



Photo: Mozambique, Elsebeth Aller

CONCEPT PAPER

QUALITY EDUCATION

Oxfam is guided by “Universal and Equitable access to Quality Education” and also the fact that “lack of access and poor quality of education have serious consequences for especially girls and women” (Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019)..

In November 2016, in Copenhagen, in a meeting convened by Oxfam IBIS, Oxfam constituted an “Education Community of Practice and Influence” agreeing that “Strengthening transformative public education for all to fight inequality” is the overall goal of our future education work.

Achieving this goal will:

1. Have a straight redistributive impact – putting ‘virtual income’ into the pocket of poor and marginalized people – particularly in relation to girls and women.
2. Enhance social mobility.
3. Strengthen political mobilization - a transformative, quality education leads to knowing your rights and responsibilities, having a voice, being able to participate and organize, and building active citizenship for children, youth and adults.

This series of Oxfam IBIS concept papers define the Oxfam IBIS’ understanding and approach in key areas.

Each paper contains the following sections:

- A) **Justification** for Oxfam IBIS’ work on the issue
- B) Brief overview of relevant **theories and definitions**
- C) Presentation of **Oxfam IBIS’ approach** and lessons learned
- D) References to **further documentation**

JUSTIFICATION

Oxfam IBIS' Education for Change strategy focuses on two strategic lines of action, namely Quality Education and Education Policy and Financing. The present concept paper describes Oxfam IBIS' understanding of Quality Education, in the strategy defined as follows: "Quality education, formal and non-formal, supports the cognitive, creative, emotional and practical skills development of all learners. This is achieved through active participation in the learning processes. The objective of quality education is to empower the individual and the collective to apply what they have learned to their lives as active and responsible citizens, to make their own choices and decisions, and to participate in democratic processes at local, national and global level. Quality education is based on the participants' own former knowledge, experiences, language, history and culture, but it also expands participants' understanding, sometimes challenging existing structures and views."

Quality Education is first and foremost a human right, agreed upon in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), and reinforced by a number of international conventions. In addition to being a human right in itself, the right to education is also an enabling right that can help change people's lives. Because of its enabling quality, many other human rights are linked to the right to education - such as the right to freedom from forced labour, the right to work, gender equality and the right to participation in decision-making. Oxfam IBIS therefore, in accordance with the strategy: "considers the fulfilment of individual and collective rights to quality education for children, youth and adults a cornerstone in the struggle against poverty and in the development of social justice and sound democracies." However, in Oxfam IBIS' view, not all types of education have this socially transformative character. Education is political, and has always been a powerful instrument in social exclusion, oppression and cultural, ethnic and gender discrimination, both in the developed and developing world. Oxfam IBIS' strategy therefore builds on the concept of transformative quality education. Quality Education according to Oxfam IBIS should include a transformative approach that "empowers learners and enables them to constructively consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives in dialogue with others, and gives them the skills to engage in social actions."

The education gap between developed and developing countries and between rich and poor in developing countries is immense. The formal and non-formal education that exists in many countries does not have much to do with the concept of Quality Education. The international community, through Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has pursued varied strategies to ensure access to education, but not enough attention has been accorded the quality component of education. Access to education has increased in many countries, but unfortunately at the expense of quality. Increased access has often been achieved by allowing too many learners in one classroom or by letting formal teacher education be minimised (e.g. from 3 years to 1 year). In fact, with only a few years left to meet the deadline of EFA, the international community now talks of a 'global learning crisis'. 250 million children are not learning basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. Likewise, millions of youth and adults have received non-formal literacy courses, but have not reached any fluency in reading. The importance of Quality Education for All for all of these people in the process of becoming active citizens is more obvious than ever, and is therefore at the core of Oxfam IBIS' education work.

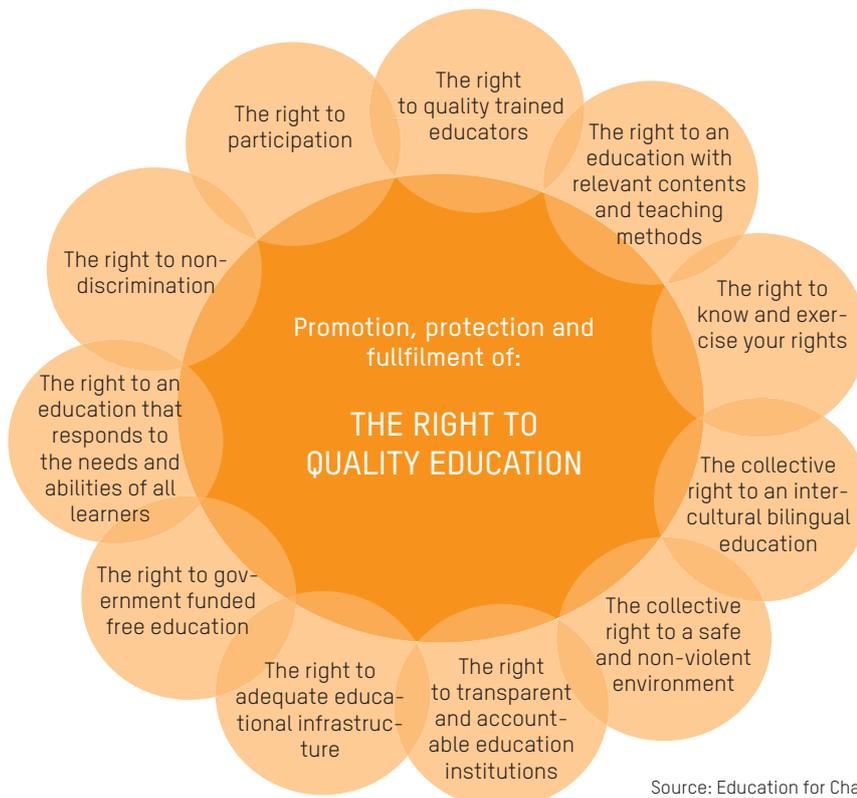
THEORIES AND DEFINITIONS

THE RIGHTS BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS

Oxfam IBIS’ strategy on Education for Change is founded on a Rights-Based Approach (RBA) clearly marked by a conscious use of the frame set by both the legally binding instruments in the Human Rights complex and political tools of commitment such as EFA and the MDGs. When using RBA in education, development is seen as a combination of the economic, social, cultural and political processes of achieving the realisation of individual and collective educational rights and commitments. Also intertwined with this is the empowerment of people and their organisations to gain political influence and social justice. Oxfam IBIS’ strategy focusses on the right to free, relevant quality education for all women, men, girls and boys, their right to be involved in decisions affecting their own lives and their right to organise themselves in order to further secure and develop these rights and commitments. Oxfam IBIS considers the 3 following aspects as interlinked and essential to include in all Oxfam IBIS’ formal or non-formal education work:

- The right to education (the human right to free quality education)
- Rights in education (the content, the teaching methods, the language of the teaching, the teacher-learner relationship, teaching-learning materials reflecting the equal rights of all human beings (including gender, ethnic, religious, political groups etc.), non-discrimination etc)
- Rights through education (education as an enabling right that opens up for the fulfilment of other rights).

THE RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION



Source: Education for Change strategy IBIS 2011-2017

The quality of formal education systems for primary and lower secondary education is the basis for achieving the expected learning outcomes for children. Participation in formal quality education as a child or during adolescence is the most effective base for developing skills and values needed for adult life and future work. However, many children do not receive quality education, and this leaves young people without the skills they need. In addition to basic education, youth should be offered Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) to prepare them for employment, and youth and their organisations need to be empowered in order for them to participate actively in society, advocating and demanding their rights to quality education. Adult illiteracy rates are alarmingly high (774 million, and two-thirds of them women). Adult literacy is a right in itself, and also has a strong effect on self-esteem, democratic participation, earnings, health and success in securing the education of one’s own children.

KEY ELEMENTS IN QUALITY EDUCATION

The following overview of Quality Education outlines the essential elements that need to be present for education to be defined as quality education. The overview is presented below, and each element will be described in further detail in the following section of the paper. Several of the elements are also covered more fully in separate concept papers.



OXFAM IBIS’ APPROACH

Quality Education is a long term objective. The characteristics and principles of Quality Education are what Oxfam IBIS and partners consciously work towards in all their implementation and advocacy. But achieving Quality Education in Oxfam IBIS’ and partners’ work is a long term process of piloting and trying out, for example, curriculum changes, methodologies and professional development, then reflecting on the experiences gained, applying and documenting new learning in order to use it for dissemination, institutionalisation and advocacy, based on the experiences gained and models developed. Instead of only holding governments responsible for achieving Quality Education, and being the critical, analytical watchdog, Oxfam IBIS also sees its role and that of its partners as one of experimenting, piloting and developing evidence in order to demonstrate to governments how it is possible to deliver quality education (see the Change Triangle). The ultimate outcome of

quality education should be for learners to achieve desired learning outcomes as defined in accordance with local and national contexts. This also reflects the fact that the program and project work of Oxfam IBIS and partners cannot be measured only against the ideal definition and principles of Quality Education. Each thematic program therefore has to define its own benchmarks and indicators in relation to Quality Education, based on the context, and use them to monitor progress.

A TRANSFORMATIVE AND LEARNING CENTRED APPROACH

Transformative Education is a central concept in Oxfam IBIS' Education for Change strategy, where it is defined as follows: 'Transformative education empowers learners and enables them to constructively consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives in dialogue with others and gives them the skills to engage in social actions'. From Oxfam IBIS' point of view, education is never neutral, but a powerful political instrument to create either exclusion and oppression or positive change, such as increased equality, peace and democracy. For education to contribute to positive social, cultural and economic development, it needs to be transformative. Oxfam IBIS has over the years developed a transformative approach to education that addresses both the curriculum, content of education and teaching methodologies. Transformative teaching methodologies are 'learning centred'. From a transformative point of view, the learner has a fundament of knowledge when entering any educational activity. The educator's duty is to generate engaging and relevant learning experiences where learners examine their prior knowledge and modify, review, affirm or change it into new knowledge, based on their interactions with the world and use of different learning resources. This is only possible through a participatory critical learning process. Interactive teaching can include activities like working in groups or pairs, journal writing, role play, drama, songs, dances, etc. These methods should stimulate critical reflection, empathy and autonomous thinking in the learner. Transformative education also includes Active citizenship education, which aims at strengthening learners' inclination to participate in society and to engage in policy debates about issues of concern for them. Citizenship education includes a curriculum on themes such as human rights, the rights of children, democratic values, gender equality, tolerance and non-discrimination. It also encompasses learning the skills of democratic dialogue and participation and engaging in advocacy towards decision makers for the fulfilment of rights.

QUALIFIED AND MOTIVATED EDUCATORS

Quality Education cannot be achieved without quality educators. If attention is paid to quality pre-and in-service teacher training, acknowledgement of the importance of the job of the educator, quality continuous supervision, adequate salaries and other benefits, substantial improvements can be made in formal as well as in non-formal education. Educators are at the heart of achieving quality education. They are the role models and the key to unlocking learners' potential, whether these are children, youth or adults. The relation between the learner and the educator is crucial in all education both formal and non-formal. Without well trained, committed and empathetic educators leading a process of inquiry and investigation, education will fail to be either empowering or of high quality. Educators should have a basic knowledge themselves of the subject and content in which they will be teaching or facilitating learning. Learning basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics as well as other relevant subject matter is a condition for the educator to be able to facilitate learning. An educator should also learn how to teach: how learning takes place and how to apply different methodologies relevant to various types of learners and subject matters. The ideal educator should also be able to create a safe and trusting environment in the classroom and know how to promote active citizenship, a democratic culture, and tolerance and respect, including gender equality, for all learners. Oxfam IBIS prioritises the continuous professional

development of educators in all education interventions and where possible supports relevant actors in improving the working conditions of educators. Oxfam IBIS' work with educators includes: educators' continuous professional development related to both formal and non-formal education, including support for pedagogical supervision, practical training based on the reality of educators, peer learning and the introduction of learning methods and use of learning materials, all aimed at developing educators who are reflective practitioners.

MOTHER TONGUE AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Oxfam IBIS emphasizes that Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education constitutes an important element in quality education. It is based on cultural and linguistic plurality, essential qualities for meeting the needs of peoples in both Africa and Latin America. Mother Tongue instruction, combined with relevant methodologies aimed at active learning, has a number of advantageous results: increased access and equity, also related to gender; improved learning outcomes; reduced repetition and drop-out rates; socio-cultural benefits, and lower overall costs. Even where an important goal of education is to learn e.g. a second national language, this too is facilitated by starting schooling in the mother tongue. Oxfam IBIS understands Bilingual Education as an education that includes both mother tongue education and education in the relevant second language. Mother Tongue – Bilingual Education is when the learners start their education in their mother tongue, and the second language (e.g. English, French, Spanish or Portuguese) is introduced after some years by educators who are trained in second language pedagogy. The educator should preferably be able to teach in the learners' own language (and where relevant also the national language as a second language) and have the skills to manage multilingual and multicultural classrooms. The important thing is then, as a minimum, that the teaching done in the national language is done as second language instruction. Without this, millions of children, youth and adults in Africa and Latin America will not achieve the learning outcomes aimed at.

INCLUSION AND GENDER EQUALITY

Education for Change is inclusive because it ensures that all, irrespective of sex, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, political orientation, religion, internal displacement, refugee status, geographical spread etc. have equal access to quality education. They should also have their needs and individual and collective rights represented in the curriculum, content, language of instruction and teaching methods applied. It is of great importance to make sure that all learners are included and respected equally, both by the educator and among learners. The school management and educators should make sure that they give all learners the same opportunities for participation and learning. The educator should, for example, ensure the fair distribution of questions to all, make sure that all learners are involved in discussions, and make all themes relevant for them. Mutual respect should be addressed also in the content of teaching. Gender analysis is used as an inherent tool concerning requirements for, for example, equal participation, the methodologies used, the content, the role of the educators, the external facilities, safety, and the support of parents and communities. A learning environment which secures everyone's active participation and which challenges the standardized gender roles of boys and girls, women and men, and which emphasizes that both genders are equal and equally valued is essential. Securing a safe environment for the learners with a special focus on eliminating education-related gender based sexual abuse and violence is fundamental.

RELEVANT CURRICULUM AND LIFE SKILLS

Quality Education is characterised by a curriculum, content and learning materials that are intercultural and contextually relevant to all learners based on the learners' own former

experience, knowledge, mother tongue, and culture. A relevant curriculum should have as its ultimate objective the development of responsible, active, democratic, and equal citizens. Quality Education also takes into consideration the teaching and learning of relevant life skills, it protects the learners (children, youth and adults) and prepares them for the challenges of the local and more distant environment. Oxfam IBIS works to ensure that learners achieve relevant life skills on the following issues:

Learning for sustainability	Environmental education, climate change and disaster risk reduction.
Health	HIV/AIDS preventive education, Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), hygiene and other relevant health issues.
Practical skills	Practical and vocational skills for children (such as handicrafts, farming etc.) and Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) for youth and adults
Active citizenship education	Human rights, children's rights, democratic values, gender equality, tolerance and non-discrimination.
Intercultural skills	How to understand and respect people from different cultures, value their differences and engage in dialogue with people different from ourselves.

QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Quality Education is also characterised by an appropriate physical learning environment containing all relevant external requisites (buildings, classrooms, toilets, water, books and learning and playing materials and outside space, etc.). It is important that the school infrastructure takes into account the safety and health of learners. This includes access to clean water and toilet facilities, and special care should be taken to make sure that girls have separate toilet facilities and that the needs of children with disabilities are taken into account. A quality learning environment also includes an appropriate psychological and emotional environment, where the learners are respected by each other, by the teachers and by other school related staff. The school environment should ensure the protection of learners so that they do not risk any kind of abusive treatment (violence, sexual harassment, discrimination or other psychological ill - treatment). To ensure a safe and protective environment, a code of conduct for teachers and all school staff must be in place as well as mechanisms to monitor its enforcement and to hear and deal with any complaints from learners.

WELL-FUNCTIONING EDUCATION MANAGEMENT AND CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION

Quality Education is associated with committed, accountable and transparent education managements and education authorities and not least active, interested and committed communities that participate in the life and management of, for example, the school, the youth centre and the community centre. The involvement of communities, both men and women, plays a huge role in securing Quality Education, especially regarding the issue of relevance, but also seen in the broader perspective of civil society organising itself. Participation in existing governing structures in formal and non-formal educational institutions (e.g. Students Associations, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), Education Councils (ECs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) is in this sense very important. Quality education interventions are not disconnected from the rest of the surrounding community and what takes place in society in general. Therefore an important part of Oxfam IBIS' Education for Change strategy is to enhance dialogue between communities and all relevant stakeholders in education and to support participatory education governance e.g. through establishment of school boards. Another aspect is to develop ways of organising the learners in education e.g. by strengthening student councils, peer groups and associations.

FURTHER DOCUMENTATION AND REFERENCES

- Global Monitoring Report 2005: Education for All: The Quality Imperative, UNESCO, 2005
- Global Monitoring Report 2013/2014: Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality Education for All, UNESCO, 2014
- Beyond the Conceptual Maze: The notion of Quality in Education, UNESCO, 2012.
- The Change Triangle, Fagligt Fokus, 2010
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN, 1948

ABOUT OXFAM IBIS EDUCATION FOR CHANGE CONCEPT PAPERS

Oxfam IBIS Concept Paper: Education and Gender, version 1, March 1st, 2017

This series of concept papers was introduced June 1st, 2014 with the target audience being Oxfam IBIS staff and management as well as partners and stakeholders. The papers have been developed through a participatory process and are living documents to be revised whenever needed. At this point the series includes the following concept papers:

1. Quality Education
2. Transformative Education
3. Educator Professional Development
4. Youth Education and Training
5. Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education
6. Education in Fragile Situations
7. Education and Gender Equality

All Oxfam IBIS concept papers can be found at www.oxfamibis.org

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