

How Effective Is Norway's Aid to Basic Education?

Norway has placed education on top of the development agenda and is increasingly investing in basic education through multilateral institutions. Its recent funding to basic education over five years amounts to NOK 3.79 billion, nearly three quarters of which has gone to UNICEF and 24 percent channeled through the Global Partnership to Education (GPE). How effective has this aid been in improving learning, achieving gender equality, and broadening access to education among marginalized groups? Are UNICEF and GPE effective conduits for Norway's investment?

This policy brief summarizes answers to these questions based on an evaluation of four countries – Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, and Nepal – and desk studies of an additional six countries (Haiti, Mali, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, and Zambia) from 2009 through 2013. It also summarizes trends in education spending by donor agencies and governments over 10 years.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Only one of the 10 countries could demonstrate fully meeting its learning outcome goals. Results in two other countries showed partial success; while others prioritized learning outcomes but did not measure change. Most of the countries, including those where learning outcomes goals were *not* met, were successful in delivering inputs/outputs such as more classrooms, trained *teaches* and learning materials, suggesting that improved learning outcomes require more than such basic resources. What was *not* covered in most locations was student/teachers time on task, teacher professional

supervision; and the use of the vernacular language (mother tongue) for early grade learning.

There was much more progress on gender equality than on learning. Remarkably, four countries achieved parity in primary school enrolment, and many other countries made strong progress toward that goal. Efforts to collect data on male/female breakdowns have paid off in many locations and interventions are making a difference. However, girls still lag far beyond boys in enrolment as they get older.

Despite some gains, there are still gaping disparities for most marginalized children, including linguistic minorities, impoverished children, and the disabled. Unlike gender equality, there is no parity index for the marginalized; in fact, their marginalization is rarely visible since governments and even interventions typically fail to report such group breakdowns in their data. Nepal is the only country that collects some data by caste and is working on an “education equity index” for the future.

AID MANAGEMENT

Did UNICEF and GPE manage aid delivery in ways known to enhance the chances of achieving their objectives? Evaluators used a theory of good aid management that identifies key enabling conditions (such as good governance and a strong financing model) that influence the quality of the project cycle, which in turn leads to outcomes that are *relevant* to the donor and country priorities, *efficient* in terms of resources, and *effective* in achieving intended outcomes.

GPE meets more of the enabling conditions than UNICEF, but both agencies meet some conditions only partially: for example, neither defines accountability thoroughly enough so that the agency’s top leadership can readily address weaknesses at the country level. Table 1 summarizes the assessment of the eight key enabling conditions for both agencies.

UNICEF does not manage its project cycle in ways that should increase the chances of achieving program outcomes. The most critical problems are that components are not thoroughly designed, outcomes are often not measured, and what is measured is often not consistently measured across the lifetime of the program.

GPE does a better job with its projects but there were also weaknesses in project designs, which often stemmed from the Education Sector Plans on which they were based. GPE’s supervision is strong and its implementation respectable, given the complexity of its programs.

Overall, three outcomes are expected from good aid management. As shown in Table 2, both agencies deliver aid that is well aligned with donor and country priorities, but both have mixed records on efficiency. UNICEF’s enabling conditions and weak management of the project cycle undermine its aid effectiveness and possibilities for even measuring effectiveness. GPE delivers relatively effective aid, but with identifiable opportunities to improve effectiveness.

FUNDING

Despite expressed commitment to education from donors and governments, funding for the sector is declining. Data from 2004 to 2014 show that funding to basic education by donors and governments has dropped. (See Figure 1.) Interviews suggested that many countries are diverting funds away from education – or within education, away from basic education. An exception to this trend is the Government of Norway, which increased its funding by 41% compared to total bilateral support to basic education, which showed a 16% decline.

TABLE 1: ASSESSMENT OF STATUS OF ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR UNICEF AND GPE

Enabling Condition	UNICEF	GPE
Financing model	⤵	➤
Governance model		
Priority setting	➤	➤
Board representation	➤	➤
Accountability	⤵	⤵
Operational philosophy	⤵	⤵
Management support		
Technical, process, finance	⤵	➤
Quality assurance	⤵	⤵
Staff qualifications	⤵	➤

Key:

- Meets enabling condition
- ⤵ Meets condition partly
- ⤵ Fails to meet condition

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF UNICEF AND GPE ON AID MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Outcome	UNICEF	GPE
Aid better aligned with donor and country priorities (relevance)	➤	➤
Aid that minimizes waste of resources (efficiency)	⤵	⤵
Aid more likely to achieve intended outcomes (effectiveness)	⤵	⤵

Key:

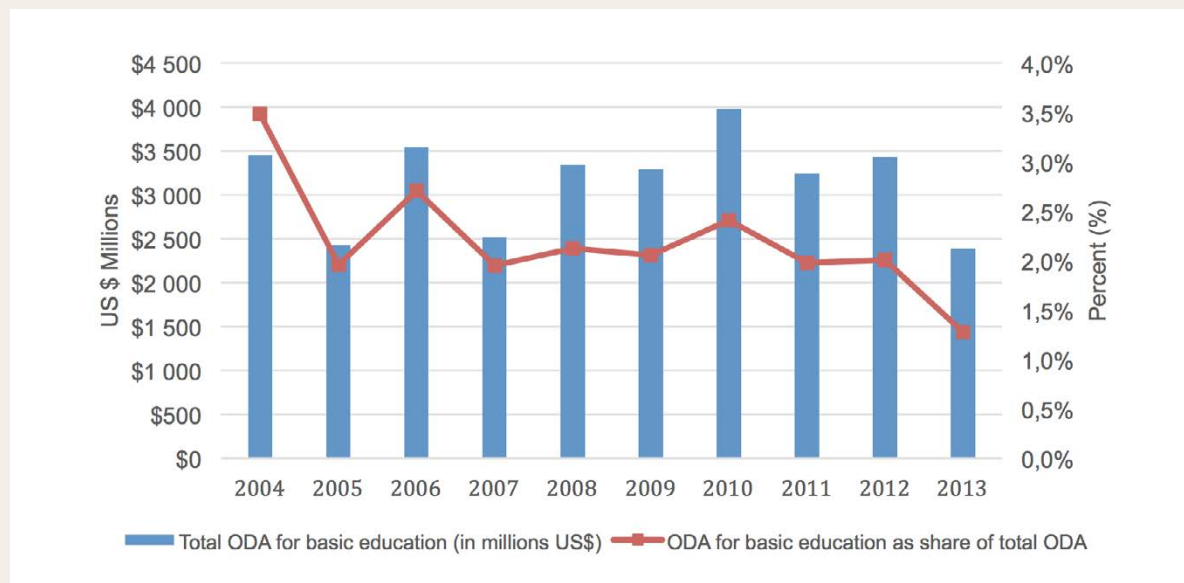
- Meets outcome sought
- ⤵ Partly meets outcome sought
- ⤵ Fails to meet outcome sought

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urge some changes in UNICEF and GPE that would prioritize learning outcomes, target gender equity in higher grades, expand access to marginalized groups, and improve aid management. (See Table 3.)



FIGURE 1: AID TO BASIC EDUCATION, ALL DONORS 2004-2013



Source: OECD-DAC Database

TABLE 3: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REPORT

To improve outcomes	Place a higher priority on appropriate measurement and improvement of learning outcomes
	Give more emphasis to proximate determinants of learning outcomes
	Promote gender equity in enrolment and learning outcomes in the higher grades of basic education
	Strengthen the emphasis in each country on systematically reporting on the participation and learning outcomes of marginalized groups and efforts to improve them.
To improve aid management	Agents (those creating the design and managing its implementation) should be held accountable for the quality of aid design and implementation, but principals (those funding aid) have a responsibility to set standards for good practice and to enforce those standards either through suasion or the judicious use of their financing.
	Routinely archive on GPE and UNICEF websites all key documents relating to upstream work and program cycles by country and operation
	Encourage UNICEF to dramatically improve the analytic rigor, clarity, and consistency of the documentary trail for its activities
	Encourage UNICEF to start country program activities only when the activity is fully funded
	Encourage GPE's Board of Directors to resolve the ambiguous accountability relationships between the LEG, the Secretariat, and the Board
	Encourage the GPE Board and the Secretariat to find ways to raise the quality of and reduce the variance in quality between ESPs.
	Encourage GPE's Board to adopt a certification process for those agencies eligible to serve as managing entities and supervising entities.

The Evaluation Department, located in Norad, initiates evaluations of activities financed over the Norwegian aid budget. The Department is governed under a specific mandate and reports directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The evaluations are carried out by independent evaluators, and all evaluation reports are made public.

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EVALUATION OVERVIEW

This evaluation brief draws on an evaluation of Norwegian multilateral support to basic education commissioned by the Evaluation Department in Norad and conducted by Development Portfolio Management Group.

Purpose of the evaluation: To generate evidence on the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of Norwegian aid to basic education through the multilateral channel during 2009-2013. As main recipients of Norwegian support to basic education, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) were the object of this evaluation.

Methodology: Desk reviews were undertaken in all the countries and four of them (Ethiopia, Malawi, Madagascar and Nepal) additionally included in-country interviews with relevant stakeholders. Methodologies included principal-agent theory and process tracing.

Core evaluation team: H. Dean Nielsen (team leader), Sue Berryman (deputy team leader), Lance Morrell, Andrew Bennet, Juan Saavedra, Milda Nordbø and Tarra Kohli.

Publications: There is also a second evaluation brief: "How can aid management be evaluated?". Both evaluation briefs, the synthesis report and the four case country studies are available as separate publications at <http://www.norad.no/en/front/evaluation>

The brief is written by Sue Berryman and Laura Zakaras from the evaluation team.