Project Sustainability in Education

Growing evidence, in sectors including education, shows that projects considered satisfactory at the completion of the investment phase may well emerge as unsatisfactory five to ten years later. What can the Bank do during project identification, appraisal, and implementation to ensure the satisfactory continuation of benefits once the investment phase is finished?

An OED study offers a framework for analyzing the determinants of sustainability in education projects and hence for identifying types of action that will increase sustainability. The method is applied to experience in five Bank-financed education projects in Colombia, Indonesia, and Malawi, supplemented by project information from seven other countries. Drawing on this experience, recommendations are offered for improving sustainability in education projects.

The analytical framework developed by the study, the first of its kind to be applied to education, is outlined in the Box. Difficulties in specification and measurement of variables in education remain, but the use of a more systematic approach to considering project performance at all stages, including after completion, may itself help to improve sustainability.

**Recommendations**

Action to improve the sustainability of a project should be planned and executed right from the earliest stages of project design. Particularly important is the creation of a strong institutional base, backed by the borrower’s full cooperation and involvement, reflecting local needs and aspirations, and consistent with the borrower’s wider development strategy.

**Design, implementation:** The Bank should take deliberate account of sustainability in the design and implementation stages of the project cycle. Designing projects to be sustainable entails giving special attention to adequacy of appraisal, physical design, initial project funding, and provision for monitoring and evaluation (M&E). One of the most important factors in appraisal is the borrower’s participation and consensus in project identification and design, since this helps to ensure commitment to project goals and activities that accord with national development plans and programs.

In Jordan I, Kenya II (Faculty of Agriculture, University of Nairobi), and Thailand I, adequate project design and implementation contributed strongly to good performance after completion. The poor post-completion performance of major components in Malaysia I (vocational schools and agricultural institutes), and Sierra Leone I (diversified secondary education and technical vocational education), can be traced directly to a flawed design and weak implementation. Flexibility at all stages is important to sustainability, as experience in Indonesia and Malawi emphasizes.

**Institutional and policy support:** project design should ensure that there is firm government commitment to project goals, and that there is institutional capacity to implement the project and oversee its operation in the post-completion phase. Jordan I, Malaysia I, and Thailand I received strong or at least adequate institutional support during and after project implementation; their benefit streams seem likely to be sustained. Colombia I and II supported major innovations in secondary education but were not supported by the necessary policy commitment. After completion it was impossible to maintain the determination and capability of the project institutions for implementing the program, and this was reflected in the disappointing numbers of graduates of the schools supported.

**Systematic M&E:** M&E encourages sustainability because it allows one to assess progress and adjust project content or goals as needed during project implementation and afterwards. Development of M&E requires strong policy support and funding commitment over a relatively long period—beyond the typical time span of Bank project implementation. Developing borrowers’ capacity for M&E, in preparation for the operational phase of projects, should be part of a broader objective of institutional development.

The reliable time-series data that are needed to assess a project’s sustainability can be collected only when M&E has been integrated into project planning and management. Except in Jordan I, Philippines I, and Indonesia II, M&E has not been well used in the projects reviewed.

*The Sustainability of Investment Projects in Education* Report No. 9225, December 28, 1990. OED reports are available from the Internal Documents Unit and from Regional Information Service Centers.
Measuring Sustainability in Education Projects

The model for the study of sustainability in education projects comprises one set of variables indicating outcomes ("sustainability indicators"), and another indicating potential causal factors ("factors affecting sustainability") with the retained hypothesis that variables in one set affect those in the other.

**Sustainability indicators**
- Inputs (e.g., classroom laboratories, physical plant and equipment, teachers, textbooks)
- Outputs (e.g., enrollments, numbers of graduates)
- Efficiency (reflected in student-teacher ratios, student-textbook ratios, facility utilization rates)
- Educational quality (e.g., relevance to educational needs, adaptability to changing circumstances)
- Spin-off effects or the capacity to produce beneficial side effects (e.g., by stimulating institutions outside the project to adopt curriculum changes, or improved teaching methods, that the project has demonstrated)

**Factors affecting sustainability**
- Internal
  - Design stage (e.g., adequacy of appraisal, adequacy of initial funding, provision for monitoring and evaluation)
  - Implementation (e.g., adequacy of planning and management during implementation; delays, other problems in procurement, construction, or financing in the course of implementation; flexibility, problems in implementation)
- External
  - Macroeconomic
  - Education sector
  - Subsector
  - Policy changes

**Subsequent implementation of related projects**

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<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
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Adequate support, including recurrent funding, after completion: The Bank's disengagement from projects at completion leaves the borrower to cope with nurturing and managing improved or enlarged educational institutions, even though the Bank may know that not all project inputs (such as trained teachers, equipment, or new curriculum) are in place, or that the borrower will have difficulty providing the recurrent funds to operate the schools. The Bank might well consider mounting "graduation missions" a year before project completion to ensure project benefits will be sustained.

In Jordan I, Malaysia I, Thailand I, and Malawi I—despite that country's continuing general constraints on public expenditure—regular adequate recurrent funding played a key role in maintaining project outputs. In Kenya I and II, Liberia I, Philippines I, and Sierra Leone I, real recurrent expenditures declined after project completion and most of the physical facilities, equipment and instructional material, as well as the general condition of the project institutions, deteriorated.

Post-completion follow-up: Follow-up projects increase sustainability because they tend to strengthen institutional capacity assisted by earlier investments. Education projects should be planned in series as part of a long-term investment program with clearly defined goals based on sound sector work, and should include activities designed specifically to enhance the sustainability of earlier investments.

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