

**Inter-Ministerial Cooperation  
An Effective Model for Capacity Development?**  
Part 1  
Synthesis Report

Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

## Background

In 2000 the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (MOER) established a cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) in Nepal and one with the Ministry of Education (MOEZ) in Zambia.

In Nepal, an agreement between the two ministries was signed for the implementation of a formative research project. In Zambia, the cooperation focussed on policy reform and capacity building at headquarters level and different thematic interventions in one province. The main components of the cooperation have been study visits to Norway, exchange of literature and teaching material, and intermittent technical assistance by advisors from Norwegian higher education institutions.

The Norwegian Ministry became involved because of its experience with preparing and implementing educational reforms in Norway. In the beginning the ambitions were modest and focusing on specific aspects of the two sector programmes. The cooperation was not based on any clear perspective or understanding of inter-ministerial cooperation, but on a belief that collaboration between two sister ministries could offer a new and effective way of providing technical assistance and support to capacity development, one that is different from traditional technical cooperation. Such ministry-to-ministry cooperation would involve mutual professional exchange between colleagues rather than the more orthodox aid approach - which is mainly about one government providing funds and technical assistance towards the development of another country.

## Purpose of the evaluation

The main purpose of this evaluation is to provide insights into new forms of capacity development and to what extent inter-ministerial cooperation has become a new and effective model for such development. It was not meant as a project evaluation, but rather a thematic study of the link between ministry-to-ministry cooperation and capacity development. The study should explore and assess new ways of providing technical assistance - a topic of significant importance to most donor countries. The evaluation should also provide inputs to further planning of the collaboration with the two countries.

## Structure of the Report

This is the Synthesis Report (Part 1 of the evaluation) summarizing findings, conclusions and recommendations from the two country case studies. Part 2 consists of the two country reports, with several annexes presenting the country and sector context. The synthesis is divided into five main chapters. After the introduction with background, purpose and methods, chapter 2 describes the understanding of key concepts, i.e. 'capacity development' and 'institutional cooperation' and the 'inter-ministerial cooperation', including the experience gained from evaluations and literature of technical assistance and capacity development. Chapter 3 consists of the analysis and findings. Chapter 4 offers main conclusions and recommendations targeting all the relevant stakeholders. The last chapter presents comments to the evaluation reports and a response from the evaluators.

## The approach to the evaluation

Given the paucity of literature on inter-ministerial cooperation (IMC) the evaluation team has followed an inductive approach to its work. We have attempted to interpret the notion of IMC

as it appeared in the experience of preparing the two programmes, their implementation and further development, as well as in the reflections by representatives of the different stakeholders involved. It was clear that the IMCs have been valuable ‘works in progress’, whose forms, contents and orientation, not to mention coherence and consistence, still need much attention so as to reach the potential of this form of cooperation.

For analytical purposes, three interpretations of ministry cooperation were used so as to understand the nature, developments and effects of the IMCs with the two countries concerned. The interpretations are derived from different perspectives that have been part of the IMC experience to-date:

- Inter-ministry cooperation as “programme support”.
- Inter-ministry cooperation as “technical assistance”
- Inter-ministry cooperation as Ministry twinning or “ministry-to-ministry” cooperation at headquarters level.

In the first interpretation of an IMC as ‘programme support’ sector ministries collaborate so that various types of support can be provided by a ministry in the North to a ministry in the South for the purpose of enhancing implementation of educational reform. In the second the focus is narrowed down to a Northern ministry providing technical assistance for agreed on purposes on request by a ministry in the South. In the third the focus shifts to direct collaboration between the two ministries concerned at the level of ministry headquarters as well as at other levels of the system.

The first two interpretations are based on the assumption that the support is part of ‘development cooperation’, i.e. where support flows from the Northern partner to the one in the South. Moreover, they are mainly concerned with the effective provision of services to achieve development goals of the Southern partner, preferably on explicit demand from the latter. By contrast, a ‘ministry-to-ministry’ cooperation relates to the idea of a longer-term partnership between two sector ministries at headquarters level. It starts from the premise that in principle the two ministries are equal partners, with a common interest in engaging in peer dialogue on policy and practice, in learning from one another and in jointly tackling key issues and problems in the further development of their systems.

Such cooperation is seen as different from technical cooperation since it is not automatically about the ‘more developed partner’ helping the ‘less developed partner; but assumes that each partner has strengths and weaknesses that are worthy of joint reflection. The focus is on sharing of experiences and learning between colleagues in similar working situations.

In the context of the third interpretation the other two could be regarded as complementary instruments: a specific programme and/or technical assistance administered through a sister ministry, e.g. a Ministry in the North sub-contracts advisers to work in sister Ministry in the South or supports a specific teacher training college or HIV/AIDS programme. The three interpretations are therefore not mutually exclusive. A partnership can exist in its own right under the label of inter-ministerial cooperation. Technical assistance and specific programme support can also exist under the wider umbrella of collaboration at headquarter level. However, it would be difficult to regard the first two interpretations on their own as examples of inter-ministerial cooperation since special technical programmes would need to derive their legitimacy, rationale and value from the wider dialogue that is maintained at headquarters level.

## Major findings

1. Our overall conclusion is that the Norwegian IMCs with developing countries have produced valuable outcomes but that thus far they have not realised the full potential which such form of cooperation appears to have. As a result its ultimate contribution to institutional capacity building still has to be determined.
2. The IMCs have so far been used as an umbrella for securing selected (consultancy) services and other programme support flowing from Norway to the partner ministries in the south. It was found that this support has been very beneficial for personal and organisational capacity building in selected thematic areas. Thus, by facilitating such support, the IMC has met with a measure of success.
3. However, the cooperation has so far not been able to establish the impact of new ideas and models at institutional levels, in terms of organizational arrangements, political commitment and improved capacity for replication and scaling up. The capacity building has mainly addressed the individual and organizational levels of capacity development, and less the system dimensions in a sector context. Also, the Norwegian initiatives have not yet been sufficiently integrated in the overall education sector reform.
4. The concepts of inter-ministerial cooperation and capacity development have provided broad direction and motivation for a new type of cooperation between Norway and Zambia/Nepal. However, from the beginning the concepts were not sufficiently clear and interpreted differently. The analytical basis for the Norwegian support was missing and, though programme adjustments were made over time, we could not find any joint effort at a later stage to identify strengths and weaknesses of the initial concepts and underlying assumptions or to understand the potential of inter-ministry cooperation.
5. Since different stakeholders did not share an articulated common perspective as to what the IMC was all about, the cooperation has been marked by a variety of ideas, assumptions and expectations. In hindsight these can be associated with different interpretations of IMCs: a *programme* of support (to the Southern Province in Zambia), an arrangement for *consultancy services* (to Nepal), and a '*ministry-to-ministry*' cooperation. In both countries this produced a mixture of different types of characteristics.
6. Due to the close association of inter-ministerial cooperation with development cooperation the relationship quickly turned into a programme focussing more on '*content*' than on '*process*' aspects of the system, with a strong technical assistance component and a number of projects with few and weak links to the sector programmes.
7. The above does not automatically imply that IMC is an effective model for capacity development. We are of the opinion that this question cannot yet be answered. The benefits identified in Nepal and Zambia could well have been achieved under a conventional development assistance relationship whereby MOER Norway would have acted as an adviser to Norad and as a facilitator for contacts in the Norwegian education system.
8. We also conclude that the IMCs have operated within a rather traditional 'development assistance' framework and that neither some of the original notions of 'exchanging ideas and experiences' and 'engaging in peer dialogues' nor the actual successful instances of good practice in this regard, have been significantly explored by the joint ministries as to their ability to contribute to a new and effective model for supporting capacity development.
9. Although this report has been about IMC experiences and interpretations involving Norway and two developing countries, it is hard to closely compare the processes and outcomes of the two IMCs. Not only do the two developing countries have very different

histories, socio-economic circumstances and education systems, the IMCs have also emerged from different dynamics and have followed divergent trajectories. It appears that in none of the two countries it has been possible for the education leadership to shape such cooperation in a manner that uniquely suited its own needs and interests.

10. The planning followed different patterns in the two countries. In Nepal, a detailed plan for formative research was worked out, while a more incremental approach was followed in Zambia. A separate programme document was not prepared. The lack of such a document and strategic guidance from the Norwegian Ministry of Education contributed to a significant “programme drift” and created unclear roles for the technical advisors.
11. In both countries the cooperation was to a large extent understood as technical cooperation. MOER had ideas of what Norwegian experience and expertise could be provided to Nepal and Zambia, though much less of what it could gain through a reciprocal partnership. As such, IMC has remained within the paradigm of traditional technical cooperation – in which one country provides assistance to another and less about reciprocal partnership and sharing of experience between partners.
12. Since the Norwegian IMCs have largely been operating in traditional ‘development assistance’ modes, the ‘value added’ that may emanate from a more ‘ministry-to-ministry’ oriented interpretation can only be deduced from glimpses that were visible in the programmes. These ‘glimpses’ can be described in three categories: (a) the type of technical cooperation personnel that can be used for the collaboration; (b) the scope of recruitment of appropriate personnel (c) the nature of the tasks that they can be assigned with.
13. The use of ‘colleagues’ from another system, who combine knowledge with a broader perceptiveness, whose expertise is grounded in the home system, and who do not claim to be global experts, appears to be a crucial element that makes for a significantly different kind of learning experience. The practice of regular visits from technical advisors has enabled a high level of continuity of technical assistance, without negatively affecting national ownership which is often the case with resident technical advisors.
14. It was also evident that the very scope of recruitment provided by a ministry could also be a major factor benefiting the building of capacity. As both IMCs have shown, the use of persons with intimate experience of how certain approaches and practices work can have a major impact on capacity development. Given the limited experience of the IMCs to-date, it may be that the benefit of the ‘technical colleagues’ lies less in their ability to put in place a ready-made system that has proven its value elsewhere than in working with their counterparts to construct local versions of ‘good practices’.
15. In Zambia the inter-ministerial cooperation has been an important initiative that has already made some valuable contributions to educational development. It has demonstrated that some principles of an inter-ministerial cooperation can work. The formative research project is also considered as a promising new initiative in the education sector in Nepal.
16. Comparing actual costs with the overall achievement in Zambia, the performance in relative terms has been reasonably good and favourable in relation to comparable alternatives. Funds have been used in a highly meaningful way on a range of activities considered valuable by participants and beneficiaries. Taking into consideration the volume of reports produced in the formative research project in Nepal, financial resources have been used effectively – the value for money has been satisfactory despite the shortcomings discussed in this report.

17. In other words, the short-term objectives of the cooperation in the two countries have to a large extent been reached. There is also some evidence of medium term impact, like in Zambia: increased awareness and interest in thematic areas like multi-grade teaching, interactive ways of teaching HIV/AIDS, changing roles of District Education Boards, etc. Formative research in Nepal seems to have improved awareness of marginalized groups, religious minorities and girl's education, etc. As mentioned, there are also some signs of new forms of providing technical support (see 12 , 13 &14).
18. It was Norad and the Norwegian Embassies in Nepal and Zambia that invited the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway to be involved in two countries. As such ministry-to-ministry cooperation was an idea introduced by Norad and later followed up by the Norwegian Ministry of Education. In Zambia the idea was received with significant interest and involved also Ministers of Education on both sides. The cooperation was firmly supported by the previous senior management in the Ministry, but lost much of its momentum when a new management took over. In the beginning there was no demand for formative research in Nepal and the project was initially weakly anchored in the Ministry of Education.
19. In Zambia, the initial high-level involvement was followed by a much more reserved position due to transfer of key personnel. In Nepal, the MOES was not much involved in the beginning, but has become strongly involved in the second phase of formative research. The Norwegian Ministry of Education took a lead in preparing the formative research project while implementation was delegated to an adviser from a Norwegian University College.
20. The involvement of Ministry headquarters in direct dialogue and exchange has varied. In Zambia, the anticipated ministry-to-ministry cooperation around policy reform and institutional change (theme 1) has not yet been implemented. The cooperation has mainly focused on five thematic projects in Southern Province. In Nepal, during phase one the formative research project remained primarily a project for research capacity building in a university centre and did not address the actual uptake of research outcomes by the MOES. Ministry headquarters only remained responsible for overall coordination and management.
21. In both countries the Norwegian Embassy was very committed and pro-active in assisting the formation of the new relationships. Later, the Embassies seem not to have been able to find its proper strategic role in exploring and facilitating the complementarity between the Norwegian ministry and the sector support. The Norwegian Ministry of Education emphasized also that they worked for the sister ministry and should be seen as different from Norad and the Embassy – a difference not always understood by partners in Zambia and Nepal.
22. The capacity for carrying such inter-ministerial collaboration has been limited both in the Norwegian ministry and the two sister ministries. In particular, the ministries have not been able to link the cooperation strategically to the implementation of the sector programmes.
23. There has been sufficient monitoring and documentation of financial inputs, activities and immediate outputs in both countries. What is missing are more systematic effort to assess outcomes and longer-term impact. Also, there has been no monitoring of possibly unique and innovative dimensions of the IMCs and their significance for capacity building.
24. A moot point is whether agreements in both countries could be seen as examples of tied aid, in which the recipient ministries have no option of choosing an alternative use of

resources. In Zambia the Ministry had in principle such an option, but has not considered it as an alternative. The budget for inter-ministerial cooperation and support to Southern province was also kept separate in the sector pool. In Nepal the Ministry of Education received direct funding from the Norwegian Embassy – as with technical assistance from also other countries.

### **Recommendations**

1. MOER Norway should clarify the nature and content of inter-ministerial cooperation and differentiate between a ministry-to-ministry partnership, a formalized technical assistance programme and programme cooperation.
2. The concept of capacity development in the context of IMC should also be clarified based on relevant literature and practical donor experience.
3. MOER should assess its own experience and expertise for providing technical support to developing countries.
4. The Ministry should prepare a strategy with guidelines for working with sister ministries in developing countries. Such a document should ensure that the International Department in Ministry of Education in Norway follow an agreed approach in various countries based on lessons learned so far.
5. The division of responsibilities between Ministry of Education, Norad/MFA in Oslo and the Norwegian Embassies, together with communication mechanisms and lines should be discussed and articulated within a strategic partnership framework.
6. The funding arrangements for inter-ministerial cooperation should be adjusted and follow the choice of inter-ministerial cooperation: At the level of ministry-to-ministry relationships, activities should be paid for by special budgets in each ministry since this would not be about development cooperation per se. At the level of specific IMC activities decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis.
7. A system for monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and impact for more efficient and effective inter-ministerial cooperation should be worked out.
8. The inter-ministerial cooperation between Norway and Zambia should continue; but its focus and modalities should be reviewed through consultations between the two ministries. The cooperation should only continue if the Ministry of Education in Zambia sees the benefits, is committed and willing to prioritize the ministry-to-ministry level cooperation.
9. During the period of phase 2 of the formative research project in Nepal, the earmarked funding from the Norwegian Government should gradually be phased out. Formative research should become an integral part of the sector programme and funded from the sector pool. Other country specific recommendations are presented later.

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