

INFORMATION BRIEF



Working politically to increase efficiency of administrative offices in DRC

Summary

This Information Brief presents an overview of the progress made in supporting reform of administrative offices to improve the education system's efficiency and effectiveness in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

It builds on the 'Working Politically for School Fee Reform in the DRC' Information Brief, and brings the experience of Accelere!2 (A!2) working in this field, sensitising stakeholders on the need to implement system reforms to ensure free education sustainability. This brief includes a summary of our lessons learnt when working in the area of school fee reform.

It also explores the evidence gathered to support the argument for increasing the administrative system's efficiency and explains the combined approaches and tools taken by A!2. Finally, there is a section on lessons learnt when working with administrative offices in particular.

Background

The DRC education system is deconcentrated, with 59 educational provinces. Within these provinces and sub-provinces, there are administrative offices in charge of the administrative, financial, and pedagogical management of public and private schools. Their staff, as civil servants, are in principle paid by the State. Some administrative offices are particularly in charge of pedagogical management, others are focused on teachers' and schools' registration and payment. The PROVED and Sous-PROVED provide overall administrative management structures, and public faith-based schools also have a parallel administrative system that largely replicates the state system.

Studies show that education quality in DRC is poor, partly because schools do not receive enough pedagogical and organisational support from the administrative offices. The increase in the number of administrative offices over the past 15 years has not improved the situation. On the contrary, this has worsened it by creating larger numbers of new administrative offices that do not necessarily know the role they play in the system. The last two ministers of education both contributed to expanding the number of offices and actively recruited allies.

Reform of the administrative offices has been planned in two major projects in the past few years: PROSEB, funded by the World Bank, and PAQUE, funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The new Minister of Education is willing to bring about change but is locked in political interlinks due to the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, which limit his capacity to reform.

Why is there a need to increase efficiency?

A rapidly increasing number of administrative offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational provinces multiplied from 26 to 59, resulting in more administrative offices. • Some administrative offices manage as few as 10 schools each. • Public faith-based schools receive oversight from both State and faith-based administrative offices.
Numerous and unqualified staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of administrative office staff multiplied by 16 in 30 years, while the number of teachers was multiplied by three. • Large number of unregistered and unpaid agents, previously financed directly by parents through school fees. • Some administrative offices have around 300 staff on their payroll, with no clear responsibilities or space to work. • Staff are not recruited through a selective process.
Inadequate and often weak funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30% of school fees was allocated to administrative offices prior to the introduction of free primary education in 2019. • Unequal funding between different types of administrative offices. • Numerous unregistered and unpaid administrative offices.
Roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge of roles and responsibilities. • Lack of pedagogical and organisational support to schools. • Lack of planning and budgeting, lack of performance review.

What have we learnt from working politically on school fees?

A!2 gained experience from working politically on school fees reform. This acquired knowledge can also be applied when working to improve administrative offices' efficiency:

Empower people to become actors of change

This includes keeping them informed about their rights and duties and motivating them to change their behaviours and attitudes.

Maintain consistent and coherent messages

It is important to create awareness.

Spread the word

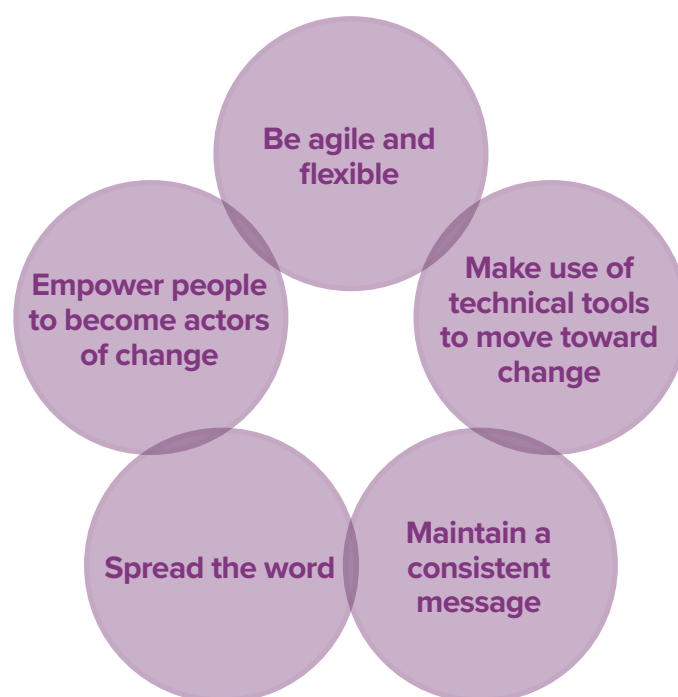
Building momentum and communicating to broader audiences build wider awareness for change and can create public pressure.

Be agile and flexible

This allows moving forward and taking different paths to achieve goals when there are some blockages.

Make use of technical tools

We used Political Economy Analysis to understand power dynamics between stakeholders alongside Roadmaps tools, which identified ways to reach objectives.



Our approach

Efficiency is a sensitive subject, especially if it involves a need to rationalise resources or reduce the workforce in a country where the State is by far the biggest employer. The administrative offices' system also lacked transparency and accountability to beneficiaries and to central government, which allowed individuals or groups to take advantage of the system, for example by redirecting a large part of the school fees paid by parents for their own use.

In this context, A!2 used several combined approaches to break through and make progress regarding the efficiency of the administrative offices' system.

1. Start to build relationships by developing capacities

The programme first approached a sample of administrative offices at a sub-provincial level to propose capacity building activities to improve daily work, such as training and coaching. Administrative staff often were found to be unqualified or lacked knowledge of what their role required. To address this, A!2 worked with the Ministry of Education to develop norms and standards for an administrative office functioning, along with job descriptions for key positions, and a set of specifications that detailed the responsibilities of the administrative offices over the year.

2. Increase the evidence base

In DRC, the education system is characterised by a lack of reliable data. A!2 started by georeferencing all administrative offices in six provinces, collecting a range of useful information on their characteristics, management, finances, human resources, etc. Another study was conducted on the viability of administrative offices looking at their way of working and governance systems. This brought evidence to justify the need for reform.

3. Make people the protagonists of change

Instead of applying external solutions to a Congolese issue, A!2 put administrative staff at the centre of all the work, coaching them for a year to analyse what they were already doing well and where they could improve. A self-assessment tool enabled staff to identify their own development and encouraged them to improve their scores between each assessment, putting in place remediation plans and taking action to reduce gaps. A!2 also identified champions among administrative staff who were particularly open to change and able to influence, coach and support other staff.

4. Build a critical mass to maintain pressure on decision makers

There was no appetite at central level to think about rationalisation in the administrative offices' system; administrative offices provide employment for many people and administrative positions are often used as rewards or compensations. A!2 decided to raise awareness of the need for reform across a wide range of actors, including faith-based organisations (FBOs), national and provincial deputies and civil society. This included providing information on how the administrative offices work and their issues, to empower actors and enable them to raise their voices so they were able to ask for change. A!2 collaborated with a World Bank-funded project to ensure that it included a component of the administrative offices' reform, which is now part of their disbursement-linked indicators.

5. Target actors in power to drive reform

A!2 worked extensively with a sample of administrative offices at sub-provincial and provincial level in six provinces. They made constructive propositions on how to reform the system, including reducing the staff and administrative offices. Propositions came from the group as a whole, so that individuals did not feel that they were risking their careers. At central level, the main actors were against any rationalisation, initially, but began to be influenced by the groups of provincial actors especially when civil society, FBOs and some deputies started to ask questions about the efficiency of the administrative offices' system. By enlarging the existing task force to include representatives of FBOs, civil society and teachers' unions, the programme increased the number of voices across the sector seeking reform. A!2 also worked closely with the Ministry Cabinet and moved closer to the Presidency, to demonstrate the need for reform.

6. Know when to step back and reorient

When another programme funded by the World Bank, PERSE, decided to start working on administrative office reform through rationalisation, A!2 stepped back and let their team lead the way as they were better positioned to reach approval at Ministry level. A!2 then reoriented its support towards improving efficiency within the administrative offices.

Tools implemented

To improve daily work and maximise efficiency in the administrative offices, AI2 developed and then encouraged the staff to use some practical tools:

Tools for improving administrative offices' work

Guidance to prepare an annual action plan and budget, and to conduct an annual performance review

Norms and standards for an administrative office functioning and an auto-assessment tool to measure progress

Tools for improving staff capacity

Job descriptions and administrative offices specifications

Four training modules approved by the Ministry of Education on leadership, pedagogical management, financial management and administrative management.

A rationalisation reform in process – Led by the Ministry at central level and PERSE

Norms and standards for administrative offices

Updated maximum number of staff per administrative office type

Calculation of savings to be made if tools are applied

Lessons learnt

Create safety in numbers

Make sure other actors have the possibility to raise their voice and be listened to in a safe way. Developing groups and tasks forces will enable actors to advocate in safety while facilitating collaborative problem-solving. Collective power also allows greater transparency and accountability.

Rely on deconcentrated and/or non-state actors

Enabling other actors, especially provinces, to become advocates for local needs enlarges the circle of stakeholders involved in education discussions and strategic planning and at the same time improves local governance.

Play with the dynamics of power

A stakeholder analysis to identify who has the decision-making power to drive reform will allow you to target actors at central and local level in a tailored way.

Rely on individuals rather than institutions

Institutions are weak, so relying on key individuals is a good strategy to produce sustainable change. A way of doing that is by identifying champions that are enthusiastic about change and can produce a positive influence on others.

Be ready to take a step back

Recognise when you are not strong enough to push by yourself and step back is an asset. Others might be better positioned to influence change and you can reorient your resources to other priorities.

Look for support among other actors

This will ensure enough and different stakeholders can raise their voice and pressure those in power to act in favour of the reform.

This document has been produced as part of activity 2 of the ACCELERE! Programme.

ACCELERE!2, implemented by Cambridge Education, provides support for the reform of the Congolese education system with financial support from UK aid and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

For more information, contact: virginie.briand@mottmac.com; mathilde.nicolai@camb-ed.com.