Welcome to the March 2012 CSEF bulletin!

In this issue you will find examples of how persistent civil society campaigning and engagement can influence policy and legal frameworks on education, with stories from the National Education Coalitions in Bolivia and Vietnam. Both young networks, but which have in a short time built their credibility and obtained a position as leading education advocates in their countries.

We have also recently welcomed Barbara Chilangwa as a new member of the GPE Board of Directors, representing southern civil society. We hope coalitions across Africa, Latin America and Asia & the Pacific will take advantage of the opportunities this representative brings for civil society engagement in the Global Partnership for Education.

All material from the CSEF bulletins and much more can be found on KARL, please join. If you want to know more about CSEF or KARL, please go to www.campaignforeducation.org/csef/ or email kjersti@campaignforeducation.org.

Happy reading!

Kjersti

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The CSEF-supported Bolivian Right to Education Campaign (CBDE) is considering a new model of social participation to ensure a smoother and more powerful relationship between branches of government and civil society organizations in the education sector. This idea is the result of lessons learned by CBDE during its process of political advocacy for the new Avelino Sihani - Elizardo Pérez General Education Act in Bolivia.

It all started in 2006, when Bolivia's President Evo Morales took office and proposed a series of reforms, including an education reform. When he enacted Bolivia's new Constitution in 2009, there was a clear need for a new education act. Therefore, the government carried out an extensive consultation to propose the new text and in September 2010, the government opened the bill for public discussion, inviting civil society to evaluate it critically before it was sent to the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

Taking advantage of the favourable political climate, the Bolivian Campaign convened working groups to discuss the bill, based on cross-cultural dialogue and different perspectives on reality, to ensure that the new act emerged from a broad social consensus. Some 50 civil society organizations participated in the meetings. Several concepts arose from the discussions, including the guarantee that education be regarded as a human right to which the state must adhere; the guarantee that education be free throughout the different levels and mediums of the education subsystem; and the plan for education to eliminate socio-cultural patterns, stereotypes and prejudices that legitimize discrimination and to generate processes to end violence and strengthen the rights of excluded groups. These elements were consolidated and published in the
document “Contributions to the Avelino Siñani - Elizardo Pérez Education Bill”, which contrasted the statements of the original bill and the suggestions for changes. The document was submitted to the Ministry of Education; the Education, Health, Science, Technology and Sports Committee; and the Office of the Ombudsperson, and it was presented before hundreds of people at events in La Paz, Cochabamba, Sucre, Potosí and Oruro.

In December 2010 the Ministry of Education submitted its final version of the act, which included several of the contributions made by civil society:

- Depatriarchalizing education, based on gender equality, no differentiation of roles, nonviolence and observance of human rights;
- Requiring that education be compulsory through high school;
- Using education to promote dialogue and conflict resolution and to help understand people's rights and how they should be exercised;
- Including sign language as a means of communication for the purpose of integrating all people under the Plurinational State of Bolivia; and
- Developing students' awareness regarding food production, community and environment by encouraging production and consumption of organic products, food safety and sovereignty, and protection of biodiversity, the land and Mother Earth, to improve students' wellbeing.

Although these contributions represent an important achievement, some concepts such as gender equality in the University Higher Education subsystem are not explicit in the final version of the Act. The CBDE also understands that full realisation of the right to education depends on an effective dialogue between government and civil society. Therefore, it began to influence the discussions on the Base Curriculum for the Plurinational Educational System and the Base Curriculum Design for the Alternative and Special Education Subsystem. The CBDE also began to approach the concept of “social community participation in education” regarding the national education policy.

In this regard, CBDE member organizations recently prepared the document “Contributions to the Production of Social Community Participation Rules,” which includes experiences, lessons learned, studies, and highly critical, inquisitive and creative reflections on participation as both a right and a social, ethical and political citizenship-building process—which is part of and is materialised in the framework of state transformations. Among these reflections, the document highlights the need to reinvent the social participation model, rendering it more democratic and incorporating the voice of the poor, both during consultations and when making education policies and decisions. There is also an urgent need to consolidate the institutional framework of social participation both in formal education and in the alternative and special education, higher education and teacher training subsystems.

Ten years ago the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), with the technical assistance of UNESCO, prepared the National Education for All Action Plan 2003-2015. This plan was approved by the government on 2nd July 2003 and is both a government tool for adjusting policies at the macro level and a framework for provinces and cities to develop their respective provincial Education For All plans. However, after several years of implementation, the government is facing many challenges to achieve the objectives and targets set out in the plan, particularly for non-formal and pre-school education. Although the Vietnam government has invested 20% of the total national budget towards education, the allocation for non-formal education makes up less than 2%, and only 8.22% for pre-school education. In the school year 2010-2011, the enrollment rate for children into kindergarten (from 03 months to 03 years old) was only 21.5%. This gap is the reason why the Vietnam Coalition for Education For All (VCEFA) advocates for improvement within these two crucial areas.

During its 18 months of operation, with the support from CSEF, VCEFA has held a series of consultation workshops with civil society organizations across the country. These initiatives have focused on different issues concerning education in the Vietnamese context, such as non-formal education, financing for education, policies for continuing education, and recommendations for pre-school education in Vietnam. Following the workshops, VCEFA has sent civil society’s recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to ask for enhanced policies which can support improved quality for non-formal education and pre-school education. Demands include increasing the education budget, providing capacity training for teachers and managers and assigning more permanent/full-time staff. Partly thanks to VCEFA’s tireless efforts the MOET has issued two important policy documents on pre-school education and on Community Learning Centers (CLCs), which are initiatives functioning to improve quality of life and provide lifelong learning opportunities for people in the community, especially the
poor or disadvantaged with limited access to education. Circular No 40 establishes a legal framework on the operation of CLCs, including the provision of more staff for Community Learning Centers. Decision No 60 entails a plan for developing pre-school education in the period 2011-2015, focusing on benefits for children and teachers at pre-school education level, and implies responsibilities of related sector departments such as the Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affair, Ministry of Internal Affair, and the Ministry of Finance in supporting the implementation of this decision. These policies are important steps forward for non-formal and early childhood education in Vietnam.

The Global Partnership for Education is a multilateral partnership working towards ensuring education for all children and the achievement of the EFA goals. It brings together representatives from developing countries, donors, private foundations and civil society for global cooperation on education. The partnership offers technical and financial support for improving education sector dialogue, planning and implementation processes. In addition it offers a space for partners to work together towards more effective and better coordinated policies on aid.

The GPE Board of Directors is a key governance function of the Partnership. Civil society holds three constituency seats on the Board; for southern CSOs, northern CSOs and the teaching profession (one Board Member and one Alternate for each seat). The previous Board Member representative for southern civil society, Miriam Chonya from the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC), is now the Permanent Secretary in Zambia’s Education Ministry, and the role on the GPE Board has been passed on. Since Board seats are held by organisations, ZANEC nominated Barbara Chilangwa (ZANEC Chair and executive director of Camfed Zambia), as the new southern CSO representative on the GPE Board. Barbara’s unique experience, gathered through 33 years in the education field, includes teaching and various roles in the Ministry of Education. She has also spearheaded initiatives to get children into school, been an advocate for girls education and fought child abuse in schools. Nagi Alshafe from the Sudanese Network for Education For All (SNEFA) maintains his role as Board Member Alternate for southern civil society.

**How can southern civil society participate in the GPE?**

CSOs are recognised as important stakeholders in GPE, for their role in education policy discussions, as implementers and as watchdogs. Southern civil society representation on the GPE Board is essential for bringing issues on the ground to the table and for influencing global practices such as ensuring sufficient financial support to education, aid effectiveness, and country ownership. For example, coalitions can play an important role during country funding application processes, in helping to ensure civil society participation and contribution to the proposal development with governments and donors.

A joint Southern Civil Society email list was set up by GCE last year, providing a space for sharing information and updates from the GPE, with the aim to spark fruitful conversations and discussions among GCE member coalitions in the south. The email list is a key tool for communicating with Barbara, Nagi and other civil society members on issues of interest or concern, and offers an opportunity to have your voices heard in a global forum.

To email the southern CSO representatives or for any further questions, including about the Southern CSO email list please contact kjersti@campaignforeducation.org.

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