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WORKING PAPER

EQUIP2
Educational Quality Improvement Program
Policy ▪ Systems ▪ Management

An Analysis of USAID Assistance to Basic Education in the Developing World, 1990-2005

Foreword from USAID

It is important for USAID to undertake serious, rigorous reviews of its programs so that we can learn from our collective experiences and make improvements and adaptations to our programming approaches accordingly. This document is one of several publications by the Education Quality Improvement Program 2: Policy, Systems, and Management (EQUIP2) that attempts to provide useful analyses to support improved programming. This study is unique and valuable because it is a meta-evaluation of all USAID projects in basic education between 1990 and 2005. Whereas other EQUIP2 research takes a more in-depth look at USAID education experience in particular countries, or in particular technical areas of programming (e.g., complementary models of education), this meta-evaluation reviews all USAID basic education programming across this 15-year time frame, and across all regions.

There are many useful findings in this study:

- ***Setting goals and targets***: This evaluation found that projects often tended to be overly ambitious in setting project goals, objectives, and targets. This finding, and the actual historical data and trends noted in the study, provide a useful basis for setting realistic objectives and targets.
- ***Education quality and assessment of learning outcomes***: Results from the meta-evaluation indicate that USAID has had a fairly strong emphasis on quality and learning assessment for a number of years. Not all USAID interventions are intended to directly result in measurable changes in learning in the short-term (e.g. support for Education Management Information Systems or the provision of policy advisors); however there were fewer instances of reporting on changes in learning outcomes, including comparisons against baseline data, than were anticipated. This suggests that there should be increased attention to sound assessment of changes in learning outcomes in relevant projects.
- ***Incomplete archives***: One of the most surprising findings is the significant number of gaps in USAID's publicly accessible records for the education sector. There needs to be much greater attention by USAID staff and its partners to the universal requirement that all regular reports and evaluations be submitted to the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) so that the documentation is publicly accessible.

The *Comments* section at the end of this document provides additional contextual information and commentary that may be useful in reviewing the findings of this report. This section addresses issues such as broader changes in education in target countries during this time period, methodology, and the nature of project versus program support in USAID.

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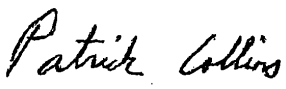
There has been remarkable overall progress in improving international basic education in recent decades and there is much that we can be proud of. At the same time, great challenges—and opportunities—remain, and this study demonstrates that there is still much that we can learn from our collective experience, and much that we can do to improve the effectiveness of our efforts. I am extremely grateful to the authors, David Chapman and Jessica Jester Quijada, for their initiative and perseverance in carrying out this important work. Together with other EQUIP2 publications, we hope that this study will be useful as a tool for reflection and action.



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Abstract

Between 1990 and 2005, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) committed over $2 billion to encourage and support basic education systems in the developing world. What has been learned from this investment in education systems that might guide continued educational development efforts of the U.S. and other donors? To address this question, the authors reviewed USAID basic education documents for 33 projects across 23 countries implemented between 1990 and 2005. Key findings include the following:

- USAID can be proud of some excellent work and documented successes. Projects reviewed in this study contributed to raising education quality, extending access, improving persistence, and strengthening public and private institutions in numerous countries. However, a substantial number of projects had little documented evidence of program outcomes and impacts, and many projects of the period had limited readily accessible documentation of any kind. Fewer than half the projects reviewed had complete documentation that included initial, interim, and final reports; final evaluations were available for only a third of the projects. The lack of adequate documentation constrains USAID's efforts to learn how to improve the quality and focus of its interventions.
- For the most part, USAID project designs were formulated in terms of education system outcomes (e.g., student achievement, access, persistence, learning) but most project documents available for this review concentrated on the extent project outputs (e.g., number of textbooks printed, number of teachers trained) were delivered. In some respects, this was a reflection of USAID operating practices during the period, as well as the nature of documentation reviewed. Regardless, while it is undoubtedly important to monitor the delivery of project-level outputs, it is not necessarily a guarantee that these inputs to the larger education system assure the success of a larger education enterprise.
- A review of anticipated outcomes and targets found unrealistically high levels of initial expectations, which made even reasonable levels of accomplishment appear to be inadequate. Results sometimes were over-promised at the project design stage and modest evaluation findings were sometimes overstated. Data indicating that projects had an impact on student learning were available in nine of 33 projects; where project students out-performed non-project students, gains ranged from 0.04 to 38 percent. Documentation of project impact on access, retention, and graduation was available in five of the 33 projects. Of these, there was evidence of improved persistence in three countries and improved grade retention in two, though the magnitude of impact was often modest.
- Findings regarding frequency and magnitude of learning gains and improvements in student flow are consistent with those found in World Bank primary education projects during this same period. Based on USAID and World Bank data, this paper offers estimates of gains in learning and persistence that would be reasonable to use in planning future education projects.

Development assistance projects operate in complex political and economic environments, so success of even the best-designed project can never be assured. Results of this study indicate that USAID projects during the 1990s and early 2000s made important contributions to strengthening education systems, extending education access, and increasing student learning. USAID itself was also undergoing almost constant reorganization and reform during this period, which affected systemic continuity and documentation practices. If anything, the results of this review represent a conservative estimate of USAID successes since impacts may have emerged that were not indicated in the documents available for this study. Findings highlight the considerable challenge posed by efforts to influence the operation of national education systems.

Introduction

Between 1990 and 2005, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) committed over $2.3 billion to support and strengthen basic education in the developing world (Table 1).[1] This investment reflects both a widely held belief that basic education is a right, and recognition of the centrality of education to the economic, social, and political development of nations. Education has been linked to, among other things, better family health and nutrition, enhanced capacity of the poor to participate in the political process, and higher lifetime income (Birdsall, Levine & Ibrahim 2005, World Bank 2004a, Lockheed & Verspoor 1992).

Table 1: USAID Funding to Basic Education 1989–2005[2]

Year	Investment in $ millions
1989	64
1990	67.1
1991	67.1
1992	135
1993	135
1994	0 [3]
1995	135
1996	108
1997	98
1998	98
1999	98
2000	103
2001	102.8
2002	150
2003	216.6
2004	382.7
2005	412.8

1 Not all of the funding shown in Table 1 was for projects completed in or prior to 2005 – some of these projects were ongoing and extended beyond the scope of this review.

2 Figures for years 1989-1999 were provided by the Basic Education Coalition (through George Ingram) and represent appropriated funding to Basic Education; data for years 2000-2005 was provided by the Congressional Research Service and indicates actual USAID expenditures to Basic Education.

3 Lack of allocation in 1994 was due to delays in Congressional appropriations that year.

Despite the widely recognized importance of international development assistance, the effectiveness of that assistance has been the subject of controversy (Easterly 2007; Economist 1999; World Bank 1999, 2006). While much of that criticism is directed at international aid generally, a generous share of criticism has concerned the effectiveness of international assistance to education more specifically (World Bank 2006; Al-Samarrai, Bennell & Colclough 2002; Government Accountability Office 2007; Nkansa & Chapman 2006). Critics question the success of past interventions to improve education and point to urgent needs in other sectors where the returns on investment are more certain and immediate. These concerns have led many development assistance agencies to undertake retrospective assessments of the effectiveness of their work. For example, recent studies have examined the impact of education projects sponsored by the World Bank (Nielsen 2006), UNICEF (Chapman 2002; Chapman et al. 2004), and CARE (Goldenberg 2001).

The present study examined evidence from 33 USAID projects implemented between 1990 and 2005 as the basis for addressing three questions: What interventions have USAID projects employed to strengthen and improve basic education in the developing world? How well have these education projects performed? And, what insight can be gained from these investments that might help shape future USAID funding of education systems?

The study was grounded in two conceptual models. At the individual project level, the analysis employed a goal attainment model (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman 2003; Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen 2003). Questions addressed within this perspective concern the extent to which intended goals and objectives were actually achieved, a framework consistent with the outcomes orientation advocated by USAID itself. At the organizational level, the analysis is grounded in Galal's (2002, 2007) framework of educational reform, elaborated by Welmond (2004).

Galal and Welmond posit three approaches to improving education practice and argue that effective reform requires adopting measures under all three approaches. Each approach places a somewhat different constellation of demands on education decision-makers. In the ***engineering approach***, education is seen as a production function in which the quantity, quality and mix of inputs determine educational outputs and longer-term outcomes. When outputs or outcomes are unsatisfactory, interventions involve increasing the quantity of inputs, improving their quality or changing their mix. In the ***organizational approach***[4] education is seen as a principal-agent problem. The principal (e.g., a ministry official) is interested in particular outcomes (such as good quality education), but has to rely on an agent (e.g., teachers) to obtain these outcomes. The challenge, then, is for individuals at one level of the system to get individuals at a different level of the system to act in desired ways. The ***political accountability approach*** concerns the relationship between citizens and policymakers. This approach posits that, if citizens can influence decision-makers, politicians, and education managers in their formulation of education policies, setting education priorities and allocating

4 Galal (2002) refers to this as the industrial organization approach.

resources, they can improve educational outcomes. This framework was used to assess USAID's breadth of approach to national educational reform.

The study contributes to international development in three ways:

1. First, though USAID currently emphasizes outcomes-oriented design and results-based program management, it is often not clear what level of outcome represents a realistic target to be accomplished. An analysis of past experience can provide an empirical basis for assertions about what future projects can be expected to achieve. In the absence of empirical data, targets get set by guesswork that can easily be influenced by wishful thinking. Levels of prior success provide a useful indicator of reasonable levels of accomplishment in future projects.
2. Second, the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance has been widely questioned. Within the constraints of the data available, this study provides a basis for assessing aid effectiveness and the extent to which such criticism is warranted.
3. Third, because USAID project design is somewhat decentralized, often outsourced, and USAID personnel rotate jobs frequently, managers do not always have a clear sense of what specific development strategies are most widely employed or which ones proved to be most effective.

The context of USAID support for education

Any analysis of USAID accomplishments during the 1990-2005 period must be understood within the larger context of factors that influenced USAID decision-making during that era. Four factors are particularly important in understanding results of this study.

First, the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) focused and galvanized world support for the goal of universal primary education within a framework that emphasized equity and highlighted the importance of learning outcomes. The international consensus emerging from this conference (represented in the EFA movement) was a powerful influence that led to dramatic increases in total donor aid to basic education during the 1990s and early 2000s. USAID funding for basic education more than doubled between 1992 and 1993, where it remained at relatively consistent levels until the early 2000s. USAID contributions to basic education then quadrupled between 2001 and 2005.[5]

Second, in 1987, USAID introduced program assistance (also called non-project assistance, or NPA) as a mechanism for distributing aid funds to recipient countries (Chapman & Dykstra 2006). NPA emerged in response to criticism in the late 1980s and early 1990s that "projectized aid" failed to promote local ownership, lacked sustainability, and fostered aid dependency.[6] Consequently, assistance to education was provided through a combination of *program funds* given directly to the receiving

5 Much of this increased funding was for education-related programs in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, Most of these projects were not completed by 2005 and so were not included in this analysis.

6 The Development Fund for Africa, for example, was an entirely different structure for organizing aid to Africa which led directly to non-project assistance in most of the Sub-Saharan countries reviewed here, including Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Malawi, and Namibia.

government provided they meet a set of conditions, and *project assistance* that typically provided technical assistance to help the receiving government accomplish the larger reform. In 1998 Congress halted the use of NPA, largely over concerns that there was insufficient accountability for how NPA funds were used once they were transferred to recipients.

Third, during the 1990s, influenced in part by the total-quality management movement (Deming 1984), USAID introduced internal reforms aimed at emphasizing outcomes-based project design and results-based project management. Each USAID Bureau and Mission developed a set of strategic objectives and all projects and programs were justified and eventually evaluated in terms of their alignment with (and eventual attainment of) those objectives. Among other things, this led to new reporting protocol (referred to within USAID as the Results Review and Resource Request, or R-4, process), which was not always clearly linked to the project documentation, and a new system of archiving USAID documents (discussed later).

Finally, USAID went though a period of ambivalence regarding the usefulness of program evaluation. For a period of three years in the mid-1990s it stopped funding for evaluation of its field projects. This left holes in the documentation during this period.

Method

This study was based on a review of USAID documents prepared as part of country-based education programs implemented between 1990 and 2005 that could be reasonably retrieved through an aggressive search of USAID's primary archival system, the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). The sample included projects that started earlier but which ended within this timeframe. Documents were identified with the assistance of the Development Information Service (DIS), which from 1985 through 2006 served as USAID's principle research arm.[7] The DEC repository is the most comprehensive archive of USAID documents available. For the purpose of this study, the types of documents retrieved included design documents, intermediate and final reports, formative and summative evaluations. Table 2 reports the location, dates, and dollar value of projects reviewed for this study. Content analysis was used to categorize the nature and frequency of themes.

Note that during this era USAID provided both project and non-project (e.g., program) assistance.[8] In all instances examined here, countries that received USAID program assistance also received project assistance and available data did not support a separate analysis of the outcomes that could be associated with these different mechanisms for awarding aid. Since NPA was reported and tracked differently, this analysis focuses on the contributions of project assistance, as documented through available project reports.

7 DIS was first known as the Research and Reference Service (R&RS); the name changed in 1995, under its third contract renewal.

8 For a further discussion of this distinction, see Chapman & Dykstra 2006.

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Table 2: Summary of projects reviewed for this study[9]

Country	Project Name	Acronym	Dates	Amount
Benin	Children's learning and equity foundations I & II	CLEF	1995-2001	$11,169,442
	Primary Education NGO project I & II	PENGOP	1994-2003	$5,000,000
Bolivia	Interactive radio learning project	IRLP	1991-1996	$5,000,000
Botswana	Basic education consolidation project	BEC	1992-1995	$6,950,000
Cambodia	Cambodian assistance to primary education	CAPE	1995-2000	$30,000,000
Dom. Rep.	Private initiatives in primary education	PIPE	1990-1997	$5,850,000
Egypt	Basic education Project	BEC	1981-1994	$190,000,000
El Salvador	Early Childhood Family Education Activity	EDIFAM	1998-2002	$6,000,000
			2003-2005	$2,600,000
	Strengthening achievement in basic education	SABE	1990-1998	$33,000,000
Ethiopia	Basic education system overhaul project	BESO	1994-2001	$30,000,000
Ghana	Quality improvement project	QUIPS	1990-1996	$35,000,000
Guatemala	Basic education strengthening project	BEST	1993-1998	$16,681,520
	Guatemala Education Finance Policy Dialogue	EFPD	2004-2005	$650,000
Guinea	Fundamental Quality and Equity Levels Project	FQEL	1995-2000	$20,000,000
	Structural Adjustment of Education Programs	PASE	1990-1995	$22,300,000
Haiti	Incentives to improve basic education	IIBE	1986-1993	$20,000,000
	Haiti education 2004, results package	ResPack	1996-2001	$20,000,000
Honduras	Basic education and skills training	BEST	1995-2000	$11,552,189
	Primary education efficiency project	PEEP	1986-1995	$23,878,000
Jamaica	Uplifting Adolescents Project	UAP	1996-2000	$7,063,563
	New horizons for disadvantaged youth	N/A	1997-2004	$10,200,000
LAC	Center of Excellence for Teacher Training	CETT	2001-2005	$20,000,000
Lesotho	Primary education Project	PEP	1992-1996	$4,444,134
Malawi	Girls attainment in basic literacy and education	GABLE	1991-1998	$20,500,000
	Education Sector Policy, Planning, EMIS Support Activities in Higher Ed Strategic Plan	ESPP	2003-2005	$1,985,620
Mali	Basic Education Expansion Project in Mali	BEEP	1989-	$21,000,000
Namibia	Basic Education Support	BES	1991-1996	$35,000,000
Nicaragua	Basic education, Nicaragua	BASE	1992-1998	$30,000,000
South Africa	South Africa basic education reconstruction	SABER	1992-2002	$55,300,000
Swaziland	Education Policy, Management and Technology	EPMT	1989-1996	$7,102,000
Uganda	Support to Uganda Primary Education Reform	SUPER	1992-2002	$25,000,000
	Uganda Strengthening EMIS	EMIS	1999-2004	$0
Zambia	Communities supporting Health, HIV/AIDS, Gender, and Equity Education in Schools	CHANGES	2000-2005	$0
TOTAL				$733,226,468

9 CETT is the one regional project included in this study as it was seen as a direct intervention in support of teacher professional development. Dates and funding amounts are based on what was recorded in the project documents reviewed. The authors recognize that these figures may not be consistent with Agency totals. For example, based on data from the Africa Bureau (2001), $107 million was allocated to Benin as of FY2000 since 1990. A review of project documents only accounted for approximately 65% of this funding, or $69 million for Benin during this period. Financial figures were not reported at all for either Uganda EMIS or Zambia CHANGES, which were both multi-million dollar interventions. While acknowledging the limitations of this approach, for consistency across all projects, the authors have included here the figures reported in the project documents available.

The document sample was limited to those that involved interventions aimed at strengthening the design or delivery of basic education in a specific country. Documents reporting on activities undertaken by centrally funded, multi-country initiatives that did not involve the introduction of specific educational interventions in specific countries were excluded.[10,11] For projects included in the sample, document selection was further limited to those related to design, project descriptions, evaluations, project reports, and research studies. Hence, the sample excluded "products", such as user manuals, textbooks, and training materials prepared for use with project participants. Overall, 286 documents covering 33 country projects, with a total value of nearly one billion dollars, were reviewed. Of the documents reviewed, 11 were external final project evaluations, 17 were midterm evaluations or audits, 15 were administrative project completion reports, and 243 were design, contractual, or intermediate administrative documents (see Annex 2). Of the 33 projects reviewed, only 30 percent had a summative final evaluation that explicitly sought to answer questions as to whether the project achieved its objectives, or to capture substantive learning about effective education interventions. Half of the projects (17) completed a midterm evaluation, and only 15 projects (45 percent) had a final report on file in the USAID archives.

To assess the adequacy of the document sample, it is necessary to understand how USAID documents are archived. During 1990-2005, the U.S. government maintained two contracts aimed at creating, maintaining, and accessing information on USAID-funded projects. The first, the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC), created a database that collected and archived project documents. The Development Information System (DIS) was developed under a separate contract to serve as a research arm of USAID. As USAID staff needed information on past USAID-funded projects they could request DIS to search the DEC archives. In conducting computer searches of information in the DEC system, DIS had privileged access to DEC and was able to search on keywords and search criteria not available to outside researchers.

The DEC information retrieval system was constrained by three factors: (1) While USAID required that Mission and project staff submit documents to the DEC, it was enforced inconsistently; consequently, many documents were not submitted resulting in incomplete documentation for some projects and no documentation for others. (2) During the 1990s USAID suspended funding for project evaluation for a period of three years (discussed earlier) so the effectiveness of projects conducted during this time was not consistently assessed. Finally (3), in 1996 project-based coding was replaced with the current system of organizing and tracking based on USAID's strategic objectives. Since (a) USAID missions had different strategic objectives and (b) basic education is not addressed by any single USAID strategic objective, the strategic objectives in which education projects would be located was not always clear. Together these constraints meant that USAID's primary retrieval system was limited in both comprehensiveness of

10 For example, documents reporting results of the multi-country research studies sponsored ABEL, EQUIP, and IEQ projects were not included in this analysis. However, documents from those centrally funded projects reporting on country-specific buy-ins were included.

11 It is important to note that the centrally funded projects USAID sponsored during this time produced some excellent research and conceptual work that is not included in this study since the current focus is limited to projects that were aimed at introducing a specific set of interventions aimed at changing the course of an education system.

the material it contained and the ability of users to access what was there. Even so, DEC remains the single best source of past project documentation available. DIS, on the other hand, no longer remains. In mid-2006 USAID discontinued the DIS contract and no research service is now available to mine the DEC data system.

While this study did not include all USAID project documents produced by projects during this 15-year period, it did include all that were reasonably available through an aggressive search of the USAID archives. The strength of this approach was that it protects the replicability of the study.[12] An independent search of USAID archives should yield the same sample of documents.

Alternative sources for project documents are limited. Project documentation is generally not published in a format that gets retained by libraries. Such documents are produced in limited quantities and when the supply is exhausted, access is effectively ended. Documents may be retained on a more informal basis by the contractors involved in project implementation but these contractors have little reason to maintain long-term archives. These documents rather quickly enter the realm of "fugitive literature," available only on the personal bookshelves of a few individuals who were interested in the project at the time. Had efforts been made to capture documents by searching the offices and bookshelves of development specialists, the yield might have been greater but the sample would have been ad hoc and impossible to replicate. Nonetheless, the difficulty encountered in document collection is the basis for one of the key findings from this study.

The study comes with six caveats. First, it is probable that more good evaluation was done than was documented. Second, some of what was well documented at the time of the original project may not have been contained in the DEC archive system and, consequently, would not have been included in this study. Third, within individual projects, evidence of impact and judgments of success may have varied over different stages of the project. Documentation about individual projects that was available to this study was, in some cases interim reports and presumably would not have captured the full range of project accomplishments. Fourth, project- and program-level data represent a snapshot of development impacts over a particular period of time. In many of the countries other donor interventions as well as other USAID projects preceded those included in this analysis, and may well have contributed to results evident during this era. Impacts (or lack thereof) often cannot be clearly attributed to any particular project.

Fifth, in some cases the political and economic context of the countries in this study changed dramatically over the 15-year frame. Projects designed for one context ended up operating in a different context which sometimes affected their effectiveness. Sixth, it should be acknowledged that the importance assigned to long-term knowledge development within these projects varied and was not necessarily an explicit goal of USAID's monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms. USAID's focus was usually on immediate decisions for project management. Still, an analysis of experience across

12 The weakness of this approach is that some well-known programs are not included, as the official documentation was insufficient.

projects across countries across years can yield some useful clues about effective practices. For all these caveats, the documentation reviewed in this study represents the most comprehensive basis for reviewing USAID project accomplishments that is reasonably available to any researcher using the USAID document retrieval system.

Findings

Part I: USAID project goals and strategies

What goals and objectives did USAID seek to achieve?: The stated goals and objectives of nearly all of USAID programs and projects during this period were (a) to improve education quality, (b) increase access, retention and graduation rates, (c) improve equity, and (d) do these things in a sustainable way. Other frequently stated objectives were to promote decentralization, strengthen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and promote donor coordination.[13] Since these represent the overarching outcomes that USAID sought to achieve, the analysis and presentation of findings were organized to examine the data with respect to each of these.

Project design: USAID project design typically was based on considerable needs assessment and problem identification, usually in consultation with governments, Ministries of Education and other donors. Most projects approached project design from a systems perspective and were designed as multiple interwoven interventions. Projects were grounded in a belief that meaningful education reform depends on simultaneously addressing multiple constraints. For example, teacher training is largely wasted if newly trained teachers do not have the textbooks and instructional materials they need to be effective in their classrooms. These in turn depend on both the development of a curriculum, a textbook development process, and an effective textbook distribution system. Projects, then, were typically multi-component interventions in which the success of each component often depended on the success of other components.

What strategies did USAID fund?: Table 3 reports the level of the education system, primary intended beneficiaries, subject matter focus and strategies employed within these projects. For the most part, projects focused on the general population of students at the primary school level, though nearly a third had a special emphasis on promoting girls' access achievement and completion. This emphasis reflects the consensus within the development community during the 1990s that a focus on primary education and, within that, on increasing access, was the most appropriate investment in education (Heyneman 2006). At least half of the projects involved a curriculum or instructional materials component that included a focus on math or language.

The 33 projects reviewed in this study employed a wide variety of interventions to accomplish their objectives, as illustrated in Table 3. The solutions that projects employed offer an insight into what USAID thought was the underlying problem they

13 In some projects, decentralization and NGO development were presented as overarching project objectives; in others they were presented as strategies for accomplishing other objectives, such as improving quality or access.

were trying to solve.[14] The ten interventions most widely employed in the USAID projects fall into three categories: (1) capacity development (usually focused on teachers and MOE officials), (2) development or revision of curricula and provision of instructional materials, and (3) improving decision support mechanisms (e.g., EMIS systems, test results, monitoring, evaluation, operations research) (Table 4 and Annex 3). This suggests a widespread belief that the absence (or low quality) of inputs, and these inputs in particular, was the root source of constraints on education access and quality, a point discussed later.

How did education projects assess their success?: The dominant measure used as the basis for judging project success was the extent to which promised inputs were delivered. Annex 4 reports evaluation criteria by project while Table 5 provides a cross-project summary. Thirteen of the 33 the projects also examined criteria related to how teachers' or students' classroom behavior changed as a result of project inputs or activities (e.g., change in enrollment patterns, student flow through the system, teachers' instructional practices, or changes in actual student learning).

Table 3: Summary of project activities by country (33 country projects reviewed)

Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency
Level			
Early childhood	3	Primary	24
Secondary	4	Adults	3
Vocational	1	Higher/tertiary education	2
Population			
General	17	Girls	8
Out-of-school youth	4	Ethnic minorities	3
Private schools	2	Special education	2
Subject matter focus			
Math	13	Language	13
Social studies (& civic ed)	4	Health/HIV/AID	3
Science	3	Environmental education	2

The review of documents indicates that many USAID and project staff were more oriented toward tracking project outputs (which generally were system inputs) than documenting system outcomes.[15] To a considerable extent this was to be expected, since USAID and project staff were required to track inputs as part of their ongoing monitoring and reporting functions. Nonetheless, attention to outputs was thin. One seeming reason for this input-orientation is that converting project funds into

14 The identification and rationale for the larger problems that USAID sought to address through these interventions is often contained in planning documents and annual reports prepared at the USAID Mission level, which were not incorporated into the scope of this study.

15 In some cases, there appeared to be a confusion of inputs with outputs. This occurred when the number of teachers trained, textbooks delivered, or workshops conducted were presented as outputs rather than being treated as inputs toward a larger goal. For a discussion of inputs versus outputs, see Windham & Chapman 1990.

educational inputs (e.g., textbooks, teachers, data management systems) was most directly under the manageable control of project staff. The extent that these inputs subsequently performed effectively once deployed was viewed as beyond their ability to control. Nonetheless, this orientation led some Mission and project staff to declare project success without really assessing the consequences of the training, materials, and structures on teachers' classroom practices or students' learning. For the most part, USAID project designs were formulated in terms of outcomes, but most monitoring and evaluation efforts concentrated on inputs. These findings must be interpreted within the context of the work and the times; the focus on project outputs rather than on education system outcomes was, in part, a response to USAID reporting requirements and, even more broadly, Congressional interest.

Table 4: Ten most widely used strategies in USAID education projects, 1990-2005

Focus of projects	Number of projects
Teaching materials	
Curriculum development	21
Instructional and materials development	19
Education materials distribution	15
Capacity development	
Teacher training	20
Capacity development – MOE	16
Data for decision making	
Operation/policy research	17
Achievement testing	16
Test development	15
EMIS development	15
Monitoring and evaluation	14

Table 5: Criteria used to judge project success

Criteria used to judge project success	Number of Projects
Extent of promised inputs delivered	22
Change in enrollment	9
Change in student flow (repetition, drop-out)	7
Change in student or teacher behavior	6
Student learning	10

One consequence of the dynamic nature of the political and economic environment of the countries in which USAID worked was that the logic of initial project designs sometimes needed to be revisited once a project was underway. Occasionally, project designs seemed to be grounded in questionable logic that linked the project intervention to the intended goal. For instance, in Honduras (PEEP) there was disagreement between

the evaluation team and the USAID Mission about the logic of the assumptions underpinning the project design (USAID/Honduras, 1993). In the view of the evaluators, the pre-specified indicators of project success were misaligned with the actual project activities. In particular, the evaluation team asserted that the design assumption that improving textbooks would improve efficiency of education system was faulty. They argued that success in the textbook component would not necessarily affect those indicators, a view rejected by the USAID staff.

In still other cases there appeared to be a loose linkage between initial design and subsequent implementation. In Malawi, an evaluation attributed increases in girls' access to schooling to attitudinal changes created by the project, but seemingly ignored the possibility that the increase resulted from a recent government policy abolishing school fees which was widely credited by other observers for the enrollment increases (Hebert, Millsap & El-Sanabary 2002). In Ethiopia, the evaluation team found a disconnect between the BESO reform objectives and elements of the BESO project (Sommers 1996). The evaluation concluded that the allocation of BESO program (NPA) funds and project resources were not always clearly linked to BESO purposes and objectives. While at times these issues might reflect weak project design, they also highlight the efforts of USAID to assess the success of its efforts in ways that would allow for mid-course correction.

Part II: Were goals and objectives achieved?

As stated earlier, the most frequent goals and objectives of USAID projects were: (a) to improve education quality; (b) to increase access, retention and graduation rates; (c) to improve equity; and (d) to do these things in a sustainable way. USAID often expressed a desire to promote decentralization (e) and strengthen NGOs (f). In some cases, promoting donor coordination (g) was also indicted as a desired outcome of the project. The next section examines the extent to which these were achieved.

A central output of most projects was the delivery of educational materials and training that, in turn, represented inputs to the country's education system. The following quick sample of project output measures illustrates the nature and scale of some of the USAID efforts in this regard:

- Honduras PEEP project: 5,000,000 textbooks developed and distributed; 25,000 teachers trained; 600 classrooms constructed and equipped and another 500 renovated.
- Honduras BEST: 223,897 students attended alternative schools; 29 NGOs strengthened in collaborative work.
- Swaziland EPMT: 144 publications created and distributed, 6 master's degrees, 7 study tours, 121 trainers trained, 4,500 school personnel trained.
- Dominican Republic PIPE: 4,466 teachers trained, 70,300 textbooks and instructional sets distributed, 329 school directors trained.
- Benin PENGOP: 1,300 PTAs supported, 635 school infrastructure projects.

- Bolivia IRL: increased access to math programs in 700 schools, 150,000 students served, health programs in 345 schools serving 60,000 students.

The ultimate goal of USAID education activities, however, needs to be assessed in terms of the extent these system inputs were used and made a difference in the experience of teachers and students.

(a) Improving Education Quality—Achievement testing: In its most common use, education quality refers to the extent that an education system is able to achieve the generally accepted goals of education, central to which is knowledge and skill development (Adams 1998; Anderson & Burns, 1989; Chapman & Adams, 2002; Chapman et al. 2005; Craig et al. 1998; Fuller 1987; Lockheed & Verspoor 1991). Across the 15 years of USAID education projects, improving education quality was the stated priority of nearly all projects. As Table 4 indicates, improving quality was generally defined in terms of increasing student learning, though some projects defined it in terms of improved system efficiency, including management or administrative structural changes or training, or increased capacity for actors within or external to the educational system. Where student learning was the explicit goal, achievement testing was the most widely advocated way of measuring whether such learning actually occurred. Based on available data, testing systems were a part of over half of the projects reviewed (Table 4).[16]

Project efforts to assess student learning are summarized in Annex 5. Of the 33 projects reviewed, 28 identified raising educational quality as a stated goal. Of those, 17 proposed student learning as a key indicator of educational quality. Of these, available data suggest that 12 actually measured student learning, of which 11 used pre- and post-testing to assess change over time. Of these eleven, nine designed the testing in a way that would support claims that student learning changed over time as a result of the project intervention (e.g., used a comparison group). Of these, five projects found meaningful increases in learning as a result of the project intervention. Another three found mixed results, in which project students out-performed non-project students in some subject areas and under-performed non-project students in others. In one additional case the results were not clearly enough reported to interpret.

This summary suggests that, though raising education quality was the main goal of 28 of the 33 education projects reviewed, only 12 actually assessed the extent to which project activities led to desired student learning outcomes and only six were able to demonstrate clear success in increasing student learning (three others yielded mixed results). While it is possible that a larger number of these 28 USAID projects resulted in student learning gains, documentation to support that speculation is not available. Development specialists wishing to learn from past experience are limited to the documentation that is available.

The limited attention to learning outcomes, despite assertions about the importance of increasing the amount of student learning, has defenders. Testing is expensive. Setting

16 Readers are reminded that testing systems might have been employed in other USAID projects but the results not archived in DEC.

up special testing systems to assess the impact of a project takes money away from direct delivery of services. There is often a tension between spending project resources to assess progress and spending project resources to make progress. There also may be a perception that donor-created testing systems are a wasteful duplicate of existing government efforts, even when government tests do not specifically test what the interventions were designed to teach.

Where achievement was assessed with some degree of rigor, results indicate that a number of projects achieved remarkable gains in student learning (Annex 6). Ghana QUIPS provides an excellent example of a well-designed study of achievement gains using a pre-post comparison group design that supports claims that the gain was due to the project intervention. In the first year of the project, in both English and Math, students in project schools out-performed students in comparison schools by about 2 to 4 percent. Over two years that achievement gain for projects students grew to 38 percent in Math and 15 percent in English. Moreover, the rate of learning was faster in project schools than in non-project schools. In most situations, students in project schools maintained or even improved on achievement gains made as a result of project interventions even after leaving the program.

The evaluation of the Guatemala BEST radio Math project indicated a 16 percent gain in test scores (a proxy for the amount learned) in the first year of the project. Similarly, the El Salvador Strengthening Achievement in Basic Education (SABE) project also demonstrated respectable achievement gains over the life of the project (Table 6). In reporting on a project in Swaziland, evaluators observed that in Grade 1 Math the median score rose from 34 to 37 between 1992 and 1994, with the number of students achieving mastery (defined as 80 percent correct) rising from 36 percent to 51 percent over three years. In Grade 1, English mean scores rose from 19 to 24 over that same period while the proportion of cases in the two highest score categories increases from 12 to 34 percent. Results from Grade 2 Math and English show similar increases in mean scores and in proportions of student scores at the high-end of the score distribution. The evaluation team concluded that the introduction of continuous assessment in Grades 1 and 2 made a difference in learning outcomes for students in Swaziland (Clark & Pearson 1996).

Table 6: El Salvador SABE project: National achievement gains over life of project[17]

Subject	1994	1995	1996	1997
Third grade language	19	20	19	28*
Third-grade math	38	38	40	50*
*smaller sample used in 1997				

A number of projects start with a clear intention to monitor student achievement gains only to encounter difficulty, usually around collection of baseline data. For example, in the Honduras BEST project, the project team acknowledged the importance of achievement testing, but documentation suggested that no testing was done. In the

17 Source: AED Final Report: SABE Project (1998)

Honduras PEEP project, the plan called for student achievement testing as a basis for project evaluation, but this was not accomplished. The project team encountered a problem when initial student tests were administered too late to provide baseline measures thereby losing the opportunity to assess achievement gains over time. As the project had not carried out the proposed standardized testing of students, it lacked data on the impact and quality of the project (USAID/Nicaragua 1995: xv).

In some cases, tests were developed as deliverables under the project, but then not used in the evaluation of the project's success, for example Botswana, Dominican Republic, and Lesotho. When this occurred, it was often because the time needed to develop the test resulted in missing baseline data collection.

Evaluation reports sometimes emphasized gains even when they were small and even when they did not consistently surpass non-project student gains. Similarly, some presented data in ways that implied greater success than was actually achieved. Authors tended to "round up", putting the most positive spin on their results. While that may be understandable, it sometimes is misleading. In a Jamaica project, one report concluded that all students in project and non-project schools showed gains during the life of the project. The evaluation report concluded that students in project schools made considerable improvement (Dye, Jennings, Lambert, Hunt & Wein 2002:35). Yet, in fact, students in project schools did not necessarily outperform non-project schools. Some might view this claim as misleading since it implied project success even when there was no evidence that project students did better. Another interpretation of the results is that project students would have done equally well without the project.

In a different Jamaica (UAP2) project, evaluators noted that achievement data indicated that most project students improved by at least one grade level in Math (Simpson, Harris, Schubert & Yusuf-Kalil 2003). While true, that minimizes the finding that, while 55 percent of the project students increased at least one grade level, 63 percent of the non-participants increased at least one grade level. Such claims may be accurate but are misleading and are not helpful in creating a solid knowledge base about interventions that work. Projects that yield minimal, though positive, achievement gains beg the question of whether the payoff was worth the cost, an issue virtually never addressed in project documents.

In Malawi, achievement in project schools in English, Math, and Chikewa appeared to be impressive. In Math, scores of student in project schools increased by 17 percent over the course of the project. However, when comparisons were made to non-project schools, the interpretation was more mixed. For example, in Grade 5, project schools out-performed comparison schools in Math, only slightly out-performed them in English, and were comparable in Chikewa (Hebert, Millsap & El-Sanabary 2002). The evaluation report emphasized that project schools out-performed non-project schools in most grades and years, but minimized the narrow margin of difference at some of those grades.

Finally, lacking achievement data, several projects fell back on anecdotal and subjective judgments of teachers about whether students were learning. While such judgments may or may not be accurate, the validity of such claims is often suspect since those making the judgments often had self-interest in the project appearing to be successful. One example of the fall-back to subjective judgments is the South Africa DDSP project.

Overall, the experience of the projects included in this study indicates a wide variation in success of efforts to improve student learning outcomes. While USAID projects did contribute to meaningful achievement gains in some countries, that was not the dominant outcome. The message of experience is to be "modest in your expectations," more rigorous in assessing learning gains, and more candid in reporting the results.

Table 7: Assessment of learning outcomes in World Bank primary education projects[18]

Extent that learning was assessed	# of USAID projects	# of WB projects
Number of projects reviewed	33	33
→ Of those, the number in which raising educational quality was a stated goal	27	28
→ → Of these, the number in which student learning was proposed as a measure of project success	17	11
→ → → Of these, the number which actually measured learning outcomes	12	7
→ → → → Of these, the number in which • a comparison group was used • only at gains over time of project students was measured	 9 1	 2–3 4–5
→ → → → → Of these, the number of projects that found • an increase in student learning among project schools • mixed results	 6 3	 7 0

One way to help interpret these findings is to compare student learning gains in USAID projects to those of other international development organizations. In particular, between 1963 and 2004 the World Bank undertook 188 projects in which at least half of the funds were allocated to primary education (World Bank, 2004b, 2006). An in-depth analysis of a stratified random sample of 33 completed primary education projects yielded findings similar to those found in the present analysis of USAID projects (Table 7). About the same proportion of World Bank education projects identified education quality as a goal, though fewer of those projects selected student achievement as an indicator of project success (11 vs. 18), actually measured student learning (7 vs.12), and

18 Adapted from World Bank (2004). Primary Education Portfolio Review, Background paper for the evaluation of the World Bank's support to primary education, Washington DC, p. 25.

or utilized a comparison group. Of the 27-28 projects in each of the two studies which sought to improve education quality, about the same number of USAID and World Bank projects found evidence of increased student learning.

The magnitude of the achievement gains in the World Bank projects is similar to those in USAID projects (Annex 7). In three of the five World Bank projects (China, Mexico, Uruguay) achievement gains over three to seven years of project activity ranged from 0.7 to 6.0 percent. In one country (Chile), gains ranged between 3.4 and 19.2 percent, depending on the subject area and type of school. A project in China showed more dramatic gains (16-40 percent) but methodological issues make interpretation problematic (World Bank 2002, 2006). In general, findings from both organizations suggest that a realistic estimate of multi-year achievement gains in a basic education project is around 2 to 6 percent, depending on context, subject matter, and grade level.

(b) Improving student access, retention and graduation rates: Along with improving quality, increasing education access was a central goal of eight projects. Retention and graduation rates were recognized as important extensions of access and tracked in seven countries (see Annex 4).

- In El Salvador (SABE) primary net enrollment increased from 74 to 79 percent between 1991 and1995 while repetition dropped from 8.03 to 6.10 percent.
- In Guatemala, both *Nueva Escuela Unitaria* and Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE), project schools had a higher percentage of first graders continue to Grade 2 than in the comparison schools. In both cases, this effect was sustained and translated into higher percentages of student persistence to Grade 6. The difference favored NEU children entering Grade 6 by 13.4 percent for boys and by 7.9 percent for girls; in IBE, these differences were 4.2 percent for boys and 2.9 percent for girls.
- For Honduras PEEP, primary graduation graduates rose from 50 percent of the 13-year-old population in 1985 to 70 percent in 1994, a change that is probably due in part to the efforts of the PEEP project.
- Yet the BEST project, also in Honduras, yielded mixed findings. Retention rates met project targets at existing centers; however rates were 17 percent below anticipated targets for new centers.

Results were mixed in other projects as well. In Ethiopia, gross enrollment rate (GER) in the two target regions was higher than the national average. In one of those regions, the increase was meaningful but in the other the increase hardly surpassed the national average (Caribbean Resources International Consult, Inc 1998). A summary of these past accomplishments provides a basis for establishing benchmarks for future project efforts to improve student flow (Annex 8).

Grade repetition rates in Malawi declined from 18 percent to 15 percent between 1994 and 2000, though the overall primary dropout rate actually increased by 1 percent. Further, while the education portion of national budget increased by 15 percent between 1992 and 1995, expenditure per child decreased due to dramatic enrollment increases

(Hebert, Millsap, & El-Sanabary 2002). The gains in student flow were impressive but the overall trends might still be seen to be downward. Yet the conclusion of the evaluation was that "these results demonstrate that the original goals and objectives of [the project] have been addressed and met to an appropriate and adequate measure of success. As such, an important impact on the whole primary education sector and system has been affected" (Hebert, Millsap, & El-Sanabary 2002:11). Some might see this conclusion as overstated.

While increased access, persistence and graduation were goals in their own right, several projects explicitly used enrollment growth as a proxy for improved educational quality. The assumption was, presumably, that enrollment is quality sensitive. When families believe that instructional quality is improving, they are more willing to absorb the direct and indirect (e.g., opportunity) costs associated with having their children in school. This argument is complicated by three factors. First, greater access can depress student flow statistics as more academically average students enroll, which sometimes lowers average achievement rates and drives up grade repetition rates. The experience of Malawi and Uganda following the introduction of universal free education illustrate the downward effect on quality posed by rapidly increasing access. Second, governments can manipulate graduation rates by altering the pass rates on school leaver examinations, as was the case in pre-civil war Liberia (USAID 1988).[19] Finally, progression and graduation rates depend on the extent that tests used for grade promotion and cycle completion are valid and reliable measures of what the curriculum actually teaches.

Again, a comparison with World Bank experience provides a benchmark useful in assessing the USAID experience (Annex 7). Across the USAID and World Bank projects, declines in multi-year grade repetition rates ranged from 2.3 to 7 percent (with the exception of the USAID project in Honduras where it was reported to decline by 55 percent) while declines in student dropout rates ranged between 1.5 and 9.2 percent. Findings from both USAID and World Bank projects suggest that a realistic estimate of a multi-year improvement in progression (or conversely, a decline in dropout) rate might be in the 4 to 8 percent range, depending on context and grade level.

Improved completion rates across the USAID and World Bank projects ranged from 2.9 percent to 13.4 percent. This suggests that promises during project design of completion rates above about 14 percent are likely to be wishful thinking. While these estimates are offered only as general benchmarks, grounding promises of future project achievements in evidence of past accomplishments offers a sensible approach to project design.

(c) Changes in teacher or student behavior: While increasing learning may be the desired outcome, most projects try to do that by changing teachers' and students' classroom behavior. Consequently, some argue that measuring teacher and student behavior is a more valid indicator of project success than is actual student achievement, since these behaviors are more directly linked to project activities. Achievement, they argue, is influenced by other factors beyond the direct control of the project, such as

19 Note that the Liberia example was not drawn from the documents reviewed for this study, but from a broader review of the literature conducted as part of this research.

student aptitude and family circumstances. Yet few projects tracked changes in teacher or student behavior to ensure that project activities were having their intended impact. One likely reason is that assessing teachers' and students' classroom behavior is labor intensive and expensive. Nonetheless, some projects were successful in doing this. For example, in Guatemala, evaluators found improved turn-taking and collaborative behavior among students (Nieves, Lundgren, Bezmalinovic, & Matute 1994).

In Jamaica, the project was successful in changing classroom environments to facilitate learning. However, pedagogical approaches that emphasized participation of the child in a variety of learning opportunities had not been implemented. Instructional delivery in project schools remained highly traditional. The concentrated effort by the Jamaica project to provide hands-on professional development and other technical assistance at the school level, at the point of the midterm evaluation had not yet shown an impact on student performance or teacher behavior (Chesterfield, Enge, & Simpson 2002).

In Nicaragua, a midterm evaluation found that teachers were in favor of the child-centered curriculum but did not know how to apply it within a decentralized setting (USAID/Nicaragua 1996). The guides and manuals for first and second grades had been distributed to a large number of schools but the evaluation team was doubtful that, if teachers were not shown how to use them, they would ever be used. The evaluators observed that the 50,000 participant days of training were single-goal oriented (to train teachers in the use of the guides, etc.), sometimes theoretical, and quite expensive. It was one-shot training which lacked follow-up. (While documentation from subsequent evaluations was not available, anecdotal information suggests that the project made necessary adjustments and was ultimately successful.) Across projects, the main lesson from experience is that changing teachers' and students' classroom behavior is difficult.

(d) Sustainability: A criterion of success in many projects, in addition to positively influencing access, retention, achievement, and graduation, was that the interventions be sustainable. The emphasis within USAID on sustainability is, in part, an offshoot of its increased focus on outcome-based funding, e.g., outcomes are of little value if they are only transient. It is also a reaction to the criticism that there has been little to show from the U.S. investment in assistance to education systems over the last 30 years. Indeed, the lack of sustainable impact is widely seen as a key threat to continued flow of international development assistance (Picard & Garrity 1997; Nkansa & Chapman 2006).

However, one of the challenges in assessing sustainability is the diversity of views about what should be sustained (Nkansa & Chapman 2006). What is meant by sustainability in international assistance projects is often poorly defined. Hence, it is not clear whether the goal is that: (a) specific organizational structures established by a project (e.g., parent-teacher associations, interactive radio instruction) remain after the funding ends; (b) capacity of participants increases, regardless of the fate of particular structures; or (c) the overall economic health of a country improves due to the aggregate impact of donor

assistance.[20] Without a clear definition, it is difficult to determine the extent that donor projects have actually been successful in terms of sustainability.

In its simplest terms, sustainability is the ability of an activity or system to persist (Dempster 1998). Within some USAID projects sustainability is defined in terms of the extent that specific activities and structures created during the project continue beyond the life of the funding (Nkansa & Chapman 2006).[21] The most persuasive assessment of sustainability would emerge from longitudinal or retrospective analyses of what actually persevered after external funding ended.

Since USAID project designs and evaluations have generally failed to either define or measure sustainability, no substantive conclusion can be made about program success in this area. However, the judgment of project staff during implementation offers a proxy measure of what is likely to follow. Across many projects, there were strong doubts expressed by project personnel about the prospects for sustainability without continued external donor funding, though the reasons tend to differ slightly from country to country (Annex 9). Availability of local funding to pick up costs was the largest (but not the only) factor inhibiting continuation of these projects. Management capacity of government and lack of clear ownership of project activities were also cited. The overall conclusion from this review is that the likelihood of sustainability was not seen as an area of particular success.

(e) Decentralization: Greater decentralization of responsibility and authority for education decision-making (and often financing) has been an increasingly popular component of USAID (and other donor) projects. During this 15-year period, six projects incorporated some explicit attention to decentralization (Annex 3). Since final reports of these projects were not always available, the overall success of decentralization efforts is difficult to determine. However, among the observations offered in the available project documentation were the following:

- In Ethiopia, BESO project staff observed that decentralization improved the planning capacity of the MOE departments and improved the management functions of target regional education offices (Caribbean Resources International Consult, Inc 1998).
- In Uganda the decentralization of primary education created a cleavage between the still centralized teacher training system and the teacher related functions of the district education offices (Moulton 2000).
- In Nicaragua, a midterm evaluation found that after two years of implementation of the autonomous school approach, the reforms had reached fewer than 500 schools and had not yet created solid community support for basic education (USAID/Nicaragua 1995); although the subsequent decade of intensive USAID and World Bank support for the reforms was not captured in the available USAID documentation.

20 For further discussion of the meanings of sustainability see Nkansa and Chapman 2006. Authors discussing sustainability as capacity development include Dahl 1995; Bhat, Cheria and Edwin 1999; Harris 2000; Picard and Garrity 1997). Capacity viewed as the overall economic health of a country is discussed by Center of Excellence for Sustainability 2001; Harris 2000; Daniels 2000.

21 The Nkansa and Chapman (2006) citation, while based on a USAID project during this period, is not drawn from the documents reviewed for this study but from a broader review of the literature conducted as part of this research.

- The midterm evaluation of the SABE project in El Salvador indicated that the decentralization plan was not working as intended. Establishment of regional and sub-regional ministry offices may have instead reduced administrative efficiency as bureaucratic structures became obstacles for principals and teachers in making their voices heard (Management and Business Associates, Inc. 1994). How this concern was addressed is not indicated in the documentation that was available to this study.

In some countries, the fate of decentralization depended on those at decentralized levels with new-found decision-making powers to assign priority to education over needs in competing sectors. The evaluation team in Uganda observed that the push for decentralization was threatened by the sustainability of the textbook component of the SUPER project. At the point of the formative evaluation, the evaluators concluded that the fate of textbooks would depend on how well the local priorities match national policies. If the finance ministry were to allocate block grants to districts, the district councils would have the power to allocate funds within the granted amount. However, "there is no guarantee that the district council will award priority to primary education, or within primary education to instructional materials. This could seriously jeopardize SUPER's policy objectives" (Guild, Moulton, Wolf, DeStefano, J., & Wandira 1995:48). Further documentation was not available to determine how USAID and the Uganda Ministry of Education dealt with these challenges.

In other countries, USAID projects included strategies closely linked to decentralization which were intended to strengthen local involvement in decision-making. For example, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Haiti all introduced mini-grants programs, in which schools could compete for funds for innovative activities aimed at improving school practice. The midterm evaluation in Ethiopia indicated that the mini-grant program appeared to have been well received (Caribbean Resources International Consult, Inc. 1998), but an adequate assessment of the design and effectiveness of mini-grant programs was not documented in the USAID evaluations reviewed.

The important point in all of these cases is that substantive education reform programs require on-going adjustment and continuing problem-solving. None of the conclusions reached in the above examples represent final judgments about the effectiveness of either the project or the reform, but rather represent findings that should inform subsequent reform support strategies. The lack of on-going assessment and documentation severely limit the interpretation and utilization of the reports.

(f) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): During this era, USAID projects sought to strengthen the role of NGOs within the education sector. In some countries, there were political reasons for wanting to work through NGOs. For example, virtually all USAID project work in South Africa during apartheid was channeled through NGOs as a way to avoid working with the apartheid government. Often, however, the interest in working with NGOs was because they generally had strong ties to the local community. Hence, strengthening NGOs was viewed as a way to simultaneously promote decentralization and community participation. For example, the BEST project

in Honduras worked with 24 NGOs and up to 12 municipalities to offer 250,000 out-of-school youth and young adults basic education programs through existing Ministry of Education adult education centers. The IIBE project in Haiti sought to strengthen private provision of primary education as an alternative to a low-quality public system.

A number of projects reported success in strengthening NGOs but, in many cases, expressed doubt that they were yet at a stage where those NGOs could operate independent of external funding. For example, in Benin the evaluation found that national NGOs were meaningfully strengthened, but project staff still expressed concern about the capacity of the NGOs to carry the work forward on their own, due largely to uncertainty about financial capability (Mamadou 2003). Similarly, in the Dominican Republic the NGO funded in this project was not operating strategically and was uncertain of how to replace funds when the project ended (Bernbaum & Locher 1997). The evaluation concluded that the NGO was seen as an elitist organization by local stakeholders.

(g) Donor coordination: In virtually all countries, USAID was only one of many international organizations working to improve education. It was not unusual for the World Bank, DfID, JICA, UNICEF, CIDA and others to have projects underway in the education sector that sometimes overlapped or even competed with USAID for Ministry attention. Evaluation reports seldom documented positive experiences in donor coordination, perhaps because when things were working as planned it was considered unremarkable; or perhaps because donor coordination was not an explicit objective at the project level. Often donor coordination is the responsibility of entities at a higher level than projects. While USAID is philosophically committed to effective coordination among these organizations, the operational experience of project staff was sometimes one of frustration.

An evaluation of a project in Benin for example found that USAID and the World Bank were running competing projects, with the USAID effort in direct competition with the World Bank-initiated parastatal. USAID staff complained of confused lines of authority and competition for MOE attention. In Ghana, the World Bank was declaring considerable success and impact in solving educational problems while the main USAID project was designed under the premise that these problems were practically unaddressed (Education Development Center 1994). Project staff in Honduras (PEEP) expressed concern that the project was vulnerable to derailment when the USAID project ended and other donors such as the World Bank and Germany replaced USAID inputs (Creative Associates International, Inc. 1995). In Malawi, donor coordination was not regarded by USAID project staff as being successful (Hebert, Millsap & El-Sanabary 2002), and in Lesotho, initial donor cooperation ebbed over the course of the project (Reece & Kilpatrick 1996).

Discussion

USAID projects have both a political and technical purpose. In broadest terms, the political purpose is to build goodwill and promote U.S. strategic interests. The technical

purpose is to improve quality, access, and sometimes efficiency, of education systems, hopefully in ways that are sustainable over time. A project can be technically flawed and still yield important political payoffs, just as a project can succeed technically but be judged a failure politically. The balance between political and technical purposes differs across countries and within countries over time. This study examined evidence related only to the technical aspects of project success. From that perspective, this review supports six cross-cutting observations.

USAID has accomplished some excellent work and documented successes. USAID projects contributed to raising education quality, extending access, improving persistence, and strengthening public and private institutions in several countries. However, some projects appeared to have little retrievable documentation indicating that stated goals and objectives had been achieved. It is still possible, indeed probable, that many projects that lack evidence of having achieved their goals still were positively regarded by governments and citizens of the countries in which they operated. It is not unusual for beneficiaries to be positive about the source of the benefit stream. However, positive regard is not a substitute for improving education systems in ways that demonstrably raise access and quality. Within the goal attainment framework advocated by USAID and given the limitations of the data available to this study, a number of projects cannot be counted as successes. The lack of adequate documentation constrains USAID's efforts to learn how to improve the quality and focus of its interventions.

The pattern of interventions suggests a balanced approach to education development. A broader lens through which to assess USAID project success is offered by the Galal (2002, 2007) and Welmond (2004) framework (discussed earlier). Did USAID projects rely solely on the provision of inputs to drive education reform (an engineering approach) or did they also address the need for incentives to support implementation (an organizational approach) and wider public participation in the activities of education reform (a political accountability approach)? Galal and Welmond argue that effective reform requires adopting measures under all three approaches.

Table 8: Distribution of USAID project strategies within Galal Model

Production function	Incentives	Political accountability
Teacher training Commodities School construction Textbooks	Teacher salaries Teacher deployment	NGOs School grants Decentralization EMIS

Table 8 illustrates the strategies employed within USAID education projects when organized within the Galal framework. At an organizational level, the distribution of USAID project strategies during this 15-year period, taken together, reflects a balanced approach. At a project level, while many projects had some focus on provision of inputs (training, textbooks, etc), they also generally included some attention to incentive

systems, and many included components aimed at improving wider community participation and political accountability.

USAID project designs are formulated in terms of education system outputs and outcomes, but most monitoring and evaluation efforts concentrated on system-level inputs. Evaluations and reports were mostly focused on documenting the delivery of project-level outputs (e.g., number of textbooks produced, teachers trained, etc.) which serve as system-level inputs. In some cases this appeared to be an effort to focus on those elements most directly under the manageable control of project staff. While project funds may be used to produce trained teachers, textbooks, and classrooms, these are not desired ends of the education process, but only intermediate inputs toward the goals of improving access and learning. The real value of the inputs can only be established through their program of use. While a project that does not deliver needed project-level outputs is likely to be judged a failure, providing those project-level outputs does not necessarily ensure success. It is important to monitor the degree of project-level outputs delivered but a mistake to assume that these inputs to the larger education system guarantee the success of the larger education enterprise.

Little attention was given to assessing project accomplishments against stated goals and objectives. As noted earlier, the goals of nearly all USAID projects implemented between 1990 and 2005 were to increase student learning, increase access, progression and graduation rates, do these in a sustainable way and, in some cases, strengthen NGOs. Yet, with notable exceptions, these were not the focus of most project-level monitoring or evaluation. More attention was given to the extent to which clients were satisfied and promised inputs were delivered. It is quite possible that the assessment of progress toward stated goals was included in broader USAID Mission- or Bureau-level studies. However a review of project-level documents did not reveal this.

Results of many projects were over-promised at the design stage and overstated in subsequent evaluations. Findings suggest that results sometimes were over-promised at the project design stage and modest evaluation findings were sometimes overstated. Small differences were used to support broad claims of success. While this may be good politics and generate positive public relations, such practices contribute little to informing new project design.

Although projects at times fell short of promised accomplishments, the problem may be more with the expectations than the results. Small gains in student achievement emerging from a multimillion dollar project may be the hard truth of development. Unrealistically high expectations for what externally funded projects can accomplish lead to projects being perceived as failures, not because the intervention was inadequate, but because the project could not achieve such unrealistic levels of anticipated success. As long as inflated promises are seen as a necessary strategy for securing funds and project approval, and to the extent that there is no serious consequence for consistent failure to achieve inflated promises, such strategies will likely persist.

USAID is limited in its ability to learn from its experience. A key finding is that USAID is largely unable to access the findings and experience gained from much of its work or to learn from its own experience. While USAID has invested considerable resources in documenting, monitoring, and evaluating projects, much of that information is lost to outside researchers, and perhaps to USAID staff as well, due to past archiving practices. This history highlights a choice for the future: If USAID seeks to learn from its experience it may need to reconsider how project experience is captured and retained. Alternatively, if USAID is not going to seek lessons from project level documentation, it may not be necessary to continue to invest so heavily in the production of that documentation.

USAID personnel have multiple sources of informal and formal information on how well projects are performing. They may not feel they need formal documentation to tell them what they already know. Beyond that, there is often a tension between investing time and money in monitoring, testing, and evaluation to assess program success versus investing those same resources in direct delivery of services. Based on the documents available to this study, USAID and project staff appeared to believe that there were greater consequences for failure to meet production schedules than for failure to fully satisfy evaluation needs. They have a point. If the project is not fully implemented, the evaluation will not be very meaningful. This frustration is mentioned in several documents. For example, in Honduras (PEEP), the analytic requirements of the project were greatly overshadowed by the production demands. Project staff observed that, while production schedules were met, there tended to be a lack of technical analysis which would have sharpened the focus on utility of project efforts (Creative Associates International, Inc. 1995).

Conclusion

Results of this study indicate that USAID project assistance during the 1990s and early 2000s made important contributions to strengthening education systems, extending education access, and increasing student learning. If anything, the results of this study represent a conservative estimate of USAID successes since impacts may have emerged that are not indicated in the documents available for this study. That said, findings highlight the considerable challenge posed by efforts to influence the operation of national education systems.

Development assistance projects always operate in a complex cross-current of forces posed by, among other things, national history; the vision, administrative capacity, and political will of the recipient governments; and the economic environment of the country. Many desired outcomes depend for their success on factors outside the manageable interest of USAID and project personnel. Even so, results of this study can contribute to the ongoing reconsideration of development assistance strategies within USAID and similar organizations committed to improving education systems through development assistance.

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Comments from Patrick Collins, EQUIP2 Cognizant Technical Officer (CTO)

Following numerous reviews of this important evaluation, as CTO I feel it is important to provide the following comments; these comments do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Contextual Changes in Target Countries. One aspect that the meta-evaluation did not address is the historical context of education progress in the target countries. Since the study relies on project documentation, which does not always capture national trends, it can leave the false impression that there was little progress from 1990–2005. This period was one of considerable national and international emphasis and greatly increased investment in education. Multiple global initiatives including Education for All, the Dakar Framework, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Fast Track Initiative, were coupled with rising national commitments to education. USAID's investment in the education sector alone increased six-fold over the period. Whereas it is difficult to attribute the changes directly to donor support, it is reasonable to conclude that the major international effort has contributed to the historic progress in educational achievement.

Progress against key indicators was most notable during this period (see related charts in Annex 1). Primary school enrollment, for example, increased substantially; of the 23 countries in the study, gross enrollment (GER) improved in 17 countries by an average of 32 percent, with the largest increases of 67 and 54 percent in Ethiopia and Malawi respectively. The net enrollment rate (NER) at the primary level improved in 14 of the countries by an average of 26 percentage points. The most dramatic improvements in access were in Guinea (25 to 65 percent), Malawi (50 to 94 percent), and Ethiopia (23 to 61 percent). Data is more limited on other measures of education system efficiency and quality, and in many cases the story is mixed. While five countries showed measurable improvements in pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), the rapid increase in access created by universal primary education (UPE) policies resulted in overcrowded classrooms in some countries. The most striking examples of deterioration in education quality as measured by PTR were a 100 percent increase in Ethiopia, an 82 percent increase in Uganda, and a 63 percent increase in Cambodia. It is notable that of the 18 countries in the sample with sufficient data on PTR in 1990 and 2005, only three exceeded the FTI target of 40 pupils per teacher in 1990, but eight had PTRs higher than 40 in 2005.

The data for survival to Grade 5 are mixed but with an overall positive trend. Of the 11 countries with sufficient data on this measure, 7 had improved the survival measure by between 5 percent (Lesotho) and 35 percent (Namibia). Survival to Grade 5 decreased in 4 countries: –5 percent in Benin, –8 percent in Botswana, –12 percent in Uganda, and –35 percent in Malawi. For the 13 countries with data on primary completion rates, 12 showed improvements between 7 percent (Swaziland) and 253 percent (Mali). Overall, 5 of the 13 countries— El Salvador, Malawi, Benin, Guinea, and Mali— improved primary completion by over 100 percent during the period.

Methodological Challenges. In order to have a replicable methodology, this meta-evaluation is based only on those documents that were publicly available from USAID's official archive, the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). Unfortunately, because the documentation is incomplete, conclusions could only be drawn from limited information reflecting curtailed observations at a fixed point in time, and therefore may be misleading. For example, in Nicaragua, based on the midterm evaluation, the project did not seem to be doing well. According to the documentation available, after two years of implementation of the autonomous school approach, the reforms had reached fewer than 500 schools and had not yet created solid community support for basic education (USAID/Nicaragua 1995). The subsequent decade of intensive USAID and World Bank support for the reforms and their commensurate impact was not available in the DEC, and consequently not included in the study. However, although the project evaluation and final reports were not properly archived, these documents indicate that the project was able to correct the initial problems and was perceived as a great success. Substantive and meaningful education reform is, after all, a long-term process. The methodological approach therefore potentially led to conclusions that at least in some cases, when viewing programs in their entirety would seem incomplete or imprecise.

USAID Program vs. Project Interventions. It is also important to make a distinction between education programs and projects. The meta-evaluation attempted to mine lessons learned from project experience through project-related documentation. While beneficial, it should be noted that USAID projects typically operated within a broader Mission-level programmatic rationale, much of which would not have been reflected in project-level reports. As a result, there is a potential misalignment between the project-level goals and objectives as reported by the implementing organization and the broader programmatic strategic objectives that the Mission was aiming to achieve through funding multiple discrete projects. One of the challenges then in interpreting the results of the meta-evaluation is that it did not situate the findings of individual projects within the larger programmatic context in which USAID Missions were operating.

USAID support to education in countries generally takes the form of a USAID Mission with education staff. This usually consists of a long-term, three to five year program that addresses high-level—meaning broad Mission-level policy objectives—education needs in the country. Typically, several projects make up the program. In developing the program, USAID staff coordinate with the host country government, in-country stakeholders, and other donors to determine the strategic direction of the program in support of the country education plan. Program goals and objectives are generally articulated on a more general level (e.g., support for improved equitable access to quality basic education) and may focus on certain grade levels, geographical areas, subject matter, or other thematic areas.

Based on this strategic program focus, USAID will then design specific projects, generally lasting two to five years, with lower-level—meaning technical and/or management related—objectives, activities, and indicators within the manageable

interest of the project (e.g., number of teachers trained in a new curriculum, or number of books distributed). These projects are designed to support the achievement of the higher-level USAID program and, in turn, the higher-level national education plan. The achievement of these higher-level national objectives (e.g., gender parity in enrollment, targets for increased enrollment or completion rates) generally requires a longer time frame—five to twenty years or more. For USAID, this means that multiple projects are often designed as part of a sequence within a larger USAID program that in turn supports the achievement of significant national improvements over time.

It is also important to note that USAID functions as a decentralized agency. During this period, Missions had substantial, yet perhaps varying, latitude to design their own programs; one Mission might have only one large, long-term project contributing to one strategic objective and implemented by only one contractor, whereas other Missions developed multiple education projects, sometimes as a combination of short- and long-term interventions implemented by various contractors, and contributing to one or multiple strategic objectives. This variation across Missions, countries, programs, and projects over time further complicates the analysis of individual projects as presented in the meta-evaluation.

In addition, education spending is typically one of the largest portions of national budgets, and even when USAID has robust education programs, they are generally only a tiny percentage—1 percent or less—of total education spending in countries. Thus, USAID education programs do not always provide direct services; rather, programs are often strategically designed in coordination with the host country and other donors to support collective achievement of national goals through, for example, capacity building (e.g., training of teachers, curriculum developers, and district education officers) and/or program support in certain thematic or geographic areas.

In other words, while USAID projects may support the provision of specific inputs—such as teacher training or learning materials—the sheer size of the education sector in countries is such that there is virtually always shared attribution with other stakeholders in terms of achieving national outcomes such as improved learning, gender parity, and enrollment rates. Moreover, making improvements in education requires far more than just the provision of inputs, such as schools and books, it involves behavioral changes on the part of thousands of individuals in each country, including students, parents, teachers, principals, and district and national level officials.

This is a critical point to understand. This evaluation correctly notes that many project documents mainly reported on inputs vs. system level outcomes or impact (though program level documents not included in this study often did provide such higher level data). The issue, however, is that even where national, system level results are available, they are invariably due to numerous interventions and actors, and thus success or failure cannot solely be attributed to USAID; indeed it is often difficult to disaggregate the unique contributions of USAID support. An ongoing question then, is what are reasonable levels of targets and objectives for USAID support, and what is a reasonable

balance - for targeting, reporting and performance management purposes - between input results that can clearly be attributed to USAID, and the higher, national level results that we all desire, but which are well beyond USAID's manageable interest?

It is important to understand the difference between projects and programs and the reality of shared attribution in reviewing the findings of this meta-evaluation since, unfortunately, the publicly available documentation of program-level planning and reporting is very poor. This has occurred for a variety of reasons. First, USAID project and program planning and reporting systems changed several times during the period of this study, complicating or eliminating the opportunity to assess the overall progress of country programs and projects over time using publicly available information. Second, as someone working inside USAID, this study is also a reminder that there is a wide range of "grey literature," such as regional trends analyses, program concept papers, and other key strategic analysis and planning documents that are not included in official archives because they are internal documents or procurement sensitive.

Conclusions. As a result of all the factors noted above, publicly available information on USAID education efforts during this time period is less complete than would be desired. Thus, the study is based on available project-level data rather than Mission- or country-level and long-term program-level information. This suggests the value of using this meta-evaluation as a basis for undertaking additional analyses using an expanded methodology.

USAID has devoted significant resources to supporting international basic education over the years. Our sincere hope is that the results of this analysis will be useful in informing decision-making and in highlighting areas where additional actions, information, or analysis are needed.

Comments from John Gillies, EQUIP2 Project Director

The EQUIP2 Leader with Associates Award on Education Policy, Systems, and Management has explored numerous issues affecting education quality including decentralization, school effectiveness, school fee abolition, student assessment, business partnerships in education, education data and indicators, monitoring and evaluation, and education system reform. This paper, *An Analysis of U.S. Assistance to Basic Education*, is an important addition to the EQUIP2 portfolio. The study is the most comprehensive review of USAID education projects available, analyzing patterns and findings of 33 projects over a 15-year period. Some of the findings provide fresh insights into education programming. Other findings are not new, but bear repeating and emphasizing. This study will complement a broad range of EQUIP2 research activities looking at effective strategies for improving education systems over the long term.

The study is important not only for the questions that it can answer, but equally important for those it cannot. A reader who is familiar with USAID education projects will recognize a lot of truth in the details, but will also note that the report does not speak to the very positive impact and influence of USAID assistance over time. The serious

limitations of documentation and evaluation, a finding in itself, left the big questions unanswered: *Was aid to education effective? Which strategies result in the best outcomes? Are the programs sustainable? Does decentralization work?* Even some basic questions could not be answered definitively: *How many of the projects achieved their intended outputs and did those outputs have an impact?*

USAID's reporting, monitoring, and review procedures should serve two functions: to provide accountability for the use of public funds to Congress and the American people and to enable organizational learning to improve effectiveness at the project/country level as well as for the overall Agency. This study shows that the system did not meet either challenge very well.

Evaluation

The study found that only 11 of the 33 projects had a final evaluation, and only two of these were considered highly rigorous, with a clear purpose, using multiple methods, sufficient time, and addressing policy relevant issues. Although nine of the evaluations concluded that the project was successful, neither the definition nor evidence of success was always clear. Most of the evaluations focused on compliance and accountability for results, but they did not always report against the targets. More importantly, the evaluations failed to ask policy-relevant questions about the validity and execution of the underlying strategy and development hypothesis that a given set of activities will result in better education systems. Every project is based on implicit or explicit policy assumptions, which were infrequently evaluated. Therefore, the evaluation conclusions too often consist of generic insights: projects should be flexible; more time is needed; projects should consult with stakeholders; or projects should plan better.

A substantive evaluation should distinguish between theory failure and implementation failure, and should identify which aspects of strategies work or do not work, and under what circumstances. Most of the USAID evaluations reviewed for this study do not do this. The project evaluations had a "black box" approach—looking at activities and, sometimes, outcomes, but seldom analyzing the relationship between the two. Conclusions about the relative effectiveness of alternative strategies cannot be made, in part because the data is not there and in part because the questions are never asked. External evaluations were undermined by the shortage of robust project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, which aside from missing or poor quality data (which in part reflects weak capacity in developing countries), lacked internal formative evaluation, technical expertise, and a project evaluation framework. Only two evaluations identified the project M&E system as a particular strength, and five studies found this component deficient. While projects usually collected data for reporting and performance monitoring, this is not a substitute for substantive M&E. This demonstrates a deeper problem than the limited ability to report on accomplishments; it shows that M&E was not an integral part of the project design and strategy.

Mission and Project Reporting

The EQUIP2 study captured all of the project-level documents available in the archives

for the target projects. A possible weakness of the methodology is that it does not capture the program-level reporting through which Missions formally reported results. In the context of assessing the effectiveness of aid to education, it is important to note that the education portfolio consisted of multiple projects, both concurrently and over time. Given documentation weaknesses, the study was not able to include all of the projects or program support in any of the countries studied. While some of the program outcomes might have been captured in program or country level reports, such reports were not reviewed in the study. Since the program reporting is sometimes only loosely coupled to specific project interventions, it presents a different set of challenges in terms of both attribution and its analytical power in understanding the impact of particular strategies.

The program reporting (Results Review and Resource Request or R-4, and Annual Reports) contains information that was not used in this study, but does provide additional perspective on some issues. A limited review of R-4s and Annual Reports found that they can provide a rich narrative about such issues as engagement in donor coordination, influence on national policy dialogue, and long-term strategic vision that are not captured in the project documents reviewed in this study. Moreover, the R-4 reports usually provided a transparent "targeted vs. achieved" format and sometimes included important measures of access and quality, such as: leaving exam pass rate; gross enrollment ratio; curriculum developed and used; percentage of teachers with qualifications; percentage of students performing at standards; active parent associations; promotion rates; or policy frameworks adopted.

The program reporting was by no means problem-free. The best R-4 reports provided a longitudinal picture of country progress against stable indicators. Unfortunately, the R-4 reporting in some countries suffered from lack of continuity and coherence; indicators could appear and disappear quickly or be redefined in the middle of the reporting period, which made it difficult to assess results over time. The indicators being reported by the Missions were not always clearly related to the project activities in a way that change could be attributed.

Consistency in results reporting suffered from a series of organizational reforms and changing requirements, procedures, and indicators, efforts to find common indicators, and changing reporting formats. In FY 2002, the R-4s (often over 100 pages long) were replaced by very short Annual Reports that dramatically disrupted the data consistency. In 2002, the main indicator appearing in Annual Reports was "number of children enrolled in schools affected by USAID programs," eliminating sometimes a dozen specific measures. Since that time, the Agency reporting requirements and guidelines have changed several times.

The Challenge of USAID Monitoring and Evaluation of Aid Effectiveness

The procedural and reporting reforms in USAID have been undertaken with the best of intentions: to better capture the Agency's activities and successes in a way that informs Congress and the American people about the impact of foreign aid on education. There

is an undeniable challenge in capturing and rolling-up a diverse array of locally relevant programs into a metric that is meaningful to Congress. Unfortunately, as the study demonstrates, it appears that the reforms during 1996–2002 did not solve the problem. The reporting, evaluation, and documentation formats are neither informative as a reporting tool, nor do they have any great value for organizational learning and program improvement. It is unclear whether or not this exercise is meeting Congressional needs for program oversight.

These issues are symptoms of an underlying institutional problem. The problem of inadequate evaluation and organizational learning is not new; studies have repeated this finding for decades. The problem is not due to a lack of understanding, but rather the lack of institutional incentives for and value of evaluation. USAID under-invests in learning in part because of structural problems—a classic case of externalities. The benefits of substantive evaluation accrue to the organization at large, or to future projects, but the funding and priorities are controlled by project managers whose performance is measured not by learning, but rather by production and activities. Project managers under-invest in knowledge because they cannot capture the benefits of evaluation.

A similar structural constraint results from the changing guidelines about program reporting (i.e., common indicators and Performance Monitoring Plans or PMPs). The frequent changes in reporting requirements absorb management attention, and distract it from the programmatic goal of gaining substantive knowledge for program improvement. This process has undermined organizational learning both because of the lack of continuity about measures, and because it undervalues long-term evaluation. High-level managers appear to focus on reporting rather than program improvement. When USAID temporarily eliminated the requirement for midterm and final evaluations in the mid-1990s, it was not done out of ignorance, but rather because the evaluations were pro-forma—and expensive—exercises that were not being used. Although the intent was to encourage evaluations that would be used, the impact was to lessen attention to evaluation in general.

Furthermore, the question of effectiveness of aid to education is more difficult to answer when the primary unit of analysis and programming is the project. A project is a time-limited intervention with defined objectives that is taking place in the context of long-term national institutional and political change. The project approach has both management and implementation advantages to providing assistance, but creates distortions and limitations as the unit of analysis for evaluating impact. As the study aptly points out, the institutional pressures to over-promise on sustainable outcomes in a short period are counterproductive. This is a real problem even with the historical norm of five-year projects. It will be greatly exacerbated if the trend continues to shorter planning and implementation periods of one to three years, in which case meaningful evaluation must be able to place the project into context.

Although the need for meaningful assessment and learning about effective strategies for education is clear, the solution is less so. The challenges are lack of capacity in the

Agency for framing and conducting evaluations, lack of institutional incentives, and the lack of an overarching framework for program assessments. If the challenge of organizational learning is to be addressed, some of the following elements must be in place:

- Clear and unambiguous value in the system for substantive evaluation and learning. This may come from Congress, USAID leadership, or others but it is unlikely to be sustained and systemic if left to individual project managers.
- A coherent set of framing questions at the Agency level that addresses the broad policy-relevant questions that constitute the sector concerns. Such framing questions will be an important factor in moving beyond the sole focus on accountability and compliance.
- The process must first and foremost be utilization-focused. Evaluation needs to be a central part of project design and implementation rather than a documentary requirement.
- If evaluations are to be useful for management purposes, they need to be professional and high quality, with clear questions, solid methodology, and a coherent use plan.

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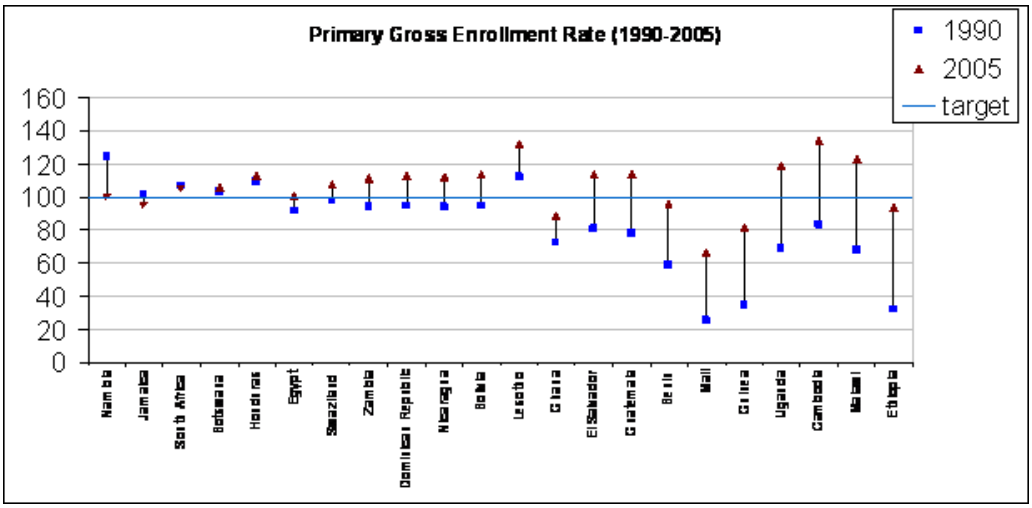
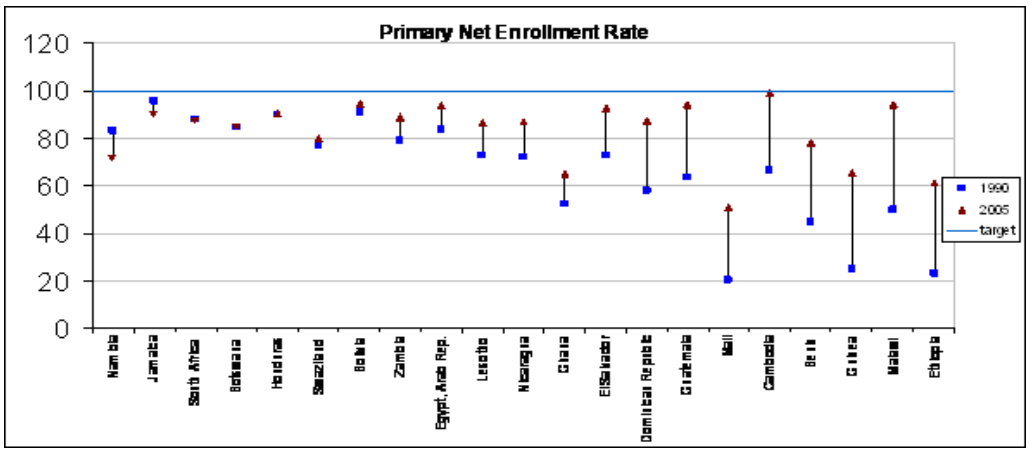
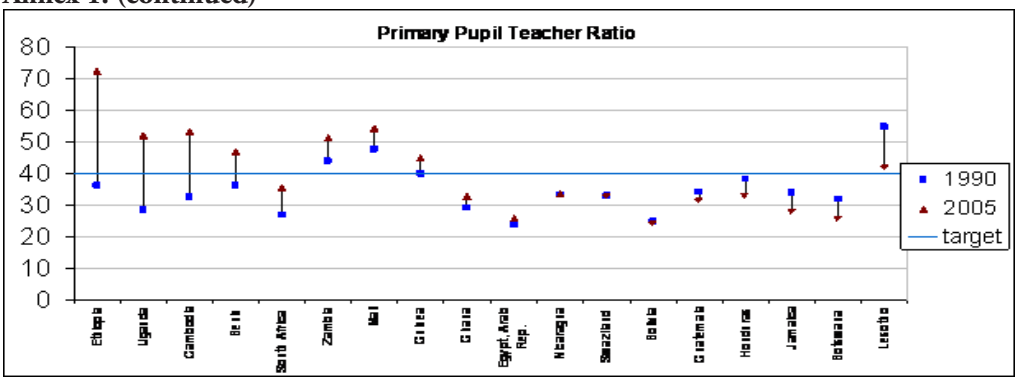
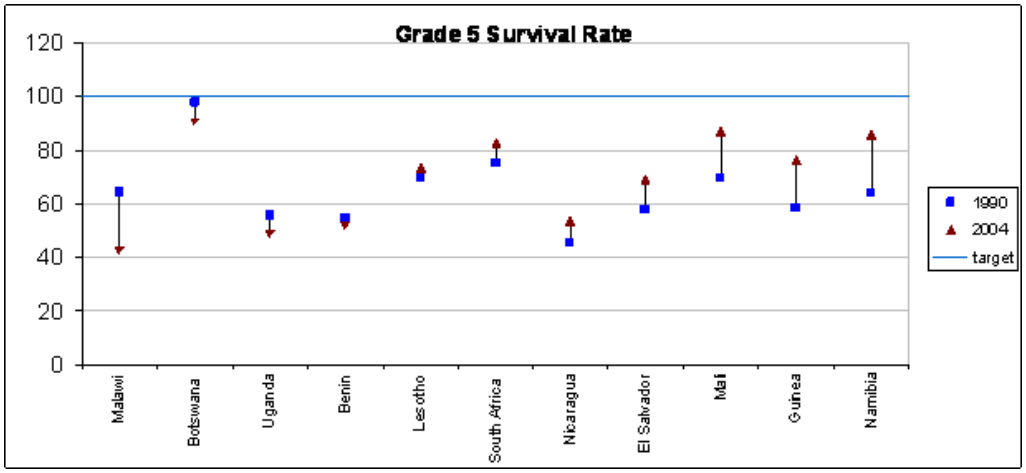
Annex 1


Primary Gross Enrollment Rate (1990-2005)
1990
2005
target
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Namibia
Jamaica
South Africa
Botswana
Honduras
Egypt
Swaziland
Zambia
Dominican Republic
Nicaragua
Bolivia
Lesotho
Ghana
El Salvador
Guatemala
Benin
Mali
Guinea
Uganda
Cambodia
Malawi
Ethiopia


Primary Net Enrollment Rate
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
1990
2005
target
Namibia
Jamaica
South Africa
Botswana
Honduras
Swaziland
Bolivia
Zambia
Egypt, Arab Rep.
Lesotho
Nicaragua
Ghana
El Salvador
Dominican Republic
Guatemala
Mali
Cambodia
Benin
Guinea
Malawi
Ethiopia

Annex 1. (continued)





Annex 2. Types of documents included in this review

Country	Project	Interim Documents	Final Report	Mid-term Evaluation	Final Evaluation
Benin	CLEF	√	√	Audit	
	PENGOP	√	√		√
Bolivia	RLP	√	√	√	√
Botswana	BEC	√	√		√
Cambodia	CAPE	√			
Dominican Rep.	PIPE	√	√	√	√
Egypt	BEC	√		√	
El Salvador	EDIFAM	√	√		
	SABE	√	√	√	
Ethiopia	BESO	√		√	
Ghana	QUIPS	√		√	
Guatemala	BEST	√	√	√	
	EFPD		√		
Guinea	FQEL	√			
	PASE	√		√	
Haiti	IIBE	√			
	ResPack	√			
Honduras	BEST	√			√
	PEEP	√		√	√
Jamaica	UAP	√	√		√
	New Horizons	√	√	√	
LAC	CETT	√			
Lesotho	PEP	√	√	√	√
Malawi	GABLE	√			√
	ESPP	√	√		
Mali	BEEP	√		√	
Namibia	BES	√		Audit	
Nicaragua	BASE	√		√	
South Africa	SABER	√		√	√
Swaziland	EPMT	√	√	√	√
Uganda	SUPER	√	√		
	EMIS	√			
Zambia	CHANGES	√			

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Annex 3. Summary of Project Activities by Frequency (33 country projects reviewed)

Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency
Improving infrastructure		-- cluster-based	2
-- Commodities (furniture, computers)	10	-- distance	2
-- School construction	6	-- cascade	3
Strengthening systems		-- master teacher training	2
-- Capacity development – MOE	16	-- Headmaster training	8
-- EMIS development	15	-- Radio instruction	7
-- Monitoring & evaluation	14	-- Television instruction	1
-- TA to support MOE operations	10	-- Distance education	3
-- Teacher training coll support	8	-- Multi-grade classrooms	4
-- Short term participant training	6	-- Demonstration schools	2
-- Long term participant training	6	-- Laboratory schools	1
-- Improve financial management	6	-- Training resource teachers	1
-- NGO development	5	***Developing curriculum/materials***	
-- Strategic planning	5	-- Curriculum development	21
-- Personnel management	4	-- Instructional materials devel	19
-- Governance/leadership training	4	-- Active student learning	5
-- Teacher redeployment	3	-- Self instructional materials	3
-- Devel school quality standards	3	-- Education materials distribution	15
-- Training school board members	3	-- Teacher/curriculum guides	10
-- TA support to NGOs	3	***Increasing public support for Education***	
-- School grants	2	-- Social marketing/Advocacy	10
-- Reorganize teacher colleges	1	-- Community participation	9
-- Expenditure tracking system	1	-- Parent committees/PTAs	6
-- School mapping	1	-- Decentralization	6
Measuring learning outcomes		-- Parent education	5
-- Achievement testing	16	-- Scholarships for girls	4
-- Test development	15	-- Community devel seed funds	3
Educational policy		***Other***	
-- Policy/operations research	17	-- Early childhood family education	1
-- Policy development	13	-- Deworming	1
-- Special studies	13	-- School feeding program	1
Instructional quality		-- Reduce # of subjects taught	1
-- Teacher training	20	-- Promoted community schools	1
-- direct	2		

Annex 4. Predominant evaluation criteria employed

Country	Project	Inputs tracked	Change in enrollment	Change in student flow (repetition, attrition, graduation)	Change in behavior	Change in learning
Benin	CLEF	√				
	PENGOP	√				
Bolivia	RLP	√	√			See Note 1
Botswana	BEC	√				
Cambodia	CAPE					
Dom. Rep.	PIPE	√			√	
Egypt	BEC	√	√			
El Salvador	EDIFAM	√				√
	SABE	√	√	√		√
Ethiopia	BESO	√				
Ghana	QUIPS	√				√
Guatemala	BEST	√	√	√	√	√
	EFPD	√				
Guinea	FQEL					
	PASE	√	√			
Haiti	IIBE					
	ED 2004					
Honduras	BEST	√		√		
	PEEP	√	√	√		
Jamaica	UAP	√	√	√		
	New Horizons	√		√	√	√
LAC	CETT	√			√	√
Lesotho	PEP	√				
Malawi	GABLE	√	√	√	√	√
	ESPP	√				
Mali	BEEP	√	√			
Namibia	BES	√				√
Nicaragua	BASE	√		√		
South Africa	SABER	√				
Swaziland	EPMT	√	√	√	√	√
Uganda	SUPER	√	√			
	EMIS	√				
Zambia	CHANGES	√	√	√	√	√

Note 1: Measured, but results are hard to interpret

Annex 5. Did projects that aimed to improve education quality result in increased student learning?

Extent that learning was assessed	Number of projects
Number of projects reviewed	33
→ Based on the data available to this study, the number of these projects in which raising educational quality was a stated goal	28
→ → Of these, the number in which student learning was proposed as a measure of project success	17
→ → → Of these, the number in which testing was used to assess student learning	12
→ → → → Of these, the number in which pre-testing was used to assess change over time	11
→ → → → → Of these:	
– The number in which a comparison group was used to assess impact of project vs. naturally occurring change	9
– The number that looked only at gains over time of project students	1
→ → → → → → Of these:	
– The number of projects that found a significant increase in student learning among project schools/ students	6
– The number of projects that found mixed results, with comparison groups outperforming project groups in some subjects at some grade levels	3
– Can't tell from the information reported	1

Annex 6. Magnitude of project learning gains compared to comparison group (Projects in which some learning gains were reported)

Country	Project	Magnitude of project learning gains compared to comparison group	Citation
Ghana	QUIPS	38% (Math, over 2 years) 15% (English over 2 years)	Amuah, Gyamera, & Vormawor (2000)
Guatemala	BEST	16% (radio Math)	Enge, Etheridge, et al. (1993)
Jamaica (Horizons)	New Horizons	Mixed results, over 3 years: In Language Arts, project girls out-performed comparison group girls by 3.3%; project boys out-performed non-project boys by 0.4%. In Math, non-project girls out-performed project girls by 4.0 %>; non-project boys out-performed project boys by 4.4%.	Chesterfield, Enge, & Simpson (2001)
LAC	CETT	CETT teachers did better than non-CETT teachers Magnitude of difference not provided	Chesterfield, Culver, Hunt, & Linan-Thompson (2005)
Malawi	GABLE	Grade 3: Results favored project schools all three subjects. Grade 4: Project schools out-performed non-project schools in Math, only marginally outperformed comparison schools in English, underperformed comparison schools in Chichewa. Grade 5: Project schools outperformed in Math, only slightly outperformed in English, essentially comparable in Chichewa.	Herbert, Millsap, & El-Sanabary (2002)
Namibia	BES	Grade 1 & 2 – project students out-performed in Math and Environmental Studies, no differences in English achievement	Snyder (2000)
Swaziland	EPMT	Grade 1 Math, increase of 3% in mean score over 2 years, with number of students achieving 80% mastery increasing from 36% (1992) to 40% (1993) to 51% (1994). Grade 1 English, mean scores rise from 19 (1992) to 24 (1994) while the percent of students scoring in the two highest categories increases from 12% (1992) to 29% (1993) to 34% (1994). Grade 2 Math and English show similar increases in mean scores and in proportions of student scores at the high-end of the score distribution.	Clark & Pearson (1996)
Zambia	CHANGES	Significant increase in cognitive assessment scores for 2017 pupils. Children who received treatment improved significantly more than children in control schools.	Graybill (2004)

Annex 7. Magnitude of learning gains and changes in student flow in World Bank projects

Country	Name of project	Magnitude of project learning gains compared to comparison group	Magnitude of changes in student flow indicators (internal efficiency)
Chile[1]	Primary School Improvement	**Gain in learning score between 1991-1996**[a] ***Spanish*** ***4th*** ***8th*** Private-paid schools 7.1% 3.4% Private-subsidized 16.2 9.1 Municipal schools 13.1 9.0 ***Math*** Private-paid schools 13.3 4.0 Private-subsidized 18.8 8.8 Municipal schools 19.2 7.5	Between 1991-1996 average repetition rates for the primary cycle dropped 7% (from 12.8 to 5.8). Average years to completion of primary school dropped 2.7 years (from 12.4 to 9.7).
China[2]	Third Basic Education	Between 1993 and 2001, grade 6 Chinese language pass rates increased by 3.8% (from 95.4% to 99.2%) and math pass rates increased by 5.5% (from 94.6% to 99.1%).[f]	Between 1993 and 2001: Grade 1 student dropout rate declined 1.5% (from 3.0% to 0.5%). Grade 1 repetition rate fell 7.3% (from 8.4% to 1.1%). The completion rate for 15 year olds increased 9.2% (from 90.4% to 99.2%). At lower secondary, dropout rates declined 4.9% (from 6.8% to 1.9%) and completion rates increased by 12% (from 86% to 98%).
India[3]	District Primary Education	During the first three years of implementation (1997-2000), achievement scores increased between grade 1 and grade 4 by 40% in math and 23% in language. For grades 3 & 4, there was an 18% increase over baseline in math and 16% increase over baseline in language.[a] During 2000-2003, grade 1 scores increased by 13% in math and 12% in language. Grade 3 & 4 scores increased by 26% in math and 16% in language.[a] Whether findings were based on cross-sectional or longitudinal analysis could not be determined. No comparison group was used. A different test was used at baseline and at final-point testing.	16% of districts reduced dropout to the 10% target but baseline data was not available.
Mexico[4]	Second Primary Education	Although project schools still lagged behind the national average in student academic achievement, there was a 2.1% reduction in the score gap in Spanish (6.9% to 4.8%) and a 0.7% reduction in mathematics (3.5% to 2.8%) between 1996 and 2000.	Dropout rate in project schools declined from 3.9% (6.0% to 2.1%), to the same level as the national average. Repetition rates fell 2.3% (from 10.4% to 8.1%).
Uruguay[5]	Basic Education Quality Improvement	From 1996 to 1999, cognitive assessment of grade 6 students indicated that the percentage whose performance was deemed satisfactory increased 6% in mathematics (from 35% to 41%) and 4% in English (57% to 61%).	From 1996 to 1999, repetition rates for primary grades declined by 2% (from 12% to 10%).

1. World Bank. (1999). Implementation completion report, Republic of Chile, Primary Education Improvement project.
2. World Bank. (2002). Implementation completion report on a credit in the amount of SDR 67.3 million to the People's Republic of China for a Third Basic Education Project.
3. World Bank. (2003). Implementation completion report on a credit in the amount of SDR 291.7 million to India for a District Education Project II.
4. World Bank. (2002). Implementation completion report on a loan in the amount of US$412 million to the United Mexican States for a Second Primary Education Improvement Project
5. World Bank (2002). Implementation completion report on a loan in the amount of US$31.5 million to the Republic of Uruguay for a Basic Education Quality Improvement Project

a. Lack of comparison group makes it difficult to assess contribution of project over alternative instructional treatments students would have received.

Annex 8. Changes in student flow as reported by projects

Country	Change reported by project	Context	Target Group	Citation
Change in Persistence				
El Salvador	5%	Increase over 5 years in primary net enrollment	National	AED (1998:7)
Guatemala-NEU	13.4% (boys) 7.9% (girls)	Increase in persistence between Gr 1 and Gr 6.	NEU project schools vs. comparison group	Chesterfield & Rubio (1997)
Guatemala-DIGEBI	4.2% (boys) 2.9% (girls)	Increase in persistence between Gr 1 and Gr 6.	DIGEBI project schools vs. comparison group	Chesterfield & Rubio (1997)
Honduras	3.0% -17.0%	Increase in anticipated target for existing training centers < Shortfall in anticipated target for new centers>	CADERH basic education training centers for adults	Dye, Hunt, et al. (2000:25).
Honduras (PEEP)	12%	Increase over 5 years in primary net enrollment	National	Seelye, Munger, et al. (1995:6).
Malawi	"lower" 1%	Change in Grades 1-4 <Increase in overall primary dropout rate during this time>	National	Hebert, Millsap, & El-Sanabary (2002:10).
Benin	26.1% (total) 16.65% (girls)	National change in GER over 8 years (1990-1998); increase in girls' GER from 1995-2001	National	Williams, V. (2001:5).; The Mitchell Group (2001: 5).
Change in Repetition				
El Salvador	2.07%	Over 5 years	National	AED (1998:7).
Honduras (PEEP)	55% reduction	Over 5 years	National	Seelye, Munger, et al. (1995:6).
Malawi	3.0%	Grade 1-4 over 6 years	National	Hebert, Millsap, & El-Sanabary (2002:11).

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Annex 9. Observations about sustainability from project evaluation documents

Country	Project	Assessment of sustainability
Benin	PENGOP	No evidence of project being taken to scale with local funds.
Bolivia	IRLP	Sustainability is in question. Government is not capable of managing project (interactive radio learning) on its own. Sustainability depends on subsequent funding from the World Bank and other sources.
Ethiopia	BESO	Evaluation report does not provide strong (or much of any) evidence that project activities will be sustained.
Honduras	PEEP	Ongoing mechanisms for quality control were not institutionalized. Analytic technology was not transferred. Mission expressed doubts that training centers could be financially self-sustaining; training centers felt the increasing demands by USAID did not consider their financial and technical capacity to provide quality services.
Malawi	GABLE	Low likelihood of sustainability.
South Africa	SABER	Evaluation team questions the sustainability of the project in its present form. Evaluation team had serious doubts about the DDSP's sustainability and replicability due to lack of integration of the project.
Namibia	BES	There are real causes for concern about costs and sustainability. There are grounds for suspecting that the system as it currently exists involves a level of cost that is probably not sustainable in the long run.
Swaziland	EPMT	Evaluation report questioned sustainability of the project because most of the project accomplishments were undertaken by expatriate advisers.
Uganda	SUPER	The sustainability of the supply of textbooks to primary schools hinges on the evolution of the macro economic situation, the extent that textbook provision is pursued at the expense of other recurrent investments in the sector, the extent to which the cost of materials are shared with parents, whether liberalization of procurement lead to cost savings, and how decentralization will impact allocation decisions.
Zambia	CHANGES	For the second year running, the project was not linked to work with the MOE when it was developing its annual work plan and budget. This is regrettable because the only way project activities can be maintained is if the development of annual work plans and budgets are conducted in a collaborative manner.

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EQUIP2
Educational Quality Improvement Program
Policy ▪ Systems ▪ Management

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