

Feedback from the Francophonie Summit

By Ficeméa



26 and 27 November 2016 will be remembered as a major victory for supporters of high-quality public education. At the summit in Madagascar, the 57 Member States of the International Organisation of La Francophonie adopted the Antananarivo Declaration which explicitly refers to the the problems associated with the commodification of education. This is the strongest statement ever made by heads of State against commodification

and in support of public education and regulation. It is a sign that efforts by civil society actors to raise awareness on the matter amongst State representatives and international bodies have been successful. It also shows how important all of our joint efforts in recent months have been.

The declaration included the following paragraph *“Recognising the development of commercial schools and educational institutes and supporting high-quality public education provided free of charge to everyone, we call upon the IOF and the Conference of Ministers for Education in the States and governments of the Francophonie (Confémen), in cooperation with civil society, to continue the discussions started at the Kinshasa Summit (2012) and to take measures to promote effective institutional mechanisms for regulating private actors in the education sector in order to guarantee the quality and fairness of education services.”*

Whilst the fact that so many Heads of State expressed such a

clear position on the issue is an important step in itself, it is now essential that national authorities are held accountable for the implementation of this declaration.

Commodification of education – a multifaceted process

In recent years, the international community has witnessed unprecedented growth in the role of private actors in the education sector, with the result that education systems have been totally transformed in both the “South” and in the “North”. This also includes actors offering low-cost, poor quality services which target emerging and poor countries. Many investors, and multinational companies in particular, are involved on a large scale in the highly lucrative education “market”. The commodification of education is an insidious process that takes various forms and impacts both the formal and non-formal education sectors. It results in business ventures offering academic support, study coaches, ready-made “kits” for coping with dyslexia or dysorthographia, “educational” digital software etc.

This multifaceted phenomenon impacts the quality of educational content and knowledge acquisition. It leads to segregation between different areas of countries and different socio-economic groups, further widening social inequalities. As a result, it puts the right to education itself at risk.

The commodification of education is defined as the transformation of education into a profitable commodity. There are two types of commodification. First, the privatization of education, which is defined as increased control of the education sector by private actors. Secondly, it entails privatization of the educational methods used, i.e. the introduction of methods and approaches used in the private sector into the public education system.

Three major consequences can be identified:

- *Basic education becomes inaccessible and social*

inequalities are widened. A recent study[1] by Solidarité Laïque and the Global Initiative for Economic Social and Cultural Rights, in partnership with associations in Haiti, including the Ceméa Haiti, analyses the situation in a country where 84% of schools are private schools: "Policies on access to education have not been the much hoped-for catalyst for equal opportunities, but rather have helped further widen the inequalities that already existed." One of the reasons for these inequalities is the cost of enrolment, which mainly affects the poorest households as it constantly increases. According to 62% of households, these excessively high costs and other financial barriers are the main reason that children aged between 3 and 16 years are not sent to school. More than 90% of Haitian households also said that they either did not have or barely had sufficient resources to cover their basic needs, which means that children's education is in jeopardy. »

- *Standardization of teaching methods.* For example, the number of 'Low Cost Schools' is growing. Bridge International Academies Ltd (BIA) is a US-based profit-making company. It is the largest private business school chain in the world. Bridge International Academy schools are funded by Pearson, the Bill Gates Foundation and Facebook. These 'low cost schools' have been set up in Liberia (20 schools), Kenya (400 schools) and Uganda (63 schools). The concept is based on two keywords: rationalization by economies of scale and standardization. The Bridge Academy has designed teaching tools linked to lessons read out by the "teacher" from a tablet. The teacher becomes a simple 'coach' who is given a class after five weeks of training. The same content is taught in the same way in all schools at the same time. The Ugandan government has taken legal action to close Bridge schools because they

did not meet minimum teaching standards. However, the company still hopes to reach 10 million students by 2025.

- *Replacement of public funding (national and international) by partnerships granted to private companies* which are more focussed on profit targets than educating the population. Let's take the partnership between the Ministry of Education in France and Microsoft as an example. Since the financial stakes are high, the big digital companies – GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft) in particular – try everything they can to impose their standards and their products, not only in terms of the equipment schools use but also, and above all, through teaching practices.

Combatting this commodification is a major challenge for all involved in defending the right to education for all, throughout life.

The statement by the IOF against commodification – a joint response at international level and a tool for advocacy

It is in this worrying context that a group of non-governmental organizations, trade unions, researchers and educational movements, including the Fédération Internationale des Ceméa, have created an international consortium to reflect on and take action on this issue. These actors are coordinating research and advocacy activities and also working on a methodology to identify the impact of privatization on human rights.

The Francophone members of this consortium have written a joint appeal from civil society that speaks out against the commodification of education and education systems. The text aims to alert public authorities and civil society actors to the issue and to raise their awareness of the inherent dangers connected with this process of commodification of education. It also urges them to take action to counter this process.

Today, our Appeal Against the Commodification of Education was signed by 302 civil society organizations from 38 countries.

This appeal now needs to be passed on, heard and debated. States, regional institutions such as the European Union and the African Union must, like the UN^[2] and the IOF, protect and boost education as a genuine public good, and promote a vision of education as a driving force for individual, collective and social empowerment.

At national level, we have to call upon the various ministries in every country to take action, mobilize actors involved in educational matters and make proposals because the solutions exist.

We are able to link the local and international levels that are at play in our democracies. International policy guidelines should not be controlled by experts and technocrats alone. They are part of the public debate and must not be disconnected from everyday realities. Our role as actors on the ground and educators is to work with people on these fundamental issues. We must enable citizens to take ownership of national, regional and international policies in order to participate in the debate, understand the issue and be able to act on the policies that shape the future of our societies.

Education is not a commodity it is a right! We want every individual to be able to exercise it.

Sonia Chebbi,

Permanent Delegate at the International Federation of Centers for Training in Active Education Methods (Ficeméa)

The mission of the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) is to embody the active solidarity between its 84 member states and governments (58 members and 26

observers). It is a community that shares the same destiny and is conscious of the links and potential that come from sharing a language, French, and universal values.

The IOF aims to improve the living standards of its populations by helping them to become actors in their own development. It provides member states with support to develop or consolidate policies and implements international policy and multilateral cooperation activities, in accordance with the four main missions adopted at the Francophonie Summit:

- • promote the French language and cultural and linguistic diversity;
- • promote peace, democracy, and human rights;
- • support education, training, higher education, and research;
- Develop cooperation activities that support sustainable development

[1] Study [in French] entitled *Haïti, enseignement privatisé, droit à l'éducation bafoué* [Haiti, privatized education, right to education ignored], an alternative report supported by 10 Haitian and international organizations published on the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review of Haiti in November 2016.

[2][2] In a resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council in July 2016, the United Nations urges States to “address[.] any negative impacts of the commercialization of education”.

Breaking – The UN says UK development aid to commercial private schools could violate children's rights



UK support for private schools in developing countries criticised by UN Committee

Geneva, 24 May 2016

The United Kingdom (UK)'s controversial support for commercial, low-cost private schools in developing countries has been questioned by a [UN Committee](#) on children's rights.⁽¹⁾ The UK Department for International Development's support for the for-profit primary and pre-primary school chain, Bridge International Academies (BIA) was singled out as a particular concern.

Concerns were also expressed yesterday during the periodic review of the UK's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that commercial private schools in developing countries, with the backing of the UK government,

are resisting efforts by governments, such as Kenya's, to regulate the sector and put in place minimum standards.

The questioning took place during a review of the UK's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 23rd and 24th May in Geneva.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which monitors children's rights, including the right to education, also asked for clarification on the UK's plan to academise all schools in England.

The 23-strong UK delegation was unable to comment on the UK's support for private schools abroad, or how it was monitoring the impact that 'millions of pounds' of UK aid to developing countries is having on children's right to education. It has promised to provide a written response within 48 hours.

Commercial low-cost private school chains, such as BIA, are [coming under greater scrutiny](#) for a number of issues, including: concerns on their quality, which is based on standardised teaching and poor labour conditions; the segregation effect of their fees; and, profit-making from poor families, all in contravention with human rights treaties.(2)

The UK has channelled development aid to low-fee private schools in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria. In an earlier question on increased development aid directed to private actors in education and health, the CRC questioned whether the UK will introduce a legal framework to oblige business to respect children's rights.

Delphine Dorsi, Executive Coordinator of the Right to Education Project (3), reacted: *"The questions from the CRC and the lack of the response from the UK confirm our worry that the UK could be acting in violation of its human rights obligations by harming children's right to education in poor countries."*

Abraham Ochieng, from the East African Centre for Human Rights based in Nairobi, Kenya, added: *“The rapid expansion of commercial schools with development funding is undermining the right to education and government’s efforts to improve education delivery in Kenya. It is essential for Kenyan civil society, in dialogue with the government, to address the situation, and for partner countries such as the UK to refocus their support to free, quality public schools, rather than undermining it in the name of business interests.”*

Christine Blower, General Secretary of National Union of Teachers, reacting to a related question put to the UK delegation by the CRC on the government’s intention to turn all schools into academies: *“The CRC is right to question the UK Government about its privatisation agenda both at home and abroad. We know that the Government’s intention to fully academise the education system in England will lead to the privatisation of our education system. Education is a human right and a public good, for the good of learners and society not private profit.”*

END

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Notes:

1. Ms Amal Aldoseri, an expert member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked the UK delegation the following question during the periodic review of the UK's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "My last question in this cluster is on private education. More specifically on the development aid donated by UK government to Bridge International Academies, operating in Kenya and other countries which is a commercial, low-cost private schools funded by, the UK government, among others. We brought this forward to the Kenyan government during our dialogue with them earlier this year, and the Kenyan government is struggling to regulate these schools, but with the support of UK government, Bridge is resisting all forms of regulation aiming to maintain acceptable and professional standards. What are your efforts to monitor the utilization of the millions of pounds donated by the UK to developing countries in order to ensure that these funds do not lead to children's rights violations? Is there any mechanism for this purpose to assess the impact of such funds, for example, on deepening the segregation between socio-economic groups in fund-recipient countries? And on a related matter, can you please inform the committee on the proposal to academise all primary and secondary schools in England by 2022. It has been postponed, but we would like to hear more clarifications."
2. For more information, see the Joint statement in response to the World Bank on Bridge International Academies (May 2015): <http://bit.ly/1JgKrrM>
3. The Right to Education Project submitted a report to the CRC: *The UK's support of the growth of private education through its development aid: Full report* (October 2015): <http://bit.ly/1suPlQ1> Report summary (April 2016): <http://bit.ly/1qwqslR> Additional information annexed to

report (April 2016): <http://bit.ly/1Thfmi4>

CSOs decry World Bank support for education

A number of world education organisations have expressed discontent with the World Bank President's support for "Bridge International Academies," a private multinational profit-oriented basic school chain, as a means of reducing poverty.

In the face of global poverty reduction efforts and attempts to make basic education free and accessible to all, the organisations are concerned about the show of support for the private school chain prominent in Kenya and Uganda, by World Bank President, Dr Jim Yong Kim, during a speech he delivered in April.

The group of 116 national and international civil society groups, including the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC), 30 CSOs from Kenya and Uganda, and others from Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas and the Pacific, expressed their worries in a joint statement and open letter to Dr Jim Yong Kim on Thursday.

Other signatories are Action Aid International, Education for All and the Global Campaign for Education.

The letter said Dr Jim Yong Kim's praise of Bridge International Academies (BIA) suggested that the World Bank Group believed in that model of education and also believed that it was "acceptable and desirable" for poor people and communities to pay for basic education.

“The international community has fought to abolish school fees over the last two decades due to their negative impact on the poor, and their role in entrenching inequality. We are deeply troubled that this fee-based model is now being promoted as a means of ending poverty,” the letter said.

It also countered the president’s claim that the system was achieving results at a fee of “just \$6 a month,” saying that BIA’s efficiency in education was being based on a questionable and non-objective study conducted by BIA themselves.

The group argued that the true cost of BIA’s education was between nine dollars and 13 dollars a month, considering uniforms, exam fees, textbooks and other expenses.

They said the cost of education for three children in Bridge Academy could take up at least a quarter or even more than half of the monthly income of the poorest Kenyan and Ugandan households who earned 75 dollars or less per month.

The group, therefore, called on the World Bank to cease investment and promotion of BIA and other fee-charging private basic education providers, and to publicly recommit the World Bank to universal, free and compulsory basic education by strengthening Kenya and Uganda’s public education systems.

They have also asked the World Bank to avoid basing its views on self-produced evidence from private providers of education and to listen and respond to the concerns of civil society.

Uganda: Back Poor Secondary Schools, Not the Richer Ones – NGOs

opinion

By Moses Talemwa

Early this year, Munaihe (name changed to protect his identity) received the news that he had passed his primary leaving examinations with aggregate-5. Unfortunately, Munaihe's mother was not as excited as her son.

The poor family from Namutumba could not pay for him to join senior one at the local seed school.

"They told me that they had to take care of my two other brothers and so I had to wait until the money became available," says Munaihe, who is now into sugar cane vending.

Munaihe could easily have been admitted for senior one at Bukonte Seed SS, however, his family is too poor to afford the Shs 65,000 tuition, per term required there. He could also have made the admission list at Kisiki College Namutumba, the district's best-performing school, according to last year's O-level results. But, being a private school, it is even more expensive.


Munaihe is part of a large family of nine children, all surviving on the best efforts of their mother. He is also the victim of what 100 organisations around the world are calling a flawed support system by the World Bank.

The NGOs, which include Uganda's Initiative for Socio-Economic Rights (Iser), argue that the World Bank should end its support of education for the privileged and instead look at seed schools like Bukonte, and take more out of poverty.

REVISIT PRIORITIES

The executive director at Iser, Salima Namusobya, believes the World Bank should revisit its priorities on education.

Private Schools for Kenya's Poor Spark Controversy

 *Children study at a private non-formal school, one of about 120 in the in Mathare slum, in Nairobi, Kenya, June 2, 2015. (Hilary Heuler / VOA)*

NAIROBI, KENYA

The walls are made of rusty corrugated metal, the roof lets in the rain and the muddy alley outside is strewn with trash. The 20 or so children packed into the small room, however, do not seem to mind, as they are focused on learning English.

Although this non-formal school blends in with its physical surroundings here in Mathare, a Nairobi slum of about a half-million people, it is utterly unique from the four public schools historically responsible for educating all potential students in the community. And even for those who do gain admission to those preciously few public schools, says head teacher Richards Olare, the education is poor.



Conditions in many schools are basic and poverty in the slum means that many parents cannot afford even low school fees for their children, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2, 2015. (Hilary Heuler / VOA)

“They don’t have enough rooms, and then even the teacher-pupil ratio is actually very imbalanced,” said Olare. “Having more than 100 children in a class makes it so hard for a teacher to have close relationships with the kids.”

Providing education

Olare’s school is not free – children pay around \$5 a month to attend. But the slum has around 120 non-formal schools like his. They serve an important role, he said, stepping in to teach the thousands of children who otherwise would not be in school at all.

“We teach, we use the same syllabus, the same curriculum, but we are non-formal in the physical structures,” Olare said. “Otherwise we do exactly what is done in the public schools.”

Such for-profit schools came to attention recently when the International Finance Corporation, which is part of the World Bank group, invested \$10 million in Bridge International Academies, a multinational chain of low-fee private schools. Bridge also is backed by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg.

Bridge says its for-profit model not only provides an opportunity for children who otherwise would be left out of school, but also gets better results. Such schools complement the public system, the company says, and it hopes to eventually be considered for public funding itself.

But Sylvia Mbataru of Hakijamii, one of a group of civil society organizations critical of Bridge, is bothered by the idea of a separate schooling system for the poor. She said this funding should instead go into making sure everyone can be educated at the same schools, for free.

“They have all this money to go and invest in a private education system where kids and poor parents are forced to dig in their pockets to access education. Why is it that this money cannot be channeled to governments and support them to make education freely accessible to everyone?” she asked.

If you are living in the slums, Mbataru said, even a few dollars a month can be a lot of money. Janet Awor spends her days selling fried chapatis on the roadside in Mathare. She has four children in school.

“Me, I am working outside there. I am working very hard to get that money. I’m struggling for school fees, rent, food,” said Awor.

School fees

Nearly all her income goes into school fees, she said, and she often has to borrow money for food.

But two of Awor’s children are in a public school, and despite a 2003 law making primary education free, she said she has to pay for that, too.

Community organizer Bernard Ochieng said that in Mathare, public schools often charge even higher fees than private ones.

“Government are saying the school is free, but in the real sense school is not free. School is free in the TV or in the media, but when you go in the school, you will realize that there is no free education there,” said Ochieng.

As long as the government fails to educate all Kenyan children

for free, private schools will continue to exist, said Ochieng. But whether the World Bank should be pouring money into them, he added, is another matter entirely.