**Evinfo**

**Evaluation of the European Commission’s support to Education sector in partner countries (including basic and secondary education) – ref. 1282**

**Abstract**

During the evaluation period (2000-2007), the EC contracted €1.9 billion for direct support to primary and secondary education and €3.2 billion through General Budget Support. EC investments were successful in increasing access to schools but support to quality was often lacking and learning achievements remain limited. The Fast Track Initiative has not consistently delivered on its alignment aspirations; presenting accountability and aid fragmentation issues. EC capacity development support geared towards improving the delivery of educational services is often impeded by the lack of adequate resources and realistic timetables to allow real ownership by the partner's government. The EC's shift to SBS and GBS has helped partner countries to start reforms in the education sector. However, the success of these reforms depends on their integration in wider public reform including decentralisation and public finance management. There is a need for EU delegations to improve their capacity to deal with this new cross-sectoral approach.

**Subject of the evaluation**

This evaluation provides an assessment of the Commission support in the education sector over the period 2000-2007. It covers EC support to basic and secondary education in partner countries excluding vocational training activities and co-operation in higher education.

**Purpose**

The purpose was to provide the Commission with key findings and lessons from its past and current co-operation in the education sector and to provide a valuable aid for future programming.

**Methodology**

The evaluation is based on 9 evaluation questions, relating to the five DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact), as well as coherence and EC added value.

The evaluation was carried out in three phases: a desk phase including an inventory of the EC support to education and the identification of the evaluation questions (i), a field phase including 6 country visits (ii), and a report writing phase including the drafting of the final report (iii).

**Main conclusions:**

1. Over the period 2000-07, the EC contracted a total amount of around **€1.9b for direct support to the education sector, excluding HE¹ and VET²**, using the following types of aid modalities • Sector Budget Support, individual projects, support to sector programmes

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¹ Higher education
² Vocational education and training
(excluding SBS)\(^3\), and financing of Trust Funds. Of this amount, around € 1.4 billion (i.e. 74% of the total amount contracted) was disbursed over the same period. When taking into consideration HE and VET, the total amount contracted by the EC over the period 2000-07, through its “direct” support was around € 2.8 billion, of which € 2.1 billion (i.e. 75%) was disbursed. The EC financial contributions supporting the sectors that fall within the scope of this evaluation (thus, not including HE and VET) represent 69% of the total amount contracted by the EC for the entire education sector. A substantial part of the GBS provided by the EC can be considered as indirect support to the education sector. Over the period 2000-07, a total amount of around € 4 billion was transferred to national governments of beneficiary countries under GBS operations. Out of this total amount, around € 3.2 billion referred to GBS. No statement can be made on what share of the € 3.2 billion went, in effect, to the education sector. While direct and indirect EC support to education have both increased over time, the relative share of direct support has decreased when compared to other sectors (health).

2. EC investments were successful in increasing access, but quality of education and learning achievements remain in crisis. The EC has effectively assisted partner countries to accommodate an enrolment expansion, thus improving their capacity to meet MDGs. However, LDCs in Sub-Saharan Africa and fragile states lag behind. Moreover, quality of education is often lacking, and learning achievements remain in crisis. Without further significantly increasing direct support to education, especially in LDCs, the impact of EC support on improving quality will remain limited.

3. FTI\(^4\) has not consistently delivered on its compact and alignment aspirations. Ongoing reforms efforts of its architecture and focus must be accelerated in order to strengthen the mutual accountability aspects of FTI and reduce aid fragmentation.

4. EC support focused on the primary level, with only a small share of overall support providing direct assistance to secondary education, mostly in medium human development countries. It has become clear that secondary education systems in most countries are not ready to accommodate students everywhere.

5. The EC shift to sector and general budget support has acted as a trigger for EC partner countries to set up education sector resource management systems, including sector strategies, policy frameworks and MTEFs. However, ensuring that MTEFs are operational and used appropriately in sector budgeting, planning and implementation remains a challenge for most countries. Yet this also means a stronger capacity is required at EUD level to deal with the new elements of these types of aid.

6. EC capacity development support geared towards improving the delivery of educational services, also at decentralised levels, is often impeded by the lack of adequate re-sources and realistic timetables. Resultant operational pressures can have adverse effects on the degree of ownership of the capacity development agenda felt by the partner government. Successful reforms depend on their integration and linkage with public sector reform in the partner country, such as decentralisation or overall public finance management (PFM) reform.

7. Support to NSAs aimed at strengthening their monitoring role can provide value added to EC mainstream education support. EC support in some countries has helped in setting up or providing general frameworks for strengthening the role of NSAs in education sector management.

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\(^3\) This term had to be created by the evaluation team in order to describe EC support to a sector or sub-sector that is not SBS, nor a project. The CRIS database does not allow proper identification of all Sector Policy Support Programmes (SFSP) directly. Therefore, this construct had to be chosen.

\(^4\) Fast Track Initiative
8. The EC has actively participated in a number of co-ordination mechanisms related to education and involving the governments in partner countries. While the increased role of the government proved to be key in strengthening co-ordination mechanisms in most cases, little support was directly provided to enhance the capacity of the partner government to assume a leading role in the co-ordination of the development activities.

**Main Recommendations:**

1. Possibly reconsider **sector priorities and overall funding to education** in the framework of the upcoming programming cycle. Given the dire funding situation in relation to meeting EFA and MDG goals for education, the EC may want to reconsider its overall priorities, in terms of the share of development aid allotted to the various sectors.

2. Consider new approaches to focus EC support to ensure that the support is triggering **quality improvements**. Apart from simply increasing resources, current commitments could be made more effective in terms of their support for quality improvement through focusing policy dialogue and performance assessment on quality revealing education issues and challenges. Indicator-related targets should be disaggregated in order to reveal disparities.

3. Engage with **FTI**, at both HQ and country levels, to promote ongoing reforms and honour the implicit commitments, strive to improve the mutual accountability, aim to make FTI’s alignment efforts more ambitious, explore expanding FTI’s focus to provide untied support (e.g. capacity development) beyond the planning phase.

4. In close dialogue with partner countries and DPs, shift resource shares in sector-wide programmes **from primary to secondary education**

5. Step up efforts to work out the operational details of strategic multi-annual planning and budgetary tools in countries that are struggling to make these tools work appropriately. There is a need to assess the validity and usefulness of examination results as **indicators for education-related variable tranche release** in GBS and SBS, as well as to develop approaches to enhance these as triggers for quality improvement.

6. Integrate efforts to promote overall governance reform into support to education sector reforms, particularly including **decentralisation and PFM** reform.

7. Enhance efforts by EUDs aimed at strengthening the monitoring role of **NSAs by acting as “watchdogs”** through, for example, civil society surveillance projects. Moreover, there is a great opportunity to enhance NSA involvement in education sector monitoring and evaluation.

8. Develop additional efforts aimed at improving the capacity of the partner government to assume a leading role in the **co-ordination** of the development activities at sectoral level.

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