Formative Evaluation of the Citizen-led Social Accountability Project in the Education Sector in Burkina Faso: Key Findings

Background:
The Government of Burkina Faso launched its first Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) in the education sector in 2011. The PETS highlighted the low efficiency of public expenditures in the sector and attested to the existence of important “leakages” along the administrative spending chain, particularly at the local level. As part of the management response to the PETS findings, a citizen-led social accountability project covering the education sector was developed and supported by UNICEF’s financial and technical support in 49 municipalities. The project aimed at contributing to: (i) the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditures in social sectors, particularly in the education sector; and (ii) a more strategic implementation of the decentralization agenda. To assess the results achieved by the project since its start and to identify key factors that may not only improve the project implementation and management but also support its scaling-up, the UNICEF Burkina Faso Country Office commissioned a formative evaluation in 2016. The evaluation was classified among the best UNICEF evaluations in 2016.

Methodology:
The evaluation used a theory-driven design, combining realist evaluation principles, contribution analysis and case studies. Data collection included literature and document reviews, administration of a survey questionnaire to stakeholders in 20 municipalities including Parents Association, teachers, local NGOs community-based organizations, and representatives of organizations working on social accountability issues. In addition, semi-structured interviews were also done with central government stakeholders, external financing partners and UNICEF staff. That allowed deepening the understanding of different stakeholders’ perspectives on how citizen-led social accountability could contribute to improved public services and on how best to leverage its value added. Four case studies (two of rural and two of urban municipalities) were also done to get more in-depth and contextualized perspectives on the most critical aspects of the project at the municipal level.

Conclusions:
The citizen-led social accountability project appears as a powerful driver of positive change conducive to the achievement of education goals in Burkina Faso. It has contributed to the creation of a functional platform of dialogue between local authorities and citizens around planning and monitoring of priority interventions at municipal level. In the targeted municipalities, the project contributed to: (i) strengthening capacity of local authorities to manage local development; (ii) increasing commitment and participation of citizens in the implementation of the decentralization agenda and (iii) improving quality of public finance management and supplies, materials and infrastructures for the primary education sector.

Recommendations:
- Review the conceptual framework of the social accountability and citizen control project to move from a sectoral to a (more) holistic approach;
- Review the project performance monitoring framework by focusing more on the learning function, feedback and citizen participation;
- Strengthen the participation of women and vulnerable persons (by also respond to their needs) into social accountability and citizen control mechanisms.

Lessons Learned

From the Evaluation Findings
The evaluation of social accountability and citizen control in Burkina Faso, with a special emphasis over the project supported by UNICEF in this area, yielded three lessons learned on the effectiveness and efficiency of such type of projects:
- The performance and effectiveness of social accountability and citizen control project cannot be greater than that of its weakest component which is the “citizen control”. Then the first lesson learned is that, for this type of project, to be more efficient, it is necessary to adopt a systemic approach that focus more on the citizen control component, particularly in rural settings.
- To make the project more efficient, the implementation modalities should be adapted to the specific needs of the targeted communities and the specificity of the context, particularly in rural settings with low literacy rates. Then the second lesson learned is that “No One Size Fits All”.
- The relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the social accountability and citizen control project are based on the level of integration of citizens’ concerns. Then the third lesson learned is that the “beneficiary concern” is to be held as a priority referential for future design, programming, operationalization, implementation and evaluation of the citizen-led social accountability project.

From the Evaluative Process
- The use of a mixed team (national consultants and an international credentialed evaluator) contributes not only to enhancing the quality of the evaluation being conducted but also to fostering national evaluation capacity-development.