Executive Summary

Final evaluation of the Education component: Edukans projects, Uganda

DIRECCT programme

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1 Presentation of the evaluation

The final evaluation concerns the EDUKANS project entitled "EDU Q-card". This project aims to improve educational performance by effectively involving all stakeholders, using the "EDU Q-Card" tool. This tool is a questionnaire enabling schools to (self-)evaluate their performance in a structured way. It is based on Edukans' STAR-school model, which encompasses five areas of educational quality, each with eight key indicators.

To carry out this evaluation, various categories of stakeholders were contacted via WhatsApp and interviews were conducted remotely via WhatsApp, Zoom and Teams.
Eleven interviews were conducted, as well as an in-depth review of the project documentation. The consultant was supported by a Cota member of staff, Alexandra Cogels, bilingual FR-EN, who conducted the interviews online, in the presence of the consultant and using the interview guide she had prepared. This pairing worked very well and made it possible to obtain the desired information.

2 Results and conclusions

2.1 Performance criteria

Relevance

Good match with the needs of the Ugandan education system
The Edukans project is fully in line with one of the MoES's strategic objectives, which states that by 2024/2025 "50% of schools will have a school improvement plan".

In 2020, the government drew up a national policy emphasising the need to strengthen teachers' skills. The Edukans project is in line with this ministerial commitment: one of the main thrusts of the project is to strengthen teachers' teaching skills through training.

Retooling and remotivating teachers after COVID-19
The Edukans project has played a crucial role in upgrading and motivating teachers following the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided tailored training and support, enabling teachers to understand and put into practice the new competency-based curriculum introduced by the Ugandan government in January 2020.

Complementarity to be found with the Ministry's "E inspection" tool
The government's introduction of the digital "E inspection" tool poses a risk of redundancy or sidelining of the EDU Q-Card tool. In order to ensure that these two tools complement each other as much as possible, it would be appropriate to initiate collaborative exchanges with the competent authorities.

Effective intervention logic: good stakeholder involvement
The general objective of the project is as follows: "To ensure the continuity of educational services in order to mitigate the impact of the covid crisis in Uganda". The question is more about a future containment: if there were to be a future containment, would the project help to ensure the continuity of education services? The answer is yes, but indirectly. The Edukans project itself did not involve developing distance or hybrid teaching and learning that would enable education services to be maintained during a pandemic. Nevertheless, thanks to the project, headteachers, teachers and the community are more motivated, involved and committed to improving the quality of their school. This strong commitment could well lead to mobilisation to maintain the continuity of educational services, even in situations of confinement.

Coherence

Good complementarity between partners, but no formal coordination

Other technical and financial partners are involved in teacher training, but their work is very complementary. However, there does not seem to be any formal coordination between these partners, although synergies and pooling could be envisaged.

Efficiency

Inflation has forced us to reinvent ourselves

Fluctuations in foreign currencies linked to inflation led to financial losses for the project, which failed to mention the revision of exchange rates in the grant agreement. Inflation therefore had a negative impact on the project's budget, leading to the implementation of adjustment measures to reduce costs.

Project delays linked to the context

According to the stakeholders interviewed, the project has experienced some delays due to external events. For example, at the start of the project, schools were closed for a while because of a teachers' strike demanding a pay rise. Then, some project activities could not be implemented according to the predefined schedule because teachers and learners had to make themselves available for other activities organised by the MoES.

The digital challenge: lack of ICT skills, absence of an Internet network and insufficient tablets

One of the major challenges of the project was the technical use of the EDU Q-Card application. For example, beneficiaries close to retirement encountered significant difficulties in using it, due to their limited familiarity with digital tools. Another digital challenge was the lack of internet connection in some schools. The project was able to adapt its approach to fully meet these challenges.

Efficiency

Objectives achieved

Currently, 218 schools in five districts are now using the EDU Q-Card for their self-evaluations with local stakeholders. These figures, which exceed initial expectations, clearly demonstrate the effectiveness and scale of the adoption of the EDU Q-Card tool.

EDU Q-Card: a holistic, easy-to-use and effective assessment tool

EDU Q-Card is a holistic school evaluation tool. The questionnaires cover the five essential pillars of education, namely 1) the learning environment; 2) learning methods; 3) teaching; 4) school management; and 5) parental and community involvement. This holistic approach ensures a thorough and balanced evaluation, covering all key aspects of school operation. Statistics show that the EDU Q-Card tool is widely used in schools with a high degree of effectiveness. The tool provides an exhaustive (self-)evaluation of the school's performance, while facilitating the development of an action plan for continuous improvement.

Effective synergy between training - (self-)assessment tool - post-action plan monitoring

This synergistic approach between training, the EDU Q-Card tool and post-action plan monitoring has considerably enhanced the effectiveness of the project.

Good teacher training, but a little short and lacking in support materials.

The two-day training offered to teachers is of high quality. Given the mixed results of the post-tests and the teachers' need for teaching skills, it would be wise to increase the duration of this training. Furthermore, the project did not plan to provide teachers with pedagogical support to help them transfer the new skills they had acquired.

Impact

Individual level/ Strengthening teaching and digital skills

The project has enhanced teachers' teaching skills. The improvement in teaching practices is due to the combination of training, peer exchange sessions, (self-) assessment and pedagogical monitoring. The CCTs and inspectors were trained by the master trainers in the use of EDU Q-Card. As a result of this training and the repeated use of the tablet during visits, the CCTs have strengthened their digital skills, becoming more familiar and comfortable with the use of technology.

Organisational level/ Return of children to school and improvement in their academic level

The project has enabled children to return to school after two years of school closures. At the same time, there has been an improvement in assessment scores and a significant drop in the number of children dropping out of school. According to the stakeholders interviewed, the return to school is mainly due to the awareness-raising activities carried out by the project with parents and learners.

Organisational level/ Strong community involvement in education

The community is more involved in the process of improving their school. This commitment is linked to the fact that they are fully involved in the project. The headteacher and deputy headteacher self-evaluate the school according to the five criteria defined in the EDU Q-Card tool. An associated CCT/inspector/evaluator then carries out an external evaluation of the school. Following these evaluations, dialogue meetings are organised with teachers, School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). During these meetings, the various stakeholders discuss the results of the evaluations and propose actions to remedy the shortcomings identified.

Systemic level/Better understanding by beneficiaries of the concept of quality

Thanks to the EDU-Card tool, headteachers and teachers have a better understanding of what teaching quality is. They now have clear and specific guidelines, enabling them to carry out a guided self-evaluation. This deeper understanding is helping to strengthen the quality culture within educational establishments.

Systemic level/ Impact of digital technology on education policies

Strengthening the digital skills of CCTs/inspectors has had an impact on the review of education policies. For example, district education officers are reviewing the recruitment procedure for headteachers to ensure that they have ICT skills, enabling them to continue using EDU Q-Card. Some districts have gone even further, stating that to become a teacher, it is now necessary to hold an ICT certificate.

Durability

Cascade training to ensure autonomous project management

To ensure autonomous management of the project by all stakeholders, the project used a cascade model. This approach encouraged the spread of skills and knowledge through the different strata of the education system, allowing each group to train the next autonomously. In this way, the project has succeeded in creating a truly autonomous and sustainable learning network. To maintain this network, it will be essential to provide ongoing training so that each level can adapt to changes and keep its skills up to date.

Empowering the players

1) Empowerment of CCTs. The CCTs and inspectors underwent training that enabled them to increase their skills. They then gave the same training to headteachers and their deputies. By becoming trainers, they were able to consolidate their own skills while strengthening their role as

key players in the education system. In addition to this skills enhancement, they now have an evaluation tool (EDU Q-Card) and tablets, which considerably facilitate and support their supervisory role. Empowering the CCTs contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of the project over time.
2) Empowering school heads. Thanks to the project, headteachers have been empowered. It is no longer necessary to wait for the CCTs and inspectors to come and carry out an evaluation of the school before taking action. They now have the skills and tools they need to carry out their own self-evaluation and act accordingly.
3) Community empowerment. Prior to the implementation of the project, the community tended to attribute responsibility for improving the quality of education solely to the government. The project succeeded in instilling a sense of responsibility within the community, making them aware of their crucial role in improving the educational environment.

Data ownership issues: exploring strategies for autonomous data management by the Department
The data collected via the EDU Q-Card application belongs to Edukans. The project is currently working with the Ministry to gain access to the data. However, the Ministry's continued reliance on Edukans for data access could be a concern in terms of sustainability. It is recommended that strategies be explored to build the capacity of the Ministry so that it can take over the management and use of the data independently.

Risk of a lack of ongoing training for headteachers
The project's final evaluation report highlights a potential risk to its sustainability, namely the training of headteachers. The MoES does not provide training for these actors. As a result, the project's initial approach, which aims to train and monitor headteachers at school level, could run into difficulties if it is to be sustained.

Associated assessors: loss of skills
Nine associate evaluators were trained by the project and recruited to carry out the school evaluations and monitor the implementation of the action plan. Their contracts ended at the same time as the project. The termination of their contracts represents a loss of skills within the evaluation team.

2.2 Specific questions: gender criteria

Good consideration of gender in the project
The EDU Q-Card tool includes five evaluation questionnaires. The "Learning environment" questionnaire includes three gender-related criteria: sanitary facilities, policies, gender-sensitive teaching approach. The inclusion of these criteria in the EDU Q-Card tool highlights the fact that gender issues are taken into account and that there is a desire to involve all stakeholders in improving these aspects within schools.
Gender mainstreaming in project activities
The project statistics show that the gender dimension is well represented in the various project activities.

Unexpected positive impact of the project: girls back at school
The return of girls can be explained by three main factors. Firstly, by aligning themselves with the gender criteria of the EDU Q-Card tool, teachers began to integrate a more gender-sensitive teaching approach. Secondly, communities have been made aware of the importance of getting girls back to school. Thirdly, some schools have been able to improve their infrastructure by building separate changing rooms and latrines for girls.

3 Recommendations

1. Increase the length of teacher training to ensure that teachers acquire the necessary teaching skills in a thorough and lasting way.
2. Develop and provide a support document summarising the basic principles of pedagogy and the key ideas of the training, to reinforce the transfer of the skills acquired.
3. Continue to provide training in the use of ICT in order to enhance the skills of beneficiaries in this area.
4. Continue the cascade training model, ensuring that the players receive regular training to maintain their skills and ensure the continuity of the project.
5. Develop a formalised strategy for sharing resources, expertise and good practice between projects working in similar areas, in particular with World Vision and STC. For example, STC is also involved in training primary school teachers. In order to ensure overall coherence, it would be interesting to pool certain activities or materials.
6. Explore strategies to strengthen the Ministry's autonomous capacity in the management and use of EDU Q-Card data, including training programmes, a gradual transfer of responsibilities and the creation of a permanent structure for the management of educational data.
7. Engage in discussions with the relevant authorities to identify synergies between the EDU Q-Card and the E Inspection, which would avoid duplication and maximise the effectiveness of both tools.

4 Lessons learned

1. The cascade training approach has proved to be an effective way of disseminating knowledge throughout the different strata of the education system. This method fosters the autonomy of stakeholders and ensures that skills are disseminated efficiently and inexpensively.
2. The active involvement of the community in the school improvement process contributes to real and lasting change.
3. Building digital skills has had an impact on education policy reviews at district level, highlighting the importance of ICT skills for CCTs/inspectors, headteachers and teachers. This influence may inspire other districts to incorporate similar requirements.
4. Managing exchange rate fluctuations and inflation has highlighted the need to build flexible mechanisms into grant agreements.
5. Unforeseen events such as teachers' strikes underline the importance of flexible planning. Projects should incorporate coping mechanisms, such as buffer periods, to mitigate potential delays and minimise disruption.
6. The project highlighted challenges relating to digital skills, lack of internet connectivity and insufficient digital equipment.