

Annual Report 2007: Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute

OSI's mission is education justice. This entails three things: 1) a primary focus on inclusion at the classroom level, with specific policy emphasis on disparities in the provision of quality education at the level of allocation of state resources; 2) working against systemic corruption and lack of openness in the education sector and promoting stronger civil accountabilities; 3) rethinking education to emphasize its role in advancing humanity and valuing diversity at its core along with the acquisition of personal skills and knowledge for the world of work.

Introduction

In 2007, the Education Support Program (ESP) made significant progress toward its mission of advocating against global disparities in the provision of education and promoting access to education for marginalized children. Moving beyond its long-standing emphasis on the post-socialist countries of Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Mongolia, ESP has expanded into Africa, South Asia, the Middle East and Turkey.

That growth has brought with it four primary challenges. First, while the post-socialist countries were ripe for change and largely centralized, many of the “new” countries have weak governmental structures. The strategies that ESP recommends had therefore to be broadly applicable—and not just through interventions that depend on numerical scaling-up.

Next, the sustainability strategies on which ESP had long relied—namely, incubation of projects until they could be institutionalized or otherwise mainstreamed—are no longer universally adoptable. Local capacity building had to become of paramount importance.

Third, because of globalization, policy-making tools—even on the local level—have changed dramatically. Much educational reform now focuses on outcome-based measures, many of which neglect the needs of marginalized populations. ESP had to recognize the trends and design its programs to answer some of the global calls for adherence to “best practices.”

Finally, in light of the global influences on education policy, the aid environment has also changed. External financial assistance is directed largely at those programs that fit the conventional wisdom of educational reform. ESP had therefore to work on the international level to influence policy directions, while always concentrating on “globalization from below”—that is, the support and dissemination of worthy local ideas to a larger stage.

The results of ESP's work in 2007, described below, indicate substantial success in addressing those challenges and furthering the larger mission of OSI: to promote education justice.

Promoting Educational Inclusion

Programs, initiatives and research designed to improve the chances of children with special education needs—those who suffer from disabilities, learning difficulties or are social disadvantaged—formed a core activity area for ESP in 2007.

In Central Asia, ESP launched cross-border research on children with special educational needs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. With the planned addition of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan

in 2008, ESP—in cooperation with National Soros Foundations and the Central Asia Education Cooperation Network—will create a comprehensive report on education for children with special education needs. This report will review the current policies for children at risk and provide recommendations to Ministries of Education regarding necessary policy changes to improve education opportunities for these children. The results of the research will provide the basis for advocacy work in Central Asia for special needs children.

ESP has also provided small grants to 11 local organizations in Central Asia that are already working with marginalized children in innovative ways. These organizations will serve as demonstration projects to identify best practices for working with special needs children and to disseminate successful practices more widely. In addition, local research is underway in several Central Asian countries, focusing on opportunities and restrictions for rural children in Kazakhstan, the results of the transition on school opportunities in Kyrgyzstan and the educational needs of children with visual impairments in Tajikistan.

In nearby Mongolia, Options—a three-year research and service program launched in 2007 with the support of ESP, OSI and other international partners—is working to improve educational opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing children, young adults and adults. In its first year, the program organized a national conference, produced a television documentary and organized teacher and other trainings to fill unmet needs in the deaf and hard-of-hearing population, among other accomplishments.

Inclusion of the Roma minority continued to be an issue of focus for ESP in Europe. In April, OSI released the first volume of a monitoring report, “Equal access to quality education for Roma,” containing country reports for Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Serbia. In December, the second volume was released containing an overview chapter and country reports for Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovakia. The reports indicate that most Roma children still face disadvantages in every aspect of their education, a fact that remains true two years into the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” program. In addition to collecting data on the situation of Roma children, the reports also offer policy recommendations.

ESP’s Monitoring Education for Roma project—after publishing its first international comparative dataset for Roma education in 2006—continued to collect and update its information in 2007. The dataset on important education indicators is vital for measuring progress in education within the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Children in Serbia and Montenegro marginalized not by race but by disability were also the subject of research carried out with ESP support. The Association of Students With Disabilities of Serbia received a grant to examine educational opportunities and obstacles for youth with disabilities in secondary schools. The year 2007 marked the conclusion of another ESP-supported project in Serbia, the Fund for an Open Society Serbia’s initiative “Inclusive Education, From Practice to Policy.” Begun in 2005, the initiative by 2007 had built an inclusive education network, published a guide for teachers on inclusive education practices and launched a follow-up project, “Intercultural/Multicultural Education, from Practice to Policy.”

In Romania, meanwhile, the Partnership for Inclusive Education brought together ESP, the OSI Mental Health Initiative, the Romanian NGO Education 2000+ and the Rehabilitation Foundation

Speranta Timisoara to raise awareness among officials and the public about the need for inclusive education for marginalized children.

Finally, there is growing evidence that migrant and minority groups in Western Europe face particular disadvantage within education systems in that region. Their lack of equal access has far-reaching implications: It compounds marginalization, threatens societies and brings into question democratic rule in those countries. In 2007, ESP delved into these issues by supporting a fact-finding initiative called “The Education of Migrant, Minority and Marginalized Pupils in Europe” (EMMME). The results of the year-long investigation—including a concept paper, literature review, and mapping exercise—will be presented to OSI in 2008 and will include possibilities for further action.

Conducting and Enabling Regional and International Research

Cross-border research produces valuable insights into what is needed to promote education justice not only within individual countries but also region- and worldwide. ESP has been instrumental in supporting and carrying out such innovative research projects.

A new project launched in 2007 focuses on one of ESP’s priority areas, South East Europe (SEE). “Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe” is a three-year research, evidence-based advocacy project involving 8 SEE countries. Given the noted policy-to-practice gap and the insufficient participation of parents, students and teachers in education management and governance, the aim of the project is first to better understand the causes of disparities in education quality and equity by carrying out national surveys of school directors and action research, and second to support sustainable initiatives on the local, national and regional levels to improve education quality and equity.

Also in 2007, ESP and the Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC) published the results of their research on school dropouts. The monitoring report provides the broad context, scope, causes and consequences of dropping out early from school as well as offering six country studies covering Albania, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Mongolia, Slovakia and Tajikistan.

Another key ESP-NEPC collaborative study was published in 2007 as well. “Education in the Hidden Marketplace: Monitoring of Private Tutoring” presents the results of a nine-country survey that examines how education has been affected by private tutoring in light of the high-stakes testing present in many post-socialist countries. The first-of-its-kind research also laid the groundwork for a follow-up study that will cover 10 countries and offer more explicit policy recommendations.

NEPC and ESP have also launched the “Parental Informal Payments to Education” study (PIPES) project, research focusing on schools’ receipt of financial donations from parents and whether these resources affect equal access to schooling. The aim of the project is to evaluate the transparency of informal parental payments to public schools in seven countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Slovakia and Latvia. In most post-socialist countries, public education is supposed to be free of charge, but schools frequently ask parents to contribute money. Accountability and transparency are questionable, and there is no clarity as to which fees are allowed and should be encouraged and which are illegal. The study will explore the demand for and forms of private contributions to schools, analyzing the share of private funding in state-financed education and observing how it is administered. Research was nearly complete at the end of 2007, and

international and local reports will be prepared in 2008. Advocacy activities are also planned for the coming year.

ESP in 2007 committed to further supporting the NEPC program to allow its institutionalization as the premiere network influencing policy in the countries where its members operate. Currently the network—which also issues a quarterly newsletter and will hold its first summer school in 2008—is comprised of 23 independent centers that are active policy agents in 21 countries.

The Roma Education Initiative (2002-2005) documented its practice in 2007 in an international exercise that involved project implementers as writers. The studies, which followed a common methodology, documented varying aspects of REP's comprehensive approach in seven countries. The volume, *Experiences of the Roma Education Initiative: Documentation Studies Highlighting the Comprehensive Approach*, also includes a review of relevant literature, as well as a chapter on lessons learned and implications for policy.

Supporting Teacher Training

Involving teachers and other education professionals in the work of reform is key to long-term success. ESP continued to focus on teacher training in 2007 as a way to promote education justice.

One very concrete accomplishment of ESP's work in Africa could be found in Liberia, where the Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking (RWCT) program implemented training for 60 primary and secondary teachers as well as 25 higher education teachers. RWCT trains teachers to utilize learning methods that help students think reflectively, take ownership for their personal learning, understand the logic of arguments, listen attentively, debate confidently and become independent, life-long learners. The training cycle in Liberia should be completed by August 2008. Also in Liberia, ESP in 2007 began negotiations on its involvement in the Liberian Teacher Training Program with the aim of embedding critical thinking training within the overall teacher education process in that country. RWCT program implementation began in 2007 in Latin America and Turkey as well.

Work in 2007 also focused on building the foundation for the expansion of the RWCT program into the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia. The expansion has necessitated the revision of materials and training strategies, and the program is also being adapted for implementation in post-conflict settings. The program is taking a new direction within the traditional OSI network, particularly in Central Asia and Ukraine, where service delivery activities are directly linked to advocacy and policy development.

Long-term results of OSI and ESP involvement in promoting educational training were evident in Mongolia, where the Mongolian Education Alliance (MEA)—an NGO established with OSI funding in 2004—won a World Bank bid for training in the Rural Education and Development (READ) program. Within its first two years, the MEA project will involve nearly 400 rural schools and 3,300 teachers, encouraging the formation and use of classroom libraries to further professional and academic development. As a result of the project, it is expected that more than 104,000 primary students will gain access to reading materials.

Advocating Transparency and Good Education Governance

More tangible support for ESP-supported programs could be found in a \$5 million grant awarded by the U.S. government to a project in Ukraine advocating fair and transparent higher education entrance examination reform. ESP provided technical support starting in 2001 to the International Renaissance Foundation, which conducted the first certified testing in 2003. The program has revolutionized testing in Ukraine and has attracted considerable donor attention, as evidenced by the large U.S. grant.

ESP played a role in ongoing anti-corruption efforts in Georgia in 2007, sponsoring a seminar aimed at building the capacity of education officials to fight corruption. The seminar was held at the explicit request of Georgia's Education and Science Ministry. In addition, ESP sponsored the ministry's participation at an IIEP UNESCO summer school program in Paris designed to help officials learn to combat corruption.

In Kosovo, an ESP grant enabled some first steps in reforms aimed toward transparency and against corruption in education with an April seminar in Ohrid, Macedonia. The seminar, organized by grantee the Kosova Education Center, brought together educational leaders, teachers and NGOs to show how education can play a crucial role in teaching young people about respecting transparency and the rule of law.

More preliminary work on improving educational governance took place in Pakistan, where ESP supported a two-year study examining best practices in Pakistan's education system. The research, published as a study brief entitled "What Works and Why in Education in Pakistan," marked a shift from providing descriptions about the education system in favor of finding the existing positive examples of educational quality.

RE: FINE Program

Between 2004 and 2006, Resourcing Education: Fund for Innovations and Networking (RE:FINE) supported education projects in the post-socialist region to promote accountability, equity, anti-corruption efforts and improving outcomes. In total, nearly 90 civil society organizations and institutions in approximately 30 countries have been involved in RE:FINE projects working together on joint initiatives for school reform.

The fund promoted closer cooperation between NGOs to encourage the transfer of knowledge in support of meaningful change in the education sector. Civil society organizations built up considerable experience and skills in achieving change through informed stakeholder dialogue and in making schools more open and democratic through changes in education practices, school management and increased community participation.

In 2007, 19 RE:FINE projects were still running with a total budget of \$1.8 million. Due to ESP's realignment of goals in 2006, the RE:FINE program will not continue in its original form, and all grants will conclude in 2008.

Furthering International Cooperation

ESP continued to work on the international stage to promote international policy and networking to advance the cause of education justice.

In 2007, ESP linked strongly with the Global Campaign for Education (GCE). Part of that cooperation included a grant to GCE to publish the 2008 School Reports, an advocacy tool that collected data on education in 178 countries. The “Report Cards” graded heads of state on their performance with regard to education and were launched with considerable ceremony in December at the Education for All’s High-level Working Group meeting in Dakar, Senegal. Hundreds of local students presented the report to the working group in a musical procession led by Senegalese musical hero Baaba Maal. ESP’s engagement with GCE continues to offer insights into how to develop and strengthen civil society collaboration in South Asia as well.

Back in Africa, ESP took part in the development of the Capetown Declaration, a statement promoting the availability of open education resources. Efforts to accelerate the international effort to provide open resources, technology and teaching practices in education stemming from the Capetown Declaration will launch in January.

Laying Groundwork

Africa was also the site of much work building the foundation necessary for further ESP involvement in promoting its mission. ESP in 2007 strengthened the relationships between its organization and the OSI African regional offices, Open Society Institute Southern Africa (OSISA), Open Society Institute West Africa (OSIWA) and Open Society Institute East Africa (OSIEA). ESP has also begun to establish stronger links with other OSI network programs, in particular the Early Childhood Program and AfriMap.

In collaboration with OSIWA, ESP is working closely with the Government of Liberia to rebuild the education system and coordinate the engagement of other OSI Network Programs to develop a sector-wide OSI initiative. In addition to supporting the Ministry of Education with long-term technical assistance for policy development, ESP is also working with other education development partners to establish a pooled funding mechanism that enables the ministry to access and control funds to finance its education sector policy.

A school-based HIV education program will launch in 2008 in Swaziland, and significant preparations were also made for work in Angola. ESP program officers visited Angola twice in 2007 and, in partnership with OSISA, provided a grant to establish the development of the Angola EFA Network. ESP also attended several meetings of the African Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA) to better understand how to deepen engagement within the already-existing civil society movements in Africa.

With the launch of the Caucasus Initiative, preparatory work was undertaken to advance the cause of education justice in that region as well. In July, ESP and the Austrian government convened an exploratory meeting of Soros education network partners to discuss the feasibility of establishing an overarching strategy for marginalized children in the Caucasus region. The hope is that such a strategy could allow for the development of common proposals to improve the educational opportunities for marginalized children in post-conflict environments.