

BOOKS, BUILDINGS, AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:

AN IMPACT EVALUATION OF WORLD BANK SUPPORT TO BASIC EDUCATION IN GHANA

Howard White and Edoardo Masset,
World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (OED)

Both the quantity (enrolments) and quality (pupils' learning outcomes) of schooling improved in Ghana over the 1988-2003 period. These gains are directly linked to better school quality, particularly improved infrastructure and greater availability of school supplies. This in turn can be linked to donor support, in particular the World Bank's support, which has financed the construction of 8,000 classroom blocks and provided 35 million textbooks over the period.

Background

This note provides a summary of the results and lessons for DFID from an impact evaluation of support to the basic education sector in Ghana between 1988 and 2003. The impact evaluation was financed by a Trust Fund that Evaluation Department in DFID manages with the World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (OED).

The Millennium Development Goals aim for universal primary education by 2015 and gender equality in enrolments at all levels of education. The Education for All (EFA) initiative lays out a strategy for achieving these goals. The World Bank's own strategy stresses the school quality aspects of EFA, emphasising the need to focus on preserving learning outcomes while access to education is expanded.

This report assesses the impact to date of the efforts over the past 15 years toward increasing the quantity and quality of basic education in one African country, Ghana.

The study addresses the following questions: (1) What changes have occurred to school attainment and achievement, including the MDG indicators of completion and gender equality in enrolments, since the start of reforms in 1986? (2) What are the determinants of changes in basic educational outputs for children of basic school age in Ghana? (3) Which education interventions have the greatest impact on the determinants of educational outputs? (4) What has been the role of the Bank and other external donors in promoting education interventions that results in improved school attainment and achievement? (5) Do improved school attainment and

achievement support better welfare outcomes as captured in the MDGs, such as lower child mortality, better nutrition, and reductions in income-poverty?

Key findings

The key findings from the report were:

- Enrolments in basic education have increased by over 10 percent compared to 15 years ago. Moreover, today fewer than 20 percent of primary school graduates are illiterate, compared to nearly two-thirds 15 years ago.
- Statistical analysis shows that these improvements in learning outcomes are clearly and strongly linked to better welfare as measured by higher income, better nutrition, and reduced mortality.
- The data show that gains in educational outputs are directly linked to better school quality, manifested in improved infrastructure (school building contributing to higher enrolments) and greater availability of school supplies (textbook provision being a very cost effective means of improving test scores). Teaching methods are also shown to be the single largest determinant of test scores.
- The analysis shows that increased school quality can in turn be linked to the Bank's support, which has financed the construction of 8,000 classroom blocks and provided 35 million textbooks over the last 15 years. Others, notably DFID and USAID have focused on improving teaching methods, and have therefore also played a role in the improvement of test scores.
- School building and rehabilitation have been a cost effective means of increasing enrolments. Other activities, particularly textbook supply, are most cost effective in improving test scores. The challenge is to balance these traditional, proven and still necessary approaches with other activities such as promoting community engagement and enhancing the effectiveness of teaching.
- Better education is also shown to lead to better welfare outcomes, including lower mortality, improved nutrition and lower fertility. Children attaining higher test scores as a result of their schooling can also expect to enjoy higher incomes later on in life.
- Increased reliance on community and district funding means that schools in poorer areas get left behind, and as a result there are still some schools with very poor facilities in which very little learning takes place.

Lessons

The lessons that DFID can draw from this study are:

- Investment in hardware (in this case the availability and quality of classrooms and instructional materials) directly contributes to both educational attainment and achievement.
- Software (e.g. teaching methods) also matters. Therefore, efforts should be made to retain trained teachers, to improve teacher morale, and to expand in-service training.

- When satisfactory levels of hardware inputs are reached – which is still far from the case for the many relatively deprived schools – future improvements could come from focusing more closely on software inputs.
- A class of schools in poorer communities are very poorly resourced, so resources should be targeted to overcome the bias that results from community-based financing.
- The private sector has been neglected, although it is of growing importance; attention needs to be paid to it both in government strategy and donor support.

DFID Response

The Education and Skills Team (PD) will now take forward consideration of these lessons. These will include global discussion on education quality, particularly the important contribution of “hardware” to education (buildings and books).

The full evaluation report is available from www.worldbank.org/oed/ie

.....

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the UK government department responsible for promoting development and the reduction of poverty. The government first elected in 1997 has increased its commitment to development by strengthening the department and increasing its budget.

The central focus of the government's policy, set out in the 1997 White Paper on International Development, is a commitment to the internationally agreed target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, together with the associated targets including basic health care provision and universal access to primary education by the same date. The second White Paper on International Development, published in December 2000, reaffirmed this commitment, while focusing specifically on how to manage the process of globalisation to benefit poor people.

DFID seeks to work in partnership with governments which are committed to the international targets, and seeks to work with business, civil society and the research community to this end. We also work with multilateral institutions including the World Bank, United Nations agencies and the European Community.

The bulk of our assistance is concentrated on the poorest countries in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. We are also contributing to poverty elimination and sustainable development in middle income countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and elsewhere. DFID is also helping the transition countries in central and eastern Europe to try to ensure that the process of change brings benefits to all people and particularly to the poorest.

As well as its headquarters in London and East Kilbride, DFID has offices in many developing countries. In others, DFID works through staff based in British embassies and high commissions.

DFID's headquarters are located at:

1 Palace Street,
London SW1E 5HE, UK

and at:

DFID,
Abercrombie House,
Eaglesham Road,
East Kilbride,
Glasgow G75 8EA, UK

Switchboard: 020 7023 0000
Fax: 020 7023 0016
Website: www.dfid.gov.uk
Email: enquiry@dfid.gov.uk
Public Enquiry Point: 0845 3004100
From overseas: +44 1355 84 3132
ISBN: 1 86192 672 3