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National Education Quality Initiative (NEQI)

Improving social and economic development through quality education for all

The quest for the improvement of education quality is one of the most significant challenges facing the South African government, and is regarded as 'a national priority that requires involvement and engagement throughout all levels of our society' (Minister of Education, August 2005). Improving the quality of education is particularly critical in ensuring that the learning needs of all children are met and for providing pathways out of poverty for families and communities.

As a high-level cross-cutting initiative of the HSRC, NEQI aims to support the government in addressing this challenge. The primary objectives of the initiative are to:

- develop relevant policy options, with estimated costs, that have a demonstrable positive impact on learning in schools, particularly for the poor and disadvantaged learner;
- undertake policy-relevant research to enable and support policymakers and key stakeholders at all levels of the system to make evidence-based decisions on effective strategies for improving education quality;
- engage in policy dialogue processes with different stakeholders, to share and disseminate information and ideas about good practice that could improve the quality of education; and
- facilitate the exchange of local and

international education quality experts and decision-makers in order to contribute to decision-making processes that would enable the implementation of relevant and efficient education quality strategies at all levels of the system.

These objectives emerge from extensive discussions with various national and international stakeholders who have identified key quality priorities, including improving reading and writing in schools, developing indicators to monitor the performance of schools and determining the impact of free education on the quality of education.

Completed research

The following research projects were completed during the reporting period:

Improving education quality through policies for public educators

The Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) commissioned the HSRC to provide research support for a series of international study visits to obtain information on the formulation of evidence-based policies that could improve the conditions of employment for public educators in South Africa. The report was completed in October 2006 and presented at a seminar entitled The role of labour relations in improving quality in learning outcomes in public education, during the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers.

Manual for monitoring the implementation of Education For All in Africa

UNESCO commissioned the HSRC to prepare a manual for African member states and

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National framework for monitoring learning achievement in Eritrea

In another project for UNICEF, the HSRC provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education in Eritrea to develop and implement a framework for monitoring learning achievement in that country as a means of improving the quality of basic education delivery. The national framework instruments and relevant indicators, which were developed in collaboration with Ministry staff, will be used to implement the second Monitoring Learning Achievement study.

Ambassador Frans Engering of the Netherlands Embassy and Dr Olive Shisana, HSRC, sign the agreement for the Literacy and Numeracy Project, while Mr Cornelius Hacking looks on



Methodological challenges in measuring Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2 and 3

The main purpose of the project was to identify the methodological challenges in measuring the progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in South Africa. The project focused on goals 2 and 3, that is the achievement of universal primary education (MDG 2) and the elimination of gender disparity in education (MDG 3). The project sought to review current indicators used to measure the MDGs, in consultation with the national Department of Education, and to propose additional indicators for use in monitoring education quality in South Africa. The final report will be completed in June 2007.

Impact of research

The methodology and design applied in the project, monitoring trends in education quality (MONITEQ) (see Parliamentary grant section, on page 13) has been adapted to conduct the first grade 9 systematic evaluation study. This study, which will be integrated as part of the grade 9 Common Tasks of Assessment, will be piloted at the end of 2007, with the main study planned for the end of 2008. The MONITEQ results will also be used to develop a framework and a set of relevant indicators for use in

partners (educational stakeholders, educational implementation agents, civil society, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies, non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations) that could provide an effective framework, techniques, and performance indicators for continuous and sustained monitoring and evaluation of the six Education For All goals in Africa. The manual was completed in October 2006 and submitted to UNESCO for adoption.

Indicators for Child-Friendly Schools

The Eastern and Southern African Regional Office of UNICEF commissioned the HSRC, in collaboration with regional education officers, to support regional education officers and develop relevant indicators to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) framework. A report on the indicators was completed in December 2006 and circulated to regional officers for piloting in their respective countries.

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monitoring the functioning of the education system at the end of the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases.

Ongoing research

The HSRC component of an assessment system for learning improvement, funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, is intended to support the Department of Education in developing an effective assessment system to provide relevant and timely information for teachers to address learning needs within the classroom. It will also provide information to policymakers for use in improving the conditions that impact on learning and teaching in schools. The HSRC project comprises three research components, summarised below:

Classroom assessment resources for learning improvement

This component seeks to develop classroom-assessment tools for teachers to improve learning. The aim is to develop a computer-assisted classroom assessment system for use by teachers to obtain information on learner strengths and weaknesses. This information will allow teachers to provide relevant feedback to learners and to develop appropriate interventions for improving learning.

National assessment of learner achievement: grade 9

The overall aim of this component is to design and implement the grade 9 national assessment study, which will be piloted at the end of 2007 and implemented in 2008. A national framework that includes a set of key indicators for monitoring the functioning of the education system at the end of the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases will also be developed.

Assessment policies and structures to improve learning

The aim of this component of the project is to review current assessment policies, practices and structures at all levels of the system. The overall research question is to critically analyse the current assessment system with a view to developing policy options for an effective, integrated assessment system for South African schools. These policy options will include a discussion of its functioning, cost, feasibility and positive contribution to improving learning in schools.

Future developments

For the next five years NEQI will further intensify and consolidate policy-relevant research with regard to education quality in the following ways:

- conduct studies on the use of assessment to contribute to decisionmaking that enhances learning and teaching in South African classrooms;

- facilitate the implementation of an integrated and effective assessment system that provides relevant and timely information to roleplayers at the different levels of the system;
- pilot a systems model, for use in monitoring the functioning of the education system and based on the policy goals of access, quality, efficiency and equity (AQEE), with associated key indicators;
- contribute to a deeper understanding of key strategies and mechanisms to improve the quality of education in South African schools;
- host a number of international and national policy dialogue forums on education quality based on ongoing research; and
- disseminate findings by way of policy briefs, newspaper articles, books, and journal articles.

NEQI regards the development of networks and research capacity among researchers, practitioners, research students and policymakers as a core priority of its work. To this end, short- or long-term research fellowships are available for experienced national, regional and international roleplayers to enhance and deepen the education quality knowledge base. Research fellows will be actively involved in the ongoing work of NEQI and will also have the opportunity to pursue independent research in the field of education quality.



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