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**Local Solutions to Global Challenges:
Towards Effective Partnership in Basic Education**

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**Working Document
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
CONFEMEN	Conférence des Ministres de l'Éducation des pays ayant le Français en partage
MLA	Monitoring Learning Achievement
NESIS	National Education Statistical Information Systems
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs des Pays de la CONFEMEN
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SACMEQ	Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In 1990, in Jomtien, Thailand, and in 2000, in Dakar, Senegal, the international community set out and reaffirmed the goals of Education for All (EFA). These goals have not yet been met. While there have been a number of positive achievements over the period since 1990, the international community has failed to reach the EFA goals, at least in part because of the challenges of achieving meaningful partnership to ensure the effective provision and use of external support to basic education, and hence improvements in basic education in partner countries. Although the commitment to basic education and partnership – the intentions – are evident, what is most lacking, is the practice of partnership as reflected in the willingness and determination to improve basic education through locally developed solutions. In spite of the rhetoric about partnership and local solutions, the reality is that external agencies and partner countries have been more attentive to the global challenges than to the local solutions.

2. These are the key conclusions of a unique evaluation commissioned two years ago by a consortium of 13 external agencies and four partner countries. The evaluation examined the process of external support to basic education provided by international and national funding and technical assistance agencies to partner countries from 1990 to 2002. It focused particularly on the relationship between the intents, practices and results of external support, in order to draw lessons for policy and programme improvement. The evaluation was both global and local. It included a global review of documents on external support to basic education and illustrative case studies of external support to basic education in four partner countries – Burkina Faso, Uganda, Zambia and Bolivia.

3. Externally supported basic education at a global level, and in the four participating countries, has contributed to important progress towards achieving the EFA goals, especially in the area of expanded enrolment in primary schooling. However, the goals of achieving gender parity and reducing regional disparities in primary school enrolment are proving more difficult to realize. In addition, improving the quality of externally supported basic education represents an enduring problem for partner countries. Yet it has been accorded a lower priority, as emphasize as been given to universal primary education.

4. Over the decade since Jomtien, there has been substantial progress towards the provision of external support through programme approaches or sector-wide approaches (SWAs), albeit with the continuing existence of project support. There is considerable evidence that project forms of support can play a positive role, especially in supporting innovations and in providing targeted support to marginalized groups.

5. The shift to programme support is an indication of the commitment of external agencies to strengthen partnership. This, combined with the development of national programmes for basic education, has, at least in part, contributed to strengthened national ownership and improved partnership. However, this form of support does not necessarily improve partnerships if implemented as a blueprint rather than a process. While it has led to some improvements in national ownership and to better coordination of external assistance, it has also, in some cases, contributed to increased tensions and divisions among distinct groups of external agencies.

6. The evaluation identified a number of factors that have had an impact on partnership or are affected by weak partnerships – factors related to continuity, capacity, participation and relevance.

7. Issues of continuity arise at all levels – at the level of the global challenges in basic education; at the level of the financial commitment of external agencies; and at the level of the management within partner governments and external agencies. Although there is agreement on the broad range of components included in basic education, in reality the focus of most activities of both external agencies and national partners has been on formal primary schooling to the detriment of non-formal education, including adult literacy. This narrowing of the focus has been emphasized with the introduction of the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and led to a perception of discontinuity in the priorities of the international community. In addition, there is considerable concern, despite efforts such as the FTI and the implied long-term commitment associated with sector-wide approaches (SWAPs), about the continuity of current levels of funding, particularly since the volume of external support to basic education did not increase at the rate that could have been expected from the nature of the commitments at Jomtien.

8. In addition to the obvious imbalances between external agencies and national partners in terms of financial resources, there are also imbalances in administrative and technical capacity that threaten to undermine efforts to develop effective partnerships. This may be exacerbated by the finding in that, in some countries at least, the move towards programme approaches has either not led, at least in the short-term, to a reduction in the administrative burden for partner governments. In fact, a very heavy burden of planning, coordination and monitoring has been made more difficult by uneven progress in the development of common administrative procedures among external agencies and a reluctance to accept local processes as adequate.

9. The movement to programme support or SWAPs has not secured full participation for all stakeholders and, in some cases, has undermined full participation. There is evidence of the emergence of two distinct categories of external agencies – an inner group providing support to the common programme, through budget support, and an outer group providing project support, albeit in some cases within the framework of the national programme. This may detract from partnership. Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that some national basic education programmes have been developed without the effective participation of civil society organizations and key stakeholder groups, such as teachers and parents, whose participation is critical to a broad partnership.

10. Finally, partnership has had an impact on, and is affected by, the relevance of both external support and the content of basic education. The nature of external support has, in some cases, been inappropriate to the administrative and organizational contexts in partner countries. Similarly, external agencies supporting basic education have not been able to coordinate or rationalize their complex administrative procedures to make them appropriate to the administrative and management structures of many partner countries. Perhaps more important are concerns about the relevance of the focus of external support on classical formal, in-school primary education. If secondary school expansion does not keep pace with expansion in the primary system, few primary school leavers will be able to attend secondary school. Yet there are questions about whether primary education adequately prepares young people for the work world. There has been limited success, within the focus on UPE, in reforming the content of primary schooling to link it better to life after school.

11. Even though, throughout the decade since Jomtien, the concept of partnership has loomed large in the discourse of both external agencies and partner governments, the reality is that there is still much in the provision of external support that is not based on effective partnerships. If these continue to limit the development of effective partnerships – both between external agencies and partner countries and within partner countries – the achievement of the EFA goals and the MDG by 2015 is at risk. Addressing these limitations is the challenge now facing the international community.

2. INTRODUCTION

12. In 1990, in Jomtien, Thailand, the international community made a commitment to achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) by the year 2000. Those goals were not achieved. In 2000, in Dakar, Senegal, the international community met again to recommit its efforts to the Jomtien EFA goals.

13. In spite of not having yet met these ambitious goals, there have been a number of positive achievements over the period since 1990. The international community, including external agencies and national partners, have reflected sustained agreement on the priority of basic education and its components. External agencies have offered considerable financial and technical support to partner countries for the development of basic education. Both external agencies and national partners have expressed renewed commitment to partnership and the development of local solutions to the challenges of basic education. So, why have the goals not been achieved?

14. In spite of these considerable efforts, the international community has failed to reach the EFA goals, at least in part because of the challenges of achieving meaningful partnership. Effective partnership would contribute to ensuring the effective provision and use of external support to basic education, and hence to improvements in basic education in partner countries. Although the commitment to basic education and partnership – the intentions – are evident, what is most lacking, is the practice of partnership as reflected in the willingness and determination to improve basic education through locally developed solutions. Locally developed solutions are those that are most relevant to the particular contexts of partner countries and are built from the ground up, rather than through the application of blueprints and templates developed at a global level. In spite of the rhetoric about partnership and local solutions, the reality is that external agencies and partner countries have been more attentive to the global challenges than to the local solutions.

15. These are the key conclusions of a unique evaluation commissioned two years ago by a consortium of 13 external agencies and four partner countries.¹ The evaluation examined the process of external support to basic education provided by international and national funding and technical assistance agencies to partner countries from 1990 to 2002. It focused particularly on the relationship between the intents, practices and results of external support in order to draw lessons for policy and programme improvement.² This paper presents the results of that evaluation.

16. The evaluation was at the same time global and local. It included a global review of documents on external support to basic education and case studies of external support to basic education in four partner countries – Burkina Faso, Uganda, Zambia and Bolivia. The document review included documents which focused on international and national policies on external support to basic education and also on basic education;

1 The Steering Committee for the evaluation included representatives from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom; Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland; European Commission; Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ), Germany; Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy, Burkina Faso; Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Danida, Denmark; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway; Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda; Ministry of Education, Zambia; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Chair); Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); UNESCO; UNICEF; Vice Ministry for Initial, Primary and Secondary Education, Bolivia; and the World Bank. The consortium of private firms with experience in evaluation and education, which carried out the evaluation, included the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), Canada; Goss Gilroy Inc., Canada; and Education for Change Ltd., United Kingdom.

2 *Local Solutions To Global Challenges: Towards Effective Partnership In Basic Education: Final Report*, October 2003.

financial flows and global quantitative assessments of results in basic education; modalities of support to basic education; models of partnership in basic education; and other specific issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS and poverty reduction. The case studies, which involved several missions carried out by international and national-based consultants, were included for illustrative purposes only and were not intended to be representative of all countries receiving external support for basic education.³ They were not assessments of basic education in the four countries. They looked at issues associated with externally supported basic education in order to assess the nature and evolution of external support.

³ The case studies provided a rich mosaic of situations and problems encountered in the efforts to support basic education and achieve Education for All (EFA). They provided a good mix of experience for smaller population countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Andean zone of South America, but they do not include very small population countries. Nor do they include any of the very large population countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and Indonesia), which account for the majority of primary school age children who are out of school.

3. EVALUATION RESULTS

17. The evaluation results are grouped around the three themes of the evaluation: external support to basic education; externally supported basic education; and partnership. Within each of them, the evaluators considered the intents, practices and results and attempted to compare and contrast the practices and results with the intents, as documented in the literature and observed in the case study countries.

3.1. External support to basic education

18. The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All in 1990 represented a watershed for the international community because the conference declaration set out agreed-upon goals that were shared by external agencies and national partners. These were accompanied by commitments to support the achievement of the goals and an agreed-upon process of planning, follow-up and reporting at both the national and international levels.

19. This section explores the volume, nature and modalities of external support for basic education from Jomtien to 2002.

3.1.1. Volume of external support

20. At a global level, in the period from Jomtien to Dakar, the volume of external support to basic education did not increase at the rate that could have been expected from the nature of the commitments at Jomtien. By 2002, there remained a very wide gap between the estimated amount of external assistance required to accelerate progress towards the EFA goals for 2015 and the amount being provided. While there have been significant efforts since Dakar to increase the flow of funds in support of basic education, including the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI). These efforts have not yet resulted in increased disbursements and they have encountered problems in attracting sufficient long-term commitments from external agencies.

21. Commitments to these global goals were reflected in the four countries covered by the case studies. However, the profile of resource commitments to the four countries differs from that of the global review. The four countries participating in the evaluation experienced a pattern of financial support that is quite different from the global pattern reported in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002 (UNESCO, 2002). Whereas the document review suggests that the volume of external financial support to basic education was stable or declined slightly over the 1990 to 2000 period, the case country studies reported increased resources, or at least commitments of resources, following the development of national programmes for basic education. While the evaluators encountered some difficulties in identifying the details of the volume and shape of financial external support to basic education,⁴ the available financial information, combined with qualitative information from stakeholders, suggests that these countries have seen, for the most part, substantial and sustained increases in the second half of the 1990s and extending into 2001. This pattern has been associated with the development of national policies, strategies and programmes in basic education. In Uganda and Zambia,

4 In part, this is due to the fact that, despite repeated calls for improvements in reporting of external flows to basic education, external agencies do not code their support to the basic education sector in a consistent way. Those charged with monitoring progress still must deal with substantial flows that are essentially not identified with specific uses within the education sector. In part, it is due to the lack of information in partner countries about the volume of external support for basic education. This problem remains pervasive at both a global and national level.

where national programmes for the development of basic education were established in the latter half of the 1990s, the volume of external support has increased. In Uganda, between the advent of the national programme in 1998 and 2002, approximately 60% of the financing for primary education came from external source. In Burkina Faso, with the advent of its national programme, external agencies have indicated a willingness to commit considerable resources for basic education. The most complete information on the volume of external support was available from Bolivia where, following the development of a systematic national policy, strategy and programme in education reform, external support for basic education increased from very low levels in the period before 1995. By 2001, it had increased from just under US\$30 million annually in 1995 and 1996 to more than US\$50 million in 2001.

22. However, at a global level, there remains a gap between the funds required to achieve the EFA goals and the funds being committed by external agencies. This may, in part, be explained by external agency perceptions of the lack of absorptive capacity of partner countries as well as the complexity of programme planning and development processes at a global and national level. Evidence from the case studies suggests that external agencies have been reluctant to increase the level of funding until national policies and programmes that reflect the global goals are in place.

3.1.2. Nature of external support

23. External support is provided not only in the form of financial assistance, as discussed above, but also through policy dialogue and technical assistance (TA). There has been continuous involvement in policy dialogue and TA by a wide range of external agencies. The intensity and range of external agency involvement in TA has varied over time, as has the role of lead agency in each area of activity. In particular, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and selected bilateral agencies have provided important TA at different points in time in each of the four country studied. The movement to different modalities of support (programme, as opposed to project, approaches) is often accompanied, during the planning stages, by an increase in the volume and intensity of TA. In the four countries, there was a shift in focus of TA away from education-specific expertise, such as teacher education and curriculum development and towards programme development and improved management.

24. Over the period covered by the evaluation, a number of global and national factors contributed to a narrowing of the focus of external support and national resources to concentrate almost exclusively on Universal Primary Education (UPE) to the detriment of non-formal education, including adult literacy. This has been particularly the case in Uganda, Zambia and Bolivia where the national programmes for the development of basic education focus, almost exclusively, on formal, primary schooling. In Uganda, for example, the 1996 decision of the government to abolish primary school fees for up to four children in each family to encourage UPE set the stage for a clear focus of external support on increasing access to primary schooling. In Zambia, the focus adopted by both external agencies and the government has been perceived as shifting attention and support from other EFA goals – most notably from early childhood education and adult literacy initiatives. In Burkina Faso, on the other hand, the recently developed national programme for the development of basic education includes components of basic education other than primary education. Notwithstanding the inclusion of non-formal education in the recent plans in Burkina Faso, over the past decade, the majority of external agency financial support and government attention has been given to primary schooling. Although, there was also considerable external support for adult literacy initiatives, it was less than for formal education. As in other countries, most of this

assistance has been channelled through national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

25. The tendency for non-formal education to be dealt with by different administrative structures than primary and secondary schooling had contributed to its isolation, as has the tendency for external funds to be provided to non-formal education through NGOs. Yet, it is worth noting that external agencies and governments alike are placing more emphasis on non-formal education and on EFA goals outside UPE in the planning of new-generation programmes.

3.1.3. Modalities of external support

26. Perhaps the most significant change in the nature of external support, reflected in both the document review and the case studies, has been substantial progress towards the provision of external support through programme approaches or sector-wide approaches (SWAp).⁵ In all four countries covered in the case studies, the development of national strategies and programmes for the development of basic education and the move towards programme approaches or SWAp were accompanied by a small number of external agencies providing support in the form of budget support or common funding. In all cases, the governments encouraged other external agencies to make the same commitment and, over time, the number of agencies committing to common funding has increased.

27. Bolivia was the first of the four countries to develop such a programme. The Education Reform Programme (PRE), which began in 1994, provided the legal and institutional framework for much of the external support to basic education after that date. Subsequently, four external agencies committed loan funds and grants to form the core of a programme approach with common funding. The government has consistently lobbied external agencies to provide as much support as possible through the PRE, which it views as more closely aligned to the priorities of the Bolivian state and more conducive to local ownership than project support.

28. Uganda and Zambia developed their national plans somewhat later in the decade. The Ugandan Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP), covering the whole education sector, was developed after the 1996 announcement of the abolition of school fees. It provided the framework for budget support. Although it was initially supported only by a group of only six agencies, the Ugandan government preferred that all external support came through budget support mechanisms. As agency confidence in the government's capacity to manage pooled funds grew, other agencies have begun to provide common funding.

29. Similarly, in Zambia in 1996, the government developed a policy document that set the priority for basic education and led to the development of a sub-sector programme for basic education – the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP). Although there were delays in implementation, since 1998 BESSIP has been the framework for external support for basic education in Zambia. As in Uganda, initially only a few agencies committed to provide common funding. Although not all agencies

5 In the literature and in the four countries studied, there is lack of consistency in the use of some terms. This is particularly the case for the terms used to describe different support modalities. In some cases, the terms "sector-wide approach" (SWAp) and "programme approach" are considered to be synonymous. In other cases, the "programme approach" is considered to be different from and, in fact, a precursor to, a SWAp – an intermediate step between the "project approach" and a SWAp. Similarly, there is inconsistency in the use of the term "sector". In some countries the term "sector" refers to the education sector. In others, it refers to what others might call the "sub-sector" of basic education. The evaluators did not adopt common terminology in order to be faithful to the way in which these terms were being used at the partner country level. The ways in which these terms are used in each country are reflected in the country studies.

could provide common funding, BESSIP emerged as an umbrella programme under which all agencies would work towards the agreed priorities and targets.

30. Burkina Faso was the last of the four countries to adopt a national framework for the development of basic education that would provide the umbrella for all external support. Towards the end of the 1990s, the government developed a 10-year plan and there was a clear transition in the discourse of the external agencies towards programme support. Initially three external agencies were committed to common funding but gradually, as implementation of the national programme began, others are committing to this type of support.

31. The global documents and the country studies all note the persistence of project support even in the midst of the development of a programme approach. Some external agencies are unable or unwilling to commit to budget support or common funding for a programme. In addition, the literature and the case studies reflect the continuing perceived value of project support, particularly for technical assistance and the implementation of innovative or experimental projects. In all four countries, some external agencies will continue to fund projects, albeit it within the framework of a national programme.

32. It is difficult to compare the level of ownership that partner governments and other national stakeholders have of the process of development of national programmes. However, the evaluators conducting two of the four country studies suggest that the partner country governments have a strong sense of ownership of the resulting programme (Bolivia, Zambia). To some extent, the level ownership is related to the imposition of conditionalities by the external agencies. Conditionalities continue to be a feature of external support to basic education in all four countries. In two of the four countries (Bolivia, Zambia), they have reflected national priorities and goals while in the other two (Burkina Faso, Uganda), conditionalities appear to have played a role in weakening the national sense of ownership of sectoral programmes in basic education.

3.2. Externally supported basic education

3.2.1. Focus on primary education and issues of gender, quality and relevance

33. Externally supported basic education at a global level, and in the four participating countries, has contributed to important progress towards achieving the EFA goals, especially in the area of expanded enrolment in primary schooling. Improvements to access to basic education were noted in all four country case studies. In Uganda, there have been dramatic increases in primary school enrolment. In Zambia, following a slow decline in enrolment and other basic education indicators in the first half of the decade, enrolments are slowly beginning to increase. In Burkina Faso, external support was instrumental in facilitating substantial growth in the basic education system and gross enrolment rates rose from about 30% in 1990 to 43% in 2001. In the early 1990s, Bolivia had already achieved nearly universal access for the early years of primary school but, over the decade, there was significant improvement in the retention of primary school students as measured in national promotion, retention and abandonment rates.

34. The goal of achieving gender parity in primary school enrolment is proving more difficult than expanding overall levels of enrolment. It tended to receive less explicit attention in programme planning and implementation. Addressing gender parity is especially difficult where, among other things, the very structure of the primary school system discourages girls' participation. This is reflected in the four countries covered in

the case studies as well as in the literature. In Uganda, retention remains a problem, particularly for girls in the upper grades. In Zambia, although in urban areas the ratio of girls to boys in schools is nearing parity, the differences between rural and urban areas are the most significant challenge to equity of access and achievement. In Burkina Faso, gender and regional disparities continue to be evident. Although Bolivia has already achieved nearly universal access in primary school, girls in rural areas continue to lag behind boys in their participation rates.

35. While there have been improvements in access to primary education, there remain many concerns about the quality of that education. Improving the quality of externally supported basic education represents an enduring problem for partner countries, a problem that limits the effectiveness of external support. In Uganda, for example, the quality of primary education is believed to have suffered because of the expansion of the system to improve access, particularly because of overcrowding in the schools and the hiring of teachers with minimal education. Expansion and decentralization of the education system in Uganda has tended to encourage the addition of classrooms to existing schools, rather than the establishment of new schools. As a result, some primary schools are becoming very large, which is not conducive to improving quality. This trend has also contributed to growth in the number of private schools in Uganda.

36. Although expansions to the system may have contributed to reduction in quality, it seems also quite likely that quality issues persist due to an inability to make use of available research and monitoring tools and because organizational cultures resist innovation and change. This, in turn, contributes to problems in the perceived relevance of externally supported basic education, particularly for primary school leavers. In Uganda, attempts are being made to improve the professional development of teachers, to reform the curriculum and to ensure that textbooks are available. Although the impact of these changes cannot yet be measured, the recent establishment of the Education Standards Agency (ESA) is expected to improve the monitoring of educational quality, as well as strengthen partnerships in inspection, monitoring and assessment between the centre, district and local levels.

37. Yet even in Bolivia, which has attained nearly full enrolment for the early years of primary school, there are strong indications that the quality of basic education provided in the formal primary system continues to resist efforts at improvement. Tests results from the education quality assessment system indicate that it is difficult to detect statistically significant differences in reading and mathematics achievement when comparing schools with and without access to the national education reforms.

38. In spite of this progress in enrolment and, in some cases, retention and gender parity, the pace of expansion means that achievement of the EFA goals and the MDG by 2015 remains at risk.

3.2.2. Governance issues

39. In order to make effective use of external support (and of national resources), partner countries often need to undertake basic reforms of their systems for planning, managing, and delivering basic education services. There are often significant roadblocks and impediments in the reform process, including tradition and organizational cultures, which are highly resistant to change. These are reflected in three specific areas – the challenges of participation of teachers and parents, decentralization and the development of monitoring and evaluation systems.

40. The most significant factors undermining reform may be the exclusion of key stakeholders from the planning of reform efforts and the absence of a strong sense of ownership of the reforms on the part of partner governments and national stakeholders. Both of these are related to evolving concepts of partnership. The isolation of teachers from the programme design and development process has the effect of weakening the political legitimacy of many reform programmes in basic education and, tends to result in programmes that lack relevance and practical application in such areas as teacher training, materials development and curriculum reform. Efforts to use external support to increase the efficiency of basic education systems, especially formal schooling, have often not taken adequate account of the interests, needs and viewpoints of teachers or provided for their ongoing professional development. In fact, some programmes to expand coverage and improve efficiency include measures perceived as an attack on teachers' professional status and pride, such as changes in teacher status, salary reductions or reductions in the length of teacher education, with insufficient attention to the principle of teachers as partners and owners in the development of primary education.

41. Efforts to develop mechanisms for local participation in the administration, management and governance of local school systems have laid the basis for increased participation of parents and communities through, for example, parent associations and school councils. The development of these bodies has been a feature of the development of basic education programmes in all four countries covered in the case studies. Yet they need to be further developed and to go beyond their current use as administrative support bodies so that they can better link schools to communities.

42. Decentralization has been a constant theme and a continuous challenge in the use of external support to basic education. There is no suggestion that decentralization can or should be abandoned or reversed, since it has an important role to play in ensuring greater relevance of the basic education system to local communities. What seems most important, however, is for decentralization efforts to proceed at a judicious pace so that local needs and capacities can be taken into account and strengthened. Where this has not occurred, it has limited progress in the implementation of national reforms. In Zambia, for example, civil service reform and decentralization initiatives were encouraged by the external agencies: the former as a path to increasing management efficiency and effectiveness; the latter for its perceived benefits of local responsiveness, flexibility and accountability. The process of decentralization is currently underway but poses challenges for the central ministry to build the levels of management, accountability and ownership at the district levels necessary for the national programme for basic education.

43. There have been important efforts to use external support to improve monitoring and evaluation systems. These have contributed to a better information base and have strengthened the capacity of partner governments to take part in joint assessment missions associated with SWAs or programme support. On the other hand, there are problems in linking the results gathered through monitoring and evaluation to changes in programmes and in systems for delivering basic education. Most importantly perhaps, there have been problems in assessing pilot projects and special initiatives so that they can "go to scale." Burkina Faso presents an interesting example of these challenges. Prior to the design of the new national programme for the development of basic education there were many stand-alone pilot projects in various regions of the country. Over the years, neither the government nor the external agencies seem to have been willing to take the responsibility for taking these innovations beyond the level of experimentation to implement them at a national level. As a result, while primary schooling in the country consists of a large core of conventional classical schools, there is also a patchwork of other modalities of schooling that have been sponsored by various external agencies but are unlikely to fundamentally alter the structure of the overall

system. These experiments promoted by different external agencies continue to be a feature of the new national programme.

3.3. Partnership and the factors supporting partnership

44. The evaluation suggests that truly effective partnerships for basic education have not been achieved in many countries. Yet it also suggests that this is not a reason to call off the search. Nor does it mean that the history of the almost 13 years since Jomtien is one of wasted effort. The evaluation does identify a number of factors that contribute to effective partnerships in basic education – continuity, capacity, participation, and relevance. This section concludes with a discussion of the impacts of modalities of support on partnership.

3.3.1. Continuity

45. Issues of continuity arise at all levels – at the level of the global challenges in basic education; at the level of the financial commitment of external agencies; and at the level of the management within partner governments and external agencies.

46. The global EFA challenge set out in 1990 has been subject to some refocusing with the emergence of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for education. These goals and the formal concentration of the FTI on these goals have tended to reinforce the trend for external support to focus on UPE. This has diverted attention away from a focus on all components of basic education. Yet basic policy continuity around the EFA goals in partner countries has been a positive contributing factor in encouraging significant levels of funding and other forms of external support. Changes in the focus of the global challenges when countries are still responding to previously set goals may undermine partnership.

47. There are very serious concerns over the sustainability of the current level of funding. The history of increasing external support and expanding systems of public schooling in partner countries without a commitment to continuity in funding gives rise to considerable risk of non-sustainability. External agencies need to recognize that the commitments implied by their support of major expansions in primary school systems are long-term. Despite efforts such as the FTI and the implied long-term commitment associated with SWAps, most funding of external support to basic education is provided on a relatively short-term basis. There is a necessity, at least in some countries, for recognition on the part of external agencies of the need for high levels of sustained, predictable, funding for both the recurrent and investment costs of basic education over a long-term period. The risk to each of the partner countries of substantial disengagement by the external agencies is very high and the consequences would be devastating and may undermine partnership. It may amount to setting up countries to fail. In Uganda, for example, concern has been expressed that the country has been encouraged to expand the system to such an extent that it is too heavily dependent on external funding. At the same time, it is important to recognize that many partner countries (for example Bolivia and Zambia) have contributed to sustainability by matching increases in external resources provided by external sources with comparable increases in national budgets and expenditures.

48. A significant challenge to effective partnership is the lack of continuity and capacity in the management of the basic education system. In some countries (including Burkina Faso and Zambia) problems in staff rotation and discontinuities in public sector management have very important detrimental effects on partnership since they undermine

the capacity of the partner country to hold its own in discussions and negotiations on policies and programmes. They also undermine externally supported efforts at capacity building. In contrast, Bolivia has been able to maintain a fairly high level of stability in the managerial and technical staff of the Ministry and has benefited more from capacity development efforts.

49. Programmes of public sector reform aimed at improving human resource management and professionalizing and regularizing processes for staffing, training, promotion and retention have been linked by external agencies, in their policies and plans, to their continued commitment to provide support to key ministries involved in basic education. However, the extent to which these overarching reforms have, in reality, had an impact on basic education is not yet clear.

50. There are also concerns with continuity and capacity within the external agencies. The shift to SWAps has resulted in a change in the work demands for external agency staff. They are required to be more involved in sector-wide analysis, policy formulation and planning, negotiations and require a greater understanding of the “politics” of external agency coordination. Yet, these are not part of the traditional skills of education experts in external agencies at the country level. In Uganda, for example, in those agencies that have moved towards the SWAp modality, agency personnel require skills in system-wide analysis, policy formation, planning and, to some extent, the negotiations and “politics” of external agency harmonization. These are not the traditional skills of the education cadre, and agencies are having to recruit and train staff accordingly.

3.3.2. Capacity issues

51. Imbalances between external agencies and partners countries are not only financial. The problem of imbalances in administrative and technical capacity between external agencies and their national partners continues to seriously undermine efforts to develop effective partnerships in basic education. Some countries have been able to maintain a stable cadre of managerial and technical staff and have benefited from external support to capacity development. As in the case, for example, of Bolivia, some have also been able to access expertise and experience in the region (with the help of external support).

52. There is evidence that, in some countries at least, the move towards programme approaches has either not led to a decrease in administrative burdens for the partner country or has even, in the short-term at least, led to an increase. Where this has occurred it has been attributed to the heavy burden of planning, coordination, monitoring and reporting faced by the partner government in the transition to a sectoral approach. It is also sometimes related to a failure on the part of external agencies to adopt coordinated and simplified procedures for programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. In Zambia, for example, the national program was designed to offer an umbrella under which different external agencies could shelter. The different modalities adopted by the various agencies have placed a burden on the government and increased the administration overhead. Yet, in three of the four (Burkina Faso, Uganda, Zambia) case study countries, the evaluators point to the fact that the core group of external agencies providing programme support have attempted to harmonize administrative procedures. All country case studies point to some improvements in coordination of external support.

3.3.3. Roles and participation

53. The movement to programme support for basic education has often involved the emergence of two distinct categories of external agencies: an inner group providing support to the common programme, through budget support, and an outer group providing project support, albeit in some cases within the framework of the national programme. It is essential that the many agencies constrained from participation by their mandates and structures (including United Nations agencies and TA agencies) not be excluded from participation in key policy development and programme assessment structures. Their active involvement will strengthen the variety and quality of support available to national partner governments as they deal with the demands of programme support.

54. Similarly, the engagement of national stakeholders is critical to successful partnership. There is a tendency for the dialogue surrounding the development, implementation and assessment of large-scale programmes of support to basic education to be conducted on a narrow basis, without effective participation by civil society organizations and key stakeholder groups such as teachers and parents. This has the effect of alienating key groups necessary to the success of programmes and may undermine the level of political support and community commitment available to sustain the subsequent programme.

3.3.4. Relevance to local context

55. There are important issues concerning the relevance of certain aspects of both external support and the content of basic education. In some cases, the nature of external assistance has been inappropriate to the administrative and organizational contexts in partner countries. As an example, support to certain types of teacher education is sometimes not appropriate to the system of teacher education and advancement in the country concerned. Similarly, external agencies supporting basic education have not been able to coordinate or rationalize their complex administrative and operational norms and standards for budgeting, procurement, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Clearly these systems are not appropriate to the administrative and management structures of many partner countries.

56. More importantly perhaps, there are serious questions concerning the relevance of the focus of external support on classical formal, in-school primary education. As primary school systems expand and the size of the annual cadre of primary school leavers increases, the question of what happens to those who complete primary school becomes more and more acute. Not many primary school leavers will be able to attend secondary school due, in part, to the fact that secondary school systems have not expanded to keep pace with the increase in primary school enrolment. For those who do not go on to secondary school, the question then becomes whether the primary education has adequately prepared them for the work world. There has been limited success, within the focus on UPE, in reforming the content of primary schooling to link it better to life after school. The future for students after primary school is a major issue in the relevancy of basic education for learners and their parents.

3.3.5. Impact of the modalities of external support on partnership

57. Analysis of the shift from project to programme modalities in the case study countries suggests that the impact has not necessarily, by definition, been one of strengthening partnership. While it has been strengthened in some countries (Bolivia, Zambia), there has not, as yet, been any discernible effect to strengthen or weaken partnership in Burkina Faso or Uganda. It is the view of the evaluators that the shift from projects to programmes is not inherently positive or negative from the perspective of partnership.

58. It is clear that project support for basic education has played an important role in supporting innovation and the development of new practices. While there is some concern that this innovation may be lost in the move to programme support, there is also a strong potential for the improved effectiveness of project support as innovations and pilot projects are taken to scale in national programmes. The key problem is to ensure that project and programme support are integrated.

59. The shift from predominantly project support to basic education to an umbrella programme or SWAp (with some projects persisting, as they usually do) will be more likely to have a positive influence on partnership when it includes:

- A commitment from partner governments, programme funding agencies and project supporting agencies (including those engaged in advocacy, policy dialogue, and TA) to allow for full participation in programme processes of planning, monitoring and evaluation by project supporting agencies;
- Mechanisms for wider consultations with key stakeholders from outside government and the external agencies;
- An approach to programme support which recognizes the role of projects in pilot testing innovations at regional and local levels as well as nationally;
- Explicit planning for links from projects to programmes so that innovations and pilot tests are not left isolated from national level funding and support; and

60. Significant financial and technical assistance to develop the administrative and technical capacity of key units in the partner ministries of government so that they are able to design, commission and carry out programme and project planning, monitoring, review and evaluation tasks and can take overall responsibility for those functions.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

61. The overriding conclusion of the evaluation relates to the ongoing search for meaningful partnership as a road to the effective provision and use of external support to basic education, and hence to improvements in basic education in partner countries. The commitment to partnership is evident in the efforts of both external agencies and national and local partners over the period from 1990 to 2002. What is most lacking, however, is a willingness and determination to improve basic education through locally developed solutions – solutions developed in partnership with national stakeholders.

62. The six main conclusions of the evaluation and the implications of these conclusions are described in this section. These implications provide the framework for discussion among external agencies and national partners.

4.1. Reliance on prescribed solutions

There has been a strong tendency for external agencies to place increasing emphasis on the use of external support for accelerating progress in basic education, especially in relation to the education goals of the MDG and to the EFA goals. This tendency has been accompanied, at times, by a reliance on blueprints, templates and prescribed solutions that has been detrimental to a commitment to partnership, has been inconsistent with the capacities of partners and has sometimes limited the relevance of programmes and projects. There is a need to place greater emphasis on the relevance of external support to local needs and capacities – for more tailored local solutions within a global consensus on goals

63. Clearly, the most important implications of this conclusion all concern how external agencies and national and local partners can find ways to identify, develop, design, fund, execute, monitor and evaluate programmes in basic education that are truly reflective of national and local needs and capacities while remaining true to the global commitment to provide access to all facets of quality basic education. A scan of the evaluation findings suggests that some key strategies for developing more effective programmes that are more relevant to national contexts would include:

- Ensuring wider and more meaningful participation by a more diverse group of stakeholders in the development of national programmes (including SWAp arrangements);
- Placing, in particular, students, parents and teachers more centrally in the process of programme design and development and, more specifically, avoiding measures that reduce the professional standing of teachers;
- Allowing for genuine flexibility in the scheduling of reforms and expansion in the system of basic education so that local capacities (inside and outside the system of formal schooling) are developed, which keep pace with change and which allow communities to benefit fully;
- Actively pursuing experimentation and innovation in areas outside formal, primary schooling with a concurrent commitment to follow up on successful innovation with investment at a national level so that basic education can be made more relevant to the needs of learners; and
- Recognizing that, while external agencies may be in an inherently stronger negotiating position due to their access to financial and technical resources, the policy

direction and operational design of major programmes in basic education must be grounded in national and local needs and priorities.

4.2. Shift to programme support

The movement to programme support and SWAps is one of the most significant trends in the provision and use of external support to basic education. It has been intended, at least in part, to contribute to strengthened national ownership and to improve partnership (and thereby improve the effectiveness of the provision and use of external support). In a real sense, the shift to programme support is an indication of the commitment of external agencies to strengthen partnership. However, this form of support does not necessarily improve partnerships if implemented as a blueprint rather than a process. It has, in some cases, contributed to increased tensions and divisions among distinct groups of external agencies. On the positive side, it has led to some improvements in the sense of national ownership and to better coordination of external assistance

64. If SWAps are to contribute better to both partnership and more effective basic education, there needs to be a commitment to view them as an ongoing process of cooperation, rather than a blueprint for programmatic action. This will require a major strategic shift in the development of SWAps. The application of this more process-focused approach to SWAps in basic education would include subsidiary strategies for both external agencies and partner countries, including:

- Ensuring that national stakeholders outside central line ministries of government take part in the development of SWAps relating to basic education;
- Taking active steps to include the full range of external agencies with technical expertise and policy experience in dialogue on programme development, management, monitoring and evaluation in basic education;
- Ensuring that policies on budget support, programme support and SWAps recognize the cross-linkages and compatibilities between projects and programmes;
- Providing either project or programme assistance in support of innovation integrated into the national plan and programme for basic education;
- Cooperating with governments and external agencies to harmonize administrative and operational norms and standards and to reduce their administrative burden on partner agencies;
- Allowing for full participation by all external agencies supporting basic education in coordination mechanisms and joint review processes;
- Recognizing the importance of sector-wide planning, including both secondary schooling and teaching education; and
- Ensuring that the ministry of education and other ministries involved in basic education participate in public sector reform programmes.

4.3. Continuing role of project support

The movement to supporting basic education through SWAPs and other forms of programme support needs to be accompanied by an understanding of the positive role of project assistance, especially in supporting innovations and in providing targeted support to marginalized groups. There is considerable evidence that project forms of support can be more effectively integrated into programme approaches with the consequent effect of strengthening the positive aspects of both modalities.

65. The potential positive interrelationship of project and programme support to basic education was a common theme in all four of the countries participating in the evaluation, and was further reinforced by the results of the document review. Surprisingly, there is a persistent tendency for some partner governments and external agencies to more or less automatically view project support as a negative factor in the transition to effective programmes. There is also a sometimes arbitrary approach to the assessment of which situations best favour programme or project support on the part of some external agencies. What is clearly required is a more pragmatic approach that recognizes the positive role of project support in the development of innovative strategies and approaches and in reaching marginalized groups.

66. On the other hand, project proponents must also recognize the limitations of the project form in supporting basic education on a national or regional scale and the dangers, pointed out in the Burkina Faso case study, of a culture of continuous pilot projects which are never taken to scale. In a certain sense, the development of programme approaches to supporting basic education may be seen as an important advance in the effectiveness of projects themselves since they can now be better linked to national efforts. The main requirement is for external agencies and governments alike to adopt a pragmatic approach to the mix of project and programme support and to place less emphasis on blueprints and dogma.

4.4. Continuing administrative burden

The movement to programme approaches in supporting basic education has not always been accompanied, at least in the short-term, by a reduction in the administrative burden for partner governments. A very heavy burden of planning, coordination and monitoring has been made more difficult by uneven progress in the development of common administrative procedures among external agencies and a reluctance to accept local processes as adequate.

67. At first glance it seems difficult to accept that the movement towards a reduction or elimination of project support, with its requirements for partner government oversight and the disparate systems of project development, approval, implementation and follow-up of the external agencies, would not be accompanied by substantial reductions in the administrative burden felt by partner countries.

68. In practice, however, the procedures and systems required to plan, negotiate, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes supported by multiple external agencies represent another type of administrative load for partner countries. At least during the early stages of SWAPs to supporting basic education, this burden is actually very

substantial. It is made even more significant when the movement towards programme support is not accompanied by a strong commitment among external agencies to simplify and harmonize their administrative and procedural requirements, including requirements for monitoring and evaluation.

69. It is important that external agencies which are committed to a move to programme support as a key strategy in more effective external support to basic education make a similar commitment to simplifying and harmonizing their administrative requirements and procedures with other external agencies and with partner governments.

4.5. Adequacy of focus on formal primary education

Although there is agreement on the broad range of components included in basic education, in reality the focus of most activities of both external agencies and national partners has been placed on formal primary schooling with negative effects on other areas of basic education. Further, while progress has been made in providing access to primary schooling, there are serious persistent problems in improving the quality of basic education

70. Meeting the international commitment to the broad scope of basic education requires the support of both external agencies and national partners. They must ensure that the policy environment, within a specific external agency and at the partner country level, promotes and encourages all components of basic education and progress towards the EFA goals.

71. For the first element of this problem, expanding beyond formal primary schooling, strategies may include:

- Reiterating the emphasis on the full range of EFA goals in statements and guidelines on policy and practice in education and basic education;
- Advocating for the full range of EFA goals in international conferences and meetings and in inter-agency negotiations on programmes. In particular, while the MDGs should be supported, external agencies and national partners should advocate to ensure that the education goals of the MDGs are not used to discourage support for other EFA goals;
- Increasing financial and technical support to areas of the EFA goals beyond primary schooling;
- Ensuring that funds to non-formal education and adult literacy are not entirely channelled through NGOs;
- Re-emphasizing the importance of gender parity in policies on basic education; and,
- Providing capacity development and other TA to agencies responsible for non-formal education and adult literacy.

72. National partner governments may seek strategies to ensure that the national context is amenable to developing all components of basic education. These may include:

- Encompassing early childhood education, youth and adult life skills education, and adult literacy goals in national policies and strategies for education;
- Supporting and advocating for the full range of EFA goals in international meetings and conferences and in negotiations with external agencies; and
- Ensuring national agencies responsible for non-formal education and adult literacy are included in the programme and SWAp arrangements.

73. Within the current focus on formal primary schooling, external agencies and national partners are being exhorted to address not only the supply side, but also the demand side of basic education. This requires additional attention to questions of quality and relevance. Typical strategies may include:

- Continuing to fund projects and TA within the framework of programme or sector-wide support that allow for the testing of innovative ideas to address quality and relevance;
- Providing financial and technical support to better use monitoring and evaluation in the improvement of the relevance and quality of basic education; and
- Supporting research efforts and reviews of promising initiatives that allow for more explicit links between basic education and poverty reduction in the development of policies.

74. Partner countries may seek to implement strategies to better integrate external support into national efforts to address the quality and relevance of basic education, including, among other things:

- Ensuring that national policies on basic education emphasize quality and relevance, in addition to access;
- Developing and implementing policies requiring the use of monitoring and evaluation for the assessment of pilot projects in basic education;
- Making the approval of pilot projects conditional on their relevance for national policy and programming;
- Using monitoring and evaluation to assess promising initiatives and link project results to national programmes and SWAps;
- Promoting a culture of innovation and change within ministries of education that supports efforts to improve quality based on the results of formative and mid-term evaluations; and
- Strengthening programme components aimed at supporting participation in school management and accountability structures by parents and learners in an effort to ensure the relevance of basic education provided in schools.

4.6. Funding level gap

There has been a sustained agreement within the international community, including external agencies and national partners, on the priority of basic education, but funding levels from the external agencies have not kept pace with expectations or implied commitments. This is, at least in part, a reflection of the complexity of planning and resource allocation processes surrounding the provision of external support and of problems in the absorptive capacity of partner governments.

75. In order to overcome the apparent gap between the national and external financial resources needed to provide quality basic education to all and the volume of resources currently available, external agencies and partners together will need to find strategies to overcome the apparent problem of the longer term sustainability of expanded systems of basic education. While this challenge continues to prove extremely difficult, as shown in the experience to date of the FTI, it is possible to suggest some elements of a strategic approach to securing the needed resources. These might include:

- Recognition by external agencies and national partners alike that investments in capacity development must be linked to increases in both external and national resources dedicated to basic education – thus providing a strategy for overcoming absorptive capacity limitations which, in turn, inhibit the flow of external resources;
- Placing increased emphasis on the feasibility and stability of national policies in basic education as a direct incentive to increased flows of external resources;
- Greater recognition by both external agencies and national partners of the link between governance, civil service reform and the volume of external assistance to basic education (and to other sub-sectors of education);
- International recognition of the need to link goal-setting at a global and national level more directly to the duration of external commitments so that longer term goals are not subject to dramatic fluctuations in short-term external support;
- Efforts to simplify the process of planning national strategies and programmes along with reducing the burden of programme planning imposed by external agencies; and
- Efforts to broaden the base of projects, programmes and activities in basic education so that resources can be used outside the system of formal schooling.

5. THE CHALLENGE OF THE EVALUATION

76. In the words of the preface to the evaluation reports:

Evaluations provide a mirror, helping us to see more clearly the choices we have made and the paths we have decided to follow. Their findings prompt us to reconsider those choices and explore other paths. That becomes our next, indeed current, challenge.

77. How is the international community going to respond to this challenge?

78. The evaluation noted the positive contribution of the international community in making and maintaining a commitment to basic education in partner countries and to moving to programme, as opposed to project, approaches. While less attention has been paid to other components of the EFA goals, access to primary education has improved in most partner countries.

79. Yet, throughout this period, the concept of partnership has loomed large in the discourse of both external agencies and partner governments but the reality is that there is still much in the provision of external support that is not based on effective partnerships. There is still a tendency to rely on global solutions to local challenges, to see the programme approach as the new template for providing external support, to dismiss the positive contributions of project support and to underestimate the administrative burdens of the programme approach on partner countries. If these continue to limit the development of effective partnerships – both between external agencies and partner countries and within partner countries – the achievement of the EFA goals and the MDG by 2015 is at risk.

80. Can the international community now align more closely its intentions with its practices in order to strengthen the results in basic education? Will it rethink the process of moving to programme approaches to see the process as one of partnership with partner countries? Will it work more closely with all stakeholders in the process of strengthening basic education? This is the challenge that this evaluation poses to the international community. The evaluation results will continue to be presented at national and international gatherings involving both external agencies and partner countries in order to broaden the reach of the evaluation and stimulate discussions so that the international community can respond to the challenge to strengthen the partnership for basic education.