



**NETWORK FOR POLICY RESEARCH REVIEW AND  
ADVICE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

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**N O R R A G   N E W S   4 7**

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**Value for Money in International  
Education**

**A New World of Results, Impacts and  
Outcomes?**

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## What is NORRAG?

NORRAG (Network for Policy Research, Review and Advice on Education and Training) is a focus and a forum for the analysis of international cooperation in the education and training field.

The objectives of NORRAG are:

1. Collection, critical analysis, and synthesis of research on education and training policies and strategies, and on international cooperation;
2. Dissemination of just-in-time information and knowledge on education and training policies and strategies, and on international cooperation;
3. Advocacy of critical analysis on education and training policies and strategies to governments, NGOs and other organizations;
4. Cooperation with other networks in order to share information, carry out joint programmes, joint efforts in advocacy and strengthen networks.

The main instruments of NORRAG are its publications (*NORRAG NEWS* and Policy Briefs), its website and the organization of/and participation in meetings.

For more information, please visit: [www.norrag.org](http://www.norrag.org)

## What is *NORRAG NEWS*?

*NORRAG NEWS* is a digital newsletter that is produced twice a year. Each issue has a large number of short, sharp articles, focusing on policy implications of research findings and/or on the practical implications of new policies on international education and training formulated by development agencies, foundations and NGOs. The niche of NORRAG has been to identify a number of 'red threads' running through the complexity of the debates and the current aid and cooperation discourse, and to dedicate special issues of *NORRAG NEWS* to the critical analysis of these themes.

A full list of *NORRAG NEWS* is available at the end of this issue.

## NORRAG NEWS 47

### A SPECIAL ISSUE

#### Value for Money in International Education. A new world of results, impacts, and outcomes?

This special issue is about the emergence of the discourse about Value for Money (VfM) in all its complexity, as it relates to aid policy. There is a very positive side to its emergence as it is part of a reaction to the popular and media view that much aid has been wasted.

In ordinary parlance, Value for Money means believing that you have got a good deal: 'Proof of good Value for Money is in believing or concluding that the goods/services received were worth the price paid.' In other words, it is the **receiver** of the goods or services that decides if it is good value. When it comes to VfM in aid or development cooperation, however, it seems to be often the other way round: it is the **giver** not the receiver who seems to be deciding. There is a paradox here to be explored in this special issue.

If aid or development cooperation is a kind of gift, then perhaps there is something awkward about the giver working out if their gift is good value? In traditional OECD aid, the provision of development cooperation to poorer countries is not expected to be reciprocal, though there may be conditions attached. It may be different in South-South cooperation for non-DAC donors where the expectation is that there is a 'win-win' situation and where the understanding is that the outcome is 'common development' between the partners, not between 'givers' and 'receivers'. But if the giver is in the driver's seat and is saying, for example, 'Value for Money in our agency's programme means: We maximise the impact of each pound/dollar spent to improve poor people's lives', this might mean, again, that the giver is deciding about the value of the gift.

In the 'festival of the gift' at Christmas time, in many countries, there is a huge variety of motives in providing Christmas presents to others; but surely it is not only useful gifts which are good Value for Money?

Aid gifts are even more varied. Thus an aid gift in the form of general or sector budget support (GBS, SBS) is rather difficult to assess; it is not simple to earmark it so that the British, Danish or German dimension of such aid is visible. In other words, it may be easier to determine the value of the much-maligned tied aid since it is often rather more visible than GBS or SBS. Aid which uses country systems may be harder to disentangle.

So here is a first dilemma in the pursuit of Value for Money: *Are some of the new aid modalities, such as SBS or GBS, more difficult narrowly to assess in terms of identifiable, visible impact?* If so, this may mean that VfM has a different connotation for some of the traditional donors versus some of the so-called new or emerging donors.

*Aid for trusted receivers versus more aid for fragile states?* Here is second challenge in assessing VfM. For aid agencies, the world's poor continue to be the principal target; yet many of the poor are in what are, awkwardly, called fragile states. If aid money is increasingly to be targeted at fragile states, with weak institutional capacities, does that not raise a particular challenge for VfM?

*Measuring VfM?* – If VfM is to do with measuring and demonstrating the *impact* of what has

been delivered or achieved, then a third challenge is that some things are easier to measure than others, such as school attendance rather than school quality, bed nets rather than policy influence. Putting this another way, we need to conceptualise *Whose value? Whose money? What kind of impact? What kind of indicators?*

*Assessing rapidly or sustainably?* Fourthly, when is it most appropriate to assess VfM in an aided project or programme? Arguably, there are good reasons to analyse the impact during the project's life; but what about once the project has finished? What if the project only has influence while there is funding? Are there ways to assess the longer term effects of funding?

*Other members of the VfM family?* As soon as we begin to examine the increasing influence of VfM, we meet other members of the family: such as Results, Impact, Outcomes, and of course Effectiveness. What are the relations amongst these? And then we find that there are a series of institutes and think-tanks associated with the analysis of these, such as the Results for Development Institute (RDI) set up in 2007, and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) in 2009, to mention only two. But there is a rich landscape of such institutions, many of them with excellent capacities.

*What is the impact of impact evaluation in the South?* With the changes in the aid discourse in the North, what are the effects on projects and programmes in the South? Are there larger 'transaction' costs of proposals and final reports as the demand for concrete impacts and real results increases? How does this affect Northern and Southern NGOs, consultancies, researchers and policy people?

*What about Value for (Research) Money?* Does the discourse of measurement begin to affect research strategies and does this help to explain the rise of interest in randomized control trials (RCTs) and their application to the social sciences including education? Can the discourse help bridge the separate worlds of research and policy?

*Finally what does the discourse mean for NORRAG NEWS (NN) and for NORRAG members?* Do we not need to pay much more attention to what impact we are having on our 3,700 registered members, 40% of which are based in the South? With our four objectives (see page 3), should we not know more about the influence of each special issue of NN? We make some proposals to achieve this here. But we shall be very interested, in this special issue of NN47, to hear from our members in policy positions (North and South), in NGOs, consultancies and in academia.

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## Foreword

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Twenty-five years ago the first issue of NORRAG NEWS appeared in November 1986 edited by Christine McNab, now UNDP Deputy Special Representative for Iraq, and Kenneth King. It wasn't called a Special Issue, but in fact it focused particularly on an analysis of Scandinavian development assistance in education. The purpose of NORRAG was said to be the improvement of North-South communication, and particularly in the area of international education developments, including those influenced and supported by aid agencies.

The current special issue focuses on Value for Money and on the Results discourse. So it is probably useful to apply some of the insights in these 40 or more short pieces to ourselves in NORRAG. We attempt this in more detail in a later article by King and Palmer. But here we list just some bullet-points to start debate and encourage further reflection.

### **Governing by Numbers as well as by Qualities?**

Given our original mandate of North-South communication, now translated into our four objectives which include collection, critical analysis, synthesis and dissemination of research on education and training policies, and on international cooperation, we do need to pay attention to some basic numbers: There were just 15 NORRAG contact points in November 1986; now there are more than 3700 registered members in over 150 countries. Over 40% of these are located in the so-called South. We can also tell how many downloads there have been of each issue of NN, and how many site-visitors there have been. We have quantitative data through a regular survey on how people use NORRAG NEWS in their work. We know how many registered members there are in the UK (the largest constituency) but equally in China, Japan, Brazil and India.

But we also have a good deal of qualitative data by region, with insights into how NORRAG NEWS gets used in teaching, in policy, in research, as a library of resources and of ideas, and for staff development. We have paid particular attention to the so-called 'policy influence' of NORRAG and NORRAG NEWS through deliberate email exchange with the policy community.

### **NORRAG and the Value for Money (VfM) discourse**

Swiss Development Cooperation's increased support for NORRAG is making it possible to improve our main instrument for communication, - the NORRAG website. But what are some of results that we currently don't know enough about? Here are some starter questions:

How do we react to our readership pattern in the BRICS (numbers of members in brackets): India (182); South Africa (130); China (78); Brazil (15); and Russia (3)?

How do members in Mainland China use NORRAG NEWS, as the NORRAG website is currently inaccessible?

How is NORRAG NEWS used as a teaching resource in comparative and international education courses?

Faced with the sheer power of the new social networking tools, how does our existing Networking Tool actually get used? (<http://www.norrags.org/networking>)

Should we expect any networking amongst, for example, the 92 registered members in Ghana, or the 69 in Kenya?

How have the core group of 40 to 50 people who have contributed to a Special Issue used that particular issue of NORRAG NEWS since it was accessible on the web?

What would a 'success story' of utilisation of NORRAG NEWS look like at the 'field level', whether in an NGO, an academic department, or a government office?

Within a month, we shall be sending out our next email survey. Do use the open comment section of that to give us some questions of your own, and of course your own insights into NORRAG's Value for Money.

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## **Editorial**

### **Valuing Aid to International Education and Training**

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It is the right moment to have a special issue of NORRAG NEWS on valuing aid to education. Few themes could be more important as NORRAG completes its first 25 years. It allows us to consider some history, to recognise the present drivers of value, and to prepare the international education community for ensuring that education retains a key place in any post-2015 aid architecture. Here we pick out some of the generative themes that run through this collection and the wider literature on which they are based.

#### **Positioning and targeting the value of aid to education**

Value for Money (VfM) in education needs to be located against the history of earlier values, including high priorities for TVET and tertiary education before Education for All (EFA) took pride of place in March 2012, exactly twenty two years ago. The right to basic education was rediscovered in 1990, but 'improvement in learning achievement' was crucially stressed as one of the 6 key Jomtien targets. However, the world, and especially donor agencies, focused on universal access to and completion of primary (or basic) education. 'Value and validity' only occurred once in the Declaration and Action Plan, to emphasise the role of local

knowledge and culture in defining development. 'Money' didn't occur at all though resources did in all its meanings. As for evaluation, it was emphasised that 'Observable and measurable targets assist in the objective evaluation of progress'. Indeed, time-bound targets were seen to be crucial in underlining the urgency of achieving EFA. Hence the date of 2000 for universal access to primary education, and the shift to 2015 with the millennium development goals, Though Learning for All was rediscovered by some agencies in 2010 and 2011, and became a crucial part of the Value for Money discourse, it was there, plain to see, in the Jomtien World Conference in March 1990.

Much aid is dependent on core values such as commitment, solidarity, trust, mutual respect, common humanity, even charity, help and self-help. These values are inseparable from citizens' support of aid whether through national governments or through non-government organisations (NGOs). This face of the citizen is possibly more important than the citizen-as-taxpayer, who is often invoked in the VfM discourse.

The principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality are critical to many NGOs today, just as the 'principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries' have been central to China's official aid since the 1960s. The presence of these principles and of these attitudes towards giving cannot be easily quantified; but they have become part of the history and culture of giving.

#### **Valuing aid in the era of aid effectiveness**

The era of aid effectiveness from Rome (2004) to Paris (2005), Accra (2008) and Busan (2011) coincided with a widespread and well-known critique of traditional aid ineffectiveness from Moyo's *Dead Aid* (2009), Easterly's *White Man's Burden* (2006); to Ellerman's *Helping People Help Themselves* (2005). [See NORRAG NEWS 42, *A Safari Towards Aid Effectiveness* (2009)]. There was also an implicit critique of traditional aid from some of the so-called emerging donors. It was therefore politically necessary to defend aid and be able robustly to point to positive results, to 'what works', or in Kevin Watkins' colourful phrase: 'Why Dead Aid is Dead Wrong' (Watkins, 2009). There was plenty of good general analysis such as Riddell's *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* (2007). But at the sectoral level in Education aid, it was becoming important to be able to match some of very powerful evidence about impact that had been assembled in the Health sector.

#### **The apparent lightness of the evidence base in aid to education**

Reminiscent of when the World Bank's education policy staff turned in the late 1970s to analyse and promote 'What we know' about the impact of textbooks, class-size, teachers and other variables on educational achievement, there is a new urgency again today to be clearer about the results, impact and outcomes of aid interventions in education and training (and in other sectors). But over the intervening more than 30 years, very few certainties have emerged about what factors really make a difference to education quality beyond teacher quality. Other more specific interventions such as school feeding programmes and textbooks may seem promising as one-offs, but without the enabling environment of committed, good quality teaching, they are not sufficient. In the year of the Third World Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and of the Global Monitoring Report on Skills, it should be noted that the evidence base in TVET is much weaker than in formal education.

**The inescapable complexity of rigorous impact evaluations?**

There is however a considerable challenge in establishing a causal relationship between aid interventions and sustained educational improvement. Even a glance at the What Works Clearinghouse of the US Department of Education ([www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov)), for instance, will make this obvious. Arguably, however, the real methodological challenge in educational improvement, whether by national governments or by development assistance, is in the areas of institutional development, capacity building and staff development of the larger system in which specific interventions or initiatives are embedded. Of course, teacher quality itself, which is so crucial, cannot operate unless there is an enabling institutional environment. Thus it is not a question of determining whether, for example, conditional cash transfers or school feeding programmes “work” by however rigorous a trial process, but also whether they “work” regardless of teacher quality, and further whether, as mentioned, teacher quality itself is really possible without a supportive institutional environment.

These differential challenges at the level of the project, the programme and the institution or system are immensely more complicated if the educational innovations or interventions are being introduced in fragile or conflict states. Equally where there is corruption embedded in the education system, whether in fragile states or elsewhere, there is a huge additional challenge to securing the anticipated impact. Furthermore, in the case of where the aid modalities of general and sector budget support are operating, the identification of aid impact has to take a fundamentally different approach. Indeed, the results imperative has somewhat weakened the move towards these newer aid modalities.

**Balancing results-for-development vs development-as-results**

Aid in the 2010s has vastly more actors than in the 1960s and 1970s, including many more private foundations, as well as a large array of so-called emerging donors. The aid spend covers the whole spectrum of modalities, from the very visible donation and construction by China (for some \$200 million dollars) of the African Union building in Addis Ababa, opened in 2012 to the average spend annually by DFID in Ethiopia of £330 million sterling until 2015. The impact, outcome and results of these expenditures are fundamentally different from each other.

Whether a donor is providing £1000 or £1 million sterling, it is absolutely necessary to understand the complexity of the gift, - how it adds to what is already underway, how it becomes owned, how it contributes to sustainability, or how it contributes to mutual benefit (in South-South cooperation). Evaluation and assessment are crucial parts of this, but ideally these need to be jointly carried out, so that new understandings of development outcomes are shared between development partners North and South.

The real contribution of the results and VfM discourses is that they require revisiting the very nature of development. The beauty of one Chinese idea of development is that it is about identifying where the water in little rivulets is already beginning to flow in the right direction. Assistance is about deepening the channel so that it becomes a river. But of course, when financial aid involves very large sums of money, assessing additionality, as in the metaphor above, is impractical.

The two-way challenge of the results focus is to present the aid contribution at the country level in ways that make sense to the media and through them to the wider concerned public

in the aid-giving country, as well as to the media and public in the aid-receiving country. When aid numbers are large, it is tempting on the relevant websites to talk of millions being supported, reached or trained; quantities remain politically attractive and probably necessary, even if system reform, capacity building and institutional development are critical to sustainability. Support for the latter defy simple quantification.

All across the OECD countries the results imperative is increasingly influential. [See for example *The Economic Impact and Effectiveness of Development Aid* (20 March 2012)] One European development agency now claims on its website that its aid data are presented according to an open standard following the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). But it is quite explicitly seen as two-way openness for the benefit of those who give and those who receive:

This means that the public, aid actors and other stakeholders can follow when, to whom and for what purposes aid funds have been disbursed, and with what results...

However, in the end this benefits those who pay for the assistance - the taxpayers - and the people reached by the assistance.

### Further Reading

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# **CONCEPTUALISING THE DISCOURSE OF VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM)**

## Value for Money in Education

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**Keywords:** VfM; private/public good

**Summary:** Education looks like a complex kind of good with clear private benefits and clear public aspects. It cannot be treated as a pure private good without misunderstanding it in fundamental ways. This piece elaborates three problems with educational markets in which 'Value for Money' is a prime consideration.

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The question of 'Value for Money' for education is rightly a matter of public concern. In recent years however it has come to be framed in terms that are overwhelmingly one-sided, namely not just in terms of the economic and social benefits that may accrue from education, which is a perfectly legitimate concern, but also in conceptual terms that provide a narrow and distorted account of a fundamental human activity and good. This framing has been done in terms of seeing education as primarily an individual private good. The reason for this kind of thinking is not hard to fathom; education is a benefit to the individual educated, it appears that no-one else can enjoy the benefits of an individual education – it is *excludable*. One can *reject* education; there has to be some activity from the educatee as well as from the educator for education to happen and it appears to be *rivalrous*; one person's education reduces the availability for others – there are only so many children one teacher can teach. Education therefore appears at a superficial glance to have the characteristics of a pure private good.

But the above is a good example of reasoning within a very narrow frame of reference so that the phenomenon in question is misunderstood in important ways. Let us take *excludability* first. Even if someone decides to make use of their education in a purely selfish way (a controversial assumption), there is no reason to suppose that others will not benefit from their expertise. Even the ability to read and write, when it is distributed on a sufficient scale, will have widespread societal benefits – for those who are illiterate and for the children of the literate who will be enabled to learn to become literate. It is at least questionable whether one can reject education if enough pressure is put on an individual to become educated – hence compulsory education. Liberal theorists like Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill proposed tough sanctions, either for parents who failed to educate their offspring or for those who failed to become educated, even though they rejected the idea of universal, free public education with a curriculum controlled by the state. *Rivalry* is a problematic question. On the one hand a society can make provision for universal education; on the other, it is also to some extent a *positional good* where the type of education one has enjoyed or the degree of one's educational achievement can affect the ability of others to fully benefit from their own education. But positional considerations can be ameliorated by the provision of good quality public education.

So education looks like a complex kind of good with clear private benefits (which are by no means only economic) and clear public aspects. It cannot be treated as a pure private good without misunderstanding it in fundamental ways. An advocate of market-controlled education might concede these points but argue nevertheless that education should be supplied as a private good and that its value as a private good will ensure that it is universally taken up, which will, in turn, ensure that its public benefits are enjoyed by everyone. Such a response, however, presupposes a very optimistic view of what can be achieved by educational markets, a view that was not shared for, by example, Adam Smith. I will draw attention to three problems.

The first is that in a society with unequal individual resources some individuals may be able to buy more education than others, thus *excluding* others from certain kinds of provision and, in effect by bidding up the price of education, *rejecting* others from enjoying it. Such measures accentuate the positional nature of educational goods, thus increasing their *rivalrousness*. Profoundly unequal levels of education thus do much to damage its public quality. But there is another quite fundamental problem. It is too readily supposed by comfortable, educated academics that everyone regards education or at least that provided by formal schooling, as a good. But this is not always the case, as Mill and Smith were wise enough to recognise. There are two points here. The first is that the attainment of education is a long term process and the benefits tend to be discounted by the potential beneficiaries, particularly if they are immature and have not attained full powers of judgment. Second, the actual people who are to be educated are not, in many cases, those who have to purchase their education. If they see any future benefit to themselves it will be a long term one and they may well have to consider the opportunity costs of purchasing education for an offspring rather than using those resources for something else of immediate use.

We know, of course, that in many developing countries many poor parents are prepared to invest a large amount of their disposable income on their children's education in a private school, very often an unregulated one. But this brings us to a third problem with educational markets in which 'Value for Money' is a prime consideration. How does one make a valid judgment that the education that is on offer for one's own purchasing power is a worthwhile expenditure as opposed, say, to letting one's child be educated in a state school? The educational market is often opaque and the benefits, even the individual private benefits, are difficult to calculate, partly because of considerations advanced above. The purchase of private education on a 'Value for Money' basis, particularly for poor parents, is a problematic exercise.

On the other hand it is perfectly reasonable for taxpayers to expect that the resources invested in public education are well used. In this case, the 'Value for Money' criterion takes on a different nature as the judgement has to be made on the benefits to society as well as to the individual of such an investment. Unfortunately, the private good conception of education is becoming increasingly dominant and has the potential to affect individual choice in such a way that individual purchasing decisions may undermine the public goods character of educational provision. Further consideration of the Value for Money criterion for judging the worthwhileness of educational goods needs to take full account of the complex nature of education as a good and the difficulties for private individuals of making valid judgments about the quality of what is on offer. This is even more difficult for poor parents without access to the same resources of cultural and social capital than well-off, educated parents.



## A 'Value for Money' Approach to International Education Development: Moral and other Difficulties in Assessing Social Policy Outcomes

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**Keywords:** 'Value for Money' in education development; education quality; education as a human right; utilitarian social policy; principle-based ethics.

**Summary:** This article offers a brief critique of 'Value for Money' as a policy guideline in international education development by situating it within broader questions about moral and other difficulties in assessing social policy outcomes.

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Value for Money is a bit like motherhood and apple pie – or at least I've not yet come across anybody who's not in favour of it. It would be too cheap a shot to criticize such a policy guideline (whether in international development aid or any other field) as so general or so patently obvious as to be vacuous; so the fact that the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has adopted it as an over-arching approach to donor funding decisions would seem to indicate that it's really something else that's going on here: perhaps 'Value for Money' constitutes a funding criterion so widely open to interpretation that it transfers some of the power in the making of funding decisions back to the agencies – possibly a swing of the pendulum away from the 'partnerships' agenda of recent years?

One has to wonder how the principle of 'Value for Money' is to be applied to something that, at the end of the day, is not in need of economic justification, because it's a basic human right: such as education. It's not easy to see immediately how investment in women's literacy programmes in a societal context where women and girls are denied, among many other rights, the right to education, might provide good 'Value for Money'. The benefits will be seen in the personal, social, cultural and probably the political domain long before they will be realized in the economic domain. The principle would begin to make sense in such a situation only if donors took the really long view. And even then, one wonders how the economic benefit would be measured. It is true that the DFID document in question sets down clearly at the outset that the intention is not to do only the things that are the easiest to measure, but the inclination to do things that can be measured is probably there in statements like "we have to get better at measuring" (DFID, 2011, p. 2).

A similar question can be asked about aid focused on the quality of education (which is clearly an important direction for the post-2015 debate). Aid focused on quantity is more easily measured. Gross and net enrolment rates are more able to be calculated in any national assessment of the achievement of UPE (EFA Goal 2) targets than might be the quality of the education those children received once they were enrolled. The DFID strategy document admits this very point: "DFID [has been] focusing too much on the attendance of students and not enough on children completing primary school and securing good learning outcomes. For example in Ghana, only 26% of final grade primary school children are

proficient in English and only 11% in maths” (DFID, 2011, p. 5).

This looks like a case of rather too much money spent on getting everybody into school, and not enough spent on ensuring that there is worthwhile learning going on. This author at least is increasingly convinced that education quality, and more specifically, the quality of learning, is to be found primarily in the quality of teaching. John Hattie (2009) has conducted by far the largest and most comprehensive meta-analysis of what enhances student learning at school most effectively. He has found that “Teachers need to be aware of what each and every student is thinking and knowing, to construct meaning and meaningful experiences in light of this knowledge, and... to provide meaningful and appropriate feedback [on their learning to] each student” (Hattie, 2009: 238). Dylan Wiliam (2011) has extracted from the research literature key findings that indicate the importance of teachers in enhancing their students’ learning most effectively, research which confirms that teachers lie at the heart of education quality. In the classrooms of the best teachers, students learn at twice the rate that they do in the classrooms of average teachers: they learn in six months what students taught by average teachers take a year to learn. And in the classrooms of the least effective teachers, the same learning will take two years. Moreover, in the classrooms of the most effective teachers, students from disadvantaged backgrounds learn just as much as those from advantaged backgrounds; and those with behavioural difficulties learn just as much as those without.

Teacher development (and not always in the ‘standard’ ways of pre-service and in-service professional development) should in the view of this author accordingly be the most important focus of education development. But how does one measure the ‘Value for Money’ realized in investing in the quality of education? It’s difficult to see how one might measure ‘Value for Money’ where teacher development is concerned; or principal leadership in teacher development: effects are mediated and longer term.

But there are questions more vexing than those raised here so far, in some ways more difficult than questions about whether education, when understood as a human right, is in need of any economic justification; more difficult than short- and long-term horizons in assessing ‘Value for Money’; more difficult than trying to measure less tangible things like education quality; and more difficult than assessing outcomes when they are mediated through so many other (no more easily measured) variables. These more vexing questions have to do with two different ways in which we assess social policy outcomes: in terms of utilitarian ways of thinking, and in terms of deontological ethical frameworks. [Deontological ethics, from the Greek, *deon*, meaning duty, implies that we have a duty to uphold the principle of what is right, and is the source of much rights-based thinking in political philosophy.]

Although we might not always realize it or readily give a name to it, ethical and social policy decisions are frequently made with reference to utilitarian ethics. Utilitarianism is a theory of social justice, pioneered by the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), which holds that social (or, as far as we are concerned here, educational) policy ought to be determined by what produces the greatest good for the greatest number. Utilitarians choose social policies that produce the ‘highest aggregate utility’: an individual’s ‘utility’ is (in theory) calculated by subtracting the sum of negative consequences that would result from a particular policy from the sum of positive consequences. Then the aggregate utility is calculated across the entire population. Of

course these things are virtually impossible to quantify, but this framework illustrates the kind of thinking employed by utilitarians.

Utilitarians would be particularly swayed by the principle of 'Value for Money'. It may cost more, for example, to provide an adequate, and even compensatory, level of education for students with special educational needs, and perhaps especially so for children with disabilities, who are often hidden in developing countries and more traditional cultural contexts and who, according to some in the field, are far greater in number than is commonly thought. This is a group of children across the developing world who appear to be ignored or at least forgotten. However, a 'Value for Money' perspective informed by utilitarian thinking would not easily permit resources to be diverted to the education of children with disabilities. Since, for the cost of providing adequate, or even compensatory, education for one child with a disability, we would be able to educate, say, two, or more, 'normal' children, who would probably be able to contribute to the economy more substantially than the former, the higher aggregate utility is obtained by not providing any additional resources for children with disabilities.

Another, equally important, frame of reference in ethical decision-making, deontology, just mentioned, would suggest that every child has a right to education, whether disabled or not. Conceiving of education as a human right is consistent with deontological thinking. This suggests a universalist orientation to such rights, implying that there should be no exceptions, and that the principle be applied impartially and consistently. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was central to the development of deontological ethics, and suggested, in his 'categorical imperative', or absolute moral command, that the test of our actions lies in whether we are willing to have the same moral standards applied to us as we apply to others: hence his so-called Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", which assumes the treatment of people as ends rather than mere means – that we respect people as beings with intrinsic worth. It follows that the deontological critique of utilitarianism would be based on the accusation that utilitarianism treats some people as means to the ends of others. To return to our example, deontology would not allow us to divert the additional resources provided for the minority of students with very special educational needs to the great majority of students. Again, utilitarianism would allow this, because it would provide the greatest good for the greatest number. A deontologist would not allow this if she were committed to the principle of equal access to education for all (since children with special needs would require additional resources to enable them to enjoy the same level of access to education as other children). Taking resources away from these children would be treating them as means to the ends of other children.

Utilitarianism can thus produce consequences that seem morally unacceptable: if the greatest good for the greatest number of learners can be achieved by not providing substantial extra resources (teachers, time, material resources) for that minority of students with very special educational needs, utilitarianism suggests that we not do so. And, given that 'Value for Money' thinking is all too easily allied with utilitarian approaches to social policy, we need to be mindful of this before concluding that 'Value for Money' is indeed as wonderful as motherhood and apple pie.

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## Deducing Priorities: A Singerian Approach to Unpacking Value for Money

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**Keywords:** values; priorities; measurements; development; Copenhagen Consensus

**Summary:** This piece argues that the discourse of Value for Money helps us confront the values implicit behind what we prioritize through the “if this, then that” deductive reasoning used in Peter Singer’s moral philosophy. It uses Bjorn Lomborg’s controversial Copenhagen Consensus as an example of this in context to education for development, wherein deductive reasoning unpacks the implicit values of impact-based development typified by the Gates Foundation and consequently ranks education low in comparison to other problems.

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Value for Money is one of those terms that seem self-obvious at first sight - who doesn't want value for their money? The rebuttals are sometimes intuitive for practitioners but not always obvious or easy to explain. I propose using deductive logic to unfold priorities in a way that shines a light on what is often the real objection: implicit values. It aims to see where the logic takes those engaged in the debates over Value for Money, and then to explore what those implications mean in context to your own priorities. The value of this logic goes beyond critique, as looking at what exists at the end of an “if this, then that” deduction helps recalibrate our own questions surrounding *what* value for *which* type of costs.

Bio-ethicist Pete Singer is a model for this type of analysis with his work on what we mean when we say we value life (see Singer, 1996). Singer jumps into the abortion and end-of-life

debates and demands we look closely at the words we use: if we eat meat and swat at flies then “life” isn’t so important to us; if it’s OK to let the brain-dead die, then we don’t value “human life” as much as we think we do. He argues what we really value is “personhood,” but that would exclude infants and some mentally disabled. He’s not necessarily arguing we *should* devalue them, but that we’re not clear about *why* we value them if we consistently use the logic and terms we commonly employ. This type of logic exposes not only what we value, but the different types of costs connected to that valuation. Most of us value babies and the mentally disabled for decidedly non-economic reasons.

Concerning Value for Money in development, Bjorn Lomborg’s work on the Copenhagen Consensus (Bhagwati et al., 2008) plays a similar role as intellectual gadfly. Lomborg assembled an array of mostly Nobel Laureate economists and gave them an imaginary budget of \$75 billion dollars to find “the best ways of advancing global welfare, and particularly the welfare of the developing countries” within a four year timeframe. These values were ostensibly the same that animate the Gates Foundation - intrinsically measurable and statistically sound impacts on improving the quality of life for the world’s least fortunate. Their results were controversial, to say the least.

Coming in first and third place were nutrient supplements and fortification. Second place went to implementing the Doha Round of World Trade Organization negotiations; fourth was immunization; fifth was “biofortificaion” – another term for genetically engineered seeds (for added vitamins instead of herbicide resistance). Number six was deworming, which they counted as also helping education (see Miguel & Kremer, 2004). Education for its own sake didn’t make the list until number seven – taking about ten percent of the finances available to target “children who had already attended some school and then dropped out” with reduced school fees. Fourteenth on the list was global warming mitigation – but only as R&D for low carbon technologies. HIV prevention came at a lowly nineteen.

It’s easy to reject these findings off-hand if you disagree. I believe it’s more worthwhile, if also more difficult, to reframe their question to reflect what you genuinely value for the money or at other costs by producing your list of priorities and realistically limited resources with which to address them. To do so honestly would go beyond the subjective preferences that seemed dominant before the rise of randomized impact assessments, philanthrocapitalism, and the hunt for humanitarian bargains. It would entail making explicit what is usually implicit and allowing priorities to align themselves, based on internally consistent criteria.

It is fine – and I believe correct – to say that education and the climate are valuable for reasons the Copenhagen Consensus economists didn’t, and perhaps can’t, calculate. Would education as Dewey, Piaget, or Freire conceptualize it really have globally measurable impacts? How do we quantify the empowerment of smallholder farmers or slum dwellers? What is the dollar cost of our biodiversity loss that will take five to ten million years to return through natural selection? More important, are those really the right questions?

This is not an argument against indicators and measurements, but an argument for explaining what – exactly - our values are so that we can see what they look like when completely and consistently unfolded as Singer and Lomborg have done. If you incorporate the non-financial costs of biodiversity loss, for instance, how does this impact on how you prioritize other development issues? How would uncountable externalities of village healthcare impact on the prioritization of nonformal education? I think we should learn to

relish - instead of flinching from - the discomforts that looking closely at our values, assumptions, and logic brings. It would mean we're doing something right.

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## The Complex Alchemy of Educational Change

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**Keywords:** South Africa; context, complexity and VfM

**Summary:** Schools are not factories, and to view educational change through the metaphor of production has serious limitations where human actors, passions and politics shape the speed and pathways along which funded mandates might achieve certain pre-specified goals. Not recognising these shaping influences can frustrate the simple money-results logic that often underpins well-intentioned donor plans.

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It is completely reasonable for a public or private funder of education to inquire about, or even insist upon, certain definitive outcomes or results from what is seen as an investment in teaching or learning or curriculum change. It is even desirable that such upfront agreement is done in consultation with the recipient of such funds, especially in the case of donor funds. The notion of holding the users of public funds accountable for how and with what effects such funds are used would be regarded as rational and acceptable across national contexts. Such notions as "value-for-money" or "return on investment" make social and especially economic sense.

In a country like South Africa, which spends much more money on education as a percentage of GDP or as a slice of overall government expenditure, than any other African state, and with the worst results in terms of international tests of comparison in

mathematics or science or literacy, it is especially compelling to ask the simple question: where did the money go?

This reasonable expectation, however, runs into a minefield of problems when it is pursued with single-minded fervour and with narrow lines drawn between financial input and learning outcomes; for example, as if education changes in the same way a factory increases its yield in units of canned fruit in relation to investments in new fruit-canning machines. It is precisely this transfer of an economic production metaphor into places as complex as schools where the expectation of 'bang for your buck', to put it crudely, falls apart.

In the first place, context matters. In a South African school system with years of systemic dysfunction and institutionalised disadvantage, simply pumping money into schools and waiting at the other end for results is misguided. It ignores deep inequalities, as well as professional withdrawal among many teachers from their responsibilities in the classroom. Add one of the strongest teacher unions in the world that effectively limits the authority of government over schools, and it quickly becomes clear that in this context a simple input-output expectation from investments is inappropriate.

In cases of desperate disadvantage, we know that schools use money intended for one set of purposes for other immediate needs in a school. When the South African government established schools with semi-autonomous status in the use of public funds, keeping electricity going or feeding students would often take precedence over the purchase and supply of textbooks, for example. Holding constant the easy explanation of corruption, schools under pressure seldom use funds for one purpose—such as promoting learning in science—when basic needs are greater elsewhere.

Then there is the question of adequacy, a much-needed legal and financial concept in developing countries. We seldom pause to ask how much money is enough to yield desirable educational results. The black-box approach to funding often overlooks the question of adequacy in severely underfunded school environments. We have little research on what kinds, combinations and levels of funding would lead to particular teaching or learning outcomes.

What these limitations point to is the need to appreciate complexity; to understand that human actors are involved in translating funds into futures, and that the range of external (such as unions) and internal factors (such as basic needs versus educational priorities) often impede the straight lines drawn between money and results.

I am certainly not making the case for less accountability and this is no justification for schools using money for one purpose and diverting it to other more immediate needs. It is simply a case for greater understanding, more research, and improved strategies to be used in how we fund education. That way results would be more meaningful and sustainable, even if the time to achieve outcomes might be a little longer.

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## The Unbearable Lightness of Evidence-Based VET Practice

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**Keywords:** evidence; what works; governing by numbers; VET research.

**Summary:** The move towards evidence-based policy and practice is problematic in multiple ways. It is based on a simplistic view of how straightforward evidence is and ignores a wide range of valid research approaches. In the case of vocational education and training (VET), there is neither definitional clarity nor data that would permit confidence in such an approach. Moreover, there is clear evidence that such approaches are routinely forgotten about when there is political or financial interest in promoting a particular policy position.

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As this NORRAG NEWS edition makes clear, the shift towards Value for Money brings with it strong claims about the importance of evidence-based policy and practice. However, these claims are built on a flimsy basis across education as a whole and in vocational education and training in particular. Here, I will briefly critique two key turns in the discourse of international education policy and research: "governing by numbers" and "what works".

*Governing by numbers:* We are experiencing a rise in the power of statistics as part of policymaking; what can be called: "governing by numbers". Yet, as Gorard (2008) reminds us, these are not as simple and objective as we are led to believe. Rather, Gorard shows that all statistics are subject to professional decisions regarding what to collect and how; how to manage data problems; and how to analyse and present data. This makes it impossible in strict terms to make confident comparisons of statistics over time and or space and undermines the processes of doing secondary analysis. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that the selection of which statistics to prioritise and how to determine them is always a political as well as a technical issue. Moreover, whilst Gorard is writing about England where there is relatively strong capacity, the challenges are likely to be far worse in poorer countries, where the data are weaker and requires greater use of professional judgments to decide how to stretch this weak data far enough to give policy advice.

This is particularly the case for VET, where it is widely accepted that data are weak. To some extent, this reflects the low status of VET in recent years as decisions on what statistics to collect and with what vigour and rigour, is indicative of policy priorities, reflecting in turn wider societal debates and contestations. However, there are also particular problems in how to define VET that have profound implications for what it means to collect and analyse VET statistics.

*What works:* As it emerged in the North, particularly initially in the USA, the "what works" approach was subjected to a range of political, epistemological and methodological critiques. Glass (1987), for instance, argues that the original "what works" study in American education was part of a political project and lacked a rigorous methodology of proving what



works. Areas where there was a lack of quantitative data couldn't be known about and some areas of heated contestation were similarly unknowable as there was no "what works" to be distilled. However, there was also a lack of an attempt at rigorous meta-analysis where this could have been possible.

Schoenfeld (2006) noted that the What Works Clearinghouse, that built on this initial initiative, had clear criteria for what research could be considered:

- Randomised experiments
- Quasi-experiments that use equating procedures
- Studies that use the regression discontinuity design

In a similar vein to Gorard's critique of statistics above, however, he argues that there is too much minute difference in studies to be confident in doing meta-analyses.

Schoenfeld's concern is that it is very difficult to do such work rigorously enough, but for many in the education-for-development community the concern is more fundamental: questioning whether education can be known in the ways assumed by the "what works" approach, and stressing instead the constructed, contingent and contextual nature of the social world.

Whatever the merits of these critiques of the "what works" approach, at the present time it is simply impossible to apply this to the field of VET in Africa and possibly globally. Even in South Africa, there is not one study of VET that would meet the criteria Schoenfeld lists above. However, this contrasts with the rise in VET's importance in development thinking, especially on and in Africa, in the very recent past. Thus, we are faced with a fundamental problem for evidence-based policy: VET interventions will be funded because there is political will but there is no evidence base on which to do this. More seriously at the global level, it is evident that certain policies, most obviously national qualifications frameworks, are being adopted in spite of the lack of evidence for them. Most worryingly, when the ILO did conduct rigorous international research on this topic, its cautious findings were rejected by those with an interest in promoting such systems internationally. That there is insufficient evidence that a key policy works appears to be of less interest in practice to many policy actors than that they want to sell it.

For researchers, the evidence-based move can be seen as an attempt by powerful international organisations to force a certain epistemological and methodological approach on them as the only way to do research. However, instead of the evidence-based monoculture, we need a pluralism of methodologies and forms of data, evidence and knowledge. This must include better quantitative data and its more sophisticated analysis, but this needs to be placed alongside ways of hearing the voices of learners and professionals, and analytical tools that are capable of locating VET in contexts of time and space. Moreover, policymakers need both to be more modest and reflexive in their expectations of what knowledge can be mobilised for policy purposes and more serious in their commitment to supporting the generation of the types of knowledge that they claim to value. At the same time, researchers need to be clearer in seeking to shape research agendas; more rigorous in their approaches to research; and better in their external communication of their findings.

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**Further Reading**

This NORRAG NEWS piece re-presents some arguments from two longer pieces: McGrath (2012) and McGrath and Lugg (2012). Both should be available at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/aip/07380593> by the end of March 2012.

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# **EVALUATING THE RISE OF RESULTS AND EMERGENCE OF IMPACT**

## From the GMR to UNESCO to Education Results for Development

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**Keywords:** Results; VfM; conservatism in education.

**Summary:** The increase in focus on results, evidence and Value for Money in the field of education provides an opportunity to tackle the appalling conservatism and lack of questioning that characterizes much of the sector. The benefits of this new focus far outweigh the risks of adopting it.

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My title describes my own career over the last decade, during which I have been Director of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO and now Managing Director for Education at Results for Development, where we are dedicated to unlocking solutions to tough development challenges that prevent people in low- and middle-income countries from realizing their potential. This decade has very much been the period during which results, evidence and Value for Money have come to the fore in education.

Overall I welcome this development because it finally provides an opportunity to tackle the appalling conservatism and lack of questioning that characterizes much of education. Education systems are organized the way they are because that is how they have always been organized. This conservatism no doubt stems from many sources, but two seem to me fundamental: the sociology of teachers and administrators and the assertion of the right to education.

Around the world, teachers are not drawn from the ranks of the academically most able – the exceptions are those countries like Finland and Singapore which rank very highly on the international comparative assessments like PISA. In particular, other than specialized secondary school teachers, teachers have very often had little or no exposure to scientific method and the use of evidence. So they tend not to apply it very much to their own work and this can then affect the whole of a country's educational system, as the ranks of educational administrators are most commonly made up of promoted teachers. It is, frankly, rather scary that we on the one hand talk so frequently of the importance of students learning to think critically and on the other do not employ as teachers those who have themselves been exposed to the basics of such thinking.

I have been as vocal as anyone in asserting that education is a human right – indeed this was my principal motivation in working at UNESCO. But one of its downsides is to create an atmosphere that does not sufficiently allow questioning. This is not strictly logical, of course – there is no reason that we should not apply reason and evidence in figuring out how best to ensure that people realize their rights. But the assertion of the right does, in practice, seem to produce a kind of intellectual laziness and even a reluctance to examine different ways of achieving the right.

The new emphasis on results, evidence and Value for Money largely stems from two sources: the revolution in development economics that has resulted from the application of randomized control trials (RCTs) and the concern of taxpayer-funded aid agencies to show that they are indeed financing the achievement of good and cost-effective outcomes.

Of course, there are important limitations to RCTs especially that they don't help much with really big questions like the relative performance of the public and the non-state sectors or with decentralizing from a federal to a state level. But these experimental techniques, which derive from medicine, are quickly showing how little we actually know about what really works in education at the level of the classroom and the school. About the only result which currently seems very robust is that remediation works – identifying early on those pupils who are not doing as well as others and taking steps to support them so they do not fall behind; another attribute could be like having recruited teachers of high academic ability that characterizes top performing education systems. Almost everything else is yet to be systematically established.

Aid agencies' concern with cost-effectiveness and VfM can certainly be criticized as imposing a new type of conditionality – indeed, this is one reason why I do not particularly support moves towards “cash on delivery” aid for education. At the same time, it has encouraged a very welcome return to thinking about results, costs, cost-effectiveness, alternatives and the like which had characterized the early days of aid to education in the 1960s but which had got very lost by the end of the last century with the growth of the rights-based Education for All movement. It is striking how the use of rigorous analysis in the international health field has led aid for health to almost double as a proportion of total aid to its current level around 17 percent over the last 10 years while that for education has stagnated around 10 percent.

So, of course, there are some risks and oversimplifications attached to the use of results, evidence and VfM in education but these are insignificant compared to the enormous benefits that are beginning to stem from a more rigorous approach to what works and what it costs. May it further erode the professional conservatism of the education community.

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## Rethinking Aid Evaluation

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**Keywords:** Japan; Value for Money; Donor-recipient

**Summary:** Aid receivers know what kinds of goods/services were actually received, but less about how much money was paid. Donors know more about the money that was spent but less about the goods/services actually delivered. Assessing the Value for Money of aid means that participatory assessments are required.

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The discourse about Value for Money (VfM) is closely related to how to evaluate development aid. In terms of who should decide if the goods/services were worth the price paid, the receiver or the giver, I think that both receivers and givers should do it by conducting joint evaluations. On the one hand, receivers know what kinds of goods/services were actually received, but less about how much money was paid. On the other hand, givers know more about the money that was spent, but less about the goods/services actually delivered. Good evaluation design includes both point of views and information about goods/services and money and other stakeholders' views.

In Japan, we evaluate aid policies and projects based on the five DAC evaluation criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The concept of VfM is discussed based on effectiveness, efficiency and impact. In aid evaluation, we also need to look at aid from a relevance and sustainability point of view.

In terms of the first dilemma posed in the organizing memorandum for NN47, I agree that general or sector budget support (GBS, SBS) is rather difficult to assess, and that is one of reasons why Japan has implemented aid mainly in the form of project-type cooperation. Although GBS and SBS are focusing on Government's expenditure side, developing countries tend to have problems on the revenue side (such as weak tax collection ability). Supporting institutional and capacity development on the revenue side is one of the alternatives.

In terms of the third challenge, Measuring VfM, appropriate indicators should be identified at the planning stage of aid projects. These indicators include quantitative and qualitative factors or variables. Some things are easier to measure than others; when we try to measure institutional development, management capacity, degrees of ownership or participation that is not an easy task. In this case, local knowledge is very effective and helpful, because appropriate indicators can be identified on local socio-economic conditions. Therefore, participatory planning by stakeholders and joint evaluation are an effective process to identify the most appropriate indicators of local context.

### Note

- (1) This piece was written in a personal capacity and should not be taken as the view of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Beyond Results to Impact

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**Keywords:** Beyond results; impact; 3ie; impact assessment

**Summary:** Demonstrating results means we need a larger number of rigorous impact evaluations in a wider range of contexts.

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The results agenda in development is nearly twenty years old. The 1993 Government Results and Performance Act required annual reports from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on the results achieved with government funds. In response USAID identified a set of country-level outcome indicators as a measure of results. So, for example, national trends in primary enrolment rates in countries such as Egypt and India were taken to show the success or otherwise of US foreign assistance. But, as the General Accounting Office soon pointed out, these national trends are affected by many more factors than US aid alone. In response USAID ceased reporting these national level data as results indicators. But the lesson learned by USAID was slow to be learned by the development community as a whole.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have successfully mobilized the international development community around a series of multi-dimensional poverty targets, including Universal Primary Enrolment. This focus is welcome. But the MDGs have also encouraged the continuation of the incorrect interpretation of outcome monitoring as saying something about results. So, for example, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a 'Results Report', giving trends in enrolment data and other indicators of 'results', but with the disclaimer that these results "cannot as a rule be attributed specifically, either wholly or in part, to the Netherlands". So, despite the title, it is not clear how the report was in any way useful for assessing the results of Dutch aid.

So what do results mean?

A result is what has been achieved. So, in terms of outcomes, this means what difference did aid make? Enrolments can be increasing because of factors such as increasing household income and parental education. It is certainly not the case that the entire observed increase in enrolments is attributable to aid. Until recently evaluators argued that it was too difficult to disentangle all these different factors to state definitively the role of aid. But the situation has changed with the spread of experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations, which are indeed able to answer the attribution question.

Impact evaluation can be used not only to say whether aid is working or not, but also which types of intervention work best and under what circumstances. There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of demand side interventions, notably conditional cash transfers, but also health and education interventions such as deworming, in increasing enrolments. But, at the same time, there is no point in increasing demand when supply is poor. Reaching the

last ten percent, likely to include street children and nomadic populations, will require innovative approaches to supply.

And programmes may work in one place but not another, an example of what is called impact heterogeneity. For example a school feeding programme may improve enrolments, but will not affect learning outcomes if there are no teachers. So school feeding will have little or no impact on learning when teacher absenteeism is rife, but can do so when teachers are present.

As is widely recognized, there has been substantial progress toward universal primary enrolment, but learning outcomes are poor. Well designed impact evaluations can identify cost effective means of improving these outcomes. For example, a study in China shows that giving vitamin pills containing iron to tackle anemia raised test scores by two standard deviations in a matter of months for just a few cents a day. There are very positive findings with respect to computer assisted learning from both China and India.

Demonstrating results means we need a larger number of impact studies in a wider range of contexts. The only way a development agency can legitimately and accurately state what difference its aid is making is through conducting impact evaluations of a sufficiently large representative sample of the activities they support for this to be possible. Where aid is given as budget support, then it is the activities directly supported by government spending which should be subject to impact evaluation. It is encouraging to note, that several governments are taking on this challenge. In South Africa there are plans for a rigorous impact evaluation of pre-school, and in Uganda the various programmes which tackle teacher absenteeism are being assessed.

Rigorous impact evaluations will thus tell us results. And only rigorous impact evaluations can tell us results in this way. But they also tell us how to achieve better results in the future.

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## Evidence-Based, Politically Savvy Ways of Doing Development Aid

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**Keywords:** RBA; Results based aid; proponents and critics.

**Summary:** This piece identifies four good reasons why it is important to get better at measuring results, seven common criticisms of the so-called 'results agenda', and proposes steps to resolve the tension between its proponents and critics.

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*"The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit." - Benjamin Jowett, English Clergyman (1817-1893)*

It seems perverse at first to oppose measuring the results of overseas aid. If your business relies on your customers being less informed than you about the value of what you are selling them, you can see why even a little sunlight may be dangerous.

But foreign aid is not like that. Everyone I meet who works on development is motivated by the desire to make a difference for people in the developing world. So why is there so much anxiety among serious and sensible people about the idea that we should measure and make public the results of aid? There are seven common criticisms of the so-called 'results agenda'.

**First, it may add to bureaucratic overload.** Collecting information about results is yet one more central reporting requirement, in a system that is already overburdened with forms and procedures.

**Second, it may make aid less strategic.** The need to produce quantifiable results may tend to make donors prefer a short-term investment in something which can be measured instead of an investment which may have more significant, longer-term but less quantifiable benefits. Do we want to spend more on bed-nets today, if that is at the expense of investing in a country's capacity to manage its own health system in future?

**Third, it may impose the wrong priorities.** We know that aid works best when it truly responds to the priorities of developing countries themselves. But if donors are trying to target a handful of results indicators – such as the number of children in school – then this may reduce their flexibility to get behind government programmes.

**Fourth, it may ignore equity.** If we reduce aid programmes to numerical totals, we may neglect the people in deepest need, who are often the hardest and most expensive people to reach.

**Fifth, it may create perverse incentives.** We have seen in our own public services how poorly designed targets can distort choices in unhelpful ways. A target to increase school enrolment may lead governments to pay too little the quality of education, for example.

**Sixth, it may inhibit partnership.** Aid is more effective when donors work together with developing country partners and with the private sector. The necessity of being able to quantify and demonstrate the results of each aid programme makes it harder for everyone to get together in a common cause.

**Seventh, the results information is all bogus anyway.** Claims about results must rely on assumptions about the counterfactual. Even the most rigorous impact evaluations do not reliably tell you what will happen when a slightly different project is implemented in a different context. Effects may be described within the boundaries of the project itself, but it is much harder to understand the broader effects of aid on the political economy of the country or its macro-economy. In the absence of a common framework for attribution, every one of the organisations through which the same money passes claims all the results of the programmes which it finances, leading to massive double-counting and exaggeration.

Underlying all these seven worries is a sense that the push to measure results is insulting to the development profession. Years of training and experience of working in difficult and nuanced situations cannot be replaced by an information system which reduces each aid project to a few numbers. Nor do aid professionals need targets to incentivize them to make the most of the budgets under their control: that's the entire *raison d'être* of their professional work.

All these concerns are valid and important; and yet I remain a strong supporter of the results agenda in aid, and (for the most part) I admire the way it is being implemented by the British government and others. I believe that Andrew Mitchell is implementing the results agenda in DFID in a sensible way which pays attention to these risks.

We must set against these concerns the reasons why the results agenda is important. First, **we cannot sustain rising aid budgets** in the face of growing public scepticism (YouGov / Action Aid, 2012) unless we can demonstrate to the people who pay for aid that it is making a difference. In March the ONE campaign published an important summary of results which are expected from UK aid between now and 2015 (ONE, 2012). The numbers were put together for ONE by the reliable aid data geeks (and my former colleagues) at Development Initiatives. By bringing together information from across the aid programme and simplifying it into a small number of summary statistics, they make a more compelling case for aid than anything we have seen in recent years.

Second, **we have a duty to the world's poor to use money as effectively as we can.** Sadly aid budgets are still too small to live up to the commitment made by world leaders (in 2000) to 'spare no effort' to reach all the Millennium Development Goals (see UN Millennium Declaration), and that means we have to make hard choices. Because the need is so great, almost everything we do with aid will make a positive difference, and it is easy for this to breed complacency. People making choices about aid should not merely try to do good, but try to do the very best they can so that they help as many people as possible as much as possible. If the differences between aid projects in the impact for each pound spent were small, we could be somewhat relaxed about spreading aid across many different activities, all of which would bring some benefit. But as the moral philosopher, Toby Ord, points out, some interventions are as much as a thousand or ten-thousand times more cost-effective than others, and that means we ought not succumb to the temptation to do a little of everything (<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/>).

Third, **measuring results is the key to unblocking the dysfunctional political economy of aid.** Ineffective aid is more than a nuisance or a waste: it threatens to undermine the whole project. We can see the natural pressure on politicians to tie aid to domestic firms; to retain discretion to move aid about to respond to the most recent headline; to do a little of everything everywhere, to appease commercial interests and project the national image as widely as possible; and to spend aid on photogenic projects rather than supporting countries through the slow process of institutional and political change. By contrast the costs of tied, unpredictable, proliferated, projectised aid are invisible, because we do not adequately measure results. With tangible pressures to be dysfunctional, and in the absence of plausible evidence of the costs, it is no surprise that donors have made such little progress implementing the commitments they made in Rome, Paris and Accra to make their aid more effective (OECD, 2011).

Fourth and finally, **measuring results is the most plausible response to complexity.** There is a growing understanding that development is an emergent characteristic of a complex system (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008). This means that it cannot be reduced to a series of smaller, more tractable problems to be solved independently. We have to support developing countries to experiment, to test new ideas and approaches, track the overall effects, and then be ready to help them to adapt as they find out whether they are heading in the right direction. (This point is well made in a recent Development Drums podcast (Development Drums, 2012) featuring Tim Harford talking about his book, *Adapt: Why Success Always Begins With Failure*). On this view, measuring results must be an alternative, not an addition, to the convoluted plans, milestones and monitoring that can inhibit the flexibility of many aid projects.

How can we resolve the tension between four good reasons for getting better at measuring results, and seven valid concerns expressed by many in the development profession?

It is helpful that there is agreement about *ends* if not *means*. Nobody doubts the value of being able to demonstrate to taxpayers that their money has made a difference; of improving how aid is spent; of overcoming vested interests in ineffective aid; or of creating a stronger feedback loop to support evolutionary complex change. The concerns all relate to *how* that will happen.

Furthermore, we should recognise that the seven concerns about the results agenda are about risks which have, so far, largely not materialized. For example, while it is possible that focusing on results could lead some decision-makers to under-invest in strategic, long-term interventions, there is no suggestion yet that this is actually happening. Before the recent DFID bilateral aid review, several people working in DFID expressed privately fears that the money would flow mainly to superficial but easily-measurable projects with little transformational or systemic benefit; all told me afterwards that those fears had proved unfounded. DFID has made intelligent, nuanced choices about what to support, and through which aid instruments, which suggest that they have not lost sight of the key objective of long term, sustainable, systemic change.

Nonetheless, the point of identifying and articulating risks is to manage them. There are important steps which donors can take to protect themselves from these proper concerns about how the results agenda might be implemented. I propose here a dozen steps which donors could take which would help them to secure the goals of the results agenda, while reducing the risks that many development professionals have identified. They are divided

into three parts: reduce bureaucracy, remain strategic, and increase rigour while remaining proportionate.

#### *Reduce bureaucracy*

- Use reliable results measures to replace, not supplement, existing procedures for tracking how aid money has been used. In practice that is likely to require a bottom up review of what additional reporting is needed, if any, once good results measures are in place, and getting rid of the rest.
- Put in place a simple, transparent framework to be used by donors, multilateral institutions, NGOs and other implementing agencies for attributing results to different contributors to a common activity, to avoid double counting and to eliminate the incentive for each donor to 'go it alone'.
- Agree a global set of standardised output and outcome indicators as part of the International Aid Transparency Initiative reporting standard, to reduce the burden of reporting on developing country governments and implementing agencies, and to enhance cost-effectiveness comparisons. Then donors should impose a self-denying ordinance that they will track and report results *only* if they are either an indicator chosen by the developing country itself or if they are one of the globally-agreed standardized indicators.
- Trust development professionals by giving them more freedom to design and implement programmes to achieve the agreed results, including the freedom to adjust them in real time without needing to seek approval.

#### *Remain strategic*

- Put in place a transparent, simple, common framework for taking account of expected future results (e.g. from investments in capacity), so that strategic, long-term and risky investments are properly valued.
- Where there are concerns about equity, transparently include this by specifying the premium for marginalised or under-served groups. For example, if you think it is more important to educate girls than boys, say so, and include girls explicitly at a higher weight than boys in the results measures.
- Make choices about portfolios, not each aid project individually. A portfolio enables donors to invest in riskier, high-return projects (because the risks are diversified across the portfolio) which they might not support if they consider each project separately. Focus on portfolio performance in reporting (while also providing detailed information about projects individually for those who are interested).

#### *Increase rigour while remaining proportionate*

- Do fewer, better evaluations. There are still far too many mediocre process evaluations of individual aid projects; these should be substantially scaled back, with part of the savings going in to a smaller number of larger scale rigorous impact evaluations. The net effect of this will be to save money and bureaucracy, while generating more useful knowledge.

- Reduce the evaluation capacity in each aid agency, putting part of the savings into shared global capacity to do more rigorous and independent impact evaluations. Evidence about the impact of social interventions is a global public good; so donors should work together to fund and produce it collectively.
- Put in place a global register of impact evaluations, in which all impact evaluations must be registered when they begin, drawing on the precedent of clinical trials. Such a public register would, at almost no cost, reduce publication bias, prevent unnecessary duplication and spread learning.
- Recognise that not every intervention should be evaluated. It should often be sufficient for an intervention to set out transparently the existing, rigorous evidence on which it is based.
- Put in place an Institute for Development Effectiveness, modelled on the National Institute for Health and Clinical Effectiveness (NICE) to examine impact evaluation evidence and provide independent and transparent guidance on cost-effective interventions. Set a ceiling (say, £10m) above which a programme cannot be funded unless it is supported by an existing independent, published, relevant, rigorous impact evaluation which has been quality-assured by the Institute for Development Effectiveness. In the absence of such evidence, a project above the ceiling should go ahead only on a trial basis and only if it includes a rigorous impact evaluation to fill the identified knowledge gap.

Large aid agencies are beginning an uncomfortable transition. In the past they have seen themselves as experts to whom the public has delegated the important job of managing the support we give to the developing world. Their job was to act on behalf of citizens who were disempowered by lack of information. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, aid agencies will play a quite different role – in fact, almost the opposite of how they have seen themselves in the past. They must become a platform through which citizens can become involved directly in how their money is used. Some aid agencies will not survive this change: those that do will be the ones which seize the opportunity to provide transparent, trustworthy, meaningful information which empowers citizens to make well-informed choices. Putting in place a comprehensive, honest results framework is the first step along that road.

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#### **Further Reading**

Development Initiatives - <http://www.devinit.org/>

International Aid Transparency Initiative - <http://www.aidtransparency.net/>

United Nations Millennium Declaration –  
<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

#### **More from Owen Barder**

<http://www.owen.org/>

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## **Do we Need an Institute for the Study of Development Fads?**

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**Keywords:** Value for Money; Extrinsic/intrinsic motivation.

**Summary:** As we think about value-for in the development business, we should keep in mind how this impacts on the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations of giving aid.

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It is always useful when thinking of development issues to recall the fundamental distinctions about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Most bad ideas in development (i.e. social learning) involve some scheme based on extrinsic and even blatantly pecuniary motivation - positive or negative. As one of the best recent philosophers of education put it:

In this way, we have discovered the carrot, the stick, the blinder, the shoe, the collar, the bit, the curb, and many other refinements... We need to remind ourselves that all these kinds of things... have been in the public domain for a long time, and that we should replace the patent office with an institute for the study of educational antiquities. (Hawkins, 2000: 43)

Just as one such fad, "results-based aid", starts to fade, raising the hope that perhaps there was some learning in the development business, essentially the same idea re-emerges with changed rhetoric, e.g., "cash-on-delivery" aid or "Value for Money" aid. So many development thinkers over the decades have demonstrated their incomprehension of the subtleties of development aid by modelling it on the idea of "vaccinating children" that this example has long since become a punch-line for jokes about development naïveté. But now I see in the *New York Times* the breathless "new" idea of "cash-on-delivery aid" to pay developing countries so much cash for each child vaccinated! (New York Times, 2011).

The attempt to establish a clear observable quid-pro-quo connection between aid from the helper (money) and results by the doer or helpee ("value") not only tends to undercut and crowd out more intrinsic motivation on the part of the doer, it will also sponsor superficial, quick-returns, and going-through-the-motions "reforms" or activities on the part of the doers.

Hence as we think about value-for-money (like the previous topic of scholarships and awards in NN45) in the development business, I can only suggest we keep in mind these basics about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Money can only function as a sustainable means to do what people are already intrinsically motivated to do. But when one suggests using monetary or other extrinsic awards to provide the motivation itself ("the carrot"), then one should take a course in the "institute for the study of educational antiquities" to see all the ways it will go wrong.

As I have had to repeat these points again and again over the years, I have also speculated why development aid has taken so many loops around this particular hamster wheel. Only recent graduates in economics or finance can be so clueless about the shortcomings of extrinsic motivation. People who have worked for some time in development aid must have some good ideas about the sort of motivation on the part of the doers that is sustainable and that can lead to real change (as opposed to going through the motions to make the donors happy).

Yet those experienced people are typically in an organizational or bureaucratic situation where they have to show their bosses and the original donors of the resources that they are "getting Value for Money." We see the same organizational pressures in businesses and in schools where the bosses or administrators want to "see results" and "see them soon." Occasionally, one sees progress where certain administrators understand that genuine sustainable transformation is a subtle, indirect, and long-term business. But even then, the administrator's boss may soon be saying "Why aren't we seeing more 'real results'? Are your people 'really' producing Value for Money?" Even if there is an unlikely alignment of experienced and understanding bosses, then in the course of managerial turnover, the old pressures of "Value for Money" will arise again and that leads to yet another loop around the hamster wheel. Hence the cycle of development fads may have less to do with any lack of understanding on the part of experienced frontline staff than with the pressures that arise in development aid organizations to "see results and see them soon".

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## The Trend for Donors to Treasure (and Fund) what can be Measured

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**Keywords:** Value for Money; ODA; allocative efficiency; education

**Summary:** This note discusses the increased attention of donor to measuring the “Value for Money” (VfM) of their Official Development Assistance (ODA or aid). The note focuses on education aid.

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### VfM drivers

There are many valid reasons for the increased interest in measuring the impact of aid. Effective use of public resource is an important concern, perhaps especially for resources used externally. And to assess the effectiveness requires some sort of measurement. This concern is particularly present at a time when most donor countries are struggling with rising public budgets deficits, juxtaposed with growing disillusionment about aid effectiveness and rapid growth in funding from “new” donor countries as well as from a variety of private sources. It is natural in this context for parliaments and public opinion in donor countries to want better information on whether aid outcomes are commensurate to the levels of aid provided over the last two-three decades. And how does the resulting high level of aid dependency in many aid recipient countries affect the sustainability of whatever results have been achieved? For example, in 2009, total aid (all sectors) exceeded 10% of GDP in 22 of the 48 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, a level reached in only five countries outside Africa.

Another VfM driver is the objective of achieving *more evidence-based decision-making*. This objective applies to both aid recipient countries and donors. As regards the former, much progress has been made since the 2000 Dakar Forum by low-income countries to develop more evidence-based education sector policies and programs. Less attention has been paid to how the *catalytic impact of aid* may be enhanced through more evidence-based aid allocation and coordination *by donor countries and agencies* to ensure that the sum of their individual aid allocation decisions maximizes the impact of their aid on global development goals.

To illustrate: Despite solid research evidence on the multiple benefits of early childhood development (ECD) and female literacy (two of the six EFA goals), these areas receive almost



no aid. This is particularly striking for SSA where almost half of adult women are illiterate and the enrolment in pre-primary education is below 20%. As little domestic funding is used for these purposes, aid could provide additionality rather than substitute for domestic funding. Additional funds for high impact investments should be good value for aid money. Thus, even if the impact of e.g., ECD in a particular country setting cannot be measured in the short term, the *global knowledge base* suggests that supporting ECD is good use of aid, provided that other constraints on the effectiveness of such aid can be dealt with (see below discussion of capacity-building). Therefore, the **first concern of the Vfm drive** should be to ensure that aid is used for purposes where the potential impact of additional funding is already well established. After all, it helps little to be able to measure progress in what one does if one is not doing the right thing.

### **Effectiveness versus efficiency**

In line with the 2005 “Paris Declaration”, the attention to *aid effectiveness* has focused on enhancing the *efficiency of aid delivery* through more harmonized aid modalities, better alignment of aid on recipient countries’ policies, and improved ownership and governance by aid recipient countries. Though progress has been slow, this is useful. But, as already noted, too little attention has been paid to the extent to which the aid is *allocated efficiently* to purposes where it can have the greatest catalytic impact on outcomes of *total* funding in the education sector (domestic plus aid). Most of the indicators used to monitor aid effectiveness under the “Paris Declaration” focus on *delivery efficiency* rather than on *allocative efficiency*. But while the former is necessary, it is not sufficient to ensure aid effectiveness if the allocative efficiency is poor. Similarly, it does not help much to be able to demonstrate that a small, ring-fenced aid project is efficient if the results cannot be replicated to impact the overwhelming majority of education spending, which in most countries is from domestic resources. Again, as already noted, the first **concern of the Vfm drive** should be to stimulate progress towards doing the right things. This would be in line with the recent Busan Declaration’s call for broadening of the international aid debate in order to enhance the attention to more *effective use of aid* to promote development.

### **The comparative advantage of aid is evolving rapidly**

One implication of this evolution is that to address the coming decade’s education challenges will require much more *capacity and knowledge intensive policies and programs* than those needed to achieve last decade’s increase in access, largely achieved through increased provision of classrooms and teachers. Some of these are “old” challenges in areas where progress remains elusive, such as enhancing education quality, equity and relevance, and improving the capacity of education sector institutions. Others stem from successes over the last decade, such as increased demand for post-primary education. Still others reflect the increasing need for education systems to respond better to demands stemming from historically unparalleled rapid *global* economic and social change, globalization, and the growing role of knowledge and innovation in all aspects of development.

In other words, instead of setting the pace of change, the education system’s ability to serve effectively the economy and society will increasingly depend on how well it is able to respond to developments *outside* the system. One striking and paradoxical feature of many education systems is their low capacity to learn and to innovate, be it to improve management and accountability, pilot and innovate to develop education policies and programs adapted to local conditions, or apply new technologies and modes of teaching to

improve the quality of learning. In short: Education systems' ability to address the next decade's challenges will more than ever depend on their ability to learn and embrace - rather than resist - change.

In this context, *the comparative advantage of aid is increasingly to help countries develop such capacities*. However, aid has a very poor track record in building sustainable capacity. This is an example of it not being sufficient only to allocate aid to the "right" purposes; the impact will also depend on the use of effective aid modalities and instruments. In the case of capacity-building, effective aid will require a new approach both by donors and aid-recipient countries, replacing the old focus on long-term external technical assistance and external training to build *technical capacity* with one focusing on building *well-performing and accountable institutions* capable of mobilizing, strengthening, and utilizing largely *existing* national capacity.

Effective ways of providing such aid are likely to include more support for well-designed knowledge exchange and peer learning through south-south and triangular cooperation, and for effective institutions and networks producing regional and global public goods. The growing inter-connectedness, made possible by the ICT and internet revolutions, has greatly increased the scope for drawing *cross-border externalities* from *national* experiences and technical expertise. But to turn this into *global public goods* requires competent international and regional agencies and networks that can identify, quality-assure, synthesize and disseminate this type of experience and provide technical support and facilitate technical cooperation to help adapt to local conditions interventions that have been successful in other countries. These types of regional and global public good functions are severely underfunded. *One* reason is the difficulty of measuring the Value for Money put into institutions producing such goods (especially in the short run). Another is the very slow progress in enhancing the efficiency of such institutions.

### **Towards more evidence-based aid**

Much work is needed to enhance aid effectiveness and, thus, the "Value for Money" spent on aid. Still, three things are clear: First, to measure the impact of the *type of aid* needed to play to aid's comparative advantages in the present decade will be increasingly complex. Measuring the number of classrooms built is easy; measuring improved education relevance or institutional capacity is complex. Second, one of the clearest lessons from the past half century of aid is that building capacity of institutions and effective systems takes years, often decades. How to measure the impact of aid in this context and to convince donors to stay the course? Again, doing the right things is a good start but, as the poor track record of capacity building shows, this is not always sufficient. Third, this said, much can be achieved by **working harder to provide more evidence-based aid, by drawing fully on the global knowledge base to help close the gap between how aid is actually allocated and how it should be allocated to play better to its evolving comparative advantage.**

However, progress towards more evidence-based aid allocation is hampered by the complex set of factors that govern aid allocation decisions as well as by weaknesses in the *global education aid architecture*. The latter limits the ability of the global aid community to allocate aid strategically. As regards the former, the current aid allocation is the outcome of complex processes in donor countries, development agencies and aid recipient countries, each responding to many constituencies. The *primary* objective of some of these constituencies is not necessarily to accelerate education development in aid recipient

countries. For example, much aid is tied and comes back to the donor country as payment for services, and a large share of what is reported as aid for higher education by some large donors is imputed costs for foreign students they host and who may never return home.

In combination, such weaknesses in aid allocation and coordination limit the effectiveness of both domestic and external education funding, and concerted efforts should be made by the global aid community to remove them. This will not be easy, considering the weaknesses of the global aid architecture, the perennial difficulty in reforming institutions producing regional and global public goods in the education sector, and the vacuum in global leadership in the education sector. Perhaps the most important and urgent action in getting more value for aid money would be for the global aid community to address such problems? This would be one concrete way for the education sector of responding to the Busan Declaration's call to move "from effective aid to cooperation for effective development".

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### **DFID's Use of Evidence: Achieving Value for Money Through Knowing 'What Works'**

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**Keywords:** DFID; Value for Money; evidence; evaluation

**Summary:** DFID's emphasis on research and evidence of what works in development interventions is a means of ensuring Value for Money for both UK taxpayers and the beneficiaries of British aid.

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Over recent years, within a difficult global financial environment, aid budgets have come under increased scrutiny. For government agencies such as DFID – which continues to hold a high level of political and financial commitment despite a resource-constrained environment – the pressure is intense, both to deliver change to intended beneficiaries (the very poorest), *and* to be able to demonstrate credibly what is actually being achieved with taxpayers' money – i.e. what British aid has delivered to change the lives of the poorest people.

Thus, like many other organisations in the international environment, DFID has placed increasing emphasis on both (i) understanding the medium-term outcomes (rather than inputs and outputs) of interventions, and (ii) seeking to become an organisation that bases its decisions on evidence of what will work in different contexts. In this sense, Value for Money is linked to the concept of knowing – on the basis of replicable research or robust

evaluation – what is most likely to achieve the development outcomes anticipated, and how interventions should be designed and delivered.

Development interventions are complex, assuming social and behavioural change, and implicitly requiring change to deeply-embedded political structures. This is fully recognised. So is the fact that the evidence base supporting complex interventions is often quite weak. To date, in many disciplines, research effort has largely focused on *quantifying* the scale of development ‘problems’. Much less effort has focused on the identification of potential solutions, or generating understanding of ‘what works’ in bringing about change – perhaps understandably, given the methodological challenges of establishing causality. But this knowledge is important.

**Research and evaluation.** Over the last five years, effort has therefore been put into deepening and intensifying evaluation effort, both within DFID and externally, and into building a high-quality research portfolio which will provide evidence, both as a public good for our development partners, and to provide policy-relevant evidence for programme design and implementation. Externally, DFID has been involved with other colleagues and partners in the development of initiatives such as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), which was established to produce high-quality policy-relevant evidence as a public good.

**DFID-funded research.** New research is commissioned through competitive tender, and is peer reviewed at key points. New research is focused on the following three areas: understanding ‘what works’; understanding context; and on discovering the technologies and products which will make a difference to the lives of the poor.

**Use of evidence.** Significant effort has also been undertaken to structure DFID as an organisation which uses and assesses the quality of evidence at every stage in its decision-making processes. In a 2011 review (1), the (UK) Government Office for Science acknowledged the ‘recent and marked... shift within DFID towards better integration of high quality scientific evidence into decision-making, policy and strategy’ (DFID, 2011: iii) and commended the current efforts to embed evidence-based thinking across DFID.

This has been undertaken in a number of ways:

**Strengthening analytical capacity and specialist expertise.** Over the last year, the generic position of Head (and Chief) of Profession has been redefined, to include acting as a ‘thought leader’, at the forefront of professional knowledge within each area of specialism. DFID advisers have to acquire both disciplinary knowledge within their specialist area, and a number of core analytical skills, including statistics, critical appraisal, and evaluation; and the number of advisers has been significantly increased through a series of external recruitment exercises.

**Building assessment of the quality of evidence into routine corporate processes.** In 2010, the Bilateral Aid Review included an exercise to assess the quality and robustness of the evidence base which supports major programmes. In many cases, peer assessment judged that the quality of evidence required strengthening. Programme approval procedures have since changed, including (from January 2011) completion of the ‘Business Case’, which must be completed prior to approval of any expenditure above £500. It requires demonstration and assessment of the theoretical assumptions and the quality of the evidence which

supports the proposed intervention, and, for expenditure above £40m, must be centrally peer reviewed. The Business Case also requires an explicit evaluation strategy – particularly where the evidence base is judged as ‘limited’. Evidence is rated against the following criteria:

- **Strong evidence:** A proposed programme is based on strong evidence of achieving expected outcomes that are relevant to the local context, from well conducted (methodologically rigorous) studies, or impact or other evaluations.
- **Medium, weak, indirect, inconclusive or context specific evidence.** Where evidence is specific to one context but being applied in another, the programme is classed as an ‘innovation’.
- **Limited or none:** There is limited or no evidence from rigorous studies. An intervention may still work well *without* prior evidence (and innovation is encouraged) – but there should therefore be an intention to design evaluation into the programme.

**Embedding evaluation and learning from programmes.** An evaluation policy was drafted in 2009, and is now undergoing minor revision, to reflect changes within the organisation, and the establishment of the external Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI). A new evaluation specialism, which requires externally reviewed accreditation, has been introduced, so that country office staff can gain specialist help in designing evaluations in major or innovative programmes.

**Evidence products and access to evidence.** Finally, a range of ‘evidence products’ has been established to guide staff, including evidence papers, rapid reviews, and Systematic Reviews. This ensures that the strength and quality of evidence is assessed and understood, based on agreed methods designed by consortia such as the Campbell and Cochrane Collaborations. Key papers are held on a central evidence site, designed to be of use to staff when designing programmes.

The processes of change which development interventions seek to bring about are complex and difficult, operating at multiple levels, with a great many players and other stakeholders. The level of risk involved in delivery can be high. It is this which underpins the level of effort currently being invested by DFID in understanding evidence, and increasing its volume – to respond to the challenge of providing Value for Money through knowing what is most likely to work effectively, and to a continual process of lesson learning and the generation of new knowledge.

#### Note

- (1) The purpose of Science and Engineering Assurance (SEA) reviews, managed by the Government Office of Science, is to provide assurance to the Department Permanent Secretaries that science evidence is effectively integrated into policy development and delivery. The definition of science used includes social science.

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## DFID, Education ODA and Value for Money: A Commentary

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**Keywords:** DFID; ODA; Education; TVET; Skills; Value for Money; VfM

**Summary:** This commentary is intended to give the reader an overview of, and brief introduction to, DFID's Value for Money focus as it relates to education ODA.

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### DFID and Value for Money (VfM)

For DFID, Value for Money (VfM) is about maximising the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people's lives. Results, transparency and accountability are DFID watchwords (O'Brien, 2011), and demonstrating VfM is now a standard requirement of everything DFID funds. The issue of VfM for DFID, while not a new approach, was brought to a head by a series of factors. First, the May 2010 new UK coalition Government's stress on accountability resulted in the commissioning of Bilateral and Multilateral Aid Reviews (BAR, MAR) (DFID, 2011a; b) (1). Second, and regarding the education sector, came the June 2010 National Audit Office report on DFID's Bilateral Support to Primary Education (NAO, 2010), and the subsequent November 2010 Public Accounts Committee hearings (House of Commons PAC, 2010).

As an outcome of the BAR, DFID is focusing on poor and fragile countries (especially those with large out of school populations), reducing the number of countries receiving bilateral aid (from 43 to 27), and more strongly linking support to tangible results. For the first time ever, all of DFID's bilateral 2011-2014 programme (about £20 billion) has been allocated based on results offers competitively bid by country offices around the world (Shafik, 2011).

The MAR assessed and rated 43 multilaterals. 9 were rated as "very good", including some that are concerned (in part) with education, namely the Asian Development Bank, the IDA (World Bank) and UNICEF. 9 other organizations were rated as 'poor', including: FAO, ILO, and UNESCO.

In addition to the re-prioritisation as a result of the BAR and MAR, to ensure that aid is spent wisely, DFID has put in place other mechanisms including the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (2) and a Transparency Guarantee (3).

### VfM and Education: the NAO and PAC Reports

DFID is the second largest funder of education in low income countries (after the World Bank); its education spend amounts to about £1 billion a year, with 70% of this as bilateral spend, and most of the remainder going through multilateral channels.

The 2010 NAO and PAC reports noted, among other things, that DFID: cannot adequately attribute impact to DFID spend; has placed “too much emphasis on simply measuring the numbers entering education” (House of Commons PAC, 2010: 3); and, has paid less attention to attendance, completion and learning outcomes.

At the November 2010 PAC hearing, DFID promised to address these issues (and more), and to report back a year later (see further, below).

In 2011, DFID announced its new approach to aid in *UK Aid: Changing Lives, Delivering Results* (DFID, 2011c). Reading between the lines of what this publication said about DFID’s approach to education ODA, one can suggest that DFID was doing its best to set results-focused goals, but was constrained by data limitations. The 2015 targets outlined say that DFID will “support” nine million children in primary school and two million in lower secondary, and train almost 200,000 teachers to “improve the quality of education and children’s learning” (ibid: 12) (4). What it does not make clear is what “support” actually means, and if it implies – for example – that DFID will support these 11 million children and adolescents to reach a minimum competency level. On the crucial, results-focused, issue of learning it is only said that this will “improve” as a consequence of the almost 200,000 teachers DFID will help to train. We are left to speculate if these teachers will be the same teachers that are teaching the 11 million DFID supported children. Moreover, it is clear that training teachers is not enough to improve quality; if the broader context of salaries, working conditions, respect and teacher involvement in policy remains disabling, the extent to which training can improve quality will be limited.

One year on from NAO report and PAC hearings, DFID issued its promised update on bilateral support to primary education in November 2011 (DFID, 2012). It is clear that those seeking new DFID spend on education now have to provide a lot more evidence of expected results and VfM. For example, the one year update notes that:

- New rigorous appraisal and design requirements are in place; any new education spend requires that education business cases be approved.
- All new DFID education programmes support and monitor learning outcomes.
- DFID is working to improve national data systems in all countries where they have education programmes; this includes strengthening Education Management Information Systems (EMIS).

## **The Challenges of VfM and Aid to Education and Skills**

### **Measuring VfM in education**

A key issue for DFID is how to measure Value for Money in education. The PAC accepted indicators to be reported to them and which collectively comprise DFID’s definition of ‘full data coverage’ for VfM decisions in the education sector (DFID, 2012). These indicators include:

- Cost per child per school year;
- Average teacher salary per year;
- Unit cost of average primary school text book;
- Unit cost of classroom construction;
- Primary completion rate or primary school survival rate;

- Learning outcomes – end of cycle exam pass rate or other nationally representative learning assessment.

While some reading this NORRAG piece will clearly critique this narrow set of indicators, it should be recalled that the kinds of indicators that DFID could propose were evidently limited by the availability of data. For example, at the 2010 PAC hearing, it was openly stated by DFID's then head of (education) profession that end of cycle exams are "not necessarily an effective measure of what children are learning" (House of Commons PAC, 2010: Q77). And yet this still became an agreed upon indicator.

Several other indicators, which were deemed to be "relevant" (5), were identified by DFID but their absence was not said to "undermine the ability of a DFID Country Office to make informed decisions" (DFID, 2012: Appendix 1).

***"How do you know that DFID money makes a difference?"***

This was a question to DFID from the Chair of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (House of Commons PAC, 2010: Q12). It hits right at the heart of the major challenges: determining attribution and impact (6). DFID's response at the hearing acknowledged the challenges associated with this, as well as the fact DFID has "not been as good at this in the past as [DFID] need to be" (House of Commons PAC, 2010: Q54). DFID further commented that the economic appraisal which all projects have to undergo tries to assess what the counterfactual might be without DFID intervention.

The NAO and PAC reports also flagged up that determining attribution of outcomes/impact is even more difficult when it comes to budget-support and multilateral support (compared to bilateral programme/project support) (7). This is not new information of course. But it is interesting that DFID now has a ('new') commitment to demonstrating results, at the same time as a commitment to maintain the 0.7 per cent aid target for 2013 – which will likely mean more DFID spend may be channelled via 'good' or 'very good' multilaterals.

**What about VfM for skills training interventions?**

Technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) was obviously not covered in the 2010 NAO report – which focussed on primary education. What then, can we say about how DFID intends to secure better VfM for any spend it makes on TVSD?

We know that DFID is part funding the 'Systems Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results' (SABER) programme of the World Bank, and that one of the policy domains addressed by SABER (*and* that DFID is supporting), is workforce development (which covers TVSD). So there is clearly desire from DFID to be able to monitor and report more effectively on TVSD spend.

When it comes to TVSD, DFID's current documents still talk in terms out outputs, rather than outcomes/impact; e.g. DFID will "provide vocational training for 45,000 young people [in Afghanistan]" (DFID, 2011e: 19).

DFID has made it clear that it will work to improve national education data systems like EMIS. However, since EMIS is very Ministry of Education centric, DFID (with others like the



World Bank) also need to improve national TVSD data systems *and capacities* so that TVSD bench-marking toolkits developed (e.g. by SABER) can actually be utilised.

***“The way we define VfM is achieving objectives at minimum cost”***

So said, Nemat Shafik, then permanent secretary of DFID (House of Commons PAC, 2010: Q46). Though elsewhere (e.g. DFID, 2012), DFID makes it clear that it is not about cutting corners and compromising quality, DFID acknowledges that it will be more expensive to achieve the same, or similar, objectives (e.g. UPE or minimum learning outcomes) in some countries (e.g. conflict and fragile states) than in others.

DFID is clear that there is a need to balance VfM in terms of cost, with need (e.g. investing in girls) and with policy commitments (e.g. working in conflict and fragile states).

**Allocating resources to activities with the highest returns in education?**

*“...we have to invest in the highest return activities in order to maximize poverty reduction” (Nemat Shafik, in House of Commons PAC, 2010: Q46).*

*“...we need to take into account what the international evidence tells us about where are the best rates of return to particular investments” (Liz Ditchburn, in House of Commons PAC, 2010: Q54).*

DFID has made it very clear that it recognizes the VfM of investing in girls’ education.

But what is not so clear is this: on the one hand, the latest international evidence points towards higher levels of education having higher levels of income return (Colclough et al., 2009; King and Palmer, 2006; Palmer et al., 2007) (8). And yet, DFID education spend is focused on lower levels of education, especially at the primary level. On the other hand, DFID’s Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) with HM Treasury both have a focus on the MDGs, and since DFID is responsible for delivering on the PSA/SDA objectives and outcomes, DFID has to tie policy closely to these agreements and hence the MDGs; and the education MDGs relate to gender and primary education.

Thus, when it comes to education, whether or not there is a contradiction between delivering on the PSA/SDA and delivering on VfM remains to be seen (9).

Aside from the issue of which areas of education to invest in, there are other issues regarding VfM in resource allocation. DFID is the first to pilot the cash-on-delivery approach in the education sector (in Ethiopia), and is making more use of conditional cash transfers (e.g. in Yemen).

**What of VfM in financial resource mobilization?**

It might be argued that DFID’s VfM approach appears to put more weight on getting more out of DFID’s resources (both bilateral and multilateral spend), but pays less attention to using DFID resources to leverage additional financing from innovative financing approaches (especially those that relate to education) (10). Using DFID resources in a catalytic manner to leverage additional financing is very much in line with getting VfM (11).

The global education architecture is starting to shift in 2012, and there are attempts afoot that could potentially bring better VfM to education aid at the macro-level. There is increasing talk that the Global Partnership for Education (the former FTI) should be transformed into a Global Fund for Education. And there are also attempts to better coordinate the role of the private sector in education globally, through a Global Business Coalition for Education.

### **“Value for Money evidence” and Education Research**

DFID is keen to generate “Value for Money evidence regarding what works, what can be done better or cheaper and what does not work” (DFID, 2011f: 17). In the context of VfM, DFID views research very much as a development intervention. Research needs to guide aid investment choices: what are the right places for DFID to work?; what are the right things to fund?; which aid instrument delivers the most results?

DFID is “investing in new research to generate evidence of ‘what works’ in education, including a series of eight systematic reviews – the majority to be available by mid 2012. These studies address topics including contract teachers, vouchers and teacher absence. Joint research partnerships are being developed with international institutions to promote new research on quality, pedagogy and learning outcomes” (DFID, 2012: para 42).

The modality of how education research is funded by DFID may also be going through a change. For the last several years, DFID education research has been monopolised by three research programme consortia (RPC), focussed on access, quality and outcomes; further research should undoubtedly build on the work of these 3 RPCs. But in terms of funding modality, there was something to be said for the smaller research grants that were perhaps more responsive to demand and better able to make use of Britain’s VfM in education research.

### **Concluding Comments**

Clearly, ensuring - *and being seen* to ensure - VfM is now ingrained in everything DFID does. This will result in much more significance placed on ensuring the existence of good quality data and information systems in developing countries, the development and deployment of strong data collection tools and the training of qualified analysts; all elements that can be quite time-consuming and likely require strong ‘back office’ support. In the context of 30% back office administration cuts at DFID, operationalising VfM may require some innovative thinking.

### **Notes**

- (1) A Humanitarian Aid Review was also commissioned.
- (2) Launched as a permanent body in May 2011, this aid ‘watchdog’ will gather evidence about the effectiveness of DFID programs to ensure that the public has independent verifiable evidence about the impact of aid.
- (3) Launched in June 2010, this guarantee commits to publishing full information about programs and projects on DFID website.
- (4) There are several minor changes to these education targets as set out in DFID (2011c) and as now (March 2012) appear on the DFID website.
- (5) These include: Cost per child per achievement level; Pupil attendance; Teacher attendance; Opportunity to learn measure; Measure of reading fluency in early grades of primary.

- (6) Attribution here refers to the ability to attribute outcome X or impact Y to DFID spend Z, rather than to other spend (e.g. from government, from other development partners, NGOs etc). Impact here refers to the ability to determine causality between an intervention and the consequence of that intervention, as well as to determine what would have happened in the absence of the intervention (the counter-factual).
- (7) In 2010/11, 64% of DFID total program budget was channelled through multilaterals (DFID, 2011d).
- (8) Interestingly, both of the research projects that produced the reports referenced were DFID-funded.
- (9) There are of course strong arguments to make for continued investment in primary education, even when returns are higher at higher levels.
- (10) See [www.leadinggroup.org](http://www.leadinggroup.org)
- (11) DFID is trying to leverage funds, but not specifically for education, and not specifically linking in to the numerous innovative financing mechanisms currently being discussed. For example, in June 2011, DFID launched the (one year pilot) UK Aid Match fund which will match public donations to appeals for development activities focused on poverty reduction in developing countries (£1 for £1 to a ceiling of £5m).

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## The Busan Discourse on Results, Effectiveness, Impact, and Value for Money: what do they Mean for Emerging Donors?

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**Keywords:** Value for Money; results; result-based management; Busan HLF4; emerging donors; South Korea

**Summary:** Value for Money (VfM) was firmly present in Busan HLF4 with its frequent appearance in various documents/statements from building block sessions and side events. What would then the result-based management (RBM) and the VfM mean for those emerging donors including China, India and Brazil who have signed up for the Busan Partnership document, and how would they (or would they not) implement it? In an attempt to answer these questions, this piece critically reflects upon the recent debates (and development) in S. Korea on the RBM and VfM.

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“Over 2,000 delegates... [are] reviewing global progress in improving the impact and *Value for Money* of development aid” (emphasis added, an official HLF4 website news entry).

The preoccupation with results and Value for Money (VfM) has been increasingly visible among the traditional aid circle in recent years. With the economic/financial difficulties at home and the media frenzy on emerging powers (e.g. China’s resource-backed development projects in Africa), the combined considerations of economy, efficiency and effectiveness seem to have gained greater kudos. Indeed, as the quote above highlights, VfM’s firm presence in Busan HLF4 was highlighted by its frequent appearance in various documents/statements from building block sessions to side events. Yet, in the outcome document, VfM is only mentioned once while results 24 times, effectiveness 15 times, and impact 8 times. Indeed, this observation, although cursory, throws up various questions – particularly relating to those emerging donors including China, India and Brazil who have signed up for the Busan Partnership document. What would the result-based management (RBM) and the VfM mean for them, and how would they (or would they not) implement it?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I critically reflect upon the recent debates (and development) in S. Korea on the RBM and the VfM. Despite its DAC membership, Korea still shares many similarities with other emerging donors. And simultaneously, the donor has begun putting effort towards a result-based ODA system. Thus, the case of Korea would provide some insight into how others may approach the agenda.

The first question concerns the ambiguity of the RBM and VfM concepts themselves – e.g. who defines results, what the intended results are for. The rhetoric of a ‘win-win’ and ‘common’ development outcome between the partners (therefore mutual benefits) can be easily found in the Korean aid policy discourse. Yet, the reality seems otherwise. It is often the result that the donor intends. For example, one of my colleagues in Korea confided in me with frustration about the way in which project evaluation criteria were dictated by their

utility for advancing Korean companies' overseas expansion. Often such objectives are 'hidden' away from public eyes – and are often structurally incorporated into the aid system itself. Such donor-driven VfM is also seen in the recent CNK (a Korean diamond mining company operating in Cameroon) scandal. In order to secure a mining concession (an intended result), some Korean government officials allegedly prioritised grant aid to Cameroon over other projects. Thus, structural inclusion of private sector initiatives and tying aid are often practised as one way to ensure the result and VfM.

The second point relates to too much (shifting) emphasis on results. Therefore more resource has been allocated to showcasing 'effective' results while the important process of learning seems rather overlooked in project implementation. This is not to say increased efforts on monitoring and evaluation are a bad thing. But the efforts have to be based on a more integrated approach. There are two cases I have come across showing some worrying signs. For example, one of the KOICA-run training sessions on the RBM used a flow chart that separated the project process from project result (1). This flow chart was then followed by a comment stating that "the focus of M[onitoring] & E[valuation] has been shifted from the process to result". The recent emphasis on the RBM does not necessarily mean shifting away from the project process. The learning (via trial and error) during the project process forms important information/knowledge to share with the partners – which ultimately should serve as evidence to improve development impact.

Further, Korea's fragmented aid structure hinders systematic knowledge sharing with the partner countries for better development result. For example, the Bangladesh government wanted to see successful KOICA funded grant aid (ICT) projects being further developed into EDCF ODA loan projects (2). However, KOICA's post evaluation often only took place after two-three years from the project completion. Such fragmentation and 'time gap' hamper not only knowledge sharing between donor and partner countries – but also more effective cooperation between the donor agencies (KOICA and EDCF). In addition to this, there is an added complication. The project management company (the contractor) does not fully share the acquired knowledge during the project as the information is regarded as the company's intellectual property.

The third question concerns the highly technical and expert-led process of management and evaluation. RBM is necessarily about measuring, monitoring and evaluation. Yet, these activities are not fully integrated into the project cycle. Moreover, technical capacity for RBM is not yet established nor institutionalised. Korean aid agencies have relatively recently begun to recruit and to 'nurture' in-house experts. Therefore, often commissioning evaluation projects means that contractors have to set up a set of evaluation guidelines and to simultaneously evaluate projects. Without a solid basis for measuring, monitoring and evaluating results, it is indeed difficult to expect effective implementation of the RBM and VfM.

But some Korean aid officials are also cautious of blindly following the international aid norms while emphasising the importance of realising the spirit of Paris Declaration. Indeed, as my KoFID colleagues emphasised "[a]fter all, measure[ing] development results should be seen as a tool and not as a goal" (Lee et al, 2012).

#### Notes

(1) KOICA is the Korean ODA grant implementing agency.

(2) EDCF is the Korean ODA loan implementing agency.

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## The Risks of a Results Agenda

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**Keywords:** Results; Value for Money; Learning; Relationships

**Summary:** Aspirations to use development financing for transformative change in the lives of people in poverty are put at risk by the current push to deliver results in relation to narrow and mechanistic Value for Money criteria.

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Before the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness at the end of 2011, the 'blue club' of bilateral donors (Britain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States) issued a joint statement in which 'a drive for better development results' headed the list of their priorities (see DFID, 2011). A post-Busan 'coalition of the willing' has been established to pursue a 'results and accountability' agenda but their persistent emphasis on results and everything they entail in terms of tyrannical managerial Value for Money practice puts at risk aspirations to use development financing for long term positive change in the lives of people in poverty.

A year ago, the UK Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, 'set out the results that UK aid would deliver for the world's poorest people over the next four years' and said DFID would be 'hard-headed about making every penny count'. Explaining to the British public how UK aid delivers Value for Money – educating more children than those we educate in the UK but at 2.5% of the cost – is influencing how DFID thinks, works and pressurizes those organisations it funds.

To be able to count exactly how each penny of aid money gets spent, donor governments are risking not making any difference at all. They can show how many kilometres of roads they have built or numbers of babies vaccinated as compared with before they started the projects. But such facts reveal little about how the change was achieved and what can be learnt for future policy and practice; and the end of project evaluations are no substitute for continuous learning and adaptation of approach. Eventual outcomes are often very different from what the logical framework requires. Stuff happens. Power, history and culture shape

the multiplicity of relationships and actors influencing any aid intervention. It makes more sense to design aid to recognize this. Experienced staff and consultants know it. But they are being forced to portray reality other than it is – for the benefits of keeping things simple for the taxpayer.

Truly effective aid depends on people and the quality of their relationships with each other. Yet, the origins of the results agenda lie in a mistrust that eats like a cancer into aid agencies' capacity to make a difference. I am not convinced the emphasis on results will solve the problem of trust. On the contrary, it risks making things worse. The results rhetoric gets exaggerated by bureaucratic systems and by those middle level managers with little country level experience who are forcing grantees and development partners into straitjackets that constrain them from helping transform the lives of people in poverty. All of us in the aid practice community are responsible for building trust. Steps in the right direction include paying attention to the inequitable power relations, including our own behaviour, which keeps people in poverty; being modest about what any purposeful intervention can achieve; and communicating simply with taxpayers about complex reality.

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### Further Reading

Please visit [www.bigpushforward.net](http://www.bigpushforward.net) that explores these issues more fully.

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## UNESCO and the Results Agenda: What Time-Frames Apply?

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**Keywords:** UNESCO; norm; value; legitimacy

**Summary:** In the push towards a results-based agenda, long-term goals risk being sidelined because the cost effectiveness of investment in them is difficult to assess. UNESCO's assigned task is the promotion of values: living together and respect for human rights and dignity. The way in which UNESCO, or any institution, carries out its activities can and should be transparent and subject to scrutiny. However, whether or not UNESCO makes a successful contribution is dependent on long-term outcomes and factors beyond its control. The verdict, positive or negative, will



emerge from ideological perceptions of legitimacy much more than from cost-benefit calculations.

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UNESCO's contribution to development of education is difficult to measure by classic indicators, because UNESCO's role lies principally in the promotion of values and norms. Yet, UNESCO has initiated or joined all significant international efforts to adopt and monitor targets for improvement of education, most notably those relating to universal basic education. These two features represent a paradox as well as an illustration of the difficulty of measuring "Value for Money" of long-term goals. Successful outcomes in efforts to advance depend on a very large number of factors, very few of them controlled by UNESCO.

In a widely referred-to essay in 2010 Andrew Natsios, former Administrator of USAID, posited that "...those development programs that are the most precisely and easily measured are the least transformational, and those programs that are the most transformational are the least measurable" (Natsios, 2010). He has more than a point; he has the point. All of development is about trying to balance necessary short-term accountability and indispensable long-term goals: sometimes these can complement each other, and much of the time they probably work in separate, even conflicting directions.

Every single statement about UNESCO's aims, whether in its constitution or in documents interpreting it over the years, is about values: using education, science and culture to improve the human condition and therefore the state of the world. The Education for All initiative is a case in point: the aim was not merely to get all children into classrooms (or alternative situations), but to use universalization of education to enhance human potential. We can measure the means mobilized, but measuring the outcomes—and attributing agency—is practically impossible.

Assessment of results (and therefore the value of "investment") and yardsticks used to indicate progress or success are frequently ideological, and are in any case largely focused on good practice (however that is defined) of donors or agencies (1). How and to what extent progress on the values promoted by UNESCO can be attributed to UNESCO and to international cooperation in general is based on conviction, anecdote, and to some extent a confusion between correlation and causality. We cannot call for tenders for advancing international understanding and then award a contractor on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis of the submission.

The only real leverage of a small institution like UNESCO (2) is its influence on norms and ideas, for which the essential ingredient is legitimacy. Life-long learning, universal education, the right to education, the status of teachers, the importance of education for citizenship in the broad sense, equal opportunity (gender and special needs for example), and tolerance of diversity are among the many values promoted by UNESCO. It has promoted these by developing standards supported by conventions and recommendations, by gathering information and fostering research, by building capacity through networks and training. Can a direct impact of UNESCO on positive change be identified and measured? Of course not. Does the legitimacy of UNESCO depend on the collective ideology of its member countries? Of course. Is there an objective measure of its success or failure to advance towards the goals of its founders? This writer thinks the answer is no, but that is not an admission of failure. On the contrary. Should we gauge progress towards adoption of universal human rights values by measurable yardsticks? Can we? I don't know, but I think the world would

be a much poorer place if we decided that their quantification would determine their survival.

So, while quantifying is important, not everything can be weighed accurately when the time-frames are long and the objectives relate to intangible human attitudes and behaviours. Measurement of collaborative establishment of objectives, effective implementation and transparent processes can all help ensure that donors' funds are not sidelined. That type of measurement is important. However, it cannot ensure results, which are dependent on a much larger constellation of circumstances and not dependent on a single agency or intervention. Does that mean that "further[ing] universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion" (UNESCO, 1945: article 1) is a waste of time? It's in the eye of the beholder.

#### Notes

- (1) Easterly and Williamson say that " ...studies ... cannot demonstrate evidence that our measures of aid quality or aid practices are directly related to aid impact, since ... we have no measure of the latter" (Easterly and Williamson, 2011: 1932).
- (2) Its annual budget corresponds, for example, to one day's cost of the US intervention in Afghanistan.

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# **ANGLES ON VALUE FOR MONEY IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

## Results and Value-for-Money: from Results 1.0 to Results 2.0

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**Keywords:** results; value-for-money; aid; aid effectiveness; donors; institutions; evaluation; impact.

**Summary:** Focusing on the results of aid is a political and operational imperative. However, a narrow interpretation of results can over-simplify, and misdirect resources. Better is an approach which is country-led, recognises the need to invest in institutions, and looks at the programmatic impact of all national and donor contributions taken together. This is Results 2.0

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Walk into the lobby of DFID's Headquarters in London and the focus on results is plain to see. A series of posters announces high-level outcomes: 11 million children educated, half of them girls; 10 million children less hungry; 10 million women provided with access to modern family planning; and 50 million people given the means to work their way out of poverty. Underpinning the public messaging is cultural and administrative change, designed to embed a focus on results and Value for Money in strategies, plans, projects and reporting. A new 'business case' framework has been introduced, which makes outcomes central. And it is no accident that the new, independent evaluation facility, funded by DFID but reporting directly to the International Development Select Committee in the House of Commons is called the Independent Commission on Aid Impact. No DFID official, no recipient government, no external stakeholder can be in any doubt that Andrew Mitchell, the Secretary of State, means business when he says that

We're also fundamentally redesigning our aid programmes... The focus will be on outputs and outcomes rather than inputs... donors have a double duty, a responsibility to achieve maximum Value for Money: not just results but results at the lowest possible cost (Mitchell, 2010).

It is not difficult to understand why Andrew Mitchell has set this agenda. In the end, an aid programme exists to deliver results and change people's lives. In addition, however, Andrew Mitchell has a budget to defend and a case to make – not just to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but to the wider public. When public expenditure is being reduced and services cut, many look askance at the ring-fencing of the aid programme, indeed at planned increases. The Daily Mail is one newspaper which has campaigned against the aid programme, with talk of aid money being 'squandered' (Daily Mail, 2011). So far, public support for aid has largely held up in the face of this kind of assault, but support for aid in the UK has always been fragile: broad, but relatively shallow.

Andrew Mitchell is not alone, of course. A focus on results is at the top of the agenda in most of the aid ministries of the world and was a key message from the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4, 2011), held at the end of November 2011 in Busan, South Korea. The new European Union development policy, *Agenda for Change* (EC, 2011), published in

October 2011 and to be approved by the European Council in May 2012, proposes the adoption of a common framework for measuring and communicating results.

Who could possibly disagree with a commitment to making the most of aid money to reduce poverty? Not me. A results focus is both substantively correct and politically essential.

However, there are some problems and risks with a very narrow approach to the results agenda. Andrew Mitchell is well aware of these and has developed a more sophisticated narrative (Mitchell, 2011). Some others have yet to catch up. I call the narrow approach Results 1.0 and the better alternative Results 2.0 (Maxwell, 2011). Results 1.0 can:

- Over-simplify the results chain and ignore the key role of institutions in development;
- Privilege project-by-project analysis and leave out of account the overall impact of multiple donors, as well as the Government's own efforts;
- Over-simplify the economics, ignoring the fact that foreign exchange transfers to countries may or may not (and often do not) result in a 1:1 increase in Government spending; and
- Encourage spending in relatively simple cases, where aid targets human development indicators directly, rather than spending in fragile states and other complex cases, where different kinds of investment may be needed, for example in peace-keeping or basic state-building.

To illustrate the difference between Results 1.0 and Results 2.0, imagine two rather different situations. The first concerns a relatively well-governed poor country, where the Government is committed to poverty reduction, has made a commitment to expand primary education, but is constrained by a shortage of resources, both domestic and foreign exchange. In this case, either general or sector-specific budget support might be appropriate, in a results-based framework with contractual overtones. A variety of donors might join together to support the Government's effort. It might even be possible to roll out one of the new aid modalities, like cash-on-delivery. The line of sight between aid funding and educational outcomes should be relatively easy to track.

The second case is more difficult. The Government is weak, both in terms of leadership and capacity to deliver. The institutional environment is characterised by high levels of rent-seeking. Parts of the country are openly rebellious. Foreign exchange is badly needed to help stabilise the macro-economy, pay down debt and build foreign exchange reserves. And although everyone would like to see educational standards improve, it is not at all obvious that simply throwing money at the problem will succeed. In this case, donors need to work carefully on the institutional drivers of change, identify delivery partners among local governments and NGOs, support peace-building and civil service reform, and generally prepare for a long-term engagement. Primary school outcomes may well be visible at the end of the tunnel: but the pinpoint of light will take some time to grow larger, and there are many intermediate steps before the final objective can be attained.

None of this means that aid ministries can be excused the need to focus on results and demonstrate value-for-money. However, the right place to start may be with countries themselves, their own objectives and their own successes. The development 'story' then changes. It is no longer: 'look what we have done with our aid'. It is rather 'look how Country

X has changed and what it has managed to achieve. We and many others helped. Isn't that great?'

Can we have a message like that in the lobby of DFID?

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### Further Reading

More on the topic of this article can be found on his website at [www.simonmaxwell.eu](http://www.simonmaxwell.eu)

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## The Aid Industry is Threatening Partner Countries with its ROD... Results Obsession Disorder

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**Keywords:** development; aid donors; results; accountability

**Summary:** By excessively focusing on measurable results, the aid industry ignores the essence of the development process and thus undercuts the very objectives it pretends to pursue: ownership, accountability and participation.

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“In today’s world, development is about results.” Thus reads the opening sentence of a December 2011 brochure where the World Bank presents its new financing instrument called “Program-for-Results Financing”. The brochure is embellished with pictures of smiling Africans, delighted, one assumes, because they are the beneficiaries of value for (other people’s) money.

For, indeed, the “Value for Money” agenda aka “Results Obsession Disorder” is spreading fast. Confronted with incisive questions from sceptical citizens and politicians, the aid industry feels it has to prove itself and therefore takes the road of “performance indicators”, “aid that makes a difference”, “measurable results” and “Value for Money”. Where DFID has taken the lead, other donors, including now the World Bank, have followed.

It is hard to find a pithier expression of what “Value for Money” is about, than the opening sentence of the Bank’s brochure. Development, in that view, is indeed not more than the delivery of results. Every societal objective can and ought to be translated into a “deliverable”, a rational objective that has nothing to do with ideology and gets rid of the political or moral dimension of the issues involved. Results are judged independently from considerations of fairness, accountability or participation of the people involved.

In other words “Value for Money” ignores the essence of development in a very fundamental sense. It is based on a schematized and incomplete representation of the development process. In doing so it entails, knowingly or not, the additional risk of deceiving politicians and the public to whom it pretends to be accountable. Indeed, showing results based on such a defective picture of reality may create the impression that development is simple and straightforward, and that aid is a gigantic machine of money-in, development-out.

At the operational level, the “Value for Money” approach inevitably bears a number of important risks. As aid agencies will be assessed on their measurable results, they will be inclined to opt for activities whose results are easy to measure, regardless of their sustainable impact on fundamental developments in the society. This is outright deplorable because we know that those developments that are most easily measured are the least transformational while those that are most transformational are the least measurable. But

even where agencies choose programs that aim at fundamental societal transformation, there will be a high risk of *indicatorism*, that is indicators will tend to become autonomous goals. In practice, agencies will tend to focus on immediate, small-scale output rather than on long-term macro-outcome. And as they are aware they will be assessed on “Value for Money”, they will avoid risks and opt as much as possible for activities for which the results are assured.

The most pernicious shortcomings of “Value for Money” however are due to its strong donor-centric rationale. As is clearly visible in the Bank’s brochure mentioned above, at the end of the day, it’s the donors who will assess whether or not there is “Value for Money”. And they will measure it in accordance with their standards, their policy preferences and, ultimately, their ideologies. We should never forget that the power balance between a donor – who has the money – and a local partner – who is dependent on it – is always very asymmetric. Therefore, “Value for Money” will tend to cripple the sense of responsibility and initiative with local partners. Sure enough, they will direct all efforts towards obtaining the agreed figures within the given time-span, because that is how the donors will measure their performance (and eventually disburse their money). At a more fundamental level, this will tend to weaken the sense of accountability to local populations. “Value for Money” may thus undercut the very principles the aid industry pretends to promote: ownership, accountability and participation.

Should all this lead to the conclusion that we should not work towards results? Throw our indicators in the wastebasket? Abolish monitoring? Just do things? Of course not! Of course we should count and measure. But counting and measuring must be part of a dynamic process among partners, of joint learning and adjusting, continuous communication and interaction that goes well beyond the measurable elements of an aid program. The relationship with a partner in development must not be reduced to a disbursement-for-results relationship. For that is the antithesis of concerted action. Development cooperation is about patiently building trust and creating a shared sense of responsibility for common goals. And that takes time.

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## Old Discourse, New Vocabulary; Value for Money

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**Keywords:** Aid; DFID; Discourse; Value for Money; VfM

**Summary:** This paper questions the concepts of *aid* and *Value for Money*, discussing their meaning and use by DFID. It is suggested that the concepts build on older definitions of aid, and that they remove agency from the poor and allocate it to development “experts.”

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The discourse related to the business of development seems to be in constant need for new vocabulary. One of the latest buzzwords from DFID is *Value for Money*, appearing, for example, in a statement from the Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell, just before Christmas, on 23 December 2010: “UK Government support for aid organisations will be targeted at those agencies which demonstrate they can deliver best Value for Money while they improve the health, education and welfare of millions of people in the poorest countries” (DFID, 2010).

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), in its entry for the term *value*, defines it as “That amount of some commodity, medium of exchange, etc., which is considered to be an equivalent for something else; a fair or adequate equivalent or return,” using Value for Money as an example (OED, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1991, vol. XIX, p. 415). The question that comes immediately to mind in reading Mitchell’s announcement, is, *value for whom?* A “fair and equivalent return” on investment *for whom?* DFID seems to bring some clarity on that issue in its March 2011 Multilateral Aid review (DFID, 2011a), in which it is noted that the aim of the latter is to “ensure that *the UK* gets maximum Value for Money for UK aid through its contributions to multilateral organisations” (DFID, 2011b). Does this mean that the UK needs “a fair or adequate equivalent or return” on investment in development? Such assertion, at least at a first glance, seems to contradict the OED’s definition of the term *aid* as “to give help, support or assistance to” (OED, vol. I, p. 273). In such definition, no return on investment is envisaged; else it would be investment, not aid. However, OED found the definition of foreign or official “aid,” so different from our usual understanding of the term that it necessitated a special entry: “Material help given by one country to another; esp. economic assistance or material help given by a rich to a poor or underdeveloped country” (ibid. vol. I, p. 273). The examples given by the OED under this entry underscore that “aid” does not necessarily mean help, support or assistance, but something else altogether: “since the Soviet Union ... and China have joined in the game of competitive aid-giving the Western Powers, it is argued, *cannot afford to drop out*” (my emphasis, OED, vol. I, p. 273, quoting *Listener*, 1964, 614/1). Further, still quoting the OED, “such aid can salve the conscience of the Christians in the countries that control the world economy” (OED, vol. I, p. 273, quoting *Theol. Stud.* 1970, XXXI, 261). Aid can therefore be considered an investment – or a political game – and can perhaps at the same time provide comfort to the Christian consciousness of the world rulers.

But let's return to DFID. In-between the two aforementioned announcements, DFID published a brochure titled *DFID's Approach to Value for Money (VfM)*, dated July 2011 (DFID, 2011c). In this document, DFID is providing a number of useful definitions and clarifications. The first sentence in this document reads, "Value for Money (VfM) in our programme is about maximising the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people's lives" (p. 2). Value for Money is thus linked to the improvement of poor people's lives. On p. 3, the National Audit Office's (NAO) definition of Value for Money is provided, as being "the optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes." Again, the questions remain, "optimal use" for whom, for which intended outcomes? For the first question, it seems that DFID targets value for "taxpayers money," i.e., the general British public. For the second question, albeit not entirely clear, it seems that the target is the Millennium Development Goals. Neither the consciousness of Christians nor the economic and political "aid game" is mentioned. However, the British taxpayer's consciousness should still feel good, because henceforth the development business is run professionally, with clear effectiveness goals. The vocabulary is convincing, taken in its entirety from the corporate world: In management, there should be "Accountability for VfM at the corporate [DFID] level" (p. 10), and the [DFID] "Investment Committee" will "Advise the Management Board/Ministers on: 1. strategic investment choices; 2. resource allocation priorities; and 3. whether our mix of investments is aligned with our strategic vision" (p. 10).

The vocabulary, albeit very explicit on the notion of transparency, is sufficiently blurred on the returns on investment (to the UK? to the poor in the world?) to soothe both the money-conscious taxpayer and the philanthropist. In these documents, the poor seem to have disappeared altogether from the discourse; they are subordinate categories in the vocabulary, for which decisions are taken by "experts:" "we all [presumably DFID experts] need to show diligence in what we decide to do and how we implement (knowing what works and being sure that we are delivering development results in the most effective and efficient way.)" (p. 12). Of course, since DFID experts may know what works and are increasingly sure that the delivery of development is effective and efficient, little remains to be done by the poor, except having faith in the Secretary of State for International Development's Christmas 2010 message to them, that they represent an acceptable investment for the British taxpayers' money.

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**Whose Development Results Count?****Fred Carden (1)****International Development Research Centre, Ottawa**Email: [fcarden@idrc.ca](mailto:fcarden@idrc.ca)**Keywords:** aid effectiveness; values; development evaluation; inequity.

**Summary:** The unit of analysis in development programming should not be the aid program or aid effectiveness, but development itself, that is improving the lives of all people in a society and doing so in as equitable a manner as possible. To do this, we must learn and track the values and socio-political interests of both those who make decisions and those who live with the consequences of decisions taken.

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*"It is not about your project; it is about my country".(2)*

This comment was made by a Mauritanian evaluator in response to a vigorous methodological debate between two expert evaluators who were exploring what methods should be used to evaluate development programming.

What the quote points out is that we often ignore the fundamental questions around,

- Whose development and whose results matter?
- Whose values are important?
- How do we define progress?

My position is that development results are not about the project or program being implemented (the aid agenda) but about the change that is taking place on the ground. The unit of analysis should not be the aid program or aid effectiveness, but development that is improving the lives of all people in a society and doing so in as equitable a manner as possible. This is a fundamental challenge to the aid effectiveness agenda which tends to

focus on the direct connections between an aid package and improvements in a particular country.

All social science, including evaluation, is conducted in contested environments where the science must dance with the values and politics of those who use the science. The science must contend with human volition and decision processes with all their uncertainties and indecision. What is most important here is to be clear on whose values and beliefs are included and whose are excluded.

Building this shift calls for changes in how we think about methods for measuring development results. To get to this, we need to **rethink** evaluation for development to shift our focus and priority away from the project or program and its funding to development effects on the ground. The political agenda has already moved here with the Paris Declaration. Practice is lagging. We need to **reshape** evaluation to take the local setting not the project or program as its unit of analysis. And we need to **reform** development and evaluation practice to directly address the asymmetries and inequities in North-South dialogue.(3)

These changes require strong leadership, both at the top and in the evaluation community. But we can never forget that method alone does not protect knowledge claims. We must learn and track the values and socio-political interests of those who make decisions and those who live with the consequences of decisions taken. Evaluation should contribute to change. So it is not only about project evaluation or even program evaluation, but about development evaluation. To reiterate the quote I started with, we must never forget that, "*it is not about your project; it is about my country*".

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1. The views expressed are those of the author. The paper draws on a longer working paper, *Development is not an Intervention*.
  2. Oumoul Ba Tall, speaking at the European Evaluation Society, October 2009.
  3. Here I am drawing heavily on a collaborative paper, prepared by Bonbright et al.
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## Securing Value for Money: A Results Focus for Danish Development Aid?

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**Keywords:** New development agenda; NPM; sector budget support; Value for Money.

**Summary:** It is suggested that the new public management (NPM) in aid administrations introduced a goals / performance framework, with an emphasis on short-term results, that lead to the Value for Money concept; the consequence is that donors increasingly decide what should be supported and challenge the principles of the Paris Declaration and the AAA.

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In 2001, DFID, the British aid agency, formally untied all development assistance with the justification that “tied aid reduces Value for Money”. Since then, the concept of Value for Money (VfM) has appeared with increasing frequency in the aid vocabulary. The concept now tends to become a high-level goal for development assistance despite the lack of an authoritative definition established in practice. In Denmark, the term has not yet been used explicitly as an instrument in the overall aid management, presently under revision after the change of government in 2011. But it is an underlying principle for the present results-oriented aid management, and the term is used in many aspects from project and programme planning to so-called value-for-money audits for project reviews, aiming at keeping administrative processes lean and efficient under the overriding concept of aid effectiveness and the monitoring of results.

There may be at least four reasons why VfM has come into vogue in relation to the changing landscape of development: (i) the trend towards general sector budget support; (ii) the focus on a rights-based approach to development; (iii) interaction of military (CIMIC-operations) and humanitarian aid in the coherence agenda in fragile and conflict-affected states; and (iv) the evolvement of humanitarian assistance towards cash grants instead of food. In contrast to traditional support to sectors, such as education and infrastructure, they are all aid modalities where the outcome and the impact are difficult to evaluate as tangible results. To some extent, the VfM concept builds on the principles of new public management (NPM), the management philosophy used by governments since the 1980s to modernise the public sector. It has paved the way for VfM with its emphasis on goals and performance. The main hypothesis for NPM is that more market orientation in the public sector will lead to greater cost efficiency (or Value for Money) for governments, without any negative side effects on other objectives and considerations. But NPM also tends to have a short-term perspective with annual audits of goals and performance at a time when private companies move from year-end budgeting to a more flexible rolling 12-month business plan based on long-term visions and perspectives. The long-term perspective of development aid, exemplified in objective-based planning instruments such as the logical framework approach (LFA), does not lend itself too easily to short-term, value-for-money considerations.

With increased sector budget support (SBS), the recipient administrations will be evaluated on the same criteria as donating governments, that is, democratic accountability depending on limiting corruption, waste and incompetence, which are held to go with it. There are signs, however, that some donors are reconsidering their support to SBS. As an example, Gunilla Carlsson, the Swedish Minister for Development, has announced in a radio-interview that Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, will cease to provide SBS. The minister, known for her criticism of 'talk-aid' (less talk and more action), has called for a new approach to aid, not in dialogue, not with travel, conferences and talk, but with action, which will produce practical results from aid, in other words Value for Money ([www.U-landsnyt.dk](http://www.U-landsnyt.dk), author's translation - 12.02.12). The tax payers have in her opinion and others' a legitimate claim to know how aid money is spent. This has always been the case, but the slow-down of the economy in the Northern hemisphere, where development funds are coming under pressure, challenges the notion of the recipient setting the agenda and controlling the flow of money. This is aid in a time of crisis when 'boomerang aid' is diverting aid to companies in rich countries, challenging the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, although the latter agreement is more about including the private sector in development than increasing the focus on poverty alleviation.

There are still few guidelines for the application of the VfM perspective, such as in the planning of business linkages models in private sector support programmes. The impact of such programmes is normally measured in terms of job creation or income which are difficult to measure because the provision of funding in itself does not generate economic growth and employment. The situation becomes even more difficult if the effect on import substitution, increased self-confidence due to education and training is measured in monetary values. Caution should be exercised to apply VfM as a general principle without considering the methodological constraints and the lack of reliable data.

In conclusion, in times of austerity, the general public, feeling the effects of shrinking government budgets, challenge how tax payers' money is spent, and development aid is not exempt from this scrutiny. At the same time, the development agenda is changing, and although the majority of aid is still channelled to traditional recipients, aid has become more political and used more often than before in the donors' own interest. The agenda also focuses on new areas which are difficult to quantify despite the tradition for emphasis on results and performance in the usual planning tools, such as LFA. There is still a lack of experience and guidelines on how to apply the VfM concept, especially how to measure the impact in monetary terms in areas where there is no direct causality between input and outcomes. Real Value for Money will only be achieved if aid is used as a catalyst for regional and local business development and job creation for the high number of youth entering the labour market each year, holding the key to real development on the basis of trust and co-operation in a learning-oriented environment. This may require deep reforms of government processes and institutional cultures that go beyond aid management but which are still based on accountability to taxpayers as well as beneficiaries.

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## Does Value for Money have a Place in Capacity Development for Education?

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**Keywords:** Value for Money; capacity development; education

**Summary:** Value for Money is a good principle as long as it is not looked upon in a mere economic way. Social and long term benefits – although more difficult to measure – are also important values that you can account for.

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Value for Money has recently been gaining importance in the strategy of the Official Belgian Development Cooperation. This is primarily done through efforts that apply results-based management into practice. In 2009, Belgian NGOs and the Minister for Development Cooperation reached an agreement about improving aid efficiency. The indirect actors of the Belgian Development Cooperation have sought to embrace results-based management and are now reporting regularly on their results. Efficiency has become an important criterion in evaluating requests for co-funding of projects and programmes. Reporting on outputs, outcomes, indicators, results and impact is increasingly inherent to their activities. This trend is reflected in the first 2010 NGO annual reports, which took a more systematic approach when outlining the results achieved (Belgian Development Cooperation, 2010: 20).

In this article, VVOB shares some critical reflections on the Value for Money principle and some advantages/disadvantages of its utilization in the context of capacity development for education. VVOB is the Flemish Organisation for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance. Commissioned by the Belgian and Flemish governments, VVOB contributes to the quality of education in the South; its core business is to provide technical assistance in educational programmes. In this way, VVOB supports local capacity development as a means to stimulate sustainable development and poverty reduction.

VVOB recognizes that Value for Money as such is a justifiable principle. It's about being clear what outputs and outcomes we can expect from our interventions, and how to maximize these impacts to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized. We work on strengthening our monitoring and evaluation processes by using logical frameworks and thorough thinking about results, impact, outcomes and effectiveness of our programmes.

Although Value for Money is a sound notion in terms of accountability and the maximizing of impact, as an educational capacity development organization we don't embrace it without question. According to one of its strongest advocates, DFID, Value for Money is "about maximizing the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people's lives" (DFID, 2011: 2). This gives a strong impression that impact is all about measuring quantitative results, preferably in the short and middle-long term. Detailed statistics may indeed work very well for pure service delivery programmes, but they're not always suited for programmes

focusing on capacity development. For example, VVOB is committed to certain organisational objectives such as lowering the drop-out of children in primary education, better alignment of education and the labour market, and improving learning outcomes at the end of basic education. When there is a need for well-trained teachers for instance, VVOB would strengthen the capacity of teacher colleges to deliver their own appropriately trained teachers. Apart from this, VVOB also supports effective teacher management at all levels to ensure good teacher education. This is achieved through professional and motivating school management, empowering ministries of education to strengthen systems of training and the recruitment and deployment of teachers. From this viewpoint, strengthening capacity to reach long-term sustainability, we have noted the following: (1) not all the richness of what is being achieved by capacity development for education can be grasped in numbers and figures (2) results of capacity development often become visible only in the long term. This is not a plea against quantitative measured results, but an assertion that there is *also* a need to introduce more narrative methods for capturing capacity development. This is said with respect to the complex and often long-term impact of capacity development in the education sector.

A second critical reflection is about the concern that Value for Money will serve as a powerful rationale for donors to award financial resources to programmes and projects. Such an approach can be in contradiction with principles of equity. Will receivers not be strongly inclined to choose the cheapest option? Will we start to focus on those just below the poverty line, and living preferably in areas that are easy (and cheap) to travel to? Or will we also invest in for example TVET-courses especially targeted at the people from poor socio-economic backgrounds and rural areas? These people have weak literacy and numeracy skills and are more difficult to reach. Success is also far from guaranteed. This example shows that a rigid approach of Value for Money may widen the gap between haves and have not's. Therefore, we need to be careful that Value for Money is not leading to incentives to give priority to the inexpensive and simple interventions. Value for Money may also exclude the possibility to elaborate projects with uncertain results. So we argue that there is a need to maintain space for experiments.

The third critical reflection concerns the North. DFID's assertion (above) about using each pound in the best way to improve people's lives, also carries the risk of contributing to oversimplified and stereotyped images of development cooperation in the public opinion. Building a new campus or fulfilling the needs of school material for a smiling child is far more visible and an easier way to raise funds than saying that you work on the capacity building of a teacher college. We worry about the fact that Value for Money may collect support over other initiatives that use the simple "moral impulse" of solidarity, instead of those who keep showing the complexity of development cooperation (especially in education matters).

In conclusion, Value for Money is a good principle as long as it is not looked upon in merely an economic perspective. Although more difficult to measure, social and long term benefits are important values that you can also account for.

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## Obtaining more Value for Money in Educational Development Projects through the Use of Assessed and Contractually Binding Indicators Relating to Skills Transfer

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**Keywords:** Skills sharing; project indicators; aid effectiveness; sustainability; education and training projects.

**Summary:** This piece re-visits issues relating to the effectiveness and Value for Money of technical assistance projects in cases where, for long-term sustainability, significant development of the cognitive and affective behavioural characteristics of the recipient agents of change is essential. In many development projects we often assume that the knowledge, understanding and skills required to manage in the post-project environment will be transferred through a relatively passive engagement with the 'experts' while they work. As education practitioners we know that this is not the case but as project designers and managers we often forget this fact. The article looks at tightening up the skills sharing process through the use of capacity-building indicators at the project output level, and discusses the importance of contractual commitment from both sides to ensure better aid effectiveness.

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This article should be anachronistic and the issues it raises should, as a matter of common practice, be addressed by project designers and practitioners. Sadly it is still relevant and harks back to the very early days of development assistance where the aid provided did not match the recipient agency's capacity to utilise it.

It seems that when it comes to international development projects, and particularly education-related projects, personnel on both sides often become very sloppy and ignore the critical sustainability elements which depend on human capital development. There is an assumption that everyone knows what is needed, is committed to the task and has a clear vision of the goal. Sadly, and in so many cases, that vision is only held by the delivery-side personnel.

There are thousands of technical assistance projects ongoing around the world but it is almost certainly safe to say that the majority of them do not have assessed indicators or contract clauses which oblige both the provider and the receiver of the assistance to adequately demonstrate that the capacity of the recipient agency has been built to a level which will ensure sustainability. The result is that in many development activities do not result in a sustainable resource which can be confidently developed in the future. At worst, the whole enterprise simply decays without trace after a year or two.

Taking education and training projects as examples, the tangible outputs of such projects are often things like new curricula, better trained teachers or better equipped training institutes

etc., and it is often assumed that through the process of producing those outputs the local delivery agencies will become sufficiently adept at maintaining them in the future. However, in order to garner real and lasting Value for Money much more emphasis needs to be placed on the human resource development of the agency itself.

Luckily, and from the domains of project design, business management and educational assessment, we have all the tools at hand to address this issue.

Critically we have the logical design and monitoring framework, but unfortunately this marvellous tool is usually better understood by the project designers than by the project recipients, and its importance is often ignored by both as soon as the project begins. Ideally, all of the key recipient agency project personnel ought to be trained in how to create and read a logical framework, and should engage, along with other stakeholders, in the process of specifying the final project outputs, output indicators and activities. In addition, and at the logical framework finalisation stages, extra outputs and indicators relating to training and assessing the performance of the key, recipient agency staff who will continue to do similar work after the project period, ought to be included.

The parallel here, from the world of education, is formative and summative assessment where the learning outcome is captured as an indicator statement related to staff development, stated in the logical framework. The objective is to train the recipients of technical assistance in a more active, job-related, objective and assessed manner, and so encourage more active participation in the project activities and a deeper understanding of new knowledge, skills and concepts.

By including such indicators and effective means of assessing them in the project design, the implementation agency on the delivery side is then bound, contractually, to address them, and the personnel on the receiving side are more likely to actively engage in learning and retaining new skills. It opens the door for the inclusion of more formalised capacity-building training, allows the project activities to be written into personal performance targets which are subjected to staff review procedures, and it stresses the importance of aid effectiveness from the point of view of sustainability and more lasting Value for Money.

Among others, there are three major problems related to capacity building in many development projects in developing countries. They apply, particularly, to government agencies and make it extremely difficult to adopt the indicator-driven capacity development discussed above. The first relates to the frequency of staff turnover whereby project personnel are moved to other projects and/or departments before current project completion. The second relates to the appointment of personnel who are not trained or experienced in the specific areas the project is addressing, and the third relates to the slow development, or absence, of a core of sector expertise in many bureaucracies.

Given the serious and negative impact the three problems stated above has on aid effectiveness, it would seem reasonable to address them before any commitment to a project is made. All are potentially 'killer risks' and should not be listed as 'assumptions' when design and monitoring frameworks are developed. If contractual agreement for the long-term establishment of a dedicated, initially trained and long-term project team which will transfer the project to a permanent sector cannot be reached, the rationale for the project is likely to be questionable. If implemented, such a project is not likely to meet its goal and the money will largely be wasted.

## **A Results-Based Replenishment of the Fast Track Initiative - Now the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)**

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**Keywords:** FTI; GPE; global partnership; quality education.

**Summary:** The Global Partnership for Education successfully launched a worldwide campaign to reinvigorate political and financial support for the education sector and achieve concrete results in efforts to get all children into school for a quality education.

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Since its launch in 2002, the Global Partnership for Education has become an international partnership with 46 developing country partners that have achieved significant results in improving education for all children, successfully enrolling 23 million more children - 54% of them girls - in primary schools between 2002 and 2009.

But with at least 67 million children still currently unable to attend school, much remains to be accomplished. To that end, the Global Partnership recently launched its multi-year Replenishment during its first ever Pledging Conference on 8 November 2011 in Copenhagen, Denmark, where representatives from 52 countries across the globe gathered together and collectively committed \$1.5 billion in contributions to the GPE Fund, a \$2.5 billion increase in domestic spending on education, increasing bilateral contributions to basic education and an investment of over \$2 billion in organizational resources to expand activities in universal quality basic education programs. Driven by a policy platform committed to improving the quality of education for all children, the Replenishment is not, however, simply a matter of funding for the Partnership Fund; our goal is to reinvigorate support for the education sector overall and achieve targeted results in our efforts to get all kids in school for a quality education. To this end, the Global Partnership intends to achieve results in basic education by undertaking the following:

1. Reduce the number of children who cannot read by 50 percent in 20 countries in 5 years.
2. Ensure that countries develop strong education strategies through collaborative support by the government, local donors and civil society. These strategies will include clear targets that are defined at the country level which will help to demonstrate the additionality of Global Partnership funds. In addition, the GPE Secretariat will produce an annual report that analyzes the results achieved by developing country partners against the initial targets, which will be complemented by independent impact evaluations at the country level.
3. Help all developing country partners to assess reading outcomes regularly, ensure that such assessments will be within the financing constraints of government

budgets and help develop low-cost, high-quality assessment protocols that do not rely on expensive external validation and analysis.

4. Conduct an analysis of learning to develop metrics and a conversation around the most effective and efficient ways to increase the linkages between financial support and learning outcomes, an area where linkages have in the past been far too loose.
5. Reduce the number of out-of-school children by 25 million in 5 years. Given the infrastructure implications, a Value for Money lens will be applied to construction policies. We anticipate that this will result in support for more locally-driven, community engagement in construction processes, and the Secretariat will engage in dialogue with all partners achieving results for available financing.
6. Help developing country partners to identify the textbook procurement processes that will improve the availability of reading books and textbooks in the countries.
7. Develop guidelines to improve service-delivery level in the schools in order to maximize impact.

The Pledging Conference was a pivotal moment for the global effort to assure a quality education for all children. But this is not the end; what comes next is even more important. It is now up to us to make sure that the momentum from Copenhagen continues. With this in mind, it is important that the Partnership truly fulfills its role as a partnership and engages all members of the international community in improving education for all children worldwide.

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## **EC Grant Support to Education in Partner Countries Viewed from a VfM Perspective: Some Insights from a Recent Evaluation (1)**

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**Keywords:** basic education; secondary education; effectiveness; budget support; access and quality.

**Summary:** A global evaluation of EC support to basic and secondary education revealed a huge amount of support to basic and secondary education with budget support to be the dominant modality for EC direct and indirect support. Like in VfM, release of grant funds is performance based and depends on compliance to triggers (policy and system reform requirements) and meeting indicator targets. While there is much evidence of the effectiveness of support related to access, this is not matched with achieving quality related performance objectives. This balance is stressed in VfM and the EC evaluation methodology may further measure this balance as part of aid effectiveness.

The evaluation assessed to what extent the Commission assistance to basic and secondary education has been relevant, efficient, effective and sustainable in providing the expected impact in the education sector.

Over the period 2000-2007, the EC contracted an amount of €2.8 billion to the education sector of which €2.1 billion was disbursed. Of this overall total, 69% of the contracted amounts was allocated to basic and secondary education. The highest share of direct support is through Sector Budget Support (€1,027 million). The lowest to individual projects (€419 million). Apart from direct education sector support, a substantial part of General Budget Support (GBS) provided can be considered as indirect support to the education sector. Over 2000-2007 a total of around €4 billion was transferred to national treasuries under GBS operations. Around €3.2 billion had compliance indicators which, among other areas, related to the education sector. It is impossible to make an assumption as to the share of this GBS allocated to the education sector.

While both direct and indirect support to education has increased over time, the relative share of EC direct support has decreased when compared to other sectors.

What is the use of this huge amount of EC aid money from a VfM perspective? What are the results?

Growing pressures on public resources within donor countries plus the more stringent conditions for the provision of aid have contributed to stressing VfM and accountability and transparency as key issues in donor support.

The emphasis in EC support in line with VfM is measurable performance based on a contract guided by Financing Agreements (FAs), monitored by a Performance Assessment Framework stipulating performance objectives, policy reform measures required (triggers) and performance indicators; which are being monitored by compliance missions as a basis for releasing part of the overall grant on an annual basis.

Applying a wide range of data-collection methods, the evaluation accommodated 9 evaluation questions (EQs) based on judgment criteria and substantiated by a number of indicators leading to the following key results:

- EC support is highly relevant and aligned with national priorities and policies and increasingly harmonised with other donors.
- Support helped countries in progressing towards UPE and in improving access and completion rates.
- The main focus of support is to primary education, but to secondary education in medium human development countries. There is also focus on secondary school construction/rehabilitation in fragile states and conflict and post-emergency situations.
- Education quality is in crisis and needs further support focus and this is reflected in alarming literacy and numeracy acquisition levels.
- Support through new modalities assisted in improving effective service delivery, especially when reform efforts were integrated into a wider governance agenda.
- Increasing transparency and accountability of education sector service delivery remains a challenge for EC support.

- The aid modality mostly selected by the EC is SBS or GBS, but this engagement approach needs to be well structured in a fragile context and where governance quality is eroded.

These results are substantiated and disaggregated by region and by aid modality and can be seen as impressive.

When interpreting these results from a VfM perspective, EC support should achieve the right balance between economy, efficiency and effectiveness encompassing issues of quality and service improvement.

The weakness of the EC evaluation methodology applied is the lack of such balance impinging on validity of the outcomes as far as VfM is concerned. What is the value of increased access if and when it is not matched with improved quality?

Substantial achievements have been made in accommodating gaps in access related issues. Analysis shows that the interface between access and quality is complex; increased enrolment leads to further crowding of already overcrowded classrooms or needs to be matched with school/classroom construction, which then requires recruitment and training of new teachers, further burdening the recurrent cost budget.

According to data examined in the evaluation, the mastery level in most countries is alarmingly low, revealing a serious quality crisis with no improvements found between 2000 and 2007. However, good quality is essential if investments in education are to yield a high rate of return in terms of poverty reduction and sustainable economic and social development. In many countries, especially in LDCs and fragile states, basic education systems are 'wastage systems' characterized by low internal efficiency. This low efficiency is based on a low cohort survival as indicated by low completion rates and relatively high drop out rates. Absolute learning levels are so low in many developing countries that millions of children complete primary schools without acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Without even further increasing support to education, especially to LDCs in Sub-Saharan Africa, EC support to access has left little room to impact on improved quality of learning and teaching. The support provided has often assisted governments to meet bare necessities of education system survival, including recurrent budget financing of teacher salaries.

The most serious obstacle to effective monitoring of progress towards MDG targets is the shortage of up-to-date statistics; identification of the best performance indicators is essential to ensure that there is a sound basis for using them for disbursement purposes; population censuses are often outdated and incomplete yet are still the main basis for population projections; as enrolment rates affect financial allocations, reliability issues are vital as enrolment figures may be inflated in order to obtain further funding ("targetism").

Scores on learning assessments and final examinations are the only valid quality related outcome indicators. They are, however, rarely applied for monitoring purposes but start to be used as indicators for flexible tranche release.

EC support to the education sector, though not focusing its performance assessment on the balance between enhancing access and quality, is strongly based on government ownership of reform.

EC indicators (like other agency indicators) are based on assumptions that they are measuring outcomes pursued and levered by EC budgetary support. The short-term relationship between budget support and these outcomes (including process and systemic ones) is questionable as they are depending on many contextual variables such as the influence of poverty on access and retention through opportunity costs of schooling to ultra poor families. The type of outcome indicators, rather than process ones, fosters “targetism” at all levels rather than approaches enhancing in a structured way performance in complex reform processes. Both partner governments and European Union Delegations may favour quantitative targets in the access domain to complex qualitative and quality ones. Meeting or missing targets provide a diagnosis but in most cases curative approaches are outside EC (or other agency) control (apart from withholding disbursements).

These weaknesses, however, are part of a process of linking government’s freedom and autonomy with regard to their budget to triggers and indicators, which are both useful stimuli (giving directions) and valid external monitoring tools.

Conditionalities and compliance to these are part of a broad discourse and the EC has, by applying flexibility and by giving much more emphasis on quality indicators, taken a strong step in the direction of improved validity and reliability of the monitoring process of release of grant funds. Triggers linked to policy reform are stressing compliance with stimuli for system performance improvement rather than applying control devices only.

The balance between partner country ownership, the need to steer external investments to generate maximum mileage for development, and accountability towards citizens and European taxpayers may determine Value for Money from different perspectives.

#### **Notes**

- (1) From: Thematic Global Evaluation of European Commission support to the education sector in partner countries (including basic and secondary education).

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## **Aid’s Impact on Education Outcomes**

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**Keywords:** capacity development; institutional development

**Summary:** Aid to education and its evaluation needs to be systemic and long-term, and the capacity development that is afforded needs to be nationally managed and coordinated. Sustainable education outcomes will not be achieved merely by reproducing yet more successful, but individual projects. Perversely, development agencies that focus only on demonstrable short-term impact may have the opposite,

long-term impact on the education systems and their deepening development, to whose progress they are trying to contribute.

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The simplicity of the question, “What do we know about what works in foreign aid to education?” unfortunately, is not matched by the simplicity of a list of effective interventions or the simplicity in the way aid to education is provided, though in the old days, this is precisely what was attempted in school effectiveness research: where do you get the most bang for your buck? Over the past two decades, not only have aid agencies become more sophisticated in the aid modalities they use, complicating evaluations of aid’s effectiveness, but they have also focused increasingly on learning, as opposed to educational access. Of course, part of the problem of the focus on access relates to the narrowing down of the Dakar EFA goals into the primary school completion rate, the MDG 2 indicator, which, itself, was an attempt to go beyond merely enrolment statistics to a minimum of five years primary school completion, as an indicator of learning. However, donors’ introduction of learning achievement assessments in their education aid programmes, as a better means of measuring qualitative outcomes, risks repeating the litany of capacity development failures already experienced in aid to education – as well as aid programmes, more generally. Notwithstanding all the talk of recipient-led capacity development, the business of providing consultants to ‘train’ Ministry staff – and the willingness of Ministries to accept ‘capacity development projects’ has hardly changed over the years. Neither have the evaluations of capacity development, focusing on numbers ‘trained’, sessions given, ‘satisfaction’ of ‘clients’, etc. Meanwhile, if the learning achievement study results are released to the public – which, often, they are not, because of politicians’ embarrassment due to the low scores – the *use* of such studies – and the capacities behind them – are rarely applied to policy analysis and policy making. The ‘product’ – the training, the survey, the results – trumps the process and the institutional development, which could lead not only to the sustainability of the competencies – and ideally, retain them in-house – but their widespread *use* beyond the planning departments which may or may not communicate well with the technical directorates tasked with chalkface improvements.

And in the search for ‘what works’, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) have become the new school effectiveness research of yore, so that development agencies can point to impact and scale up such pilots, based on evidence. But the evidence that is lacking is the approach to integrating such successful, individual interventions in the essential institutional and organizational capacity development of the ministries to utilize research and their own databases from their EMIS for policy analysis feeding policy making.

Capacity development failures have continued to be manifested in projects as well as in SWAps, in pooled funds and in budget support programmes. They could be seen as the beam in the donors’ eyes as they point out the mote in recipient governments’.

Against this complex backdrop, most aid agencies take the “easy” route in providing an account to the public at home of the results of their interventions in the education field - by focusing mostly on reporting on the “numbers assisted” rather than educating the public, on whose votes they rely, and deepening public awareness of the complicated nature of development effectiveness (and only one of its constituents, aid effectiveness). In some cases, they go even further, claiming in their “simple sound-bites” achievements for which the evidence is wanting. For instance, the largest multi-donor funded education programme, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE, formerly known as the Fast-Track Initiative or FTI)



claims that “countries receiving support from the GPE perform better in all basic education indicators than countries receiving no Partnership support” implying that ‘their’ foreign aid has ‘worked’. (1) However, having reviewed the best available evidence, the Preliminary Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (Cambridge Education, Mokoro Ltd. and Oxford Policy Management 2009), was only able to conclude that there is “no robust evidence that FTI-endorsed countries have systematically outperformed un-endorsed ones.” (2)

Grindle (2010) and Booth (2011) have both written incisively about policy coherence and institutional development. The strong implication is clear: for aid to education to have a sustainable impact on educational systems, approaches are needed which focus beyond the short-term and beyond particular or specific interventions. They need to be much longer term, and with much greater attention paid to the educational system as a whole, including the institutions, organisational practices and incentives, with sufficient understanding of the political, economic and social context which underpins it and with which it has a critically important interface. In short, if aid to education is to “work”, what is needed is something quite different from the typical ‘aid project’, and the increasing focus of development agencies on impact is likely to obscure the lessons that have so clearly emerged from decades of experience.

Students aren’t dying due to the ineffectiveness of education aid, but many are still not learning or not learning enough. Aid to education and its evaluation needs to be systemic and long-term, and the capacity development that is afforded needs to be nationally managed and coordinated. Sustainable education outcomes will not be achieved merely by reproducing yet more successful, but individual projects. Perversely, development agencies that focus only on demonstrable short-term impact may have the opposite, long-term impact on the education systems and their deepening development, to whose progress they are trying to contribute.

#### Notes

- (1) <http://www.globalpartnership.org/results/comparative-performance-data-gpe-vs-non-gpe-countries/> (accessed 3 January 2012) Five indicators were used: 1) Total enrolment; 2) Primary school completion rate; 3) Gender parity in primary completion; 4) Percentage of repeaters; and 5) Percentage of total government expenditure devoted to education.
- (2) The Report continues: “These findings are not surprising, given the short data series available, the likelihood of selection biases, the complexity of underlying processes and the heterogeneity of countries within each group. The only safe conclusion is that the mid-term evaluation cannot rely on global comparisons of this sort, and will need to base its findings on careful country case studies.”

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## **Financing Corruption? Aid Money and Teachers' Practices in Cambodia**

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**Keywords:** Cambodia; teacher; corruption; aid money

**Summary:** This article illustrates how corruption is widespread in the education sector in Cambodia. It particularly explores and explains how aid money could become an instrument inducing or facilitating teachers' corrupted and unethical practices.

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Cambodia is notorious for widespread corruption practices. The 2011 Corruption Perception Index, which measures the perceived levels of public-sector corruption in 183 countries, ranks Cambodia as 164th in the order of increasing levels of corruption. (Transparency International, 2011). Not only high-level officials but also ordinary lower-level officials are involved in corruption in Cambodia. Therefore, many Cambodian people are accustomed to the notion that bribery is a necessary part of their everyday life, in order to receive even the most basic, ordinary, public services. Indeed, a respectable national survey of 2000 households about corruption revealed that 1.4% of the Cambodian household expenditure was used to pay bribes (Nissen, 2005).

Education, in particular, is seen as one of the more highly corrupt public services in Cambodia. The survey found that 33% of the households regarded public schools as a public service in which they would need to pay bribes to get what they wanted, followed by getting public services from the courts (at 100%), police (at 67%), and customs (at 50%). Parents would need to pay off teachers, head masters, and ministry staff for good scores in examinations, good records in attendance, and school admissions and transfers. In some cases, they would need to pay money to avoid unfavorable and rough treatments of their children by teachers.

While corruption in the education sector in Cambodia is commonplace, the public actually feels the most unease about their teachers being a part of the corruption culture. This is partly due to the fact that about half of the total civil servants in the country are school teachers, and partly because teachers are expected to show exemplary behaviours to their students who, after all, are the future of Cambodia. Regrettably, many teachers do not conform to the people's expectations. While many teachers are bribe-takers, they are also

bribers themselves. They would use bribery to get their promotions and favourable assignments, and to obtain other special treatments from their head masters and/or their ministry officials.

Aid money often induces and facilitates such corrupt and unethical practices by teachers. Since the 1990s, aid donors' concerns have been heavily concentrated on teacher training, but the proliferating aid projects were not coordinated by the national or local governments; consequently the control of channelling aid properly became a major issue (Duggan, 1996: 369-370). Under such an uncontrolled scenario, teachers learnt how to manipulate aid money.

Incidences of teachers involving in corrupt and unethical practices related to aid money are many, but the most common ones are in the following examples. Teachers would pay bribes to headmasters for them to be assigned to attend teacher-training workshops financed by aid donors. Although these teachers might not be interested in and their profiles were not relevant to the content of the workshops, they nonetheless could expect higher allowance or travel expenses paid by donors. Teachers would pay bribes to headmasters and ministry officials in order to be assigned as counterparts of donor-assisted projects. In this case they could expect salary supplementation and other allowances paid by donors. Also, teachers would teach students what they learnt in the workshops only in their private supplementary classes, through which they could then collect additional tuition fees from students, apart from their regular classes in school. They would also use teaching materials provided by the workshops only in their private classes. Furthermore, teachers would photocopy and sell exercise books provided by these workshops to students. And, they would even plan and hold unnecessary workshops and meetings financed by donors.

Here in this case of the donor's intended use of funds versus the receiver's misuse or abuse of such, there is revealed two Value for Money systems operating. While a donor's Value for Money system is meant to bring educational benefits to students, however, in reality, because the receiver is part of a fragile institution, this aid transfer generates another unwanted Value for Money system. This unintended system brings undeserved gains to corrupt people, but not to the actual intended beneficiary. It therefore raises the question of knowing what the real effective value of the aid is for the students. In reality, donor agencies may be looked upon as unwittingly financing corruption.

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**Results Based Aid – a New Aid Label or Potential for More Impact****Stephan Klingebiel****German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE),  
Bonn**Email: [stephan.klingebiel@die-gdi.de](mailto:stephan.klingebiel@die-gdi.de)**Keywords:** RBA; results based aid; limitations; misincentives**Summary:** Results based aid aims to identify development outputs or outcomes that can be measured and quantified. Proponents of the concept can point out the potential benefits; although there are a number limitations and disadvantages.

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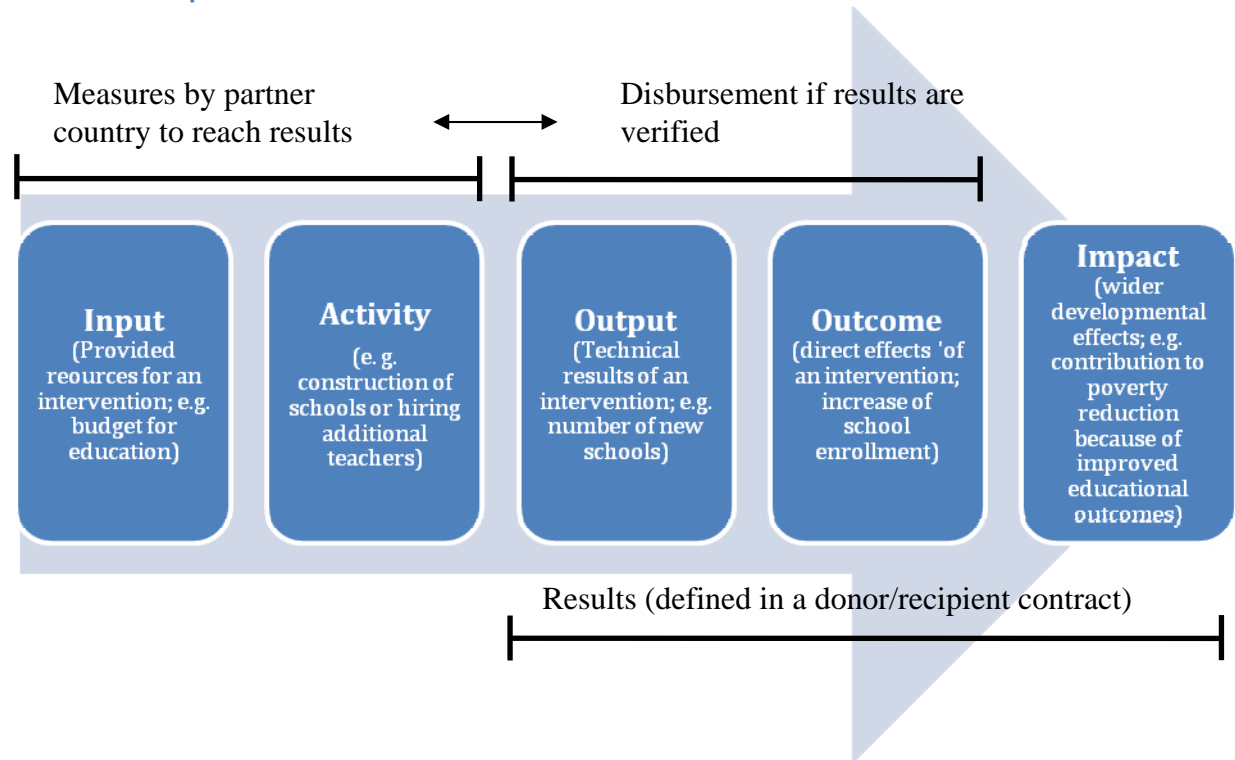
Yes, of course, all aid approaches aim to achieve “results”. There are two aspects to this debate: on the one hand, further improving the effectiveness of development cooperation (aid) is important to the specialists, whereas on the other hand many donors (parliaments, the public etc.) continue to call for the justification of aid expenditures. This creates great pressure to give the most concrete evidence for the utility of aid budgets.

The current international discussion on results based approaches differs from debates so far, in as much as in practice, aid has been frequently inputs and progress oriented. For instance, approaches tend to be geared towards the allocation of funds for investment (e.g. to build schools) or providing advisory services (e.g. to the education sector), with no way of accounting for the success of such aid measures based on verifiable “results” (in the sense of *outputs, outcomes* or even *impact*). Success in aid is instead often recorded based on input or progress indicators, such as whether a country has raised its budget for education, or whether agreed upon reform documents (e.g. a general strategy for the education sector) have been adopted. Such an approach can indicate how the development activities in a partner country can be evaluated, but for two reasons its information value is limited. Firstly, it is not always clear whether the intended results have actually been achieved. For instance, does a greater budget and the advice given really result in more pupils in schools?

What about the quality of their education? Secondly, the question arises: what part has the development aid had in the over-all situation? If results were achieved, is there a cause-and-effect relation to aid activities (attribution challenge)?

Results based aid (RBA) aims to identify outputs or outcomes that can be measured and quantified, i.e. results that can be directly linked to development activities. A contract between the donor and partner country stipulates that for every incremental success a set amount (“reward”) will be paid. So far, there is only limited experience with such approaches in practice. Sometimes they are a refinement of performance based budget supports, but in other cases it has been suggested to incentivise single successes (i.e. pay per pupil finishing school). As attractive as this approach seems, its practical implementation might turn out to be difficult. There is a great risk of creating misincentives, because all the available resources might be focused on achieving just the one goal.

Chart: RBA: Impact Chain



There are mainly four potential risks or limitations associated with RBA:

1. *Misincentives, unintended consequences and non-systemic strategies*: Generally speaking, there is a danger of misincentives; strong focus on a specific outcome might tend to result in non-systemic analysis and strategy. The pressure to achieve certain goals can thus cause the neglect of other priorities in a given sector. Indicators that might not be entirely suitable to this approach, risk the implementation of policies that are too much focussed on quantitative goals. For instance, if just the number of graduating pupils was recorded as the result, that might endanger the quality of education (raising the number of pupils per class etc.). The question also arises, whether processes in the partner country might not be undermined (such as budget priorities by the parliament).

2. *Responsiveness to incentives*: The concept assumes that the partners are open to incentives to perform better. This applies to those partner countries that show a strong performance orientation (good performers), or at least where there are areas of access, such as in specific, viable institutions (“pockets of effectiveness”). In countries with a difficult political environment, other approaches would probably be much more suitable.
3. *Sectors and data*: Results based approaches cannot be implemented equally well in all sectors. Social sectors as well as sectors with infrastructure services that can easily be measured are well qualified. In other sectors it may be harder to measure these results or to come to an agreement on them with the partner countries (such as in the area of good governance). Further, this approach can contribute to creating a strong incentive for the manipulation of data.
4. *Delinking of (some) RBA approaches and the political context / Abandoning political dialogue*: Where RBA approaches involve an automatic mechanism for payment following the achievement of certain goals, difficulties might arise if a development partner were forced to make payment, even if faced with an unfavourable political environment, including massive governance problems (such as serious human rights abuses).

In summary, the debate is conceptually helpful in order to encourage a systematic discussion on results. Generally speaking, proponents can point out the potential benefits, although there are a number of relevant limitations and disadvantages. Practical experience with RBA is still lacking. It is unclear whether the disadvantages outweigh the benefits. Finally, RBA approaches assume a clear performance orientation in the partner countries. This might apply to the reform dynamic countries (good performers), but countries without good governance may be less susceptible to such systems of incentives, and thus other approaches might be more suitable in cases like this.

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# **NGOS AND THE IMPACT AND RESULTS AGENDA**

## NGOs and the Results Agenda: Unrealistic Expectations or a Blessing in Disguise?

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**Keywords:** Value-for-money; International NGOs; Impact evaluation; Results; Effectiveness

**Summary:** The latest wave of enthusiasm for results and “Value for Money” is pushing international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) like Oxfam GB to significantly up their game in both understanding and demonstrating their impact. Whilst this is, in itself, a good thing, it is quite challenging to successfully implement in practice. There is a danger that it could lead to a situation where we are praised and reinforced for doing mediocre and even wrong things really well.

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Whilst the vast majority of the UK’s government departments and state funded programmes are currently scrambling to grapple with unprecedented cuts in public spending, only the overseas aid budget, along with that of the National Health Service (NHS), have been spared. This has – not surprisingly – come at a cost. Now there is unrelenting pressure to demonstrate that each and every penny spent on overseas aid delivers “Value for Money”. From one perspective, this sounds reasonable enough. Of course, the ordinary taxpayer should expect that government expenditure, regardless of the area of spend, brings about beneficial results with minimal, if any, wastage.

The problem, then, really has nothing to do with the concepts associated with demonstrating results or even “Value for Money” in all its ambiguity. Rather, the challenge is how to operationalise them in practice, particularly in a way that is credible, honest, and do-able.

We, as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), can of course do a lot on the efficiency side of things. We can, for instance, make sure we have in place state of the art systems and procedures to drive costs down and minimise leakage. But if the money is not spent on the right things in the first place, whatever savings are brought about, even through the most efficient cost saving mechanisms, won’t matter much. A prerequisite, then, for Value for Money is doing the right thing. And doing the right thing, even if done inefficiently, is infinitely more valuable than doing the wrong thing in the most efficient way possible.

What does it mean to do the “right” thing? This, of course, depends on one’s perspective. For the vast majority of INGOs, however, this boils down to doing something meaningful that has a real impact – makes the world a better place than would have otherwise been the case.



But how do we know that our actions will bring, are bringing, or even have brought about meaningful change? The answer to this question is much easier when pursuing evidence-based interventions. These are interventions that have been shown through the undertaking of quite rigorous, scientific methods to bring about positive results. Examples include distributing insecticide treated nets for malaria prevention, de-worming of children, and male circumcision to reduce the spread of HIV.

So one way for INGOs can demonstrate Value for Money is to focus on evidence-based interventions, whilst ensuring that their delivery is as cost-efficient as possible. The drawback, however, is that the evidence-base on what works and what doesn't is widely acknowledged in the international sector as being seriously deficient. Not only would we find ourselves fulfilling the role the state should ideally be playing but also the number of interventions open to us would be very limited. Most INGOs, furthermore, attempt to address problems that are context-specific, emerging from participatory processes with project stakeholders. Here, working to develop and test scalable models is not the objective.

So where there is no evidence-base, how can we be sure that what we will do, are doing, or have done will bring about meaningful change? In pursuing any new, untested programme or specific intervention, it is recognised good practice to first do one's homework. This can take the form of a needs assessment, problem analysis, participatory planning exercise, power analysis, and/or feasibility study. We could even do something what economists call ex-ante impact evaluations. Here, attempts are made to forecast how much impact a number of alternative interventions are likely to have, with the hopes of identifying the one that will have the greatest bang for each pound spent.

However, most of our interventions are implemented in uncertain and complex contexts. Consequently, no matter how much we invest in such processes, the resulting design will not necessarily be an infallible blueprint for impact success. Our only real hope of knowing – with a reasonable degree of certainty – whether we have made a difference is through the undertaking of methodologically appropriate and sufficiently rigorous ex post impact evaluations. However, as I have mentioned elsewhere (Hughes and Hutchings, 2011) most INGOs are simply not set up to pursue rigorous impact evaluation designs as part of their regular practice. Historical investment in this area has been weak.

From one perspective, then, the seemingly unprecedented pressure to demonstrate results and Value for Money is a blessing in disguise, particularly for those of us who are passionate about impact evaluation. It is driving the people that run our organisations to take "proper" evaluation more seriously – not simply something that would be nice to have. It will hopefully also lead to more innovation within the INGO community on how we can get sufficiently reliable feedback on our effectiveness, without necessarily having to carry out academically purist impact evaluation studies that can cost hundreds of thousands of pounds. Indeed, we impact evaluation enthusiasts at Oxfam GB are exploiting this latest wave of enthusiasm for results, evidence, and even "Value for Money" for all its worth.

However, many of us are also wary about how all of this is actually going to play out. Properly understanding and demonstrating impact, as already mentioned, is challenging at the very best of times. It is all too easy, then, for the donors and even ourselves to focus on the efficiency – as opposed to effectiveness – dimension of Value for Money. We could potentially find ourselves in a scenario where we become overly fixated on the costs of our

inputs and outputs, given that this forms the basis on which our performance becomes judged. There is a real danger, then, that we get praised and reinforced for doing the mediocre and even the wrong really well, at the expense of catalyzing truly transformative social change.

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## Community Self-Help in the Face of the Measurement Challenge: The value of food-for-learning

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**Keywords:** Non-formal education; Self-help; Food provision

**Summary:** This article discusses the impact of providing food as part of non-formal education programmes. It has been observed in semi-arid areas in Kenya that food provision at the grassroots has applied for emergency drought relief and “food for work”, has been extended to non-formal education. Thus, the situation has created the expectation of food in return for participation in non-formal education, which may negatively influence choices for learning opportunities on the ground, and will disrupt people’s consciousness on self-help efforts.

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I have been working for community based and participatory social development projects in education, health and environment in marginalised semi-arid areas in Kenya since 1995. This paper will discuss the role of food provision in influencing the value of non-formal education in participatory projects through my experiences in the projects as well as my observations of parallel projects by other stakeholders.

In marginalised areas in Kenya, ensuring that people have access to comprehensive, quality and updated information on health is important for securing their and their children’s survival. For example, knowledge of HIV infection mechanisms, modes of transmission, and measures of prevention are important for the prevention of infection in daily life in a high HIV prevalence community.

In this regard, CanDo has dispatched health experts to each village and conducted non-formal education at the grassroots since 2004. For example, AIDS learning workshops explain basic and comprehensive scientific knowledge and possible home based care and access to treatment on HIV/AIDS, and analyse (in a participatory manner) the social impact of AIDS on the local community.

Since we started our project in the late 1990's, food distribution in the name of emergency drought relief by the government, bilateral aid agencies and NGOs has been common in our project area. "Food for work" projects conducted by them are also common (e.g civil works such as rural road construction and renovation, digging dams for water reserve, trench excavation for prevention of soil erosion, and so on). Thus the notion among the people had been formed that communal work should be compensated by food.

In the late 2000's, we noticed some NGOs were utilising food provision for people's learning occasions. For example, an NGO organised health education workshops for people at villages and provided food at the end of the workshops. Hence, the NGO could attain a good level of participation in these workshops. On the other hand, our workshops have experienced persistent food demand, and lower turn-up or refusal of participation from the people.

"Workshop mean money." When we failed to conduct AIDS Learning Workshop at a village in our new project site due to no attendance in February 2012, the explanation was given by a local leader why the people had not participated to our workshop.

Furthermore, when we conducted a feasibility study on our future project in another area in November 2011, a local government officer explained the relationship between people's learning attitude and food provision. "We welcome NGOs, like you, to conduct AIDS education workshop for our community people, because we are not able to gather them for such training due to lack of food to give them."

For years, we have observed in many areas of Kenya that NGOs have provided non-formal education with food provision. The method is able to gather a good number of people and record good performance of attendance. However, the food driven situation makes it difficult for the participants to anticipate the contents of and be ready for learning a topic which may be vitally important for their survival. Furthermore, the food expectation among people may negatively influence their choices for learning opportunities on the ground, which will disrupt people's consciousness on self-help efforts.

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## The Impact Agenda and NGOs: Results for Whom and for What?

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**Keywords:** monitoring and evaluation; results; NGOs; civil society

**Summary:** INTRAC (the International NGO Training and Research Centre) works with hundreds of large and small NGOs and civil society organisations around the world. For twenty years the organisation has trained and advised NGOs on their monitoring and evaluation systems. This article reflects on the changing expectations and demands regarding results which we see emerging amongst civil society organisations.

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In June 2011, over 170 participants from 41 countries came together in the Netherlands for a conference entitled 'Monitoring and Evaluation: New Developments and Challenges' (1). This was the 7<sup>th</sup> such conference that INTRAC had convened on this topic. Monitoring, evaluation, learning, planning and results are by no means new debates within international NGOs and civil society organisations. However, we are observing shifts in how and why organisations capture and demonstrate results, which filter through into the training, consultancy and research work that INTRAC carries out.

There is a huge demand for training and advice on M&E. NGOs – large, small, international and local – as well as donor agencies are increasingly looking for advanced training in monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment which is indicative of the rising demands on organisations to demonstrate that they are making a difference. This goes beyond putting in place good M&E systems in the interests of organisational management. Funders, notably public donors, are becoming more demanding of grant-holders. This includes using more explicit targets and outcome indicators; it also includes having more robust baseline data against which to demonstrate outcomes and results.

We are also seeing trends towards the use of generic frameworks and high level indicators for monitoring results. Self-assessment tools and common frameworks (2) provide core systems which can be adapted for use by different organisations. High level indicators allow data to be aggregated upwards to provide a large organisation working in multiple countries or through multiple partners to provide a synthesis of the impact of work in particular fields. However, they also have their challenges for country offices and local partners, particularly when their work is extremely context-specific.

Another trend we observe is that organisations are experimenting with new methodologies for capturing impact and results, including experimental and quasi-experimental approaches. New partnerships are being formed with academic institutions and impact assessment bodies to design such approaches, but also to explore their value and usefulness. New debates around impact evaluation methodologies are emerging every day. Qualitative methods are being put to the 'rigour' test in new ways which presents a

challenge to the participatory, bottom-up and context-specific approaches which have dominated in recent years (sparking the big ‘push back’ and ‘push forward’). (3)

Organisations which receive large grants from public donors are most affected by demands to demonstrate results in line with universal systems and indicators. Intriguingly, however, the trend goes beyond these publicly-funded bodies. Private foundations and privately-funded organisations (large and very small) – which respond to different constituencies and demands – are also exploring ways of demonstrating how they are making a difference and ensuring that they have professional systems in place to monitor their performance.

Such shifts throw up numerous questions. The most fundamental is around the impetus for evidence-based M&E systems. A key question INTRAC M&E specialists ask is whether organisations are putting in place systems for the benefit of their external donors and stakeholders (of which there may be many, each with different requirements) or for internal learning and development (4). Is M&E a technical issue or part of the organisational culture, something that is done for the benefit of the organisation and more importantly the ultimate beneficiaries whose lives the organisation is seeking to improve? INTRAC is interested not only in questioning whether organisations are achieving results and good outcomes, and whether their systems are sufficiently robust to begin to attempt the complex task of attributing results to interventions; but also in questioning *why* we are doing this and *how* it relates to the mission of the organisation, to the partners that it works with, and ultimately to the people that it is seeking to help. As emerged from the conference in June 2011, too often southern-based organisations feel that results monitoring is an extractive process, designed for upwards accountability, and not designed for downwards accountability to local partners and beneficiaries.

Learning more about the results and impact of development interventions, and enhancing the evidence base from which to design new activities and revise existing ones, is important in the face of a changing international development and aid framework. However, the emphasis needs to be as much – if not more – on the ‘learning’ as on the evidence.

#### Notes

- (1) The conference was jointly organised by INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre), PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia) and PSO (Vereniging voor Personele Samenwerking met Ontwikkelingslanden/Association for Staff Cooperation with Developing Countries). Materials from the conference can be accessed from: <http://www.intrac.org/pages/en/conferences.html>.
  - (2) Examples include BOND’s Improve It Framework (<http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/improveit.html>) and NIDOS’ Effectiveness Tool ([http://www.nidos.org.uk/learning/resources\\_ii.asp?cat2=50](http://www.nidos.org.uk/learning/resources_ii.asp?cat2=50))
  - (3) See; <http://bigpushforward.net/>; <http://bigpushback.wordpress.com/>
  - (4) INTRAC has produced a series of papers on M&E. See: <http://www.intrac.org/pages/en/monitoring-evaluation.html>
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## External Aid Effectiveness: Value for Money and Measurable Results The Case of Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)

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**Keywords:** Aid effectiveness; Value for Money; quantifiable results; measurable results; FAWE

**Summary:** The Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in South Korea in November 2011 generated debates on the question of Value for Money, effectiveness of external aid and measurable results. Indeed international NGOs such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) face demands from donors who are insisting on showing results and being accountable to the funds received. The question is: how FAWE, which focuses on influencing policies in the Ministries of Education, can balance between producing quantifiable results that are easily measured through provision of scholarships, and results which are difficult to measure. In cases of influencing policies, Value for Money and aid effectiveness maybe measured by Governments' commitment to implement gender-responsive activities.

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The Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, which was held in Korea in November 2011, generated debate on the question of Value for Money, effectiveness of external aid and measurable results. At Busan, development leaders reviewed progress in improving the impact and Value for Money of development aid, and made new commitments to further ensure that aid helps reduce poverty and supports progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Delegates at the Busan meeting also broadened the application of the Paris Principles beyond aid to development cooperation and defined how the Paris Principles apply to new actors and contexts, such as emerging donors, fragile states, and the private sector.

One important aspect of the Busan meeting was the inclusion of civil society organisations (CSOs) in formal negotiations. It was significant for CSOs to actively participate at the meeting as they are major development stakeholders. The notion of Value for Money and the question of aid effectiveness remain crucial and a challenge in achieving the MDGs.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), whose mandate is to support African girls and women to acquire education for development, faces demands from donors who are insisting on showing results and being accountable for the funds received. Several donors support FAWE's programmes in 34 National Chapters across the African continent. The demand for results, Value for Money and accountability has led to the development of

indicators with tight measurable results. These results must show the impact of FAWE's interventions. This raises the question: Do FAWE's interventions contribute to reducing gender inequalities in education and thus to poverty reduction?

Indeed, to a certain extent FAWE has shown results in achieving improved access, retention and performance rates of girls in schools through application of its Gender-Responsive Pedagogy approach in schools and teacher training colleges, establishment of gender-responsive schools, and influencing educational policies in ministries of education.

However, the challenge which FAWE is facing is showcasing quantifiable tangible results for such interventions. Some donors embrace quantifiable results which are evident especially in provision of scholarships. In this case, Value for Money is easily measured by the number of girls and boys receiving fees, educational materials and other essentials. Donors know exactly how many students have benefitted from scholarships and they assess value for funds based on these numbers. However, how many students actually complete their education, find employment and access opportunities to reduce poverty? How can the outcomes and the impact on these students be demonstrated in the middle and long term? Despite these challenging questions FAWE National Chapters continue to deliver programmes which donors appear willing to fund.

Yet FAWE's main mandate is influencing policy. Results in this case are at best difficult to measure and at worst simply not measurable. FAWE National Chapters can influence policy revision and the translation into action of these revised policies by, for instance, ensuring ministries of education factor the revised policy into the national budget sectoral plans. In such a case, Value for Money and aid effectiveness may be measured by governments' commitment to implement gender-responsive activities. One example of a measurable outcome in influencing policy is that the Government of Namibia has included FAWE Namibia's gender-responsive interventions in its Strategic Plan. The results in this case will be measured on actual implementation of the revised policies which contribute to the MDG of achieving universal primary education by 2015.

Despite the challenges in realistically measuring impact, FAWE will continue to influence policy, lobby governments to translate revised policies into action plans, and to implement gender-responsive activities that will deliver worthwhile measurable results, accountability and Value for Money through its National Chapters.

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**RESEARCH RESULTS,  
TARGETS AND POLICY –  
THE OLD CHESTNUT**

## Cost-Effectiveness Analysis in Education

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**Keywords:** cost-effectiveness; student attendance; enrolment; cost analysis.

**Summary:** Cost-effectiveness analysis can help policymakers compare various programs aimed at achieving a particular outcome (e.g. increasing student attendance), but such analysis requires careful thinking about what specific questions are being answered and what assumptions are being made in the calculations. Our example analysis of 11 student attendance programs found that addressing health barriers and providing families with information about the higher wages earned by graduates are two of the most cost-effective ways to increase children's time in school.

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In the last few years there has been a sharp increase in the number of rigorous evaluations of the impact of development programs in a host of fields including education, health, finance, and governance. The objective of such studies is to use scientific evidence to measure the true impact of various policies and programs, and such evaluations can then help policymakers adopt the policies that have the largest impact based on rigorous evidence. But it can be very difficult for policymakers to compare results from different programs and their evaluations, when the studies were conducted in different countries, in different years, and used different instruments to achieve the same outcome. And without information on what it cost to achieve the observed effects from a particular program, it is still extremely difficult to choose programs which will yield the greatest Value for Money. One way to encourage policymakers to use the scientific evidence from these rigorous evaluations in their decision making is to present evidence in the form of a cost-effectiveness analysis that compares the impacts and costs of various programs run in different countries and years that aimed at achieving the same objective.

Cost-effectiveness analysis, in the simplest terms, calculates the ratio of the amount of "effect" a program achieves for a given amount of cost incurred, or conversely the amount of cost required to achieve a given impact. For program evaluation, this means measuring the impact of a program in achieving a given policy goal (for example, the extra years of schooling induced) against the cost of the program (e.g. providing merit scholarships). This ratio, when calculated for a range of alternative programs addressing the same policy goal, conveys the relative impacts and costs of these programs in an easy and intuitive way. However, relatively few studies published in academic journals include cost data on the programs they are evaluating, and what data is available is presented in a wide variety of formats that does not allow for easy comparison between programs. Moreover, what exactly is meant by "costs" and "impacts" is itself subject to considerable debate, depending on the perspective from which the analysis is being undertaken. Are the costs to all stakeholders relevant, or only those that accrue to the implementing organization? Can multiple effects on a number of outcomes be included in the measure of "effectiveness?" A

good cost-effectiveness analysis requires careful thinking about what specific questions are being answered, and what assumptions are being made in the calculations.

To compare programs using cost-effectiveness analysis, it is also necessary to agree on an outcome measure which would be the “key objective” of many different programs and policymakers. In the field of education there are a few obvious contenders. One of these is regular student attendance at schools, and researchers are increasingly using a standardized way of measuring attendance (with random head count checks). Although time spent in school is an imperfect measure of the increase in education, it does provide a useful approximation, particularly given the recent focus on increasing primary school enrolment and attendance.

Primary and secondary schools are free in much of the developing world, and yet millions of children drop out every year, or fail to attend classes when they are enrolled. The Millennium Development Goals gave policymakers the target of universal primary education by the year 2015, and numerous strategies have been implemented to try to reach that target, with differing degrees of success. Different interventions also incur drastically different costs, and some programs achieve schooling gains with much greater cost-effectiveness than others. **Which are the most effective, and cost-effective, interventions? With the goal of increasing students’ time in school, how should limited resources be spent? The following cost-effectiveness analysis, based on a number of impact evaluations from around the world, illustrates the type of lessons that can be learned using this methodology.**

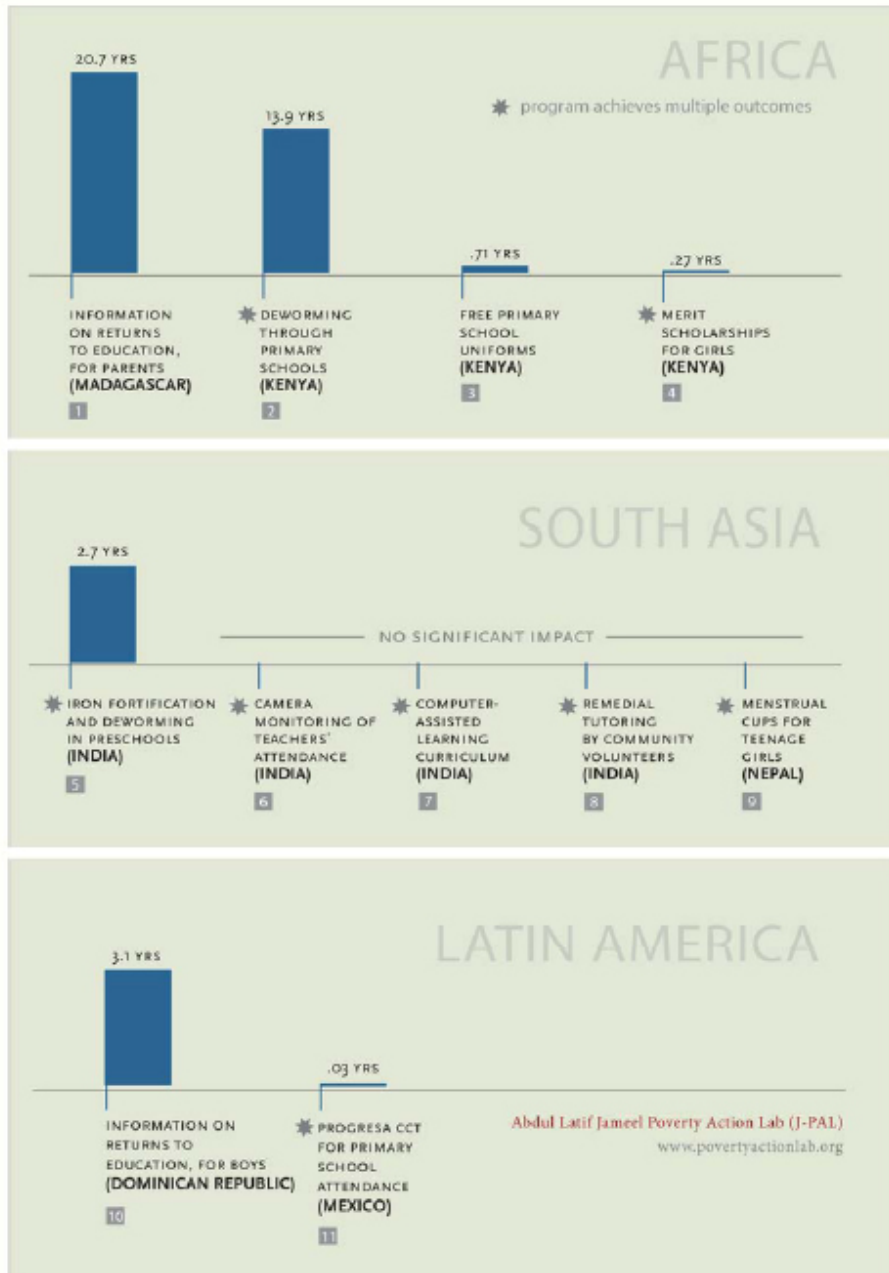
**Subsidies:** Studies show that parents are sensitive to the costs of schooling, and offering subsidies or incentives like school meals is effective, though not necessarily cost-effective, at improving participation. Programs such as scholarships, free uniforms, or school meals have all been shown to be effective ways of getting kids into school, but they can be expensive for the amount of impact they achieve.

**CCTs:** Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) have been shown to increase participation in evaluations around the world, although the high costs of providing large transfers to families can reduce the cost-effectiveness of this approach (note that this version of the analysis includes transfers as a cost, but they are also a benefit to program beneficiaries). New evaluations suggest that comparable impacts on enrolment and attendance can be achieved even with smaller transfers, increasing the cost-effectiveness of CCT programs.

**Information:** In many places, families are not aware of the returns to education, and providing them with information about the higher wages earned by graduates increases participation very cost-effectively. Informational campaigns, targeted at parents or students, are the most cost-effective of the approaches examined in this analysis.

**Health Issues:** Addressing health barriers like anaemia and intestinal worms that keep children out of school can be one of the most cost-effective ways to increase participation. However, it is not always obvious which health problems really prevent children from attending- for instance, treating Kenyan children for intestinal worms was both cheap and effective, but providing girls in Nepal with menstrual cups had no effect on their attendance.

**COST-EFFECTIVENESS: ADDITIONAL YEARS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION PER \$100**



## Demonstrating Results in Ghana's Skills Development System

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**Summary:** Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is under heightened pressure to demonstrate Value for Money (VfM). But whose VfM? In what context? How can results be measured effectively when current TVET data is so input-focused? This short piece explores these questions, and others, using Ghana as an example.

**Keywords:** Ghana; Skills Development; TVET; Philip Foster; Value for Money; Results

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### Foster's fallout missed Ghana

Philip Foster's article on the Vocational School Fallacy (1965), which drew on research in Ghana, remains a truly seminal piece which is still widely referred to (Lauglo, 2010). One of Foster's key assertions was that students perceive academic education to be more "vocational" than vocational education proper; he noted that since there were more (formal) employment opportunities for those with academic backgrounds compared to those with vocational experience, academic education is in fact more "vocational". He argued that students are heavily influenced by these labour market opportunities, and less affected by practices that attempt to re-orientate mind-sets by vocationalising curriculums. As Levesque (2011) pointed out in NN46, 'from Foster... onwards a range of studies has concluded that [vocational education]... has not led to the assumed employment opportunities and been Value for Money'.<sup>1</sup> Such conclusions, however, have not affected the enthusiasm for TVET in Ghana.

### Long held perceptions that TVET is Value for Money in Ghana

Political and policy statements and education reform efforts by successive former Ghanaian governments (as well as Gold Coast colonial administrators back to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century), have always maintained that investing in TVET is good Value for Money. Why? Because these groups have historically seen some kind of an automatic link between providing youth with skills and youth subsequently becoming employed, or employable.

The reality of the skill-to-work link is far more complex of course, and it is widely recognized among education, TVET and labour market experts that training does not equal jobs. However, the political driver of TVET policy in Ghana, as in many other developing countries, often trumps this view. And, in the face of persistently high youth unemployment levels, TVET is seen as a (politically) logical solution.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Bank, unlike Foster, supported diversified secondary education worldwide from 1963 to the mid 1980s, but then came in line with Foster's findings from the mid 1980s.

But if skills do not lead to jobs, where is the VfM? Ministers certainly see political VfM in announcing the launch of new national skills programs, and MPs get political kudos for a donation of tool-kits to another hundred youth in their constituency. But Ghana is strewn with the wreckage of such populist skills programs that have been ill thought out and almost always end up either small scale, unsustainable or simply unhelpful; such programs may be short-term political VfM but are not VfM in socio-economic terms.

### **Value for Money in what context?**

Foster's (1965) assertion that students are more influenced by what is going on outside the school, in the labour market, than by what planners attempt to push into the school curricula fits neatly with discussions now about the importance of considering context and the enabling environment (Palmer et al., 2007). The extent to which youth are able to acquire and utilize technical and vocational skills is very much context driven; TVET may be Value for Money in one district or region, but not in another; or it may be Value for Money for some socio-economic groups, but not for others; or certain types of TVET may be Value for Money, while others are not. It is not just a question of VfM for whom? But of VfM for what, and in what context?

### **What does the evidence say?**

According to available evidence, can we say that TVET is Value for Money in Ghana? TVET is, of course, made up of multiple components in Ghana and making general claims about the utility or otherwise of TVET is not useful. As a brief reminder, or introduction to those less familiar with Ghana, the pre-tertiary TVET landscape consists of: i) two main public TVET systems, respectively run by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare. In addition, up to seven other ministries provide some form of TVET; ii) private TVET schools and institutes, for-profit and non-profit; iii) formal enterprise-based training; iv) informal apprenticeships; v) non-formal and short-duration training programs. We shall explore just two of the above in this short NORRAG piece.

Secondary school-based TVET (Technical training institutes/ TTIs): Econometric estimates find that income returns to secondary school-based TVET are the same as those for academic secondary schooling (World Bank 2008), implying that students get VfM from studying at the TTIs. But it should be recalled that TTIs make up only about half of the public TVET provision (in terms of enrolment) in Ghana, and it is likely that the other providers would not fare so well under such assessment.

Informal apprenticeship: Some quantitative estimates in Ghana have suggested that apprenticeship training does not lead to higher earnings when compared to those without an apprenticeship (ibid). Others have suggested apprenticeship is really only Value for Money for those with lower levels of education (Monk et al, 2008), but there are strong reasons to question this assertion since it treats all apprenticeships as the same and ignores the presence or absence of an enabling environment for skill utilization (Palmer et al, forthcoming).

### **The challenges of measuring results in skills development**

The evidence base with which to assess whether or not investing in TVET is good Value for Money or not is, to say the least, still patchy and input-focused. How then, do we measure

results or VfM in an information scarce context? In Ghana, as in many other developing countries, TVET information focuses on inputs, or perhaps outputs, but rarely on outcomes and impacts. Such a situation cries out for significant efforts to strengthen TVET planners' capacities in monitoring and evaluation, and for the development of robust TVET information systems (that goes beyond the standard Ministry of Education centric EMIS that development partners usually rally behind).

### **Revisiting TVET financing in Ghana from a VfM perspective**

TVET financing in Ghana does not promote results. On the resource mobilization side, there has been acknowledgement for at least a decade that there needs to be more diverse and more sustainable sources of TVET financing sought. But on the ground, not a great deal has changed. Public providers are still almost entirely government funded (or funded via donor grants and loans) using an input-biased financing formula. While many different finance streams have been discussed and debated, only one has – very recently – materialized: a Skills Development Fund (SDF). Using competitive financing windows, it is hoped that the SDF will help to drive results. However, while a great step forward, two words of caution are required: i) the majority of all TVET financing continues to be input-focused and delivered via the usual government channels; ii) so far, there has been no agreement to put in place an industry levy that would help to sustain the SDF. Nonetheless, there is growing recognition of the need to relate payment for provision more closely to learning and labour market outcomes.

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## Impact of Agency Results Policies on Research Priorities

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**Keywords:** Development funding; Effectiveness; Value for Money; Decision making; “Research, think tanks and consultancies”

**Summary:** This piece comments on what the (new) Value for Money focus may have on research priorities.

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The current funding for development is increasingly being crowded by arguments on whether committed resources are having an impact, and at a reasonable enough cost. Changing policies in development funding “flag-bearers” have far reaching implications. The recently emerged discourse on “Value for Money” re-ignites fireballs on top of the arguments around effectiveness and efficiency. For practitioners, this signals another step in tightening the link between funding and development results while ignoring heterogeneity of operating field environments. All points in the funding pipeline are expected to show Value for Money.

Beyond the good intention of ensuring that development is delivered at a reasonable unit cost, the Value for Money discourse is not free from challenges for the source, intermediate decision making bodies and those finally disbursing the money to be covered into services, materials and skills. Like cost effectiveness and efficiency, with the deliverance of programmes and projects based on a Rights Based Approach, it is the ultimate change in lives of the people that determines whether the right interventions have been delivered to ensure dignified lives of aid recipients. This again reminds us about the arguments at the Busan 4<sup>th</sup> High level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in (2011), as to whether we are addressing aid effectiveness or development effectiveness.

Value for Money is therefore relative even for the same interventions under varying social, economic, environmental and even cultural contexts. The same intervention will vary in cost between stable and fragile states. Bases for comparison will be as ambiguous as the uneven



contexts themselves. Much as the relationship between funding resources required to drive change in varying contexts will continue to be contentious, decision making on what is the actual value of money for a specific intervention set of interventions will be forced into the ambiguity corner.

Communities of research, think tanks and consultancies are expected to provide pointers for what are the likely drivers of change and how they should be combined for optimal and even best results. In realigning their work to comply with “Value for Money”, they will have to quickly reassess their roles and ways of working in order to demonstrate that they are worthy parts of the development funding pipeline, while at the same time raise their evidence-laden voices on the rationality of “Value for Money”. The obvious risk for not expediting the internalisation is to allow an obscure position of such communities in brokering communication about choices for allocation of resources, particularly between institutional givers and recipients.

Despite the overwhelming progress in impact evaluations, not least the randomised control trials, there will be no magic for leveling the Value for Money landscape. It will remain in practice that decisions are made selectively and behind proxies, with likely results of exclusion where support is needed most. Furthermore, transparency objectives will be put in the reverse gear. Arguably, research, think tanks and consultancies need to work collaboratively to understand and share their own narrative on implications of the Value for Money debate in the development funding pipeline.

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## Results in Evaluations – Some Practical Issues

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**Keywords:** Resources; development goals; results and evaluations; methodology; end users; flexibility.

**Summary:** In the recent past, there had been a growing interest and increased emphasis upon impact of various developmental interventions across the globe leading to a change in conception of evaluations of such interventions both in terms of evaluation philosophy as well as practice. The present discussion raises some practical issues linked with impact evaluations in terms of methodology, ethics, the intention and compulsions of end users, and problems of developing economies. It argues that while impact evaluations are the need of the time, a flexible approach is needed.

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Evaluation is expected to indicate how well the available resources have been managed in achieving and/or how better they can be managed to achieve the desired development goals. Thus, 'results' – be it the outcomes or the wider impact - have come to be the focal point of evaluation. In the recent past, there has been a growing and increased emphasis upon such results-based evaluations internationally and within countries, leading to a change both in terms of evaluation philosophy as well as practice. International instruments like the MDGs, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative give expression to this growing concern for results among the aid-giving countries – a concern perhaps accentuated by the severe economic downturn and the crunch of disposable resource in recent years. This wide-spread concern to ensure that the resources spent lead to achievement of targeted results has also gradually permeated into the policies and programs of developing countries. In the South Asian context, for example, in recent years India and Sri Lanka have established elaborate institutional and systemic arrangements for monitoring performance of programme implementing agencies within the national governments.

In theory it is perfectly logical and rational to link resource utilization to results and judge performance solely in terms of the latter. In practical application of this unexceptionable principle, however, certain issues - theoretical and practical - do arise that need to be addressed; important among these are those relating to the measurement of impact itself. If we follow the logical framework, results in terms of inputs-outputs are relatively easy to measure for a developmental intervention. This is the traditional approach and generally performance is assessed in terms of expenditure incurred or physical targets achieved. But measuring outcome and impact is more complex with issues of 'attribution' vs. 'contribution' to sort out. In spite of substantial methodological advances, the problems associated with the identification of a proper counterfactual in a non-experimental setting persist. Then there are other questions like: where do these impact evaluations lead us? Can

states like India afford to stop a developmental intervention if it does not lead to the desired end in the short run? Are evaluators competent enough to carry out impact evaluations? Do rights and ethical considerations come in the way of insisting on results and acting on impact evaluations if evaluations are conducted following experimental designs?

On a more practical plane, there is the question of timing of impact evaluations. Perceptible results may appear in some cases after a considerable period after implementation of a programme, as for instance in the case of initiatives for female education leading to fall in fertility or even educational and skill development initiatives leading to income augmentation. Such initiatives are based on a priori theoretical considerations and empirical evidence found elsewhere. If the logic on which the programmes are conceived is sound and supported by practical evidence elsewhere, the impact is likely to be positive even if delayed. Evaluation of the impact of such programmes will have to wait for quite a long time, whereas evaluations are required immediately for decisions regarding the future of the programme. There have been cases in developing countries where the programmes were yet to take off fully but the evaluators started an impact evaluation!

Evaluators are also to keep in mind the users of evaluation findings and the basic purpose of such evaluations. In India it is gradually becoming mandatory to evaluate all the developmental programmes and schemes; but for what purpose? Generally, evaluations are a means to support or oppose decisions on extending/ replicating these interventions. Governments are not very keen to modify/close interventions due to various political compulsions whatever their impact may be. Only minor modifications are possible. In such circumstances, even with good intentions, impact evaluations lose their impact. Reasonably good evaluations, half of whose major suggestions find their way to acceptance and implementation, may be better than very thorough impact evaluations with recommendations totally unpalatable to the policy makers and which consequently have no chance of implementation whatsoever.

It may not thus be viable and feasible to have impact evaluations for all the interventions and or to have one ideal design of impact evaluation. It is necessary to have in-depth thinking on which interventions would require impact evaluations and when. To make evaluations cost effective it is necessary to plan them at the time of planning the intervention itself so that baseline data is created during implementation of the intervention. Results, understood either as outcome or impact, have no doubt to be important considerations in developmental outlays but, in the context of developing countries, one has to be rather flexible in one's approach keeping various considerations in focus. Too much insistence and urgency to show intervention 'impacts' may result in evaluations being little more than cosmetic exercises.

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## Measuring Value for Money in Education System Reform for Knowledge-based Development in Qatar

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**Keywords:** knowledge-based economy; skills development; Qatar; education system reform; performance management; Value for Money

**Summary:** This article advances a performance management framework for K-12 education system reform that aligns ministry and sector strategies with the development goals established by the Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016 and the Qatar National Vision 2030.

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Through the engagement of international organizations with the region, the concept of knowledge-based economy has taken on an expanded meaning in the Arab region. The Arabized concept of knowledge economy is fused with other development challenges not part of the Western conception of the term such as large-scale education and training system reform (UNDP, 2002; UNDP, 2003; UNESCO, 2005; World Bank 2007; MbRAM Foundation and UNDP, 2009). Influenced by the gradual adoption of knowledge economy as a widespread regional policy goal beginning in the early 1990s, in January 2007 the Planning Council of Qatar and Qatar Foundation sought the assistance of the World Bank to perform a knowledge economy assessment and articulate a national vision. At the time, a background analysis for the World Bank report observed the following education and training issues: “few links and formal relationships between the training institutions and the needs of the labor market; education and training institutions are highly separated with little coordination; no linkages between training and job career prospects; and most of the training centers lack human and financial resources. In general, there is a lack of an overall strategy for workforce development in Qatar (World Bank Institute, 2007).”

To address these challenges, the Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016 (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011) sets three system-wide education and training policy objectives: quality, equity and inclusiveness, and portability and mobility. Primarily receiving technical assistance for institutional capacity development as aid from international organizations, the Qatari government, through the Supreme Education Council, serves as the regulator, provider, and funder of the education and training system while playing a strong role in defining industrial economic development policy. In line with the Paris Declaration, Qatar is currently in the process of establishing results-oriented reporting and performance assessment frameworks to more effectively manage increased resources devoted to the education and training sector. These frameworks are aimed at using information on results to improve implementation of reforms, policy making, increase transparency, and assess progress against national and sectoral development strategies.

By defining specific policy areas for education reform, a performance management framework was devised to track delivery upon goals set out in the National Development

Strategy at two levels to ensure that empirically supported socio-cultural and economic benefits attributable to education and training are achieved:

- Policy-based key performance indicators measure system performance relative to the achievement of the overarching policy aims of quality, equity, and portability;
- Output KPIs measure the effectiveness of the education and training system in terms of achieving academic, social, and economic outcomes which are precursors to the future development of Qatar.

An indicative performance management framework for K-12 education system reform in Qatar is available in full by clicking on the first link below.

### **Further Reading**

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for The K-12 Education and Training System in Qatar  
<http://www.slideshare.net/wesleyschwalje/monitoring-and-evaluation-framework-for-the-k-12-education-and-training-system-in-qatar>

Measuring Skill Gaps in Qatar and the Arab World  
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A Conceptual Model of National Skills Formation for Knowledge-Based Economic Development - <http://www.slideshare.net/wesleyschwalje/a-conceptual-model-of-skills-formation-for-knowledgebased-economy-in-africa>

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## **Donors and 'Value for Money' Impositions: South Africa's Exceptionalism in Research Development and International Cooperation in Higher Education**

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**Keywords:** South Africa; Ownership; Emerging Donor; Higher Education; Research Funding

**Summary:** This article argues that South Africa's massive investment in research development puts it in a position where it is able to decide on its own research agenda and Value for Money measures without much external interference of donors. It is this same spirit of ownership that it seems to nurture as an emerging donor in its recent international cooperation programmes with other universities and institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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South Africa is a relatively new actor in the aid industry. Prior to the 1994 democratic elections it had been largely cut off from the international community. Few donors, if any, interacted with the country and there was hardly any external assistance for any sector, including education, as many countries had suspended diplomatic relations with the country. Post-1994, South Africa's focus has been largely on nurturing self-reliance and national ownership, and it was therefore less open to receiving external aid and technical assistance. It is for this reason that it has been occasionally labeled 'a reluctant recipient' of aid by some commentators (e.g. King, 1999). Furthermore, South Africa's economic strength and position as a middle income country amidst a sea of low-income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa puts it in a 'privileged' state where it is not a primary target for international development assistance. On the contrary, the middle income status has prompted it to join the league of 'emerging donors' together with other BRIC countries including Brazil, Russia, India and China.

In the context of higher education research development, unlike typical countries and universities in Sub-Saharan Africa whose research budgets and agendas are often funded by and dictated to by donors (Sawyer, 2004; Teferra and Altbach, 2004), South Africa appears to be an exception. Notwithstanding the fact that South African universities and individual academics participate in a number of North-South-South research partnerships funded by international donors and philanthropic foundations, the state continues to be the primary funder of research through its Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the National Research Foundation (NRF). An example of South Africa's commitment to funding research is the recent South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) which is an initiative of Government "to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation in the South African science system". The initiative aims to "strengthen the country's universities to produce high quality postgraduate students, research and innovation outputs" (NRF, 2012a). Since its inception in 2005, over R1.1. billion [equivalent to over US\$100 million] has been invested in the programme. With the recently awarded 60 new chairs, this investment will

more than double in the next 10 years. This is in addition to other supported research development initiatives including International Research Grants, Strategic Knowledge Fields Grants, Scholarships and Fellowships Programme, Capacity and Strategic Platforms Grants, and Strategic Platforms Grants, among others (NRF, 2012b), which are all geared at repositioning South Africa as a key actor in the knowledge economy. It can therefore be argued that at a macro level, South Africa is generally free from donor demands and imposition of accountability and Value for Money regimes that research aid-dependent countries/institutions have to endure from time to time.

As an emerging donor in the area of science and technology and research development, South Africa's exceptionalism is still evident, considering its two-way approach to international cooperation in education. An example in case is the International Relations and Cooperation Focus on Africa Programme (FAP) launched in 2009. FAP which is coordinated by the NRF and funded through the Science and Technology Fund aims to promote and support research on the African continent through funding and human resource development. The vast majority of the funding within the programme is "bilateral/binational in nature i.e. collaborative funding that has been negotiated between South Africa and a partner country on the African Continent" (NRF and RISA, 2011). Value for Money in this case is measured in terms of the projects' scientific merit, significance to both countries, suitability and capacity development (student training), among others. Since funding and justification for the research is a responsibility of two consenting countries/institutions, none can impose unrealistic accountability measures since it is a mutually negotiated process. Whether this approach can be sustained in the future given that South Africa's development partners have promised to match South African international development funding on a rand for rand basis once South Africa's Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) is up and running [and are therefore likely to impose their own accountability and Value for Money regimes] – time will tell!

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## **Performance Driven Skills in South Africa: The Artisan Numbers Game Interrogated!**

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**Keywords:** performance monitoring; artisan targeting; skills development

**Summary:** The paper identifies the role of the national Performance Monitoring and Evaluation system on artisan development. The results driven perspective is less likely to respond to the more fundamental reasons for the lack of effectiveness of the system as a whole.

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### **Introduction**

Skills development in South Africa has been underpinned by a larger discourse of national performance monitoring and evaluation. The emphasis on producing particular numbers of artisans, while clearly well intentioned, is underpinned by a 'short-termist', 'technicist', and by implication 'reductionist', perspective, and is clearly antithetical to effective and sustained national skills provisioning. Excessive attention to achieving pre-defined annual targets in response to the skills shortage serves to undermine longer-term sustainable skills development imperatives. All of this can be understood within an "economics imperialism" paradigm as conceptually reminiscent of neoclassical economics which has come to dominate other disciplines (see for example: Fine, 2010; Fine & Milonakis, 2009). It is more clearly a response to the managerial-ist perspective designed to respond to monetary value measures.

Here, I argue that the numbers-driven performance perspective which has become particularly evident since the 2009 election, and the establishment of an enhanced Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation function in the Presidency, undermines the development of a more enabling skills development framework in response to the skills challenges facing the country.

The first part of this note explores briefly the macro contextual structure of performance monitoring and evaluation framework. The second illustrates how this is realised in the skills development arena. The paper concludes with some challenges to this development identified.

### **2. The Government-wide performance monitoring and evaluation framework**

A key feature of President Zuma's administration was the establishment of a considerably strengthened Presidency. Two Ministers were appointed to deal with government-wide planning, monitoring and evaluation within this structure in a quest for more efficient service delivery. The planning component is currently led by a former Minister of Finance, and it has just recently released a vision for 2030 called the National Development Plan



(arguably more about development of the economy than about development per se). The other Minister responsible for Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) established in 2010, is directed at providing a, “results-oriented approach” to enable “...intergovernmental planning and resource allocation.” The overall objective of this Ministry is understood within an “impact-driven’ mode designed to meaningfully impact on the lives of those it intends to benefit.<sup>2</sup> The performance and targeting goal for effective developmental outcomes represents a crucial element of the general discourse of goal oriented performance effectiveness.

The ‘Guide to the outcomes approach’ (version 1, 1st June 2010), makes the following point about the importance of clearly discernible goals that are expected to increase the possibility of improved performance and service delivery:

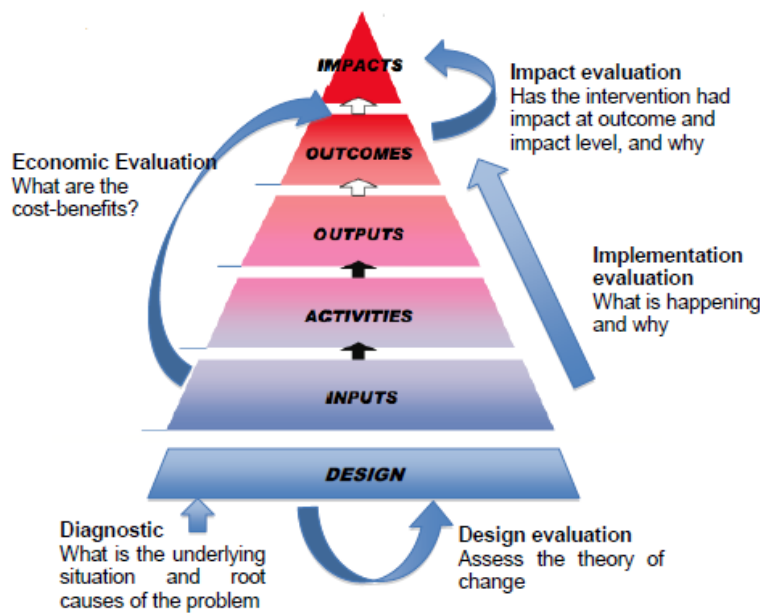
‘Each outcome has a limited number of measurable outputs and sub-outputs as well as clear targets’ (DPME, 2010: 6).

The notion of evaluation is underpinned by a distinct Value for Money perspective as the following definition provided in the document suggests:

‘The systematic collection and objective analysis of evidence on public policies, programmes, projects, functions and organizations to assess issues such as relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency), **Value for Money**, impact and sustainability, and recommend ways forward’ (DPME, 2011: 3, my emphasis).

The evaluation types identified in this document established the primacy of economic evaluation, although other types of evaluation have been identified (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Evaluation Types identified by DPME**



Source: DPME, 2011: 8, Fig. 3

<sup>2</sup> see for instance DPME website, < <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?reid=1689>>

In this evaluation, the economic evaluation perspective is underpinned by ‘effectiveness’ (Cost Effectiveness Analysis - CEA) and ‘benefit’ (Cost Benefit Analysis - CBA) paradigm (DPME, 2011: 9). In this perspective, the cost of neglect of the human (potential and development) element is not considered. Also in implementation, the real value of the intervention that is not strictly economically quantifiable is not factored in.

Service delivery is expected to happen by a set of behaviourist accountability mechanisms designed to ensure more efficiency. Although there is a sense that some attention needs to be paid to purpose, this is subsumed within a perspective that sees outcomes as more critical than an understanding of the real purpose and sustained solution-based imperatives.

Thus the stage is set to ensure that quantitative targets are more than likely to be emphasised at the expense of the less tangible qualitative improvements. There is also an implicit assumption that all quantitative achievements must by their very nature result in qualitative enhancement. In education, this invariably leads to “output measures” and is likely to result in measurement of various indicators, including inter alia, numbers admitted to various programmes, throughput, and completion rates. The qualitative mechanism to improve this is likely to be less important.

### 3. Skills development performance

In terms of the National Development Plan, artisan development is considered a crucial component of the overall target of 10,000 set by the Minister, who suggested that, “... this target can be reached with concerted effort and adequate funding”. The document reiterates the artisan “target of 30,000 by 2030, subject to demand”. Clearly, the caveat is an important one in terms of the nature of artisanal development (The Presidency, 2011: 277). Weakness in the FET College system is also reiterated in the National Development Plan, which points out that although they are ‘varied and diverse’, except for “...some notable exceptions, they are mainly weak institutions” (ibid). Surprisingly little is said about the funding of FET colleges which form the backbone of the artisan and apprenticeship system. Estimates from the budget suggest that proportionally FET Colleges receive less than a quarter from the public purse as compared to the University sector.

In line with the PME approach, performance agreements have been developed with the Ministry responsible for each of the competencies. Under output 3, the Higher Education and Training Minister, under the broad objective “increasing access to occupationally-directed programmes” is required to inter alia:

- Increase the number of learnerships to at least 20 000 per annum by 2014;
- Produce at least 10 000 artisans per annum by 2014;
- Put in place measures to improve the trade test pass rate from its 2009 level of 46% to 60% by 2014;
- Increase the placement rate of learners - At least 70% of learners should have placement every year;
- Increase the proportion of unemployed people, as compared to employed people, entering learnerships from the current level of 60% to 70%. (DPME, 2010, emphasis inserted)

Although these targets are clearly realisable, they offer little in the way of a sustained solution to the skills deficits facing the country. While it might well offer a short-term solution to artisan development needs, the short-term efficiency driven system is unlikely to

see the importance of a more sustained solution of improving the institutional basis for a sustained artisan development pipeline. The focus and use of targets and numbers might well generate the numbers targeted, and perhaps respond to the immediate requirements, but is likely to leave the underlying conditions that led to the demise intact. The PME system and by default a crass 'Value for Money' perspective might well win votes in the short term, but is unlikely to have lasting consequences.

### Conclusion

The contextual determinant of apprenticeship development leading to artisan status in South Africa has been undermined by a distinct numbers imperative driven from a macro political imperative for clearly defined outcomes. While clearly well intentioned and underpinned by a perspective intended to deliver services more effectively, the reductionist way in which this is envisaged does not provide the basis for an enabling and sustained skills development system.

When all else fails, Value for Money provides an important basis to hold entities accountable. A recent headline report provided the following information about sector education and training authorities (SETAs') performance, quoted in Parliament as saying there was "little" to show for the ZARR3,5 billion ploughed into them (SETAs) since 2000. "...He says the SETAs are not giving the government Value for Money, with the boards and management members enriching themselves" (Business Day, 07.03.2011).

Notwithstanding the primary brief of SETAs to produce artisans for the country, the fact that the Minister is able to provide the 'checkmate' default of SETA (in)effectiveness, on the basis of 'Value for Money,' tends to close the debate about real contribution. The fact that an entity is not able to show Value for Money damns it in the public space to enable policymakers to do whatever is necessary to prevent further 'wasteful' expenditure or do whatever it takes to enable money to be used more effectively.

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**ANY DIRECT IMPLICATIONS  
FOR NORRAG OF VFM,  
RESULTS OR IMPACT**

## **NORRAG's own Exploration of its Value for Money**

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**Summary:** Over the past 6 months, NORRAG has been re-examining ways to improve its own influence and impact. Below, we briefly outline some of the approaches that we are currently acting on.

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### **NORRAG NEWS**

NORRAG has changed from being a small network of some 150 paying members (1990-2003) to a virtual – and free at the point of use – online network that now (March 2012) has over 3,700 registered members.

Throughout its existence, NORRAG's core 'output' has been, of course NORRAG NEWS (NN); a publication of some 30-40 short articles based around a particular topic (aid effectiveness, TVET, targets, EFA, Value for Money (VfM) etc). Since 1987, it has been produced twice a year. It has just completed 25 years.

NN has found and developed a niche as a publication that is neither an academic journal nor a policy brief. It is over a hundred pages long, but most articles are two pages or less. It is not an advocacy bulletin. But in any particular special issue it seeks critically to present the many different dimensions of the chosen debate. It is therefore ideal for someone who rapidly wants to know where the aid effectiveness, TVET or VfM debates have reached. It is widely used by graduate students in international education as a critical learning resource.

### **Strengthening the Value-Chain that Connects NORRAG NEWS and NORRAG Activities**

We are planning ways to get even more 'output' from the 'input' of NN; making each issue of NN go further, and doing more for both the 3,700 registered NORRAG members and other 'non-registered' readers (norrags.org got over 24,000 unique visitors in the last year). In particular, we are currently exploring ways to strengthen the 'value-chain' that connects NN and NORRAG activities; for example, by explicitly linking issues of NN to subsequent face to face workshops, policy events and conferences.

### **A NORRAG Blog**

NORRAG produces 2 issues of NORRAG NEWS annually, with each one focusing on a special topic. At the same time, NORRAG now has over 3,700 registered members and it would be naive to assume that all of them find every issue relevant to their own interests all of the time. Of course, we know how many downloads there are of each issue of NN, and we may assume that many of those downloading NN are members. But to make NORRAG more relevant to more of its members more of the time, we are considering launching a NORRAG blog that could address international education and training issues, especially issue that are

not covered by a recently past or forthcoming issue of NN. The blog would help fill the six-month gap between issues of NN.

### **Website Development**

NORRAG recognises that its website, [norrags.org](http://norrags.org), is its key dissemination platform and main way of engaging with all those registered as part of the network, as well as a way to make NN available to all those who visit [norrags.org](http://norrags.org), read NN online and then choose not to register. We are currently completely re-developing the website so that it is more user-friendly. It will also include an improved networking tool, social media integration, RSS feed and other features. If you have any suggestions, please email them to [norrags@norrags.org](mailto:norrags@norrags.org) with the subject line: WEBSITE. We expect the new website to be near to completion early in this summer.

### **Issue-Specific Advisory Group as a Quality Assurance Instrument**

Since each issue of NN focuses on a specific theme, it is likely to have more relevance or impact to some constituencies and individuals than to others. It follows, therefore, that a useful approach to assessing impact, or at least utilization, of NN would be to seek the views and opinions of some of the key expert contributors for that particular theme. An issue-specific expert advisory group could be set up, as noted above, for each issue. This group can help with assessing the utility of the specific NN issue, or of the longer value chain that covers a particular theme (and might include a national meeting around the theme, blogs, follow up notes etc).

We shall need to be realistic here. NN is not an academic journal, but are some of our many contributors ready to engage in follow-up activity? This is a central question. With an academic journal article it may take a year or two to reach publication, including receiving comments and reviews from referees. In the case of NN, the time-span is very much shorter, just 2-3 months from initial request to publication. How might this affect the readiness of some of the contributors to add value to what they have done? Or, conversely, how does their writing in NN add value to what they are *already* doing (e.g. dissemination of research, amplification of opinion etc)?

### **NORRAG and Policy Influence**

Even NORRAG's name - Network for Policy Research, Review and Advice on Education and Training - clearly implies that the intention is to inform policy via research, via reviews and via advice. NORRAG does this by disseminating critical analysis of research, of policies and of aid through its twice-yearly NORRAG NEWS, and via other activities like workshops and meetings. But NORRAG is not an organization that has a sharp advocacy message to deliver, in the manner of some NGOs; any reader familiar with the contents of a typical NORRAG NEWS knows that our approach is to critically interrogate issues from multiple angles, some supportive, some not, some ambivalent. NORRAG is engaged in what we might call "multiple messaging". But since there is no single, clear message that NORRAG is promoting, how do we track its policy influence?

NORRAG perhaps helps to play the role of a critical broker, raising awareness about the complexity of a topic at the same time as teasing out its different strands. It may help readers to understand the many different facets of policy influence by seeing the comments

of some 20 NORRAG NEWS readers who have been in policy positions, whether in government or in academia. This will shortly be on the web site. It is of course very rare indeed for social science research findings to translate directly into policy change. But a NN contribution is, as we have said, very different from a traditional, long research-based article or research report with its final section on 'Implications for Policy'. It may have a different kind of impact.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

NORRAG currently tracks data on all registered members (by country, region etc), pdf downloads, and uses Google analytics to assess website visitors. We have also previously used online surveys (in 2007 and 2010, with a 3<sup>rd</sup> survey planned for 2012) to get quantitative feedback from members (and while this approach has merit, we do, of course, fully recognise the limitations). We have also actively sought qualitative feedback and comments from a range of the NORRAG constituency, through a series of eight regional assessments of NORRAG. In fact, this mid-term assessment of NORRAG in 2010 provided us with the richest insights we have ever had into how NORRAG and NORRAG NEWS is seen in North America, continental Europe, UK, Latin America, Eastern and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, South Asia, and East and South East Asia.

We are currently in the process of reviewing our M&E approach and indicators related to the outreach and impact of NN and other NORRAG activities like cluster meetings. As noted above, we are also currently discussing the value of establishing small ad-hoc issue-specific advisory groups for each issue of NN.

### **Methodological Challenges**

In our editorial we discussed critically the new methodologies for "rigorous" impact evaluation. If we applied the spirit of these to NORRAG and NN, would we have to ask questions like: What would happen if NORRAG stopped publication in this its 25<sup>th</sup> year? Would there be a demand for something similar to be created? Or, would it make any sense to give NORRAG NEWS to one group (of researchers, NGOs, policy makers) and nothing to a parallel group, and then try and identify what difference, if any, NN made?

But would it not make more sense to try and understand in much more detail how NN has actually been used creatively by committed university teachers, policy makers, and NGOs, so that we have 'good practice stories' of utilisation? The counterfactual would be if we can't find such examples. Of course, it would be particularly attractive if we could source some of these accounts from the developing world. Perhaps we can build this qualitative dimension into our forthcoming 3<sup>rd</sup> members' survey, in the sense of identifying where these pockets of creative use can be found.

**We would be very interested to hear from NORRAG readers about how you use NORRAG NEWS, as well as other suggestions to assess the "impact" of NORRAG NEWS and NORRAG generally.**

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## **A NORRAG Blog to Improve Connections and Interactions amongst Members?**

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As a young “NORRAGER”, I find it interesting to re-read NORRAG NEWS 30 (2002) on “NORRAG & the web. The harsh realities of going virtual?”. This was published at the very point that NORRAG NEWS (NN) finally went from hard copy to being freely available on the web. We can see that most ideas, suggestions and concerns about the network are still very topical ten years later. As expected, NORRAG’s change in scale and nature – from a ‘traditional’ network of 175 members to an open e-network of more than 3,700 e-members – has widened access to NN and other information. Yet, NORRAG still remained something similar to 10 years ago, - “a network of ‘recipients’ of information and knowledge”, “NOT nearly so interactive and democratic as some networks”, to use Kenneth King’s words about NORRAG in 2002 in his editorial for NN30.

Although this might be satisfactory for a large number of e-members who only wish to stay informed about NORRAG products, and especially NORRAG NEWS, through the website, there are also some members who have expressed their wish for more interactions than in the occasional face-to-face meeting that NORRAG organises at the country level.

There was a message blackboard on the new 2002 website, but it did not really work, as no one found the time to leave messages there. But perhaps in 2012 NORRAG could explore the potential of a blog to facilitate interactions and develop a sense of belonging to a network. It implies that one or two persons (part-time) would monitor the blog and feed it regularly with posts related to current developments in the field of international cooperation in education and training, NN issues, and NORRAG activities. NORRAG members would be able to leave comments and suggestions, or send posts on current issues not covered by NN.

The blog would not replace either the website or NN as a source of information for visitors and readers; there would still be email alerts, and other forms of exchange currently existing between members, such as the Networking Tool. But a NORRAG blog could complement these and maybe encourage more active networking. Discussions initiated through the blog may lead to further collaborations, or discussions (face-to-face, or virtual through Skype or Paltalk for example) organized by NORRAG members, and based on their interest and demand. In any case, it might be worth trying, as it could make the NORRAG network a bit more alive and owned by its members while keeping it as a “guided democracy”, to use Kenneth’s description of the old NORRAG and NORRAG NEWS.



## Conference on “Policy Transfer in Vocational Skills Development Revisited”

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On 13th and 14th September 2012, a conference on policy transfer in vocational skills development (VSD) will be held at the University of Zurich; the event will be organised by the University of Zurich Institute of Education, in cooperation with NORRAG and the Centre of Development and Cooperation of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (NADEL).

The specific focus of the conference will be on the transfer of global VSD models that have been promoted in the context of international development cooperation. The first of these models is the dual system training model, which represents the core rationale of the VSD systems in a number of Western European countries. This approach has been promoted, for many decades, particularly by German and Swiss development agencies, mainly as it is being thought to be a highly cost-effective approach to training, that – compared to exclusively school-based training systems – strongly involves representatives from the world of work in training, thus providing trainees with relevant skills. However, experience in transition and developing countries has shown that implementation can be challenging, for instance as employers are often not ready to engage in formal training or as organisational structures in the private sector (e.g. employers’ associations etc.) are lacking. The second policy approach to be discussed at the conference is that of promoting national qualification frameworks (NQF) in international development cooperation. In contrast to the dual system, this approach has evolved more recently in Anglo-Saxon countries, and is being seen as an instrument for harmonising highly heterogeneous VSD systems but also for facilitating educational mobility across the entire education and training system. Like only few other approaches in the field of VSD, the NQF model has diffused at a enormous pace across the globe, particularly also among transition and developing countries. However, the effects of qualification frameworks have been a matter of intense debate, for instance when it comes to assessing the impact of reforms on the relevance of training programmes for the labour market.

Against this backdrop, the conference aims to discuss the challenges of policy transfer and of implementing reforms designed along the lines global model solutions in different national and local contexts, which also requires a look at the underlying motives of stakeholders involved in the transfer process. Most importantly, the conference will pay attention to the evidence base for the impact of reform initiatives at the country level. In addition, it also has the objective to contribute to a better understanding of how such models can be adapted to specific national and local contexts in developing and transition countries so that reforms do, indeed, serve the needs and demands of different social groups.

More information on the conference can be found on the conference website:

<http://www.ife.uzh.ch/veranstaltungen/vsdconference.html>

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**Full list of NORRAG NEWS (1986 – 2011):**

NN 46	Towards a New Global World of Skills Development? TVET's turn to Make its Mark	September 2011
NN 45	The Geopolitics of Overseas Scholarships & Awards. Old and New Providers, East & West, North & South	April 2011
NN 44	A Brave New World of 'Emerging', 'Non-DAC' Donors and their Differences from Traditional Donors	September 2010
NN 43	A World of Reports? A Critical Review of Global Development Reports with an Angle on Education and Training	February 2011
NN 42	A Safari Towards Aid Effectiveness?	June 2009
NN 41	The New Politics of Partnership: Peril or Promise?	December 2008
NN 40	Education for Sustainable Development? Or The Sustainability of Education Investment? A Special Issue	May 2008
NN 39	Best Practice in Education and Training: Hype or Hope?	October 2007
NN 38	Technical and Vocational Skills Development	January 2007
NN 37	Special Theme on Education and Training out of Poverty? A Status Report	May 2006
NN 36	Special Theme on 2005? The Development Year? Millennium Project & World Summit & the Commission for Africa and G8 Implications for Education, Training & Partnership	December 2005
NN 35	Critical Perspectives on Gender, Education and Skills in Western and Central Africa at Basic and Post-Basic Levels	July 2005
NN 34	Language Politics and the Politics of Language (in Education)	September 2004
NN 33	Targets in Education & Training Off-Centre?	January 2004
NN 32	Critical Perspectives on Education and Skills in Eastern Africa on Basic and Post-Basic Levels	August 2003
NN 31	A Status Report on New Thinking & Rethinking on the Different Dimensions of Education and Training	January 2003
NN 30	NORRAG & The Web, The Harsh Realities of Going Virtual?	August 2002
NN 29	The Globalisation of Development Knowledge	December 2001
NN 28	Knowledge, Research & International Co-operation	July 2001
NN 27	The Brave New World of International Education & Training	December 2000
NN 26	The World Education Forum in Dakar	April 2000
NN 25	Swapping Partners, The New Politics of Partnership and Sector Wide Approaches	December 1999
NN 24	A Last Round of Aid Policies for Education, Training and Research this Century	April 1999
NN 23	Knowledge Generation in Higher Education - New Challenges for North-South International Cooperation.	October 1998
NN 22	International Development Cooperation	January 1998
NN 21	The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education.	August 1997

NN 20	TVET & Skills Development - Researcher and Agency Perspectives	December 1996
NN 19	Education for All? For Whom? - An Issue Related to The Mid-Term Review of EFA in Amman, Jordan	June 1996
NN 18	Consulting and Advising in International Education and Training	November 1995
NN 17	European Union - Aid Guidelines on Education and Training	April 1995
NN 16	Higher Education : The Lessons from Experience, Comments from around The World on The World Bank's Higher Education Paper	August 1994
NN 15	Rough Guide to The Literature on Education and Training in Selected Countries	December 1993
NN 14	New Trends in Training Policies [& Shorter Section on Training for The Informal Sector]	July 1993
NN 13	Networking Education and Training	December 1992
NN 12	Aid under Review	July 1992
NN 11	Higher Education	December 1991
NN 10	Education Research Capacity	July 1991
NN 9	Technical Vocational Education and Training	December 1990
NN 8	What Happened at The World Conference in Jomtien?	June 1990
NN 7	World Conference on Education for All and International Literacy Year	March 1990
NN 6	Section on NGOs as Donors.	June 1989
NN 5	Sections on Multilateral and Bilateral Agencies	November 1988
NN 4	Special Section on UK and USA	June 1988
NN 3	Special Section on The Netherlands and The Federal Republic of Germany	November 1987
NN 2	Special Sections on Canada and Scandinavia. News from The South and North	May 1987
NN 1	First Issue	November 1986