providing a range of capacity-building opportunities so that they can become strong local organisations, representative, informed, democratic, accountable and active. The key focus is on school management committees, although it is also important to involve other local groups who have a link, or potential link, to education. It is these groups who can engage directly with schools and ensure that school policies and management are inclusive, empowering and appropriate.

However, citizen participation is also important at the district and national levels, to influence wider education policy and practice, and to ensure strong voice of poor and excluded people throughout the education system. Work at these level focuses on developing deep and broad education coalitions (or strengthening those which are already in existence). This also involves linking with teachers’ unions and other citizens groups – which may focus on different but related issues. It also includes looking at how work at national level can link to local and district level work.

Strengthening civil society or citizen participation in education serves two major purposes. It will impact on the education system itself, enhancing education quality and delivery. And it will also have a wider impact of creating a stronger and more informed civil society, aware of its rights. Those who participate in education governance will become aware of their right to participate in other fora and can use the skills gained in this area to transform power relations and secure other human rights.
Work at local level

This work focuses on the vision of an active and engaged community, which feels strong ownership of their local school, has positive relationships with teachers and other staff members, and an active interest in the education of its children. This active and collaborative relationship will contribute to enhancing the quality of schooling children receive, as well as ensuring that they are able to learn in a safe and secure environment.

The central focus of citizen participation is through the formal school management committee or whatever equivalent body is mandated for decision-making at school level. However, in some places it will be important to work with other groups. This might be because the SMC has no legally mandated power, or because it is dominated by specific interest groups. Therefore, it is also important to consider other non-formal ways that citizens can organise and engage in education, through linking to a variety of different local groups, representing different sectors of the population, including children, women and local leaders.

Local school governance is clearly important, as this example from Malawi illustrates: Before the work of the Nkhomano Centre for Development in Northern Malawi, community participation in school management was very limited. The first stage in transforming this was to train village headmen, traditional authorities and Ward Councillors. These groups were targeted as the power holders – the 'custodians of the dynamics of community-based initiatives'. The training was wide-ranging and included issues of children's rights and gender awareness. It also looked at the roles and responsibilities of these actors in promoting school development and governance. The second stage was to train SMCs and PTAs on their roles, on education issues (such as child and teacher rights and welfare, school timetabling and action planning), and on how they could effectively participate in the management of their school. This was complemented with further training for pupil representatives and teachers on issues of rights and responsibilities. This was accompanied with an education campaign (led by NGOs in collaboration with parents, teachers, chiefs, pupils) to highlight the importance of education. A final element of the project was to set up a zone management committee (with government and civil society representatives) to oversee education operations in the area.

Previously, school management committees felt unable to challenge head teachers on resource management, and for the first time they are engaging directly, preventing the abuse of school equipment and resources. A tracking sheet is used to monitor school materials and facilitate regular stocktaking. There is also monitoring of teachers’ behaviour – checking that they are attending and punctual as well as instigating disciplinary procedures for behaviour such as drunkenness, or sexual relations with pupils. The SMC also supports the design and implementation of the school development plans and this has led to increased enrolment, complemented by the creation of children’s rights club in schools. With the SMC working alongside the school the quality of education has improved.
School management committees

In nearly every country there is local provision for school management and decision-making. This body is usually called a school management committee or governing body. The extent of their mandate and decision-making power varies from country to country (and sometimes within country) but they are the key to democratising education at the local level.

However, in many countries school management committees exist in name only. They may meet rarely, be little more than puppets of the head teacher, be unaware of their role and mandate, or lack access to information necessary to participate in school governance and decision-making. In many cases, a few people, often those who already wield power in the community, dominate them. Moreover, the SMC itself can become politicised, through direct involvement of political leaders on the SMC, or through less direct political interference and influencing.

This situation is made worse because of the social status of the head teacher. They might be the most educated person in the local area and held in high esteem, making it difficult for community members to challenge them or hold them to account.

Working with current committees to enable them to become representative, clear about their mandate, skilled and confident of their roles and able to function democratically is a key priority of a rights-based approach to education. An empowered SMC can enhance education quality at local level. If it is well grounded and representative it will enhance local ownership of education, making the right to, and rights in education a reality.

Levels of induction, training and support offered to SMCs differ greatly from country to country. It should be the government that coordinates and provides such support, but this simply is not happening in many places. This section highlights a range of issues that should be discussed and included in any SMC capacity-building programme. It could be that the local...
organisation itself uses these ideas directly to train and support local SMCs, or that they are used indirectly as a basis for collaboration and negotiation with government to influence their capacity-building programmes. If they are used directly with SMCs it will be important to reflect on how to make this work sustainable, to influence the local government or district education office to take the programme forward. It will also be important to think through how wider advocacy and influencing work can help create more space for SMCs. So, in addition to building skills, attention needs to focus on ensuring that:

- There is sufficient legal mandate for SMCs;
- Key stakeholders are supportive of SMCs and enable them to participate effectively;
- SMCs are able to balance focus on their specific school with influencing wider debates on education policy (see ‘Federating SMCs’);
- SMCs have sufficient information, skills and links to fulfil their role and mandate.

**Understanding the mandate and role of the SMC:**

As mentioned above, many SMCs are barely functioning. They may exist in name only, with two or three members of the local community meeting occasionally when asked to by the head teacher, and acting more as a school fundraising than governing body. They may have no access to school information or knowledge of their legal position or role. Even when the situation is not as dire as this, a common picture for SMCs around the world is limited participation and action, with a lack of skills and capacity to fulfil their role.

Understanding the mandate involves exploring where the SMC fits into the education system, looking at the powers it has and the limits to these powers. A first step is to access official documentation on SMCs. Depending on how the system is designed, this might be available from the school itself, local government or the district education office. The official documentation should give information as to the make-up of the SMC as well as the functions it should play. As well as understanding the legal role that the SMC should play, it will be important to analyse whether this role is appropriate and sufficient or if it should be changed at all – this could be through redefining or expanding space. In a joint document including recommendations on various aspects of education, ActionAid International and Education International (the international federation of teachers’ unions) recommend that school management committees should:

- **Staff recruitment and management:** in many countries SMCs are responsible for selecting school heads and recruiting other teaching staff. There is debate as to whether this should be the SMC’s role, or if they should play a more limited advisory role rather than direct management. This is especially important with regards to the appointment of non-professional teachers, which had become common practice in many areas and is clearly contradictory to a rights-based approach (see below for more on non-professional teachers).
- **Resources:** this includes non-personnel budget allocation, fundraising, planning and implementing specific school development initiatives.
- **Community links:** this takes a variety of forms, including awareness-raising on school activities, mobilising funds, and building relationships between teachers and the community.
- **School environment:** this can involve choosing text books, looking at issues of pupil / teacher safety, some input into pedagogy / curriculum and extra-curricula activities, and monitoring school enrolment and retention.

Some of the functions an SMC may play:

- Staff recruitment and management: in many countries SMCs are responsible for selecting school heads and recruiting other teaching staff. There is debate as to whether this should be the SMC’s role, or if they should play a more limited advisory role rather than direct management. This is especially important with regards to the appointment of non-professional teachers, which had become common practice in many areas and is clearly contradictory to a rights-based approach (see below for more on non-professional teachers).
- Resources: this includes non-personnel budget allocation, fundraising, planning and implementing specific school development initiatives.
- Community links: this takes a variety of forms, including awareness-raising on school activities, mobilising funds, and building relationships between teachers and the community.
- School environment: this can involve choosing text books, looking at issues of pupil / teacher safety, some input into pedagogy / curriculum and extra-curricula activities, and monitoring school enrolment and retention.
An Education System Diagram can be used to explore the roles and relationships of an SMC. A systems diagram is a way of understanding how organisations and individuals link together, and the nature of their relationships (see example on page 26). The first stage is to map out the range of people and institutions that have a link to education; this includes the statutory bodies, NGOs, teachers, community members and school pupils.

Building on this mapping the group could look at where information flows well in the system, what types of power relations exist, where there are opportunities for influence by SMCs, where there are constraints, etc. Questions to help prompt discussion might include:

- What other groups of people influence our school management and decision-making? Who has most power?
- What decisions are made in education? Which of these can / do we make?
- Who do we get information from? Who do we give information to?
- Where does the school get money from?
- Who is involved in making school policy?
- Who decides what we do as an SMC? Do we have a legal role and responsibility?
- What is the relationship between the SMC and the wider community? Would we like anything to change? If so, how?
- How do we ensure that legal space is filled? Is the role we are given realistic? Do we have the skills to fulfil our role?
- Are we happy with the legal role, does it need to be changed?

Reflection on these questions could lead to specific action planning to change aspects of SMC functioning and practice.

They also state that SMCs should not hire or fire teachers, or set salaries, as this should be the responsibility of national government.19

One outcome of a discussion on the role of the SMC could be identifying the need to access more information and training. This could include general education information (on education fees, timetables, policies, teacher:student ratios, etc.), as well as information relating to the school itself (school budget, enrolment, teacher qualifications). See Section Five for more ideas on the sorts of information which would be useful. General information about government functioning, how to engage with government, open information policies, etc. may also be relevant here.

Training might also focus on specific governance issues, such as budget management and organisational development, as well as on specific policy issues such as girls’ education, and HIV and education.20

---

19 Education International and ActionAid International, 2006 (Draft) Parktonian Recommendations
20 Obondoh, Nandago and Otieno, ‘Managing our schools today: A practical guide to participatory school governance’ Pamoja, the Africa Reflect network, 2005 provides a series of modules which can be used in training for school management committees. For copies...
Other activities could be more outward focused, looking at how to extend or fill the SMC mandate. This could include lobbying government and other institutions to ensure that the SMC is able to operate effectively. It might also include linking to other SMCs locally, or up to district and national level to develop a wider movement. If there is no legal space for SMCs, local groups interested in education may come together to create demand for local school governance structures and systems (see below).

**Representation:**
Once an SMC is clear about the role it should be playing it will then be important to look at who is currently a member of the SMC, who they represent and whether there are any local groups which are not currently represented sufficiently. While there is often legislation covering SMC make up and processes for selecting members (this is frequently a mixture between mandated positions which come with roles, such as education official and head teacher, and community members), this does not usually differentiate between different groups existing in the community; thus representatives often include only relatively wealthy, male community members.

It is likely that two issues will need to be considered – firstly, who in the community should be represented in the committee; and secondly, how do we ensure regular attendance from official representatives (this could also give rise to discussions such as whether it is useful to have a meeting space without official representatives present, see below).

**Community representation:** This consists of looking at who is in the community, and then discussing whether and how to involve the diverse groups, with a particular focus on excluded groups. Categories will differ greatly from place to place, and are never ideal, but might include: gender, level of wealth, level of education, whether their children are in or out of school, position in the village, distance from school, occupation, religion, ethnicity, mother-tongue language and caste.

The SMC should not be closed to any group, and should actively ensure a balance of male and female representatives and representation from poorer segments of the community. However, it is also important to analyse whether the SMC is the most appropriate way

---

**EXAMPLES OF SMC MAKE UP**

In Bangladesh (1998) a typical SMC comprises three parents, a community leader and a teacher, while in Cambodia (1997) the SMC can include the cluster head, the village chief as honorary chair, head teachers of schools in the cluster, teacher representatives, PTA representatives, the head of the cluster technical committee and members of the clergy. (Harvard; 2001).

Local government officials are involved in Indonesia, Philippines, Ethiopia and Tanzania, amongst others. And in some countries (for example in Thailand, Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, Argentina, Nicaragua and Peru) children will also be involved.

Legislative changes to school governance models may be a necessary first step in including parents and community members in school management. However, community members are often not aware of their rights to participate, or do not have the confidence to participate. In Nepal, legislative changes in 2001 created more space for parents and communities to participate in the management of their local schools. Following this change, ActionAid worked with partner organisations to build the capacity of parents and communities to engage in school management. In addition, the chairs of the management committees of all the secondary and lower secondary schools of Saptari district were trained on their duties, rights and responsibilities. This involved 70 chairpersons, who were able to learn about education policies and how they are to be implemented at the school level.
for diverse groups to be involved. These decisions should be made based on an assessment of power dynamics in the community and the most appropriate way to manage these. For example, it might be more empowering for the most marginalised groups to have their own space to discuss and analyse education issues, but with an accountability structure which links them directly to the SMC, and ensures transparent and open information flows between the two groups. This is particularly important if there are many community members whose children are not in school; to look at why this might be, and ensure that SMC actions are not contributing to this exclusion.

**Official representation:** Most SMCs have members participating in official capacities – including local education officials and other local government officers, head teachers and teachers’ union members. Their presence is important to give the SMC its status and ensure that relevant information is available to the SMC, and that decisions and recommended actions are taken seriously and have official backing. However, it can also be a constraining element – limiting the potential for open and democratic discussion in the SMC, because of unequal power relations. In addition, if the officials rarely turn up to meetings this can act as a block to decision-making, as the group may not be empowered, or feel empowered to...
move debates forward without official approval. Depending on the local context, you might want to set up a system where community SMC members have space for discussion before meetings with the wider group. Measures to increase official attendance could include monitoring their attendance and reporting this publicly, or to the relevant government official, on a quarterly basis.

**Functioning as a democratic group:**
Bring any two people together and there is a power relationship. Unequal power relations within a group will affect a group’s ability to work inclusively, and to value all voices equally. If the group is trying to enhance local school governance it is important that they provide a model of good governance that can be replicated. In addition, it is important that the traditionally quieter voices are heard as they are likely to bring in new and different perspectives. However, this does not mean that everyone should play the same role within a group – it can be helpful to assign specific roles and responsibilities, as this can make it easier for group members to hold each other to account.

It will be useful to do an explicit analysis of power relations in the group using a *Chapatti diagram*. This will be significant for both SMCs and community groups, where positions of power outside the group will impact on how people relate to each other within the group.

A first stage is to decide what gives people power – and to identify certain categories which are important in the specific context. These might include gender, age, caste, educational background, literacy level and how an individual came to be part of the group (they might be elected or required to join as part of their job).

Group members should represent each individual with a circle. The size of the circle should relate to the amount of power that the individual has in this specific context. The reasons for this power may be represented by different colours. The circles should then be placed in relation to each other – with relative distance used to illustrate the connections between individuals. It might be useful to also include the school itself in this analysis – so the distance (physical or emotional) of individuals from the specific school can also be analysed.

A second stage of analysis could be to identify the different roles (chair, secretary, 

**REFLECT & ANALYSE**

It can be very helpful to reflect on, and expose, current power relations as a basis for constructing a more positive dynamic. There are various tools which can be used to help a group function more democratically. These may involve monitoring contributions in meetings: using symbols to represent length of intervention, whether the intervention opened up or closed down debate, and perhaps classifying participants in terms of age, gender, education level, etc. A further exercise involves controlling contributions – with each group member being given three objects, and having to forfeit one each time they speak, or using an ‘empowered object’ that has to be held if you want to speak. Other useful tools are ones that promote reflection. For example, each participant is given a role to play, such as dominator, saboteur, bored, etc., and within the discussion they have to play this role. At the end people try to guess who was playing which role, and analyse the impact of the role on the group. This can be further explored using a series of listening exercises, to experience how it feels to be listened to, or ignored. Based on these exercises the group might develop a series of ground rules which guide how they will work together, and respect each other.
treasurer) or mandates (girls’ education, teacher quality, increasing school accessibility) within the group. The power associated with each of these roles could be overlaid on the original diagram. If the roles have already been decided they might reinforce, or reduce an individual’s power. If no roles have been decided, it might be useful to look at how specific designations could improve the current power balance. However, it is important to consider the skills needed to play the specific roles, and ensure that the person either has, or could develop, these skills, through specific training opportunities, for example on managing accounts for the treasurer. Roles may be job-shared, so that the different skills and perspectives are used across the group, and accountability mechanisms are inbuilt. This will also contribute to building stronger relationships and trust across the group. Another option is to rotate the roles, in a way that provides some continuity for the group, but also supports the integration of new members into different positions of power.

Every organisation has a lot to learn from a well-functioning group, based on the principles of equality. This local group might influence the way other local coalitions are organised, share information and take decisions.

Why have roles – and which roles to have?

All individuals have their strengths and weaknesses. Having a specific role enables an individual to play to their strength – and contributes to a group becoming more than just the sum of its parts. However, it is important to value all roles equally in order to ensure that no one is marginalized.

Which roles are important will depend on the local context, as well as legal requirements (in the case of SMCs). The following questions will help in deciding which roles to use:

- What is the aim of our group?
- What are the local issues around education?
- What roles are important to help us achieve this aim?
- What are the legally mandated roles we are supposed to have? Do we agree with these roles?
- Are there additional roles we would like to include?
- What skills do we have between us? What are we good at doing?
- What external support should we look for to help us achieve our aim?

Linking to other education stakeholders:

A school management committee needs to link with a range of different stakeholders, including school staff, local government and the district education office, and the wider community and other community groups. The reasons for linking to the different groups, as well as the power dynamics likely to arise, will differ depending on the context. This section looks at the three major groups that the SMC is likely to link with, and some of the issues which might arise.

Local government or district education office

The relationship with the government is likely to be a formal one. In many countries the school management committee is expected to submit meeting minutes to the local government (LG) or district education office (DEO), who are also the body to approach if there are any problems in the school (with the infrastructure, learning materials or teachers) or any specific ideas for school development. The LG/DEO may be the body that provides training to the SMC, and which distributes materials or funding for the school’s operational costs. This relationship can be quite one-sided, with the LG/DEO making demands on the SMC, while not necessarily fulfilling its own roles and responsibilities.
This suggests three areas of work:

1. **Being clear about the expectations and accountabilities** the SMC has vis-à-vis the LG/DEO. Do they have to submit quarterly reports? Is there a zonal supervisor who should be visiting the school? What are the procedures if the SMC needs to make a complaint about a member of staff? Can the SMC expect training and support from the DEO? How can the SMC input into LG/DEO education policy setting? What information should be flowing from the LG/DEO to the SMC? etc.

2. **Rehearsing for reality**: if there are difficult power dynamics between the SMC and the government body it can be useful for SMC members to role play specific situations, before meeting with the LG/DEO. This can help to build confidence in communication, so that the SMC members are able to share any issues they want to raise.

3. **Developing advocacy and building relationships**: often the SMC is the body which understands the local context best, and knows what is needed to make education for all a reality. However, they may not have the power to bring about this transformation, which should be coordinated through the government. This means the relationship should go beyond just submitting reports to actually sharing innovative ideas and influencing education policy. This requires targeted advocacy and relationship building – so that space is created to share ideas and the SMC is taken seriously. Activities might involve inviting the LG/DEO to specific committee meetings, presenting ideas for school development through a variety of media, or linking up with other SMCs or local education groups to strengthen advocacy potential (see below).

**Head teacher and other teaching and non-teaching staff**

The relationship with the school staff is key to a successfully functioning SMC. While the committee is responsible for supporting the school to develop and providing strategic direction, this must be done in collaboration with teaching and non-teaching staff to ensure that there is ownership and that the school context is properly understood. A collaborative relationship with the school will strengthen education quality, aid understanding between the school and community, and should be beneficial for the wider community.

Key areas for work include:

- Ensuring that the **head teacher plays a positive role** with the SMC, is not domineering and shares relevant information with the committee. It is also important that the SMC recognise that the head teacher may not represent all the views of the other staff, and create opportunities for others to attend SMC meetings and access meeting minutes.

- Working together to build positive relationships: in addition to potential domination by the head teacher, relationship difficulties may occur because of distrust of the SMC motivation or functioning. It is important that open and transparent relations are built. One way to do this is to use role play, with SMC members playing the roles of school staff and school staff taking on SMC roles, in order to share their perceptions of each other. This enables groups to share worries and perceptions of each other in a relaxed and enjoyable environment; from this basis people can discuss how to build a collaborative relationship built on mutual respect and trust.

- **Developing systems** to ensure that the SMC is able to fulfil its function of managing the school. This includes preventing possible corruption, abuse of position or bad-practice in the school. It is also important that there are systems to support free flows of information between the SMC and the school, and that decisions and processes are open and transparent. The SMC might work with the school staff to develop a charter, stating what they will and will not do and developing guiding principles for their work.
As part of this work it is also important that SMCs link with teachers’ unions (see below).

**Community and community groups**
The SMC should include community representatives. This might include parents, community leaders, and local business people, as well as faith groups and CBOs. Schools are often a place of mystery, with community members feeling that they have no control over what goes on within the school walls. The SMC can play a transformative role in developing school–community links and building ownership of the school across the community. Key here is for the local community to feel empowered and able to work effectively with the SMC. You may need to spend some time working with the local community so that they feel confident in their role. This involves:

- **Developing transparency and accountability systems:** to ensure that the SMC shares its meeting agendas (enabling the wider community to input into issues for discussion) as well as minutes and records of decision-making. This could be done through public notice boards, community meetings or through visits to other community groups. There should also be annual or biennial meetings where community members are able to actively participate, as well as opportunities for the community to elect their SMC representatives, and challenge them if they are not performing effectively.

- **Facilitating links between the school and community:** through encouraging parent-teacher events, and opportunities for parents to enter the school during the school day, to be involved in specific classes as appropriate. The SMC may also work with the school and community to look at extending the school usage – through becoming a resource centre for locally produced materials, information from local government, library books, newspapers etc. which could be accessed by the wider community; through supporting the documentation of local knowledge (see Section Five); or for adult learning processes, etc.

- **Involving the local community in strengthening education:** this involves looking at issues of enrolment and retention and working with local families to enable and encourage them to send their children to school, carrying out home visits when children drop out of school, or attend very irregularly, exploring the blockages and developing strategies to increase access. It may also involve initiating education campaigns and targeted advocacy, in collaboration with the school and the wider community, to pressurise government to invest in achieving education for all, or to introduce a more appropriate curriculum.

**Federating SMCs:**
A well functioning SMC is a key local organisation in terms of providing local links and generating local evidence for education campaigning at all levels. However, SMCs often exist in isolation, with little contact with other schools or groups focusing on education, and with few links with their peers in other parts of the district or country.

Federations of SMCs or PTAs exist in many francophone West African countries. Unfortunately, these tend to be controlled by government, and are frequently used by the government for political purposes, rather than as spaces to strengthen civil society participation in education. The ideas suggested here are for federated SMCs controlled by the members themselves, and driven by their needs and aspirations. When creating a federation of SMCs, it may be useful to draw on the ideas and questions for developing an education coalition (see below).
Federating SMCs can be useful on many levels:

- To provide space for peer exchange and support, to strengthen the functioning of SMCs and share innovations and experiences;
- To build a district-level forum with power and influence to link to the DEO and influence education policy, presenting a coordinated response from schools across the district;
- To create a district-level body which can play an intermediary role between national coalitions and the grassroots, ensuring good information flows in both directions, and that local voices are heard nationally.

Working with children

Children are rarely included in decisions regarding their education. There are few channels to get their voices heard. However, there is lots of potential within school structures for children to exercise their rights, and be involved actively as ‘citizens’ in their school, experiencing democracy in action. This will not only strengthen their involvement in the school, but will also make it more likely that they will participate in other spaces and be active citizens in the future.

Here are three key ways to ensure that children actively participate in discussions about their education (and see Section Five for further ideas):

Children's rights clubs:

In many countries, teachers are supported to develop a range of clubs, with specific time created in the curriculum for these different sorts of learning activities. These might include sport, music and crafts clubs – or children’s rights clubs.

Key to a successful children’s rights club is having a good facilitator, or a teacher who is supportive of the process. It can be useful to link to teachers’ training colleges and ask to run specific sessions on children’s rights, and running children’s rights clubs. This might include discussions on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, as well as using some of the alternative participatory pedagogies (see Section Five).

In Uganda, volunteer teachers from the community were supported to go into secondary schools and develop School Knowledge Groups. These groups operated on a voluntary basis in secondary schools, with young people deciding whether to attend the groups during their lunch hour. The groups had two main functions. Firstly, they would discuss issues currently occurring in the school – sharing their experiences of being students as well as looking at any problems or good innovations which were occurring. Secondly, they would look at local and national newspapers and pick relevant
**Supporting children’s reflection and action on their education:**

One way to get children thinking about their education is to ask them to model their Ideal School, using locally available material – sticks, stones, mud, wood, cardboard, beans, etc. Children should be encouraged to discuss among themselves the following questions:

- What would I like my school to look like (physically – classroom, toilets, playground, sports facilities, etc.)?
- What would I want to have in my school (books, teachers, friends, etc.)?
- What are my favourite lessons?
- What should the classroom look like? How big are they? How many pupils are there?
- What would happen in my ideal school?
- How is this school different from my current school?

Working in small groups, they could then create a model to show this ideal school. It might be a realistic model, or an impressionistic one. The children could then present their models to each other – and perhaps create a new model which is a culmination of the group work. Depending on the skills and interest of the children, they could write some accompanying notes to go with their model, or they could be invited to present their model to the SMC (or PTA, community group, or local government / DEO). They might prioritise the key steps needed to bring their school closer to the ideal.

A second activity could be to ask children to draw their Rivers of School Experience. Asking them to think back from when they first started school – and think about the following questions:

- How did I feel when I started school?
- Has that feeling changed over time? How?
- What key events (personal or for the whole community) have happened since I started school? How did they affect me?
- What is my favourite thing about school?
- What don’t I like / didn’t I like about school?
- What has made me unhappy/ frightened?
- Have I ever avoided going to school? Why?
- Has the school itself changed since I started? How?
- Has the school / class size grown over time?
- How does school link to my life outside school?
- Where do I think / hope my river will flow to…?

There is value to doing this exercise individually (either using locally found materials, or on paper), and then asking the children to share their rivers. This will enable them to look at whether there were common events that affected the whole school, and what type of events these were. From a discussion of this, and other issues which arise from the rivers the children should be able to come up with a list of reflections on the current state of their school, and recommendations of what they would like to see happen.
issues to discuss and debate within their groups. These might relate to children’s rights, new legislation, current affairs, international affairs, etc. The young people would discuss and analyse the issue from their perspectives, deciding to do more research on particular topics, sharing information with other pupils, or following a specific issue over the course of a week (or longer, in the case of the Ugandan general elections). Through accessing information and debating issues, those involved began to recognise that they had a right to an opinion on current issues, and that they could take action.

In Ethiopia, children’s rights clubs were established in primary schools. These clubs looked at issues of rights and responsibilities, and the children involved developed a set of laws or principles to guide their functioning. The members of the clubs played a role in encouraging other children in the school to act responsibly – looking at a range of issues from violence against girls to wearing of school uniforms, to school and community development. The key was that the actions were child-led and the children were able to work as peer educators, communicating directly with their peers.

**Student councils:**
A slightly different approach is to develop student councils which meet regularly and discuss a range of issues relating to school management and priorities. These councils may look at issues such as school environment and use of space, children’s involvement in rule making as well as discussing ideas for school development, special events and activity days, and dealing with issues as they arise in the school. In some places it can be useful to link the student council meeting to the SMC meeting, for example the student council meets prior to the SMC, but then is given space to report their discussions and conclusions to the SMC. If this happens it is important that accountability mechanisms are built in so that the SMC reports back to the student council what they did with the recommendations. Alternatively, the student council could report to the wider school assembly, sharing the nature of their discussions and involving the wider student body in decision-making. Student councils could follow a similar process to the SMCs in clarifying their roles, mandate and ways of functioning, as well as how they will relate to the diverse stakeholders.

**Involving children in education campaigning and action:**
National and international celebration days can be a great way to publicise issues on education, providing a unifying call to action across the country. For example in Ghana, GNECC commemorated the International Child Rights Day in 2005 by organising a series of high profile campaigns activities across the country. The activities included a press conference aired by all major radio stations and carried by all major newspapers in the country. Children presented special messages to the President and the people of Ghana. By running so many different activities simultaneously, GNECC were able to achieve great media attention and public interest in education issues.

The Global Week of Action is an annual event coordinated by the Global Campaign for Education (a coalition which was formed in 2000 and now has membership in over 100 countries). During the Global Week of Action, which occurs each April, civil society organises various stakeholders from national to the grassroots level to campaign on the right to education for all people — old and young, rich and poor, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality and ability. In 2003, over two million people in 70 countries took part in a world record-breaking *Biggest Lesson*, which focused on girls’ education. In 2004, the focus was on the world’s *Biggest Lobby*, where again two million people lobbied heads of states, dignitaries and officials, with letters, debates and face-to-face meetings. In some countries, children took over the national legislature or parliament for the day, in others, MPs went back to school and were presented with evidence as to why children are not able to go to school. In 2005, the GCE mobilised an
unprecedented five million people to put pressure on governments and the international community to Educate All to End Poverty. While in 2006, the focus was on Every Child Needs a Teacher. Children, campaigners, parents and teachers put together dossiers on the case for teachers, officials went back to school and were presented with these dossiers, and Big Hearings took place. Here children and campaigners took over court rooms, government or official buildings and invited education officials, celebrities and the media to mock trials where the case for teachers was presented21. The Global Weeks of Action are a great way to involve children in campaigning on their right to education, as the examples below illustrate.

In 2005 in Mozambique, the nation’s education coalition, MAGARIRO, focused on a range of activities involving children, including those out of school. The children marched in public places, carrying banners with various messages and singing songs about the problems of education:

“This year we took part in a march alongside other children and we asked for more schools, school furniture, teachers, uniform and light meals for all the district’s children, particularly at our school, for at our school there are some children sitting on the floor in class. These children will get their clothes dirty every day, and this is sad. To this date our requests have not been met, for this reason we would like to continue with the actions aimed at getting quality education for all that meets our needs, to have schools with good facilities where we can study and play properly.”

Delfina Rufino Cossa, a Grade 4 pupil.

Activities related to the 2005 Global Week of Action in Ethiopia were equally impressive. Some 5,000 children from 200 schools from across the country spoke to politicians and policy makers, urging them to address the issues keeping millions of children out of school. Campaigners marched through cities wearing t-shirts and carrying placards that read, ‘Educate to End Poverty’ and ‘Please Send My Friend to School’. Children in had face-to-face question and answer sessions with politicians in their regional capitals. Even the presidential palace in Addis Ababa opened its doors to the child campaigners. The GWA activities were aired on radio and television. To ensure maximum reach, flyers, posters, banners and other publications were made in six languages; Amharic, Oromifa, Somali, Afar, Tigrigna and English.

In 2006 in Brazil, vast numbers of children, teachers and campaigners discussed what an ‘ideal teacher’ would actually mean. Teachers in Brazil are among the worst paid in Latin America, the majority are women and they are shown little respect. The campaign focused on the slogan ‘In education, we don’t improvise, we invest’. During the GWA, campaigners got daily radio coverage, sharing teachers’ stories. At the national ‘Big Hearing’ a lesson was given on why public spending on education needs to be increased. The President himself came to listen to the evidence. In the USA, the ‘Big Hearing’ was conducted at the US Congress, bringing young people from the USA together with former child labourers from India, Mexico and Columbia. The young people joined hands and gave facts and personal testimonies to the members of Congress on the need for all children to go to school. In India, 20,000 children painted pictures of teachers, acted in street plays, debated and signed petitions, to raise awareness of the lack of teachers. Children put their case for teachers to policy makers and legal experts, with some of the most powerful evidence coming from children who had been denied an education.

Working with other groups

Strengthening SMCs or creating alternative committees?
The decision either to work with the SMC or create alternative groups will depend on the local context, and should be made considering the potential of the SMC to become representative, democratic and accountable. The example below illustrates some of the advantages and disadvantages of creating alternative groups.

In Bangladesh the decision was made to form ‘school planning committees’ involving teachers, SMC members, guardians, PTA members and Union Parishad (local government) members to involve all education stakeholders in developing a school development plan because:

The committees were supported to use a participatory process to develop their school plans – to develop a vision of their dream school and then plan how to reach the vision. As part of this process, the committees were also given the opportunity to visit other schools which were considered to provide good quality education. The planning process considered parental involvement as well as how to ensure the participation of other stakeholders. In addition, links were developed with the local media who played a crucial role in raising awareness and addressing challenges.

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE

KARNATAKA, INDIA

In Karnataka, India, School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMC) were set up to challenge the domination of officials and higher castes in the village education committees. According to one primary school teacher, ‘the VEC were not parents and were quite arrogant and were composed only of people who were powerful’.

The SDMC consists of the nine elected members of the parents’ council (three women, two members of the school committee, one from a minority background, and three others) as well as local Panchayat members, a teacher, health-worker, head teacher, school benefactors and two students. Members were trained by the Centre for the Child and the Law (CCL), with the support of the government of Karnataka. Law students helped to develop by-laws (currently still under discussion) to gain legal recognition for the SDMC; and develop information dissemination systems to ensure state-level information was reaching the SDMC.

It was important to keep the state involved in the programme. However, a fine balance was needed – so that the groups could work with the state when it was being supportive and challenge it when it was not. The link to the SDMC coordination forum (which included NGO representatives and the SDMC presidents) was important for state links and to provide a stronger voice. Various factions attempted to undermine the SDMCs, and CCL used the media to combat those attempting to politicise the committees. Continual work was done to protect the space for the SDMCs to operate effectively.

There is still a range of issues facing the SDMCs, especially as training was only given to the president who was not necessarily democratically elected. However, there are also concrete impacts; improved local accountability, financial management, and parental involvement, as well as more active links with the state government. The relationship between the committees and the teachers has also improved; ‘The teachers are calling the SDMC members to the school themselves.’
significant role in exposing corruption (for example publicising a common practice in Chittagong Hill Tracts of teachers employing substitutes to go and teach on their behalf).

The project has been largely successful in stimulating SMCs to fulfil their role, and in improving information flows between the school, parents and guardians. Communities are now playing a wider role in monitoring the school, and this has increased the punctuality of teachers as well as the quality of education in schools. However, the project was not without its difficulties. There was considerable tension between the school planning committees and the SMCs, and the project coordinators wonder whether it would have been better to work directly with the formal structure (i.e. the SMC) rather than create an alternative. Reflections on the challenges faced also suggest that there should have been more active links to the government, pressurising official bodies to increase fund allocations to schools, to overcome problems of lack of teachers, poor infrastructure, and electricity access.

Because this point was lacking, the development plans ended up passing on more costs to parents, who could ill-afford additional contributions to their child’s education. If the project had focused on strengthening the SMCs directly, it may have had more access to and support from the government, and avoided passing on costs to parents.

Creating groups:
It is not always possible to work with an SMC. It may be too dominated by vested interests and too closed. If there is no other appropriate local group, a new group might need to be created, either representing a particular minority or excluded group (such as people with disabilities) or a cross-section of groups who are currently under-represented in community structures. This group might act as a watch-dog, monitoring the formal education structures and holding them to account, or it may be a discussion forum, exploring issues of education and looking at how to influence the formal system to respond to the group’s needs. It will be useful to follow some of the exercises outlined for SMCs to decide on the group’s position, role, process, etc. It will also be important to look at issues such as formal recognition for the group, and potential links and involvement of official personnel. If this is well negotiated at the beginning of a process, it is more likely that the group will be supported and taken seriously.

Identifying other groups:
Early on in the process of looking at local education issues it will be important to map out which groups exist locally, and what their connection to education is. This will involve the standard PTA and SMC, as well as mothers’ groups, youth groups, village development committees, etc. It will be important to look at what connections the groups have with education currently, and whether and how they would like to extend these connections. It will also be important to look at how representative and democratic these groups are. Do they provide a positive alternative to working with the SMC? Or are they even more dominated by specific interests and powerful people? How are they linked to excluded and marginalised groups? Finally it will be important to understand the type of space occupied by the groups. Do they have a specific role and mandate? Do they wield any power locally? Do they have formal recognition? etc.

Working with teachers’ unions locally:
Working with teachers’ unions is key to transforming education. In the past teachers’ concerns, especially those relating to their conditions of service, have been viewed separately from concerns about access to quality education. But teachers are the key ingredient for quality education. If they are well trained, supported and paid (and committed to education) they provide the best chance children have of accessing empowering transformatory education. Unfortunately, teachers are often poorly supported and isolated. They may not have access to the training or teaching equipment they need, they may have to deal with classes of 60 or more pupils, and may be excluded from any decision-making about school...
management or education policy. Building links with teachers and teachers’ unions is therefore crucial to bring their voices, knowledge and experience into education management and governance. If they feel ownership and involvement in the system, they are also more likely to perform well and be accountable.

Historically, there has been some tension between teachers and NGOs, not least because of the role of NGOs in promoting non-formal education and using unqualified, voluntary teachers. This practice contributes to undermining the teaching profession, as well as teachers’ unions. It impacts on teachers’ ability to organise around their conditions of service, or to demand appropriate training and salaries to be able to perform their job properly.

These bad conditions of service have impacted severely on teacher status and teaching quality. Unfortunately, there are many examples where teachers are not performing effectively. This might be because of need to take on a second job to be able to survive, or because they are expected to take on so many duties outside the school (teachers are frequently required to take on the roles of government officials, such as carrying out census; or may need to travel to the capital city to collect their salaries, etc.), or because they have little interest in the profession, and no support and do not want to be posted in marginalised rural areas. This has often led NGOs (and parents and communities) to criticise teachers. This difficult history means that a lot of investment needs to be made to build a relationship of trust between NGOs and teachers’ unions. Working together is not simple, not only because of the historical tensions but also because NGOs and teachers’ unions differ extensively in how they are structured and function. While teachers’ unions are accountable to their constitution and membership, NGOs refer to their strategy, action plan, funders and beneficiaries. However, if this relationship can be made to function huge gains can be made for quality education. Both groups share similar objectives and by working together can strengthen the case for quality education.

Calling a series of meetings to develop trust between local groups and local teachers may be an important starting point, looking at where there is interest in common and identifying concrete actions to collaborate on. This could involve meetings with local branches of teachers’ unions and teacher training colleges to look at how training (initial or in-service) could integrate participatory and human rights-based education approaches, as well as looking at how para-teachers can be supported to become professional teachers (see Section Five).

Other initiatives involve linking teachers more systematically into the SMC and other local education bodies. Often only the head teacher is included in these decision-making for a, and other teaching staff are largely unrepresented. Establishing communication systems as well as opportunities to share in decision-making are needed to ensure the teachers’ perspective is heard. Moreover,

**EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE**

**ORISSA, INDIA**

In Orissa, India NGOs worked with the local teachers’ union in the campaign to revitalise public primary schools. This involved a range of activities, including the active participation of NGOs in the celebration of 2005 World Teachers’ Day. The day was marked by the release of a document called ‘School Education in Orissa – the sacrificial lamb for fiscal reform in the state of Orissa’. The publication of this serious policy paper was accompanied by a range of more accessible materials, shared among a wide range of audiences on the status of education in Orissa, present budgetary provisions and shortfalls. The partnership was instrumental in both the public mobilisation and putting pressure on government for more budgetary allocations to education.
SMCs and teachers will be fighting for similar objectives; to improve the quality of education. By uniting, their voice can be strengthened.

A further local link is with the teachers’ unions or teachers’ forum which may exist at district level. These provide a good meeting space to exchange views and share experiences at a district level, and are likely to be structured in a way which enables links with the district education office or local government. This provides a framework by which to collaborate across schools, SMCs, or other local education groups beyond the local level – perhaps by holding meetings on the same day and encouraging cross-representation at the meetings. Or working jointly on actions to approach the district government and influence education policy and investment. All relationships should be developed valuing the alternative perspectives, and looking at ways they can learn from each other.

There are also many ways to strengthen connections with teachers and teachers’ unions nationally; these are covered in the national section below.
District level

Sometimes the gap between national level and local level is too big for effective links to be made, and it is important to focus on district level as an intermediary body. In addition, depending on the level of decentralisation, many decisions regarding education policy and resourcing may be made at district level. The government at this level is an important target for advocacy and collaboration.

Work at the district level has three elements:

1. As a space for sharing – to bring together people who are working on local education issues to share ideas and experiences, and to access information on district-level activities, policies and opportunities which could be linked to strengthen local work.

2. As a space for lobbying and advocacy – to link directly with district assemblies, DEOs or district government and work with them to improve education in the region. This could include sharing locally-generated research on the state of education, scaling up local initiatives, influencing budget allocations and tracking expenditure, and offering training opportunities to district government.

3. As a space for influencing the national level – as well as accessing information from the national level the district forum can be a space to compile local information and ideas which can then be used for national campaigning and advocacy work. Through meeting at district level, education groups may develop specific research initiatives to generate information for cross-regional comparisons, or examine the impact of particular policies across the district. This can then be used at national level, ensuring that local voices are heard.

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE

GHANA

In Ghana, District Education for All Teams (DEFAT) have been developed to lobby district assemblies on education issues, as well as influencing local opinion leaders and traditional rulers to abolish practices which exclude children, especially girls and disabled children, from their right to education. They aim to create awareness and canvass support for the EFA goals, track education resources, and to influence the planning and implementation of district education plans.

DEFATs have between 10-13 members and include NGOs, CBOs, student associations, trade unions, women’s groups, media, traditional authorities, religious bodies, local council members and parent teacher associations. They have been trained on a number of issues, including using participatory approaches to map out children missing from education, interacting with the community, and lobbying and advocacy strategies. So far DEFAT members include only those who have received a high level of education, there are plans to transform this in the future, to encourage more participation from the community and non-literate groups.
In Nagaland, India the Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act was passed in March 2002. This act delegated powers and functions held by the state government to the local authorities. Village Education Committees (involving teachers, parents, and representatives from NGOs, faith groups and the village council) were given the power to manage the schools. To support this initiative, ActionAid India set up a state-level resource and learning centre to support the government to:

- Implement the communitisation process;
- Carry out research on elementary education, and develop interventions for inclusive education;
- Monitor and evaluate interventions;
- Develop guidelines on the role of communities, and raise awareness of the process at local level.

The centre also provided a five-day teacher training course, to encourage them to think through how to involve parents, as well as linking directly at community level to explore the role they could play in school infrastructure management, monitoring of education and participation in teaching-learning processes (see Section Five).

Although there were some challenges (such as tensions in the pace of work of the state and the resource centre, which has made institutionalisation of the process difficult), there have been many successes – including a restoration of faith in the government schools, and active involvement of mothers and a liberation of teachers – who now see their role as active participants in education.
National level

Work at the national level involves collaboration across a range of different civil society organisations, which are campaigning for rights, including the right to education. This work is about linking to the government, influencing it to place education high on the political agenda, and supporting it with the skills and ideas to achieve education for all. It is also about monitoring government performance, and holding it to account, to ensure that the right to education is not undermined by mismanagement or bad decision-making.

Research, analysis and relationship building underpin much of this work. To be effective at campaigning and influencing work, those involved need to be clear about what they are asking for, and knowledgeable about the political climate and who they should be engaging with. For example, there are many ways to influence the government – and direct collaboration and influence from within needs to be balanced with public awareness-raising and mobilisation, as well as influencing the range of civil society actors who will be able to increase the pressure on government. This might be through one-off events which attract media publicity, or through ongoing research and analysis, or through developing relationships of trust and information sharing. Those involved will need to decide which approach is most appropriate, given national culture, the political climate and specific opportunities.

The nature of work at this level requires collaboration across many different types of organisations. As such, the main focus of this sub-section is on developing education coalitions. This is followed with some brief ideas for lobbying, awareness raising and influencing; and then an exploration of two types of civil society actor who are not always involved in education coalitions; teachers’ unions and social movements.

Coalitions involving a range of organisations:

It can be very powerful to work with a cross section of different types of organisations. This can be useful in two ways. Firstly, it will increase the numbers of people working together on a particular issue, engendering collaboration rather than competition between different groups. Secondly, if a diverse group of people are raising the same issue they are more likely to be listened to. The cross-section of different interest groups can give more objective value to what is being said, and mean that those hearing the message are likely to be more convinced by its accurateness and legitimacy. These types of coalitions can unite unlikely allies and bridge essential gaps.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

In Mozambique, 63 local, national and international NGOs, faith-based organisations and independent individuals working in education decided to come together in 1999 to form the Mozambique Education Network. Membership was also thrown open to the media, academic and research institutions. To propel the education sector, the network drew up a work plan and made contacts with a number of organizations and institutions that are important players in education such as the teachers’ union.

In Malawi collaboration was taken one step further, with the launching of the NGO-Government Alliance on Basic Education. However, civil society still preserves its own space, away from the government, through the Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education.

In Ghana, GNECC includes the Ministry of Education, regional coalitions, policy makers; faith based organisations, the mass media and traditional leaders as well as NGOs.
Education coalitions

A coalition is a group of individuals and organisations which decide to work together on a common issue or set of issues, ‘working together enables members to speak with a stronger voice’. Coalitions serve an advocacy function, as well as providing space for sharing information. The organisations may be local, national or international; they may be NGOs, CBOs or other civil society groups such as teachers’ unions, women’s movements, PLWHA, etc. A coalition might also include academic institutions and the media, and in some cases the government, although this might change the nature of the coalition (as it will be much more difficult to criticise government actions). Coalitions of organisations working on education exist in different forms in many countries, as well as at regional and international levels.

When effective, coalitions bring together the skills, resources, energies, contacts and influence of their members. But when ineffective they can drain energy and resources, exacerbate institutional and personal rivalries and conflicts, and limit flexibility and initiative. Working with others is not always an easy process. Different organisations have different priorities and ways of working, as well as their own decision-making procedures and accountability structures. Like any group work it is important to get the process right at the beginning as this will create the basis from which all other work can take place. This section explores the value of coalitions, and outlines some of the issues you will need to consider when working in coalitions.

Why coalitions? As stressed in the introduction, a human-rights approach requires a different way of working. Historically, the external context (especially funding and interest in maintaining a clear public profile) and internal prioritising have meant that NGOs have often worked in competition with each other, struggling to secure tenders and service-delivery contracts.

In a recent review of education coalitions in 17 countries, commissioned by the Commonwealth Education Fund, it was found that coalitions are favoured by government and donors as well as civil society. In many contexts bilateral donors have stimulated the building of coalitions through their funding structures, while governments frequently find it easier to engage with one voice, and therefore would rather work with coalitions.

Unfortunately, this means that many coalitions are externally driven, with members of the coalitions having very mixed motivations for joining, which might relate to individual or organisational gain, rather than a shared vision and interest in collaborative working. Such externally motivated coalitions can be very weak, with members focusing on activities rather than targets, and with activities driven by funders rather than coalition members. In extreme cases, this can lead to coalitions carrying out a series of activities which are unconnected and not followed through – for example carrying out budget tracking without advocacy, or arranging meetings with policy makers with no clear agenda. The situation worsens when a coalition becomes a funding body, with the secretariat coordinating funding to be distributed among members. Here the dynamics of a coalition are distorted considerably, with the secretariat becoming accountable to funders, and managing the members, rather than responding to the members’ needs and priorities. The coalition is no longer representative; it could loose its legitimacy and reason for being.

This picture is contrasted with internally-driven coalitions, which emerge because of a specific vision and purpose, and grow organically out of common interest, have clearly defined goals, do not have donors or INGOs as members (as their funding will subvert the purpose and agenda) and is accountable to its members.

Tomlinson and Macpherson, ‘How to drive the bus’ (2007).
A human-rights approach implies that there is only one body who should be delivering the right to education, the government. This means that CSOs should focus on supporting (and in many cases pressurising) the government to do this. This is a common goal for all CSOs. As the objective is common, and the target identified, the advantage of working in coalition becomes clear. If CSOs can speak together and agree central messages this will amplify the message, making it harder to ignore. Speaking with one voice means that the government only has to listen to one message – which reduces the possibility of confusion or for the government to have to choose who to listen to when.

What makes a coalition work? Issues of governance and democracy are key for coalitions, and in order for coalitions to function effectively there are various issues which will need to be decided by members. A key issue will be the focus and mandate of the coalition. Are people coming together for one specific issue, for example the rights of disabled children in primary school; or for a broader issue, such as the right to education for all? The coalition may develop a broad goal or vision, and various strategic goals or objectives within this, which will help in working towards this vision. It may have working groups which focus on specific areas.

Members also need to decide how the coalition will work. This includes issues of coordination, decision-making procedures, systems for information flows and accountability, as well as specific roles and responsibilities. This will need to be agreed by the members of the coalitions, as well as the organisations of which they are part. For example, what is the mandate given to individuals representing organisations? Are they able to make decisions in the coalition space or are they expected to pass every decision through their own management? If these elements are clear they will provide a good basis upon which the rest of the work can take place. As well as having good systems, a coalition needs to make sure that the majority of its meetings focus on outward looking (i.e. education debates) rather than internal issues, so that organisations can see the benefit of being part of the coalition, and the coalition does not just become another ‘talkshop’.

Common challenges: While some coalitions work well many, unfortunately, do not. This is usually for a mixture of reasons, and power relations are often at the heart. If some

---

**EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE**

**GHANA**

In Nigeria, prior to the 2000 UNESCO summit in Dakar, the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA) was born. The process started through ActionAid Nigeria, in collaboration with a local NGO – Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP) bringing together NGOs and CBOs working on education and advocacy across Nigeria. The main objective was to develop a strong united voice for the Dakar summit, and CSACEFA was represented at Dakar by a team of six. Given the important role played by civil society in Dakar, CSACEFA was inspired to continue and expand. The network has links across the country, and is led by a democratically-elected committee, with the day-to-day activities coordinated by a secretariat (originally based in AA and now with its own office).

The network has grown over the past five years and has national recognition. This means that representatives are invited to take part in government and World Bank meetings and initiatives, and the coalition is actively involved in education planning and monitoring. CSACEFA also benefits from links with the GCE and ANCEFA (the Africa Network Campaign on Education For All), having played a major role in its emergence. However, there have been some challenges, especially in terms of information flow and power relations, between the loosely-managed geographical zones and the more organised secretariat. There were also tensions with ActionAid’s role; with some groups feeling that AA was dominating and others feeling that AA was not playing a strong enough role. There was a lack of a clear document from the outset which laid out the goal, vision and structure of the coalition, as well as policies for decision making and financial management. All this is now being addressed.
members feel marginalised within the coalition, either because their issues are not represented or because they feel excluded from decision-making processes, it is likely to cause disruption to the coalition. Other challenges occur if systems of decision-making and accountability are not transparent or adhered too. For example, the internal functioning may be undemocratic, and dominated by one or two individuals (or organisations). It might be that the same people always take the decisions in the coalition as well as representing it externally (they may be the ones that are always invited to government events, find it easier to get media coverage, have more funds, better access to information, etc.). Or there may be bad communication between the national secretariat and the members, with members having little say over coalition activities.

In addition to problems concerning the dynamics of a coalition, there can be challenges when a coalition takes on a contentious issue, which perhaps not all members agree with. A position may be taken which does not have unanimous support, or a new issue is prioritised which some members feel is irrelevant. Coalitions may also grapple with questions about funding; who to take funding from, what should be funded, and who should manage the funding. This often relates to wider issues of power and control. Finally, it’s easy for coalitions to become too obsessed with their own functioning and internal power relations, and lose sight of the bigger goal.

As well as these internal challenges to coalitions, there are external ones. For example, coalitions can be compromised through their relationship with government, which may become so close that the coalition is unable to question government actions. Relationships with other coalitions or organisations can also be difficult, especially if they are competing for the same funding.

Education coalitions around the world have been involved in a range of activities including:

- Influencing government policy or discourse on key issues such as: the role of PTAs (The Gambia); partial or comprehensive removal of education charges (Tanzania, Nepal); inclusive education (Bangladesh, Uganda); and adult literacy (Uganda).
- Campaigning and lobbying to end gender discrimination in education, especially in Bangladesh, Pakistan, The Gambia, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.
- Working with the media to influence public opinion (Ghana, Bangladesh); training for journalists (The Gambia); imaginative events with film and football celebrities (Brazil).
- Engaging in cross-country research studies, on subjects such as the impact of cost-recovery or user fees.
- Influencing the development of national EFA action plans, other education policies or the education sector within Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.
- Preparing an annual ‘Education Watch’ report (e.g. the Campaign for Popular Education, CAMPE, in Bangladesh).
- Commissioning studies on sensitive issues, such as the political manipulation of adult literacy statistics in Brazil; or the financing of education in Pakistan, which investigated the reasons for the rise of private schools catering to low income households.
- Lobbying key donors and UN agencies, such as local missions of the World Bank, UNICEF, European Commission, USAID, etc.
- Building the capacity of parliamentary committees or creating parliamentary caucuses (as in Nigeria or Bangladesh).

Education coalitions around the world have been involved in a range of activities including:

- Influencing government policy or discourse on key issues such as: the role of PTAs (The Gambia); partial or comprehensive removal of education charges (Tanzania, Nepal); inclusive education (Bangladesh, Uganda); and adult literacy (Uganda).
- Campaigning and lobbying to end gender discrimination in education, especially in Bangladesh, Pakistan, The Gambia, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.
- Working with the media to influence public opinion (Ghana, Bangladesh); training for journalists (The Gambia); imaginative events with film and football celebrities (Brazil).
- Engaging in cross-country research studies, on subjects such as the impact of cost-recovery or user fees.
- Influencing the development of national EFA action plans, other education policies or the education sector within Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.
- Preparing an annual ‘Education Watch’ report (e.g. the Campaign for Popular Education, CAMPE, in Bangladesh).
- Commissioning studies on sensitive issues, such as the political manipulation of adult literacy statistics in Brazil; or the financing of education in Pakistan, which investigated the reasons for the rise of private schools catering to low income households.
- Lobbying key donors and UN agencies, such as local missions of the World Bank, UNICEF, European Commission, USAID, etc.
- Building the capacity of parliamentary committees or creating parliamentary caucuses (as in Nigeria or Bangladesh).

Education coalitions around the world have been involved in a range of activities including:

- Influencing government policy or discourse on key issues such as: the role of PTAs (The Gambia); partial or comprehensive removal of education charges (Tanzania, Nepal); inclusive education (Bangladesh, Uganda); and adult literacy (Uganda).
- Campaigning and lobbying to end gender discrimination in education, especially in Bangladesh, Pakistan, The Gambia, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.
- Working with the media to influence public opinion (Ghana, Bangladesh); training for journalists (The Gambia); imaginative events with film and football celebrities (Brazil).
- Engaging in cross-country research studies, on subjects such as the impact of cost-recovery or user fees.
- Influencing the development of national EFA action plans, other education policies or the education sector within Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.
- Preparing an annual ‘Education Watch’ report (e.g. the Campaign for Popular Education, CAMPE, in Bangladesh).
- Commissioning studies on sensitive issues, such as the political manipulation of adult literacy statistics in Brazil; or the financing of education in Pakistan, which investigated the reasons for the rise of private schools catering to low income households.
- Lobbying key donors and UN agencies, such as local missions of the World Bank, UNICEF, European Commission, USAID, etc.
- Building the capacity of parliamentary committees or creating parliamentary caucuses (as in Nigeria or Bangladesh).
Areas to consider when forming a coalition:
These common challenges suggest a series of issues which should be considered when forming a coalition. It is worth reflecting on previous experiences of coalition working, thinking about networks, coalitions or alliances you have been involved in and considering the forms they have taken, what works well and why? Specific areas to consider include:

- **What are your aims and objectives** – Why a coalition? Who are your members? What are you hoping to achieve, in the short, medium and long-term, through working together? How will you communicate and describe your coalition to others?

- **What different motivations and expectations exist among members** – Every organisation will come with its own perspective and motivations, it is important to be honest and open about these, to start to build collaboration and trust.

- **Communication** – How will you communicate? What about? How will you balance information flows so as to prevent information overload? Where will you get information from to feed into the coalition? Whose responsibility is this?

- **Coordination** – Will you have a secretariat or coordinating group? Will this position be permanent or rotating? What will be the power relationship between the coordinator (or group) and other members?

- **Structure and function** – How formal will your structure be? How will you incorporate different sorts of membership, for example, organisations and individuals, what about those working on different but related issues, is there a role for temporary and permanent membership? For example, you may have a core membership and shifting groups of allies for discrete projects and campaigns etc.

- **Day to day functioning** – How will you make decisions? Who is accountable to who, and how? How often will you meet? How will you build a relationship of trust and respect? How will you value different people and skills in the coalition? How will you cope with integration of new members?

- **Roles, accountability and capacity** – how will you work together? What different roles will you have? How will you ensure your coalition has all the skills needed, where and how will you build capacity?

- **Evaluation or review processes** – What will you evaluate? How? Who are your stakeholders? How will you track your progress? How will you balance evaluation of the coalition as a whole, with specific events?

- **Links to the grassroots** – How to build effective relationships beyond the capital city? How will you overcome problems of communication (transport, technology, language)? How to ensure democratic processes and representation, and balance this with speed of decision making and action?

- **Power and gender dynamics** – How will you ensure positive power relations? Who speaks at meetings? which roles in the coalition are powerful? How will you avoid certain individuals or views dominating?

- **Relationship with government** – Should they be members of the coalition? What sort of members? How will this influence your advocacy efforts? Are there specific occasions to invite them to?

- **Funding** – Will members contribute to coalition financing? What needs to be funded? Will you take money from external funders?

- **What will you do when:**
  - Your organisation gets invited to a meeting – do you go as yourself or as a coalition representative.
  - All the coordinating group are men, based in the capital city.
  - You disagree on a specific issue, e.g. whether to go to a meeting with the WB representative or campaign against it happening.
  - You link to the local level, but they don’t speak English.
  - Someone in the coalition has used the name without going through the sign-off procedure for a particular statement.
Many of these issues will need to be dealt with as they arise, but it is important to have clear procedures about how to make these difficult decisions.

**EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE**

**KENYA**

Leadership roles need to be clear, as this example from Kenya illustrates. Elimu Yetu Coalition (EYC) in Kenya is officially managed by an Executive Committee appointed by the General Assembly of all members. However, EYC is based within ActionAid Kenya, which has financial responsibility for the coalition, and, having played a role in its establishment, maintains an element of control. Additionally, the coordinator is the only staff member, responsible for engaging with 120 members. The last two years have seen three different coordinators, one of whom resigned after tensions with the executive committee, when it was felt he was answering more to ActionAid than to the executive committee. But the committee itself is described as weak, unable to manage a forthright coordinator.

These competing power agendas have impacted negatively on the coalition’s operation and its image. In the absence of a coordinator the coalition came to a standstill, with members reporting that they were not attending meetings as they had not been called to them. With a new coordinator, EYC is taking steps to rectify these problems, including taking on additional staff and working towards independence from ActionAid.

*From Tomlinson and Macpherson, ‘How to drive the bus’, (2007).*

**Lobbying, awareness-raising and influencing**

Whatever the specific objectives of a coalition, it is likely that members will be involved in a range of lobbying and influencing activities. While the target and focus will depend on the specific context, it is important to use a mixture of activities, to create pressure from many directions simultaneously. There may be specific moments when lobbying and advocacy are more intense (for example, during the budget allocation process) and other times where the focus is on mobilisation, awareness raising or research. At some points, activities may involve all coalition members, at other points one or two organisations will take a leadership role.

There are three key target groups for this work: the public, peers (e.g. NGOs, academics and the media) and the government, and there are many different ways of engaging these groups:

- **Public:** It is important for the public to be aware of their right to education and their right to participate, to hold their government to account to deliver quality education for all. This means that public need to be informed and empowered. The first half of this section looked at work at the grassroots, but this can be complemented by work at national level, working with the media; linking to a range of different organisations and groups and facilitating mass mobilisation.

- **Peers:** There are a range of civil society organisations, from NGOs, to activists, to social movements, trade unions, academics and the media, who have a role to play in achieving quality education for all. Engagement with these groups will focus on sharing experiences and research, building capacity (theirs and yours) and facilitating discussions, perhaps encouraging them to join your coalitions and campaigns – on a temporary (i.e. due to their interest in a specific issue) or more formal basis. You
could also aim to influence the way they are engaging with other stakeholders, or working on education.

**Government:** The government is legally and morally responsible for delivering the right to education. Lobbying and influencing work will focus on encouraging and pressurising the government to fulfil its duty. The strategy and process will vary, depending on the type of government and their commitment to education rights. However, it is likely to include some direct engagement – relationship building, sharing of experiences and research, invitations to see education processes at the grassroots as well as a range of advocacy and campaigning techniques – which in some contexts could involve confronting and challenging the government.

Details about research and evidence building are discussed elsewhere in this pack (see Section Five), while building relationships with governments is explored in Section One. The examples shared below illustrate some other ways to raise awareness and influence, among the public, peers and government. They are techniques which could be used by a coalition, or by one organisation acting on their own.

**Using mass mobilisation:**
Mass mobilisation is a way of putting pressure on the government from the outside, while also creating awareness of an issue among the general public. The Global Action Weeks described earlier (‘Working with children’) are good examples of mass mobilisation efforts.

In Tanzania, the national education coalition (TENMET) sought to create space for civil society to influence policy through mass mobilisation. During one such mass mobilisation, thousands of pupils marched from their villages to ward-level headquarters. Others, accompanied by teachers and parents, went to the parliament. They demanded that the government should take the responsibility for ensuring access, retention and attainment of quality basic education for all. The message was delivered through the parliamentary social committee at national level but the same message was also taken to district executives. The whole process was captured by local and national print media and by national and private TV stations.

**Working with the media:**
The involvement of media in campaigning is a great tool for raising public awareness as well as influencing policy decision-makers. There are a range of different ways to involve the media, through inviting them to your events, or to see the reality at the grassroots, or through providing press releases with key campaign messages. You could organise a capacity-building workshop to share the reality of education in your context, look at the role they could play in campaigning for education rights, and also to help those working in the media to critique the role they might be playing in perpetuating violation of rights – this could be through the way they report, the language used, etc.

In Nigeria, the CHILDREN project conducted a public opinion poll (POP) within a community to enable students, parents and other community members to air their views on the poor infrastructure in public schools in the area. Following the refusal of the head teacher to be interviewed or to allow the poor structures in the school filmed, the NGO moved from street to street interviewing people about their views on the school and what they thought could be done to improve the situation. It conducted interviews with teachers, students, market men and women, artisans, passers-by and traditional leaders. It also enlisted the cooperation of some state and local government officials, who would only contribute to the programme when assured of their anonymity. This POP was aired on the NGO’s television programme, ‘Future Focus’. The programme drew wide participation from viewers who responded through telephone calls and text messages. One concrete impact of this work was the government construction of a new classroom block in the school within three weeks of airing the programme. The state government also moved in to complete abandoned building projects and renovate all the dilapidated buildings in the school.
Using round-table discussions:
Round table is a term often used for a group
discussion, especially in high-level meetings
or conferences. Using the term ‘round table’
can give a discussion a higher status, which
can be useful for advocacy and lobbying
purposes. Outcomes of the discussion are
more likely to be picked up in the media, or
listened to by government; and people are
more likely to attend an event which is seen
to have higher credibility.

Discussions can involve a range of different
actors, either just from civil society
organisations, or representing a variety of
sectors. Choices about who to invite will
depend on the focus of the discussion, as
well as the context and timing. It is usual to
limit round table discussions to 20-30
participants, to enable each person to
contribute effectively. Discussions should be
documented and followed up with a
dissemination plan – to share the results of
the discussion more widely.

In Ghana, AAI Ghana supported the Ghana
National Education Campaign Coalition
(GNECC) to organise a round table in 2005 at
the end of which it issued a communiqué
calling on the government to intensify its
effort to make education really free. This
influenced the government’s White Paper on
the Education Review Committee Report as
well as the introduction of ‘capitation grants’
to schools.

Using academic conferences:
In many countries, academia has a powerful
role to play in influencing the government.
The power of academic research means that
universities and researchers are often given
space and listened to in a way that eludes
NGOs and activists. Conferences might last a
day or longer, and could involve a range of
academics from different national institutions,
or even from beyond the national borders. A
conference can also be a useful opportunity
to build understanding between academics
and civil society activists, and to explore
ways that the two groups can collaborate
together.

In Pakistan, AAI organised a national
workshop in November 2005 with eminent
educationists, academics and intellectuals.
The overall objective of the conference was to
challenge neo-liberal social and economic
reforms, which resulted in the privatisation of
education and exclusion of poor children. The
conference focused on the degree to which
neo-liberal reforms are changing the
educational system; on the World Bank-
sponsored higher education reforms, which
controversially trigger privatization of higher
education. The critical questions identified in
the conference formed the basis for further
research and policy debate.

These national advocacy strategies can be
complemented by work at the international
level, see below.

In April 2006, senior representatives
from Education International (the global
federation of teachers’ unions) and
ActionAid International met for three
days to look at key issues in education.
Based on a commitment to quality
public education for all, the
representatives developed
recommendations across seven areas
in education: macro-economics and the
IMF, para-teachers, education and HIV,
school-level governance, violence
against girls in schools, privatisation,
and building a code of ethics. These
recommendations, known as the
Parktonian Recommendations, are now
being used at national level to enable
NGOs and teachers’ unions to work
together. For example, in Malawi,
ActionAid and the teachers’ union have
developed a national strategy for joint
working. The political ownership at
international level has helped create the
space and motivation for collaboration
at national and local levels. However, it
is still important that the
recommendations are discussed and
reviewed at national and local levels, to
ensure that they are appropriate given
the context and culture.
Working with teachers’ unions

Teachers’ unions have the potential to be a powerful force in transforming education and achieving education for all. They represent a large group of education stakeholders, are generally well-organised and have good links with the government, suggesting that they have both legitimacy and voice.

Discussions in the local level section highlighted the historical tensions between teachers’ unions and NGOs. However, if these can be overcome there will be a stronger voice for the right to quality education. Education coalitions can benefit from their involvement with teachers because they will bring a new perspective, a powerful voice and good local links. Teachers’ unions can benefit from their links with education coalitions because they bring a cross-section of different education stakeholders, have expertise in advocacy and campaigning, and are working to transform the education system more broadly, to create a situation where teachers are able to teach.

Taking a human rights-based approach forces the issue of engaging with teachers’ unions. Not only are the fundamental interests (that of a commitment to quality public education for all) shared, but also if the groups are not able to collaborate there is a danger that the actions of civil society groups might undermine the rights of teachers (or vice-versa). Government may listen to one body over the other, implicitly denying the other its right to speak and be heard on education issues. And either group may push for a policy which negatively impacts other education stakeholders, through lack of knowledge of their position or perspective.

As mentioned earlier, the 2006 Global Week of Action focused their campaign on Every Child Needs a Teacher. This was a key rallying call for teachers and other civil society actors to work together on an issue which was clearly important to all education stakeholders. In order to build strong links with teachers’ unions it is important to develop inclusive positions, which have broad appeal, so that each group can work from their own perspective.

A recent meeting brought together the key political leaders (presidents, secretary generals, women’s coordinators) from the main teachers’ unions in Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia with ActionAid staff to look at strengthening teachers’ unions in Anglophone West Africa. A key focus of the meeting was to look at the role teachers’ organisations can play in eliminating corruption, as well as building the advocacy and campaign skills of teachers’ organisations. This meeting led to concrete planning about how ActionAid and teachers’ unions could work together at national and sub-regional level on research, policy analysis, capacity building and advocacy, to pressurise the government to achieve EFA.

This regional meeting was a good ice-breaker, the first step in collaboration, which will inevitably evolve differently at national level as each country has its own context and history.

Following the meeting, concrete steps have been taken to work together at national level. For example, in Nigeria ActionAid provided a one-week training workshop for over 100 teachers’ union officials from across the 36 states. The teachers’ unions contributed 80 per cent of the funding, while AAI Nigeria contributed the technical capacity. The workshop participants are currently putting their learning into practice, and the intention is to run a second workshop next year, focusing on influencing education policy.
Working with social movements

As well as collaboration with education stakeholders, it is also important to link to other civil society activists. Education rights cannot be dealt with in isolation. The reasons some groups are denied their right to education are complex and have to do with wider issues of structural inequalities. Linking to social movements can help deepen your understanding of the wider social issues, and how they impact on education, as well as accessing a wider potential audience and links to power structures, enabling social movements to integrate education issues into their work. This is particularly the case with identity-based movements who will be able to speak with legitimacy and mandate on issues affecting their particular group.

As always, it is important that this relationship is developed with mutual trust and respect, and that good mechanisms are put into place to ensure information flows and accountability. Specific social movements may be particularly relevant at particular times – for example linking with women’s movements might support your work on girls’ education; linking with HIV coalitions, could extend your understanding of how education and HIV inter-relate; and linking with movements for economic justice could be crucial in your work on budget analysis and budget tracking. A further benefit of linking to social movements is to create a general space for learning and reflection as to what makes movements work, and use this to strengthen your own work.

Social movements can also play a useful monitoring role for education coalitions, ensuring that positions and priorities reflect the realities of the most poor and marginalised. For example, the National Campaign for Education in Brazil was started up by urban-based groups and was very strong in Rio and Sao Paulo but had few rural links. In contrast the Landless Peoples’ Movement (MST) was concerned with rural education, especially for their membership who had occupied abandoned land. It was not until 2003/4 that MST joined the education campaign and this led to new issues being put on the agenda.
Linking regionally and internationally

As well as national level coalitions it is also important to link regionally and internationally. This can help inspire those working at the national level – to feel part of something bigger, more dynamic and exciting, while also offering an opportunity to raise the profile of education, through coordinated action. Moreover, linking across borders helps bring out the common issues which impact on education around the world, as well as increasing the pressure on international and bilateral actors.

The Global Campaign for Education is a coalition of a range of civil society actors, including teachers’ unions, NGOs specialising on education and those focusing on children’s rights. Its small secretariat focuses on lobbying and advocacy work; organising the annual Global Week of Action; as well as coordinating research on a range of issues in education, such as HIV and education, adult literacy, and teacher training. Every year the GCE links with millions of people around the world for the Global Week of Action, where everyone, from children to teachers to government ministers, is encouraged to campaign for education for all.

Regional bodies such as ANCEFA (Africa) ASPBAE (Asia) and CEEAL (Latin America) are also useful reference points for education campaigning, ensuring that countries across a region are able to speak with a collective voice on issues which impact them.

In addition to traditional lobbying techniques, such as meetings with individual parliamentarians, the Commonwealth Education Fund coordinators across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, along with India’s National Coalition on Education, decided to organise a regional conference, bringing together parliamentarians from the three countries to encourage parliamentarians to discuss education issues.

The two-day conference was attended by 17 parliamentarians and 100 members of civil society. Discussions focused on the common challenges facing education across the three countries, experiences (from the civil society perspective) of engaging with legislators on education initiatives, and the different ways civil society use to support the right to education. The role of civil society in researching and informing parliamentarians and political parties was highlighted, touching on issues such as how civil society should try and influence party manifestos, and ensure that their demands are backed up by rigorously researched information – such as the results of budget analysis. A final session brought in 50 students from schools across Delhi to interact with the parliamentarians, asking challenging questions on a range of issues, including the relative priorities of education and defence in the national budgets; the role of children in policy formulation and the position of women in India.

The conference had been organised to raise parliamentarians’ interest in education, and a surprise result was the decision by the parliamentarians to form a ‘South Asian Parliamentarians Forum for Education’ (SAPFE), inviting parliamentarians from Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan to join them, with Bangladesh hosting the secretariat. The forum is planning a range of activities to move education up the political agenda, while recognising the need to tackle the wider issues of gender equality, minority rights, child labour and disadvantaged communities if education is to become a reality for all.
Mobilisation in the northern hemisphere

Advocacy and campaigning in the southern hemisphere can be complemented by action in the Global North. This serves two major purposes. Firstly, to influence northern governments and raise awareness among the general public in the North of key development issues. Through encouraging the involvement and activism of the general public in the North it is hoped that northern donors will be pressurised to increase their aid budgets, or spend their money differently. Secondly, this international exposure and action will put pressure on governments in the Global South, encouraging them to reflect on their current spending plans and priorities.

The Global Week of Action is a good example of coordinated action which takes place across the globe. For example, the Irish Coalition for GCE actively participated in the ‘Send My Friend to School’ campaign. Primary Schools and youth clubs explored the exclusion of children, particularly girls, from school and made cut-out ‘friends’ to be sent to the G8 Summit. A public awareness-raising event at the General Post Office in Dublin to post the ‘Irish Friends to the G8’ was a huge success. Secondary school students engaged with the issue through the Civic, Social and Political curriculum and invited local politicians ‘back to school’. In one school, the Minister for Development Cooperation, Mr. Lenihan, signed a pledge to ensure that the Irish Government meets its commitment to increase Overseas Development Aid to 0.7 per cent of GNP and to increase its spending on education accordingly.

It can also be important to make links between domestic education issues in the North and international education policies. In early 2005, ActionAid International USA, in partnership with the AAI Education Team and Just Associates (JASS), began an initiative designed to shape and inform future education advocacy. The initial phase of the project focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the possible intersections between international education policies and US domestic education issues and politics, identifying advocacy gaps and opportunities and starting to build relationships with potential partners. Background research was complemented with open-ended consultations with over 40 informants from NGOs, community groups, think tanks, advocacy networks, and funders. The second phase of the project was a round table discussion, enabling the range of informants to analyse the issues further and think through the challenges and opportunities of building a solidarity initiative.23

---
