First comprehensive survey of

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

By Jacques Louis du Toit

Tracking the size, shape and performance of the formal independent schooling sector

The formal independent schooling sector has grown significantly since 1990 and its profile now more closely reflects the demographics of South African learners. Such are the findings of the first comprehensive national survey of the sector, conducted by the Human Resources Development (HRD) Research Programme of the HSRC.

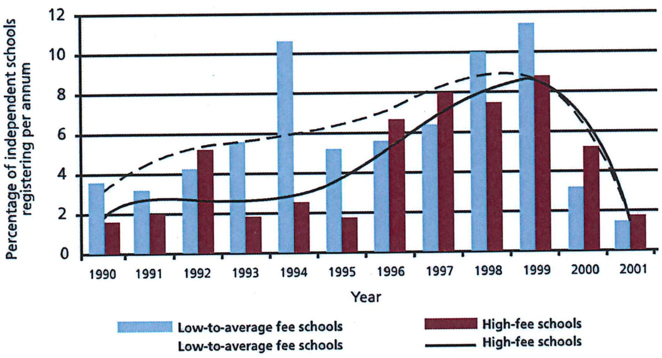
The survey, which is part of the forthcoming Biennial Review of HRD in South Africa, assesses the size and shape of the sector by counting learners and teachers, and examining performance indicators such as pass rates.

Table 1: HSRC statistics on independent schools vs DoE statistics

	DoE	HSRC
Number of independent schools	984	1 287
Number of learners	245 150	391 248
Number of teachers	14 857	24 453
School / learner ratio	1:249	1:304
Teacher / learner ratio	1:17	1:16

Table 1 compares statistics from the survey to official statistics from the Department of Education (DoE).

The HSRC assessed a much larger number of learners in the sector than the DoE, partly because it identified a larger number of schools – including schools registered with recognised independent schools associations but not necessarily with the DoE. However, the HSRC survey also reflects a larger school/learner ratio. Inferential statistics revealed that school sizes were most significantly associated with school fees, with a significantly larger percentage of large schools charging high fees. This means that a greater proportion of large schools would not receive a subsidy and are therefore unlikely to be included in the DoE's annual "SNAP" surveys. This is likely to explain the difference between the two sources, and it also strongly suggests that the size of the sector has been underestimated. The independent school sector currently contributes approximately 3.2% of total schooling, whereas it contributed approximately 1.9% during the nineties.



The survey confirms the popular perception that the sector grew significantly during the nineties – more than 60% of all schools registered between 1990 and 2001. Trend lines in the above graph suggest that growth of low- to average-fee schools (associated with excess schooling demand in lower socio-economic areas) was largest, whereas growth of high-fee schools (associated with differentiated demand in higher socio-economic areas) was at a stronger rate than before. However, growth of both types of schools declined sharply after 1999.

The survey also debunks the popular misconception that the sector is predominantly white and elitist. It shows that African learners constitute the majority of learners in the sector at 58.3%, whereas white learners constitute less than 30.0%. There are also far more girls than boys in the independent sector than in the public sector.

More than half of all schools charge low to average fees, that is, no more than R6 000 per annum. It should be noted, however, that historical inequalities are echoed, as most African learners are found in low- to average-fee schools and most white learners in high-fee schools. A comparison with data from the HRD's recent Grade 12 Learner Choice Survey also revealed that predominantly white and Indian independent schools are less integrated than former white and Indian public schools.

Table 2: Annual school fee categories

ANNUAL SCHOOL FEE CATEGORIES	TOTAL	
	Number	% of schools
R0 – 6 000	640	52.9
R6 001 – 12 000	261	21.6
R12 001 – 18 000	141	11.7
R18 000 +	166	13.8
No information	79	
Total	**1 287**	**100**

Teacher/learner ratios are lower in low-to-average and high-fee independent schools (1:21 and 1:13 respectively) than in public schools (1:34). Similarly, total pass rates for the 2001 Grade 12 National Senior Certificate examination of both groups (66.5% and 72.8% respectively) are higher than public schools (61.7%) – although the reverse is true when results are disaggregated for some provinces. It should be noted that these findings pertain to the formal (registered) component of the sector, whereas the informal component – which is also perceived by some to have grown significantly – still remains unexplored. **For more information, e-mail jdutoit@hsrc.ac.za**

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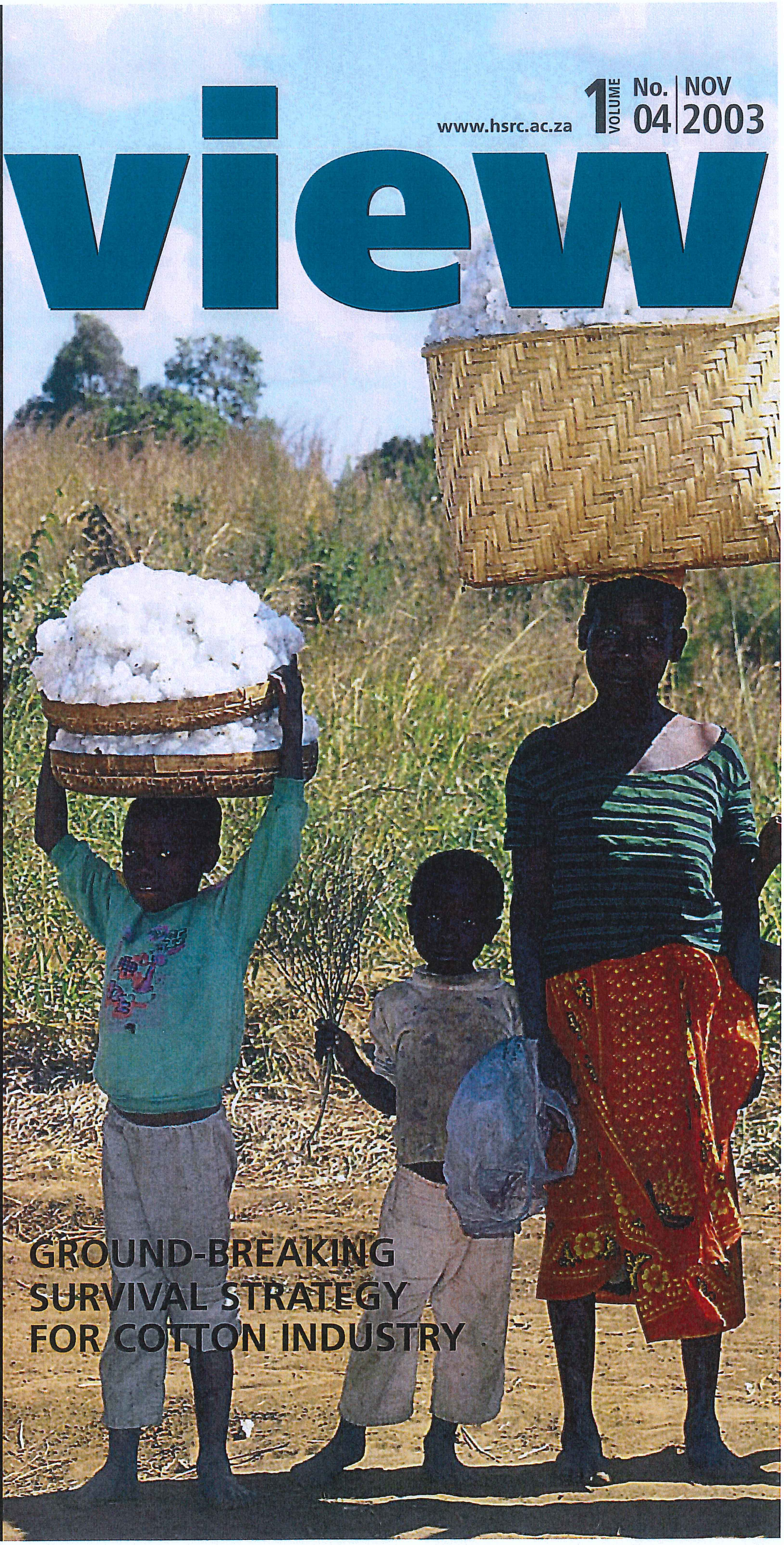

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GROUND-BREAKING SURVIVAL STRATEGY FOR COTTON INDUSTRY