



Community General Assembly in Senegal

## School Management to Develop and Sustain Community-wide Collaboration for Educational Development

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### SUMMARY

- JICA “School for All” project developed a package of interventions that strengthens the capacity of the School Management Committee (SMC) stepwise for educational development. SMC is the foundation for developing and sustaining community-wide collaboration, involving different local actors.
- The package of interventions is an effective policy option for the governments of low- and lower-middle-income countries and their partners to address global issues in educational development, such as the learning crisis and out-of-school children.
- The package of interventions should be extended to address various educational needs, such as preventing dropout of pupils, and the impact of the interventions should be verified for scaling-up.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official positions of either JICA or the JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development. Regarding the papers cited in the main text, please refer to the reference list in Maruyama et al. (2022), and Maruyama and Igei (2023; 2024). The DOI of the papers are included at the end of this policy note.

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## 1. Global issues in educational development

While access to primary education significantly expanded from the 2000s to the mid-2010s, the learning crisis has become evident as a prominent issue in low- and lower-middle-income countries (UNESCO 2014; World Bank 2018). In the countries, approximately 385 million children of primary school age, equivalent to 80 percent of the age group, were not mastering the foundational skills before COVID-19 (UIS 2017). The pandemic-related school closures exacerbated the situation (Moscoviz and Evans 2022). The learning crisis is depriving children of opportunities to fulfill their potential in their socio-economic lives. Low levels of learning outcomes also hamper long-term economic growth of the countries.

In spite of the global efforts to reduce the number of out-of-school children, the progress has stagnated since the mid-2010s (UNESCO 2019). More than 60 million primary school-aged children are out of school in low- and lower-middle-income countries (UIS 2024). Out-of-school children broadly fall into one of the two categories: those who have never attended school and those who have attended school but left it (UNESCO and UNICEF 2015). In addition to low learning outcomes, economic and social factors, such as poverty, child labor, and gender, hamper children's education (Bashir et al. 2018; UNESCO and UNICEF 2015). The background factors of out-of-school children are complex and vary across local contexts.

The challenges to the development of basic education for the governments of low- and lower-middle-income countries are urgent and enormous. The economic and social disparities in the issues of learning crisis and out-of-school children in primary education need to be addressed (Akmal and Pritchett 2021). Furthermore, the development of preprimary and lower-secondary education has become a global policy agenda with the expansion of enrollment in primary education (UNESCO 2015).

## 2. Community-wide collaboration for educational development

### 2.1 School management committee: A foundation to develop the community-wide collaboration

While the scale of the educational development issues is huge, the potential capacity of local actors, such as parents and teachers, should be considered in developing the strategy to address the issues, as educational activities occur primarily in local schools and communities (Hara 2011). When the actions to address educational issues at the local level are consistently taken across different schools and communities, it could bring about impact at scale (Hanleybrown et al. 2012; Maruyama et al. 2022).

At the local level, parents and teachers are the primary actors in children's education; however, they face significant challenges. While parents take an important role in supporting their children's learning, they have difficulties due to their low educational attainment and lack of information on their children's learning (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2020). Although teachers bear the principal responsibility for children's learning, they often find it hard to support children left behind in their classes (Sabarwal et al. 2022). Local community members should support the school; however, their

involvement in the school management is limited. As education of children requires a joint endeavor of local actors, including parents, teachers, and community members, the intervention should be designed to align and develop their activities to address multiple challenges for educational development (Snilstveit et al. 2016).

In low- and lower-middle-income countries, the SMC is the institution that could involve different local actors in education. Since the mid-1990s, the institution of SMC has been widely introduced in the countries. SMCs could engage different local actors for educational development when their functionality is improved (Hara 2011; Kunieda et al. 2020).

## 2.2 Strategy to develop and sustain community-wide collaboration

JICA “School for All” project developed a package of interventions to improve the functionality of SMCs for educational development. The package of interventions builds the capacity of SMCs stepwise to lead and sustain community-wide collaboration for educational development. Specifically, the steps of the capacity building include (i) democratic establishment of the SMC, (ii) development of an action plan, (iii) resource management and monitoring, and (iv) building the network of SMCs. The effectiveness of the package on educational outcomes has been verified through impact evaluations conducted in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, and Niger (Kozuka et al. 2016; Kozuka 2023, Sawada et al. 2022; Maruyama and Igei 2023, 2024). The package has been introduced for over 70,000 schools in Africa through collaboration with partners such as UNICEF and the World Bank.

### Democratic establishment of the SMC

While the SMC was introduced in low- and lower-middle-income countries, the local community members often fail to recognize it, or a group of individuals, such as local elders, may monopolize control over the management and resources of the school (Devarajan et al. 2013). In the package of interventions, the secret ballots are employed to elect the executive members of the SMC (Hara 2011). The democratically elected presidents of the SMC are likely to possess strong motivation for local education. Secret ballot elections enable local actors to vote for their preferred candidates, which leads to the establishment of an SMC with public support. The democratically established organization is a foundation for developing trust among local actors and collaboration for educational development (Sawada et al. 2022).

### Development of the school action plan

The primary role of the democratically established SMC is to lead the development of a school action plan. The action plan is implemented with support from local voluntary contributions and available school resources to improve the access to and the quality of primary education (Kozuka et al. 2016; Kozuka 2023).

SMC secretariat members are trained to organize a series of community general assemblies. These assemblies aim to identify key educational issues and develop a school action plan through

information sharing and discussions among local actors. The action plan, which lists the timing, resources, and persons/groups in charge, is adopted by the school and the local community during a general assembly. A community general assembly is a place where information on local education can be effectively shared, and local actors can discuss the issues (Cerdan-Infantes and Filmer 2022). The commitment by local actors in the public space facilitates and sustains their behavioral change (Bakhtiar et al. 2023).

The process of developing an action plan is structured by several steps: (i) information sharing, (ii) identification of the problem and possible solutions, (iii) preparation of the draft plan, and (iv) adoption of the action plan. This structured process can be tailored to address various types of specific educational issues, such as increasing girls' enrollment and the improvement of foundational learning (Hara et al. 2020).

### **Resource management and monitoring of the action plan**

The progress of the action plan is regularly reviewed during the community general assembly. As the local organization may lose the trust of the community due to misuse or corruption (Beekman et al. 2014), the method called “community audit” is employed for managing mobilized resources for action plan (Kunieda et al. 2020). The community audit was inspired by the concept of a social audit (Poisson 2010). The accountant maintains an accounting book, and the SMC Secretariat reports on the planning and status of the use of resources at the general assemblies. The information sharing aims to draw social attention to public resources to prevent misuse of resources by the SMC Secretariat or the school.

### **Additional capacity building for local actors to improve the effectiveness of the joint activities**

When it is necessary to strengthen the capacity of local actors to implement the activities of the action plan effectively, additional training is incorporated in the package. For example, training and provision of materials on foundational learning were integrated in the package of interventions to improve the content and quality of educational support for children. The package of intervention, integrating the pedagogical component, significantly improved children's foundational learning (Maruyama and Kurosaki 2021, Maruyama and Igei 2024). In Madagascar, the proportion of pupils in grade 3 through 5 who could read a paragraph or story written in the local language increased by approximately 21 percentage points. In Niger, the package improved math learning by 0.36 standard deviations.

### **Building networks of SMCs to develop a collective impact**

The training for the SMC Secretariats in the package of interventions includes the organization of the networks of SMCs. The network-type voluntary organization, called the SMC federation, typically includes 15 to 20 member SMCs belonging to the same geographical area (Kunieda et al. 2020).

The SMC federations can organize network meetings at the district or regional level to discuss

objectives and strategies for specific educational issues. At the communal level, the SMC federation holds general assemblies to share the results at the network meeting with member SMCs. At the school level, SMCs hold general assemblies to develop the action plan addressing the agreed objectives and strategies discussed at federation meeting. Through the sequential process from the network meeting to the local schools, action plans are consistently developed and implemented across schools in a region or district. In Niger, the sequential process increased girls' enrollment in primary education by approximately 30 percentage points (Maruyama et al. 2022).

### 3. Policy recommendations

Studies on the “School for All” program suggest that governments in low- and lower-middle-income countries and their partners should consider the following three points.

#### **(1) Using the institution of SMC differently: SMC as a foundation for community-wide collaboration**

While the scale of educational development issues is enormous, the strategy to address them should consider the potential capacity of local actors as educational activities occur at local schools and communities. The package of interventions is designed to strengthen the capacity of the SMCs step by step to develop and sustain community-wide collaboration for educational development. The package has also been extended to cover preprimary and lower-secondary education (Kunieda et al. 2020). When the institution of the SMC was introduced with the support of the World Bank, it was originally supposed to function as a means for the local community to monitor the quality of service provided by the school and raise its voice. Conversely, the “School for All” project demonstrates a different concept of the SMC's role: as a foundation for developing community-wide collaboration.

#### **(2) Leveraging the package of interventions to develop a collective impact**

The package of interventions has been extended to target specific educational issues, including the improvement of foundational learning. The package also develops networks of functional SMCs. Through the SMC network, action plans to address educational issues are consistently developed and taken across different schools and communities to bring about impact at scale. Local educational administrations can support the activities of SMC federations and SMCs.

The package of interventions aims to improve local education through grassroots activities, utilizing existing institutional arrangements in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Governments in these countries can conduct institutional reforms in education, such as the revision of curricula, to address educational issues. Educational reform and grassroots activities are complementary, as educational reform establishes or improves the institutions and systems that are the environment for the local actors.

(3) Addressing diverse educational challenges by extending the package of interventions  
As the framework of action plan of SMCs is flexible and the plan can include different types of activities, the package of interventions should be extended to address various educational issues such as the prevention of dropout of pupils, and the impact should be verified for the scaling-up. Different types of interventions could be incorporated in the package to enhance the effectiveness of activities in action plan.

### List of papers related to the JICA “School for All” project cited in this Policy Note

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- Sawada, Yasuyuki, Takeshi Aida, Andrew S. Griffen, Eiji Kozuka, Haruko Noguchi, and Yasuyuki Todo. 2022. Democratic institutions and social capital: Experimental evidence on school-based management from a developing country. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 198: 267–279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2022.03.021>

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