



UNITE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION
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STUDENTS
BEFORE PROFIT



Global response to commercialisation of education

Kenya-Case Study

Edda is a teacher union organiser in Kenya. For over a year she has been involved in a new international project to promote free quality education for all led by the global federation of teacher unions, Education International (EI). EI's *Global Response to commercialisation of education* is a global strategy aimed at countering the influence of private actors in education where it impacts negatively on educational access and exacerbates inequities.

In pursuit of the project's aims, Edda has identified the rapid expansion of so-called 'low-fee' private schools in Kenya, operated and backed by large global corporations and philanthropists, as an issue of serious concern.

Bridge International Academies (BIA) is a large chain of primary schools delivering "low-cost" private schooling to thousands of students across 42 Kenyan counties. It is claimed that in some areas such as Nairobi, Eldoret and Mombasa, more than 50% of Kenyan children attend BIA schools.

Edda is concerned that the expansion of BIA is undermining the achievement of quality inclusive and equitable education for all. The fees charged at these schools represent up to 40% of the daily income of the poorest families. To maximise its profits, through the achievement of economies of scale, it delivers a standardised curriculum and employs either underqualified or unqualified staff earning a fraction (15-20%) of a teacher salary. This has the potential of compromising the working conditions of all Kenyan teachers by putting downward pressure on salaries. BIA also fails to provide proper school facilities.

How can this be allowed to occur? She asks herself...

After some research, Edda finds out that BIA schools are in fact registered as 'non formal' schools instead of private schools under the 2009 *Policy for Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training* (APBET). Under APBET, non-formal

schools have fewer regulatory requirements in terms of curriculum, infrastructure, teachers' conditions etc.

APBET recognition and support for non-formal schools was originally intended to provide access to education to children who would have otherwise been unable to attend the formal education system due to the unavailability of an adequate number of public schools. However, this policy is now allowing big corporations and edu-businesses such as BIA to benefit from these lower legal requirements and make profit with non-formal education in areas of the country that remain largely under-served by public schools.

Edda also discovers that BIA expansion is aided and abetted by the government, which has given the chain support in various forms including technical support to recruit teachers and direct financial grants to some of the registered schools.

She is convinced of the need to implement a national strategy targeting politicians to ultimately stop the provision and promotion of education through low-fee for-profit schooling in Kenya.

The General Secretary of her organisation, Peter Mubambe, during an annual evaluation and planning meeting, advises Edda that it is time to take concrete action on this matter. Mubambe states: "We need to make our government accountable to fulfil its primary obligation to ensure that a high quality public education system is in place providing free quality education for all, with appropriate conditions and support for teachers."

The union leader goes on to explain that this is not an isolated phenomenon in Kenya: investments in "low-cost" private-sector alternatives are being promoted as a cost-effective and quick solution to universalising access to and participation in education in developing contexts including Ghana, Liberia, South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda. This phenomenon is also spreading in other parts of the world such as Colombia and Brazil in Latin America, and India and Philippines in Asia. The chain plans to increase the scale and scope of its operations to deliver education services to over 10 million children across a dozen countries by 2025.

BIA and other "low-cost" schools are beginning to become significant players at an international level, attracting financial investment from both large corporate players, philanthropists and foreign government aid. They have the capacity

to shape the views of key actors in education at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Mubambe also hands Edda a report dated November 2015 by the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR).

In the report, the UNCESCR requested the government of Kenya to provide information “on the measures taken to increase the number of public primary schools and enhance the quality of public schools, particularly in informal settlements and remote rural areas, since the introduction of the free primary education policy”. The UN also asked the government to explain “how the State party has regulated and monitored informal private schools, or low-cost private schools, to ensure quality education.”

Against this backdrop, Mubambe explains, they need to generate a public debate on low-fee for profit schools to get the public to demand, with unions, that “low-fee” for profit schooling cease in Kenya.

Mubambe concludes by asking Edda to develop a comprehensive national strategy that more effectively challenges the growing commercialisation of education and, importantly, challenges the government to fulfil its political obligations to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education... for all”* (Sustainable Development Goal 4).

In doing that, Mubambe adds, Edda has to take into account that a new research on Bridge International Academies in Kenya has been commissioned by EI and partner organisations to be released in April 2016.

The research will show how pupils are recruited; how parents are engaged; how government education staff are engaged; how quality is regulated and addressed; how teachers are treated; and how BIA managers and staff are supported and incentivised. It will also look into the impact on the communities which they serve. Further, it will provide new information on how BIA engages with the state of Kenya and how the chain effects the public schools with which they compete.

The findings of this research can serve to inform and design evidence-based advocacy strategies. A communications plan around the research launch must be a key part of the national plan.

Edda is excited about the crucial task entrusted to her and starts working immediately. She has an estimate budget of 20.000 USD to implement a 12 month National Action Plan.

Each section below is to be dealt with in separate sessions. Following discussions, each group is to nominate a rapporteur to report back in consecutive sections.

Section 1

A legislative framework

- Why are corporate backed school chains proliferating in Kenya?
 - Why are private school chains, such as Bridge International Academies, registered as non-formal schools, when they offer formal education?
 - Looking at Annex 1 Kenya Summary of existing legislation and EI's legislative framework guide, discuss a strategy to force the government to 1). Ensure that low-cost for profit schools eg BIA adhere to the formal school education registration requirements. 2). Legislate against for-profit schooling.
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Section 2

Effectively linking research with communications

Design a communications plan for the launch of the EI's commissioned BIA research in April 2016. The key objective of your plan will be to generate a public debate on "low fee" for-profit private schools and get the public to demand, with unions, that "low-fee" for profit schooling cease in Kenya. Your target audience will be politicians and international organisations including the United Nations.

In doing this, you may wish to consider answering the following questions:

- What is the **key message** you want to deliver to politicians and international organisations? This should be formulated/communicated as a strong statement able to motivate, as a driving force, a call to action for your constituency.

- How can you map out who the **key politicians** to target are to achieve your objectives?
 - What kind of **research data/findings** would you need to convince them?
 - What are the **best channels** to deliver your message effectively to them?
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Section 3

A national campaign plan

Design a national **12-month national campaign plan** by defining a timeline of actions to achieve A and B. Consider industrial, legal, political and media strategies. Assign a **budget** for a total of USD20.000.

