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Should 'Private Schools' Receive Financial Support?



'On the positioning of German development cooperation'

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Should ‘Private Schools’ Receive Financial Support? On the positioning of German development cooperation

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Introduction

Are non-governmental primary and secondary schools a solution to reaching those children that are still left behind? Or do they rather aggravate and perpetuate existing inequities in access to quality education? Do private education providers offer education of sufficient quality or do they actually just evade public control? These questions are the subject of international debate, especially in light of profit-oriented so-called low-cost private schools.

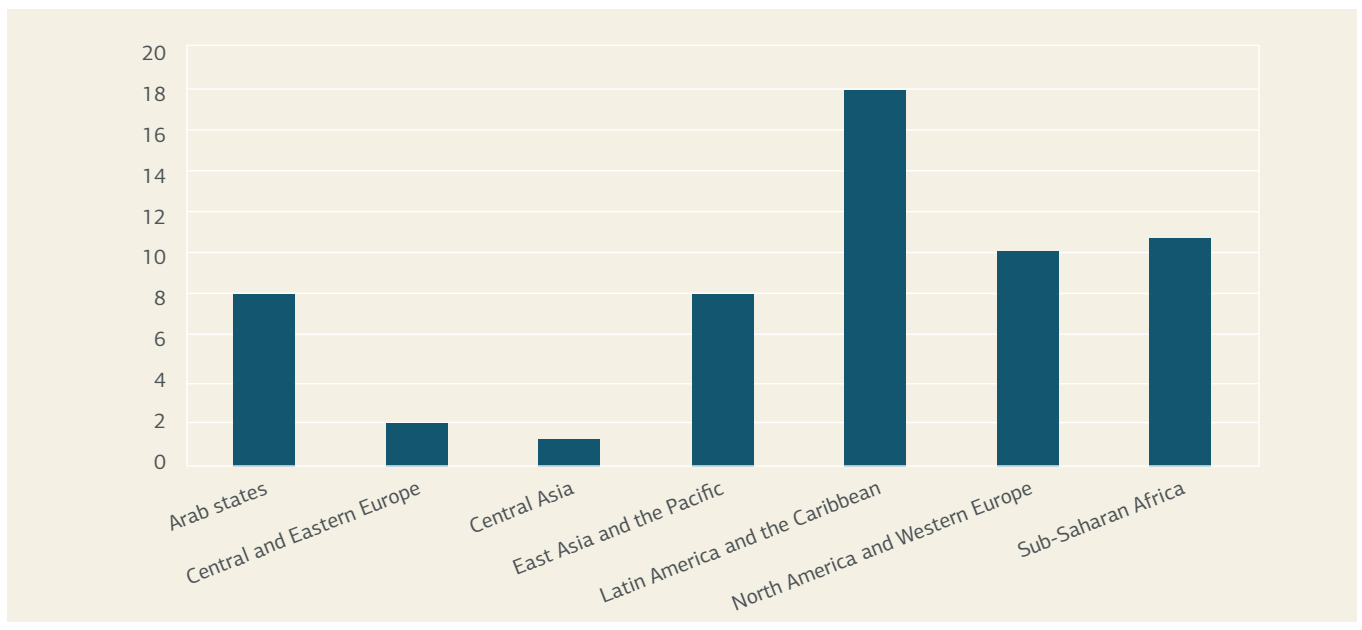
The objective of development cooperation is to help all children gain access to free basic education of good quality. The question of whether or not or under what conditions non-governmental schools should receive financial support is thus of central importance for policy design and implementation.

The aim of the study¹ presented in this summary is to provide a nuanced and balanced overview of this topic, as, to our knowledge, no such documentation yet exists.

Furthermore, recommendations will be drawn on how to deal with non-governmental schools, regarding, for example, the conditions under which it appears reasonable to finance so-called private schools with development cooperation funds. The study was prepared by the University of Bamberg in close cooperation with the Education Sector Programme of the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Conceptual and content-related support was provided by experts from the Bread for The World (Brot für die Welt), German Association of Adult Education (DVV e.V.), the German Union for Education and Science, the Global Campaign for Education, KfW Development Bank, the Kindernothilfe, and Oxfam.

¹ Long version: BMZ/GIZ (2015): Non-Governmental Schools in Primary and Secondary Education. Discussion Paper Education. URL: <https://www.giz.de/expertise/downloads/giz2015-en-privatschulen.pdf>

Figure 1: Proportion of enrolments in non-governmental schools in relation to all primary school enrolments



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2012/2013; Country categories as applied for Education for All; data for Southern and Western Africa missing

The relevance of non-governmental schools

Non-governmental schools are widespread in many of the partner countries of German development cooperation. In some of these countries, they account for a considerable share of students' enrolments. Non-governmental schools include profit-oriented and non-state-regulated providers. At the international level, there is a debate on how national governments and donors should approach this phenomenon.

The international discourse on this issue is complicated by the fact that there is no internationally recognised definition of private schools and that individual states tend to interpret their statistics differently and in their own favour. States that are under pressure to report progress towards universal access to education are often interested in reporting the highest possible number of schools to demonstrate their involvement in the education sector. Therefore these states have an interest in accounting all schools as state schools that grant state-accredited qualifications and diplomas, and that receive some form of public support. On the other hand, (non-registered) non-governmental schools are often not documented in any educational statistics.

This explains why in certain countries independent surveys often count a significantly higher proportion of non-governmental schools than the UNESCO statistics. Low-fee schools are, for example, widespread in rural India, where they account for 28 per cent of schools or in Pakistan where they account for 59 per cent in urban regions and 23 per cent in rural areas. A World Bank study documented a share of church-run primary schools of more than 70 per cent for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Definition of private schools

The interpretation of the term private school as an elitist and selective school alone does not reflect the complexity of the situation. There is not **the** private school. In contrast, schools differ by the degree of their public and / non-governmental sponsorships as well as by their legal status. Modalities thus differ on rather continuous scales such as with respect to the share of public funding.

Financing models: non-governmental schools can be differentiated according to their main sources of funding – who is financing staff, infrastructure and teaching and learning materials – and which part of these expenses are being borne by the state, private bodies and the parents? A distinction can also be drawn between schools with or without profit orientation and among the former between schools with higher and with lower school fees (private schools vs. low-fee-private schools / low-cost schools).

Example: low-cost schools

So-called low-fee private schools are often found in very poor areas where the government does not provide sufficient or any educational services at all. In such contexts, low-fee private schools are often perceived as an attractive option. For a number of years, the number of low-fee-private schools generating profits has been growing. These are often referred to as low-cost schools. Examples include low-fee private schools such as the Bridge International Academies in Kenya and Omega Schools in Ghana which benefit from economies-of-scale as well as their efficient use of technology and modern management (such as standardized teaching concepts and mobile payments for school fees). However, opinions differ

widely as to whether these schools actually achieve this goal and regarding the quality of the education they provide. Despite their claims, doubts exist as to whether such schools help children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in gaining access to education. In Kenya, Bridge charges a monthly school fee of USD 6. Further challenges concern low teacher salaries as well as poorly trained teachers.

Legal status: non-governmental schools differ by their status as a registered or state accredited school, by their degree of alignment with national or other curricula, and by their authorisation to award nationally recognised degrees and qualifications. In Germany, for instance, a distinction is drawn between substitute and supplementary schools. This legal distinction concerns the curriculum and school graduation. Substitute schools perform the authoritative functions of the state. They are authorised to award official diplomas and graduation certificates. Supplementary schools are not authorised to award German diplomas and graduation certificates, and the compulsory schooling obligations in Germany are not automatically fulfilled through attendance of a supplementary school.



Example: Madrasas

Islamic-influenced madrasas are an example of a non-governmental type of school that is recognised as a supplementary school in many countries, and as a substitute school in others. On the one hand, they facilitate access to education for parts of the population that would otherwise be excluded. Yet, on the other hand, this kind of education is usually not pluralistic. The Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan combines the memorisation of the Koran with state school subjects such as natural sciences or mathematics, and the study of Arabic and the Islamic law. Criteria for enrolment are completion of a qualified primary school and an individual placement test. The school does not issue qualifications that are required for further secondary state education. Madrasa schools are financed through in-kind and financial donations from local residents and declines financial support from the government or international donors.

Sponsorship models: there are many sponsorship models. Sponsors can be religious or denominational institutions, companies, local or international non-governmental organisations (NGO) or parent communities and associations. Likewise, the allocation of responsibilities between private sponsors and the state can vary.

Example: church-sponsored schools

Christian schools make up the largest group of non-governmental schools. Experts estimate that they account for more than half of all the non-governmental schools worldwide. Oftentimes, these religious schools have evolved from missionary schools and they still form part of the global network of missionary societies. These schools are non-profit oriented and school fees are in many cases relatively low thanks to the public funding of teachers' salaries. These schools often reflect civil involvement, as they are well integrated in local society through church councils and parents' associations. They are often established where there are no or not enough state schools. Schools of the Protestant Church Council of Rwanda are open to all children, regardless of their religious beliefs. The school fees vary from school to school but are on average approximately EUR 40 to EUR 50 per year. Teaching staff are required to belong to the school's confession or denomination. The schools are under state supervision, follow the national curriculum and use the state-approved text books.

Figure 2: Possible financing and sponsorship of schools

Responsible bodies / sponsorship	Non-governmental	„Private schools“ as state-accredited substitute schools that receive full or partial financial support by the state, often co-financed by the state and non-governmental sponsors (state: teaching staff; non-state sponsor: school operating costs and infrastructure/maintenance)	„Private schools“ that cover their costs through financial contributions from parents or low-cost-schools; socially segregating high-fee-schools
	State	State schools	State schools in countries raising school fees and/or partially disguised fees such as examination fees
		State	Private
		Financing	

Source: authors' representation



Potentials and risks

In the light of the highly diverse landscape of non-governmental schools, it is important to look at each case individually and in its specific country context when assessing and evaluating the potentials and risks of non-governmental schools in the development context. The sponsorship and financing of schools can be divided differently among state and private players (see Figure 2).



The spread of specific models in a national education sector is associated with different possibilities and risks. An analysis of these potentials and risks is based on the Human Right to Education, from which the following assessment criteria are derived:

- **Access, inclusion, equality and social segregation:** what role do non-governmental schools play in enhancing or overcoming social segregation or promoting inclusion? Are certain groups disadvantaged or favoured? Do they contribute to reaching marginalized groups? Are there reasons that justify separation via private schooling, such as the protection of minorities or the support of girls and young women?
- **Plurality of ideological beliefs and religions:** in what way and to what extent is the school system subject to ideological or religious beliefs? How does the school system provide orientation and identity on the one hand and foster openness and tolerance on the other? Is school a meaningful place where norms and values are shaped that will pave the way to participation in a tolerant world society?
- **Quality:** how can the quality of the schools be assessed and measured? What mechanisms are implemented to ensure quality in the public as well as in the non-governmental school system? How are teachers in public and in non-governmental schools recruited, trained, and financed?
- **Financing:** overall, does the state meet its obligations in the educational sector? Which parts of the social classes contribute how much to the educational system and what are their individual returns on their investment? How are non-governmental schools contributing to the financing of education? Do they address certain parts of the population?

These criteria only present hypothetically distinctive features, while in reality the questions of equality, social norms and values, financing and economic interest in education are always inter-related and cannot be addressed independently. Furthermore, the assessment of non-governmental schools also depends on their quality. It should also be taken into account that some of the tensions in the education sector cannot be resolved entirely, as decisions in educational politics reflect complex compromises in consequence of manifold demands.

The role of German development cooperation

The promotion and support of non-governmental schools play a relatively minor role in German development cooperation. KfW Development Bank supports non-governmental primary schools to a limited extent. Relatively recent examples are programmes to improve science education in church schools in Tanzania and support to the Methodist church in the Ivory Coast in the construction and equipping of primary and secondary schools.

KfW project example Ivory Coast

Under the umbrella of the Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast, the construction, equipping and rehabilitation of church-run primary and secondary schools and pre-school classes was financed in two phases in the Abidjan area and partly in rural regions. Approx. 7,000 school places were created to improve children's access to a qualitatively better school education. Internal cross-subsidisation makes it possible also for poor families to afford the school fees. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development provided around EUR 9 million for this purpose.

Development cooperation projects of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH primarily benefit public schools in the formal education sector. Yet, GIZ also has experiences in collaborating with NGOs in the provision of complementary basic education. One example is the Complementary Basic Education Programme in Malawi.

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) also supports projects at non-governmental schools in cooperation with NGOs or the churches' central aid agencies. While the churches' central aid agencies receive most of these funds as global grants, NGOs apply for funds on an individual project basis. NGO projects are for the most part infrastructure projects concerned with the building of schools in underprivileged areas.

These facilities will usually be handed over from a private sponsor to a state sponsor or they will be operated by the private sponsor. In the latter case, the funding usually comes from a mixed financing model in which, for example, the state covers the costs of the teaching staff. Christian non-governmental schools receive most of their support from the aid agencies of the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Recommendations

German development cooperation should bring more attention to the topic of non-governmental education institutions within the framework of the global education agenda. In addition to the basic education segment, other sub-sectors (pre-school, vocational education and training and higher education) should also be considered. A nationally and internationally more nuanced understanding of the manifold forms and models of non-governmental schools or private schools is also desirable.

As education is a public responsibility in the opinion of BMZ and according to human rights norms, German development cooperation should prioritise the support of partners in shaping and building education systems that guarantee quality and free basic education for all children. This is seen as one of the most important contributions of German development cooperation in the education sector now and for the future. Whether and to what extent non-governmental schools should be considered in development cooperation should depend on whether the state fulfils its educational obligations and under which conditions, whether the governmental authorities invest a sufficient part of their gross national product in education and schools, and whether they monitor and re-finance the non-governmental schools proportionately.

In order to do both, to harness the potentials and to address the challenges of non-governmental schooling appropriately, corresponding regulation mechanisms within the educational system are needed. This makes it necessary to build-up appropriate capacities for this task in education administration. In this context, the set-up and the effective use of information and data systems as well as the integration of data from non-governmental schools into a functional national Education Management Information System (EMIS) are of particular importance. Only under this condition can non-governmental schools be systematically included in national education planning. Consequently, future project appraisals of programmes of the German development cooperation should consider whether and how programmes can support the implementation and improvement of EMIS as well as the state regulation of non-governmental education providers.

The financial support of non-governmental schools through development cooperation is advisable and appropriate only if the provider operates on a non-profit basis, complies with public standards and if his educational ventures explicitly do not contribute to social segregation. If public capacities make access to quality education impossible in the short term, contextualised recommendations for actions could be developed that may also consider profit-oriented education providers. Measures should also promote capacity building among public institutions so that the state can comply with its responsibility to fulfill the promise of universal access to quality basic education.



Disclaimer: the opinions expressed in this document are solely the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinion of BMZ, GIZ or KfW.

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