Formative evaluation of the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI)

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INTRODUCTION

OOSCI was launched in 2010 as a data-driven approach to significantly increasing school enrolment and completion by formerly excluded children through:

- Developing comprehensive profiles of OOSC;
- Linking the profiles to barriers that lead to exclusion;
- Identifying, promoting and helping governments implement policies, strategies and budgets to overcome those barriers.

OOSCI “core partners” are UNICEF, UNESCO and the Global Partnership for Education

The evaluation provides a formative assessment of progress towards the overall goal of achieving a substantial and sustainable reduction in the number of children that are out of school. It covers the period of OOSCI implementation from 2010 through the 2016.
Number of out-of-school children 2000 – 2016, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimated # of OOSC in emergency countries (in millions), 2018</th>
<th>Total # of OOSC in the World (in millions), 2018</th>
<th>Estimated share of OOSC in Emergency Countries, 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preprimary (one year before primary only)</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>138.5</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104.2</td>
<td>302.7</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formative Evaluation of the Out-Of School Children Initiative (OOSCI) – UNICEF | for every child 3
EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

• Use of a theory-based design; the theory of change articulated retroactively during the scoping phase of the evaluation.

• Evidence of the contribution of UNICEF and that of partners was derived through a qualitative design. Sources included
  (i) a desk-based review of secondary data analysis;
  (ii) an online survey, administered to education programme officers in all UNICEF country offices implementing OOSCI;
  (iii) interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of respondents in UNICEF New York, Regional Education Advisors and/or OOSCI Focal Points in all seven UNICEF regional offices; and
  (iv) interviews and focus group discussions at country level during the course of the field visits.

• All primary and secondary data were subjected to a qualitative content analysis and/or a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA).

• Survey data was subjected to descriptive analyses (e.g. mean values, standard deviations). These analyses were mainly used for triangulation with an additional data source, and to substantiate the qualitative findings with a larger empirical base.
FIVE DIMENSIONS OF EXCLUSION (5DE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension 1</th>
<th>Dimension 2</th>
<th>Dimension 3</th>
<th>Out of school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not in pre-primary school</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attended, but dropped out</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will never enter</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will enter late</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-primary age children</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary age children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Attended, but dropped out</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will never enter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Primary age children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lower secondary age children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>At risk of dropping out of primary school</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>At risk of dropping out of lower secondary school</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Primary age children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lower secondary age children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dimension 1**
Children of **pre-primary school age** who are not in pre-primary or primary school.

**Dimension 2**
Children of **primary school age** who are not in primary or secondary school.

**Dimension 3**
Children of **lower secondary school age** who are not in primary or secondary school.

**Dimension 4**
Children who are in **primary school** but at risk of dropping out.

**Dimension 5**
Children who are in **lower secondary school** but at risk of dropping out.
SELECTED EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS, BY THEME

A. Progress towards universal basic education

B. Evidence generation and the utility of Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) studies

C. Partnerships to advance programming for out-of-school children

D. Strengthening education systems and capacities
Achievement of OOSCI Objectives

**Figure 3: Achievement of OOSCI Objectives**

- **Changes in resource allocation policies for OOSC:**
  - Not achieved: 2.3%
  - Partly achieved: 38.6%
  - Mostly achieved: 52.3%
  - Fully achieved: 2.3%

- **Shifts in government systems or donor priorities:**
  - Not achieved: 6.8%
  - Partly achieved: 47.7%
  - Mostly achieved: 40.9%
  - Fully achieved: 4.5%

- **Changes in school-level actions and practices:**
  - Not achieved: 6.8%
  - Partly achieved: 29.2%
  - Mostly achieved: 60.4%
  - Fully achieved: 8.3%

- **Broader debates on education:**
  - Not achieved: 6.8%
  - Partly achieved: 30.4%
  - Mostly achieved: 58.7%
  - Fully achieved: 8.7%

- **Advocacy and influence on donors and decision makers:**
  - Not achieved: 6.8%
  - Partly achieved: 27.1%
  - Mostly achieved: 54.2%
  - Fully achieved: 12.5%

- **Pro-OOSC statements by government officials:**
  - Not achieved: 0%
  - Partly achieved: 32.7%
  - Mostly achieved: 53.1%
  - Fully achieved: 14.3%

- **Changes in National Education Sector Plans:**
  - Not achieved: 6.8%
  - Partly achieved: 33.3%
  - Mostly achieved: 50%
  - Fully achieved: 14.6%

- **Greater awareness among policy makers:**
  - Not achieved: 0%
  - Partly achieved: 13.7%
  - Mostly achieved: 66.7%
  - Fully achieved: 19.6%
A. PROGRESS TOWARDS UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION

Finding: Intent to eliminate the problem of children being out of school part of government documents for the majority of OOSCI partner countries (80 percent of countries). However, links between the stated goals and objectives and strategies that countries were implementing were often inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory.

Finding: Efforts to use evidence from OOSCI studies were beginning to show dividends in a variety of solutions, including targeting different groups of out-of-school children. However, many OOSCI countries often conflated “inclusive education” with special education programmes, resulting in interventions that failed to address the exclusion of specific groups of out-of-school children.

Finding: Subnational authorities often lacked the evidence required to make a strong push for investing in education and/or to devote the necessary time and resources to inclusion strategies.

Conclusion

*Universal basic education remains a unifying goal and message for eliminating the problem of children being out of school. Also, universal basic education is increasingly being reconceptualized to include equity and inclusiveness, a necessary step on the path to allocating education resources.*
B. EVIDENCE GENERATION AND THE UTILITY OF OOSCI STUDIES

Finding: Studies in partner countries were effective in generating profiles of out-of-school children and identifying related barriers. They also provided baseline information to use for monitoring progress towards more inclusive basic education;

Finding: The conceptualization of ‘5 dimensions of exclusion’ is incomplete. It does not cover the upper secondary level.

Finding: Barriers of exclusion include economic background, followed by personal physical characteristics of children (e.g., gender, age, disability). The least prevalent barriers included personal history (e.g., traumatization, civil war experience) and school culture and/or rules of behaviour.

Finding: Some recommendations did not address the most prevalent barriers and bottlenecks.

Finding: A gap between policy and planning, on one hand, and implementation, on the other, remains, mainly because of the inadequate prioritization of issues facing out-of-school children.

Conclusion

A new advocacy effort around out-of-school children is required. Also required is the prioritization of solutions and/or interventions for the most disadvantaged subgroups of out-of-school children and a resourcing model for issues facing all such children.
C. PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN PROGRAMS

Finding: OOSCI partnership arrangements and the division of tasks among the core partners were considered to be cohesive and productive and to have increased the efficiency of a majority of implementers, while the contribution of all OOSCI partners was credited with having expanded geographical coverage of activities and interventions for out-of-school children. This outcome was highly valued by participating Governments;

Finding: OOSCI is credited with having created a higher demand for technical and policy advice around issues affecting out-of-school children, and to have increased opportunities for face-to-face interaction with decision makers.

Finding: OOSCI non-governmental partners were not diverse enough. National civil society organizations were underrepresented in comparison with international non-governmental organizations.

Conclusion

In an operating environment subject to frequent changes in government staffing and shifting donor resources, UNICEF was regarded by all actors as a constant factor and a reliable “anchor partner”; its convening power helped to move partnership objectives forward.
D. STRENGTHENING EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND CAPACITIES

**Finding:** Half of the sample countries demonstrated only modest success in the improvement of data systems; commendable success was registered in only a small number of countries due to limited financial and human resource capacities;

**Finding:** Coordination and/or collaboration between different sectors was not systematic;

**Finding:** Because of the rigid application of the five dimensions of exclusion approach, some groups of out-of-school children, especially those that are affected by religious, ethnic and other forms of discrimination, were not eligible for OOSCI support.

**Finding:** OOSCI has fallen short on sustainability. Governments remain constrained in implementation capacities for just about every aspect of the education sector. The capacity to identify and serve all children, including developing profiles of all children who are excluded from school, have been strengthened, but not in a sustainable way.

**Conclusion**

*Technical capacities were strengthened. However, improvements were confined to individual capacities. As such, the gains from OOSCI will not be sustainable unless there is greater effort on supporting Governments to achieve systemic changes.*
### EVALUATIVE ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criterion</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Relevance</td>
<td>OOSCI was found to be relevant to national and international debates on equity in development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effectiveness</td>
<td>OOSCI has been effective in cultivating a critical mass of national stakeholders but less effective in supporting countries to translate recommended policies and strategies into concrete practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Efficiency</td>
<td>OOSCI partner agencies have contributed efficiently to measures that address key challenges posed by the problem of out-of-school children in target countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Utility</td>
<td>Utility of OOSCI is linked to availability of resources on a sustainable basis. Without such sustainable resources, the problem of out-of-school children will persist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Coherence</td>
<td>OOSCI was internally coherent enough to be functional in its formative phase</td>
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</table>
RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are addressed to all partners of this initiative, but their execution targets UNICEF as the lead partner.

- **Recommendation 1:** Revise/update the theory of change for the Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI):
  - to reflect the key elements of inclusion so as to ensure that the needs of all out-of-school children are met;
  - to reflect strategies and policies that empower Governments to eliminate the lack of participation at the pre-primary level (such as sustainable, pro-poor financing for the subsector).

- **Recommendation 2:** Expand technical capabilities for effective implementation and comprehensive monitoring. With their diverse expertise and capabilities, more should be required of OOSCI partners on the following:
  - Seeking solutions to support the implementation and monitoring of policies;
  - Mobilizing and/or attracting more resources for the sustainability of implementation.
**Recommendation 3:** Reorient OOSCI to cover the entire basic education cycle and all profiles of out-of-school learners (i.e., pre-primary through upper-secondary). The methodological framework for OOSCI should:

- target key vulnerable groups that cut across all profiles of out-of-school children;
- generate explicit strategies that address the learning needs different groups of out-of-school children, and responsive modalities for delivering those learning opportunities.

**Recommendation 4:** Expand the partner base for the OOSCI to make it inclusive, while maintaining a focus on results.

**Recommendation 5:** Strengthen programmatic elements to achieve desired results – including:

- ascertaining the internal and external coherence of the initiative and the feasibility of achieving the intended results;
- ensuring that adequate monitoring and evaluation inputs and systems are put in place to enable systematic assessments of the OOSCI contribution.
Thank you