

**Islamic Education, EFA and Millennium Development Goals**

**Review Paper for World Bank Human Development Network**

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## **Executive Summary**

The goal of universal primary school participation by all children, worldwide, by 2015 requires the fullest possible mobilization of all education providers as well as the development of new partnerships addressing the needs of the poor, rural and isolated communities, girls and women and others inadequately served by current approaches. Islamic education systems provide both significant basic education capacities in countries with muslim populations and a tradition of learning underlying public education generally.

At least 50 developing and transitional countries have muslim populations of 10 percent or more. These countries include 11 of the countries designated for “Fast-track” focus by the World Bank and other international funders and 5 of the “E-9” large countries. The basic education capacities of these countries vary widely, from countries already providing universal primary education such as Albania, Malaysia, Algeria, Tunisia and Turkey to countries nearing universal provision such as Indonesia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Central Asian Republics to Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and other countries of the Sahel that will require heroic efforts to reach anything like universal basic schooling by 2015.

Many countries have built modern, secular government-administered public school systems on an earlier history of koranic schools and Islamic learning supported by local associations, mosques, religious and social leaders. There are learned communities associated with centers of Islamic scholarship dating many centuries, some of which continue to play influential roles today, such as Al-Azhar in Egypt. Traditional koranic schools providing basic religious instruction exist in most communities. Madrassas and other Islamic schools provide more formal instruction and training including preparation for religious vocations. Over the past two decades there has been expansion both of the religious models and of hybrid models combining Islamic studies with the core curriculum of the national education system.

The major findings of this review are:

- Basic schooling in non-public Islamic schools is not more than 10 percent of the age group in any of the countries reviewed and under 3 percent in most. In a few countries (e.g. Indonesia, Pakistan, Sahelian Africa) up to 10 percent additional may be in koranic schools that do not meet public education criteria.
- Public policy in almost half the countries (23 of 50) supports secular public education with little subsidy or other direct involvement with religious education.
- In countries with rapidly expanding primary school enrollments private provision of education in non-public madrassas or other Islamic schools is stable or declining.
- Most Islamic education for school-age cohorts is provided in public schools as part of the approved and monitored curriculum and in publicly provided Islamic schools.
- Statistical data and related analytic and assessment work on koranic schools and Islamic education generally is very weak, virtually nonexistent in many cases, reflecting a lack of public oversight and organizational support among other factors.
- National strategies to meet basic education needs building on Islamic education models require substantial dialogue and joint development as well as parallel attention to issues of language and language policy, policies toward private education and greater attention to decentralization, localization and community participation.

## Major recommendations and next steps:

- Guidance should be provided to Bank assessment and appraisal teams regarding the necessity of including data and analysis on non-public education provision in general and, where Islamic education organizations are significant providers, on their potential for contributing to national education goals.
- Further study is needed on the private provision of education generally, including the roles of religious entities providing basic schooling. Many of the public policy issues affecting the provision of schooling by Islamic associations and individuals are not specific to religious schools. They include the legal requirements for non-public schools, arrangements for registration and monitoring/reporting, access to land and financing, teacher training, access to texts and other materials in secular subjects and mechanisms for coordinating on examinations.
- Further study and strategic consideration is needed on the potential for supporting early childhood, adolescent and adult education, and other community education working with Islamic education systems and community-based Islamic associations.
- Further study and strategic planning is needed on organization models, organization development and mechanisms for supporting Islamic education organizations. Many of the education limitations of Islamic education systems appear to lie in the inability of the organizations to provide technical, administrative and policy/strategic support. A major limitation on external support appears to be the lack of organizational partners with the necessary technical, administrative and fiduciary capacities.
- Some means and mechanism needs to be found for supporting national statistical monitoring and reporting on Islamic education enrolment, persistence and success rates at higher levels. Regional and international data collection and comparative studies also are needed, but the priority appears to be for national assessment and analysis activities involving the organized providers as directly as possible.
- Some means is needed for exchange of experience internationally among Islamic organizations supporting schooling-equivalent madrassas and other models combining secular and religious education. There may be potential for using information technologies to support this documentation, networking and exchange.

## Lessons Learned

- For such a complex, sensitive topic substantial fieldwork, country by country, with local research teams and local authorities is essential.
- Generalizations about “reform,” “improvement” and “modernization” must be made carefully, if at all.
- Generalizations across more than a few countries are risky. In this study there were few if any countries with more than a few points of direct comparison.