



## INTERVENTION STUDY

# Baseline Primary Education Research in Angola

Investigating the potential for change: Research report of survey and action research in rural, post-conflict Caimbambo

## Executive Summary

**CfBT Education Trust and Education Action**

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## About the author

**Professor Lynn Davies is the Director of the Centre for International Education and Research (CIER),** part of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham.

She has a particular interest in the field of conflict and education, looking at the contribution of education to peace and to war in different international contexts, in stable, conflict and post-conflict societies. She has done consultancy work in Angola, Kosovo, Bosnia, Palestine, Sri Lanka and with UNRWA. She has just completed a book *Educating Against Extremism* (Trentham April 2008) which examines the role of education in combating negative extremism and terrorism; and presented a keynote lecture at the Gandhi Foundation of Canada on this topic. Her book *Conflict and Education: Chaos and Complexity* (Routledge 2004) won the Society of Education Studies prize for best book of 2004.

A linked concern is with democracy and democratisation of education. This has involved a funded Research Project and Report *Pupil Democracy in Europe* (Children's Rights Alliance 2000); a research project with teacher educators in The Gambia and guidebook *Democracy Through Teacher Education* (CIER, 2002), with a second phase working with the inspectorate, and a guidebook *Democratic Professional Development: a Guidebook for supervisors and inspectors of education* (CIER 2005).

In the area of citizenship and global citizenship, Lynn has been engaged in a funded research project 'The Needs of Teachers and Learners in Global Citizenship' (DFID 2002–2004), and has acted as advisor to British Council on Citizenship Education and Human Rights Education. She currently acts as Senior Advisor to the British Council on governance of education.

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### **Professor Lynn Davies**

*Director, the Centre for International Education and Research (CIER)*

## Foreword

“ This ‘research for primary education in Benguela’ challenges us to adopt an entirely new conception of school whose aim is to reach the core of integrated education for the Angolan child. ”

Schools need to be more than an instrument for the simple development of children’s literacy skills; more fundamentally, they need to transform into truly integrated social centres, intrinsically immersed in the life of their local community. The aim is to link the interests and activities of the school with the opportunities and dynamics of the surrounding environment and wider society.

This ‘research for primary education in Benguela’ challenges us to adopt an entirely new conception of school whose aim is to reach the core of integrated education for the Angolan child. This will be achieved through schools that work on the child’s behalf from the outset, through our non-formal education, through work within families, and through changes in the social environment in Angola and in our province in particular.

Education in this country needs to be concrete but at the same time dynamic; concrete in the sense that it should always be closely based on the experiences of pupils’ daily lives rather than starting from abstract notions, no matter how simple these might be. It also has to be dynamic; taking advantage of the functional stimuli that the family and the social environment offer to the child.

I would like to welcome this important research report, which offers insights that can be used by any school. It is necessary that people talk about change: change in human and material resources, methods, procedures, and strategies. Change becomes much more necessary and is rendered more easily when preceded by

experience and case studies, rather than when based merely on imported values – which are often out of context and therefore likely to confuse cultures and objectives.

I recommend that this piece of work be used as a reference resource to inform our planning and decision-making and for defining our objectives as well as our guidelines.

Congratulations to the Municipality of Caimbambo who served as a point of reference for the project. Congratulations to AJS (Associação Juvenil para a Solidariedade), an Angolan non-governmental organisation, for demonstrating its capability to work with communities who are in most need.

Well done!

**Dr. José Sessa Dias**

*Provincial Director of Education, Benguela*

Benguela, 06 de Janeiro, 2008



## Abbreviations

ACT	Action for Change Team (Acção para Mudanca)
AJS	Youth Association for Solidarity (Associação Juvenil para a Solidariedade)
CIER	Centre for International Education and Research, University of Birmingham
EA	Education Action
FGD	Focus group discussion

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

“It is the story of how schools who were, by anyone’s standards, at the bottom of a global educational heap, managed to take very small steps on the road to self-improvement.”

This is the story of a minor miracle. It is the story of how schools who were, by anyone’s standards, at the bottom of a global educational heap, managed to take very small steps on the road to self-improvement. The mechanisms to achieve this were not revolutionary; the themes are familiar – collaboration, raising expectations, professionalism. What is more original is that the people in the schools (teachers, students, parents), who had not been subjected to the vast international literature on school effectiveness, arrived at factors and improvement strategies relatively independently of outside advice. The intervention merely helped create ways to ask questions. This report tells the story of these schools and the answers they came up with.

The broad aim of the research project was ‘to contribute to strategies to improve teaching and learning in post-conflict contexts’. This objective was to be met through the study of remote villages in one area of Angola, which was representative of the fall-out from the years of conflict across the country. The area chosen was the five Communes of Caimbambo that are located in the middle of the Province of Benguela.

In any country where there is limited capacity of the government to reach remote schools and ensure some degree of quality education there are many common features. Many of the issues identified by this research were therefore not unexpected. However, the post-conflict context of Angola presented a number of additional significant features. The conflict has reduced the capacity, resources and infrastructure for adequate education provision by the state, creating a ‘vacuum’ in provision. Humanitarian providers’ attempts to fill some of the gap have arguably strengthened the culture of dependency, which can result from reliance on humanitarian aid in an emergency. Schools have less authority and support from the state and they tend to maintain a

survivalist culture, reacting to change rather than initiating it. People are disempowered by war and conflict. When they have experienced extreme loss of control over their lives and their future they become passive and a culture of inertia can set hold with people waiting for life to happen to them. The self-reliance that communities and schools need to recover and rebuild post-conflict is difficult to achieve in this context.

Schools, particularly those in rural and hard to reach areas need to be able to engage education authorities from the bottom up and be proactive about their improvement and development.

The focus of the research was therefore on identifying the key factors that explain why teaching and learning is more effective in some schools than in others in a post-conflict context, and secondly how school change or improvement can be initiated or sustained.

The 15-month project, which ran between January 2006 and April 2007, was facilitated on the ground by a local NGO, Associação Juvenil para a Solidariedade (AJS), and managed by Education Action (EA), London. The initial project design was developed by EA and CfBT Education Trust, Reading, with technical input as the project progressed from the Centre for International Education and Research, Birmingham.

## The project approach

“ *Accessibility to the schools, both in terms of geographical remoteness and the conditions (or in some case non-existence) of the roads to reach them, was a significant factor in how often they were visited by school directors and education officials...* ”

The project had quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative work comprised a survey of all 87 schools in Caimbambo to generate basic data on student and teacher numbers, locations of schools, buildings, distance travelled to school and student mobility. Broadly, the survey found the following:

### Schools

There was a great shortage in the overall number of classroom structures, due in part to their destruction or neglect during the conflict, but exacerbated by the large numbers of people returning to Benguela Province since the end of the war. Those that did exist varied from a few wooden palings to denote the learning space, to a thatched roof, to an adobe construction with a corrugated iron roof or, in a few cases, to a new concrete school constructed through an aid project. In some schools, open air teaching was observed. Accessibility to the schools, both in terms of geographical remoteness and the conditions (or in some case non-existence) of the roads to reach them, was a significant factor in how often they were visited by school directors and education officials (commune coordinators) from the municipal capital.

### Students

Data was collected on 3,963 students. There was an average student–teacher ratio of 32:1, although class sizes were smaller (around 27 on average), but these figures were complicated by teacher and student absenteeism, both of which were considerable problems. The survey also found that the vast majority of students lived within 4km of their school. There was a broad gender balance, with a boy–girl ratio of 5:4. In total 41 of the 3,963 students were recognised as having disabilities, suggesting that many children with disabilities are not enrolled in school or do not have their special needs identified.

### Teachers

There was a more marked gender disparity among the teacher populations with an overall male–female ratio of 5:3 of the 139

teachers surveyed. However, teacher gender ratios per school were very varied. Catholic mission schools and those less remote from the municipal capital tended to have a higher proportion of female teachers. Additionally, the data on the length of service indicates that the gender imbalance is reducing, with a much greater proportion of females among the more recently registered teachers. The survey identified teacher mobility as an area of concern, with over a third reporting having changed schools in the last two years. There was also a big problem with teachers being recruited to teach in schools that were far away from their homes. Almost half of teachers came from outside Caimbambo and only 26 of the 139 teachers were teaching in their home villages.

Whilst the data does give some indication of the problems encountered on the ground, it does not give a very full picture of primary education in Caimbambo. Many of the issues of school ineffectiveness related to the institutional culture of the schools, and these cannot be captured easily through numerical data collected on surveys.

The qualitative element of the project was an action research programme which facilitated ten pilot schools to identify small changes they wanted to make which did not rely on outside resources. The philosophy was that these changes should be democratically identified, implemented and monitored by a team of teachers, students and parents in a ‘school change cycle’. This change process was developed in response to the findings of the baseline survey and was a collaborative effort that resulted from a discussion with AJS, school directors, EA and Professor Lynn Davies. A Change Manual was devised to help the school in the process of identifying change.

<sup>1</sup> Director also refers to headteacher and principal.

## The school change cycle

*“Throughout the school change cycle, the director plays a pivotal role, establishing the ACT, facilitating meetings and activities, monitoring and evaluating.”*

In the school change cycle, change begins with the establishment of an ‘Action for Change Team’ (ACT). This team consists of two teachers, two students, two parents and the school director. Once established, the ACT identify three changes they wish to see happen in their school. They then determine what actions need to be taken to bring those changes about and which people or groups will be responsible for implementing them. To maximise the possibility of success, actions are usually quite straightforward and it is suggested that only one be tried for each of the changes identified. The next stage of the process is to implement those actions. Throughout the school change cycle, the director plays a pivotal role, establishing the ACT, facilitating meetings and activities, monitoring and evaluating. At the same time, school change being a democratic process, teachers, students and parents are all encouraged to participate as fully as possible and feel ownership of the project. Monitoring of school change consists of keeping basic records of all meetings and events associated with the project and ensuring that the ACT keep notes of their activities. Depending on the kind of change the school is trying to achieve, monitoring may also entail classroom observation, interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluation involves collecting together and reading through all the pieces of information, discussing as a group what worked, what didn’t work and the reasons why changes either did or didn’t happen, and then writing a final report, to which the whole ACT is encouraged to contribute. AJS and the commune coordinators provided assistance and support where necessary throughout the cycle.

The changes planned by the pilot schools fell into two broad categories: construction of new buildings such as classrooms, offices, teachers’ houses and teachers’ transit houses; and improvements to teacher professionalism, for example punctuality, attendance, preparation of lessons, planning, explaining, and active teaching methods. Mechanisms to achieve these included a new emphasis on collaboration and talking

(meetings between teachers, meetings with parents), taking initiatives to obtain the curriculum, and some support from AJS in areas such as lesson planning.

The table on the following page shows the changes planned and achieved by each school.

As illustrated in the table, the majority of changes were either partially or fully achieved, with new constructions going up and evidence (from directors, parents and students) of some teachers exhibiting improved skills and greater commitment to their teaching as well as to the school. It should be noted that many of the activities identified as ‘changes’ would be routine in schools in more developed or stable contexts. Lesson planning, following the curriculum, coming to school on time – none of these would be seen as part of an ‘improvement’ process in the UK for example; but in Angola the prolonged war has prevented these practices from becoming established as a culture of education. Not only did the majority of teachers have no training in the basics of teaching, most would not have had experience for themselves of schooling in which the teacher planned lessons, followed the curriculum and came to school on time. The changes therefore required a step change in school culture. Across the changed schools there was a perceptible shift in attitudes and approaches to teaching amongst students, teachers, parents and directors alike. However, although the changes identified by the ACTs were largely achieved and improvements made, clearly much needs to be done if a deeper and more substantial shift in attitudes and methodology is to be brought about.

**TABLE 1: Changes planned and achieved by each school**

School	Changes planned	How	Achieved?
<b>Tchiculo</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Construction of teachers' houses</li> <li>2. Teacher comes on time</li> <li>3. Teachers prepare lessons</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parents and students make mud blocks</li> <li>2. Meetings, house visits, telling commune coordinator</li> <li>3. Meetings, lesson planning, classroom observation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. Yes, meetings about teachers' performance and planning</li> <li>3. In progress</li> </ol>
<b>Calima</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Obtain curriculum programme</li> <li>2. Promote teachers' meetings</li> <li>3. Construct classrooms</li> <li>4. Teachers are not late nor absent</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Go to Municipal office</li> <li>2. –</li> <li>3. Parents distribute tasks</li> <li>4. Influence communal coordinator in teacher allocation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. Yes</li> <li>3. Yes</li> <li>4. In progress</li> </ol>
<b>Cambumba</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers are punctual</li> <li>2. Teachers use adequate methods</li> <li>3. Teachers explain well</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Effective supervision, attendance book</li> <li>2. Demonstration, supervision</li> <li>3. Lesson planning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No, director left; new director is trying to restart</li> </ol>
<b>Primaria 145</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers prepare lessons</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pedagogic discussions, teachers understanding material</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> </ol>
<b>Epunda</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers use adequate methods</li> <li>2. Parents buy school materials for their children</li> <li>3. Teachers explain well</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lesson planning, photocopy curriculum</li> <li>2. Make a savings plan</li> <li>3. Lesson preparation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> <li>3. In progress</li> </ol>
<b>Halo</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers love their work more</li> <li>2. Teachers master the material</li> <li>3. Parents involved in teaching and learning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Punctuality, getting curriculum, preparing lessons</li> <li>2. Getting curriculum</li> <li>3. Meetings between school management and community</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes, although not all teachers</li> <li>2. Yes</li> <li>3. Yes</li> </ol>
<b>Chinguvi</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students more punctual</li> <li>2. Teachers make lessons more agreeable</li> <li>3. Fortnightly meetings between teachers and parents</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meetings with parents, starting the lesson with those who are present</li> <li>2. Giving exercises to students</li> <li>3. Encourage parents to contact the school, individual meetings about their child</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. In progress</li> <li>3. Yes</li> </ol>
<b>Malowa 2</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers share the curriculum</li> <li>2. Construct classrooms</li> <li>3. Teachers explain well</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint meetings of all teachers</li> <li>2. –</li> <li>3. Better lesson planning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. In progress</li> <li>3. Yes</li> </ol>

## Factors affecting school effectiveness

“*The key learning areas were that changes must be recognised by the schools themselves, for ownership and sustainability...*”

The project clearly identified nine key factors in school effectiveness and improvement to be addressed:

- the central role of the director of the school
- parental and community involvement
- parental engagement with teachers and teaching
- teacher collaboration
- teacher access to curriculum
- student participation in change
- student enthusiasm and understanding of the teaching-learning process
- support from local authorities such as commune coordinators
- the Action For Change team (developed during the action research elements of this project) in the school.

The key learning areas were that changes must be recognised by the schools themselves, for ownership and sustainability; but that initial training and meetings were essential to explain democratic processes of change identification. A written resource was important in this regard, but the role of the school director was central in mediating the processes and in communications with the

community. For sustainability, a cultural shift was needed which included having regular meetings of teachers where pedagogy was discussed; regular meetings with parents where teaching and learning were discussed as well as parental contributions to the school; a new perception of the capabilities of students to participate both in learning and decision-making; systematic recognition of school and teacher efforts by outside authorities; and habits instilled of taking initiative and making demands to achieve quality education.

Contextual constraints on change were also identified, arising from the effects of civil war on the local population, including the post-conflict economic situation, authoritarian forms of student discipline and low expectations of students' capacities; gender disparities; teacher turnover; availability of textbooks; access to the school; and the culture of planning.

Analysis of the role of intervention found it highly positive, although issues needed to be considered regarding sustainability, the need for manuals to be accompanied by training, the ethics of action research, exit strategies and overall research and project limitations in post-conflict impoverished contexts.

## Conclusion

“ *The final conclusion has to be that a relatively small input can change a culture that has been shaped by conflict...* ”

This study has shown that a small-scale intervention can make a significant difference to a school with minimal resources. The changes may seem hardly radical (teachers coming to school, teachers coming on time, teachers planning lessons, teachers using the formal curriculum, directors supervising teachers, adequate physical environments), but they have the potential to lead to at least a minimally satisfactory level of teaching and learning instead of an arbitrary learning experience for the students. Cultures have shifted, and people are seeing each other

differently, with raised expectations on contributions all round. All this points to the need to find some way to build on the successes of the project, both for the schools involved and for schools in similar circumstances.

The final conclusion has to be that a relatively small input can change a culture that has been shaped by conflict; and that that culture change can go a small way to lifting children out of a cycle of poverty or lack of aspiration. We hope that this story enables others to begin their own narratives of change.

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Please note that the views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Angolan Ministry of Education, Associação Juvenil para Solidariedade, Education Action or CfBT Education Trust

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