

## **Internal OSI Discussion Note: Education and Open Society**

**To: National Foundation Boards**

**From: OSI's Education Support Programme (ESP)**

**Date: April 2008**

### **Introduction**

This note was prepared by the Education Support Programme (ESP). It draws on contributions of the 42 OSI education staff, representing 19 national foundations, who attended the National Foundations' Education meeting in Tunisia on the 29<sup>th</sup> February and 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2008. We would like to express sincere thanks to participants for their very helpful input and advice.

Education is essential for achieving and sustaining open societies; it is also a key means to creating and sustaining the demand for social change. This note suggests that OSI should aim for a tighter synergy between its work on the 'core' areas in OSI's mandate – free media, access to information, non-discrimination, access to justice, properly conducted elections and so on – and its work on education at pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Integrating comprehensive education reforms into national strategies, while utilizing ESP's resources for consolidation and global advocacy, will deepen OSI's role in enabling social transformation.

This note discusses five ways in which education can contribute to achieving open society goals in the current global context. We invite national foundation boards to contemplate the relevance of these five considerations as you develop national foundation strategies. We shall be happy to arrange for an ESP staff member or one of the other participants from the Tunisia meeting to present this note at a discussion of your board if you would consider this to be helpful.

### **The argument**

Two basic questions present themselves in countries where OSI is engaged or considering engagement: What signifies an opportunity for achieving an open society? And what needs to be put in place to build and sustain momentum towards it? The urgency of these questions rests in the understanding that an open society is an achievable goal, not a merely utopian one.

Generally, OSI emphasizes the primacy of civil and political rights in the transition towards an open society. This typically incorporates a range of priorities that include strengthening the democratic process, promoting peace and justice, establishing the rule of law and human rights, ensuring open access to information, securing freedom of speech and free media, and so on. OSI has, in recent years, gone beyond the traditional civil and political rights framework to support good governance in a broader sense, including monitoring corruption and the utilization of national resources. For educationists, this raises questions about where education fits within these urgent priorities; and how the relationship between education and open society can be understood.

Education and other social and developmental interventions are often considered to belong-term, non-confrontational strategies that may help to build good will and create openings for strengthening human rights and democratic reforms. OSI recognises that education and public health, which together frequently represent over half of public spending, are important in an open society but at times takes the view that these sectors are either non-essential to achieving an open society or that support for reform in these areas can be safely left to other development partners. We don't believe education is a "soft option" or that it should be left to other partners because we consider education to be integral in all efforts to achieving open societies. Furthermore, OSI is uniquely placed to play an important role in education reform efforts precisely because of its focus on open society goals. The struggle to achieve a good quality education for all children cannot wait until such time as the political process is genuinely responsive to citizen demands. Indeed, working towards democracy and respect for the rule of law is itself significantly shaped by the fruits of quality education for all citizens. Advocacy on both sets of issues should go hand in hand; democracy and the rule of law on the one, education for all on the other.

In our view, a failure to invest in quality education betrays a lack of will to achieve an open society and ultimately threatens a rolling back of open society gains. OSI's institutional memory suggests two examples of this. First, our organisation invested significantly in the social and civil spheres to promote open society in the Former Soviet Union through the 1990s, yet it proved to be not possible to sustain momentum for open society across this entire space. In Russia, pressures to avoid further fragmentation, contain capital flight and regain Russia's influence in the world, among other things, precipitated a turn to a political centrism that is allergic to most open society ideals. Second, in South Africa, the world witnessed a remarkably peaceful transition to multiracial democracy that delivered perhaps the finest constitution and constitutional court in the world. Yet almost thirty years after George Soros made his first open society grant and fifteen years after transition, continuing racial tensions, threats against the media, moves to close a key police unit that combats corruption and the growing assertion of traditionalist values in urban landscapes raise the spectre that open society gains can also be lost. Both Russia and South Africa show how essential the underlying economic and social considerations, as well as the cultural readiness to embrace an open society, are to sustaining open society gains; and how fleeting and fragile these gains can be.

It would be a mistake to believe that an open society can be achieved and sustained through civil and political reforms alone or, for that matter, through advances in economic and social reforms without the platform of civil and political rights. Our strategic task is to assemble the strongest ideas and alliances for achieving open societies that we possibly can. We therefore invite national foundation boards to consider the significance of five global education issues for national foundation strategies that, we believe, can tighten this critical synergy.

### **i) – Education justice**

OSI's core mission in education is captured in the idea of education justice. Education justice highlights the disparities in the provision of and access to quality education at national and global levels and promotes properly supported inclusion for all vulnerable children and youth. It recognises the threat persisting inequalities pose for sustaining open society goals.

The national education priorities that are supported by many national foundations intersect with education justice concerns in numerous ways and national foundations can play an important role to identify and strengthen a justice agenda in national education reforms. This provides an essential underpinning for open society as well as national growth. Strategies for emphasizing education justice will vary from country to country. It may be possible to work closely with the state to influence the pace of reforms or the direction they take but it may also be necessary to take a firmer stand against a government. The recently won Ostrava case against the government of the Czech Republic, for which OSI provided direct counsel and prepared an amicus brief with other partners, took eight years for the European Court of Human Rights to rule that the placing of Roma children in special schools is discriminatory. This is a clear example of the synergy between civil rights and education justice.

Education justice fundamentally involves a commitment to a fully accountable education system and to education quality for all. The notion of quality itself needs to be continually redefined so as to incorporate in the curricula and teaching methodologies the values of openness, tolerance, relevance and critical thinking. This will go a long way in promoting values and skills to sustain open society in a fluid and changing global environment.

## **ii) – The relevance of a rights framework for education**

Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the rights-based approach (RBA) in development has gained strong support internationally. The RBA is often viewed as a paradigm shift in development that redefines the role of the State and international organisations. For the State, service delivery is re-articulated in the language of rights which imposes a legally-binding culpability (as duty-bearer) towards its citizens (as rights-holders with entitlements to services). The role of international organisations shifts from gap filling where States have been unable or unwilling to provide services, to one of facilitating the empowerment of citizens to *claim* their rights, which emphasises working *with* States, not against or in spite of them, to help them meet the demands of citizens and be accountable to them.

The right to education is articulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which was adopted in 1966 and entered into force in 1976. Although the ICESCR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) were split in content thanks to the politics of the cold war, and the ICESCR is significantly less well drafted and vaguer in its commitments, more recent conventions have moved towards a re-mergence of the concepts that were linked in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Treaties drafted in more recent years, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (crucial in the context of education), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, all of which have been ratified by most states in the world, provide important global frameworks for developing and advancing ESCR. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provides most unequivocally of all that ‘Every child shall have the right to an education.’

A conceptualisation of education as a right can provide an important focus for civil society mobilization and advocacy for national foundations. It is already central to any work around education issues in Africa, and may have currency to advance gains being made by civil society advocates in other contexts as well as offer a framework for programming at the national level.

### **iii) – The potential for an EFA-plus campaign**

The movement toward universal access to primary education was launched in 1990 with the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA). The EFA Framework for Action was adopted by the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 in the very same venue that OSI held its Africa Forum in February 2008. The EFA framework, which incorporates six goals (listed below) that are to be met by 2015, provided an unprecedented boost for education advocacy and practice globally. It has provided an important catalyst for developing national priorities for education and while many countries are not on target for 2015, the framework has given impetus and structure to national reforms. Universal primary education (UPE), the second EFA goal, is echoed in goal two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are eight development goals (listed below) that were adopted by the UN in 2000 and are also intended to be met by 2015.

However, laudable as the goals are and as successful as the framework has been, there are deficiencies to EFA. The UPE demand was initially a pragmatic compromise to encourage support by national governments and set an achievable target. Yet in reality EFA is a set of minimum demands that are posing serious limits on the right to education even as countries work to achieve them.

Equity in secondary education is now recognised to be the most important education indicator associated with national economic growth. The EFA agenda must take this into account now at its mid point, particularly for the sake of those children who have finished primary school and who have no where to go for secondary school. As we see already in Liberia, secondary education is a major challenge for governments because it requires a significant and long-term investment in teacher development beyond the primary education sector. Stretching expectations for quality education to the secondary level can have positive ripple benefits for quality education at primary school level particularly if the emphasis on quality is maintained. Similarly, EFA makes no sense in Africa without a mention of the effects of HIV/AIDS on education. Nor is it adequate on early childhood development or vocational education for young people, both of which are highlighted in the framework. We therefore feel that while there is great value to EFA, it neglects to fully address certain important areas that are critical to ensuring that education systems enable citizens to actively engage in the social, economic, and political development of open societies. As part of an EFA-Plus campaign, we suggest that OSI should be advocating globally for ten years schooling, including an express commitment to equity in secondary education, which has been shown to maximise effects on poverty reduction. ESP has plans to link with regional and international organisations to mobilise support for an EFA-Plus campaign.

An EFA-Plus campaign builds on the strengths and successes of EFA and allows for the emergence of more relevant regional versions. This would provide a clear advocacy focus for OSI and a fertile context for international education advocacy. It also provides a potentially useful strategic connection for national foundation strategies and the OSI education mission put forward by ESP.

### **iv) – Policy advocacy and social advocacy**

Typically, two basic forms of advocacy are identified: evidence-based policy advocacy, i.e. a specific way of arguing for a policy or point to be included in a piece of legislation or law to

bring about social change, and social advocacy, i.e. efforts to build awareness or shift attitudes among the general population. A policy advocacy approach is particularly useful for advancing civil and political rights; it tends to be more technical and requires a concentration of resources and expert effort on a fixed target. Advancing education and social justice issues requires more of an evidence-based social advocacy approach that tends to broaden rather than narrow the focus; it also opens up tactical considerations around how to state advocacy messages in ways that advance social understanding. It requires a different set of tools and partners than evidence-based policy advocacy to get the message across. OSI generally emphasizes policy advocacy, yet there are strong arguments for a renewed engagement with social advocacy, if only to realise formal changes that may have been made on paper. Achieving open society is a long-term social process that requires the involvement and commitment of a broad variety of actors beyond the state and its policies.

Education reform requires both evidence-based policy and social advocacy. Usually also, policy advocacy is privileged above social advocacy, and many OSI-produced advocacy reports may not have a life read beyond the final round table discussion that is held once they're finished. This is particularly true for education policy advocacy which is filled with jargon and dense to read. Social advocacy is a process more than an event – and it can take a long time. Experience suggests that we need to support national foundations to develop effective strategies for to bring social advocacy and policy advocacy closer together for effective implementation of ECSR.

#### **v) – Using global frameworks and the network of networks**

International frameworks such as the MDGs and the EFA goals provide an important international scaffold for national education priorities. The EFA Global Monitoring Report, an annual study produced by UNESCO on each of the goals in turn provides an in-depth comparative look at policy and equity issues in relation to each goal. It provides very rich comparative information that is very useful for setting national education priorities in relation to quality and equity.

In addition to the UN family of organisations, international NGOs such as Oxfam and Save the Children and international civil society coalitions such as the Global Campaign for Education, which has member organisations in most countries where OSI also has a presence, sustain important advocacy pressure to get the governments – particularly of the G8 – to keep their promises to support the EFA and MDG goals. OSI has a natural role as an animator and convenor of civil society networks both at national and international levels to develop and facilitate the linkages between these organisations and agendas that include global funding mechanisms.

International comparative frameworks that focus more on learning outcomes such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which last assessed the readiness for life of fifteen-year-olds in almost 60 countries in 2006; the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which last assessed the performance of 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in 55 countries in 2007; and the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS), which last assessed the performance of 4<sup>th</sup> graders in 45 education systems in 2006, provide essential benchmarks for progress in education quality. These frameworks and coalitions can provide a stable external reference point if the pace of reforms nationally were to falter and they give a useful reference point for the education advocacy work that can be maintained by national foundations.

## Conclusion

This note is motivated by the concern that OSI should focus on education not only in its own right but also to consolidate open society gains. Additionally, ESP feels that engagement in education advocacy (evidence-based policy *and* social advocacy) needs increased attention at the foundation and organisational level, not so much from a funding point of view but a strategic one because it binds together and builds upon other OSI programming areas by creating the demand for and capacity for sustaining societal change.

The strategic considerations outlined above offer five practical ways in which foundations can utilize opportunities in international education development to strengthen their national efforts to achieve and sustain an open society. While each of the strategic considerations reflect the necessity of strengthening civil society to secure and advance education and social justice issues, they also have important intersections with the framework for civil and political rights. Most importantly, they begin to describe the ways in which the national education system can prepare the social understandings, values and skills that will sustain open societies in which democracy and rule of law can flourish.

ESP is committed to working more closely with the foundations to assist with planning to incorporate issues discussed in this document. We are also fully committed advocating for national foundation priorities. A closer collaboration between national foundations and ESP will help to harmonize and strengthen OSI's education work at all levels.

## **EDUCATION FOR ALL GOALS:**

- (i) Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- (ii) Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- (iii) Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;
- (iv) Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- (v) Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- (vi) Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

## **MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:**

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

\* Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

\* Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

## MEETING PARTICIPANTS

No.	Name	Occupation	Organization	Country	E-mail
1	<b>Aleesha Taylor</b>	Senior Program Manager	Education Support Program	United Kingdom	aleesha.taylor@osf-eu.org
2	<b>Alla Kuvatova</b>	Board Chair	OSI AF Tajikistan	Tajikistan	akuvatova@yahoo.com
3	<b>Armenuhi Tadevosyan</b>	Education Programs Coordinator	OSI AF Armenia	Armenia	armenuhi@osi.am
4	<b>Barbora Kahatova</b>	Program Manager	OSF Bratislava	Slovakia	barbora@osf.sk
5	<b>Daniel Pop</b>	Researcher	RETRA	Romania	dpop@cenpo.ro
6	<b>David Amiryan</b>	Deputy Director for Programs	OSI AF Armenia	Armenia	adavid@osi.am
7	<b>Divya Lata</b>	Senior Program Officer	Early Childhood Program	United Kingdom	divya.lata@osf-eu.org
8	<b>Dzenana Trbic</b>	Education Program Coordinator	OSF Bosnia & Herzegovina	Bosnia & Herzegovina	dzenana@soros.org.ba
9	<b>Erdenejargal Perenlei</b>	Executive Director	OSF Mongolia	Mongolia	jargal@forum.mn
10	<b>Farda Asadov</b>	Executive Director	OSI AF Azerbaijan International Renaissance Foundation	Azerbaijan	fasadov@osi-az.org
11	<b>Georgiy Kassianov</b>	Director's Advisor	Ukraine	Ukraine	kasianov@irf.kiev.ua
12	<b>Giga Zedania</b>	Coordinator	Open Society Georgia Foundation	Georgia	giga@osgf.ge
13	<b>Gordana Miljevic</b>	Senior Program Manager	Education Support Program	Hungary	gmiljevic@osi.hu
14	<b>Grace Kaimila-Kanjo</b>	Education Program Officer	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa	South Africa	gracek@osisa.org
15	<b>Gulchehra Kabilova</b>	Program coordinator	OSI - Tajikistan	Tajikistan	gulchehra@osi.tajik.net
16	<b>Hugh McLean</b>	Director	Education Support Program	United Kingdom	hugh.mclean@osf-eu.org
17	<b>Ian Macpherson</b>	Senior Programme Manager	Education Support Program	United Kingdom	ian.macpherson@osf-eu.org

18	<b>Iлона Mihaies</b>	Chair of the Board	Soros Foundation Romania	Romania	imihaies@soros.ro
19	<b>Joe Pemagbi</b>	Country Coordinator	Open Society Initiative for West Africa	Liberia	jpemagbii@osiwa.org
20	<b>Kate Lapham</b>	Central Asia Program Manager	Early Childhood Program/Education Support Program	United States	klapham@soros.kg
21	<b>Liesma Ose</b>	Program Director	Soros Foundation - Latvia	Latvia	liesma@sfl.lv
22	<b>Maja Kovacevic</b>	Program Coordinator	FOSI - Montenegro	Montenegro	mkovacevic@osim.cg.yu
23	<b>Mary-Frances Lindstrom</b>	Program Director	East-East Program	United Kingdom	mflindstrom@osf-eu.org
24	<b>Michelle Neuman</b>	Senior Program Officer	Early Childhood Program	United Kingdom	michelle.neuman@osf- eu.org
25	<b>Nargis Sultana</b>	Consultant	OSI Pakistan	Pakistan	Nssultana@yahoo.com
26	<b>Natalia Shablya</b>	Senior Program Manager	Education Support Program	Hungary	nshablya@osi.hu
27	<b>Noel Selegzi</b>	Program Director	Debate Program	United States	nselegzi@sorosny.org
28	<b>Ovidiu Voicu</b>	Program Manager	Soros Foundation Romania	Romania	ovoicu@soros.ro
29	<b>Parviz Baghirov</b>	Coordinator	OSI AF Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan	pbagirov@osi-az.org
30	<b>Petya Kabakchieva</b>	Chair of the Board	OSI Sofia	Bulgaria	petiakab2001@yahoo.com
31	<b>Piroska Hugyec</b>	ICT Coordinator	Education Support Program	Hungary	phugyec@osi.hu
32	<b>Rhett Bowlin</b>	Director	Higher Education Support Program	Hungary	rhettbow@osi.hu
33	<b>Sarah Klaus</b>	Director	Early Childhood Program	United Kingdom	sarah.klaus@osf-eu.org
34	<b>Sherri La Motte</b>	Assistant Education Program Manager	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa	South Africa	sherrilm@osisa.org
35	<b>Spomenka Lazarevska</b>	Program Director	FOSI Macedonia	Macedonia	slazare@soros.org.mk

36	<b>Svetlana Batrak</b>	Program Officer Director of Educational Programs	Education Support Program	United States	sbatrak@sorosny.org
37	<b>Tatiana Abdushukurova</b>		OSI Tajikistan	Tajikistan	a.tatiana@osi.tajik.net
38	<b>Tatjana Stojic</b>	Education Program Coordinator	FOS Serbia	Serbia	tstojic@fossierbia.org
39	<b>Valentin Deichman</b>	Program Manager	Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan International Renaissance Foundation	Kyrgyzstan	valya@soros.kg
40	<b>Yevhen Bystrytsky</b>	Executive Director	Ukraine	Ukraine	bystrytsky@irf.kiev.ua
41	<b>Zhanibek Khassan</b>	Program Officer	Soros Foundation Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	zhkhassan@soros.kz
42	<b>Zuhra Halimova</b>	Executive Director	OSI AF Tajikistan	Tajikistan	zuhra.halimova@osi.tajik.net