

Achievements & Sustainability of the BRIDGE Programme in Eswatini

The present and future of non-formal education in the government (public) sector from the perspective of the Bridge Programme, focusing on the issue of sustainability

Background

- Access to Secondary education is a issue in Eswatini and is reflected in the numbers of primary schools versus secondary schools - 618 Primary schools and 275 secondary schools.
- An estimated 32% of children of secondary-school age are orphaned (WHO, 2019)
- 18% of girls drop out of primary school and 35% of girls drop out of junior secondary school due to pregnancy, with rural and poor girls being at much greater risk. (UNICEF, 2019)
- NET enrolment rates for lower secondary 35 %.
- Non Formal Secondary Education (NFSE) classes were established in KuGeza and Nkhungwini Community Learning Centre (CLSs as part of the BRIDGE initiative)
- At Nkhungwini the lessons were conducted at the nearby community high school whilst at KuGeza they were conducted at the CLC

Achievements and contributions to the non-formal education through the Bridge programme in Eswatini

- This initiative gave a second chance to members of the community that have dropped out of the formal education system for various socio economic challenges including:
 - Poor performance resulting in repetition, early marriages, early and unintended pregnancies, lack of school fees,
- Project addressed most of the barriers experienced by learners attending formal schools through the following ways:
 - Not required to wear school uniform, safe travelling distances within their communities, Not required to pay fees, provided with learning materials, ability to attend class whilst attending to socio-economic responsibilities within families and communities, flexibility in learning times, not refused entry because of age, etc.
- NFSE teachers were trained on non-formal teaching methodologies. Through these trainings the teachers reported to have been motivated and to have applied acquired teaching methodologies when teaching learners in the formal schools.
- The project raised awareness on the importance of education at community level and was supported by critical stakeholders (including chiefs and head teachers)

Achievements and contributions to the non-formal education through the Bridge programme in Eswatini

- Response to COVID:
 - The BRIDGE supported NFSE classes managed to use social media to continue engaging with learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. These sessions complemented the radio sessions supported by the government
- Strengthened partnerships:
 1. Partnership with education practitioners:
 - National Curriculum Centre provided technical expertise during the training of NFSE
 - KuGeza CLC was recognised as an examination centre by the Examination Council of Eswatini
 2. partnership that has been established with high schools in these communities resulting in the provision of learning spaces where needed as well as technical expertise from the teachers.
- NFSE modules were procured for learners in both centres
- Through this initiative, learners are assisted to write the same external examinations as provided by the formal education system; Junior Certificate (JC) as well as the Eswatini General Certificate Secondary Certificate (EGCSE)
- Provision of infrastructure to communities- these can be used for future educational programmes

Remaining challenges focusing on the sustainability of the Bridge Eswatini Programme

- NFSE classes are continuing at KuGeza CLC with learners paying fees but is facing numerous challenges including the following:
 - Low enrolment
 - Inability to buy learning materials
 - No capacity building for the NFSE teachers
- COVID 19 effects on the education system including the Non-Formal education system.
 - Facilitators unable to continue with using social media is a challenge due to lack of learner support services - devices are very expensive and learners are unable to buy data.

Relevant national strategies to strengthen the right to education for the educationally marginalized people in Eswatini

National Education & Training Sector Policy of 2018

- The scope of this policy addresses every level and sub-sector of the education and training continuum, from Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) to Higher Education (HE) and non-formal education and training. Not only does this reflect Eswatini's commitment to inclusive Lifelong Learning (LLL), but it also draws attention to issues of access, quality, equity, relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery
 - **Short term:** Extend non-formal and continuing education programmes to select primary schools and secondary schools and provide NPE and NSE programmes to all out-of-school children, youth and adult learners
 - **Short to medium term:** Establish open and distance learning opportunities where appropriate and second chance secondary education opportunities throughout the country.
 - **Medium to long term plan:** Sustain the free primary education programme and introduce state-funded education at lower secondary level in all public secondary schools.
- The Ministry is in the process of preparing its next Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) setting out the direction for changes and investments in education over the next ten years