The thematic global evaluation of European Commission support to the education sector in partner countries (including basic and secondary education)

MINUTES OF THE DISSEMINATION SEMINAR
23rd February 2011, Tour Madou, Brussels

The seminar aimed at presenting and discussing the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation of the EC support to basic and secondary education in partner countries.

Agenda of the Seminar:

The seminar was chaired by Mr Chomel, Head of the Evaluation Unit, who briefly summarized the aim and the context of the evaluation and its main points. The EC services were represented by Mr Boidin Head of Unit I3 and Ms Iglesias Ortego quality management officer of Unit E3. After the opening speech, the team leader and two of his team members presented findings and conclusions in the morning session and recommendations in the afternoon session.

In general, all three presentations were well received; in particular timing of the evaluation was welcomed as it allows recommendations to feed into future programming. Moreover, the evaluation comes at a time when other partners have produced or are producing studies on basic education.

After each presentation time was allowed for discussion (ppt attached):

The following points were raised by the participants and the discussants:

A/ Methodology and scope of the evaluation

1. Measurement of results: the evaluation methodology is structured along evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators. Indicators provide information allowing to assess changes occurred in a specific domain. For this evaluation, the information has been retrieved through literature reviews, discussions, numerous semi-structured interviews conducted in Brussels and during the six field visits, focus groups interviews, surveys (providing qualitative data), video conferences, etc. The "measurement" of the EC contribution is done mainly through a qualitative analysis and testing on the ground hypothesis built during the desk study. This measurement involves measuring behaviours, which clearly cannot only be confined to figures.

2. Involvement of national stakeholders: national stakeholders have been involved quite extensively during the field visits. Six field visits took place during which a selected list of donors, government officials and other stakeholders have been interviewed (the list of
people met can be found in the country notes). The evaluators acknowledged a certain difficulty in reaching out and retrieving information at the school level.

3. Impact of financial crisis: the impact of the financial and food crisis on funding to education was not factored in the evaluation as the evaluation scope ended in 2007. The consequences of the crisis shall have an impact on the next EC financial framework.

B/ Issues related to funding and financing modalities (EQ9, EQ6 as well as related conclusions and recommendations)

1. Fast-track Initiative: FTI has played and continues to play an important role as a global partnership within developing countries and donors agencies even if failing sometimes to live up to expectations. The ongoing reform of the initiative should enable it to further strengthen support to bridge the political and financial gap necessary for full achievement of the EFA goals. Some achievements at the level of local education groups have been reached, and it has to be kept in mind that since 2007 many changes and reforms have been put in place to improve the FTI functioning at the higher level.

The Catalytic Fund is one of its main financial instruments\(^1\) and did not prove to fully play its expected role. The reform of this fund is part of the FTI reform and the new FTI/EFA fund should be better designed to provide support to FTI countries.

2. EC perspective on SBS and GBS: a green paper on GBS has been drafted last year and open to consultation; the EC believes that BS is a good tool for development cooperation and its use should be continued, though with some possible improvements/changes. SBS and BS can be used together: in certain cases SBS has functioned as a stepping stone towards GBS, in others the two modalities work in a complementary way. The importance of involving Non-State Actors (NSAs) has also been recognised as they have a role to play as watchdogs, and as well in policy dialogue.

3. Definition of indicators (delays and capacity issues): the shift from projects to BS has improved efficiency. BS constitutes a strong instrument for leverage. Still challenges remain: indicators are often not anchored in domestic systems and partner governments' ownership is not sufficiently promoted. This clearly underlines the importance of a more careful definition of indicators as they structure policy dialogue, government involvement and have a great impact on efficiency of disbursements. In particular, the ongoing move from process indicators to result indicators should be further continued.

The need for monitoring systems to provide data to assess BS indicators has also been acknowledged. The EC should support local capacities in this area.

4. More value for money: there is no direct correlation between money spent and results and it is very difficult to define a universally applicable approach to achieve value for money invested. This in fact often depends on the context and on the governance status in a country. However, addressing governance and PFM issues, teacher’s salaries and motivation, absenteeism, etc. in policy dialogue, confronting and simultaneously giving responsibility to the government is usually very effective.

5. Education sector financing: there is a need to have a broad approach to the education support that includes PFM issues and keeps in mind as well the role of the government in providing funds to the sector (through revenues) in order to encourage ownership of funding. In addition to ODA, innovative financing should also be considered (e.g. levies on airplane tickets, etc).

\(^1\) Even if often it is considered by partners as its main part. This incorrect perception should be addressed.
C/ Issues related to the approach to the education sector (EQ1, EQ5, EQ7, EQ8 as well as related conclusions and recommendations)

1. **Policy dialogue** plays a role in engaging on core matters (such as education quality): the quality of EUD staff is a key element for an effective policy dialogue. In many delegations, there is insufficient expertise available to properly manage the support to education and policy dialogue. Moreover, turnover is too high and affects institutional memory, which in turns negatively impacts on policy dialogue.

2. **Participative inclusive approach**: it is very important to have a participative approach in education management. Inclusiveness is a key concept, it is moreover more politically acceptable and appropriate; therefore more welcomed by partner countries.

3. **Alignment to partner governments' priorities**, where EC has made 'major advancements', should be further complemented by a support to national government's capacities to manage the education system and implement education reforms. Education reforms should be integrated in overall governance reforms. Country context should however be kept in mind to prevent a "killer dependency" of education reforms to governance failures.

4. **Importance of parliaments** to enhance transparency: the EC should strengthen their capacities to allow them to hold education authorities accountable. The NGOs role is also critical for accountability.

5. **Fragile states**: working in fragile states is often a challenge as balanced approaches need to be defined between supporting the public sector directly or supporting a sector through NSA (partnerships) or through NSA-Government partnerships. In fragile states, partnerships are the way forward, with due consideration of the political challenges they entail. Partnerships with the private sector can be very effective also in secondary education, and could help reducing the financing gap especially, but not only, in fragile States.

6. **Government led coordination**: it is a delicate issue and too strong donor support in this area can undermine government's ownership. Successful stories exist and they should be kept in mind to ensure the right balance between support and local ownership.

7. **Division of labour**: the EC is proactively promoting the division of labour, mostly in the education sector where the EC plays a key role. There is a balance between overall sector approach and the need to focus EC interventions: strategic analysis needs to be holistic and sector-wide to include all the different subsectors and their links. Interventions, however, need be focused according to resources and division of labour.

8. **Pro-poor agenda**: pro-poor agendas might not be adequate for all partners (Asia); this is why education support needs to be modernized towards inclusiveness. The EC strives to adapt its objectives, support and its instruments on the basis of the country context.

9. **Reaching the poorest**: a wide sector and intra-sector approach is fundamental to address the poorest quintiles of society. A broad analysis is needed to define interventions. Sectors like transport, food security and nutrition, water and sanitation influence education results and should be taken into account to improve the effectiveness of EC support and reach the poorest part of population.
D/ Issues related to education subsectors and quality (EQ2, EQ3, EQ4 as well as related conclusions and recommendations)

1. The role of non-formal education: the evaluation examined some examples where non-formal education (i.e. outside and after school) was supported, mostly in South Asia through cooperation between NGOs and the EC. No examples were found for Africa. One of the reasons might be that the type of large NGOs usually involved do not exist in Africa.

2. Issue of quality of education and its relation to access: Whilst access to education has significantly improved in the last ten years, quality remains a challenge and a risk to the sustainability of the results obtained in access. For governments, spending resources to improve access is politically more appealing as it leads to clearer and more visible results; support to quality does not have the same visibility and requires higher ownership. This is why governance, including teacher unions and political balance of power, has to be kept in mind when discussing systemic quality issues. Moreover, quality usually decreases when the poorest quintiles of the population access the education system: this should be addressed when supporting full access to quality education. It was noted that in middle income countries the quality issue seems less problematic.

The evaluation shows that success stories on the support to quality education exist: for example the EC support through NGOs partnership in South Asia (the Aga Khan Foundation) or through BS disbursement indicators based on quality targets (Pakistan in the Sindh province). However, the evaluation also underlines that a systemic approach towards education quality is still missing as the ability to mainstream quality at all levels.

Functional literacy\(^2\): school systems do not sufficiently address functional literacy for adults and this has an impact on the quality crisis as it affects employability of adults. The issue of functional literacy is crucial.

3. Importance of early childhood for the subsequent levels of education: early childhood development is the main factor affecting the learning achievements in school. NGOs work on this subsector of education, while the EC only gave little direct support for early childhood education. Additional efforts towards early childhood education should be made. However, it was noted that some of the support to early childhood education might be encompassed in forms of sector support like Sector Budget Support.

4. Cultural issues affecting access and quality of education: culture and traditions play a fundamental role in education and in how education is perceived. The EC has tried to keep this in mind, for example addressing and supporting Nomadic education in contexts where this was deemed relevant and necessary.

5. On the transition from primary to secondary schools: as stated in the evaluation’s conclusion 6, EC support has been mainly focused on the primary level. However, primary education is not sufficient as such, and poor countries do not have resources to set up systems of secondary education. A reflection needs to be done on the type of post-primary education that can be put in place to match objectives of national development. This should be considered in a more holistic way.

\(^2\) UNESCO Institute of Statistics defines functional literacy as follows: “A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community’s development.”
E/ EC services' reactions to the presentations of findings, conclusions and recommendations

The speakers welcomed the evaluation and its conclusions/recommendations as a very comprehensive and useful work even if Vocational Education and Training and Higher education were not part of the scope as defined in the ToR3.

1. Alignment and types of partnerships: the work to improve the tools available to support education (SWAPs, FTI) has continued after the evaluation period and progress has been achieved. FTI is working towards the implementation of reforms, and the EC needs to continue its support in this direction. The EC has aligned its work with the Paris and Accra Declarations, making extensive use of country systems and promoting mutual accountability. Lessons learning from past operations should be improved and not only at EC level, but possibly at EU or even broader level.

2. Access: access is still an unfinished agenda in very poor /fragile states, and the number of out-of-school children could still increase, despite the successes obtained in this field. The countries which have recently reached universal access, show that enabling the last 10-20% of children – the most disadvantaged, marginalised and isolated - to gain access to school requires different, and differentiated, approaches, takes more time than we would like and more money than is currently available. The issue of quality and the role it plays in improving retention is also key.

3. Quality: the EC agrees that more effort is needed in improving the quality of education. Ensuring quality is a priority for EC and future programmes will have a greater focus on this issue. Some countries have even seen a deterioration of the quality of their education. Quality for all will be more difficult and more expensive to reach with the massification of education (which implies that a number of children from poor families will face more difficulties in school). The EC has taken 'a clear shift' by the EDF10 and started to include quality indicators for tranche releases in SBS. The limited focus on quality targets of the education MDG was also noted (the focus was only on access).

4. Holistic approach: Support for education needs to be based on a context-based analysis and assessment of priorities for the sector as a whole. All the subsectors need to be taken into account when defining reforms or new support policies as well as when investing in education. Engaging in sector policy also implies contact with different authorities and not only the Ministry of Education. In particular, sector policy dialogue should not limit to ministry of education as sometimes Vocational Education and Training and Higher education fall under the responsibility of other ministries.

5. Relationship between education and other sectors as well broader governance issues: the impact of education goes far beyond the sector; education plays a central role in the achievement of development objectives, including all of the MDGs, it contributes to social stability, good governance, health and wellbeing, and inclusive and sustainable economic growth. PFM and other governance reforms can be very useful in improving the efficiency of a national system and therefore in improving the efficiency of specific

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3 There is an ongoing evaluation of higher education and vocational training.
sectors, like education. A broad analysis needs to be undertaken to find synergies between specific sectors and governance issues and also between actors.

6. **Finance**: education is in general a high return investment (especially for girls' education). In many countries, the current level of financing is inadequate (with an estimated financing gap of at USD16 billion for EFA goals). More effort is needed from partner governments (who are the main financiers of education), donors and private sector. Innovative sources need to be looked at. The EC is actively involved in an international task force that is working on this specific issue. National governments need to play their part, domestic resources are key also to promote ownership and they need to be assured before BS is provided. Going beyond quantity, the quality of funding is also a key motivator to further increase financial support.

7. **Capacities**: the EC recognises that effective implementation of education sector resource management systems, including sector strategies, policy frameworks and MTEFs', which the EC has assisted partner governments to set up, remains a challenge in many countries. Support in this direction needs to continue. The EC should also enhance local capacities to lead sector coordination, to monitor budgets and assess education systems. Technical assistance might not be sufficient to address all these needs. The EC’s own capacities have to be strengthened, how (EUDEL vs. HQ, EC vs. EU) and in which way still needs to be defined.

8. The current reorganisation of the EC, in particular the merge of DG DEV and AIDCO into DEVCO, should reduce the gap between intentions (programming) and delivery of aid (implementation), increase capacities and make policies more relevant and more context related.

**F/ Some actions taken since 2007 to improve the quality of the EC's support for education**

- The policy document "More and better education in developing countries" issued in February 2010 provides evidence-based strategic guidance on basic and secondary education
- Similar policy documents on TVET and higher education are foreseen in the perspective of promoting overall sector approaches;
- Green paper on EU development policy and parallel work on the next Multiannual Financial Framework will reshape the policy and financial framework after 2013;
- Guidance note on the usefulness of decentralization;
- Seminar on the political economy of education to better prepare colleagues in the field for policy dialogue (budgeting, power relations with the government and other countries, feasibility of the EC strategy);
- Study on indicators to move from output towards result indicators and
- Seminar on PFM both for EUD and HQ.