

Integrating and Aligning Education Investments with Government Priorities

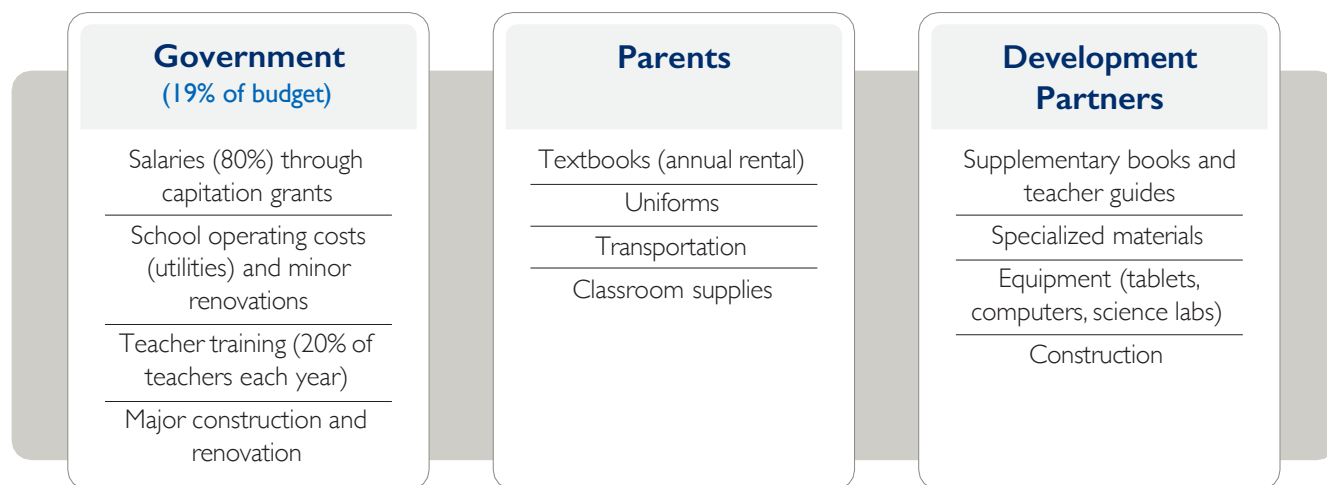
Aligning donor investment with country priorities and effective approaches of engagement are essential for long-term impact.

Introduction

Over the last decade, USAID has been supporting the Government of Tajikistan (GOT) to improve literacy and numeracy skills of all primary education students. Numerous other development agencies also fund projects in the education sector, with an average total annual contribution to education of roughly [REDACTED] (based on OECD data). The impact of these investments is less than it could be, in part because there needs to be greater alignment between the government's priorities and development partner activities.

Aligning Priorities

The provision of education is a GOT responsibility and priority, but funding for education is divided between the government, families, and external donors. The GOT pays for teachers' salaries and partially covers the costs of operating schools. Parents pay for textbooks, classroom supplies, and student transportation. Development partners fund materials, equipment, and a variety of education reform initiatives (see chart). As of 2021, Tajikistan spent 5.4% of GDP on education, compared to the international average of 4.2%. Nevertheless, the reliance on external funding creates the potential for misalignment between what government prioritizes and what development projects want to pay for.



(Source: USAID)

The 2030 National Strategy of Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan (GOT, 2020) sets three key objectives: (1) ensuring equal access and participation in education and science at all levels and all throughout life, (2) improving the quality and relevance of education and science at all levels, and (3) strengthening effective governance of the education sector. It particularly emphasizes the risks that climate change and natural disasters impose on the education system and the need for a comprehensive school safety framework and resilience strategy. Within this broader focus, the 2030 National

Strategy of Education Development identifies sub-sector priorities that include pre-primary education, upper secondary, the knowledge economy, and provision of technical skills to individuals who will potentially migrate to Russia remain sectoral priorities.

The broad strategy provides plenty of opportunity for alignment and misalignment. International partners generally support broader goals of equity, access, and governance. There is perhaps less alignment across sub-sector priorities¹. For example, USAID has prioritized the primary sub-sector, which is appreciated by the GOT.

Even within the primary sub-sector, there may be differences in emphasis. The following table highlights areas of USAID support under the Learning Together Activity with the sector plan priorities for general secondary education (Grades I-III). USAID has aligned well with quality and relevance and less well with equal access and participation.

10-year sector plan priority areas for general secondary education	Sub-priorities	Examples of USAID support
Equal access and participation	Constructing and repairing schools, taking into account the needs of children with disabilities	None
	Ensuring socially safe and favorable conditions for learning and ensuring inclusive education for all social and ethnic groups	Improving the delivery of Tajik language in schools and classes of ethnic minorities
	Encouraging participation of gifted children as a tool to increase school enrollment	None
	Reducing dropout rate in general secondary education, especially among girls and children from poor and vulnerable groups	None
Quality and relevance	Creating an effective and flexible system of professional development (i.e., training and retraining) of teachers	Implementing professional development program for teachers Improving the mentoring and coaching system of teachers
	Preparing competency-based and inclusive standards and teaching materials in general secondary education	Developing and printing new textbooks and other teaching materials for relevant classes based on a competency-based approach
	Elevating the prestige of the teaching profession in general secondary education	None
	Implementing an effective system and institutional mechanisms for assessing the quality of education based on a competency-based approach	Providing standardized national assessments for measuring student learning outcomes and competency standards, such as in primary grades (literacy, mathematics) and secondary grades Conducting literacy and numeracy assessments for primary grades every few years starting in 2023

USAID can ensure even better alignment in the future by considering how their programming meets GOT priorities at the sector and sub-sector level, by reviewing both written plans (intended priority) and executed budgets (enacted priorities), and by ensuring specific components are within institutional mandates and priorities.

¹ Climate change and school safety are priorities of the partner that funded the compilation of the national strategy.