

UNICEF

Evaluation of upstream engagement in basic education and gender equality (2003 – 2012)

UNICEF Executive Board: informal briefing:
13 January 2015

The evaluation: aims and scope

Aims:

- to describe BEGE upstream portfolio between 2003 and 2012 and assess its coherence
- to assess if strategic choices were made, if results were achieved, and how well;
- to assess how well UNICEF engaged with partners
- to draw lessons for UNICEF's future upstream work.

Scope:

- global/regional and country focus
- Fieldwork in four countries (Afghanistan, Brazil, Cambodia, Zimbabwe)

6 themes evaluated:

- Shared definition
- Building back better
- UNICEF-wide collaboration
- UNICEF positioning
- External partnerships
- Capacity

Upstream work and its results

The evaluation defined upstream work as:

“UNICEF activities which were intended to have a system-wide, sustainable effect on the national capacities of public sector duty bearers in the basic education sector for fulfilling children’s rights, directly or indirectly.”

In practice, no clear dividing line between upstream and downstream work

Volume:

- Spending on upstream work increased over the evaluation period, from USD 218 million in 2006 to USD 444 million in 2011
- But difficult to track activities expenditure in the period evaluated

Typology of observable intermediate results of upstream work:

- **Attitudinal change** – affecting the awareness of stakeholders
- **Commitments** – language and rhetoric changes, clear commitments are made
- **Procedural change** – change in the space in which policy decisions are made
- **Policy content/legislative reform** – formal changes in partner country policies and laws
- **Behavioural change** – changes in countries’ allocations, implementation of policies

Findings: global and regional levels

- UWE well-anchored in UNICEF global and global education strategy
- UNICEF role in global partnerships increased
- In HQ: increasing emphasis by the Global Education Team and development of education policies, frameworks and analytical models to anchor/support BEGE upstream work at country level
- At regional level: greater emphasis on support for country UWE, as well as regional initiatives

Results: global and regional levels

UNICEF has:

- Influenced the focus of education sector debates and priorities at global level
- Played a crucial leadership role at all levels
- Made key technical contributions to global initiatives that have translated into results at country level

Working at global, regional and country levels brings benefits at all levels and strengthens UNICEF's position for upstream influence

Findings: country level

- Little evidence of intentional **upstream focus** in country strategies, particularly earlier in evaluation period
- In case study countries, clear evidence of evolution of upstream work over the evaluation period, both in terms of its importance in country portfolio, as well as its volume and coverage
 - 3 of 4 countries described their education programme as **entirely upstream**, with downstream work representing efforts to pilot or provide evidence in support of **upstream aims**

BEGE upstream work often stops at formal policy change, less often engages aggressively to seek commitment to full implementation by state (e.g., through changes in budgets)

Results: country level

Many examples of UNICEF work translating into policy influence and capacity building:

- Strong results in Brazil and Zimbabwe
- Medium results in Cambodia, Zimbabwe and Afghanistan
- But weak performance as the GPE supervising entity in Afghanistan

Key lessons and recommendations

Key lessons

UNICEF has more work to do to build a clearer conceptual frame for BEGE upstream work, and to develop coherent strategies

- *Coherent framing will enable systematic measurement of costs and results across countries*

UNICEF's has key comparative advantages:

- Its mandate and history at country-level. Resulting relationships of trust are its 'upstream capital', to be treated with care in the face of difficult trade-offs
- Its experience on the ground and ability, through piloting, to demonstrate the benefits of proposed policy change. Hence balancing and integrating upstream and downstream work is important.

Effective upstream work:

- Is not about getting countries to adopt UNICEF approaches...
- ...but it does leverage UNICEF's position so that countries adopt and implement stronger policies that are relevant to each country's context (and to UNICEF's mandate)
- Approaches developed by UNICEF can offer relevant entry points (they are tools for upstream work, not its objectives)

Key lessons (continued)

Managing funds on behalf of partners is a new role:

- It does not sit easily with UNICEF education skill sets
- It does not automatically translate into added-value in terms of policy influence or capacity building
- A more aid-effective approach is needed

Recruiting and developing senior education advisors with technical, leadership and lobbying skills is a critical success factor for upstream work at the country level

UNICEF education has made the correct choice in taking an evidence-based approach to future upstream work

UNICEF's next challenge for BEGE upstream work is to deepen its ability:

- To influence government budget allocations
- To facilitate implementation of children-centred policies

Recommendations: organization-wide

1. UNICEF Strategic Policy and Strategy Division should develop an organization-wide framework for defining, targeting, measuring and reporting on the results of upstream work.
2. UNICEF's new expenditure coding system will go a long way to address findings on weak budgeting and tracking of UWE. However, UNICEF should ensure that a framework for UWE is comprehensively and uniquely covered by the codes
3. UNICEF needs to develop approaches and mechanisms to manage pooled funding that are more aid effective, and more likely to add value to UWE at the country level

Recommendations: for the sector

4. UNICEF's Global Education team should request a global formative evaluation of capacity building/system strengthening work so as to build its understanding of what works, when and where
5. UNICEF Education needs to expand its efforts to build country education team capacity for upstream work. This has implications at the global, regional and country levels.
6. The 2007 UNICEF Global Education Strategy approach of balancing upstream and downstream work at the country level was appropriate. UNICEF Education should continue to seek this balance: country offices and education teams should target and link upstream and downstream work appropriately, depending on their circumstances.