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Thematic evaluation of Belgian development co-operation in the education sector

Final Report

APPENDIX V: Comments and responses



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Introduction

Comments on an early draft of the Final Report were received from BTC and have been used to inform the finalization.

Comments are reproduced here with responses of the evaluators are shown below.

Inleiding

Op 12 juni 2007 vond een restitutieatelier van de thematische evaluatie van de Belgische ontwikkelingssamenwerking in de onderwijssector plaats waar de voorlopige conclusies werden gepresenteerd op basis van volgende rapporten: draft eindrapport van de evaluatie en 6 landenstudies (Benin, Burundi, Ecuador, DR Congo, Tanzania en Vietnam).

In dit document worden de opmerkingen van BTC op deze rapporten gegeven. Het is een synthese van de opmerkingen van de Plaatselijke Vertegenwoordiging, de technische adviseurs en BTC Brussel.

In hoofdstuk 1 worden de opmerkingen op het draft eindrapport gegeven. In een tweede hoofdstuk worden de opmerkingen op de zes landenrapporten besproken.

1. Commentaren op het draft eindrapport (6/2007)

ALGEMEEN

Meer analyse van de beschikbare informatie zou beter afgetekende opties voor de toekomst kunnen aanreiken. We blijven voorlopig op onze honger zitten inzake duidelijke en werkbare strategische oriëntaties over de sectorale prioriteiten, duur en volume en de sterktes en zwaktes van de verschillende instrumenten van de Belgische onderwijssteun. Het lijkt aangewezen de Belgische onderwijsstrategie te vergelijken met die van succesvolle donoren in functie van toegevoegde waarde en innovatie.

De ambities van deze evaluatie waren groot maar de analyse was beperkt. In Vietnam kwam het team na enkele uren (zie verder) blijkbaar tot de conclusie dat de resultaten van een vorige onafhankelijke evaluatie (zending Prof Eelen) verkeerd waren hoewel hun bevindingen gebaseerd waren op een meer diepgaande studie dan die van het huidige team. BTC heeft ook de indruk dat de verschillende vormen van de samenwerking niet op eenzelfde manier geëvalueerd werden (vb directe vs indirecte). Het % van het budget dat bij VVOB en APEFE aan expertise wordt gependend is van een grootte orde die niet te vergelijken valt met dit in de direct bilaterale samenwerking maar toch wordt dit enkel en alleen aangekaart bij de laatste. Een zelfde opmerking kan bvb gegeven worden voor de aankoop van materiaal bij de universitaire samenwerking.

The evaluation methodology and instruments (evaluation framework and evaluation toolkit) were discussed in two Project Steering Committees. It was agreed that a similar approach would be adopted in all case studies. The required and explicit focus on the 3Cs put an emphasis on the agencies, their policies and operational modalities and was not intended to evaluate projects.

In de evaluatie komt DGOS bijna niet aan bod terwijl DGOS wel verantwoordelijk is voor de identificatie en de planning van de bilaterale programma's die een deel van de kritiek uitleggen.

It is the Consultant's understanding that identification is the responsibility of DGDC and the partner country. When talking about identification the report considers the process undertaken by these two actors and makes explicit reference to the technical support needed by DGDC.

1.1. KADER VAN ONTWIKKELINGSSAMENWERKING

BTC betreurt dat de evaluatie niet meer rekening houdt met de bestaande referentiekaders en weinig of geen rekening houdt met de snelle ontwikkelingen, zowel international als nationaal. Bepaalde conclusies en aanbevelingen van de evaluatie zijn hierdoor niet (meer) actueel of relevant.

Zo werd in het **3de beheerscontract** tegemoet gekomen aan de gesignaleerde tekortkomingen met betrekking tot medebeheer en de formuleringen. Ook de Verklaring van Parijs voor een effectievere en efficiëntere hulp zal een grotere invloed hebben op de toekomstige hulp, zeker nu het Belgische harmonisatieplan werd goedgekeurd (8 juni 2007).

The TORs and follow-up agreements at the first PSC made clear that the evaluation period was 2002-2006, a period that has seen major changes in the international contexts and in Belgian operations. The Consultant has tried to take to reflect recent agreements when formulating recommendations, particularly Paris, but conclusions from past practices still provide important lessons.

Een illustratie is de beperking tot twee sectoren per partnerland voor de direct bilaterale hulp. Het is dus niet uitgesloten dat in de toekomst de samenwerking in de educatiesector slechts (maar voor een groter volume) in een beperkt aantal landen zal gekozen worden en dat in bepaalde landen universitaire samenwerking relatief nog belangrijker zal worden voor de Belgische samenwerking in het algemeen. De aanbeveling van de evaluatoren om meer aandacht te besteden aan basisonderwijs houdt geen rekening met deze trend.

Agreed.

De evaluatie houdt weinig of geen rekening met het **Vademecum voor Begrotingssteun** (sinds 2005 van toepassing) waar een taakverdeling BTC / DGOS werd uitgewerkt.

Agreed. The Vademecum captures the operational criteria and responsibilities for budget support. Case studies have evaluated practices that accord to the relevant guidance at the time.

Het rapport stelt voor om 'silent partnerships' te overwegen in het kader van begrotingssteun (p. 18). Op zich is BTC niet tegen dit principe maar dan moeten regels uitgewerkt. Silent partnership lijkt aangewezen als België niets te bieden heeft in de beleidsdialoog en dit beter aan andere donors laat. Voor Vietnam, waar dit expliciet gesteld werd, is dit vreemd aangezien België in het laatste decennia erg veel in onderwijs heeft geïnvesteerd (zowel bilateraal, multilateraal en via de universitaire samenwerking). Als de Belgische bilaterale coöperatie zich in de toekomst focust op twee sectoren, met een portefeuille approach, zou verwacht kunnen worden dat de Belgische coöperatie zich specialiseert in die sectoren en actief zou bijdragen tot de dialoog. Dit is trouwens ook in lijn met de "Code of Conduct" van de lidstaten van de EU dat in mei 2007 werd getekend maar dat eveneens nergens vermeld wordt.

Agreed in principle but the relative advantage, and value of the learning should be explicit, and Belgium, as a relatively small donor, perhaps also need to learn about this modality.

1.2. CONCEPTEN

BTC stelt de interpretatie door het evaluatieteam van bepaalde concepten in vraag. Voorbeelden hiervan zijn:

Beleidsdialoog wordt door het team beschouwd als een voorrecht voor diplomaten. Beleidsdialoog heeft echter zowel een politieke als een technische dimensie. Vooral voor het laatste aspect kan BTC via expertise een belangrijke input geven (het is niet voldoende om mee aan tafel te zitten, maar je moet ook iets kunnen bijdragen). In de afgelopen jaren heeft België dank zij dergelijke technische inbreng een grotere rol kunnen spelen in de onderwijssector (vb Tanzania) maar dit wordt volledig genegeerd. De PowerPoint presentatie van Prof R. Renard ter gelegenheid van de attachédagen in 2006 is een goede leidraad voor deze aanpak.

Agreed. The point made in the evaluation is the convergence of the political and the technical in dialogue during formulation and implementation of SWAps.

Transactiekosten

In het rapport wordt de nadruk gelegd op zogenaamde "stijgende transactiekosten" en wordt gesuggereerd dat dit te wijten is aan de expertise van BTC. De echte doelstelling volgens de internationale *good practices* is om de transactiekosten van het partnerland te doen dalen. Hoge transactiekosten bij projecten werden aangevoerd door DFID als een van de argumenten om af te stappen van projecthulp. Ondertussen werd duidelijk dat transactiekosten bij budgetsteun voor DFID nog hoger zijn maar die van de partnerlanden zijn wel verminderd. Of dit ook voor de Belgische ontwikkelingssamenwerking het geval is kan met de beschikbare gegevens niet gesteld worden.

Agreed. The evidence on transaction costs is confusing, although there is growing consensus that they are higher in the early phases, and that there is a transfer of work to the government. This argues for better data and clearer differentiation of additional costs, as suggested.

De interpretatie van **Technische assistentie** (TA) in het kader van begrotingssteunoperaties is verwarrend. Er wordt geen onderscheid gemaakt tussen TA toegevoegd aan een ministerie (met als doel de capaciteiten van de partner te versterken) en de versterking van het donorteam (ambassade/BTC vertegenwoordiging) en ook de technische opvolging van het programma via de politieke dialoog. In de praktijk is het alleen deze laatste vorm die toegepast wordt in de Belgische interventies. De functie van beide expertisevormen is duidelijk verschillend.

The Belgian usage of the term is understood.

1.3. METHODOLOGIE

1.4.1 Steekproef

Vanuit het terrein worden bepaalde conclusies gecontesteerd omdat de steekproef niet als representatief wordt beschouwd. Bij wijze van voorbeeld een opmerking op het Vietnam country report: "La visite des évaluateurs du projet TTNP s'est résumée en trois heures de réunion avec le PMU et une journée d'observations dans une classe de TTI et dans deux classes de Training Schools (primary + boarding). Il est clair qu'un problème de représentativité de l'observation des apprentissages se pose quand on sait que le projet couvre des centaines de classes (à des niveaux très différents) étalées sur une superficie qui est aussi grande que la Belgique !!! (...) il y a beaucoup de statements avec très peu d'analyse fine des faits et présentés sans aucune nuance."¹

The TORs made provision for 14-day missions in case study countries to consider the work of all the actors. The evaluation did not aim to evaluate projects per se. The specific example provided good evidence for the findings and the consolidated conclusions about project design and implementation.

1.4.2 Momenteel zijn drie **evaluaties** aan de gang, of recent afgerond die in zekere zin overlappend zijn met deze evaluatie en een interessante aanvulling / input vormen voor deze evaluatie:

evaluatie van de Belgische begrotingssteun

evaluatie van de Belgische steun aan de onderwijssector in Ethiopië en Burkina Faso

evaluatie van het beurzenprogramma

De bevindingen en conclusies van deze 3 evaluaties staan soms haaks op die van de thematische onderwijsevaluatie van de Belgische Ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Het lijkt aangewezen deze evaluaties in beschouwing te nemen om meer nuance aan te brengen.

¹ Zie infra punt 2.6. gedetailleerde commentaren bij Vietnam country report ..

The Consultant only had sight of two evaluations out of the three. Considering the budget support evaluation, the Consultant had a phone interview with Mr XXXX on XXX June to inform the drafting of the final report.

1.4.3. Van observaties naar conclusies en aanbevelingen

De landenrapporten bevatten interessante informatie maar bepaalde conclusies en aanbevelingen, zowel in het eindrapport als in de landenrapporten, zijn weinig onderbouwd. Zo zijn de conclusies met betrekking tot de formulering (p. 40 – 41) en begrotingssteun (p. 39) onvoldoende gestaafd.

Some examples have been added.

1.4.4. Zoals bepaald in de referentietermen van de evaluatie², is het **niet de bedoeling om persoonlijke tussenkomsten te beoordelen**. Het Tanzania country report respecteert dit niet en gaat soms ook over de schreef (ongenuanceerd en uit de context gerukt). Het is daarenboven unfair omdat de geïsoleerde persoon in kwestie geen recht op verdediging krijgt. De conclusies worden trouwens sterk gecontesteerd door derden wat door South Research, die deelneemt aan de evaluatie, bevestigd werd in een rapport maar hiervan werd niets overgenomen in het evaluatierapport.

The country report has been revisited to depersonalise any analysis, and to emphasise the importance of contexts and management structures. The case-studies support the conclusion that SWAp/budget support “implementation” will require both DGDC and BTC to work differently.

1.4. DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE MAIN REPORT

P 6, Cross cutting and mainstreaming concerns: Gender is also a cross-cutting issue which is strangely not dealt with in the same chapter C1.2

The issue has now been treated elsewhere in the report

P 6, Post primary: Nuances between basic education and primary education should be better explained, more and more countries are developing a holistic vision about this.

This section has been elaborated in the final version of the report with a section on basic education and a section on universal primary education.

P 7 TVET: Interest renewal for the vocational training sector is, in the short history of education and cooperation, a relatively cyclic phenomenon and this has to be underlined in the report.

Not only the new interest from donors should be underlined, but it is necessary to emphasise the partitioning of this sub-sector and its extremely slow evolution on the ground even if it is often the consequence of a national authorities emerging interest. It would be useful to insist more on the embryonic aspect of lobbying for TVET, from the donors side as well as from the South partners side. And this has to be contrasted with HE.

Agreed

P 8: It is true that many donors have reduced their direct support to HE but keep their involvement indirectly through specialised scientific institutes for instance and via bursary systems (all types of bursaries, including study tours).

Overall, other donors’ support to HE, of all types, declined dramatically.

P 10, C 2 1 Belgian Context: “In 2002 the first strategy paper for the education and training sector was released with an expected renewal date four years later “.

² ToR dutch version, p. 11, punt 4. methodologie: “Vermits het gaat om een thematische evaluatie die gericht is op de opties in de toekomst, moet er vermeden worden om er een beoordeling van individuele tussenkomsten van te maken.”

This report does not comment on the fact that we are already mid 2007 and we still do not have a “new strategy paper”, not even a draft (the old one’s validity is four years starting from 2002). In fact this was not the first strategy paper, the first one was around 1997.

The report notes the delay and urges that the Strategy Paper be renewed.

P 12. The policy framework: BTC has several interventions where it is working in partnership with APEFE, in Burundi, Benin or DRC. This collaboration is done on the ground and the preparatory work is done at HQs level in Bruxelles.

The evaluation addresses collaboration between agencies at intervention level at a later stage in the report and in the country case study reports for Burundi, Benin and DRC.

P 13, D.2.1. General framework Policy and Strategies: A number of criticisms (among others the lack of awareness and lack of utilisation) are focusing directly on the strategic notes themselves - they shouldn’t be targeted but their implementation should. One cannot over estimate the value of a strategic note, because it only outlines the implementation framework which requires a rigorous adaptation to local and national contexts.

The evaluation concluded that a range of actors did not use the strategy notes. This question was expressly asked by DGDC in the PSC in January 2007 when discussing the evaluation framework.

The evaluators would agree that a strategic note needs to be able to accommodate, and provide the strategy suitable for a range of contexts.

In any case, as far as BTC was concerned, it was able to fully participate to the development of the strategic note ; BTC also witnessed the fact that other actors, on a periodic basis, were consulted to contribute to the development of the note.

Understood and revised.

BTC, through sector support, also works in agreement with other actors, including multilaterals such as UNESCO and UNICEF, although the report barely mentions this type of coordination.

No examples were encountered.

P 15, last §: add Ethiopia as one of the countries to have budget support or pooled funding tot the education sector.

Done

P 23, D.3.1 Policy coherence: “ the Belgian’s perceived advantage is in technical and vocational training”... yes ...but also in training trainers, a field in which Belgium has built up a strong and long experience.

Agreed

P 33, E.1.2. Direct, indirect and multilateral aid: The report is too weak regarding comments on the observation that, for years, Belgium has been giving an absolute priority – in its discourse and general policy – to basic education (as the vast majority of donors do) but data show clearly that is not at all translated into practice.

For several years, more than half of Belgian aid in the education sector has been directed to post-secondary.

Nowhere in the “summary conclusions and recommendations” the report makes a strong statement regarding this issue.

The importance of this mismatch is agreed and the weakness of the data needed to disaggregate the different post-secondary initiatives. The revised report presents a conclusion to highlight the contradiction and recommendation to improve the information base.

P 35: The report doesn't highlight enough the fact that our cooperation in the education sector keeps clearly ignoring ECCE (0% funding).

However, all scientists and men and women working on the ground agree to claim that development at pre-school age is fundamental for future cognitive acquisitions and is a condition to achievement at school and outside school of new generations of young people in the countries of the South.

The very low percentage of funds geared towards ECCE is mentioned p29. Whilst the evaluators would not argue that Belgium has to be seen to address all sectors, or all the EFA goals, policy and strategy should recognise their importance as stated.

P 36: "Facilitation of policy dialogue" ... is to be completed by a second example including Belgium leadership in the pool funding group of the Teacher's Development Programme in Ethiopia.

Noted, but the evaluation was not informed of this work.

P 39, implementation: Nothing is said about the fact that almost all project –type interventions of BTC have been already embedded for several years in a programmatic approach and that projects as "islands of excellence in a desert of poverty" belong to the past.

The evaluation mentions under section B2.3 "This thematic evaluation covers interventions and projects that were designed at the end of the nineties and implemented over 2002-2006. Such interventions are not representative of more recent approaches to design. Conversely new approaches in the last couple of years have not yet translated into actions and results on the ground. However, they are manifesting in policy, and the practice of design and implementation, which are subjects of the evaluation"

Not all projects have been "islands of excellence in a desert of poverty".

Does the report want to make a fool of itself stating bluntly that "BTC implementation of budget support interventions is unfit for purpose..." Without sustaining this judgement by arguments and facts (direct or indirect observations) ???!!!!!! The report throw words and concepts without the slightest explanation, for instance "the discussion is obscured by institutional politics and financial self-interest"!...

The report should explore ideas on how these interventions could be used as lifts for new ideas and new experimentations in a broader framework such as a SWAP.

In addition, the report should be more inspired and informed by the detailed recommendations of the external evaluation on education support in Ethiopia and Burkina. It is the same for the ongoing study on budgetary support. These two additional sources of information would bring more nuances to the current report.

This part of the report has been revised to provide a more nuanced commentary.

P 41: It was unnecessary to recommend "The evaluation recommends that the approval include validating against current strategies and explicit assessment ..."

In each DTF there is a sub-chapter dedicated to the analysis of Belgian cooperation priorities and strategies. This document is the result of final touches done by the national partner and DGDC. BTC's formulation work is therefore systematically checked at different stages by national authorities and by the attache and his/her colleagues. DGDC's validation in the preparation of BTC interventions can be done at any time in the preparation phase.

This has been amended to emphasise that it applies to all actors.

P 42, Project and programme implementation: We do agree to improve participation of South partners, but we cannot ignore that during the formulation phase, national, provincial and sometimes local partners, are always associated to the birth of the intervention. In addition, BTC hires on a systematic basis local consultants when coming to reporting about the formulation.

It would have been interesting to know why project programming keeps not taking into account long term commitments, because almost all experts and actors join their voices to state that short term commitments in the education sector don't make much sense.

The time frame for financial commitments constrains long-term commitments. It is one of the rationales for aligning with national policies, based on the assumption that they take a longer view.

P 43: It is clear that already at the design stage of the intervention, the formulation team look at what other actors are doing ; there is once more a special chapter dedicated to lessons learnt of other donors and to mechanisms to put in place to harmonise the intervention with activities of other stakeholders. Once the project starts being implemented, the PIU very often calls upon other actors and synchronises its activities.

“Belgian projects are very dependent on Belgian full time expertise”....rectification : this expertise is not exclusively Belgian but first and foremost international.

The report now notes that Belgian projects are very dependent on Belgian/European (full-time) expertise, which is true of all the actors.

P 44, Evaluation : It is true that mainly at the beginning, BTC projects were too often focused on input and not on outcome indicators, however we have been noting over the past years significant changes in the right direction.

Therefore, writing that “Missing are the questions about the intended outcomes and their indicators...” seems to us to be a far too strong and not up-to-date statement.

It is acknowledged that practices have changed for the better over the period, with some agencies, including BTC, leading the way.

P 45: “Project evaluation is often commissioned and sometimes undertaken by BTC”... this is very incomplete because the DTF makes provision on a systematic basis for all education projects a specific budget line for mid-reviews, which allows the evaluation to be made most of the time by an external evaluator and a local external evaluator.

Most of the time the evaluation is commissioned by the SMCL, following a participatory decision-making process.

The same remark applies for the following recommendation : “The evaluation recommends that outcome indicators, baselines, etc; be included as a requirement in programme and project design and reporting...”: once more, in almost all projects in recent years, baselines are one of the first activities to be done and it has a separate budget line.

See above. The situation with respect to externality of evaluation has been clarified.

P 46: BTC usually does an internal evaluation sometimes followed up by an external evaluation as foreseen by DGDC.

For the last 3 mid-reviews of BTC education projects, BTC invited DGDC to participate in the debriefing of the international expert in Bruxelles. In addition, mid-review debriefings are automatically organised locally with the attache, the resrep and national authorities.

P 46/47, E.2.3 Technical Assistance: To recruit technical assistant, BTC organises most of the time international public tenders opened to all, including therefore to potential regional expertise. When we recruit someone, we always involve BTC-region/country so that they can actively look for candidates.

It is quite obvious to state “TA support should be secured according to the needs of the intervention rather than the availability of experts” because BTC uses the profile and the competencies of the technical assistant as defined (in a common agreement with key stakeholders) in the DTF, and on the basis of this

information a post is publicly advertised. It is therefore on needs and not on experts availability that the selection is made.

In addition, BTC certainly does not have the habit to offer long term contracts to technical advisers and this is true for the vast majority of the technical assistants.

The finding applies mainly to other agencies, less able to recruit on the open market.

P 48/49/50, Scholarships: “However most of these scholarships are tied for study in Belgium”..... In Laos and Cambodia (and to a lesser extent also in Vietnam), BTC co-manage interventions (“Training Funds”) that untie fully bursaries for studies to be done in Belgium. The vast majority of these bursaries are done in country or in neighboring countries.

In addition, mid-course evaluation reports are available as well as a follow-up report (see “*The weakest point of the management seems to be monitoring and evaluation*”).

“...very different types of person. The risk is that the results.....will be limited”. This is mostly true for hors-projet bursaries, but less so for project related bursaries in which possibilities are gathered depending on the specific objective of the intervention. In this case, programme objectives are clearly defined and align more with country priorities.

“*Belgian scholarships.....access to...IIEP course in Paris*” Yes and no. Yes if we consider that the country really needs institutional support at high level in the structure ; ... no ... if we consider that bursaries for « lower » levels match much better the objectives of various projects which need less trainings such as High-Flying IIEP Paris.

It is also often difficult to keep bursaries to practitioners as opportunities to go abroad are often caught by institutional decision-makers.

A descriptive analysis of training locations/institutions also show that the vast majority of bursaries take place in HE, which is not a priority of our cooperation.

These points are mainly agreed and reflected in revisions to the final report. But the evaluators do not recognise the implied criticism of IIEP courses for educational planners and managers.

P 50/51, Alignment: MIPS however, although they are demand-driven, are operated in a parallel system, outside the main intervention modalities”. ...OK...but this is intrinsic to the very nature of the instrument.

Agreed

P 52/53, Partnerships: “The lack of cooperation at HQ level does not ease.....” BTC-education has always had preparatory harmonisation meetings in Bruxelles (and also often follow-up meetings on the ground by the technical assistants) with VVOB (for Cambodia and Rwanda’s interventions) and APEFE (for DRC< Benin and Burundi). At some point DGDC chaired a meeting which aim was explicitly to harmonise (to the level of the logical framework) supports in a vocational training project in Benin. Study-tours are organised in agreement with other of our partners.

In Rwanda, BTC and VVOB went further and developed a joint DTF with a common logframe in the vocational training sector.

Most of these partnerships are mentioned. The evaluation does not state that there is no cooperation at all at HQ level, but that it is weak between agencies at HQ level, which is especially true amongst the indirect actors.

P 53/54, Coordination, transparence et accountability: “Burundi...APEFE has only an observatory role in the SMCL” : It would only need the SMCL to decide to give a member status instead of an observator status to APEFE for APEFE to be able to play its full role (if it is what it wants and if it has the necessary competences in country).

It is useful to keep in mind that the Benin logframe is almost the same for APEFE and BTC, same for the one of TVET-MIFOTRA in Rwanda with VVOB and BTC. In these 2 projects cooperants and not BTC staff work with BTC budgets.

“In DRC ... APEFE was not allowed to participate in the formulation....” As far as we remember, there has never been an interdiction to participate, it was more a question of non-availability of expertise at the time of the formulation.

Opinions might diverge between actors. The evaluation takes the point BTC makes here.

And in the project that is referred to here there are a number of APEFE trainers (in the 1st phase of the project as well as now), who provide training within the BTC project and organisational and financial means are provided to them.

The evaluation notes this in the DRC case-study report.

P 55, Institutional strengthening: In Rwanda BTC manages 2 interventions (in the TVET sub-sector) – which contribute to the identification of needs and their prioritisation. Support to Capacity Building (at the beginning) and MIFOTRA-Kavumu.

P 56, Fragile states : BTC-Education-Bruxelles had the duty to ensure PIUs of the TVET projects in Burundi and DRC were in contact with each other as they have similar objectives and intermediary results.

Probably because of planning reasons, availability and calendar /agendas differences, there has not yet been direct collaboration on details, although these two interventions share a number of information.

This probably explains why the evaluation teams in these two countries have not found evidence, at first sight, of particular collaboration between the two projects.

Understood

P 57, Transversal themes : We would have liked the report to be much more detailed on this. It is limited to “...*little evidence of particular intervention ‘s effects on gender*”. What was the tool used to find this « little evidence » ?

Since a number of years bilateral projects in education have specific chapters in their DTF and also often have intermediary results focusing on equality. One could have found out whether the implementation follows this or not.

We cannot find anywhere either reflections on transversal themes such as SIDA and Children rights which also have a particular status in the implementation of bilateral interventions.

Evidence would include gender related outcome indicators and evidence of gender-awareness in procedures. The evaluation saw specific work addressing SIDA, but little evidence of mainstreaming. We saw no real evidence of work informed by or promoting Children’s Rights.

Fast Track Initiative : The report would be clearer and more pertinent if it had analysed better Belgium’s role in the use of new available funds through the FTI in the education sector. Very little is said on the fact that Belgian cooperation contributed to more the five million USD in the period 2003-2006.

What are the effects on our partner country’s education systems ? What are the appreciations regarding advantages and limits of this new cooperation model between donors and national partners ? Have the evaluators had the opportunity to confirm that completion rates increased in partner countries due to this FTI support?

How can one appreciate Belgium’s role in advocacy so that partner countries evolve quickly towards the minimum 20% of national expenditure for education (one of the important benchmarks).

Do the evaluators propose other new benchmarks after these 5 years of FTI ?

Lastly, do they suggest a substantial increase or not through FTI of Belgian contributions in the education sector, or do they advise we stick to our rather symbolic contribution of 1 to 2 million euros per year to the Enhanced Catalytic Fund?

Appreciations on FTI would be welcome as this initiative is mainly done in education – especially in basic education of the following Belgian partner countries : Vietnam, Mozambique, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal et Bénin. IN addition, other partner countries (Burundi, Bolivie, RDCongo) are about to submit a sector plan.

Comments on this topic would be more useful as FTI happens at a time when we observe a significant decrease in donors commitments for basic education (see meeting “Education for all: keeping our promises” – Brussels, mai 2007)

FTI works as a catalyst and organising structure, not as a funding agency. It is particularly in the use of the catalytic fund, to which Belgium makes a proportionate contribution (more than Ireland, slightly less than Italy³). The Catalytic Fund has not yet been used in any of the case study countries, although Burundi is in the next group. After a slow start the FTI can show countries benefiting from the Fund to become eligible.

For Vietnam FTI is a backdrop to ongoing work rather than a funding channel. Similarly in Benin, where FTI has provided a nucleus for donor coordination (excluding Belgium in this non-partner).

The FTI secretariat reports significant progress on key indicators in countries engaged in the process, but this evaluators recognise that a mix of multilateral and bilateral support is involved.

Ultimately, however, this decision will be driven by considerations of aid policy- whether or not to commit to international collaborations, if necessary shaping and strengthening them. The evaluation makes such a recommendation but recognises its implications for the Belgian agencies.

³ <http://www.fasttrackinitiative.org/library/DC2006-0015%28E%29-Education.pdf>



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