



Monitoring The Implications of the Global Financial Crisis on Primary Schools, Teachers and Parents in 12 Countries

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I. Introduction and Relevance to UNESCO

This study examines the implications of the global economic crisis on school conditions and resources by researching how primary schools, teachers and households adapt and cope with global crises. While there are numerous studies on the effects of macroeconomic shocks on households and the demand for schooling as well as on public education, less has been done on how macroeconomic shocks trickle down to schools and education delivery. In the immediate aftermath of a global shock, national and cross-national data for monitoring the impact and long-term education implications are not available. This study seeks to fill that gap by interviewing primary schools, teachers, and pupils' household to examine (1) changes in teaching and learning conditions in the years before and after the 2008/9 crisis; (2) respondents' perceptions of how the global economic crisis impacted them, their schools and their households; and (3) how respondents coped with changes. The study also explored the implications of the crisis on teachers and parents' households.

The study complements initial exploratory research conducted by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which examined the early consequences of the crisis by reviewing education budget amendments, government documents, policy speeches, official decrees and circulars, journal and press news as well as expenditure data for twelve countries. Furthermore, it is within UNESCO's mandate of assessing global progress towards achieving the six Education for All² (EFA) goals. It

¹ This paper summarizes a research project supported by UN Global Pulse's "Rapid Impact and Vulnerability Assessment Fund" (RIVAF) between 2010 and 2011. Global Pulse is an innovation initiative of the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, which functions as an innovation lab, bringing together expertise from inside and outside the United Nations to harness today's new world of digital data and real-time analytics for global development. RIVAF supports real-time data collection and analysis to help develop a better understanding of how vulnerable populations cope with impacts of global crises. For more information visit www.unglobalpulse.org.

² Education for All goals include (1) expanding early childhood care and education; (2) providing free and compulsory primary education for all; (3) promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults; (4) increasing adult literacy by 50 per cent; (5) achieving gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015; and improving the quality of education.

also builds and strengthens UNESCO's research agenda on education financing, particularly in contexts of economic crises.³

Methodology and Survey Themes: The study incorporates a comparative case-study approach involving twelve countries: Armenia, Barbados, Botswana, Cambodia, Chad, Jordan, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritania, Mexico, Paraguay and Ukraine.⁴ Surveys were conducted with head teachers, teachers and parent/guardians surveys covering the following themes the following themes:

- *School Conditions and Resources:* This includes information on school financing (including school tuition fees and non-tuition fees charged by schools),⁵ facilities, pupils, staff, the learning environment and school climate, and safety;
- *Employment Issues:* This includes head teachers' and teachers' contract type, their work schedule and workload, their salary source, payment of benefits and allowances, payment delays, additional jobs and income, and professional development. It also includes employment issues for parents, such as changes in their labour force participation, employment status and economic activity of their establishment;
- *Child Schooling:* This includes primarily issues of child labour
- *Household Income and Expenditures:* This primarily covers households' coping strategies.

A total of 297 primary schools were visited in the twelve countries, representing an average of 25 schools per country. Research teams in the twelve countries conducted 4,282 surveys total, with 292 head teacher, 2,556 teachers and 1,434 parent/guardian surveys completed.

II. Key Findings

Throughout the years of the financial crisis, there were observed school-related changes in some countries and not in others. In addition, the impacts detected varied across countries. The full report delves into many of these nuances; however, by far the most consistent findings across the twelve countries pertain to school financing, related in particular to changes in school fees, difficulties that parents face paying fees, and schools' budgetary coping strategies. Issues of school financing are among the most critical impacts, as they challenge directly the goal of universal free primary education, emphasized both in the EFAs and the Millennium Development Goals.

³ More than twenty years ago, UNESCO played an important role in understanding the consequences for education and training of the widespread economic problems seen in the late 1970s and 1980s and the structural adjustment policies they stimulated. In 1989, the ILO and UNESCO established a Task Force on Austerity, Adjustment and Human Resources, which facilitated policy-oriented research to learn from country responses to the financial crisis and economic reorganization, with reference to decision-making processes and the institutional contexts of the policies and responses adopted.

⁴ While UNESCO developed the study's design, surveys and sampling frame, the fieldwork, data collection, data entry and analysis was done with research partners in each country.

⁵ School tuition fees are those fees paid by parents or families for their children to attend school, whereas non-tuition fees are charges that schools might demand for extra-curricular activities, sports, provision of uniforms, etc.

In six of the twelve countries examined, no major post-crisis change was observed in the amount of school fees being charged. However, four of these six countries reported relatively high numbers of schools already charging tuition and non-tuition school fees before the crisis. In Botswana, Chad, Madagascar and Mauritania, for example, between 50 per cent and 100 per cent of respondents say their schools charge tuition fees in 2010.

In Armenia and Cambodia, the situation looks alarming: Head teachers, teachers and parents consistently report that tuition fees are increasingly being charged by schools. In Cambodia, there is an annual increase of about 25 per cent of the schools charging tuition and non-tuition fees. In Armenia, responses varied between head teachers, teachers and parents. The number of parents saying their children's school expected school tuition payments increased 23 per cent annually between 2007 and 2010, whereas there was only a 7 per cent annual increase in the per cent of teachers saying schools expected tuition payments. Nevertheless, respondents are consistent in indicating that around half the schools in Armenia charge tuition fees. Non-tuition fees are apparently not prominent in this country.

The only countries where school tuition fees declined are Jordan and Mexico. In Jordan, for example, between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of respondents say schools expect them to pay for their child to attend, an average annual decline of 8 per cent or slightly more compared with 2007. Tuition and non-tuition fees declined in Mexico, albeit slightly, as reported by all respondents except for head teachers. In this case, it is interesting to note that the decline in schools charging fees might be due to observed increases in actual school budgets, particularly from local and federal governments.

According to head teachers and teachers, the number of pupils having difficulties paying tuition fees increased in about half of the countries' schools and classes. The crisis years seem to have exacerbated pupils' financial difficulties in Armenia, Chad, Jordan, Madagascar, Mexico and Paraguay, where the number of pupils demonstrating difficulties increased by about 15 per cent annually, on average, between 2007 and 2010. In some of these countries the rate of change is high but the actual numbers are still low. In some countries, however, such as Jordan and Madagascar, an average of 42 and 149 pupils per school respectively had difficulties paying tuition fees in 2010. If these children were to drop out of schools, as sometimes occurs when households are facing financial difficulties, entire primary education classes would vanish.

Parents' claims are more categorical than head teachers and teachers' in relation to increased household difficulties paying tuition in the year after the global financial crisis. In all countries except for the Maldives and Jordan, the percentage of parents reporting difficulties paying school tuition fees increased in more than 5 per cent annually, with an annual increase of 20 per cent in Barbados and Cambodia and the highest increase of 57 per cent annually observed for Mexico's parents. In some cases (particularly Madagascar but to a lesser extent Armenia, Jordan and Mauritania), the increase is less notable, but the overall numbers are high, resulting in more than a third of the primary schools parents strained to afford their children's primary schooling. In Chad, the change in parents'

difficulties affording to school fees were low; however 88 per cent reported facing difficulties in all four years examined.

For the majority of the 4,282 respondents (with the exception of 18 per cent of head teachers and 43 per cent of teachers), school financing issues were considered most important before other issues related to pupils, staff and the school learning environment. Parents' and head teachers' perceptions point to financial difficulties as being the most significant impact of the global economic crisis. Percentages range from as low as 31 per cent of parents in Barbados to as high as 96 per cent of head teachers in Mauritania. To a lesser extent, another perceived impact is pupils' increased difficulties paying fees. Increased school fees are highlighted by more than a fourth of respondents in Armenia and a third of teachers in Cambodia, countries where the before and after data show consistent increases in schools charges.

Like households, schools have to cope with external or internal challenges to their day-to-day operation. Income generating strategies such as seeking additional funding from the community ranks first in head teachers and teachers' perceptions on the budgetary coping strategies taken by schools. This is particularly the case in Barbados, Botswana, Cambodia, Maldives and Paraguay where 22 per cent to 70 per cent of respondents reported that seeking resources from the community was the primary strategy—in all these cases this was higher than any other category. It remains unclear if seeking resources from the community primarily includes tuition fees from households, as appears to be the case, or if it also includes other larger yet proximate social groups. In Chad and Madagascar, charging non-tuition fees is the coping strategy most used by schools, as perceived by the majority of teachers.

Findings from the qualitative and quantitative school surveys in these twelve countries consistently showed that seemingly global financial difficulties do indeed become local and micro, reaching the level of schools, individuals and families. To cope with the context of extended global crises, schools appear to be charging user fees despite global advocacy and national legislation promoting free primary education. In the absence of other buffers against difficult economic times, charging fees seems to be a default school coping strategy in the context of budget-strapped governments.

III. Key Challenges

It is worth noting some of the implementation challenges of the research. In some countries, the data to build the school sampling frame was outdated, as the national education statistics were at least two years old. The list of schools sampled thus had to be revised and adjusted during the fieldwork. Challenges that arose during the fieldwork relate to:

- *Obtaining Permits to Visit Schools:* To conduct fieldwork and any type of data collection in schools, education authorities often request an official permit, obtained after the researchers submit a research application describing the study and methods. Although UNESCO facilitated the processes (which could otherwise have been even lengthier), the process delayed the actual data collection stage, in some countries putting the activities off by about two months.

- *Visiting the Sampled Schools:* Unresponsiveness and difficult access to the schools was another major obstacle. Despite having permit letters from the authorities concerned, many of the schools refused to engage in the study. Hence, it was not possible to comprehensively survey the initial sample during the first round of fieldwork, forcing researchers to look for other schools and extend the fieldwork period. Another difficulty was the physical access to some sampled schools, as was the case in Madagascar.
- *Respondents' Quota:* One of the most general obstacles faced by researchers was to engage with schools that did not have a big enough sample of teachers or parents (this was mostly the case in small, rural schools), which resulted in visiting more schools than planned in order to fulfil the quota.
- *Survey Administration:* While for most countries the surveys were administered and filled in with the researchers' presence, in few other countries researchers were asked to leave the surveys with head teachers and collect them back at a later date. The following difficulties arose: head teachers forgot to distribute the surveys to teachers, teachers were allowed to take the surveys home but forgot to bring them back, or surveys were not ready when researchers were scheduled to collect them.
- *Data collection interruptions:* In many occasions, school visits had to be rescheduled because of school holidays, national elections, cyclones or other events that disrupted instruction and, therefore, the scheduled visits.
- *Respondents did not identify with some questions:* This was mostly common in public schools, where head teachers and teachers did not deal directly with changes in the school budget and allocation of financial resources, simply because schools generally do not manage a budget. In public schools, resources are allocated by governments in the form of teacher salaries or school supplies; head teachers manage petty cash. In other cases, questions were not always fully understood without the guidance of the surveyors, which required surveyors' presence throughout the data collection stage.

Data entry was done electronically, using online surveys developed and facilitated by UNESCO. Some countries selected for the study faced important problems to access stable Internet connections and the necessary equipment to properly engage in the online data entry process. In Chad and Madagascar, for example, UNESCO coordinated with other local UN agencies to facilitate access to Internet.