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**USAID'S SUPPORT TO SUSTAINABLE  
EDUCATION REFORM IN AFRICA:  
IS NON-PROJECT ASSISTANCE WORKING?**

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## INTRODUCTION

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In 1988, USAID adapted a new approach to supporting educational change, consistent with its goals of equitable and sustainable development in Africa. USAID's strategy aimed at leveraging education policy reform, through budgetary support to governments, disbursed in tranches against mutually established conditions reflecting the implementation of key policy, institutional and budgetary reforms. Five years of experience in assisting basic education in eleven African countries has demonstrated that USAID's programs can contribute to systemic educational reform. USAID's efforts have helped begin to lay the foundations of sustainable improvements in government capacity to deliver quality primary education. Policy and program reforms have led to increased resources for education and, in particular, primary education, improved management practices, including more transparent budgeting, accounting and personnel systems, institutionalization of planning, monitoring and evaluation functions to chart and track reform impacts, and decentralization of management responsibility to encourage more regional and community involvement in schools.

However, this new programmatic approach has been controversial. Adaptation of the non-project assistance (NPA) modality presents a radical departure from the familiar and traditional project mechanism in terms of the scope, complexity and definition of the agency's goals in education. Prior to 1988, most assistance to education was provided through projects where AID alone would design, appraise, implement, supervise and evaluate interventions of a finite and limited nature, such as providing inputs to teacher training, materials production or curriculum design. Based on the perception that project interventions alone seldom result in the policy reforms, resource allocations and administrative re-organization necessary to sustain systemic reform, USAID changed its focus from discrete project activities to system-wide restructuring. This required that it simultaneously relinquish control of program implementation, yet demonstrate that desired change had occurred on a system-wide basis. Further pressure was placed on the approach by congressional mandate that change be measured at the "people-level". The new approach called for an unprecedented collaboration with the host government, collaboration with other donors, and a deep understanding of the dynamics of educational reform.

This rapid expansion into uncharted territory has led to debate. Some argue that NPA is not a sound approach to leveraging policy change, others argue that the NPA strategy may be a good one, but that the Agency is not equipped to manage such a radical departure from the normal ways of providing development assistance, others argue that the NPA approach is sound as an Agency strategy, and what is needed is a significant change in management procedures to improve implementation.

This paper is a preliminary examination of what has happened in the relatively brief time since the NPA basic education programs started. What impact have the programs thus far had on policy, on institutional strengthening, on schools, and on children? In particular, it addresses two primary questions which are of obvious import to USAID itself and can inform other donors about the triumphs and challenges of supporting broad-based educational reform.

- Is USAID's approach to supporting basic education in Africa sound?
- And, if the approach is sound, can USAID -- and others -- apply it effectively?

## INTRODUCTION

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This paper is not intended to present definitive answers to the above questions. Instead it is the beginning of a dialogue which is intended to contribute to the shape of future efforts to support educational reform in Africa. The paper is organized in four sections. Part 1 describes USAID's strategy and approach in more detail, Part 2 looks at the issues involved in program design and management, Part 3 explores the challenges associated with evaluating systemic educational reform programs, and Part 4 presents some early conclusions about the soundness of the approach, its underlying premises and the conditions necessary to its success.

## PART 1 USAID'S APPROACH TO EDUCATION REFORM IN AFRICA

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### EMERGENCE OF AN APPROACH Program-Based Support to Sustainable, Systemic Reform

A recent review of USAID experience in the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau concluded that the complexity and inter-relatedness of the problems facing basic education require a system-wide approach to improving the delivery of educational services. As a result USAID has moved away from project assistance to program-level assistance (Chesterfield, 1992). Similarly, a World Bank study of its role in the development of human resources in sub-Saharan Africa concluded that one positive trend has been the adoption of a focus on a systems approach (or a focus on the "whole package of inputs") and a greater emphasis on policy change as necessary for successful long-term development of the education sector.<sup>1</sup> Both studies concur on three general conclusions:

- i) the need for policy-level intervention to define the context for development of the education sector,
- ii) the focus on developing the institutions that will serve as the foundation for sustainable capacity to implement policies and programs, and
- iii) the necessity to view the education delivery system as a whole, to work on the package of inputs and institutions, and not to focus simply on individual components

In addition to these lessons, a more pragmatic evaluation of the possibilities for educational development has begun to emerge. While the 1960s and 1970s saw developing countries and donors agree on the call for universal primary education, the harsh economic realities of the 1980s made it obvious that the financial constraints to achieving this were considerable. Following the Jomtien Conference on Education for All, the objective of universal primary education is still espoused, but the discussion of what measure of access to primary education is achievable in a given country within a given period of time is framed by what can realistically be financed.

A program-based, non-project assistance funded approach for USAID in the Africa Bureau represents an attempt to link development of basic education to the fiscal constraints and real resource allocation decisions faced by most sub-Saharan countries. This model for assisting the development of education embraces the means to improve on projectized assistance, especially through the following four types of interventions:

- i) linking development of the education sector to sustainable government allocative decisions within the framework of macro-economic constraints,
- ii) dialoguing with governments about the policy changes required to create the environment most conducive to the attainment of sectoral objectives,
- iii) concentrating on developing the administrative, managerial and technical capacities of Ministry of Education institutions (as well as other key actors in the sector -- communities, parent associations, NGOs),

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. *The World Bank's Role in Human Resource Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Education, Training and Technical Assistance*, Operations Evaluation Department. The World Bank 1993.

- iv) working within the context of a sectoral reform, taking into consideration the education system" and the interaction of the different policies, institutions, processes, and inputs impacting the delivery of basic education and links to desired student attainment and achievement

The stabilizing effects of structural adjustment in the late 1980s have helped establish a context for renewed development of formal education and have set the stage for redefining the direction of that development. For example, in countries such as Ghana and Uganda, economic recovery and political stability are enabling those governments to effectively address the rehabilitation of their education systems. With coordinated donor support most education systems in Africa are entering their own period of adjustment and reform, which includes

- development of more rational program-based and transparent budgets that can be used to leverage an increased share of government spending,
- control of the expansion of enrollments and unit costs to ensure the financing of a minimum standard of quality in existing institutions, and
- improvements in administrative systems that should lead to better management of resources

USAID's non-project assistance (NPA) programs in education are designed to support these kinds of sectoral reforms

The use of NPA as an USAID granting mechanism is not new. Economic Support Fund balance of payments support and commodity import programs are forms of non-project assistance. However, the last five years have seen a rise in the importance of NPA as a tool for sectoral assistance, especially in African education. Prior to 1988, most assistance to education was provided through stand alone projects which USAID would design, appraise, implement, supervise and evaluate, albeit with as much government participation as could be urged.<sup>2</sup> It became increasingly apparent that project inputs had limited impact and were not sustained when – as was often the case – the failure of resource allocation policies and institutional weaknesses prevented effective long-term change. The emergence of NPA in the education sector, with eight programs approved between 1989 and 1992, is partly a response to those lessons, and partly due to the convergence of four factors that have defined the strategy of USAID itself. They are

#### Adjustment

The defining theme of development strategy in Africa during the 1980s was structural adjustment. The central principle of structural adjustment is that macro-economic policy and government institutional capacity define the context within which development does or does not take place, and that it is possible to adjust this context to make it more conducive to economic progress. Over the past few years, this strategy has moved from being applied to macro-economic and central government policies to sectoral level policies as well.

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<sup>2</sup> The first education sector NPA program was in fact approved in 1983 in Zimbabwe. The Basic Education and Skills Training (BEST) Sector Assistance Program consisted of a Commodity Import Program (CIP) of US\$29 million and US\$15.9 million in technical assistance and project related equipment. The CIP-generated local currency was used to finance some 20 projects in the education sector in support of government efforts to expand and reform its education system.

### Special Program of Assistance (SPA)

The development of the Special Program of Assistance (SPA) followed the donor community's commitment to supporting structural adjustment through coordinated contributions to bridge the 'financing gap' faced by most countries during periods of adjustment. This meant that USAID (and other donors) would provide balance of payments support in support of governments' implementation of adjustment programs. Non-project assistance is one mechanism through which USAID could finance this kind of support.

### Development Fund for Africa (DFA)

In 1987 the U.S. Congress, concerned about the failure of development in Africa, determined to provide a new assistance instrument to USAID. The DFA was the tangible result of a new compact between USAID and Congress on an approach to development in Africa. The DFA embraces five management principles to guide Agency budgeting, design and implementation of projects and programs<sup>3</sup>. These include

- working to improve public sector institutions as the most effective means to create an environment conducive to development,
- encouraging the participation of providers and clients by working at all levels of systems,
- coordinating and cooperating with other donors through mechanisms such as the Special Program of Assistance (SPA) or Donors to African Education (DAE), and
- striving to ensure financial, institutional and environmental sustainability

Within the context of adjustment, the DFA made it possible for USAID to have a secure source of financing to support systemic, policy and institutional changes in an effort to ensure the greatest and most sustainable "people-level" impact (i.e., more children getting into school and getting a better education).

### The Education Earmark

Starting in 1988, in response to persistently low indicators of educational development and in recognition of the centrality of human resource development as the foundation for economic and social development, Congress established within the foreign assistance appropriations a set aside for education. Not only were annual absolute dollar amounts to be spent on education defined, Congress also mandated that fifty percent of the earmark be committed to basic education, and that USAID launch new programs in at least five countries where the Agency did not already have a program. While the earmark set agency-wide targets, its impact was most evident in Africa, where all the new programs were launched and where roughly 80 percent of the annual education obligation is made.

## NON-PROJECT ASSISTANCE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

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<sup>3</sup> See USAID *Fresh Start in Africa: A Report on the First Five Years of the Development Fund for Africa*. USAID AFR/ARTS 1992.

The education earmark and the DFA generated pressure within USAID to obligate large sums of money on an annual basis. In most African countries, the education sector consumes the greatest share of the government recurrent budget. NPA programs in education, which provide general budgetary support (consistent with the theme of the Special Program of Assistance) and lend themselves to substantial annual obligations, were therefore believed to be a relatively easy means of committing DFA funds toward meeting the education earmark. The Agency has in fact developed eight new NPA education programs in Africa since 1988.<sup>4</sup>

The design of these eight NPA programs in education has been governed by prior experiences and evaluations of education projects, combined with new thinking about how to enhance sustainable education system reform. All of these programs focus on broad systemic policy and institutional changes. The general objective of the programs is to promote increased, equitable access to better quality basic primary schooling. Within that broad objective, each country's particular situation shapes the determination of the specific policy conditions for financial disbursements. While country programs vary in their content and structure, they all contain certain design elements that are the defining themes of the NPA approach. There are six such elements in education NPA programs.

#### NPA Themes

Primary among the defining themes is that USAID financing is granted to government in support of a national program of education sector reform. *NPA is not intended to create a reform, rather to support one that has been developed and articulated by the government.* The education sector reform is placed within the context of overall government economic, policy and institutional reform (often as defined in a macro-economic adjustment program). In addition, because sectoral reforms often include an emphasis on inter- and intra-sectoral resource allocation, they must be linked to the larger efforts to better manage government revenues and expenditures. Also essential to USAID's support are government commitments to the policy changes necessary for the reform. Examples of the areas of policy reform supported through education sector NPA include

- absolute and relative levels of allocation and expenditure,
- policies, statutes and regulations governing personnel,
- policies setting standards for student admission and advancement through the system, and
- priorities for planning and program budgeting

The nature and quality of the reform may vary across countries in terms of the clarity with which it is defined, the technical quality of the information and analysis, the participation leading to the reform, the comprehensiveness and nature of proposed changes, and the degree of government commitment to the reform. These variations in what could be called the policy environment have a determining effect on the progress of NPA program implementation and impact.

A second element of education NPA is budgetary support conditioned on performance. An USAID grant in support of a government education sector reform is divided into tranches,

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<sup>4</sup> A ninth education NPA program is currently being prepared by USAID/Ethiopia.

corresponding to the number of years in the program (varying from three to nine) The disbursement of each tranche is conditioned on the government meeting *a priori* negotiated performance standards, collectively referred to as "conditionality" In general, conditions precedent to tranche disbursement serve as i) leverage points for advancing policy changes, ii) benchmarks of progress, or iii) demonstrations of government commitment The conditions are intended to identify essential elements of reform without which the overall program cannot succeed

A third element is the Agency's adoption of a systems approach to educational change, in which reform of the entire education system is seen as necessary for sustainable improvement This is in contrast to earlier attempts to provide project assistance to develop separate components of the education system (i.e., curriculum development and instructional materials, school construction, teacher training) With the focus on selective elements of overall system reform, the importance of the policies which govern the system becomes apparent Agency guidelines governing the application of NPA are specific on this point, stating "The DFA's legislative history [the congressional directives concerning use of DFA funds] makes it clear that non-project assistance under the DFA can be used only to support sectoral policy reform programs The purpose of such reform programs must be to alleviate the policy constraints impeding longer term development and growth at the sectoral level"<sup>5</sup>

A fourth element of education NPA is the focus on institutional development within the sector The education system consists of a complex of institutions with different administrative, managerial and technical responsibilities These institutions are the means by which policy is translated into operational programs, they include finance and accounting, planning and information, management services, personnel and teaching services, supervision and in-service training, curriculum development, instructional materials, tests and examinations, school facilities and equipment, etc. Reform of the education sector, if it is to be sustainable, requires the coordinated development of host country capacity for managing all aspects of these operations

Donor coordination is a fifth feature of education NPA programs Unlike a project approach, in which each donor can operate within a specific program area, NPA requires a review of the government's reform strategy and financing, including the support from all major donors Cooperation among donors can take the form of co-financing, where major donors join in the design of the program, including conditionalities, and participate together with government in tranche reviews A less structured form of coordination is regular donor sector review meetings, in some cases convened and chaired by a ministry of education

It is an explicit directive both of the DFA legislation and NPA guidelines that programs will be evaluated on the basis of *people-level impacts* This focus on people-level measures of outcomes is a sixth defining characteristic of education NPA USAID's support of education reform is therefore ultimately accountable for outcomes such as an increased proportion of children coming to school, getting through school without repeating grades, and finishing school having learned something useful

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<sup>5</sup> USAID Revised Africa Bureau NPA Guidance USAID AFR/PD/SA 1992

Of the \$388 million of USAID education assistance in Africa, \$258 million (66 percent) is in the form of NPA (Table 1). All of the NPA grants are accompanied by traditional project assistance in varying proportions. The projects consist of technical assistance and training designed to help education ministries build their capacity to better manage the additional resources and to implement other technical elements of the reform. The projects also can contain support to the USAID field missions for managing, monitoring and evaluating the education programs.

Table 11 Education Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>6</sup>

COUNTRY	FINANCING (USM)				DATES	
	NPA	PA	Total	%NPA	START	END
Mali	30	170	200	15	1989	1995
Ghana	32.0	30	350	91	1990	1995
Guinea	22.3	57	280	80	1990	1995
Lesotho	186	64	250	74	1991	1997
Malawi	14.0	60	200	70	1991	1996
Benin	500	7.5	57.5	87	1991	1996
Namibia	350	0.5	35.5	99	1991	1996
Uganda	830	250	1080	77	1992	2002
Swaziland		6.9	6.9	0	1989	1996
South Africa (two projects)		39.5	39.5	0	1986 1992	1996 1998
Botswana		12.6	12.6	0	1991	1997
TOTAL	25790	13010	3880	66		

## OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In terms of their design elements, USAID's education programs work, albeit in different ways, on issues relating to financial reform, improved quality, increased access and equity, and institutional or administrative reform<sup>7</sup> Summaries of these general objectives are presented below

<sup>6</sup> South Africa is a unique case because the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act has barred USAID from providing support to the South African government. Consequently, the education program in South Africa has consisted of projects designed to channel resources and support to the non-governmental sector.

*By African standards, Botswana's education system has made substantial progress with USAID and other donor project support in implementing sustainable, system-wide reforms. At present, the sectoral policy and institutional environments are well positioned to enhance the continued improvement of education at the primary and secondary levels. In such an environment the caveats normally associated with project assistance are lifted because the government itself has sufficiently defined sectoral policy and strategy so that project interventions feed into a sustainable system. Thus being the case, Botswana serves as the exception that proves the NPA rule – that a sound sectoral policy environment is key to successful development.*

*In Swaziland the previous education projects had identified specific areas in which institutional strengthening is needed to ensure implementation of government policy reforms. The present project targets those areas for capacity building and having a point of entry in the education sector hopes to engage the government in effective policy dialogue.*

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of the Africa Bureau's education programs see USAID Overview of AID Basic Education Programs in sub-Saharan Africa USAID AFR/ARTS/HR 1993

### Financial Sustainability

NPA provides a modality for addressing the sustainability of sectoral financing by working with a ministry of education to plan and budget for the required level of activity. This often involves increasing or stabilizing education's share of the government budget and, within that, the share allocated to primary education.

### Quality

USAID supports a number of quality enhancing objectives ranging from curriculum development, to materials development and distribution, to teacher training (pre- and/or in-service), to student assessment, to pedagogical supervision.

### Access and Equity

USAID's education efforts support increased access in those countries where expanding the provision of basic education is a priority of the government's sectoral reform. Equitable access to primary schooling is a concern in almost all of USAID's education programs, and is addressed through targeting of expansion and improvement to previously neglected areas or populations (i.e. girls).

### Efficiency through Institutional Reform

USAID provides assistance to reorganization, decentralization, improved collection and use of information, planning, budget preparation and expenditure control, MOE staff development, as well as community participation in school finance and management.

## POLICY CONTENT

NPA programs are expected to support government policy reforms in basic education. Policy as defined here includes centrally-determined, system-wide (or government-wide) decisions that establish the framework for sectoral development. Specifically, this includes formal policy declarations, ministerial acts, civil service statutes, budgetary allocations, or other governmental statements of priority or strategy. Analysis of the policy content of USAID's education programs in Africa indicates that despite the variety of areas of policy-level interventions, certain general characteristics are discernible.

Almost all of the NPA programs address sectoral priorities as expressed in government resource allocation decisions. Budget and/or expenditure targets, as conditions for tranches of budgetary support, range from the general (adequate resources to cover the cost of the reform) to the specific (unit expenditure amounts) and cover inter- as well as intra-sectoral allocations.

Reforms intended to increase efficiency address strengthening planning and administrative operations, as well as supporting the reorganization of ministry structures and functions and the improved use of physical facilities (i.e., double shifting in schools or increasing intakes to teacher training facilities). Policies governing teacher recruitment and assignment, staffing norms, career structures, etc., are also targeted as means to increase efficiency in the use of teachers and staff, and to improve ministry personnel management. The internal efficiency of primary schools is addressed through policies aimed at reducing repetition and drop out rates.

Programs often include support to government reforms intended to devolve authority and responsibility to regional or sub-regional levels with the aim of improving the quality and efficiency of management. These policies may also seek to secure greater community involvement in education at the school level or to promote private sector initiatives in the provision of education.

USAID education programs support policies aimed at the expansion of opportunity for schooling in those countries which place priority on overcoming low rates of access. In addition, equitable provision of educational services is another policy preoccupation. A project may envisage policy reforms intended to enhance girls' access and retention, improve distribution of resources between urban and rural areas, or target previously disadvantaged regions or populations.

Table 2 summarizes the policy content of USAID's education programs in Africa. The policy content is often expressed in the conditionalities of an NPA program, or may simply be part of the government's reform program to which USAID is providing support.

**Table 2 Policy Issues in USAID Education NPA Programs in Africa**

COUNTRY	MAIN POLICY ISSUES
Mali	<i>Redirect resources from higher and secondary education subsidies to permit expansion and improvement of basic education. Facilitate expansion through improved personnel management (staffing patterns and recruitment)</i>
Ghana	<i>Increase amount of budget available for non salary quality enhancing inputs such as textbooks and the development of criteria referenced testing. Development and implementation of pilot programs to improve equity</i>
Guinea	<i>Expand the provision of basic education through more efficient use of teaching personnel (redeployment) and of infrastructure (multigrade teaching and double shifting). Improve quality through increasing non-salary expenditure. Development of policies to promote rural/urban and gender equity</i>
Lesotho	<i>Large initial increase in and maintenance of higher level of budget for education, with 70 percent of new resources to go to improving the quality and efficiency of primary education. Reform of laws governing non-governmental ownership of schools</i>
Malawi	<i>Increase overall budget allocation for primary education. Improve efficiency by developing strategy to address repetition and by making greater use of existing facilities through multigrade teaching and double shifting and greater enrollment in teacher training colleges (TTCs). Promote girls access through targeted fee waivers and development of gender-sensitive curricula.</i>
Benin	<i>Develop a minimum standard for basic quality education as a tool to ensure equitable allocation of increased level of non-salary inputs. Promote decentralization of administrative and budgetary responsibility</i>
Namibia	<i>Consolidation and integration of regional education authorities and development of basic standard of quality tools to guide equitable re-allocation of qualitative improvements</i>
Uganda	<i>Improve quality through targeting of resources for textbooks and through upgrading the qualifications of the teaching force. More efficient management of teaching personnel. Reform of teaching profession.</i>

## DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND PROGRAMS

Under projects, the targeted objective of USAID's intervention was defined by technical output (e.g. teachers trained, textbooks delivered, etc). Unfortunately, those outputs were often pursued at the expense of institutional capacity building. A project would set up its own system for delivering training or developing an information system and USAID could claim victory when project objectives were met, whether or not the project had fostered any permanent change in a ministry's capacity. *Under USAID's program-based approach, the targeted objective is now defined as an institution capable of achieving the desired technical output, with its recurrent operational costs covered by the sectoral budget, not just the output itself.*

As all the programs consist of substantial infusions of resources to the education sector, the development of budgeting and financial management institutions and capacities are critical aspects of USAID's interventions. Other institutions are targeted depending on the programmatic focus of the education reform. For instance, where the emphasis is on teacher in-service training, the strengthening of institutions associated with the development and provision of in-service programs is supported, such as the National Teacher Training College in Lesotho. The table below identifies the targeted institutions in each of the Africa Bureau's education NPA programs.

Reinforcement of targeted institutions is addressed either through a companion project providing direct technical support (long-term and short-term technical assistance) and training or through aspects of policy reform and conditionality. For example, many programs include conditionality requiring the development of an expenditure tracking system capable of disaggregating budget data by the nature, category and educational level of expenditures. In some cases, technical advisors in the area of financial management are also provided through project assistance.

## VARIATIONS

Within the general framework of coordinated, policy-based, conditioned budgetary resources in support of a government program of systemic reform, USAID's education NPA programs vary in several different ways. The variation across programs depends on a number of factors, among which are the following: 1) the stage of development of a country's education system in terms of the levels of access and quality, 2) the history of USAID's involvement in the education sector, and 3) the extent of government commitment to reform.

Assistance to countries with severely underdeveloped education systems focuses on meeting the challenge of broadening access equitably and within the constraints of resource limitations (e.g., Guinea and Mali). Often the issues that most dominate regard efficiency and quality, how to make most efficient use of available resources and how to expand access without compromising quality, the former contributing substantially to resolving the latter. In countries where education systems are well developed, the focus of assistance may be on consolidating and improving quality while reaching out to the most marginalized populations (e.g., Benin, Ghana and Lesotho). The degree of development of government institutional capacity to manage and administer public education also determines the orientation of USAID assistance and often correlates with the overall

level of provision of educational services -- better institutional capacity often leads to the greater access and better quality. The other confounding variable in this framework is resource availability. Again, institutional capacity, access and quality and availability of government resources are all highly correlated -- richer countries tend to have better administered, more universal, and better quality basic education systems (e.g., Botswana, Swaziland and Namibia).

The focus of USAID's assistance in a country is also influenced by the length of time USAID has worked in the education sector and at what point in its experience with education sector NPA the program was designed. In countries where USAID has a long experience of projectized assistance to the education sector, current programs can build on that experience. In some cases these programs continue the projectized mode (e.g., Botswana and Swaziland) as a means to target specific elements of the education sector. Lesotho is a situation in which an NPA program follows a large-scale education project. In this case, based on a government reform plan, resource allocation, policy change and institutional development are sought through NPA as a means to make previous improvements in the sector more sustainable. The timing of program design is most clearly reflected in a program's approach to setting the policy and institutional agendas. Those designed early on in USAID's shift to NPA attempted to set out conditionality for all tranches of support from the beginning (e.g., Guinea and Mali). They were also limited to three years. More recent designs cover a longer time span (six to ten years) and have a more flexible approach to defining conditionality. (See Part 3 for a discussion of conditionality.)

In addition to the variation in terms of policy objectives and institutional or programmatic focus, programs also differ in how they are structured. On average, about 74 percent of the funding in these eight education programs is through NPA, with the lowest share being 15 percent in Mali, and the highest, 99 percent in Namibia. Only Guinea and Uganda use NPA to repay debt, while all the other programs provide cash transfers as general balance of payments support. Two programs use special accounts for earmarking local currency for the education sector: Ghana and Lesotho. Project assistance in all the programs conforms to the usual configuration of long and short term technical assistance, training, and some equipment purchases. Contractual arrangements for technical assistance range from Mission-based management of a number of personal service contractors and an to buy-ins to existing centrally funded USAID projects. All the countries except Guinea use project funds to hire a US personal services contractor program coordinator to facilitate Mission management of the program. Some of the operational implications of these variations in design are discussed later.

## PART 2 ELEMENTS OF PROGRAM DESIGN

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This section of the paper examines some of the early lessons of USAID's experience with designing and managing its new approach to supporting education in Africa. Design issues discussed include the pre-conditions for launching an education NPA program, the complementarity of project and non-project assistance, and conditionality.

### DECISION TO SUPPORT BASIC EDUCATION

An inherent assumption of USAID's current approach to basic education in Africa is the existence of a national effort of education reform. What confounds the issue is the great variation in government commitment to reform. In some instances, governments may politically pronounce basic education as a priority (often in terms of commitments to "Education for All"), but have not translated that proclamation into cogent sectoral objectives and strategies. In other cases, donor activity in the education sector may give the appearance of a government program of reform, when in reality external assistance is driving most effort in the sector. While in other circumstances, USAID may convince itself a reform exists in a country in order to justify a given decision to pursue a policy-based NPA-funded education program. Some examples will help illustrate this.

In Ghana, USAID began supporting the education sector in 1990, after the government had several years of experience implementing a reform program that was supported by the World Bank. In addition, the Ghanaian government sees human resource development as the cornerstone of its economic development strategy and is thoroughly committed to reforming and improving basic education. This tremendously facilitated USAID's decision to support education and has proven to be one of the important factors contributing to the success of that program.

Similarly, in Lesotho USAID's NPA program has essentially adopted the objectives and targets of the government's five year development strategy for the education sector. A first analysis of conditionality in the Lesotho program would tend to indicate great complexity and a micro-management of the sector. However, aside from one condition regarding government-school proprietor relations, these reforms have proven easy to monitor on the part of USAID and compliance has not diverted government effort from its reform objectives. Why? Simply because they were taken almost literally from the government's own education sector reform plan.

In contrast, Benin is an example of USAID getting involved in education at a much earlier point in the process of government definition of a sectoral reform. While the Beninese had established national consensus around priority investment in reforming and improving basic education, much of the definition of sectoral strategies and plans remained incomplete. As a result, USAID's program has spent its first two years helping the government more clearly define its intentions in the primary sub-sector. This has been useful and important work, but it has meant that concrete results and outcomes have been that much slower in coming.

Under pressure to meet the Congressional earmark for education, USAID/Malawi developed an education program supporting a reform effort accented on equity -- enhancing girls' access to primary education. Unfortunately, government plans for the sector did not even mention equity as

an objective Female access to education, because of its correlation with reduced fertility, was seen as supporting USAID's larger strategic objective in Malawi of helping reduce the population growth rate Thus an education program supporting an objective, which did not exist in the government reform effort, was justified in USAID's internal logic, despite an initial incongruence with the government's intentions in the sector

In Uganda it was difficult for USAID to gauge the readiness of the government to undertake a reform program Although it was true that at the time of the decision to develop an education program making use of NPA in Uganda, the government had instigated a reform effort, the momentum for reform was due in large part to World Bank initiative in the form of pre-appraisal studies Consequently, this created an appearance of commitment to reform, while the government's actual internalization of certain objectives and strategies was basically unknown

What factors intervene to make the Agency decide to develop policy-based NPA-funded education programs in such divergent circumstances? Two are readily identifiable. the basic education earmark and political imperatives to provide assistance to certain countries Not only did the congressional earmark for basic education set annual targets for USAID obligation of funds in this sector, it also explicitly stated that five new programs be developed between 1989 and 1991 This placed considerable pressure on USAID to start-up education programs, and specifically to start NPA programs because of the dollar absorptive capacity of this modality In addition, US foreign policy interests used USAID funding to reward countries for progress in democratic reforms (Benin and Namibia) Taken together these two factors determined that education NPA programs were sometimes launched in countries without respecting the assumption that a sectoral environment conducive to policy reform be in place, and if one is in place, that USAID share its objectives

In addition to NPA programs being developed under differing degrees of government commitment to reform, they have also been started in countries with varying levels of institutional capacity Again, political and bureaucratic motives have sometimes held sway, and countries have been slated for education NPA programs under less than ideal institutional conditions This does not only concern the decision whether to develop an NPA program, but it also affects a particular program's structure Mali, Benin and perhaps Guinea, are three cases where, at the time of the decision to embark on an education NPA program, institutional capacities, especially in terms of budget preparation and expenditure monitoring, were not sufficiently developed to efficiently shoulder the responsibility of managing substantial levels of additional sectoral financing Whether adequate levels and appropriately targeted technical assistance were included in the programs to address institutional constraints was less a function of systematic needs assessments than of political and administrative imperatives at the time of design

## HOW MUCH SUPPORT?

Once a country has been selected for an education NPA program, how does USAID determine the amount of budgetary support to include in the program? Non-project assistance, by definition, is a mechanism for supplying governments with much needed foreign exchange For this reason, the dollar disbursements should be related to a macroeconomic analysis of a country's balance of

payments situation. In addition, because these programs are often in support of budgetary changes in the education sector, specific analyses of sectoral financial requirements and allocative targets are also required. In fact, however, as previously discussed, these technical analyses are often sacrificed to a perceived urgency to commit funds. Often a fixed dollar amount is already targeted when supposed financial analyses are conducted, owing primarily to Washington's calculation of how best to meet the basic education earmark.

A fundamental tenet of the NPA modality is that conditioned budgetary support can leverage important policy reforms. What has proven extremely difficult for USAID is the development of an analytical mechanism that could somehow equate the value of policy or institutional change with the dollar amount of support required to accomplish it. The aspects of reform that concern increased resource flows, typically for non-salary recurrent expenditure on primary education, are readily quantifiable. In these cases, the "costs of reform" can be calculated on the basis of the desired incremental difference in unit expenditure. The challenge, however, is in how to quantify the benefits of reform, what is the value of increased learning that are assumed to be associated with the expenditure on non-salary inputs. Some programs have attempted to quantify expected or assumed efficiency gains. This is done by estimation of lower equivalent student-year costs required to produce a primary school completer, assuming a given reduction in repetition and dropout rates. The short comings of such a methodology are obvious since no empirical evidence exists to associate changes in inputs with gains in efficiency. While rates of return to primary education in general are used as justification for investment in the sector, rarely has the Agency undertaken to specifically calculate them.

## PRE-DESIGN POLICY DIALOGUE

At the pre-design stage, policy dialogue is a shorthand term for the complex process of discussion and negotiation among stakeholders within the country about policy and strategic decisions affecting the education sector. It involves the weighing of different interests, objectives, costs and benefits and reaching a negotiated position regarding sectoral priorities. This process, in terms of its openness, the breadth of participation, and its grounding in realistic appraisal of sectoral constraints, is an important element in the setting of government reform objectives, and therefore USAID's strategy for support.

In two countries, Benin and Namibia, the government piloted national dialogues about the goals and priorities for the education sector. In Benin, wide participation in the national conference led to a popular consensus on the sectoral priority of reforming basic education with an emphasis on improving quality and efficiency. *Les états généraux d'éducation* (an assessment of the status of the sector aided by UNESCO) were produced in Benin as a direct result of the popular concern for the state of public education, and represented the first step towards defining a program of reform. Similarly, in Namibia, transition to a post-apartheid democratically elected government was accompanied by a national conference to determine priorities in education and a government strategy for redressing inherited inequities. The Etosha conference kicked off a national campaign of consensus building and wide participation in the defining of a strategy for basic education reform.

While these two cases are good examples of government-led efforts at policy dialogue among all parties concerned with education in the two countries, they also illustrate how USAID's support can fail to adequately capitalize on the fruits of such a dialogue. Pressures within the Agency to deliver on promised funding for these two emerging democracies precluded the devotion of time to the continuation of the policy dialogue. In fact, these cases demonstrate a basic misunderstanding about policy dialogue. Too often it is seen as a discreet activity – once initial dialogue is completed, then government and donors can go about the business of education reform. In fact, by definition useful policy dialogue needs to be an ongoing process to ensure that stakeholders concerns are accounted for and that they are informed about decisions regarding implementation of policies and strategies. The most recent amendment to the Benin program recalls the importance of the initial policy dialogue and cites the lack of continued government-wide and public involvement in the reform of the sector as a major constraint to program success.

There is emerging literature on successful enhancement of the policy dialogue process<sup>8</sup>. USAID is developing an approach to fostering policy dialogue and enhancing its quality. Typically, enhancements include a structuring of the process to permit participation of an array of stakeholders and the introduction of rational analytical tools to facilitate the quantification of costs and benefits. Ethiopia is a case where USAID is trying to support the development of a dialogue process as a precursor to defining the support role the Agency will play in the education sector. Specifically, USAID is helping the Ethiopian government develop a financial simulation tool so that the budgetary implications of different sectoral strategies can be introduced into the selection of educational priorities. In addition, the education ministry is being encouraged to open up the dialogue to include other government, non-governmental, private sector and community representatives.

## NON-PROJECT ASSISTANCE AND PROJECT ASSISTANCE

According to the general model of USAID's approach to supporting education sector reform, policy change without the institutional capacity to implement those changes is ineffective. Furthermore, policy and institutional changes not targeted towards supporting improvements in the instructional environment of classrooms are purposeless. For these reasons all the Africa Bureau's education programs combine policy, institutional and school and community level interventions, however in varying degrees. It is difficult to assess why USAID opted for different combinations of non-project and project assistance in different countries. There has been no clear guidance on how to coordinate the use of project and non-project modalities. In some cases the use of NPA was mandated by Washington. In other cases, NPA appeared expeditious for obligating large sums of money. In still others, the country situation was perceived too risky to commit large sums of non-project funds. Nonetheless, there are two issues worth exploring: 1) how can project and non-project assistance be combined to support the objectives of educational reform, and 2) to what extent does the split between NPA and PA have an impact on the success of a given program?

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<sup>8</sup> See Luis Crouch *Success in Policy Reform through Policy Dialogue*, Staff Working Paper RTI 1993

The concept of educational reform, especially in its policy and institutional reform elements, could be perceived as being top down. In fact, national attempts at system reform are often centrally driven. Sadly, they have largely proved unsuccessful.<sup>9</sup> In order to move beyond an assumed link between policy change, institutional capacity and improved education, and to address the loosely coupled nature of education systems, USAID's approach has often incorporated simultaneous top down and bottom up components. The top down elements include budgetary support and conditionality intended to leverage critical policy or institutional changes. These aspects of the approach are discussed in detail below. Bottom up (or middle out) components include the projectized aspects of USAID's programs that address administrative and management capacity and specific technical areas affected by reform. The nature of projectized activities is also discussed below. The following paragraphs examine how project-provided technical assistance is used in conjunction with NPA to help overcome institutional weakness in key areas or to instigate changes at the school level.

Long- and short-term technical assistance and training are targeted to administrative or technical offices within the sector in order to help develop capacity in those areas seen as key to the success of reform. In most countries this translates into technical support in the areas of financial management, educational planning and the development of management information systems, and teacher training or curriculum development, among others. The decision as to the amount and area of focus of technical support is addressed during design and depends on analyses of constraints and institutional capacity conducted at that time. Program success, which is contingent on the assumption of a certain technical and institutional ability and willingness on the part of sector managers, also depends on the target and effectiveness of technical assistance.

Insufficient technical assistance to accompany a program of budgetary support has had negative impacts on the implementation of certain programs. Three examples are Guinea, Benin and Namibia. In Guinea, despite an institutional analysis that indicated problems in ministry management capacity, technical assistance provided in the program has been limited. Although notable success has been realized, institutional changes in planning, budgeting and expenditure control have been difficult to come by and evidence of backsliding indicates that they are fragile at best. Guinea's recent evaluation strongly recommended additional technical assistance. In Benin, because other donors have yet to deliver anticipated assistance, and because of the complexity and number of reforms being undertaken, the program has recently been amended to add more projectized assistance in certain key areas (financial management and pedagogy). In Namibia, because the USAID program was designed prior to the formalization of the government's own educational priorities, the Ministry's sequencing of reform activities was often not synchronized with the tranche conditions of the USAID program. Consequently, although the education ministry had procured its own technical support, this valuable part of the ministry's staff was frequently pulled away from reform activities in order to work for extended periods on preparing documentation to meet USAID conditionalities.

<sup>9</sup> *There are examples of successful education reform in Africa but they are largely limited to efforts to expand access (Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria). Most attempts at improving quality unfortunately have failed. In fact, the poor quality of basic schooling in Africa is in some ways attributable to the failings of past reform efforts. See the World Bank's 1988 Policy Paper Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Strategy for Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion for an overview of the history of educational reform in Africa.*

A converse example is Mali. In this case, too much projectized assistance may be countervailing USAID attempts at policy dialogue. Essentially, the Ministry has been able to forego meeting conditionality without losing the majority of USAID's assistance to the sector. In fact, one could argue that \$3 million as inducement to make hard policy choices regarding cutting of subsidies to higher education has been ineffective compared to the \$17 million in projectized assistance the Ministry continues to receive with little progress on the policy front. Although this program has been successful in promoting significant changes in teaching practices through targeted teacher training and support in pilot areas, these activities are not yet linked to changes in the policies or institutions governing in-service teacher training and pedagogical support.

Swaziland is a country where USAID is working at the policy level without the leverage of an NPA program. USAID hoped that it could provide project assistance to support key institutions in the sector, and thus participate in the definition and articulation of policy. However, this has not yet been accomplished, since USAID has been unable to influence significant policy changes or engage in policy dialogue with the government. Whether this is because of the lack of program budgetary support is unclear.

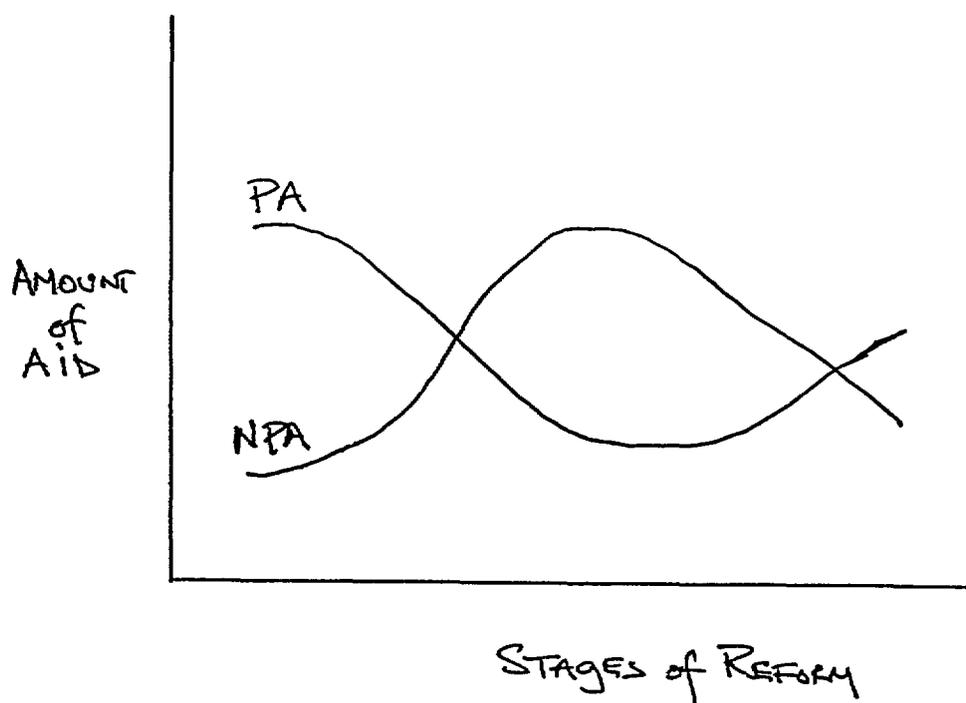
It is not possible to stipulate the ideal proportion of non-project and projectized components of an education program. However, it is evident that a balanced approach has a greater chance of successfully fostering a government's reform objectives. Too little projectized support has left USAID with no direct means to assist institutional development – a necessary condition for the translation of policy changes into programs of action in the sector. Too little NPA weakens the Agency's ability to support difficult policy reforms, resulting in projects that may have a broader scope than those undertaken in the past, but which leave open the question of how sustainable their activities will be in the absence of policy change and a reallocation of resources. The key is to ensure the complementarity of efforts.

An example of how these two approaches can work synergistically is found in the Malawi program. Gender equity, while not a clearly stated goal of the Malawian government, is strongly promoted by USAID's program of assistance. The program is pursuing equity enhancing policy changes such as elimination of fees for girls in primary school. It also includes an increase in the share of government resources going to the education sector and within that to primary education as a means to make up for the reduced revenue resulting from the elimination of fees. In addition, the program contains a projectized component which provides technical assistance and material support to the development of a gender equity unit within the institution responsible for curriculum development. In this manner, the issue of gender equity (specifically in terms of the elimination of gender biases from teaching materials and practices) is given an institutional advocacy base. Another component of the project is supporting a social marketing effort aimed at working with communities to promote girls' education. These efforts allow USAID's to work at both the policy level, through the lever of NPA, and at the institutional and grassroots levels through well targeted projectized activities.

Another important lesson in how project and non-project assistance can work in a complementary fashion has to do with the phases of education reform and the combination of these modalities. The diagram below depicts one way in which budgetary support and more traditional project assistance can be used to support different stages of educational reform. In the early stages (pre-

reform) when the government is defining its objectives and developing implementation strategies and plans, projectized assistance may be called for to develop the important institutional capacities on which the implementation of a reform program will depend (e.g. information systems, planning, budgeting, financial management, etc.)

During reform implementation budgetary support could grow in importance, helping provide the resources necessary to implement reforms and specific programs. Often there are one-time transitional costs associated with jump starting a stalled education system (training, infrastructure and equipment). External assistance could help governments bear some of these costs. Project assistance may decrease during this period, transferring the implementation burden over to strengthened host country institutions.



At the later stages of reform (or post-reform), budgetary support could decrease. At this point the government would take over and sustain the required level of financing for the continued operation of an improved education system. This would be after the initial spike in sectoral financing requirements associated with the transition referred to above. Project assistance at this stage could be used to target development of certain key capacities within the framework of a reformed education system.

## CONDITIONALITY

The disbursement of USAID grant funds in NPA programs is contingent on a government's meeting specific pre-arranged conditions collectively referred to as conditionality. Conditionality serves several purposes, but primarily acts as the means to ensure that certain policies or actions, seen by both parties as essential to the success of the program, take place. In addition, the fulfillment of conditionality provides USAID with the justification required to secure the release of a tranche of financing. This section of the paper examines the use of conditionality as a tool for assisting education reform. Specifically, it will be important to determine, if possible, whether different types of conditionality are more successful than others and if the manner in which USAID manages conditions determines their impact in the education sector. It will be useful to examine different approaches to defining conditions and how those have proven to help or hinder program implementation. Flexibility, specificity, and scope are three areas in which experience has demonstrated different lessons.

It is important to note that each of the education NPA programs in the Africa bureau make use of different approaches to and types of conditionality. Within a given program there may be policy-level conditions and implementation specific conditions, or detailed and general conditions. The combination of many types of conditions is indicative of the Agency's attempt to find the "best" formula for facilitating education reform in a given context.

### Flexibility

In the early NPA education programs (Mali, Ghana and Guinea), all conditions for each tranche of budgetary support were defined at program design. This approach was predicated on the assumption that it is possible to predict the nature and pace of policy reform, a tenuous assumption under the best of circumstances. In Mali, the NPA portion of the program was essentially derailed from the start and inflexible interpretation of conditions precedent (particularly regarding sectoral budget shares for higher and primary education) made it impossible for USAID to respond to what progress the government was making under admittedly difficult circumstances. In Guinea, disbursements have averaged several months behind schedule as government has labored to keep pace with an agreed implementation schedule. While the intent of conditionality is to help the government institute difficult changes, lack of flexibility in defining benchmarks can lead to bending of interpretation of compliance, which risks being counterproductive. Specifically, USAID finds itself accepting less than ideal proof of compliance (the equity conditions in Ghana and school construction in Guinea) because predetermined conditions cannot be altered. The lesson drawn from these experiences is that flexibility is important in the setting of targets — i.e. building in specific points at which the achievement of expected outputs can be reassessed. Where flexibility is damaging to a program is in interpreting compliance — i.e. deciding whether presented evidence demonstrates that a target has been reached.

Later programs, Uganda, Namibia, and Benin, attempted to respond to the inflexibility of pre-established conditions for all tranches. Two approaches have been used. In one, conditions precedent to the first and second tranches are defined in the program design. Subsequent conditions are elaborated through program amendments on an annual basis (Benin and Uganda). This allows USAID and the government to agree to important policy reforms or program benchmarks on the basis of an evaluation of progress to date. However, this does require that an

official amendment process be undertaken each year, with attendant demands on Mission management input and the need for regional or Washington review

Similarly, the second approach also incorporates annual reassessment of progress and determination of conditions through what the Agency has termed a "Letter of Intent" (Benin and Namibia)<sup>10</sup> The Letter of Intent (LOI) is a legal agreement between the government and USAID which identifies specific program accomplishments for a given year

An advantage of both of these approaches is that USAID and the government must communicate up front about each others expectations for a given year of the program. If executed effectively, important policy dialogue can center on this annual setting of targets, hopefully diminishing the need to bargain about interpretation of compliance. One problem that has emerged in the use of the LOI approach is the blurring of statements of intention (i.e., objectives) and firm commitments to attain specific benchmarks. The most striking example of this is the case of Namibia, where government discussion of broad sectoral objectives in a Letter of Intent were legalistically interpreted by USAID as binding commitments. The education ministry in Namibia did not sufficiently understand the LOI concept and interpreted it as a simple statement of objectives. At the same time USAID adopted the strictest possible application of the LOI. The result was that the third tranche of the program remains undisbursed.

Another disadvantage of a letter of intent is the tendency to translate program implementation concerns into conditionality. This has been the case in Benin, where the use of the LOI has tended to focus conditionality attention on programmatic changes (e.g., naming of staff, compilation of statistics, writing of plans) rather than on policy-level reforms. The implementation of those programmatic changes have been important for the government's reform effort. However, it is unclear whether conditionality is the correct mechanism for addressing those concerns.

Nonetheless, a Letter of Intent or an annual amendment to the program ideally builds in the need to communicate, reassess, and jointly define objectives and benchmarks. In this way a program can respond to critical policy issues that arise during program implementation. This requires significant Mission involvement in policy dialogue. An example drawn from Benin illustrates this point. It has become increasingly evident that progress in educational reform in Benin could be accelerated through a more decentralized approach. Amended conditions have therefore reflected a greater emphasis on decentralized control of budget and programming decisions than originally foreseen at the time of design.

Flexibility in conditionality has been brokered through another approach, evident in the Malawi program. In this case, initial conditions require the government to develop plans for reducing repetition, school construction, and development of gender appropriate curricula. Additional tranches simply require that targets laid out in the original plans be respected. While this does not address the problem of rigidity of pre-determined later year conditions, at least those later targets are based on government plans and not design assumptions about reform progress.

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<sup>10</sup> Note that Benin and Namibia make use of both of these approaches

## Specificity

Conditions in USAID's education NPA programs range from extremely detailed and highly specific to the very general. Experience has shown that this variation contributes significantly to explaining degrees of success in program implementation. In addition, analysis of the inclusion of general or detailed conditionality indicates a phased approach to determining conditions.

Early interventions in the education sector, or in specific policy or technical areas, require background study and the development of an overall strategy. For example, USAID's support to the promotion of girls' equity in access to primary school in Guinea established an initial condition of conducting a study. Later conditions covered establishing a task force, and eventually formulating a sectoral strategy. This phased approach is intended to ensure that adequate base line data exist on which to build policy and program reforms.

Interventions at a later stage, or when sectoral attention to a specific issue is more advanced, call for development of specific policies and implementation plans. In Benin, many sectoral studies had been carried out under an earlier UNDP/UNESCO project. At the time of USAID's intervention, the development of specific action plans for implementing reforms based on those studies was the next important step. Early conditions (and the focus of technical assistance) requiring these plans reflected this stage of the reform.

When reform efforts have progressed sufficiently beyond the study, strategy, policy and planning stages, then the achievement of specific outputs or benchmarks is targeted through conditionality. Some examples of this include implementation of CRT in Ghana, school construction conditions in Guinea, and materials provision in Lesotho.

In some cases use of general versus specific conditions can be explained by the stage of government reform (or general development of the education sector). It is still useful to examine the implications of these different approaches to conditionality.

Guinea presents a case making use of both approaches. Regarding financial conditions, Guinea has the most detailed conditionality. It sets out targets for education's share of overall budget, primary's share of the education budget, percentages for non-salary inputs, and per student annual expenditure on pedagogical inputs. In addition, financial conditionality requires verification of both budgeted and actual expended amounts in these categories (Ghana and Benin also address both allocations and expenditures, while Mali, Lesotho, and Malawi are concerned only with allocations). The government has exceeded or met all of the detailed financial conditions, and recent reassessment of the program has indicated that further detail would enhance the pedagogical impact of increased resource flows to the sector.<sup>11</sup> In Guinea emphasis on actual expenditures has been a driving force in helping the ministry of education establish systems for improved monitoring of and accounting for resource use in the sector.

<sup>11</sup> For example detailing specific budget lines to be targeted rather than just non-salary recurrent expenditures is a way to ensure that resources are being targeted to classroom-level inputs and not just administrative costs.

In other programs (Namibia, Benin), financial conditions are stated in general terms – availability of sufficient resources to implement the reform. This approach may eliminate the need to micro-manage reporting on sector expenditures. However, it is so open to interpretation that compliance is almost impossible to judge.

In contrast to the detailed and precise financial conditions in Guinea, administrative and technically specific conditions (teacher redeployment, equity, construction) are expressed in terms of establishing and implementing plans. Many other programs include this approach of explicitly requiring only a plan for certain reforms (e.g., restructuring of the ministry in Lesotho and Benin). Subsequent conditions then refer to the implementation of the plan. Malawi is perhaps the best example of this, as indicated above. An extreme example of a general planning condition is evident in the conditionality for second tranche disbursement in Mali. The program required a ministry plan for "restructuring its secondary general, technical and vocational, and higher education system."

The utility of such a condition for USAID, and of so broad a plan for the government, is questionable.

The most detailed set of conditions are contained in the Lesotho program. As many as nineteen conditions (compared to five to eight in other programs) for each tranche address such items as appointment of personnel to specific posts, fixed numbers for hiring of teaching personnel, detailed incremental increases in the education budget, etc. In addition, the conditionality in the Lesotho program covers a broad range of policy issues including finance, staffing, testing, curriculum development, teacher training, restructuring of the MOE, provision of classroom inputs, EMIS, teacher support, etc. The degree of specificity in the Lesotho conditionality may appear daunting, however, compliance has not proven too onerous.<sup>12</sup> Implementation details called for to meet conditionality are those drawn from the government's own sectoral plan, essentially achieving the same result as the planning conditions followed by implementation targets alluded to above. Again, one could ask whether conditionality is the appropriate mechanism for what is basically implementation monitoring.

The problem with overly specific conditionality is that USAID's efforts are directed towards micro-management of sectoral reforms. When this happens, attention is diverted from the intended objective of NPA – the establishment of a policy and institutional environment conducive to reform. Furthermore, government efforts also tend to get sidetracked from the actual business of implementing the reform by the need to produce voluminous documentation for USAID on all the specific conditions that it reports to have met.

### Scope

Is a condition aimed at a broad policy-level reform or does it target the implementation of a specific institutional or technical aspect of a reform? This distinction speaks to how a program makes use of conditionality. Many of USAID's education NPA programs use conditions with very different scopes.

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<sup>1</sup> A major policy condition concerning shared responsibility between government and private providers of education (churches) has not been met.

In some cases, USAID's approach is to target those policy or institutional changes seen as most critical for the success of sectoral reform. This could be referred to as a *policy-based* approach to conditionality. In Guinea, additional non-salary resources and redeployment of teachers were seen as the key to the government's ability to expand and improve primary education. More efficient deployment of existing staff permitted a quantum change in the gross enrollment rate in just three years. Additional non-salary expenditure was to facilitate delivery of essential pedagogical inputs. As mentioned above, further effort is needed to better target non-salary resources. However, Guinea has attained a level of resource availability at the school-level unprecedented in that country.

In Malawi, while girls get into primary school, their persistence through the primary cycle is poor. Policy and institutional reforms seen as key to improving female persistence were therefore targeted through program conditionality. Elimination of fees for non-repeating girls, development of a system for tracking students and a plan for reducing repetition, and the development of gender sensitive curricula were seen as instrumental to removing obstacles that prevented girls from completing primary school, and therefore were included as conditions.

In Ghana, an important aspect of realizing and monitoring the impact of qualitative improvements in basic education is the introduction of criterion-referenced testing. Adoption of criterion-referenced testing was made a condition of the program.

The definition and implementation of the fundamental quality level standard in Benin was made a condition because it is the planning tool that will facilitate the establishment and implementation of the ministry's plans to equitably improve quality.

In other cases, conditions cover numerous specific elements of reform activities and are used as a device for monitoring program implementation. This could be called implementation-based conditionality. As discussed earlier, this tends to be the case when a Letter of Intent is used, or, as in Lesotho, when conditions cover a broad scope of specific actions.

Which approach works better, policy-based or implementation-based? Under both approaches governments have successfully met conditions. However, two issues appear to argue for a policy-based approach. First, where policy-based conditions have been met, impact in the sector is greater: increased resources in Lesotho, Guinea, Malawi, redeployment of teachers in Guinea, elimination of girls' fees in Malawi. Impact from implementation of specific conditions is limited to the element of the program targeted by that condition: creation of steering committee in Benin and Namibia, creation of 260 additional teaching posts in Lesotho, equity pilots in Ghana. Often the larger ramifications of such specific conditions are lost. For example, the Ministry of Education in Ghana implemented a set of pilot programs to test equity enhancing interventions. However, the pilots were so poorly designed that generalization for overall policy reforms is impossible.

Second, it is assumed that the leverage of conditioned budgetary support should be used to help an education ministry realize significant and sometimes difficult policy changes. In this way, USAID's major program input is used to broker impact commensurate with its significance in the overall program design. To use budgetary support to bring about minor implementation changes is overkill. This is best illustrated by the situation where disbursement is delayed because of non-

compliance with an implementation-based condition. Should the Government of Lesotho's balance of payments situation and the education sector's budget share be hostage to the possibility that the education ministry is unable to fill the Primary and In-service Division Coordinator positions at the National Teacher Training College?

### Limits of Conditionality

In assessing the usefulness or relative success of conditionality in education NPA programs, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in using conditionality as the means to broker policy reform.<sup>13</sup> Three constraints to the practicality of conditionality relate to the following

- i) *the limits on technocratic approaches to solving policy decision problems,*

This first constraint recalls the initial assumption inherent in the use of non-project assistance as a modality of support to sectoral reform. As discussed in Chapter 1, a complex set of factors combine to determine what policy-decisions a government can make. A given sectoral strategy often represents the best compromise among competing interests. Helping the government engage in dialogue with stakeholders and enhancing that process through the introduction of objective analytical tools is our best hope at addressing this constraint. To assume that making something a condition will overcome a political obstacle is naive.

- ii) *the lack of mechanisms to ensure continued implementation of decisions taken in response to conditionality,*

Unless policy changes grow out of the locally recognized need to address a problem in the sector, there is nothing to prevent the government from reverting after having demonstrated compliance to USAID. The best means to address this second limitation is to strive to base program conditions on mutually agreed changes, which are seen by all parties (not just USAID and the government) as essential to improving the education sector.

- iii) *the conflict between the need to withhold disbursement to exert the leverage associated with conditionality and Agency pressure to disburse funds*

To make conditionality work the possibility of non-disbursement of funds has to be real. Furthermore, there needs to be some middle ground between disbursement and cancellation of a program. In effect, it is necessary that the Agency allow its field missions enough latitude to permit a program to proceed at its own pace. Reform is a complicated endeavor and experience has shown that progress follows a very jagged path. Pressure to disburse funds in a given fiscal year should not force a Mission to accept less than satisfactory compliance with conditionality, and Missions should see delaying disbursement as a viable option in the management of their education programs. Delays in disbursement should not provoke harsh judgement for non-performance of the education program by headquarters.

<sup>13</sup> Luis Crouch *Success in Policy Reform through Policy Dialogue* Staff Working Paper RTI 1993 Annex A

## Management of Conditionality

Managing conditionality -- essentially maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the government about reform progress -- is time consuming and management intensive. Missions that have been successful at maintaining an ongoing dialogue with government about education reform and that have been able to monitor progress accurately are those that have devoted the necessary effort and time.

The degree to which that contact and dialogue is formalized also determines how easily implementation of the reform program supported by USAID proceeds. Over-formalization, through official letters and communiques, sometimes works against the policy dialogue as governments may see USAID's insistence on written reports and exchanges of information as time consuming and diverting effort from the real business of implementing the reform. On the other hand, lack of clear official agreement on interpretation of conditions and requirements has led to miscommunication and divergent expectations.

The policy dialogue vehicle universal to the education programs consists of the conditions precedent to disbursement of funding and the process of annual review of compliance with them. Just as the nature and content of conditionality strongly determines the outcome of a program of assistance, the way in which those conditions are managed and implemented is an equally significant factor.

The basic format for the management of NPA is simple. On an annual basis, compliance with conditionality is verified as a pre-requisite for releasing additional financing. The annual review (or tranche review) is included in every program. Where there may be great variation is how in different countries the actors involved in management and review of conditionality play their roles.

### Conditionality management roles

In general USAID's responsibility has three aspects. USAID should

- agree with the government on the interpretation/application of conditionality,
- provide assistance to the government to implement the components of the reform addressed through conditionality, and
- verify compliance.

In addition, USAID may employ contractors to help fulfill any of its roles. The responsibilities of the contractor then correspond to those of USAID. However, it is critical to make the distinction between those roles only USAID can fulfill, and those for which a contractor is better suited. Agreement on interpretation of conditions is a central aspect of policy dialogue, and experience in most countries has shown that involvement of senior Mission personnel is required for the proper high level dialogue and negotiation. This is especially true, as is often the case, when NPA program conditions have implications wider than the education sector (resource allocation, financial reforms, civil service management reforms, etc.). Verification of compliance is also an internal USAID function. The role for which technical assistance is best suited is providing assistance to the government in implementing its reform program, which should result in compliance with conditionality.

The government's role should be to

- agree with USAID on the interpretation/application of conditionality,
- complete or manage the tasks required to implement the elements of the reform that will satisfy conditionality,
- produce the required proof/documentation that the specifications of the conditionality have been met

In analyzing how the fulfillment of these roles has contributed to a reform program's success, it is important to note the specific language used to describe the second responsibility of both USAID and governments. The emphasis is on the implementation of reform elements that will satisfy conditionality. This distinction is accentuated because USAID and governments often make the same mistake in managing conditionality. They both shift the emphasis from implementing reform components to simply trying to meet conditionality. On the part of USAID, this involves making use of technical assistance to compile conditionality reports rather than to assist governments (and build capacity) in completing the tasks on which they are supposed to report. On the part of ministries of education, this involves putting effort into producing documentation rather than working on implementing reforms.

USAID also contracts technical help for fulfilling the government's role in managing conditionality. In this case, the responsibilities of the technical assistance correspond to those of the government. However, as stated above, that role should be limited to supporting the implementation of the policy, institutional, and program changes that lead to the attainment of reform objectives, and, therefore, compliance with conditionality. The use of technical assistance to negotiate on behalf of the government subverts the whole intention of policy dialogue. Employing technical support to merely produce documentation of conditionality undermines their contribution to capacity building.

Some misapplication of conditionality is traceable to the nature of a condition. Those which require plans or reports often lead to the production of documents with little meaning or grounding, especially when requirements are overly general. This can be overcome by well directed assistance or through continuous dialogue aimed at defining the specifics of a plan. A good example is the development of the teacher redeployment in Guinea. The government, though weary of the potential political resistance to such an effort, was anxious to meet conditionality both to obtain the budgetary support and to keep the reform program on track. For this reason, they were very open to donor support in developing the plan, and multiple drafts were circulated and discussed in detail, allowing ample negotiation around particularly sensitive issues (such as compensation of redeployed teachers).

Another critical element in managing conditionality is USAID and government agreement on the interpretation of conditions. In cases where Letters of Intent (LOI) are in use, this is especially important, so that a ministry does not use the LOI as a statement of sector priorities and objectives instead of a clear indication of what it is committed to accomplishing in a given year. When USAID's program includes annual amendment of conditionality, government participation in the amendment process, which includes a reassessment of conditionality as discussed above, is critical to ensuring mutually agreed interpretation. In all programs, and especially those where conditions

are pre-determined, an annual exercise in negotiating acceptable demonstration of compliance for each condition (conducted at the beginning of the program year) helps avoid confusion over intentions at the time of review

#### Tranche reviews

All the USAID NPA programs conduct yearly reviews of conditionality referred to as tranche or annual reviews. The primary objective of an annual review is to assess government compliance with conditionality so that USAID can authorize disbursement of the corresponding tranche of budgetary support. Demonstration, or documentation of compliance is reviewed by the Mission, then, being judged satisfactory, submitted to a regional legal advisor for a final ruling. In some cases, conflicting interpretations between these two levels have greatly complicated the review process. Namibia illustrates the most extreme example of lack of a shared interpretation of conditionality within USAID. Conflicting views about what was required by program conditions led to a virtual suspension of the budgetary support component of USAID's program.

In addition, an annual review provides a forum for an assessment of the implementation progress of the government reform program. In this manner, the tranche review can place conditionality within the context of an assessment of the overall status of reform. In many programs, especially those making use of the LOI, the annual review also serves the objective of dialoguing and agreeing on expectations (and conditions) for program progress in the coming year. Obviously, when the tranche review is limited to an exchange of documents and official communications, the value of the dialogue is greatly compromised. Often, an overly formalistic approach has reduced conditionality review to a simple exercise of the government figuring out what minimal effort is required to satisfy USAID, and USAID content to check off on a list of documents. An open transparent exchange in which both sides present their assessment of progress and their expectations of accomplishment (and support) is the best antidote to the ritual exchange of paper.

There are a variety of approaches to the preparation and conduct of tranche reviews. These different approaches imply varying degrees of effort on the part of government (and management and time on the part of USAID) in the preparation of documents for the formal review. In some cases arm loads of paper have been produced, with substantial diversion of ministerial effort (and technical assistance) away from other work. To the greatest extent possible programs should look to minimize the generation of documents specific to a tranche review, and try to capitalize on plans, policy papers, etc., which government would be producing for its own needs. Where programs involve multiple donors in parallel or co-financing arrangements, joint reviews which use a single set of documents can greatly diminish ministry effort to repeatedly compile information in different forms to suit different donors.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING PROGRAM DESIGN

Despite Agency guidance on designing and managing non-project assistance programs, this approach retains an experimental nature in the education sector. Experience indicates that the program approach to systemic reform can work. It also demonstrates that there are numerous, unanticipated challenges associated with the management of NPA-funded programs. The challenges of institutional capacity, government commitment, and adequate resources will be

present in Africa whatever the modality of assistance USAID elects to employ. Turning away from NPA because of some difficulties encountered in the early stages of its application in the education sector would be regrettable. USAID should instead focus on how to better design and manage its NPA programs by extracting the early lessons gleaned in experimenting with this approach. In summary, some of the lessons discussed above include the need for

- Greater understanding of the process of educational reform and better appreciation of intermediate, system-level changes that lead to lasting student-level impact,
- Stricter definition and application of criteria for where and when to implement an education reform support program,
- Committing time and effort, both up-front and throughout a program, to assisting the process of policy dialogue,
- Better coordination of project and non-project assistance to mutually reinforce the objectives of sustainable, system-level improvements in education,
- Refinement of methodologies for determining levels (and types) of assistance and for setting sectoral expenditure targets,
- Building flexibility into program targets and conditions, but insisting on consistent interpretation of results and compliance,
- Identifying key policy and institutional reforms as the targets of program conditionality, and avoiding using conditionality as a mechanism for implementation monitoring, and
- Recognition of the management demands of the program approach and, in response, adequate staffing of concerned Missions

## PART 3. IMPACTS EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

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USAID's education specialists -- both in the field and in Washington -- are regularly asked to provide evidence that USAID has improved education in Africa. But what does "improving education" mean and what constitutes compelling proof? This chapter examines the impacts expected of USAID's educational reform programs in Africa and the type of results actually envisaged and achieved by the eleven USAID programs. Discussion proceeds by (1) placing the emphasis on impacts and their measurement within an historical context, (2) reviewing the expected impacts and measures of educational reform prevailing in USAID, (3) developing a grounded definition of "impact" from the programs themselves and contrasting them with expected impacts, and (4) exploring the reasons for divergence between expected impacts and the planned and actual impact of the USAID education programs.

### THE EMPHASIS ON IMPACTS

"Getting results" has always been the ultimate focus of USAID's design, management and evaluation activities. The logical framework ("logframe"), which distinguishes between higher and lower order objectives and impacts, was developed to assist project designers to express their intent in coherent and measurable/observable terms, and to track and assess project accomplishments. However, the impetus for measurement and pressure to demonstrate results has increased in recent years. The reasons for that are multiple and not unrelated.

Increased Congressional interest in and watchfulness over US development assistance to Africa has been concretized through the Development Fund for Africa (DFA) and the Congressional earmark for education. Both underscore the need for discernible progress and accountability. The DFA closely prescribes management principles to which USAID activities must adhere. These in themselves create a need for careful monitoring and reporting to prove responsiveness to Congress. But more significantly, the DFA's call for sustainability or "lasting change" and people-level impacts requires USAID to prove that its programs are achieving these goals.

This results-and-accountability orientation is further accentuated by the education earmark, which mandates the amount spent on education. Implicit in both the earmark and the DFA is the assumption that not only have previous efforts to support African development been less than fully effective, but that insufficient resources and attention have been allocated to education. As noted in the 1989 DFA Action Plan, "USAID (could) no longer conduct business as usual in Africa." The current generation of USAID activities in Africa is seen as a "fresh start," a new page in Agency assistance to Africa -- one that must produce tangible and large-scale results in improving the lives of the continent's citizens.

USAID has responded by recasting much of its assistance in Africa in terms of programs aimed at systemic sectoral change, rather than the traditional, more narrowly-focussed projects aimed at an

aspect of a part of a sector<sup>14</sup> "Investing in people" has become the watch-word of USAID's programs, and societal "transformation" is the ultimate standard by which its success will be judged. Both because of intensified external oversight and lack of experience with the new program modalities, primarily NPA, USAID has developed tracking systems to monitor progress in meeting performance targets of its programs.<sup>15</sup> New measurement schemes and indicators have been devised to capture the effects of USAID's programs at the beneficiary or "people"-level. In the Africa Bureau, a performance contract paradigm or "performance-based programming" is used in the development of the country programs. Missions are then held accountable for the promised results.

Performance accountability is also a defining feature of the NPA modality. Budgetary support is conditioned on governments undertaking specific policy-level actions and/or achieving certain outcomes, such as -- in the education sector -- resource reallocation or increasing girls enrollment. Government proof-of-performance is submitted at periodic tranche reviews. All programs institute monitoring and evaluation plans. In education, many of these plans specifically include assessment of the NPA modality as one of their objectives.

It would be difficult to argue that the magnitude of risk has not intensified with the introduction of NPA as a modality for assistance in Africa: the dollar amounts allocated to sectoral programs far surpass those previously invested in projects and entire country programs. For example, in the 1980s less than \$XXX million was allocated to education compared with the \$XXX of the current education programs. In this context, monitoring and evaluation takes on added significance.

### AGENCY EXPECTATION OF EDUCATIONAL IMPACTS

The intensified interest in systemic educational reform in general and the shift to the non-project assistance modality in USAID education programs came about in the 1980's during which the tremendous educational gains in Africa of the 1960's and 1970's had reversed themselves. Rates of enrollment growth and school expansion stagnated to the point where gross enrollment ratios in several countries actually fell, instructional quality declined as fewer teachers met basic qualification criteria, and shrinking educational budgets were outpaced by population growth. Education in Africa was in crisis.

Consensus -- both amongst donors and in the African countries -- emerged that fundamental changes must take place in African educational systems in order to realize the goal of expanded

<sup>14</sup> Tangible proof of this "sea-change" is found in the Special Program of Assistance aimed at facilitating structural adjustment and the prevalence of the use of the non project assistance modality in the health, agriculture and education sectors. Even where the project modality is used to support educational development, such as in Swaziland, projects are now aimed at systemic policy reform.

<sup>15</sup> The need for these has been recently underscored by skepticism of the NPA approach expressed in the 1993 House Appropriation Committee's report which states that "the benefits of such assistance have not been conclusively demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Committee."

access to quality primary education for all children<sup>16</sup> Alarm about the deteriorating condition of African education coincided with the advent of an extensive literature on educational indicators – what they are and how to measure them<sup>17</sup> Both the status of country educational systems and educational objectives were measured and stated in terms of quantifiable student outcomes: the percentage of school-aged children in school (access), the participation rate of girls and rural children (equity), the completion, promotion and transition rates (quality), and the repetition and drop-out rate and cycle years (efficiency) Throughout the decade these measures of student performance became institutionalized in sector assessments, the burgeoning number of donor statistical reports, and newly-instituted management information systems Significantly, these indicators were established as standard measures of education system productivity and efficiency, serving as criteria against which both educational reform and external assistance program impact could be gauged

These measures of education system effectiveness were broadly congruent with the DFA guidance on program development. The DFA mandates that all USAID's programs in Africa result in "people-level" impacts and contribute to improving the incomes of individual Africans in order to raise the low standards of living throughout the region According to the Africa Bureau's Non-Project Sector Assistance Guidance, "In all cases, DFA NPA programs should support sectoral development objectives, which must be defined in terms of their impact on poor people or households, e.g., increased income, production, employment" and "defined in terms that are quantifiable and measurable" Education was seen as "an effective way to raise incomes and spread the benefits of modernization" While increased household welfare may be considered a long-term impact of schooling, improving African educational systems in terms of access, equity, quality and efficiency have been identified as within the immediate sphere of USAID program influence Key impacts or "benchmarks" of USAID's educational reform programs to be primarily supported by NPA, as listed in the 1989 DFA Action Plan, are

- the share of government budget going to primary education,
- enrollment levels,
- drop-out and repeater rates for primary and secondary schools, and
- literacy rates

In addition, a cross-cutting DFA requirement is that measurement data be disaggregated by gender in order to evaluate to what extent equity goals are being met

It is notable that three out of four of these officially-sanctioned indicators or measures of impact occur either at the student level or in the population as a whole Although the DFA and the Action Plan accentuated the need for policy reform and sectoral restructuring, only one – resource allocation – can be considered an indicator of policy reform or change in the provision of educational services

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed description of policy options see World Bank (1988) *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion*

<sup>17</sup> One of the best examples is Windham (1990) *Indicators of Educational Effectiveness and Efficiency*

TABLE 3 1 Indicators from the Assessments of Program Impacts (APIs)

Country	ACCESS	EQUITY	EFFICIENCY	QUALITY	SUSTAINABILITY
Mali	Increase in number of children enrolled in grades 1-6	Increase in female gross enrollment rate (GER) Increase in number of complete schools in Koulikoro region	Increase in completion rates (to P6) Decrease in repetition rates.	Improvements in achievement in core areas of P2 and P5 Decrease in student/teacher ratio Increase in number of trained teachers Increase in availability & utilization of texts by teachers and students Increase in number of classrooms	Increase in school funding by school parent groups Increase in MOE share of central government budget, primary education share of MOE budget.
Ghana		Increase percentage of eligible children attending school in North Upper East, and Upper West		Increase in percentage of children completing P6 who are literate and numerate. Increase in number of teachers trained to minimum standards Increased availability of texts & instructional materials District ed officers, circuit supervisors, circuit monitoring assistants hired, and trained. CRTs developed and conducted	*38% of education budget going to basic education 5% of basic education budget spent on instructional materials *Gap reduced between budget and spending by 80%. *Budget data disaggregated so that primary education is a separate category
Guinea	*Increase in GER.	*Increase in GER of females and in rural areas.	Increase in completion rates (P6) Decrease in primary school repeaters.		Increase in government budget to education, education budget to primary primary education budget to non-salary operating expenses Improved national procurement procedures and reporting system on local primary school expenditures
Lesotho	Increase in GER.	Increase in percentage of primary school female enrollees completing Standard 7	Increase in completion rates. Decrease in cycle costs.	Improvements in Standard 3 test scores. Increase in number of trained teachers Decrease in pupil/teacher ratio & pupils per classroom. Increase in availability of instructional materials teacher's guides and seating	*Restructure MOE, improve MOE financial management, and implement EMIS. *Increase in MOE real recurrent budget and % of MOE budget allocated to primary education (70% target)
Malawi		Increase in GER & retention of female pupils			
Benin	Increase in GER.	Increase in female GER. Equitable enrollment in FQL schools by region and gender	Decrease in repetition and dropout rates Increase in rate of completion of cycle.	Improvements in achievement throughout cycle and at end of cycle.	
Namibia	Increase in GER. •		Increase in completion rates. Decrease in wastage and repetition rates.	Improvements in achievement in core subjects. Increase in pass rate on national examinations. Increase in number of schools providing a minimum quality of education.	
Uganda		Increase in percentage of girls who enroll in P3 P5 and P7 as a percentage of girls who start school.	Decrease in number of years provided per graduate	*Increase in number of students passing P1-6. Increase in availability of books Increase in number of teachers receiving non credit in-service training and teachers who hold Grade III or IV qualifications.	

This tendency to define and measure change in educational systems, as well as to assess the impact of its education support programs, at the student – or beneficiary level is borne out by the Africa Bureau's Assessment of Program Impact (API) framework<sup>18</sup>. The majority of API-established indicators are designed to measure change in student outcomes (see Table 1.1). Only in the areas of "quality" and "sustainability" are there measures of program impact that relate to changes within the structure of the educational system itself, such as increased number of complete schools, more favorable student-teacher ratios, etc. In addition, the agency-wide program Program Performance Information for Strategic Management (PRISM), charged with developing a standardized list of education indicators, has also – at least initially – focussed on the final outcomes of an educational system (such as gross enrollment ratios, repetition rates, etc.) or, in other words, on student outcomes.

The result is that student outcome indicators have become entrenched and reified within the Agency, so that – almost unvaryingly – the impacts expected from the USAID education programs in Africa are primarily defined and measured in terms of increased enrollment, greater participation of females and marginalized populations, improved student achievement, and lower student wastage (repetition and drop-out).

## PROGRAM REALITY PLANNED AND ACTUAL IMPACTS

Agency expectations of impact for its education programs are clear. Little other than improvements in student outcomes, the final "product" of a reformed and effective educational system, is explicitly recognized in the DFA measures for evaluating the impact of its programs and the success of its education sector strategies. *But are these impacts and indicators congruent with those planned for, supported by and measured in USAID's eleven education programs in Africa? And, more significantly, what has actually happened?* The following discussion looks at the indicators and measures the education programs use to demonstrate impact and the tangible impacts that have been accomplished to date in the countries where USAID has education programs.

### Planned Program Impacts

Improved equity and efficiency in providing key public services – such as education – in order to raise the level of general education is a stated DFA goal. Taken together, the USAID education programs identify five purposes<sup>19</sup> or potential areas for impact. They are to improve access to, equity of, efficiency of, quality of and sustainability of educational systems and services. The majority of the eleven education programs claim "quality" (9), "efficiency" (8), and "equity" (6) amongst their goals, "access" – increasing the relative number of school-goers and a fundamental DFA priority – is the focus of three programs.

A typology of program impacts derived from the End of Project Status indicators (EOPS) reveals a much more complex model of educational reform than that implied by the four impacts named in

<sup>18</sup> The API reports serve as the principle means of tracking country program impact and evaluating the effectiveness of its strategies as well as providing the basis for reports to the Bureau and Congress mandated by the DFA.

<sup>19</sup> The program purpose, as defined by Agency guidance expresses the expected impact of the program, the real or essential motivation for producing outputs and undertaking the support activity. In the hierarchy of objectives, the purpose is considered the highest level of impact (or change or reform) within the "manageable interests" of the program.

DFA documentation (See Table 1 2 ) The picture which emerges from the eleven education programs presents a hierarchy of impacts, both in terms of magnitude of impact, and of the level and area of the educational system at which the impact will take place *Moreover, in sharp contrast to the impacts on student outcomes identified by the DFA, the impacts targeted by the USAID education programs primarily occur within the educational system itself*

People-level versus system-level impacts

USAID's education programs in Africa are characterized by two foci systems and students Program focus describes the orientation, target or focus of the education program's effort, as defined by its purpose "System-level" focus means that the educational system itself – its policies, institutions, organization, administrative structure, management, personnel and service – are the objects of improvement Change and reform at the systems-level is what the program expects to support and deliver For example, the Ghana program states its focus clearly "To strengthen the policy and institutional frameworks required to assure a quality, accessible, equitable and financially sustainable primary education system." Conversely, "student-level" focus means that change is targeted and expected in student outcomes In these cases, while the program may support activities or require through conditionality actions aimed at system-level improvements, it expects and holds itself accountable for producing results measurable at the student-level A good example of student-level focus is the Malawi program statement of purpose "To increase girls' attainment in basic education "

Consequently, the impacts and measures identified by the education programs fall into two broad categories (1) those that occur at the "people-" or student-level and (2) those that indicate that the process of educational reform is taking place at the system-level

People-level impacts, as defined by the USAID education programs, are limited exclusively to the product or outcomes of the educational system, as indicated by different measures of student access, attainment, and achievement. Additional crosscutting measures at the student-level include indicators on special groups (e g , girls) or reduced costs in terms of years or dollars per graduate While the DFA cites literacy as an indicator of an effective educational system, the programs' definition of people-level impact does not include measures of external efficiency (e g , increased employment, higher wages, reduced fertility, etc ), although these may be cited as higher-order goals beyond the manageable interests of the programs

TABLE 3.2 Typology of Education Program Impacts and Measures<sup>20</sup>

		ACCESS	EQUITY	EFFICIENCY	QUALITY	SUSTAINABILITY
P E O P L E	<b>STUDENT LEVEL OUTCOMES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased enrollment ratio</li> <li>increase 1st grade admission rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased enrollment of girls and rural children</li> <li>increased % of girls in each grade</li> <li>increased girls persistence rates</li> <li>increased participation of disadvantaged groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reduced cycle years/pupil</li> <li>reduced cycle cost/pupil</li> <li>repetition rate reduced</li> <li>drop-out rate reduced</li> <li>increase % sitting for primary exam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased % of primary students demonstrating mastery at grade levels</li> <li>improved test scores</li> <li>increased % of student in FQL/BQS schools</li> <li>increased % students with non-native language fluency</li> </ul>	
	<b>SYSTEM LEVEL IMPACTS</b>					
P R O C E S S	<b>Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teachers redeployed to primary classrooms</li> <li>private schools certified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>equity policies promulgated</li> <li>teacher-learner ratios equalized</li> <li>fee waivers for girls instituted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>per pupil unit cost reduction at higher levels</li> <li>MOE reorganized by decree</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased % schools with basic materials</li> <li>targeted student:teacher ratio met</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased % of education budget for primary (sans donor funding)</li> <li>increased % of nat l budget for ed.</li> <li>increased % for non salary recurrent budget</li> </ul>
	<b>Institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>more teachers trained/retrained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>equity strategy developed</li> <li>gender bias removed from curriculum</li> <li>teachers trained in gender awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MOE functions decentralized</li> <li>strengthened planning capacity</li> <li>personnel tracking system in place</li> <li>strengthened management capacity</li> <li>strengthened school inspection</li> <li>M&amp;E system in place</li> <li>EMIS system in place</li> <li>annual budgets developed</li> <li>transparent accounting systems developed</li> <li>timely salary payments</li> <li>standard commodity package developed</li> <li>improved MOE staff competencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>student assessment system in place</li> <li>increased % of budget for teaching materials</li> <li>improved curriculum in place</li> <li>improved curriculum development process</li> <li>better teacher training</li> <li>improved textbook production/delivery system in place</li> <li>FQL/BQS standard established</li> <li>in-service teacher training in place</li> </ul>	
	<b>School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>more classrooms built</li> <li>multigrade schooling introduced/developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>equity program implemented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teacher absences reduced</li> <li>school supplies delivered on time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased % schools with qualified teacher</li> <li>increased % schools offering certain courses</li> <li>increased % teacher classroom time on instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased funds for school</li> </ul>
	<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NGOs strengthened/personnel trained</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>parent-teacher associations strengthened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quality changes discussed in public forum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>community contributions to construction</li> </ul>

<sup>20</sup> Specified target levels or country-specific information has been eliminated. Also included in the table are some output indicators selected because they appear to herald real and significant change at the system level. Given the interaction and overlap among these different impacts and measures their placement under the various purpose rubrics is subject to debate

In addition to these student-level impacts, the USAID education programs identify numerous intermediate, system-level impacts and measures which are intended to demonstrate that significant harbingers of meaningful change have occurred, which may – in combination – lead to improved student outcomes. These impacts take place within the educational system, and include a variety of indicators, ranging from institutional reorganization to a greater number of books per student. With the exception of South Africa, where the USAID education program works with the private sector and the non-governmental organization (NGO) community, these system-level impacts are generally limited to the public sector and rely on education ministry action and change.

#### Types of system-level impacts

The system-level impacts anticipated by the education programs fall into four areas where impact may take place – policy, institutional, school and community.

- Policy impact indicates that the government has promulgated, decreed or declared, and implemented a specific course, practice or standard of action which will guide its activities, programs and interventions in the future. For example, a policy-type impact may be signalled by waiving tuition fees for girls as part of its equity objectives, as in Malawi. In Guinea, increased resources for education and their reallocation within the educational budget is considered a key indicator of policy reform.
- Institutional impact refers to changes or reforms in the apparatus of government, specifically the ministry of education and its organization, operations and capacity. An institutional impact might be the restructuring of the Ministry of Education to favor primary education, as in Guinea, the regularized payroll and timely payment of teachers, as in Uganda, or the development of a standardized, criterion-referenced test (a diagnostic test of the education system), as in Ghana.
- School impact refers to those which take place at or have immediate effect on the school. In Swaziland, increasing the amount of classroom time teachers spend on instruction is a targeted impact. In Guinea, increasing the number of school places in rural areas is an anticipated result of the school construction program and teacher redeployment policy.
- Community impact alludes to system-level intervention or change that directly involves the community or village. Strengthening parent-teacher associations, as planned for in Benin, is a good example.

The numerous anticipated impacts of the eleven education programs present a powerful contrast with the parsimony of those noted in the DFA documentation and guidance. It is clear from the typology of program impacts and associated measures that educational reform – as well as USAID program impact – must take place at both multiple and different levels within the education system.

Educational reform is treated holistically by the USAID education programs. Many impacts are linked and must occur simultaneously or in close sequence for systemic reform to take place. For example, in rural Mali where the demand for education is low, increases in enrollment are predicted on the improvement of facilities, increased involvement of parents in school management and financing, and the training of teachers in pedagogy. Indicators of policy change, such as instituting fee waivers for girls, may prove ineffective for overall improvement in the status of girls unless indicators of impact in other areas are apparent – such as the presence of teachers trained to

deal with the special problems confronting girls (eg institutional change) and the availability of school places to accommodate them (school change) In short, a single impact -- be it a change at the policy, institution, school or community levels -- may not alone sufficiently signal substantive and meaningful educational reform It must be judged within an array of related indicators The case of budgetary allocation provides a good example In addition to an increase in or reallocation of resources, the impact of these extra resources should be measured in terms of better equipped classrooms, better trained teachers, better data collection and reporting procedure, better management practices, etc

Even more significantly, the impacts targeted by the education programs reveal that educational change is expected to happen in stages -- first at the system level, and later at the student (or "people") level The structure and services of the system must alter in order to affect educational outcomes While measures of student-level impact may be the best indicators of a reformed (i.e effective, efficient and equitable) education system and may foretell eventual increases in national literacy levels, they are a final chapter in the educational reform saga and, of course, should be monitored But student-level measures do not capture the necessary changes and intermediate impacts that must take place in the system itself in order to improve student enrollment, persistence and performance The DFA's almost exclusive focus on student-level outcomes as impact criteria may be premature in anticipating impacts at this level and, more seriously, fail to capture the considerable progress already made towards the more "equitable and efficient provision of (educational) services "

### Actual Program Impacts

The staged, dual-tier, and multi-faceted model of educational reform implicit in the designs of the USAID education programs is reflected in the actual program impacts produced to date Of the eleven education programs, eight programs target system-level improvements as within their scope for impact This clearly indicates that -- at the time of program design -- the majority of programs expect only to positively influence change in educational systems and not in student performance<sup>21</sup>

As a result, given the system-level orientation of the majority of the programs and that none has yet reached its scheduled completion date, the number of "people-" or student-level impacts is short, but nonetheless provides encouraging proof that both the model and modality for USAID education programs is valid Student outcomes have shown notable improvement in Ghana, Guinea, Malawi and Namibia since the initiation of USAID program activities In all four of these countries, the USAID education program, often with other donors and occasionally alone, has provided the necessary budgetary support, critical interaction and guidance, and key technical assistance required to produce these impressive student-level gains Specifically:

- In Guinea, access to primary education has increased by over 30 percent since the inception of the national reform program in 1990, progressing from a 28 percent GER in 1989/90 to 37 percent GER in 1992/93 The greatest enrollment growth has been for rural children and

<sup>21</sup> Of two that do -- Uganda and Swaziland -- there may be special circumstances involved The Uganda program has a longer timeframe than most programs (10 years), which arguably leaves enough time to impact at the student level Swaziland is a case where USAID has a long history of assistance and student-level impact should be appreciable

girls Rural region enrollments have increased 14 to 23 percent compared with 2.6 percent in the urban capital The girls' gross enrollment ratio has moved from 19 percent to 23 percent since 1990 In addition, the sixth grade promotion rate has increase from 55 to 64 percent, while the drop-out rate has gone from 15 to 11 percent and the repetition rate has dropped from 23 to 20 percent In all cases, the improvements have been more precipitous for girls than boys

- In Ghana, the gross enrollment ratio in primary school has increased from 70 percent in 1987 to 79 percent in 1991, growing 13 percent since the introduction of the national educational reform program in 1987
- In Namibia, there has been a 15 percent increase in first grade enrollment and an 11 percent increase in primary school enrollment since independence in 1990

At the system-level, evidence of impact grows more robust. Virtually all eleven countries where USAID has education programs have shown impressive improvements in the delivery of educational services to their school-aged populations A few examples illustrate the range of system-level impacts the USAID program have supported

In the area of policy reform, demonstrable impacts include

- In Guinea, Benin and Malawi, government decisions to restructure in favor of primary education are indicated by dramatic shifts in resource allocations In Guinea, education's share of the government budget has increased from 14 to 25 percent, and the share of material and non-salary operating expenditures have risen from US \$0.20 to US \$11 on a per pupil basis In Malawi, the proportion of the education budget devoted to primary education has increased from 43 to 57 percent In Benin, primary education's share of the budget went from 48 to 57 percent, and the share of the education budget for non-salary expenditure rose from 2 to 5 percent
- In Malawi and Benin, school fees for girls in primary school have been eliminated, and in Guinea and Namibia, punitive pregnancy policies expelling girls from school have been either eliminated or revised to allow re-enrollment after the birth of the child
- In Lesotho, Namibia, Ghana and Guinea, the ministries of education have been reorganized to promote and support the needs of primary education, rationalize staffing norms and delegate more responsibilities to local authorities

In the area of institutional reform, impacts include

- In Mali, Benin, Lesotho and Guinea, school mapping and management information systems have been established and are used to track school data
- In Ghana, Botswana, and Swaziland, tests to assess student achievement have been developed as diagnostic tools to measure and improve student learning

- In Namibia, Lesotho and Guinea, budgeting and accounting systems have been revised to include detailed categorization of expenditures, more transparent nomenclature, etc

In the area of school-related reforms, impacts include

- In Ghana, the number of untrained primary school teachers has been reduced from 50 percent in 1989 to 30 percent in 1993
- In Malawi and Benin, revised textbooks, teacher guides and syllabi have been published and distributed to primary schools
- In Ghana, Mali and Guinea, the student-textbook ratio has been improved

In the area of community-related reforms, impacts include.

- In Guinea, the ministry has successfully incorporated a community support component into its school construction program, in which communities contribute 15 percent of construction cost in cash or in kind
- In Benin, a study of parent-student associations has been undertaken as a precursor to the development of a strategy to promote greater parental and community involvement in school management and support

These actual impacts associated with the USAID education programs demonstrate that while notable progress toward educational reform has been made, at the *early stages* of a support program it is more likely to manifest itself at the system- rather than the student-level.

#### POTENTIAL FOR FAILURE THE EXPECTATION-REALITY GAP

The above comparison of expected, planned and actual impacts of USAID efforts to support educational reform in Africa demonstrates that there is a divergence between DFA and agency expectations of impact and what its education programs both intend and can produce. Specifically, while the DFA and the education programs share the same goal of improving educational services, the agency's indicators of impact and success are measured at the student-level, in terms of greater percentages of students either enrolling in, passing through and/or performing in a nation's primary schools. The education programs' indicators of impact tend to be measured more often, although not exclusively, at the system-level, in terms of increased resource allocations, improved inputs and enhanced delivery systems being put in place so that – eventually – better schooling will result in improved student outcomes. Not only do the USAID education programs define impact as system-level change, but the educational programs' actual impact to date has primarily been manifested in system, rather than student, change. These impacts, both from the perspective of the current literature and thinking on educational reform and from experts in education in Africa, are not inconsiderable nor insignificant, and can be considered to portend improvements at the student-level. *But there is a risk that these system-level impacts will fail to be appreciated and fairly evaluated outside the educational community, because they do not accord with the overly-ambitious expectations of student-level change prevailing in USAID and Congress.*

*Why is there a divergence between agency expectations (as expressed in the DFA) and the planned and actual impacts of the USAID education program?* There appear to be three overarching problems. First, the complexity and mechanics of measuring system-wide reform appear to be typically underestimated and inadequately planned. Second, the desired DFA impacts appear to denote a lack of understanding of how educational change takes place. And third, the USAID education programs themselves tend to send mixed and confusing signals about what they can and will produce.

### The unprecedented need for educational data

Lack of reliable data collection and reporting mechanisms within the Ministry of Education and government complicates USAID's ability to assess and document the degree of educational reform occurring and, by extension, the impacts of the USAID programs. Since most of USAID's education programs are designed to support national educational reform efforts, the data required to gauge change is both detailed and extensive. Unlike more focussed projects of the past, the current generation of USAID programs' unit of analysis is the entire national education system.

To determine whether improvements in student outcomes have taken place, detailed nation-wide educational data, as well as population data, are needed in order to calculate gross enrollment ratios, repetition and drop-out rates, completion rates, etc. Equity objectives and planning needs necessitate that student data be disaggregated by gender and locale (eg. region, district, rural/urban, etc.). And in order to ascertain the status of primary education, USAID's priority, vis-a-vis secondary and higher education, data must be collected at all three levels. In addition, the USAID education programs' focus on system-level change requires data on resources allocated to the sector and within the sector, on expenditures on various educational inputs, and on the number of textbooks, teachers, classrooms, etc. already existing and newly added to the system. Finally, school quality indicators at the student-level -- such as reductions in repetition and drop-out rates or increases in promotion, completion and transition rates -- should ideally be supplemented with more direct measures of student achievement through standardized pupil testing and assessment systems. Several of the USAID programs also include experiments, such as the Ghana equity program, or pilot projects of a new approach, such as the Mali program's work in the Koulikoro region schools. These activities also entail data collection and analytical efforts.

The formidable data needs clearly exceed what USAID or any donor can expect to collect on its own. Further, an essential element of responsible educational planning and management is the collection and analysis of school, student and educational resource data. This function is central to a reformed and productive education system, and, as such, is unquestionably the responsibility of the education ministry. Consequently, USAID generally must rely on the Ministry of Education's statistics service, financial office and/or other data collecting offices to obtain information for impact assessment.

However, reliance on host-country information systems does not mean that USAID education programs are convinced of their veracity and dependability. Four of the eight NPA programs reviewed recognize in their design documents the inadequacies of government management information systems and have provided for some assistance to this area (See Table 2.1). Similarly, three programs contribute to the development of student assessment systems. That only half of the total program countries are receiving assistance in EMIS and student assessment from USAID is

not to imply that the remaining countries have adequate reporting systems. In many cases -- such as Ghana -- other donors are providing the assistance.

But the technical assistance provided may not be sufficient for the task of developing, implementing and training counterparts to operate an extensive EMIS. Among the USAID education programs which do provide technical assistance to aid EMIS development and management, this is generally limited to one resident advisor. Information systems have multiple components -- ranging from school mapping surveys and annual headcounts to detailed expenditure reports and student achievement tests. A single advisor can not be expected to develop and implement data collection instruments and procedures, processing, analysis and reporting/dissemination systems, which is rightfully the work of various teams of specialists and their network of enumerators reaching down to the school level. In Mali, the advisor struggled to produce the statistical yearbooks with a small, inexperienced team of counterparts. In Guinea, when the young French computer specialist left the country, the ministry's statistics and planning unit found itself incapable of accessing even rudimentary data in its newly-computerized data base. This, of course, bodes ill for the quick and appropriate response to USAID's demands for accurate information of a certain type and in a specific format on a regular basis, whether for conditionality review, API reports or program evaluations/reviews.

The various programs have dealt with this in different ways. As mentioned, some provide technical assistance. In Benin, USAID is supporting the development of an EMIS through the provision of two long-term advisors in information management and planning. In Guinea, the USAID program, seeking to expand data availability and reinforce planning capacity, has decided to add a computer systems specialist and an educational planner to its existing technical assistance package. Similarly, in Malawi and Ghana, decisions to add information systems specialists to the projectized component of the education programs demonstrates the recognition that data availability is critical to program management and assessment.

#### Conflict between data needs and capacity building

At the same time that data collection and information reporting systems and ministry capacity is being developed, these infant information systems are expected to provide comprehensive and credible statistics on system inputs, expenditures and outputs on an annual basis in order to respond to conditionality and API reporting requirements. Given the amount of time it takes to develop systems and capacity -- and collect, process and analyze school census data -- it may not be reasonable to expect that student-level outcomes can be readily reported on an annual basis or even, in some instances, by the end of the USAID program.

The NPA modality places a heavy burden of statistical and financial reporting on the Ministry of Education. At the same time, it aims at capacity building by making the government responsible for proving it has responded to performance criteria, which generally entail student, financial and resource data. The dilemma is obvious: can an institution which has been judged to lack planning, budgeting/accounting and reporting skills be expected to prepare acceptable documentation proving compliance with performance conditions or, even more ambitiously, provide comprehensive and detailed data on the state of an entire educational system? The answer: no. As previously noted, in some NPA countries, the USAID program design recognized this and provided some technical assistance to aid and train the government in statistical and

financial reporting. Emerging evidence from the field shows that USAID was partly right: technical assistance is essential, but generally has not been provided in sufficient quantity to accomplish both report preparation and training to increase institutional capacity.

Not surprisingly, however, the immediate exigencies of report preparation for tranche review and fund disbursement purposes have frequently taken precedence over staff training and capacity building. Indeed, in the case of Ghana, capacity building in the area of finance/budgeting and accounting has been so sacrificed to reporting and auditing requirements that an outside accounting firm has been assigned the task. In Guinea, both technical advisors (assigned specifically to train counterparts in the finance office), as well as short-term consultants, have been tasked with the preparation of conditionality documentation, at the Mission's request. While it was originally hoped that the NPA approach would lessen the need for technical assistance, field experience has shown that NPA is management and report intensive, and that capacity building is at the heart of educational reform. Consequently, the assumption that reporting requirements in the initial years of a program will be met with both government data and limited technical assistance may well be fallacious.

An unstated a priori condition of the NPA modality is that a well-functioning information system be in place, given the imposing data needs that accompany it. This, however, is generally the hallmark of a well-functioning education system, which probably should not be a candidate for USAID support and intervention. A solution to this impasse is to ensure that the ministry EMIS systems (in planning, statistics, testing and budgeting/accounting) are equipped with sufficient technical assistance so that staff training and development does not take second place to USAID reporting requirements.

TABLE 3.3 Program Impact Reporting Systems<sup>22</sup>

COUNTRY	DATA AVAILABILITY	PRIMARY SOURCE OF DATA	ADD'L DATA SOURCE	NON-STANDARD REPORTS <sup>23</sup>	RESPONSIBILITY	# COMPLETED	# OF EXTN'L EVALS PLANNED/EXECUTED	USAID EMIS TA*	USAID M&E TA*
Mali	Poor	•MOE Stats	•Sample Schools	•Research •Quarterly •Stat Hndbk	•USAID •USAID •MOE	2 1	1/1	1 LT	1 LT
Ghana	Good	•MOE •PMU /MES	•EIP Studies •Spotchecks  •Attitude Baseline	•Research •Status •Annual Report •Research	•PMU •USAID •PMU •USAID	1	2/1	PMU, ST	PMU ST
Guinea	Adequate	•MOE Stats	•Special Studies	•Research •Stat Hndbk	•USAID •MOE	1 2	2/1	0	ST
Lesotho	Good	•MOE Stats	•Special Studies	•Research •Quarterly •Stat Hndbk	•MOE w/ TA •? •MOE		2/0	1 LT	ST (IIEP)
Malawi	Adequate	•MOE Stats	•Special Studies •Baseline Sample	•Research •Research	•USAID •USAID		2/0	0	ST
Benin	Poor	•MOE Stats	•Special Studies	•Research /Analysis •Annual Stats	•MOE w/ TA •MOE	1 2	2/0	2 LT	1 LT
Namibia	Poor	USAID Baseline		•Quarterly	•USAID?	0	4/2	0	ST
Uganda	ND*								
Swaziland	ND*						2/1		
South Africa	Poor Nat'l	•USAID Baseline •NGO Data	•Regular Investigations	•Analysis	•NGOs		2/0	1 LT	ST
Botswana	Good	?							

\*LT=long-term, ST=short-term, PMU=project management unit, ND=not determined

<sup>22</sup> Data in this table were derived for the most part from PAAD documents and in some cases may not reflect the current assessment on data availability. For example both Ghana and Malawi programs have revised initial estimations about the adequacy of data.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to routine USAID reports such as tranche review documentation Assessment of Program Impact etc.

### Poor baseline data

Impact reporting is further confounded by poor baseline data, needed to show the rate of change accomplished during the program. It is fairly obvious that in those countries where EMIS assistance is required, the pre-program baseline data should be regarded with some caution. Statistics have often been inflated, deflated or skewed for political reasons, and entire information units have been dismantled because of the politically unpalatable information they bring to light (as in the case of pre-program Mali). New standards and conventions in collecting and tabulating data required under the new educational reform may introduce inconsistencies which either magnify or diminish the rate of change.

Additionally, information is often not reported in terms that directly respond to USAID program objectives. While education data may be disaggregated by gender, it is not by urban-rural parameters. More often than not, the information does not extend beyond simple head-counts and some compound statistics, such as percentages. Seldom are more complex and sophisticated calculations, such as cycle or equivalent years, presented. The result is that meaningful baseline data must be amassed at the beginning of a program. But, as noted above, where local capacity is weak and on-the-ground technical assistance is scarce, as is the case in many of the education programs, it is difficult to produce the statistics that define an accurate "starting point." The problem of inadequate baseline data was addressed by the Namibia and South Africa program through the conduct of USAID-supported sample-based baseline surveys. Elsewhere, the USAID programs have supported baseline data collection for special interventions, such as the social marketing program in Malawi, the equity study in Guinea, and the parents' association study in Benin. (See Table #?)

### Inadequate program reporting systems

It became fairly evident in preparing this report that data of the "right" sort (i.e., program impact indicators) are difficult to come by. Despite the existence of logical frameworks with ample indicators of impact at both the student- or system-levels, most of the available documentation was not oriented toward impact accounting or answering the questions of how and to what extent access, efficiency, equity and quality have been affected. Differing accountabilities — tranche reviews for performance conditions, mid-term evaluation reports, and annual API reports — structure field reports and their contents. While a plethora of documentation exists (and can be tracked down with some difficulty), much of the information these reports contain really does not provide accurate or sufficient data on impacts or compelling proxy measures, particularly at the system-level.

Education program activities and progress are principally tracked, monitored and evaluated at the field level, under the supervision of Mission staff and generally through the offices of long- and/or short-term technical assistance. Many of the reports prepared are standard across programs, such as tranche review documentation, USAID portfolio or program reviews, USAID annual and semi-annual progress reports, institutional contractor status reports and consultant reports. While much of the content of these reports focusses on the quotidian activities of program management and performance condition reporting, the API reports and the obligatory external evaluations scheduled

during the program design are expected to report on indicators and benchmarks signifying impact

The USAID education programs' approaches to impact assessment are very similar (See Table 2.1) In general, the programs

- have avoided creating parallel data collection systems, and rely on the Ministries of Education's statistics and/or planning offices,
- have made provisions to supplement ministry data with (i) special studies targeted at a particular research question, (ii) surveys and baseline data collection on a sample basis, (iii) targeted regional investigation,
- expect data for impact analysis to be reported in annual statistical handbooks produced by the Ministry of Education and in research reports generally prepared by expatriate and/or local technical assistance (outside the ministry),
- have not been able to produce as many supplementary reports as planned,
- have planned for two external evaluations, one formative and the other summative, at the mid-point and end of the program, and
- have provided some technical assistance – either short- or long-term – to assist ministries in information management and monitoring and evaluation

Nevertheless, despite the oftentimes elaborate evaluation plans discussed in the Program Assistance Approval Documents (PAADs), information on program impacts is not readily available and hard to come by To a large extent, this is due to the narrow, student outcome definition of program impact (discussed in the first section) and the overwhelming focus on government accountability with respect to performance conditions of the NPA modality

Monitoring and reporting on performance conditionalities is not a substitute for impact reporting Tranche review documents are geared to conditionalities, which do not and should not directly require student outcome changes They do reflect system changes, frequently, in the policy and institutional areas and, less often, in the school and community areas, such as resource reallocations or the number of classrooms constructed and/or teachers trained, which promise future student-level impacts But often conditionalities are framed as activities or incremental steps toward achieving system change (e.g. the annual assignment of numbers of district supervisors, the development of work plans, etc) Seldom do the tranche review reports relate these activities to important changes in system structure, often best captured at the school-level

For example, in Guinea, on the input side, it is known that donors have significantly assisted the government in its educational reform effort with significant infusions of funds, and the government has indeed made notable policy changes and resource reallocations On the output side, it is also known that student-level outcomes have improved But what, exactly, has to happen to permit these changes? It should be possible to relate the redeployment of teachers to an increase in the number of staffed classrooms and an increased number of available student places, yet the program reports do not provide this essential data While the Guinea program may not be compelled to struggle to obtain this data as it has fortuitously and unexpectedly produced the DFA-desired "people"-level impacts, other programs might not be able to demonstrate student-level impact as quickly It is imperative that the path to reform and its results be understood and documented, so that (1) other programs may replicate it, if appropriate, and (2) a greater

appreciation and validation of intermediate system-level impacts prevail within the agency as reliable portents of 'people'-level impact

Ideally, mid-term or periodic evaluations during the life of the program should fill the gaps left in conditionality review and provide data on intermediate, system-level impacts both as specified in the logical framework and "unanticipated impacts." However, this mechanism has – thus far – proved less than satisfactory for several reasons. First, several years often separate these reviews. Both Mali and Ghana had entered their fourth years of operation before the first mid-term evaluation took place. Second, evaluation teams can hardly be expected to come up with student outcome or other quantitative data if such data have not already been collected or processed.

And third, based on a the mid-term evaluations of the education programs in Guinea and Mali, there is a tendency to focus on an NPA program's projectized activities. This is due, in large part, to the nature of the evaluations, which must recommend mid-course corrections and necessarily focus on "outputs" or "deliverables." For the budgetary support portion of the NPA program, this means either ascertaining that tranche conditions have been met and funds released or that the desired student-level outcomes have been achieved per the framework established for the education programs. Alternatively, for the projectized portion of the program, this means that numerous and specific inputs can be tracked to impact on the immediate beneficiary, in most cases the education ministry personnel targeted for assistance. Because projects are often only a small part of the USAID program and even a smaller part of the general educational reform effort, the indicators of impact associated with them can only tell a small part of the reform story. They, alone, can seldom satisfy impact reporting requirements. But, since the scope for immediate concrete action within the control of USAID is mainly limited to the projectized portions of the NPA programs, it is nearly inevitable that project-type operational concerns receive the bulk of attention – with the result that it is difficult to get a sense of the magnitude of reform accomplished.

The Assessment of Program Impact (API) system, as applied to education programs, is designed specifically to report on program impact. Indeed, this may be the best means by which impacts are tracked over time and reported. However, as discussed in the first section, the way impact is currently defined by API indicators generally ignores important system-level changes and seems to "inflate" the impacts expected of a program. The bottom-line is that even the API reporting system may not accurately present the extent and type of change associated with an education program, to its disadvantage and to the detriment of understanding how to best to support systemic change in African education.

### **The Phases of Educational Reform**

In the preceding paragraphs, much has been said about the two levels at which the impacts of educational reform can be measured. Implicit in this dichotomy between student- and system-level impacts and measures is the concept of phasing or sequencing of educational reform activities and their related impact. As has been noted, change must occur within the educational system before the impact of these changes will be exhibited in measure of student outcomes. This hierarchy of change or pyramid of impacts inherent in educational reform efforts must be recognized and appreciated. Just as the anticipated improvement in student enrollments or performance are valued as significant precursors to literacy (which may in itself be a harbinger of economic

growth), changes in the system of delivering education should be prized as meaningful forerunners of student-level gains. In short, student outcomes are unlikely to improve without prior improvements in the educational system. *Consequently, to ignore system-level changes as indicators of impact towards realizing the goal of educational reform -- either by barely acknowledging their existence in agency progress tracking systems or by neglecting their measurement entirely in assessment frameworks -- is to overlook an essential and important phase of educational development and reform.*

That system-level impacts can be broken down into additional categories (ie, policy, institutional, school, and community) indicates that impacts at a system-level can be organized into a loose hierarchy, as well. While the important point has been made that for educational reform to happen, several activities must be undertaken simultaneously, there is also an implied chronology or sequencing of events and the resultant measurable effects. For example, a change in educational policy should logically proceed activities to carry it out. From an impact perspective, it is significant that a country has decided to increase or reduce teacher qualifications. This should be noted as an important impact. In follow-up, however, it is equally important to note whether the requisite training has been provided to the teachers to ease their adjustment and validate the new policy, so that improved instructional quality or efficiency goals can be realized down the line. A good example of this system-level phasing is in Malawi where policy eliminated fees for girls in primary schools and a teacher training and awareness program about girls' special needs in the classroom, as well as a social marketing campaign aimed at parents, is being planned in order to ensure that the girls persist in school.

#### The Time Factor

The concept of phased reform suggests that numerous actions must take place over time in order to yield the people- or student-level impacts that are associated with a productive educational system. Timing, consequently, becomes a critical factor in whether a program can produce the desired and/or expected results at the student level to clearly demonstrate gains in access, achievement and persistence for all children or targeted groups, such as girls. Most of the USAID education programs are in countries where the entire education system must be adjusted or rebuilt, not merely improved at the margin or perfected (as is arguably the case in Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland). Many countries where USAID education programs were initiated were just emerging from years of political repression and civil strife, which inhibited educational development or reversed its growth. For example, the year the USAID education program started in Guinea was the first year the government had ever put together a budget for the sector. In Ethiopia,<sup>24</sup> the new transitional government is attempting to rebuild the nation's governance structure and public services after twenty years of repressive and socialistic rule.

Creating operational services within the education ministry, formulating policy, and developing and executing the programs to carry it out can easily take longer than the five year timeframe USAID generally allows its education projects.<sup>25</sup> And for these system and structural

<sup>4</sup> *The newest program with a proposed start-up date of late 1994*

<sup>25</sup> *This can be further retarded in those cases where institutional development relies on external technical assistance. For many of the current USAID education programs a year has elapsed between Program Assistance Approval Document (PAAD) approval and fielding the first long-term technical assistant.*

improvements to be felt at the school level and expressed in improved student outcomes may take even longer for several reasons

First, methodologically, a number of years is needed to show increments of change. It is likely that there will be a "lumpiness" in student-level gains. In Guinea, three years of imperceptible change in the level of girls' enrollment was followed by a year in which girl's enrollment grew by four percentage points, although no specific action had been taken to promote girls' enrollment. In Malawi, elimination of school fees resulted in an immediate increase in enrollments. However, it is uncertain whether this will lead to increase persistence in school. Information lags -- the time it takes students or their parents to learn about and take advantage of improved educational services -- can contribute to the uneven growth in student outcomes, particularly in areas of low educational demand, such as Mali, Guinea and Ethiopia. This unevenness also suggests that the unit of time -- one year for most programs -- used by the API reporting system may be too fine an increment in which to detect change and by which to chart a steady progression.

Second, quality improvements at the student level are particularly difficult to capture in a shorter time period, as a full cohort progression through the system is often needed to actually measure (and not project) gains in terms of persistence, completion and promotion.

Third, parental decisions to invest in education depend on many factors beyond the control of the education system. An obvious example, is one of economic growth and well-being. A country where employment opportunities are scarce and where poverty puts even modest expenditures on education beyond the reach of households will probably exhibit a slightly-sloped curve in enrollment growth.

The need for a generous timeframe is appreciated in principle. As noted in more than one Africa Bureau document, "systems change requires a longer-term view and a willingness to accept medium term impacts that are indirect and intermediate, rather than direct and household level."<sup>26</sup> In fact, however, either external pressure to show results or lack of appreciation of what a longer-term timeframe really means conspires to force programs into scrambling after people-level impacts prematurely and to ignore the importance of intermediate impacts or process indicators. While there appears to be a greater appreciation for a longer timeframe of assistance in the design of many of the later-developed education programs which often refer to several program phases, the early programs were conceived as a single phase of three-to-five years. The Guinea Program Assistance Approval Document (PAAD), the third program to be developed, explicitly cites "imperceptible student-level impacts" at the end of three years as a critical issue affecting program success or, more appropriately, perceptions of program success.<sup>27</sup>

*"The Mission realizes that both the Congressional earmark and Development Fund for Africa legislation seek quality improvements in basic literacy, numeracy and primary education. It is precisely in these areas, however, that the least progress will be seen during the three years of USAID assistance to Guinea. The [Education Sector Reform Program] is directed towards these ends but the magnitude and complexity of the anticipated reforms along with*

<sup>26</sup> USAID (1992) Fresh Start in Africa: A Report on the First Five Years of the Development Fund for Africa

<sup>27</sup> *Despite this cautionary note and the caveats included in USAID documents about longer timelines the recent mid term evaluation based much of its assessment on the absence of student-level impacts erroneously so as Guinea has surprisingly produced some notable improvements in student-level indicators in a relatively short period of time*

*need for associated social and economic changes mean that in the short run donor assistance will serve mainly to establish a framework within which expanded enrollments among boys and girls and improved efficiency and quality in primary education will be possible (1990)*

Nonetheless, six out of the seven End of Project Status indicators (EOPS) for this 3-5 year program are student outcome measures. The latest NPA program to be designed, Uganda, may reflect a growing appreciation of the time factor: it enjoys a ten-year time horizon due to prolonged efforts by the program designers to convince the Mission that a strategic intervention of more than 2-3 years, as originally envisaged, was required.

### Unclear Linkages and Imperfect Knowledge

An underlying assumption of the NPA approach is that clear linkages exist between system-level reforms – in resource allocation, policies and institutions – and improved outcomes at the student-level, such as increased enrollment, persistence and achievement. A second and associated assumption is that all the "ingredients" of a good education system and their relative effects are fully identified and understood. Much of the analytical work in international education in the 1980s attempted to "unbundle" the package of educational inputs associated with positive student outcomes and assign relative weights and investment priorities, using a production function approach (Heyneman and Loxley, Fuller, Lockheed et al., etc.). The reasoning behind NPA in education is that, given the primacy of the public sector in African educational systems, central planning, policy and resource improvements can create a favorable environment for lasting and sustainable school-level reform. While this is arguably true, there are some practical limitations inherent in this somewhat linear, "trickle-down" logic which could brake the rate of educational reform.<sup>28</sup>

First, educational systems have been described as systems that are "loosely coupled." They are characterized by the absence of tight hierarchical linkages among its operating units or divisions, and particularly between central administration and the school itself.<sup>29</sup> Particularly in the developing country context, ministries of education often exhibit a lack of communication, coordination and supervision among departments, regional and field units, and schools. At the same time, however, rigid, culturally-defined roles of behavior and ways of doing things, particularly teacher behavior at the classroom level, are highly resistant to change.

The best efforts at reform of ministries of education often end with policy declarations and the formulation of a set of rules and regulations accompanying the policy. However, real change – that which will result in improved student performance or system efficiency – is stymied by inattention to implementation issues, such as advising appropriate personnel of both the policy or procedural change and providing them with the proper incentives and guidance on what to do to realize policy objectives. The "distance" – both literally and figuratively – between administration and the school in developing countries is immense. The control exercised over regional and school personnel is weak. Policy-makers rarely take into account that each school is largely a self-contained, autonomous social system which can be highly insulated from outside influence.

<sup>28</sup> *The following discussion derives in part from Chapman D and L. Mahlick (eds) (1992) From Data to Action: Information Systems in Educational Planning*

<sup>29</sup> Weick (1976) "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems" in Education and Development

Without special attention to the actual targets and beneficiaries of educational reform, policies to improve access, efficiency and equity can be halted at the school door

Second, the school and classroom factors that positively affect student outcomes are not fully understood. Controversy surrounds the list of inputs to improve school quality. Debate concerning student achievement centers on the relative effectiveness of textbooks/instructional materials, pre- versus in-service teacher training, instructional supervision, etc. Nor are the strategies to put school improvement elements in place fully developed. For example, economic factors are almost universally recognized as a barrier to girls' educational participation, but there is little guidance and even less experience in crafting a workable program to offset direct and opportunity costs of schooling.

In a system which is "loosely coupled" and in which individual elements are resistant to change, good intentions can easily go awry and sets of inputs can behave in unpredictable ways because of the way changes are perceived and implemented. Yet as ministries of education and educators struggle to find the effective combination of inputs, procedures and strategies that can unlock the black box of the classroom, the time clock and inexorable pressure for national student-level impact push on.

#### Confusing educational reform with USAID education programs

USAID's education programs in Africa are designed to support government-instigated and-led educational reform. The measures by which USAID program effectiveness is currently assessed are centered on student outcomes in enrollment, persistence and achievement. This means that the USAID education programs are being held accountable for producing a reformed educational system (as well as longer-term student impacts). This, in turn, leads to confusion and misconceptions about USAID's role in educational reform, its power to effect educational reform and how its programs should be evaluated.

USAID is not in control of the government educational reform. In most countries where public education predominates, reform of the education system can only be effected by the government. The government's willingness to promulgate and implement policies to change the status quo is paramount. Reallocation of resources is key – from higher to lower levels of education, from richer to poorer families and students, from boys to girls, and from urban to rural populations. If the government is unwilling or cannot undertake these critical adjustments in the sector, it is questionable whether USAID should support education.

The role that USAID has adopted, in principle, is to support educational reform either through financial support of budgetary shortfalls due to the transition costs and through strategically placed technical assistance which can help with the adjustment process. Recognition that USAID alone can not provide either sufficient funds or all the required technical assistance to aid government reform efforts is the rationale for the DFA's and NPA modality's tenet of donor collaboration. The USAID education programs are usually designed in relation to other donors activities in the sector, and in many cases, are designed as part of a joint effort. Nonetheless, with or without other donors, it is unlikely that all the resources needed to effect all the system-wide modifications and train all the personnel they require will be available at one time. Educational

reform must take place overtime, and USAID's support represents only a small piece of the grand stratagem

Recognition of this is essential to expectation of impacts of USAID's education programs. Yet, there is a tendency within the agency to conflate USAID assistance in education with educational reform itself, which – given the nature of its programs' goal of supporting systemic reform – is difficult to avoid. The large, yet non-directed budgetary support of many of the education programs invites and practically dictates that the system as a whole be evaluated, even if USAID support represents only a fraction of the resources needed to operate the system. This inevitable overlap is strikingly evident in the program logframes, where – as evaluators have complained – program "outputs" and End of Project Status indicators (EOPS) attempt to capture the impacts of all the myriad inputs to the system – of government and donors alike. But given so many intervening variables outside the USAID program's control, how do you judge its success or failure? If the reform is not moving as quickly as possible, is the USAID program deficient? If World Bank funds do not flow as rapidly as required to accomplish a key activity, is the USAID program a failure?

The answer to these conundrums is not clear. On one hand, USAID has "bought into" the idea of reform. If reform is not happening according to reasonable impact criteria, then the program could be said to not be accomplishing its purpose. On the other hand, if some positive change is occurring, albeit not as quickly as hoped, due to the USAID education program, then the program may be doing all that can be hoped of any education intervention (project or program) under the circumstances.

A possible preliminary step out of this puzzle lies in the clear definition of reasonable impacts tied to various stages and various areas of reform. In essence, a hierarchy or pyramid of impacts for educational reform, based on five years of USAID's program experience, could be developed to guide or serve as a loose template for program design, implementation and evaluation. This, of course, would be amended according to the circumstances for each country. As noted in the first section, the current impacts expected of the USAID programs are not realistic, but a "codified" set of process indicators has not been offered in their place. Although many insightful, sensitive and appropriate process indicators can be derived from program logframes and completed evaluations, it must be noted that in some cases the criteria for determining change are vague and ambiguous, if not patently unclear. Occasionally, the education EOPS indicators are neither measurable, objective or verifiable. There are instances in which the EOPS indicators merely repeat the purpose. For example, the Lesotho program expects to demonstrate "effective" MOE structure, financial management, evaluation and planning, but offers these goals as EOPS. Actual measures of quantity or quality are often omitted. Proof of the Namibia program's success in making a more effective basic education system includes a "more coherent, balanced and relevant curriculum.", adjectives which should be explicated. Other EOPS lack specificity. Evidence that the Uganda program is improving the quality of classroom instruction is "evidence of improved classroom teaching, evidence of continuous assessment, and evidence of resources flowing to schools." As proof of impact, these EOPS leave much to interpretation and open to debate as program designers' intentions become distant memories.

This lack of clarity can constrain the proper and accurate assessment of reform progress and probable program impact. EOPS indicators are designed to capture and express in measurable –

objectively verifiable – terms the impact of the education program. According to agency guidance, they are to communicate concisely and unambiguously the conditions that signal successful achievement of the program purpose so that proponents and skeptics can agree on (program) status and what the evidence implies. EOPS should be targeted and expressed by quantity, quality and timeliness.<sup>30</sup> The USAID education program EOPS often deviate from this prescription. While lack of experience with both supporting systemic educational reform and the NPA modality undoubtedly explains, in large part, the opacity of some of these indicators, it is arguable that there is now enough experience to develop a more precise set of impact criteria.

### Problems of attribution

If change occurs during the period that a USAID education program is in effect, can it be attributed to USAID support and intervention? The question of attribution or "credit" is one that is perplexing evaluators and confounding impact analysis. As discussed above, the loosely articulated and partially understood linkages in an education system make it impossible to ascribe clear cause-and-effect associations between educational inputs and student outcomes. Likewise, the process of education reform, which experience teaches us to view as a holistic one, is not amenable to strict control and management, which allows impact to be easily tracked and imputed. In addition, the characteristics and nature of the NPA modality impede direct ascription of impact to USAID input.

USAID's NPA programs in education – as expressed by performance conditions and technical assistance – are primarily aimed at systemic policy and structural reform, rather than at classroom interventions more directly associated with student-level outcomes. This emphasis derives from DFA objectives of contributing to lasting and sustainable change, which – in turn – calls for developing a sound and efficient delivery system, as a pre-condition for better education and an improved learning environment. In those educational systems in Africa which must undergo drastic restructuring to become effective, it is difficult for ministries to do everything at once, much less tightly supervise the way reform takes place at the various tiers of the system. For an educational system to produce desired student outcomes, change must simultaneously take place at many different levels. For example, for textbooks to reach students and improve learning, the curriculum may have to be revised, the books written and produced, the systems put in place for their purchase/delivery/storage, and teacher training in their use provided. Resource and capacity constraints will undoubtedly limit what a ministry (and donors) can do at one time. Consequently, while sufficient time is a necessary factor in producing results, the conceptual distance between, for example, developing a line-item based budget and improved student performance is great. Given the scope for intervening and other contributing variables, our ability to identify and track direct effects is limited.

By definition, NPA consists predominately of budgetary support to governments conditioned on fulfillment of performance criteria. In theory, changes in the education system and results in student outcomes are "plausibly" attributed to USAID financing. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to force the issue of attribution and attempt to link these impacts directly to US dollars. Program evaluators seem to be most comfortable with the projectized aspects of USAID education programs.

<sup>30</sup> Management Systems International (1992) "Project Design Process Course" in *The Logical Framework Instruction Guide*

where results can be directly linked and ascribed to USAID resources. In fact, in Guinea the mid-term evaluation criticized the NPA budgetary support approach precisely because it was impossible to develop an USAID dollar reform calculus.

Finally, the NPA principle of donor coordination complicates directly crediting USAID with specific reforms and student outcomes. The idea is that, united, donors can exert more influence and leverage greater change by governments and their ministries of education than the individual donor assistance program could do. Complementary programs and "pooled" budgetary support funds will provide significant impetus and incentive to reform. As is obvious, joint and contributing donor programs make it exceedingly difficult to disaggregate influence and attribute change to one particular donor. When multiple donors are providing budgetary support a single donor can hardly be selected as uniquely responsible for change. Likewise, when one donor is providing budgetary support and another technical assistance, it is not fair to attribute improvements to the technical assistance whose impact on the system may have been made possible by funds leveraged through budgetary support. For example, a UNESCO textbook designer may be credited with the development of a new series of textbooks, but it may have been USAID and World Bank budgetary support funds which allowed the government to fund the textbook development unit, develop the production and delivery systems and fund the purchase of new books. A holistic approach to educational reform and donor coordination may simultaneously promote educational reform and rob the individual donor of its glory.

Donors also notoriously suffer from myopia in the scramble for credit. Although the dollar figures going to education in Africa are unprecedented in USAID's history, these do not begin to cover the cost of operating educational systems. Even when coupled with other donor contributions, the relative amount of external financing as a percentage of overall recurrent educational resources is small, ten to twenty percent.<sup>31</sup> In view of these figures, it is hard to argue that impact can be significantly attributed to any donor.

## CONCLUSION

Accountability and reporting meaningful impacts are the by-words of USAID's NPA programs in education. Ironically, the current application and structure of the NPA modality may militate against these very precepts. First, the interpretation of NPA as a modality requiring little, if any, technical assistance is belied by the tremendous data requirement to paint a picture of educational reform at its various stages and the usually fragile or nascent information systems existing in the African countries targeted for assistance. Second, the existing internal reporting systems established by the agency and the Africa Bureau are not geared to capturing the myriad indicators of meaningful change in an education system. Third, confusion over USAID's role in educational reform, the extent of its control and responsibility for producing reform impacts, and the niceties of attribution tend to simultaneously inflate expectations of what its support programs can achieve and deflate or depreciate the impacts it has contributed to by either not recognizing system-level impacts or not being willing to take credit for a joint effort. In combination, these practical

<sup>31</sup> In Ghana the PREP tranche release of \$7 million per year is about 8 percent of the recurrent budget for primary education the World Bank will provide an annual average of \$13 million per year starting in 1994. In Guinea USAID and the World Bank average annual disbursement are the equivalent to about 20 percent of the recurrent budget for pre-university education.

problems of impact assessment and accounting can conspire to make the NPA modality intractable and unwieldy as a means of support and diminish appreciation of the achievements that the education programs have already wrought

The potential for disappointment and dissatisfaction with the education programs and the NPA modality, however, can be alleviated if several misapprehensions are corrected. Specifically

- Up-front recognition that the heavy data demands to monitor and assess impact of systemic educational reform will require ample technical assistance in statistics, finance and testing areas to provide for both reporting and capacity building,
- Agency reporting systems should be amended to conform to and reflect field and program realities, specifically both formative evaluations and the API system should emphasize and incorporate more system-level impacts,
- A "codified" list of meaningful system-level impacts should be compiled, based on program experience to date, to guide future program design and evaluation efforts and enhance our understanding of the educational reform process,
- Recognition that an USAID education program is not synonymous with educational reform. Impact may not be occurring for reasons other than the inadequate program design and implementation, and which may not be with USAID control to remedy. The decision question would then not be *How do we amend this program?* but rather *Should we be attempting to support educational reform in this country?*, and
- Acceptance that impacts resulting from a joint program are as creditable and do USAID as much credit as impact that can be directly tracked to its own dollars

Clearly, the differences between expectation of impact and actual results can lead to serious problems – distortions in design, misleading impact reporting, failure to recognize and appreciate real impact. The danger is that the new approach to systemic reform and the associated NPA modality be unfairly discredited and jettisoned because of an incomplete understanding of the process and dynamics of educational reform. In many of the eleven education programs, there is solid evidence that major reforms are taking place and that changes are being manifested in important ways, such as more favorable teacher-student ratios, student-textbook ratios, better trained teachers, etc. It is a short leap of logic to discern that, to the best of current knowledge, these system-level changes should be followed by student level changes. However, in order to accurately gauge the success of USAID's interventions in education in Africa, agency *principia media* concerning educational change must be revised, and expectations of impacts must be congruent with the realities of the process of educational reform. Interpretation of program impact and – ultimately – the favorable assessment of the agency's approach to supporting system-wide change in education rests on a shared understanding of (a) what educational reform is, (b) how it takes place, at what levels and in what sequence, and (c) what is a reasonable timeframe. *As long as the Agency continues to look in the "wrong" place for change (i.e., at the student level), the less likely it is to understand and appreciate the positive educational changes its programs have helped bring about*

## PART 4: IS NPA WORKING? LESSONS LEARNED

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### ASSUMPTIONS OF THE NPA APPROACH

The sharp increase in USAID's financial support for African basic education since 1988, coupled with the move from projects to budgetary support for policy reforms, represents a major shift in the Agency's program. This shift reflects the judgement of many bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors that African development is held hostage to the weak state of basic education, and that what is needed is economic support for national sector policy reform. USAID's contribution to this international perspective, and the mandate from Congress to focus on Africa, and specifically on basic education, led to the expansion of the Agency into basic education in seven countries where previously it had no experience in the sector. USAID increased financial support to education from less than \$50 million to \$388 million in a two year period, and introduced the NPA modality for leveraging policy reform.

NPA can most simply be defined as the provision of conditioned budgetary support, coupled with some technical assistance and an ongoing policy dialogue and performance review process. The utility of this approach as a means to support educational reform is based on a number of assumptions, some of which are imbedded in our understanding of how educational reform takes place, and some of which concern USAID's role in that process as expressed in the design of its education programs.

#### Assumptions about the Policy Environment

- a **The existing education policy environment is tractable, and can be improved through better advice and the introduction of rational systems**

The education system is embedded in the larger society and education reform is shaped by macro socio-economic conditions. These conditions include the political factors of democratic governance and participation, economic factors including the level of poverty, rates of growth (or decline), the nature of productive activity and employment, and the degree of public control vs open markets, social factors such as population growth, health and nutritional status, degree of ethnic and linguistic diversity, and degree of socio-economic equity between and within social and ethnic groups (e.g. gender equity, minority group participation), and cultural factors including values, religious orientation, and ideology. These factors are neither static nor homogeneous within a country.

Although these conditions are outside the direct influence (in the short term) of education sector reform, they profoundly influence it. For example, while it is clearly desirable that a policy dialogue on basic education should involve persons at all levels in the society, a non-democratic and inequitable political system will diminish the scope and quality of this process. In countries where the economy is in decline, the education system cannot sustain a large scale reform. The decline not only shrinks the real value of recurrent budgets (affecting the supply of instructional material and the real value of teachers' salaries) it also leads to increasing underemployment, undermining confidence in the value of formal education.

The assumption that education sector reform policies can be more 'rational' should not overlook the political and contextual realities that lead governments and bureaucrats to make the decisions

they do"<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly the offer of financing from donors, coupled with conditionalities related to policy reform, often persuades Ministries of Education to claim support for a reform which they otherwise might not promote

- b Meaningful policy change is expressed through budgetary allocations, and the prevailing patterns of resource allocation are what need fixing

Policy priorities are reflected in how a government apportions funds inter- and intra-sectorally. The implicit hypothesis is that the existing pattern of resource allocation is either inefficient, inequitable, or both, and that reform in the sector depends on adjusting those allocations to obtain the "right" or "desirable" mix. This implies that someone knows what the right mix is. The dominant paradigm of the last decade has been that social rates of return are highest for primary education (and especially for girls) so governments should shift resources to primary and away from higher education. Beyond this general principle, rules of thumb and regional averages have determined what percent of the budget should go to education and within education, to primary

From the perspective of a model of systemic educational reform, this assumption represents a necessary but not sufficient condition for positive change. While the current judgement of policy analysts is that basic education must receive a larger share of education resources in most African countries, this in itself is but part of a comprehensive approach to achieving improved access and learning. The point is that it is not just more resources that are needed in the sector, but that the management of these resources must lead to better results in the schools and classrooms.

- c Reform is desired by governments, the objectives of that reform are clearly defined, and key stakeholders, donors (including USAID) and the government share these objectives

Reforms in basic education require a commitment not only from the sector, but at the national level. This must flow from an appreciation of the central role that human resources play in the country's development, and the strategic importance of basic education within the area of human resource development (Crouch, 1993). Education policies, institutional processes and financing are embedded within general government functioning. The processes of budgetary allocations and personnel policies and practices are not governed by sectoral ministries, but by politically central institutions such as cabinet, the Ministry of Planning and Finance, the Civil Service Commission, etc.

The degree to which those within the education system - from the schools to the central ministry - are clear about the reform policy is a good test of its efficacy. While the policy environment and central government provide the context for education reform, the reform needs the leadership of key actors within the Ministry itself (Craig, 1990, Havelock and Huberman, 1977).

Ministries of Education, at central and local levels, have not been notably successful as managers of reform. The bureaucratic culture tends to reward those who maintain an existing order, not those who are innovators (Craig 1990). The question is how to develop an organizational climate that

<sup>17</sup> *Reallocation of financing in Mali away from over subsidized higher education to underfinanced primary may seem rational in terms of equity and efficiency. However the death of a previous education minister at the hands of rebellious university students creates a disincentive the present minister will find hard to ignore*

rewards key players for effectively managing and sustaining reform. This is not an absolute condition, but a dynamic one: are things getting better or are they getting worse? If the latter, it is arguable that external assistance is wasted.

In addition to the key role of continuity in central leadership within the ministry, a number of features characterize an effective education sectoral reform policy:

- is based on thorough knowledge and analysis of the sector,
- it embodies contemporary theory and knowledge of the learning process,
- it is consistent with and supported by macro-economic and government human resource policies and financial support,
- it reflects social consensus, and seeks participation of those who will be affected by and those who will implement the reforms (especially teachers),
- it is communicated to stakeholders and the public using various channels, languages and forums.

The validity of the assumption that the objectives of an education reform are established, known and shared by government and key stakeholders (including donors and USAID) is open to doubt for many countries. Yet it is critical that there be ownership and leadership of the reform within government and the sector for the NPA approach to be workable.

**d Institutional capacity can be developed simultaneously with the implementation of a reform program**

A clear manifestation of systemic reform is an increasing ministry capacity to translate broad policy intents and resources into strategies, plans, programs, budgets, procurement and distribution, accounting, supervision, and systems for monitoring, assessments, and evaluation. Traditionally these functions, where they existed, have supported a process of system expansion and maintenance. They inevitably need to be reoriented to support a process of reform.

The NPA approach's emphasis on resource allocation implies an assumption that the development of institutional capacity is less an issue than the budget. While concessions are made in programs for some institutional development (provided through technical assistance and training), it is further assumed that the demands of managing additional resources provided by the increased budget can take place simultaneously with attempts to develop administrative, managerial and technical capacities. Or, to put it another way, it is assumed that the lack of certain capacities does not jeopardize the ability of the sector to responsibly manage additional finances.<sup>33</sup>

The key consideration is the match between the management requirements of a program and institutional capacity. Frequently program objectives exceed management capacity, leading to

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<sup>33</sup> This is most clearly evident in the area of budget and financial management. Benin is an example of a program that introduces additional non-salary resources to the education sector while simultaneously attempting to develop procedures and practices for accountability virtually from scratch.

inefficiency and frustration (Rondinelli, 1990) One strategy is to allow for the process of staff development and learning in the implementation of reform policies, rather than assuming that the organization can immediately implement a new program on a large scale (Senge, 1990) This strategy takes far more time than is usually provided for in program design

The assumption that institutional capacity can be developed simultaneously with policy reform can be valid where capable institutional leadership is in place, and the institutional culture doesn't block learning and transformation It requires a careful institutional analysis to determine if these conditions exist, or are emerging

**e Changes in policy will lead to changes in the behavior of institutions and staff within the sector, and will result in student-level impacts**

The fundamental assumption of USAID's approach to education reform is that through increased resources to basic education, coupled with improved capacity of educational sector institutions, sustainable increases in access to and quality of education are achievable<sup>34</sup> It appears reasonable to assume that improved management and operations of educational institutions and services will lead to more efficient use of resources What is difficult to predict is the impact this will have at the classroom and student levels

An important conception of the role of policy and central planning is that it creates the conditions, sets standards, and provides the resources for school level reform Within those conditions responsibility and incentives can be used to encourage quality school leadership and quality teaching (Windham, 1982)

One of the characteristics of an education system is that it is "loosely coupled", it does not respond to a set of inputs in a predictable way (Monk 1992) Centralized attempts to reform systems by simply providing more material inputs and training are unlikely to succeed unless ministries recognize that schools are largely self-contained, autonomous social systems and that, within schools, classrooms further insulate the learning process from outside influences<sup>35</sup>

The responsibility for designing and implementing program interventions can be organized at central, regional, district and at school/community levels The location of powers and responsibilities over resources and personnel is a key policy issue It relates to the capacity of national, regional, district and school levels Decentralization, a common feature of a number of the AID supported education reform programs, does not necessarily improve educational services - those at the lower level need to gain the capacity, the guidance and the resources and incentives to stimulate reform at the schools (Williams, 1993 and Winkler, 1993)

The assumption that institutional changes will improve school-level performance is central to the NPA/AID approach to educational reform The knowledge base on education change, and the experience to date in Africa, suggests that at the first stages of reform changes at a school level are

<sup>34</sup> *Early results from some NPA programs indicate that part of this assumptions appears valid In Guinea improvements in the mechanisms and practices governing delegation of budgetary credits to the interior have led to resources being available for improvements in classrooms Whether this will translate into tangible improvements in learning is the aspect of the assumption that remains to be determined*

<sup>35</sup> *See Hencveld (1993) Hallak (1992) Havelock (1973) and Huberman (1984)*

not evident, that institutional reforms themselves take some time to evolve, and institutional change itself must evolve effective strategies to manage and support school quality, improved learning, and reaching children who are out of school

- f The nature and rate of policy, institutional and people-level changes can be defined and predicted at the design stage, and real changes will occur during program life which can be observed and measured

Significant reform of social services is not a routine activity in any country, and certainly not in African states. Education reform may follow a variety of paths, seldom working out as a logical progression from one phase to the next. Reform may start with a small cluster of schools, at a program or regional level, and then be generalized to become system policy. This approach has in some cases led to sustained, systemic reform.<sup>36</sup>

The phases implied by the NPA approach as it currently is conceived involve

- Conducting policy dialogue to engage key stakeholders, carrying out a sector assessment and targeted research, negotiating policies and strategies, and articulating and 'marketing' the policy reform.
- Developing the planning, financing, organizing and management capacity to implement the reform policies. This generally involves the reorganization, or the establishment, of new units and the development of new functions, staff and procedures. The selection of appropriate leaders to these units and the training of staff are indicators that real institutional change is underway.
- Institutional and program development is typically undertaken simultaneously with capacity building (assumption e). This often is problematic as in cases where technical assistance staff have no counterparts (since they have not been appointed or are away on training) with the result that the TA staff do the actual program work - developing information systems, curriculum, assessments, training. This can actually have the effect of weakening institutional capacity (See World Bank, 1993). However, the alternative is a far more modest process of reform, coupled with a longer time frame for institutional capacity building.
- These policy, institutional and program changes lead to changes in the schools. School reform is ultimately the most important activity of an educational reform. Fullan (1989) summarizes the dimensions in the process of school change as follows
  - On-going in-service training at the school level, coupled with continued supervision,
  - School-level leadership in developing appropriate instruction,
  - A clear process for initiating and carrying through plans,

<sup>36</sup> For example there is the case of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) rural primary school program described in Ahmed (1993) and Escuela Nueva in Columbia (see Schiefelbein 1992). In Guatemala USAID is supporting a program modelled in part on the Escuela Nueva approach.

- Monitoring and problem-solving starting with the childrens' learning
- Direction, commitment and support from the regional level

An important characteristic of an effective school is that the staff, sometimes with the active participation of students, play a role in defining and putting into practice those elements that characterize their concept of school quality<sup>37</sup>

These school reform activities presuppose that a favorable policy environment and resources are in place to support school reform. At the least this requires that staffing, facilities, materials, communications and incentives are provided to the schools from the national, program, and regional levels

Only with changes at the school level will children benefit from the increased finances, the improvement of institutional capacity, the planning, programs, resources and training. The result of these changes in the system is intended to be a higher number and proportion of children entering school, completing the basic cycle on time, and gaining the competencies and knowledge deemed important. These results – given a realistic time frame for policy dialogue and the institutional and school level changes – are long term, up to ten years if the reform goes smoothly. If the strategy includes reform at selected schools simultaneously with policy dialogue and institutional reform, there can be a gain on the time for changes to be observed. But sustainable, systemic change is not possible in the short term.

#### Assumptions Related to USAID's Support for Educational Reform

- a **USAID can leverage change through the carrot of budgetary support and with the stick of conditionality, and the amount of change that can be obtained is a function of the amount of financing provided**

In the logical framework of all but one of USAID's education NPA programs the most significant input is the annual disbursement of budgetary support. The provision of this financing not only permits the government to increase non-salary expenditures for primary education, it also affords USAID a voice in the discussion of policy options. USAID's prerogatives (which, as stated above, are assumed to be shared with government) are expressed in the performance conditions which govern the release of funds. It is assumed that this mechanism (releasing funds only when conditions are met) helps the government implement the policy decisions required to pilot its reform. Inherent in the Agency's requirements is the assumption that the amount of dollars being disbursed should correlate positively with the amount of reform occurring in the sector, as well as with the value of the benefits the reform produces. This further implies that there exists some threshold level of financing below which change is not possible.

An important aspect of this assumption is the relative contribution that AID funds make toward the total financing of basic education, both from other donors and from the government budget. In

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<sup>37</sup> A quotation from Evans (1993) highlights this: "No one should expect teachers to embrace ideas that they didn't develop that they generally oppose that have previously failed and that reach them as competing sets of unrealistic and unfair demands."

some cases that proportion may reach significant levels, but typically the annual disbursement of funds by AID represents less than 10 percent of the governments' recurrent budget <sup>38</sup>

The condition under which this assumption is valid, based on the preliminary experience of the NPA programs, is that Government itself, at the level of political leadership, views the conditionalities as supportive of its own reform agenda. Where this is not the case, the assumption does not hold, and the focus on meeting the letter rather than the spirit of conditionality to ensure the release of a tranche becomes counterproductive <sup>39</sup>

### Donor Coordination

The efforts of other donors and the nature of their assistance play an important role in determining how successful USAID's NPA programs can be. The evidence is clear regarding the success of joint USAID NPA and World Bank Education Sector Adjustment Credit efforts. Guinea and Lesotho have illustrated how with coordinated implementation of policy dialogue and conditionality, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The two agencies have had mutually reinforcing conditionalities and have worked together to maintain the policy dialogue with government as well as to conduct performance reviews.

Similarly, where donor modalities are complementary, government reform programs have been greatly aided. This has been the case with USAID and the World Bank in Uganda and Ghana, and with USAID, the World Bank and the French in Guinea. In these cases, donors are not using the identical support modality, but have coordinated their financing, technical assistance, and policy input to fit into a government strategy and to support or complement each other.

Conversely, disagreement among donors and divergence of approaches can dilute efforts at supporting education reform. This has been the case in Mali, where the World Bank and USAID have not agreed on government compliance with conditionality. In Benin, the World Bank and other donor delays in defining their support programs has left USAID stretched beyond its means in terms of technical assistance, and beyond its mandate which is limited to the primary sub-sector.

This last example raises the issue of whether USAID can (or should) implement NPA as the approach to supporting sectoral reform if no other donor, and especially the World Bank, is involved at the policy level. Indications are that the effectiveness of USAID's program is greatly compromised under these circumstances. For one, USAID's interest and mandate is limited to basic education, while sectoral reforms encompass all levels of education. This is a critical issue in terms of intrasectoral reallocation of resources. Furthermore, if a government is assured of projected assistance from other donors sufficient to make a show of activity in the sector (schools being built, training programs implemented, cars and equipment purchased), then willingness to make the hard choices inherent in policy reform and compliance with conditionality is subverted.

<sup>38</sup> In Ghana the PREP tranche release of \$7 mill per year is about 8% of the primary education recurrent budget. The World Bank in Ghana is providing an average of \$13 mill per year from 1994. In Guinea

<sup>39</sup> The case of Namibia is illustrative of the problem conditionalities can cause. There a letter of government optimistic intentions for institutional reform became conditionalities. Government's failure to meet all of its expectations - although it devoted a considerable amount of technical assistance to document its efforts to meet the conditionalities - caused AID to withhold funds. Government has now requested that AID provide only project support.

This is in contrast to the leverage two or more donors can exert when they co-implement policy-based programs of assistance based on a genuine national directed reforms

- b All of the actors within USAID share the same vision of the objectives of a program of support, interpret consistently program strategies and conditionality, use the same language to articulate expectations, and work complementarily to reinforce program implementation

While this assumption may seem self-evident, it is worth emphasizing because experience has demonstrated that the inconsistent interpretation of objectives, technical terms and internal bureaucratic operations have made it difficult for the Agency support to contribute positively to the implementation of governments' programs of sectoral reform

- c The process of change and the pattern of resource allocation obtained under an NPA program will continue in the absence of external financing and conditionality

The issue of sustainability boils down to this assumption. Whether or not this hypothesis is valid depends to a great degree on whether or not many of the previously discussed assumptions also hold. For example, if the government truly desires change, if its objectives are well defined and it has identified the policy options it wishes to pursue, and if the education sector institutions can develop the capacity to implement those options, then the odds of this final assumption holding are greatly increased. Where the converse holds, then the Agency's assumption that NPA can lead to sustainable reform is probably wrong.

## REVIEW OF LESSONS LEARNED

USAID's increase in financing for basic education, and the shift to support systemic educational reform are positive steps for human resource development in Africa. Yet, the scale and nature of the programs have tended to overwhelm Agency and host country capacity for program design and management of the implementation of reforms. The reality of Agency funding and management have meant that there has been relatively little time for sector assessment, policy analysis, public participation in policy dialogue or negotiated strategies for reform.<sup>40</sup> There has been a tendency for Agency design teams and governments to claim that a policy reform is in place, and that USAID's program will simply support that reform, and through conditionalities ensure that it is implemented. USAID design teams have typically had to carry out assessments and complete program designs in two missions each of four to six weeks. Major gaps in information exist, but there is not time during the design to remedy this. The most serious of these gaps are

*Lack of adequate host-country led sectoral policy analysis, and stakeholder participation in negotiating reform strategies and planning*

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that in many of the countries national policy reviews and reform were underway prior to USAID's program design. In Namibia, Benin, Guinea, Ghana and Uganda there were significant national efforts to develop and articulate reform programs.

*Lack of coherent, comprehensive, or accurate time series of baseline data (by gender and region) on population, enrollments and repeaters, academic performance, staffing, material inputs, financing, and actual expenditures*

*Lack of organizational analysis, assessment of institutional capacity, and institutional reform strategy, linked to personnel policies and incentives*

Ignoring these gaps at the design stage tends to reinforce the weaknesses of the system. Yet there is typically not enough time for a design team to "fix" them, so they tend to be underemphasized or ignored. Problems then come at implementation when the policy is not supported, the data and systems for monitoring change aren't there, and the institutional capacity for leading reform is lacking. Specific problem areas that have been noted in this review include

### **Policy Context**

Program designs neglect careful macro-level analysis. The assessment of governmental economic, political and human resource conditions and policies, and the institutional capacity to implement those policies, is seldom examined critically in design documents.

Design documents often claim that there is a sector reform policy in place without analyzing that policy—its source, its technical competence, its feasibility, and its leadership and support.

Sector studies and design reflect an agenda, an orientation, a language (agency key words), and a process that is largely donor determined, rather than host-country driven. The process of stakeholder participation in critical design strategies and decisions is minimized or excluded due to Agency time pressures.

### **Institutional Capacity**

Institutional capacity is seldom analyzed in depth. Specific weaknesses are addressed in the design, but the policy issues that contribute to that weakness are often ignored. This leads to an implicit overestimation of institutional capacity to manage reform, and an overly optimistic scenario for the scale and timing of institutional performance and reform. Institutional development takes committed and competent leadership, a reasonable personnel policy, management training expertise, and time.

USAID interventions focus on national/ministry level policy and institutions. This tends to reinforce centralism, rather than reform strategies working at the school and community level. Deconcentration is often advocated on principle, although it is NOT a sufficient strategy for school level reform.

Specific areas required for the reform (strategic planning, budgeting and accounting, organizational development, EMIS, student assessments, teacher and staff in-service training, supervision, curriculum development and materials design, procurement and distribution, field research and program evaluation) require considerable technical knowledge, skills and experience, and also need local leadership and ownership. Programs underestimate the difficulty and time to achieve this.

Strategies for developing community/school level reform are not articulated in program designs such measures as local training coupled to incentives/rewards, community participation in school support and functioning, pilot projects on improving instruction with significant local input in design. The consequence is that there is little attention to the implementing reforms involving communities, teachers and schools.

#### Measuring Impacts/Evaluation

There is a lack of measures and indicators in place to track policy changes, institutional and school-level improvements, access, equity, internal efficiency, and learning achievement. Building the government's institutional capacity to acquire and report these indicators is, when organizational conditions are favorable, at least a three to five year activity (One-two years to analyze and design system, one-two years to develop and test system, and collect and process data, one year to analyze and report, assuming sufficient, capable staff are in place at the outset).

The role of the USAID program in bringing about reform tends to be overemphasized in relation to governmental and other donor inputs and activities. The design thereby tends to make unrealistic claims about the impacts attributable to USAID inputs. The mark of success for systemic, sustainable change is that government takes the leadership, responsibility and credit for policy change and innovation.

These weaknesses are the consequence of a rapid expansion by the agency into relatively unknown terrain - sectoral policy adjustment - on a large scale, in countries where USAID had no prior sectoral experience. They are what might be viewed as the datum for organizational learning - experience that can improve continuing support for African basic education.

## CONCLUSION

This critique of USAID's non-project assistance strategy for support to education reform is strong precisely because the strategy is worth improving. It represents a significant and important advance on the prior project approach to supporting education development. There are encouraging examples of where USAID program support has led to educational improvements at both the systems- and student-levels. Our experience with basic education in Africa has demonstrated that it is possible to leverage important policy and institutional changes through NPA. That success depends on the degree to which the assumptions and weaknesses described here are addressed in the relationship between USAID and the host government, with other donors, and in the design and implementation of the programs.

Whether and how the successes at the policy and institutional levels are translated into changes at the classroom level, and in the desired student outcomes of greater and more equitable access to better quality education can only be answered in the longer term. In the short-term, we have learned the following lessons about the validity of the NPA approach.

- The political and economic context determines what an education reform program can expect to achieve. Where government commitment to reform is strong and a sectoral strategy is well-defined, NPA works because key policy and institutional changes have

already been identified. Where commitment is not strong and a sectoral strategy has not been developed by government, NPA has not worked well and USAID has reverted to projectized activity in the education sector. The analysis of this context should lead to improved design decisions when and where USAID should support reform, the choice of and amount of non-project and project assistance, the type of financing mechanisms, and the content, structure and management of performance conditions.

- Donor collaboration in support of a continuous process of policy dialogue for leveraging reform is an effective, and perhaps essential, strategy
- Conditioned budgetary support has leveraged significant changes in resource distribution within education sectors,<sup>41</sup> but whether these new levels of financing for basic education are sustainable without continued outside assistance and/or pressure is still an open question
- Budget allocations reflect government priorities (and/or the pressure of conditionalities from donors). However for those allocations to result in improved educational services, institutional capacity must be related to reform priorities and strategy. Unless the institutions responsible for planning, programming and expenditure management can perform these functions, actual use of budget allocations will not correspond to reform policy priorities. An adequate time frame must be allowed for the development of institutional capacity
- Improving the institutional capacity of the education bureaucracy at central and regional levels is not an end in itself. Increased capacity for planning, budgeting, curriculum design, procuring, distributing, accounting, etc. is necessary but clearly not sufficient for education reform. A focus on the school and on more effective student participation and learning must be addressed explicitly by the reform, and by the process of institutional capacity building
- An overall framework of reform is needed which explicitly recognizes that changes at policy, institutional, and school-community levels is a phased process, for which appropriate indicators are needed to track program effectiveness along the way towards student-level outcomes. This process is management intensive, demands on-going policy dialogue with government and donors, and requires substantial technical assistance for institution building

Building on its experience with education projects, and in response to the dominant themes in the development field and the Agency in the late 1980s, USAID undertook a radical shift in its approach to supporting education in Africa. The defining characteristics of that shift focus on 1) government-led systemic reform, 2) administrative, managerial and technical institutional capacity building, and 3) central budgetary support. The main objective of this new approach was to find a way to assist education systems so that improvements in access, equity, quality, and efficiency would be sustainable.

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<sup>41</sup> See DeStefano and Tietjen *Budgetary Impact of NPA in the Education Sector: A Review of Four Countries* USAID 1993

To conclude that USAID's non-project assistance approach has indeed led to sustainable improvements in African education systems would be premature. However, as shown in Part 2, there is compelling evidence that this approach is producing tangible results. The durability of the gains in access to and quality of primary education already manifested in some countries will depend on the success of efforts to build the capacity of the responsible African institutions. It also depends, as does development in general in Africa, on the success of macro-economic adjustment in laying the foundation for sustainable growth in African economies. Increases in the financing of non-salary inputs for basic education, a principal aspect of USAID-supported reforms, will be partially offset by gains in efficiency anticipated from better management of resources and a better functioning education system. However, the sustainability of greater resource allocations and expenditures for primary education is ultimately hostage to overall economic performance, responsible public sector management, and the maintenance of basic education as a priority sector. Many of USAID's, and other donors', general efforts in Africa are geared towards addressing the first two of these constraints. The non-project assistance approach to supporting basic education has perhaps had its greatest success in addressing the third. Furthermore, the sustainability of the reforms being supported with NPA is equally contingent on USAID's ability to sustain its commitment to this new approach as it is dependent on these factors.

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