

Ethiopia School Visit M&E Report 2009

Schools visited: 20 (target= 80)

Introduction

The M&E function in Ethiopia was quite weak in 2009. While the initial number of schools to be visited was set by the Hub itself, there was very little effort made to achieve this target. There was a time-lag of several months before the visits began, and the proportion of schools visited is very disappointing. There are certainly very interesting themes that emerge from the data collected, but they lack the colour and depth that more reports would have contributed. Some of the descriptions were sparse, and at times quite unclear. This certainly suggests both the need for a more formalised reporting system with closed fields, and a shorter time-lag between the initial training and the commencement of the reports. On a more positive note, the reports disaggregated students by gender in each school, which proved invaluable in terms of assessing equity of access.

1. Student Interviews

For the most part students seem very satisfied with the Camara computers, and in 14 of the 20 schools they stressed this specifically. A recurring theme, given the large classroom sizes, was congestion in the computer labs. This was cited as being a problem by students in 11 schools. In two schools the students articulated difficulties with Linux, suggesting additional training as being the solution. In one school students stressed their satisfaction with Linux, though in another they pointed to the lack of Amharic support as being problematic. It is important to emphasise that the students are asked open-ended questions about the computers, rather than steered in any direction. Therefore the lack of Amharic support and congestion are likely to affect the majority of schools in Ethiopia and should be prioritised.

2. Teacher Interviews.

In five of the schools teachers expressed surprise at how quickly students had developed ICT skills. Nine of the schools specifically expressed general satisfaction with the Camara computers, while two complained of congestion problems arising from a low computer-to-student ratio. Eight teachers specifically reported liking Linux, which seems high given the lack of Amharic support and training provided. One teacher suggested that Linux is a particularly good operating system for children. Three schools reported that the computers were a useful tool in delivering lessons to students. In one school teachers even reported that having a computer lab had improved their relationships with their students.

3. Beneficiary Profile

Total Number of computers received	1,946
Computers accounted for	417 ¹ (21.4%)
Mean lab size	20.85 computers
Median lab size	20 computers
Computers broken	40 (9.6%)
Computers missing	0 (0%)
Computers functioning in the labs	377 (90.4%)
Approximate total number of students	12,548 ²
Mean number of students per school	738
Median number of students per school	700
Median number of students per computer	35
Mixed schools	20 (100%)
Number of boys	7,631 ³ (64%)
Number of girls	4,247 (36%)

The most striking statistic is the number of computers that have not been accounted for. The initial plan as agreed with the Adama Hub management was to visit and report on 80 schools. This would have covered the vast majority of the computers received in the last four years. As it stands only 20 schools were visited and we have no data from the other 60 institutions, accounting for some 1,529 computers. This represents a cost of some €75,000 to Camara, or over €300,000 on the open market. While we believe that the majority of these computers were delivered to legitimate educational institutions, the other findings in the Adama Hub are inevitably tarnished. This lack of accountability by management is extremely disappointing, and was reflected in a poor audit performance. Of the twenty schools visited, at least four are owned by the former CEO, all of which showed appropriate use of the computers. The remaining schools are located in Assela, Havassa, Adama, Shashamene, and North Shewa,

¹ All subsequent calculations are based on this figure

² In 17 schools. In 3 cases the number was not specified

³ Gender breakdown given for 16 schools. Calculations are based on this number

all of which are easily accessible from the Hub. Whether this reflects a concentrated geographical focus by the Hub, or a bias in the M&E visits, is difficult to discern.

The median lab size suggests that the Camara recommendation of a lab of 25 computers has been implemented reasonably closely. However, the mean and median class sizes in Ethiopia are particularly large, making the target of 25 computers per school inappropriate in some cases. For example, two schools had 2,000 students each, and were still only given 20 computers. While Camara is patently limited insofar as its schools have limited means, there should be a systematic effort to give computers in numbers appropriate to the needs of each school. The median number of students per computer is slightly higher than desirable, assuming a 35 hour school week.

The reporting of no missing computers from schools is difficult to explain. Possibly the small number of schools visited represented those with a close relationship with the Hub. Alternatively, the Hub could have misinterpreted the M&E policy and reported computers as being broken even if they were missing from the lab. The number of broken computers certainly represents some cause for concern. The fact that 10% of the computers are broken suggests limited maintenance services available to schools. However, the proportion of computers still functioning in the labs (at 90.4%) is certainly positive.

The proportion of female beneficiaries is quite low, at only 36%. To a large extent this may be considered a natural consequence of inequitable access to education more widely; since Ethiopia has one of the poorest enrolment rates for girls in the region.⁴ However, Camara needs to consciously challenge gender disparities rather than imbed them. The Hub should actively approach girls' schools and work towards a more equal gender balance.

⁴ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_34471.html. Accessed 15th September 2009

4. The Labs

Schools that charge students to use computers	19 (95%) ⁵
Schools that do not charge students to use computers	1 (5%)
Schools with computers in good condition	15 (75%)
Schools with computers in fair condition	2 (10%)
Schools with computers in poor condition	3 (15%)
Labs in good condition	20 (100%)
Labs in fair condition	0 (0%)
Labs in poor condition	0 (0%)
Schools suitable to receive more computers	19 (95%)
Schools not suitable to receive more computers	1 (5%)

The impact of the project is somewhat undermined by the fact that all but one of the schools charge students to use the computers. Unfortunately the Hub did not report the prices charged, but the records in other countries suggest that the fees vary dramatically. While the reports did not specify whether the charges were all additional, or whether in some cases they were incorporated into existing school fees, they will inevitably preclude poorer students from accessing the computers. While there may be no means by which Camara can address this directly while retaining its core efficiency, there is certainly an argument for incorporating budgeting and charges into a lab management training module for teachers.

No dates of reception are recorded whatsoever, but the M&E Officer was quite fastidious about documenting Afritrack numbers.⁶ On this basis it is reasonable to assume that the computers concerned were dispatched to Adama between March 2008 and March 2009. Consequentially, the proportion of broken computers (9.6%) seems quite high. This is explicable by the fact that there were virtually no discernible reports of maintenance services being

⁵ Include some sort of charge- the M&E Officer did not specify if the charges were existing or new fees.

⁶ Fifteen of the schools had full or partial lists of Afritrack numbers given. For many computers the stickers had been peeled off by students.

provided to schools. While there may be some maintenance activity, it is undocumented, unsystematic, and haphazard. Likewise, there is no report of any recycling system or policy at the school level.

All of the labs were reported as being good, very good, or excellent in terms of safety and overall condition. Likewise the students in each school were described as being proficient or very proficient with computers. Inevitably, this raises questions regarding the training given to the Hub personnel, and the value of wholly subjective opinions. For 2010 the M&E Officers will be given a checklist covering aspects such as surge protection, ventilation, and grilled windows. A subjective evaluation of student proficiency is naturally a very flawed method of assessment, which highlights the need to use direct-testing among sample groups. This will be a priority once the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) strategy has been developed and operationalised.

The M&E Officer's own comments are quite useful, and depict the labs and schools in generally positive terms. In the case of nine schools he stressed that the teachers needed more training, particularly in Linux. This is a recurring theme, and Camara's decision to implement training systematically through the local hubs is commendable. There is a strong argument to go even further, and insist on basic training as a prerequisite to receiving any Camara computers. While this would represent some inconvenience to schools, there is no evidence to suggest that computers generate any positive educational outcome unless there is at least one trained and driven teacher involved.

In the case of six schools the M&E Officer noted a high student-to-computer ratio. This is probably representative of a large proportion of the schools in Ethiopia, and there is a definite need to ameliorate against large class sizes. This could easily be incorporated into the school vetting procedure undertaken by the Hub, and should be actively promoted by Camara Headquarters.