Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Component of DFID India's Education Portfolio

Final Report – Main Report

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Final Report – Main Report

A report submitted by ICF Consulting Services

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A draft version of this document was approved by DFID before the end of March 2016, and this has been finalised after taking into account further input from DFID India, SEQAS, and the TA agencies.

Contents

Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Education Research
AWPB	Annual Work Plan and Budget
BEO	Block Education Officer
BLISS	Bihar Language Initiative in Secondary Schools
BP	Boundary Partner/s
BRC	Block Resource Centres
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CGA	Comptroller General Accounts
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Scheme
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEO	District Education Officer
DFID	Department for International Development
DIET	District Institute Of Education and Training
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DPO	District Planning Officer
DWO	District Welfare Officer
EE	Elementary Education
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESD	Education Survey Division
FA	Financial Assistance
FMIS	Financial Management Information Systems
G/SE	Gender and Social Exclusion
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GoI	Government of India
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDRC	International Development Research Centre

JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JRM	Joint Review Mission
MIS	Management Information System
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MoST	Ministry of Science and Technology
MoTA	Ministry of Tribal Affairs
MoV	Means of Verification
MPSQAF	Madhya Pradesh School Quality Assurance Framework
NAS	National Assessment System
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
OBC	Other Backward Castes
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OER	Open Educational Resources
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
OGIP	Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme
OU	Open University
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
RIE	Regional Institute of Education
RMSA	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
RSK	Rajya Shiksha Kendra
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SEQAS	Specialist Evaluation and Quality Assurance Services
SDMC	School Development and Monitoring Committee
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TA	Technical Assistance
TCA	Technical Cooperation Agency
TESS	Teacher Excellence and Support System
ToR	Terms of Reference
TSG	Technology Support Group
VfM	Value for Money

Foreword

In 2012, the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Development announced a shift in support to India from financial grants to a 'know how and show how approach' of technical exchange. This evolution of the UK-India aid partnership is a logical progression which recognises India's impressive economic growth and accession to middle income country status. The rationale of this change was highlighted in a 2012 review of DFID India's health and education programmes by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which concluded: "*We are convinced that the UK's particular contribution to India's development is primarily knowledge and skills, not finance.'* The report went further, laying down a challenge to *'…identify and monitor what the particular benefits are provided by the UK aid in order to focus its activities where it adds most value.'*

The ICAI challenge is a telling one, and made more pertinent by the commitments in the government's new aid strategy to end general budget support. A shift away from large scale grant funding poses new challenges for impact monitoring. DFID's trusted 'attribution by contribution' metric is not well suited to capturing the impact of technical assistance (TA) that can deliver influence disproportionate to spend e.g. through shifts in policy, accountability or system performance. Further, as this report emphasises, technical support delivers through partnerships – seldom can monocausal attribution be determined. As Professor Kingdon stated in her evidence to the International Development Committee on India's education programme: *"It is not in the quantum of aid that is given, but more in the catalytic nature of it."*

This independent evaluation represents DFID India's first attempt to reflect upon its use of TA as part of its broader transition from a mixed portfolio of large grant and associated technical support to a TA-only portfolio. The study focuses on education but findings should have wider resonance both beyond education and India – particularly for DFID supported countries on similar trajectories to middle income status.

It is critically important that DFID rises to the challenge of better managing and capturing the impact of the TA, both to learn and improve and also to provide robust evidence to the UK taxpayer that justifies UKAID investment. This report makes an important first contribution, with insights on a range of issues including: the tools and processes DFID and its implementing partners use for programme monitoring and impact measurement of TA; the induction, deployment and role of DFID advisers; and thoughts on how procurement and contracting may need to evolve as we move into a TA-only approach. This is however a start – as DFID India transitions to this new and exciting partnership with our Indian counterparts there will be a continued focus on learning, sharing and improving.

Colin Bangay

Senior Education Adviser – DFID India

Executive Summary

The Evaluation is innovative, intended to support DFID learning

This is an exciting and innovative evaluation – the first major evaluation of its kind to look at a Department for International Development (DFID) Technical Assistance (TA) portfolio. It forms part of DFID's response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI, 2012) review of the health and education sectors in India. The findings of this evaluation are timely both for DFID India, as it transitions to a TA-only *modus operandi*, and also, with wider resonance, for DFID programmes in countries that are also transiting to middle income status. DFID's TA portfolio in India covers many key challenges of secondary education globally; it is therefore very suitable as a case study for DFID's overall education portfolio.

This is an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of DFID's TA in transferring useful knowledge, skills and practices to key personnel in India's secondary education school delivery system, ultimately aiming to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

During Inception, it was agreed with DFID India that the evaluation focus should be on lessons learning and generating evidence rather than accountability.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to develop an evidence base to demonstrate:

   I.   Which methods work well and which work less well, and under what conditions, in the design and delivery of TA in India?

   II. What lessons can be learned from TA in India that can usefully be applied in other contexts?

   III. How DFID can best design and manage TA?

This is therefore neither a typical programme evaluation, nor a standard baseline-midline-endline impact evaluation. It is both a process and a performance evaluation of the TA component of DFID India's portfolio in the education sector. The primary purpose is learning rather than accountability, aiming to see how there are interlinkages or synergies which can support learning on how to make the sum greater than its parts.

TA is relatively little understood because many of its key processes are not captured by conventional systems for measuring impact and defining change. TA is defined as the provision of know-how in the form of personnel, training, research, and associated costs (OECD, 2008). For the purpose of this evaluation, it includes TA agencies and DFID advisers.

The audience is primarily an internal DFID audience

The primary audience for this evaluation is the DFID education advisory cadre, followed by other DFID staff with responsibilities related to TA. While TA agencies in India were consulted extensively and commented on drafts of the report, they were not a formal audience as their assignments were terminated at the end of March 2016. The Government of India (GoI) was consulted, but was not considered a formal partner to the evaluation by DFID.

The evaluation was conducted by a consortium led by ICF

ICF, in partnership with Proman and New Concept, were selected as the evaluation partners for DFID India, following a competitive tender process under the Global Evaluation Framework. Dr. Anthony (Tony) Davison, Team Leader, was the technical lead for the project and was supported by a team of international, including Indian, specialists. The team included a well-balanced mix of members with different technical expertise in primary and secondary education in India, qualitative and quantitative methods, advocacy, influencing and political

economy, gender exclusion, social development, governance, education economics, Education Management Information System (EMIS), theories of change and data collection.

The Indian education context is complex, given the federal nature of the country, its size, and the scale of the challenges

Education in India falls under the jurisdiction of both central and state governments and is known as a 'concurrent subject'. In simple terms, India's education ministry, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) sets curriculum and standards, provides targeted programmatic funding (supplemental to state budgets) and collects and publishes national education statistics. Federal support to states is provided through missions.

Universal enrolment and gender equity have almost been achieved at primary level. At lower secondary level gender equity has been achieved, but nearly 15% of children are out of school. At upper secondary level, 58% of boys and 51% of girls are enrolled. Poverty and membership of disadvantaged groups, such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims, are the principal determinants of school participation, while gender becomes an increasingly significant factor from the middle of secondary education. Gender equity has been achieved in learning attainment according to the latest national assessment data, but India does relatively poorly in international learning tests.

GoI priorities include:
- Enhancing enrolment and attendance at all levels;
- Universalising education for 6-14 year olds;
- Reducing inequalities of participation between social groups and states and
- Improving the quality of education and learning achievement at all levels.

The challenges to overcome in delivering these priorities include:
- The design of strategies to effectively change the largest and most complex education system in the world (e.g. 113 million students of secondary school age);
- Improvements in the quality of teaching within given financial constraints and inadequate preservice and in service delivery;
- The use of data as evidence to underpin policy and planning strategies;
- The infusion of management systems and a change in culture from the school upwards, with a focus on student learning and;
- Overcoming existing poverty and infrastructure constraints to ensure universal access to secondary education.

It is important to remember the scale of India – whose population equals the combined population of the USA, Japan, Pakistan, Brazil, Indonesia and Bangladesh – and the challenges that entails for education delivery and reform. GoI policy stresses the importance of universalising secondary education. The system is substantial, with 220,000 secondary schools, increasingly pressurised due to burgeoning demand from the success of the primary education programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA). The quality of education requires improvement. Indian states have scored relatively badly in international achievement tests.

DFID India's TA in the education sector builds on a long legacy of support to the Government of India

DFID India's TA builds on a historical legacy going back over twenty years in which DFID India has been partner to the GoI in delivering both financial and TA. This included support to the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), launched in 1994 as a major initiative to revitalise the primary education system. Over time, DFID transitioned its support to the secondary education sector, in line with a change in GoI focus. DFID's TA is unique in

supporting the Government's large-scale secondary education programme, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and has been recognised by successive governments as promoting cumulative learning and indicates the trust and regard with which DFID's contributions have been recognised by successive governments.

The current grant programmes under the DFID education portfolio ended in March 2016 and DFID India's future support will only be in the form of TA. It is unclear what difference a shift from TA & FA to TA-only will make to DFID's ability to support Indian education or to DFID's actual or perceived role. In mid-2015, DFID India reduced its education staff from two advisers to one, and in 2016, an A1 international senior adviser post may be filled by an A2, locally-recruited, adviser.

This evaluation has been commissioned, in part, to help support that transition. The new education programme, I-LEARN, lends itself to TA as a lever, with a focus on providing upstream policy advice and technical cooperation in thematic strands (learning assessment, school improvement and leadership) across primary and secondary education (rather than to either the primary or secondary sector alone). The new TA approach will support the more efficient, effective and timely utilisation of the GoI's own funding. This approach is not therefore about the quantum of money but more about its effective use, in line with ICAI recommendations.

DFID India-supported projects support the GoI's education priorities

DFID's primary aim is to alleviate poverty; DFID views education as a significant contributor to this goal. Following the success of India in primary enrolment and with issues around secondary education, DFID's focus was to improve and expand secondary education in India: it has – and will continue – to support the GoI's education policies. It derives influence partly by directing large scale funding to the national RMSA budget, but also through a valued TA programme. The main thrust of the TA programme is directed towards building the core administrative capacities of government at national and state levels. This is intended to enable the government to accelerate its national secondary education reform.

DFID's support to secondary education reform is not primarily designed as an integrated portfolio, but responds to specified GoI priorities. It is primarily, but not exclusively focused on secondary education. DFID's influence stems partly from financial aid provided to the national RMSA budget and, possibly even more so, through providing a valued TA programme and having a fruitful policy dialogue with government. On the whole, the TA programme does not attempt to address issues of equity, inclusion and learning achievement directly, (with the notable exception of the cash transfer programme in Odisha), but focuses on the future through institution building, system development and capacity building among key groups of individuals.

The portfolio consisted of DFID contributions of £43.7 million in TA and £69.2 million in FA to the secondary education sector in India. This assistance covers six projects with a TA component:

    I.   The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan TA Fund, 2013-2015 (TA plus FA)

    II.   Teacher Support Programme, 2013-2015 (TA in the form of an accountable grant)[1]

    III.   Technical Support to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013-2015 (TA)

    IV.   Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme, 2012-2016 (TA plus FA)

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[1] TESS and MPQAF also cover elementary education, in addition to secondary education.

> V. The Madhya Pradesh School Quality Assurance Framework, 2012-2015 (TA in the form of an accountable grant).
>
> VI. Bihar Language Initiative in Secondary Schools (BLISS), 2012-16 (TA).

In addition to the DFID India-funded work listed above, there is also an important DFID research component in the form of three ongoing projects. DFID India's TA supports interventions at a national, state and local levels. National support is provided through RMSA-TCA, TESS India and MoTA. State-level support in Odisha is provided through OGIP and, in Madhya Pradesh, MP QAF, these also operate at local levels.

The linkage between programme components is not always apparent, although DFID advisers note their efforts to make the sum greater than the individual parts (including through the creation of a combined portfolio-level Theory of Change) and to share lessons learnt across different components.

The key findings show high levels of impressive TA delivery, and lead to recommendations for DFID around operating models, metrics, and communication

The overall quality of TA delivery in India was very impressive, with considerable commitment shown by both DFID and the agencies in seeking to resolve issues confronted. The combination of good practices and significant weaknesses makes India a suitable case study to address DFID's wider concerns.

These findings are pertinent to the India programme but most will have resonance elsewhere. They have been reviewed by and discussed with the DFID education adviser and the TA agencies. A broad measure of agreement was reached. Any disagreements are indicated in the text.

The study findings provide important insights with implications for operating models, induction, utilisation and deployment of DFID advisers, metrics for impact and communication of results.

Findings

Section A: The Nature and Characteristics of Technical Assistance

1. The key conditions for successful implementation of TA are:

- Effective identification of key strategic areas to target need to be negotiated up-front between the DFID Education Adviser and central or state governments, and may require subsequent negotiation.
- An iterative implementation process, consistent with the nature of the project or programme, with sustained stakeholder involvement.
- TA agencies with:
    - specialised technical staff in-house, with external specialists blended into the team;
    - sufficient management expertise to act as successful intermediaries and manage change processes;
    - sufficient research expertise to handle needs assessment and monitoring/evaluation;
    - the soft skills required to sustain stakeholder relationships; and
    - a strong understanding of the local context as well as DFID's operating context.
- Technical specialists employed by the TA agency who pay attention both to the technical task, the political economy and the process of individual capacity building.

- Emergent, detailed definitions of TA outcomes. For most of the projects and programmes under review, it had not been possible or desirable to define outcomes too precisely at the beginning. However, it still proved necessary to develop a clear and rich description of intended outcomes as a guide to implementation and strategies to test the change logic underpinning the project design.

- Knowledge in the TA agencies of their mission and scope, and the capability to restrict their activities, to avoid spreading themselves too thinly and not achieving their core objectives.

- Strong TA agency leadership, located in-country. External consultants, while invaluable, should not lead the project.

- Sufficient time for the project or programme to create the minimum conditions for sustainability. For complex education projects such as TESS, with a long developmental stage and complex localisation and cascade training processes, three years is insufficient.

2. The generic characteristics of TA determine how it should be implemented and managed.

There is no single form of TA and nor should there be. It varies according to need, scope, context and implementing agency, yet all TA has certain characteristics in common:

- A convincing narrative of change is key to successful TA.

- TA agencies contribute to but do not fully control the processes or sequences which lead to outcomes.

- The TA team needs to earn credibility and trust with stakeholders through a display of technical competence, timeliness and responsiveness, with a substantial investment of time early in Inception and Implementation.

- Soft skills need to be deployed by the TA agencies in dealing with behaviour change in individuals, groups and organisations.

- Developing and sustaining relationships with existing and new stakeholders should be a major focus.

- Data generation is vital in understanding the nature and functioning of the models of practice developed by TA, to allow for replication or scale up.

3. There is no simple cause and effect relationship between TA inputs and final outcomes.

- TA activities are non-linear and unpredictable, making them hard to capture in linear-based tools (such as logframes), and to measure through results-based management, especially where results are overly defined.

- Attribution is difficult to measure in TA. The contribution of DFID or other donors through TA agencies might be indirect or catalytic or a combination of both but is not controlled by them.

4. A proposed schematic matrix of DFID Education project types could be used as a basis for further investigation in other education projects.

- Projects were categorised in terms of the degree of change attempted against two key globally-recognised components for the education sector – **enhancing access and quality improvement. There appeared to be three types of change attempted in these projects against those two components: pre-defined discrete system change, open-ended discrete change and progressive innovation.**

Table 1.1   India TA Programme – Project Typology

		Level of attempted change		
		Pre-defined discrete system change	**Open-ended discrete change**	**Progressive innovation**
Education components	**Enhance access**	OGIP	TESS India BLISS	MoTA RMSA-TCA
	Quality improvements	MP-QAF		

Source: Evaluation Team

The three levels of attempted change, as shown in Table 1.1, are:

i. **Pre-defined discrete system change – a strategy that is designed to effect a single major pre-defined change to the education system.**

   Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme (OGIP) has introduced a cash transfer system into the state of Odisha aiming to improve access. The School Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) seeks to introduce a school assessment system into the state of Madhya Pradesh to improve quality. For both projects, the aim is to establish a single best system although, in the case of QAF it is recognised that subsequent improvements will and should be made.

ii. **Open-ended discrete change – a strategy designed to introduce a single major change in the education system, but one which requires both system and behavioural change. There is no one best solution for implementing the desired change.**

   The Teacher Support Programme (TESS India) and BLISS projects are examples. TESS is introducing new materials for use by teacher training institutions and teachers, while BLISS is developing systems for training English Language teachers.

iii. **Progressive innovation – a strategy based on a number of successive modest but cumulative changes, resulting in considerable overall changes in time. The long-term objective is comprehensive and large scale reform.**

   The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan TA Fund (RMSA-TCA) and technical support to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) appear to fit within this category.

Section B: Educational issues of Global Concern

1. **TA can be used effectively to develop cash transfer systems on a sustainable basis. Key findings to emerge in relation to Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme (OGIP) include:**

■ Demand has to be promoted as part of the scheme to accelerate take up, particularly amongst the most deprived groups, through intensive efforts with localised and highly dedicated staff.

■ Conditionality did not appear to have been strictly enforced nor to have materially affected attendance.

■ A minimum of three years is required to establish the scheme after a pilot has demonstrated the feasibility in principle of the technical solutions proposed.

■ TA did enable extremely deprived groups to attend school but the capacity of the state government to maintain the level of effort required has yet to be tested and is unlikely to replicate the level of intense support by dedicated block officers employed the TA agency.

2. **Creating innovative approaches to meeting the needs of students entering secondary education with inadequate knowledge and skills is an increasing challenge, and one of the most important equity issues.**

■ Both the RMSA-TCA and OGIP sought to address this issue, but neither have definitive or replicable results as yet. OGIP showed that culturally sensitive and attractive materials were part of the answer. It also found out that unless innovations are embedded in government policies and strategies – that is, wider institutional and organisational reform – small scale experiments are likely to founder.

3. **TA can be used to develop complex systems, but purely technical solutions are not enough without a more robust emphasis on sustainability, cultural change and capacity transfer.**

■ One of the prime advantages of TA is that it can be used to deploy highly specialist expertise that is not available in-country to accelerate the advance of technical systems. DFID India's support for the development of a National Assessment System (NAS) and state-level Education Management Information System (EMIS) illustrates this. A further example is the pedagogic and materials writing expertise brought by the Open University for the TESS project which systematised the production of pedagogically-sound and imaginative learning materials which rapidly advanced previous Indian initiatives.

■ Over-reliance on technocratic approaches causes problems without a greater focus on sustainability, cultural change and capacity transfer. For example, if capacity is to be built in new areas, such as NAS, MoTA, or OGIP, then there needs to be a commitment by the government to provide and employ identified expertise who will be trained up and take on the new roles.

4. **A focus on pedagogy is central to educational change and the achievement of enhanced and more equitable educational outcomes. Other systemic reforms are weakened if pedagogy is not taken into account.**

■ It is challenging to improve teaching and learning processes through a better model of school assessment in the absence of corresponding support for pedagogic change, as illustrated by the MPQAF project.

■ The learning hub experiment of OGIP demonstrates that with external support to schools and better quality materials, adjusted to some extent to the culture of the disadvantaged children, improvements to pedagogy can occur. However, in the absence of policy change in favour of more varied pedagogies and a more systemic approach to pedagogic change

embedded in organisational and institutional reform, the experiment does not seem sustainable. This has important equity implications.

Section C: Issues of Cross-Sectoral Concern

Gender and Social Inclusion

1. **Gender and equity issues are still crucial to TA practice even when the majority of a programme is universal.**

■ Within the portfolio, there are both programmes that are targeted to address the needs of specific target groups (such as OGIP which focused on providing cash transfers to boys and girls from scheduled tribe and scheduled castes in Odisha) and universal programmes which provide benefits for all social groups within the target geographic areas. Most of the DFID programme in India is in the latter category. The specific lessons that can be derived from the programme are therefore relatively slight.

■ Comments relating to gender and equity issues have already been made above (5, 6 and 8). In addition;

■ Materials development for teachers needs always has equity implications. It is too early to assess the impact of materials produced by TESS in terms of either their overall impact or their differential impact upon children of differing socio-economic groups. However, while many stakeholders considered that the materials produced would be suitable for all schools a significant minority disagreed.

■ Planning for equity and social inclusion can be assisted by sensitive data system development. The data systems developed by TCA-RMSA in India provide policy makers and planners with important data sets disaggregated by gender and socio-economic grouping. This provides an essential foundation for planning, but will not be fully effective without paying attention to the bureaucratic culture in which the data is embedded.

■ There are ways in which TA agencies can insert important gender and equity issues into advice and implementation focus, as was done in the MoTA project on specific areas of engagement such as hostel reform.

Policy Dialogue

2. **Policy dialogue is not a one-off action but an iterative process over time, which also changes with the turnover of different policy makers. The preconditions for successful policy dialogue in India are:**

■ A clear policy framework agreed between DFID and the GoI defining areas of TA operation but without predefining the eventual products.

■ Initial research into the development problem, to establish the credibility of the TA agency and provide both data and a framework with which to enter into dialogue.

■ TA products that are not too precisely pre-defined by DFID in the ToR/scope. Precise definitions of the results of an intervention inhibit policy discussion.

■ Managed policy dialogue. Space has to be created by the DFID Adviser and the TA agency for discussion to take place with government counterparts and other policy-makers. Formal structures such as the Indian Joint Review Mission can provide good opportunities for structured and intense policy dialogue.

■ Policy briefs, as a means of crystallising debate. Interpretation of data in the policy brief has to be refined, given the sophisticated nature of the Indian client.

Sustainability

3. Sustainability is achieved when systems or behaviours are firmly established and owned by sufficient key stakeholders, at all appropriate levels, and where benefits are equitably distributed.

■ The degree to which a project or programme has achieved sustainability is complex and often requires careful weighing of conflicting evidence. It is often challenging to determine whether sustainability has been achieved within the traditional timeframes of DFID project completion reviews (PCRs). Indicators of sustainability that have emerged from the India programme include:

– *Professional and political support:* is there enough support at all relevant levels of the bureaucracy; informed professional support amongst academics, teacher trainers and national professional institutions; managerial support within the school? Has the model been adopted by government?

– *Adoption of the innovation:* has capacity been built as intended? Has the innovation been established in a critical mass of cases? Are there initial positive results (at least) and are these confirmed by time series data on behavioural or institutional change? Is innovation integrated into day-to-day work patterns?

– *Is the model financially sustainable?* Has it been built into government budgets?

– *Is the equitable flow of benefits demonstrated?*

– *Is there an exit strategy?* Has this been agreed with the government in advance, in particular, for cash transfer schemes? Does this include not only financial aspects but also aspects around the type and nature of labour support?

Learning during implementation

4. The nature of TA requires learning during implementation.

■ TA is innovative and therefore needs to define the development challenge through research and analysis in order to work effectively and secure credibility. It is also inherently experimental and frequently catalytic at least in aim. These factors suggest that all TA has to be data rich and that learning during implementation is vital.

■ There were excellent examples of innovative means of learning during implementation although the quality of formal monitoring & evaluation systems was variable, suggesting the need for institutional support of TA agencies. Useful indicators have been developed in India on teacher's capacity to reflect, the proportion of timer spent on teacher talk and the manner of classroom organisation.

■ Changes in pedagogy can be successfully measured as well as described.

■ Useful indicators that have been developed in India include:

– the teacher's capacity to reflect;

– the proportion of time spent on teacher talk; and

– classroom organisation.

5. Proof of concept should be demonstrated before scaling up or replication is attempted.

■ Given the expense and consequences of introducing ineffective systems into government practice, it is essential that DFID ensures that proof of concept is demonstrated to a reasonable degree before scale up or replication is initiated. Proof of concept entails demonstrating that the innovation can operate effectively in a typical range of conditions with no more external assistance than can be sustained after the expiry of TA. TA is often a stage in the process, requiring further work by local stakeholders after TA expiry.

■ The cash transfer system established with DFID support in Odisha was initially piloted, which showed the feasibility of the TA approach taken. It now appears to be established,

and will largely be sustained after DFID's exit, and is replicable, although there will be less dedicated support at a block level to ensure that the hardest to reach beneficiaries are registered and supported through a bureaucratic process.

■ In contrast, neither the MPQAF nor the TESS projects had demonstrated proof of concept. QAF had not assembled evidence to show (at least plausibly) that the new form of school assessment would succeed in catalysing improvements to teaching by means of better school planning. TESS had not shown that the cluster of practices associated with the introduction of Open Education Resources (OERs) could be operated successfully in a given range of school types.

■ Demonstration of proof of concept is also important for equity and gender considerations. If educational innovations such as OERs are taken up solely by schools with particular characteristics, differences in learning outcomes between boys and girls, or, more probably, different socio-economic grounds might be magnified.

6. The marketisation of TA knowledge and expertise indicates an important role for DFID advisers.

■ Problems are exacerbated by weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems and the perceived value of specialised TA knowledge, which is not readily shared. DFID India advisers have made efforts to act as knowledge sharing brokers between contracted agencies as well as encouraging a broader open community of practice amongst government, civil society and NGO actors working in secondary education. This catalytic networking role could be developed further. However its success would depend on a greater allocation of time by hard-pressed DFID advisers. This role is currently seen as an 'add on', offered by dedicated advisers who viewed this as both beneficial to all and strategic for DFID, rather than as a mainstream activity of a DFID adviser.

Section D: DFID Management, Tools and Systems

It is the contention of the evaluation team that current DFID tools and management systems need to be modified to reflect the particular characteristics of TA. A workshop was held with all TA agencies in India to explore their views on the appropriateness of current tools and systems. While there was not universal agreement on all issues the analysis below represents the broad consensus which emerged.

1. The exercise of 'soft' skills underpins successful TA but is not adequately recognised in DFID management and review tools and systems.

■ 'Soft' skills are those concerned with developing and sustaining relations of trust and credibility with stakeholders and partners, such as negotiation, listening, facilitation and problem-solving skills. Credibility is typically demonstrated by providing specialised technical knowledge informed by research into the development problem being addressed, and doing so in a timely and responsive manner. Trust is essential because TA often involves dealing with sensitive issues and underpins working relationships. Evidence from India suggested that credibility and trust have to be established before effective inputs can be delivered, which has implications for the expectations of what can be realistically delivered in the early stages of TA projects by both agencies and DFID advisers, as well as the length of timing of TA projects. It has further implications on the duration of a DFID advisory posting, given that advisors can be more effective once they have built networks and established credibility.

■ *TA agencies managing the projects of DFID India's education portfolio estimated that as much as 20-50% of their time was spent on activities or processes that were not included in their logframe, and yet it is their performance against the logframe that is managed in the Review process and is the determinant for payment by results.* DFID's monitoring,

management and review processes would be more comprehensive if soft skill activities and processes were included in the management tools and fully incorporated into monitoring and review of TA.

■ Soft skills are equally critical for DFID advisers managing and supporting TA projects as for the teams delivering TA. These soft skills include navigating the art of the possible between what DFID desires to implement as a donor, and what the counterpart (the Indian government in this case, at both federal and state levels) requests on the one hand; and what the TA agency is capable of delivering on the other hand.

2. The logframe has inherent challenges as a tool for TA projects.

■ The logframe provides a discipline in thinking through a project and a tool for reviewing activities and achievements over time and a mechanism by which DFID can assess TA performance.

■ However, for projects which are TA or largely TA in nature, the usefulness and applicability of the logframe is undermined – it does not easily capture qualitative indicators, it assumes linear progression, it does not easily capture changes in enabling conditions over time and between 20-50% of work done by TA agencies in India was not captured in logframes. That is a very significant proportion considering that the logframe is the key tool to measure performance and results at annual and mid-term reviews.

■ The logframe needs to be a joint exercise at every stage, to ensure clarity and agreement on the objectives and processes of a project.

■ However, ultimately it is a tool which is unlikely to be tailored enough to work well for TA projects.

3. The Theory of Change (ToC) is very relevant to TA but needs to be adapted to fit the particular needs of TA.

■ The ToC is a tool well suited to TA: it can be used to illustrate process as well as outcomes. It allows for both pathways, rich descriptions of the changes that are being attempted and can readily include the 'soft' activities of TA. As such, it complements the logframe as a management tool for both the TA agency and DFID.

■ ToCs are a relatively new concept for DFID and were introduced to India after many of the projects were operational. Most ToCs developed by the TA agencies were devised retrospectively, as well as the overall portfolio-level ToC. ToCs in India for the education portfolio tend to be diagrammatic representations of the logframe. Many (but not all) finished states are thinly described. Changes in behaviour and assumptions are under-analysed. Most TA agencies did not look at, or revise, the ToCs over the course of the project.

■ ToCs would be a useful tool if all agencies engaged more in ToC thinking, and described both processes and outcomes in richer detail, including specifying the soft skills to set up and sustain the preconditions for effective TA. There could be more intense focus on immediate and medium-term changes to boundary partners and on immediate and medium-term changes. Assumptions could be made transparent and could be specified in an accompanying narrative. Alternative strategic options could be specified in ToCs. ToCs should also be regularly updated (as logframes are) in order to specify how assumptions around change have evolved in the course of implementation.

■ Improved ToCs might avoid implementation pitfalls and would give DFID a more comprehensive set of monitoring, assessment and review tools, thereby reducing the level of inference required to make fair judgements. There also appears to be a need for the development of smart monitoring tools and metrics (including ToCs) from DFID centrally,

to provide a more uniform approach and stronger guidance with the emergence of a greater focus on TA-only approaches.

4. **Value for Money analysis is difficult to apply to TA, but the measurement of learning gains could serve as an adequate proxy for poverty reduction due to the consistent long-term association between cognitive improvement and economic growth.**

■ The India programme clearly illustrates the methodological problems associated with the application of VfM analysis to the education sector. Formative evaluation data is not always available to underpin VfM judgements, particularly for assessing effectiveness and cost effectiveness. Key data, such as gains to learning (directly relevant to elements of the programme such as the TESS or BLISS projects) are not available due to the length of the processes required compared with the limited time frame of the projects. It is not always possible to identify the specific contribution of TA to wider processes of change, given the actions of multiple other actors.

■ In spite of the methodological issues, the well targeted interventions in the education sector have enormous potential for reducing poverty and therefore for VfM effectiveness and cost effectiveness. The evidence suggests that there is a consistent, statistically significant relationship between gains in cognitive skills and economic growth which is both long-term and applicable across countries.[2]

■ The India programme demonstrates impressive VfM in some areas. EMIS has been substantially improved as a data system without incurring additional recurrent costs for state governments, which makes it highly efficient, but lack of attention to how data might be used has reduced its potential effectiveness. The OGIP project has targeted equity issues with hard to reach deprived children in ways that are effective. The TESS project is potentially of considerable significance for effectiveness and poverty reduction if learning gains result, but the lack of a pilot to demonstrate proof of concept and the length of the processes required to design and institutionalise Open Education Resource materials means that VfM judgements cannot be passed at present. While economic in design and implementation, MPQAF has not demonstrated that the model will change school practice sufficiently. The project illustrates that VfM may not be achieved if a project concept is too narrowly drawn.

■ If the education sector is to realise its VfM potential, DFID needs to:

– secure a better understanding of the policy levers that will have most impact on raising learning achievement. The India programme suggests that improved formative evaluation to generate initial data and selected ex-post investigation are key to building such understanding;

– use only high quality, experienced advisers, working within an appropriate policy framework, particularly one that allows time for cognitive gains to come to fruition.

5. **It is not always easy to measure the results of TA.**

■ **There is a real tension between the way in which results are required by DFID, in part to provide clear statements to the British taxpayer to justify and be accountable for aid spending, and the characteristics of TA.** The impact of TA is often downstream, so linear cause and effect models do not always work. There are often difficulties in defining a 'result'. These problems may be partially mitigated by:

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[2] Cross country longitudinal studies involving 50 countries between 1960 and 2000 suggest that a standard deviation increase in cognitive achievement is associated with 2% additional GDP growth per year. Reverse causality does not apply. Increases in enrolment per se do not have a strong effect on economic growth (See especially Hanushek and Woesmann 2008 and 2012).

- Taking account of the exercise of soft skills, and including the deployment of soft skills more explicitly in DFID management and review processes.
- Defining a wider range of processes (including alternative strategies and processes) in the ToC, making greater use of detailed descriptors of intended changes that will enable more refined judgements to be made about the degree to which change has occurred as planned.

- In combination, these changes could provide DFID with a more comprehensive and more richly described sets of results against which to monitor, review and assess the TA agency. However, more work overall would be needed to reduce this tension around results-based management.

6. Portfolio management can promote the achievement of strategic objectives and be a means of identifying synergies between portfolio components.

- Multiple attempts have been made by DFID's education advisers – including convening all the DFID funded TA agencies to collaboratively develop a retrospective ToC for the whole portfolio (see **Figure 9.1**) – which encouraged the TA partners to view their contributions within a broader context and to explore how their work interrelated with each other, with focus on a common ultimate goal. However, it should be recognised that TA agencies are measured and managed on delivery against their own challenging logframes and ToRs rather than in support of a collective portfolio. The TA agencies are not always best placed to know what synergies there are, or could be, between different aspects in the portfolio. In addition, commercial TA operations are inherently competitive and are not incentivised to share and collaborate.

- Further, such work requires considerable input from the education adviser. Informal collaboration between the TESS and MPQAF projects (notably both accountable grants and not competitive tenders) showed the potential for projects to have mutually beneficial reinforcing effects. However, time constraints and competition do seem to have restricted the degree of collaboration. There is clearly more that could be done in this area – but impact would be dependent on addressing the incentives for TA agencies to collaborate and time allocations and support given to advisers.

7. The quality and experience of a DFID Education Adviser are critical determinants of TA effectiveness.

- **TA has enormous potential for achieving real impact and, if so, high VfM returns. However, this is heavily dependent on the careful selection of strategic interventions, and the management of TA agencies to ensure quality products and processes.** Unless there is technical competence informed by institutional and cultural understanding at all stages (including in designing the concept, throughout Inception and Implementation, and project close), the impact of TA will fall well below its potential. In combination, these factors suggest that a DFID education adviser has to be technically credible, with management expertise and interpersonal soft skills of a high order. Small additional increments of expenditure on advisers of sufficient seniority and knowledge/skills levels are essential, as well as ensuring that there is high enough staffing levels.

- There is also a need to ensure that there is a sufficient level of DFID staff resource to cover the size and ambition of a portfolio. DFID India's education portfolio was initially managed by a Senior Education Adviser and an Education Adviser. However, this was reduced to only one Education Adviser, which seems inadequate for a portfolio of such magnitude.

8. DFID's management of TA would be improved if management tools and contracting criteria were modified.

■ The ToC is a tool well suited to TA: it can be used to illustrate process as well as outcomes and allows for both alternative pathways, rich descriptions of the changes that are being attempted and can readily include the 'soft' activities of TA, thereby complementing the logframe as a management tool for both the TA agency and DFID. The development of smart monitoring tools and metrics (including ToCs) from DFID centrally to provide a more uniform approach and stronger guidance with the emergence of a greater focus on TA-only approaches.

■ The emphasis on longer-term inception planning for TA agencies to refine design and build trusted relationships with both the government stakeholders and DFID often runs counter to an emphasis on pre-defined activities, and the demand to show 'quick wins'. If DFID were to embrace the findings of this evaluation, it would imply longer Inception plans, less detailed prescription on activities and more on outcomes, while recognising that TA agencies only have limited impact as they do not own the changes but aim to facilitate change. It would require much more emphasis on adaptive programming, learning, detailed experimentation, a focus on change, and a willingness to 'fail' fast and alter course.

What recommendations are there for DFID?

The recommendations set out below are for DFID unless otherwise specified. No recommendations have been included for the Government of India as DFID made it quite clear that the review was an internal enquiry**.**

1. Project design should be driven by the overriding objective of enhancing learning achievement.

The Senior Education Adviser in India pursued a consistent strategy of trying to ensure that cognitive achievement was central to the policy debate. This should be emulated in other programmes, particularly given the association of cognitive achievement with economic growth. Amongst the practical implications of this recommendation are:

Project/programme design should focus on pedagogy to support educational change and to achieve both enhanced and more equitable learning outcomes.

Given that improvements to cognitive achievement are central both to the role of the school and to poverty reduction, the processes by which learning is achieved should lie at the heart of DFID's education strategy by:

■ **Making improvements to pedagogy central to most project designs**, using Theories of Change to analyse how learning will be improved, and providing for explicit and detailed formative evaluation.

■ Establishing a data bank of research that illustrates the process pathways to improved learning (including pedagogy, materials and institutional frameworks). This should be updated, drawn to the attention of all education advisers, critically reviewed in adviser meetings and used to shape business cases advanced for new projects.

■ Ensuring that annual and 'output to purpose' reviews explicitly analyse how interventions are contributing to improved classroom processes, which, in turn, should enhance learning achievement. The global shift towards a learning and enhanced learning achievement will be reinforced if DFID adopts explicit mechanisms for highlighting these issues.

Metrics used in TA projects should reflect both the characteristic nature of TA and the centrality of learning achievement. Our suggestions include:

- **The timeframe for most TA projects will be in excess of three years.** Given the relatively long period required to secure sustainable gains to learning achievement, more attention could be paid to planning for **long-term engagement** with specific countries or regions.
- **Metrics for projects designed to enhance learning achievement should always specify the anticipated learning achievement gains.** These metrics will normally include:
    - the overall gain or target;
    - reference to standard deviation, to ensure that the distribution of gains is tracked; and
    - a breakdown, both by gender and by socio-economic standing.

While a focus on gender is still appropriate for all countries and, in particular for those with poor gender parity indices, it should be acknowledged that, in many other countries, including India, socio-economic status is a more powerful determinant of educational participation and performance. The example of India shows that the metric is a powerful means of achieving policy focus.

- **Good use could be made of intermediate indices** to measure or describe pedagogic change (as in the India BLISS project), in conjunction with learning outcome targets. Examples include the proportion of time spent on key characteristics of classroom practice, such as on whole class teaching or, crucially, indicators to measure the quality of dialogue in the classroom (such as the nature of teacher response to student questions or the frequency of questions) and the quality of teacher reflection on their performance in a lesson.
- **Logframe metrics could usefully reflect the above, but also some of the characteristic features of TA,** such as:
    - the more significant implementation processes and changes;
    - the initial time required to determine the precise nature of the development problem through field research (which should be reflected in the milestones); and
    - descriptions of monitoring & evaluation tools and processes required to track/measure the agreed indicators.

2. A guidance (How To) note on the Theory of Change (ToC) should be developed and issued, with the aim of developing more nuanced thinking about the Theory of Change. There should be a more systematic application of the ToC tool.

For DFID

- The guidance note **should not be prescriptive in detail, but provide a sound framework within which agencies can develop their own analyses of change**. The note should cover improvements in the quality of thinking about change, improving both project implementation and the quality of tools available to DFID advisers to monitor and review TA agency performance.
- DFID can ensure effective use of the ToC by requiring each TA agency to hold a workshop to design a ToC tool to specifications agreed with DFID. The timing of this workshop could be agreed with the agency, but would be expected to take place after the development problem to be resolved has been broadly defined and agreed with all stakeholders. While the process should be mandatory, the format of the ToC could be flexible.

For TA Agencies

- Within the framework provided by DFID, **agencies should provide: clear descriptors of outputs, outcomes and processes (especially TA processes); a robust statement of underlying assumptions, and a framework for the design of monitoring & evaluation systems.**

- The ToC should be linked to the logframe and reviewed on a regular basis throughout the programme.

3. **DFID Education advisers charged with managing complex TA programme should be experienced and credible practitioners, able to demonstrate technical competence and soft skills.**

- **Using cheaper but less experienced advisers is a false economy, particularly when the government counterparts are particularly highly skilled (as in India).** High quality inputs are required to realise the considerable potential social and economic benefits of TA in the education sector. This is especially true with a change in emphasis from raising enrolments to one of cognitive achievement. Successful strategies to raise learning are necessarily complex, context specific and require high level technical and analytic qualities. High quality advice will allow DFID to add value, complement knowledge and skills already possessed by Ministries of Education and protect its TA investments.

- This task of identifying synergies and enhancing value will best be done by experienced advisers with substantial technical competence.

4. **A functional review should be conducted, to ensure that advice of the right quality is provided.**

- The review would consider the education (and possibly other cadres) to determine its role, functions, size and composition. If necessary, subsequently take action should be taken to ensure that adequate staff are in place, with both strong technical (sector and management) and soft (including negotiation, facilitation, and networking) skills.

- Recruitment support, to allow appropriate skillsets to be found, should be provided, followed by tailored training and mentoring.

- The duration of DFID advisory posts may need to be lengthened for certain TA projects, given the time needed in the early stages to build credibility and trust.

- It is also important to have enough staff as well as high quality advisers: this will enable a higher likelihood of finding the time to enable the development of a portfolio approach to the management of multiple projects and programmes.

5. **Systems for monitoring and evaluation, consistent with both the characteristics of TA and a shifting focus towards learning achievement, should be strengthened.**

For DFID

- **Develop a global strategy for selecting ex-post evaluations of TA:**
  - A systematic strategy for selecting and implementing ex-post evaluations will help to determine the conditions in which impact is achieved, the sustainability of any impact and therefore the VfM derived from TA, given the time that is often required for TA to bear fruit. The strategy should primarily focus on projects or programmes that contribute to improving classroom processes and learning outcomes, and should examine the association between observed changes in process and trends in learning achievement. From the current India portfolio, the TESS project would be very suitable for ex-post evaluation.

- **Build in contractual conditions requiring TA agencies to demonstrate proof of concept for projects that will be replicated or scaled up.**
  - Currently, the reputation of DFID is somewhat exposed by TA projects being scaled up without adequate research being put in place to demonstrate that the concept and practice are viable over a reasonable range of conditions. Contracts should specify what has to be demonstrated by the project and bidders should be asked to specify how they would carry out the research to demonstrate proof of concept.

- **Commission a tailor-made course on monitoring & evaluation for DFID advisers, linked to new DFID operating metrics and guidance on TA.**
  - A tailor-made course on monitoring & evaluation for DFID education advisers would improve the oversight effectiveness by sensitising them to the operational metrics characteristic of TA and to their methodological implications.

For TA agencies

- **Develop access to expertise in quantitative and qualitative monitoring & evaluation appropriate for TA, focused on improving the quality of education.**

  This recommendation has two parts:

- TA agencies should be able to provide DFID with monitoring & evaluation expertise capable of handling specific TA problems. A high proportion of TA projects are and will probably continue to be large scale experimental pilots (as were the majority in the India programme), It is essential that each project has the capacity to demonstrate that the pilot concept is proven to operate successfully in a representative range of contexts.

- Proof of concept will have to be demonstrated in projects for which quality improvement is increasingly important. This implies that TA capacity will have to be such that it can handle the measurement and description of process change, particularly, but not exclusively, in the classroom.

  The above will have obvious consequences for DFID contracting.

6. The global education research strategy should include investigation into the conditions for optimising VfM

This research could focus on:

- How VfM might best be conceptualised in the education context. The association between learning achievement and economic growth appears to be established in broad terms. However, a more detailed understanding is required, such as the conditions in which it is preferable to focus primarily on a given level of education and cognitive achievement – i.e. the role of institutional and political factors in determining the degree to which enhanced cognitive achievement translates into economic growth.

- Specific strategies for enhancing learning achievement amongst students with low social capital at secondary level.

- Relationships between culture, pedagogy and economic impact of education.[3]

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[3] See, for example Robin Alexander, 'Culture and Pedagogy' in which the author warns against 'a definition of globalisation that focuses only on its economic and informational aspects as seriously deficient and in need of extension' (p. 19).

1 Introduction

1.1 What was the purpose of the evaluation?

This is an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of DFID's TA in transferring useful knowledge, skills and practices to key personnel in India's secondary education school delivery system, ultimately aiming to improve teaching and learning.

During Inception, it was agreed with DFID India that the focus of the evaluation should be on lessons learning and generating evidence rather than accountability. Two large-scale secondary education programmes – Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme (OGIP) – have their own evaluations to address the issues of accountability. During Inception, further refinements to the purpose were added:

- To use India as a case study and assess the degree to which lessons can be transferred globally to the benefit of DFID's TA programmes.
- To serve as formative learning for the TA agencies themselves.

The study forms part of DFID's response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's (ICAI) 2012 review of the health and education sectors in India.

1.2 What were the nature and objectives of the evaluation?

This study was an innovative hybrid process/performance evaluation, which best matched the requirements of the ToR. Its specific objectives were to establish:

- Methods that work well and those that do not, and under which conditions, in the design and delivery of TA in India.
- Lessons learned to be applied in other contexts.
- Best DFID design and management practices for TA?

1.3 Who were the target audiences for the evaluation?

The target audiences, in line with the defined purposes of the evaluation, were:

- Primarily, DFID itself and education advisers, but also advisers from other sectors, managers and administrators responsible for contracting TA.
- Secondly, TA agencies. However, the report was being written as the agencies were concluding their projects and programmes, so the scope for formative learning was therefore slight. The findings were nevertheless shared and discussed with the agencies.

DFID did not consider the GoI as a target audience. It was made clear to the government at federal and state levels that the evaluation was a form of research directed to improving DFID's own systems of TA delivery.

1.4 Who conducted the evaluation?

ICF, in partnership with Proman and New Concept, were selected as the evaluation partners for DFID India, following a competitive tender process

under the Global Evaluation Framework. Dr. Anthony (Tony) Davison, Team Leader, was the technical lead for the project and was supported by a team of international and Indian experts, including:

- Key Indian sector experts Dr. B. Chandrashekar and Mr. Subir Shukla, who provided invaluable education expertise;
- Mr. Srinivasan Raghavan, who was responsible for analysis of EMIS;
- Mr. Sanjay Tiwari and Ms. Vimala Ramakrishnan, who provided quantitative and qualitative analysis respectively;
- International staff member Ms. Alice Poole, who was responsible for policy and programming engagement governance;
- Education economist Mr. Grayson Clarke (and, later, Mr. Malcolm Mercer), who were responsible for the VfM analysis and
- Ms. Janet Gardener, who was responsible for social development, gender exclusion and tribal exclusion.

Some changes to the team were required due to illnesses and key team changes were agreed with DFID advisers.

1.5 What we were asked to do and why? (See Annex 1 for the ToR)

1.5.1 What is the Indian education policy context?

India has made substantial progress in recent decades in reducing the incidence of poverty and enhancing all human development indicators. Life expectancy has more than doubled since Independence. The proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day has halved and rural poverty has declined by 14% in the same period. In spite of these developments, about half of India's population lives in low income or special category states and gender and ethnic inequalities persist, providing substantial challenges for education policy and planning.

Education in India falls under the jurisdiction of both central and state governments and is known as a 'concurrent subject'. In simple terms, India's education ministry, the MHRD sets curriculum and standards, provides targeted programmatic funding (supplemental to state budgets) and collects and publishes national education statistics. Federal support to states is provided through missions.

Universal enrolment and gender equity have almost been achieved at primary level. At lower secondary level gender equity has been achieved, but nearly 15% of children are out of school. At upper secondary level, 58% of boys and 51% of girls are enrolled. Poverty and membership of disadvantaged groups, such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims are the principal determinants of school participation, while gender becomes an increasingly significant factor from the middle of secondary education. Gender equity has been achieved in learning attainment, according to the latest national assessment data, but India does relatively badly in international learning and national assessment tests. The universalisation of secondary education and enhancing the quality of education at all levels are therefore government priorities. There is substantial variation in enrolment and learning achievement between states.

The main policy goals in the effort to achieve elementary education are to:

- Universalise access and retention,

- Bridge gender and social category gaps and
- Enhance learning achievement.

For secondary education, the broad policy goals are similar, but with less immediate emphasis on universalisation. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, effective 2010, gave effect to the Eighty Sixth Amendment of the Indian Constitution, making the provision of free and compulsory education to all children from ages 6-14 a Fundamental Right.

In order to deliver these priorities substantial challenges need to be overcome. These include:
- The design of strategies for effecting change in the largest and most complex education system in the world (for example, 113 million students of secondary school age);
- Improvements to the quality of teaching within given financial constraints and inadequate preservice and in-service delivery;
- The use of data as evidence to underpin policy and planning strategies;
- Infusing management systems and culture from the school upwards with a focus on student learning and accompanying systems for teacher accountability;
- Overcoming existing constraints of poverty and infrastructure to ensure universal access to secondary education by ensuring that direct and indirect opportunity costs do not block access for a significant minority. In secondary education, rapid expansion has resulted in a more variegated student body for which the schools are not well equipped to handle.

1.5.2 What has been DFID's approach to education support in India?

DFID's general approach is to support the Government of India's (GoI's) education policies, particularly through the medium of successive national reform programmes. DFID India's current TA in the education sector builds on a legacy going back over twenty years. DFID is the only donor currently providing TA in support of government programmes at primary and secondary levels. The team learned that TA provided by DFID in the education sector is highly valued by government, both within the education ministry but also beyond (as in the Department for Economic Affairs).

DFID India's long-term support to the India education sector has supported both cumulative learning and also built a legacy of trust and respect for DFID's contributions under successive Indian governments. Because of the political capital which has been built over time, DFID India has been able to be a grant funder rather than purely providing FA (unlike the World Bank). The EU has recently commenced financing secondary education in India but does not provide resident TA support to the MHRD.

From March 2016, the current financial grant programmes will end and the evolution continues – to a TA-only approach. DFID support has moved from the primary to the secondary education sector. The way in which the new education programme, I-LEARN, has been developed in the design phase reflects the need to operate with only TA as a lever, focusing much more on providing upstream policy advice, and providing technical cooperation in thematic strands (learning assessment, school improvement and leadership) across primary and secondary education (rather than to the primary or secondary sector alone). The new TA approach seeks to provide the technical support that enables more efficient, effective and timely

utilisation of the GoI's own funding. This approach is not therefore about the quantum of money but more about its effective use, in line with ICAI recommendations.

DFID's new TA-only programme I-LEARN has been designed in such a way that it focuses both on issues known to improve learning (Learning assessment, school improvement /inspection and school leadership) and secures DFID representation on the critical Joint Review Missions for both Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) at a primary school level and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) at a secondary level. The intention is therefore to build from firm foundations from over 20 years of support in the overall education sector, and to evolve in light of changing circumstances and conditions.

This study is particularly timely and of interest to DFID India since it is going through a transition from the conventional financial grant aid to TA from post-2015; the study aims to help inform future DFID programming decisions for TA. This is especially the case for India, but may also have wider ramifications for DFID's work in other countries which are transitioning to middle-income status (e.g., Ghana) and so will become recipients primarily of TA.

1.5.3 Why is India suitable as a broader case study?

The DFID TA portfolio in India covers many of the key challenges of secondary education globally and is therefore very suitable as a case study of TA. The Indian education system faces the typical challenges of many Asian or African countries in which DFID works. The dispersed character of much of the rural population and extreme social, linguistic, and economic diversity present huge challenges to education planners and policy makers. Substantial success has been achieved in enhancing participation rates at both elementary and secondary levels, but efforts to enhance learning attainment and improve the quality of teaching and learning have met with only patchy results. Consequently, although there is a group of high achievers, learning achievement as measured by international tests remains low in relation to developed economies.

The TA programme in India is very varied. While the primary focus is on secondary education, thereby possibly anticipating a major future shift in global focus on education, it also has substantial activity at the elementary level. The portfolio encompasses activities focused both on access to education and enhancements to the quality of education delivery. The latter is a more important focus, thereby reflecting recent shifts of global emphasis and possibly anticipating the major focus of DFID's future education sector programme.

It is also of interest because it is operating a country with a federal government system, with very substantial complexity and numbers involved – from the school numbers to the number of educators, and the myriad number of institutions involved including at federal, state and district level. Education is funded on a concurrent basis jointly by the centre and the states. Capacity in the MHRD in Delhi is much higher than in many developing countries. The Ministry sets a clear framework within which TA can operate. It ensures that much of the TA supports national primary or secondary education programmes, or at least falls within nationally defined priorities. The governance framework is therefore somewhat tighter than many countries, but, arguably, is a model that DFID would wish to encourage. Although its size and population are atypical, how the TA agencies have supported such complexity is of interest, especially where DFID works in other large, federal countries – such as Nigeria Pakistan, and Ethiopia.

1.6 What constitutes DFID India's Education portfolio?

1.6.1 What are the key features of DFID's TA programme?

Three features of the TA programme, recognised by DFID, should be highlighted:

- **The MHRD has extremely capable staff who are determined to ensure that donors do not infringe on the sovereignty of national decision-making.** The MHRD has clear, formulated views on the areas in which donors should be engaged. Consequently, DFID's support to secondary education reform is not primarily designed as an integrated portfolio, but in response to specified GoI priorities agreed in consultation with DFID. The degree of linkage between programme components was therefore investigated, with DFID advisers noting their efforts to make the sum greater than the individual parts and to share lessons learning across different components.

- **Current enrolment patterns perpetuate social exclusion and inter-generational poverty.** Patterns of educational disadvantage are very complex, but both boys and girls from scheduled tribes are the most excluded. Gender parity has been practically achieved at a primary level (UNESCO, 2013). An important theme in the DFID programme is to support government (at federal and state levels) to develop systemic approaches to reducing social exclusion, by developing demonstration systems in individual states to be replicated elsewhere.

- **The expansion of enrolments alone will not guarantee improved economic conditions.** There is increasingly strong evidence (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2007), that the cognitive skills of the population, rather than mere school attainment, are powerfully related to individual earnings, the distribution of income and economic growth. DFID has therefore focused on laying the foundations for enhanced achievement, recognising that comprehensively improving cognitive skills is a long-term process.

1.6.2 How big is the DFID education programme?

DFID is contributing £42.6 million in TA and £69.2 million in FA to the secondary education sector in India. This assistance includes six projects with a TA component:

- The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan TA Fund, 2013-2015 (TA plus FA) (RMSA-TCA)
- Teacher Support Programme, 2013-2015 (TA – accountable grant)[4] (TESS India)
- Technical Support to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013-2015 (TA) (MoTA)
- Odisha Incentive Programme, 2012-2016 (TA plus FA) (OGIP)
- The Madhya Pradesh School Quality Assurance Framework, 2012-2015 (TA in the form of an accountable grant) (MP QAF).
- Bihar Language Initiative in Secondary Schools (BLISS), 2012-16 (TA).

In addition to the DFID India funded work listed above, there is also an important DFID research component in Indian education in the form of three ongoing projects. These different programme components operate in different parts of the

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[4] TESS and MPQAF also cover elementary education in addition to secondary education.

education sector, at different levels of government (federal, state and local) and have different funding modalities and operating models. This is reflected in the table below.

Table 1.1   Different components of the education portfolio

	RMSA-TCA	TESS India	MoTA	OGIP	MP-QAF	BLISS
Coverage	Federal/ national	7 States	Federal/ national	1 State (Odisha)	1 State (Madhya Pradesh)	1 State
Project Timescale	2013-15	2013-15	2013-15	2012-16	2012-15	2012-15
Size of Project	£20 million (TA); £60 million (FA)	£10 m	£2.5 m	£18.5 m	£0.8 m	£1.6m (0.5m by British Council)
TA/FA	TA & FA	TA only	TA only	TA & FA	TA only	TA only
Funding Modality	TA & FA	Accountable grant	TA	Combination of TA and FA	Accountable grant	Accountable grant
Managed by	Consortium led by Cambridge Education. Includes IPE Global (management consultancy)	Consortium led by UK Open University, including the British Council and Indian partners (research/ learning organisation, UK charity)	IPE Global (mgt consultancy)	Consortium led by IPE Global (mgt consultancy)	ARK (UK charity)	British Council (UK charity)

Source: Evaluation Team

1.7   What methodology did the evaluation team use?

To find out how any success (or failure) had occurred processes were uncovered, described and related to outcomes.   A mixed **qualitative and quantitative** method approach was deployed, in line with widespread agreement (Caracelli & Greene, 1997; Bennett, 2002; Stern et al, 2012) on the benefits of such techniques. This approach included:

- Outcome mapping as an analytic framework;
- Light-touch surveys; and
- Different qualitative methods.

Outcome mapping, a proven method, was deployed and the team's experience in the design and field work phase confirmed the suitability of it as a framework.[5]   A simplified form of outcome mapping was used to frame evaluation approaches and content. Given the nature of the evaluation, primarily qualitative methods were used:

- Focus group discussion;
- Semi-structured interview;
- Documentation search and analysis.

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[5] 'Outcome mapping' refers to a particular methodology which will be core to this evaluation (Earl et al., 2001; Jones & Hearn, 2009).

There was a focus on the TA agencies, DFID and key boundary partners i.e. individuals, groups or organisations with whom the agencies were in direct contact.

Qualitative investigation was augmented by light-touch surveys to investigate possible indirect and/or catalytic effects, and also to secure wider numbers of cases to support key generalisations.[6] The surveys were primarily quantitative, but also used some qualitative techniques. Purposeful sampling was used. Two rounds of the survey were conducted, at district, block and community levels in two selected states in which the programme operates – Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. The survey team focused on selected boundary partners, to triangulate findings, and downstream stakeholders, to identify catalytic effects and potential impact or sustainability.

Please see Annex 3 for more details on the methodology deployed.

1.8 What quality assurance standards were used and how?

The following quality assurance standards and criteria were followed across the lifecycle of the study:

- Careful planning and preparation of both the study team and respondents;
- Quality control procedures inbuilt into all instruments, protocols and field procedures, to achieve a common understanding of all instruments and indicators;
- Transparency and the creation of a viable audit trail;
- Preparation of reports that provided rich evidence and a clarity about how conclusions are derived from the evidence presented; and
- Triangulation of evidence.

Key stakeholder views were presented and incorporated throughout, using feedback loops built into the process.

The evaluation team thanks the TA agencies and DFID for their time and commentary in developing the messages and recommendations.

Technical standards were maintained. Analyses and conclusions are theory-based. The nature of causality in specific cases have been clearly elaborate. Alternative explanations were considered and presented where appropriate. OECD-DAC Guidelines and Paris Declaration principles were observed. Confidentiality of the participants has been respected – commentary is not attributed to any particular participant.

1.9 What were the limitations of the data?

The study was limited by its timing, the limitations of data and the total time available. The study carried out field work between April and December 2015, which is a brief time to track change in education sector TA. Extensive time series data was not possible. Rich descriptions of key processes and events have been used to mitigate this problem. The total time available was relatively restricted which necessitated focus on a relatively limited range of key questions.

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[6] 'Light-touch surveys' refer to the surveying that was incorporated as part of the methodology, aiming to add some quantitative elements to the analysis which were otherwise largely qualitative.

Existing national data sets were not used: the study generated most of its own data but there were limitations in the quality of data. The TA cycle has proved rather brief in India, with most agencies having only a three-year period to complete their activities. This time period is driven largely by the overarching UK government decision to cease the provision of FA in India by 2016.

The evaluation was limited by the types of TA delivered in the education portfolio – although varied and rich, it consists of six key TA projects from which to form an evidence base. DFID would be advised to commission further evaluation of TA in the education sector and beyond, to supplement the data from which to draw upon.

2 Technical Assistance

2.1 What was learned about Technical Assistance?

What were the key research questions?

- What is technical assistance (TA)?
- Do current international definitions of TA capture the practice of TA in India?
- How can the characteristics of TA delivery in India be defined?

Key lessons learned about technical assistance

1. There is no single form of TA, nor could there or should there be – it varies according to need, scope, context, and implementing agency.

2. However, all TA has certain characteristics in common:

   - A convincing narrative of change is key to successful TA, and focusing on change throughout design and implementation.
   - TA contributes to the development outcomes but does not control them. The activities of endogenous actors are also vital. TA agencies therefore do not fully control the processes or sequences which lead to outcomes.
   - Technical assistance activities are non-linear and not fully predictable. It is therefore hard to capture in linear-based tools (such as logframes).
   - Focus on behaviour change by individuals, groups and organisations, often entailing painful or unwelcome adjustment requiring the deployment of 'soft' skills by the TA agency.
   - The TA team needs to earn credibility and trust with stakeholders through a display of technical competence, timeliness and responsiveness, with a substantial investment of time early in Inception and Implementation.
   - A focus on developing and sustaining relationships with stakeholders through the change process, and building relationships with new stakeholders as they emerge.
   - TA often aims to be catalytic in nature, often followed by replication or scale up. Data generation to understand the nature and functioning of the models of practice being developed by TA is therefore vital.

3. The characteristics of TA determine how it should be planned, managed, evaluated and reviewed.

Source: Evaluation Team

2.2 What are international definitions of TA?

International definitions focus on generic TA.

- The World Bank has defined TA as 'the transfer or adaptation of ideas, knowledge, practices, technologies or skills to foster economic development' or as 'the transfer, adaptation, mobilisation and utilisation of services, skills, knowledge, technology and engineering to build national capacity on a sustainable basis' The purposes of Bank TA were classified as (a) policy development; (b) institutional development; (c) capacity building; (d) project or programme support.
- The OECD defines TA (or technical co-operation) as 'the provision of know-how in the form of personnel, training, research and associated costs' to augment the level of knowledge, skills, technical know-how or productive aptitudes of people in developing countries.'

- Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) has stressed that capacity development is regarded as the general objective of TA and should be both country owned and fully integrated in national development efforts.
- These definitions define the broad goals of TA, but do not consider the processes that are involved, nor the possibility that achieving the specified objectives may be disruptive to individuals, institutions or organisations.

2.3 What are the principal characteristics of DFID India's TA Portfolio?

The goals and the characteristics of the India programme, as they have emerged from the evidence gathered by this study, are, to a large extent, typical of TA as a generic form of development practice.

2.3.1 A principal characteristic of TA in the education sector in India is variety.

The India programme demonstrates that there is no single form of TA. The sub-components of the portfolio include both programme implementation against specified objectives and the iterative development of activities and objectives within broadly agreed thematic areas (the RMSA-TCA programme and MoTA). Within the former, there are programmes for which success is defined as finding the one best technical solution (the OGIP cash transfer programme) and others developing an optimum set of materials to be used in their own way by teachers and other practitioners (the TESS project).

Given the variety of forms of TA within the India education programme, good practice depends upon the nature of the programme and its objectives. Best practice is therefore defined as the optimum fit between the methodologies employed by the TA agency and its programme objectives.

2.3.2 Good TA, in spite of its intrinsic varied nature, focuses on individual, institutional and organisational behaviour change.

Changes to individual or institutional behaviour are central to the notion of capacity building. However, as the India programme demonstrates, building capacity usually requires painful adjustments to individual or institutional behaviour. The need for this is not always understood by participants at the beginning of a programme and, even when it is, it is not always welcomed. Examples from the India education programme include the introduction of a new model of school assessment (SQAF) which requires participants to:

- Abandon past practice;
- Use new forms of teaching implied by the TESS materials;
- Adopt new operating systems, following the introduction of a cash transfer system in Odisha; and
- Accept profound changes to the technical design of the National Assessment System (NAS).

Behavioural change is often painful, but is central to the goal of TA, which has profound consequences for its practice. It places a premium on the deployment of soft skills, especially in enabling individuals and institutions to accept the need for change. These include:

- **Developing a convincing narrative of change**. The India programme suggests that this involves a careful and detailed contextual analysis including:
  - a needs analysis;

– an examination of past efforts in India in the same field; and

– an examination of the policy and institutional context.

The broad outlines of these issues will already have been developed by DFID and incorporated in DFID's Business Case. However, the TA agencies were required to develop a more detailed analysis, as a precondition for specifying a convincing statement of what changes were required (and why) and how these could be achieved.

■ **Using the narrative of change to demonstrate the technical credibility of the TA agency.** All TA agencies working on the India programme have found it necessary to demonstrate their technical, as well as administrative, competence. The credibility of their change narrative was directly linked to how technically competent the agency was regarded by its partners. Even more important, the technical competence of the agency proved critical in sustaining the momentum of change, particularly with sophisticated Indian government counterparts, and resolving the inevitable problems that arose during the change process.

■ **Developing and sustaining relationships with key stakeholders**. These include the individuals, groups and organisations interacting directly with the TA, and those it anticipates influencing and key policy makers and planners at central and state levels. Precisely because behavioural change is difficult, it was crucial to sustain sound working relationships based on mutual trust. Trust had to operate at two levels. Firstly, personal trust had to be developed and sustained, so that partners could trust the agency, believe in its integrity and its ability to maintain confidences. Secondly, at the technical level agencies had to demonstrate that they understood the needs of their partners, could develop appropriate processes to meet those needs in a timely way and could propose convincing technical solutions to complex problems.

2.3.3 TA contributes to change, but is not the whole story

The objectives of TA are rarely achieved solely by the actions of a TA agency, however good that agency might be. In practice, the response of partners are crucial as they control both the pace and nature of change. The external development agency facilitates the process of change by providing access to new resources, ideas or opportunities for a limited period of time.

There are several reasons why the agency is just one of many actors influencing development outcomes, as exemplified by the India programme. Firstly, genuine government to government collaboration has meant that TA inputs in India contributes to the wider reform initiatives planned by the GoI. All TA components were part of wider and longer-term government reforms. Secondly, most components were building upon previous (or current) initiatives undertaken by Indian central or state authorities. TA was providing new solutions to problems that had not been fully resolved in the past, but which needed to be resolved:

■ TESS India provided a wide ranging and pedagogically-robust means of designing materials for teachers and teacher trainers;

■ RMSA-TCA provided a means of incrementally improving the technical quality of data systems;

- MPQAF was designed to address one aspect of enhancing learning achievement, by providing a model of school assessment that would be a primary factor in enhancing school quality improvement plans.
- OGIP acted as a top-up for government scholarships introduced early in the implementation.

2.3.4 TA contributes to, but does not control the final form of, development outcomes.

There is no simple cause and effect relationship between TA inputs and final outcomes. Methodologically, this makes attributing impact to the activities of the TA agency problematic in many (but not all) instances. Attribution requires isolating the key factors that caused the desired results and attributing them to an entity or to a particular set of activities. When development outcomes result from the work of multiple actors, this procedure is no longer valid. This has significant implications for the way in which many donors, including DFID, aim to attribute results and to manage by results specified up front.

2.3.5 TA often aims to be catalytic

The partners of a TA agency are individuals, institutions or organisations with which the agency are in direct contact, and those partners are in contact with multiple other actors. While the primary task of TA is to build the capacity of its direct partners, this is normally to enable those partners to influence the behaviour of their partners downstream.

The potential for a catalytic effect is one of the prime reasons for investing in this form of development assistance, as it offers the enticing prospect of achieving substantial impact for relatively modest initial investment. However, tracing the link between upstream TA contributions and downstream results mediated by TA partners or their partners is complex, making it difficult to attributed value for money (VfM).

In addition, while TA often aims to be catalytic, there are a number of reasons why it does not always achieve these aims, including;

- insufficient project timeframes;
- inadequate resources;
- lack of capacity in boundary partners, and so on.

In these cases, it will have indirect effects that may not be catalytic in nature.

2.3.6 TA activities and processes are non-linear

Donor tools, such as logframes, analysis or results based management, are assume it is possible to predict a causal chain of change linking development inputs to development outcomes. While this may be true for some TA (for OGIP in the India education portfolio, to an extent). This raises the responsibility of implementing a programme with predefined and agreed objectives that do not depend on the success of other concurrent initiatives to achieve the desired outcomes. This is not true for most of DFID India's TA.

Together, the characteristics of TA outlined above means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict the sequence and nature of change that will follow TA inputs. Outcome mapping theory, for example, claims that 'linear cause and effect thinking contradicts the understanding of development as a complex process that takes place in open systems'.

3 Capacity building

3.1 What are the core elements to capacity building?

There are multiple elements to capacity building, a core part of most TA. Those covered in this section of the report include aspects which are especially pertinent to education sector projects, namely:

- the use of cascade training,
- the development of data systems,
- planning, and
- sustainability.

Capacity building refers to the development of individuals, organisations, and institutions. Definitions of capacity include:

a. *Capacity is "the ability of people, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives."* (UNDP, 2002.)
b. *"Capacity development is the process whereby individuals, groups, and organisations enhance their abilities to mobilise and use resources in order to achieve their objectives on a sustainable basis. Efforts to strengthen abilities of individuals, groups, and organisations can comprise a combination of (i) human skills development; (ii) changes in organisations and networks; and (iii) changes in governance/institutional context."* (ADB, 2004).

3.2 What was learned from cascade training?

Key research questions on cascade training were:

- Does India offer any models of good cascades in capacity building, a key element of much TA?
- Are there any lessons on how to design courses associated with cascade training?
- Are there any lessons from India on how to design and implement the monitoring & evaluation of cascade training?

Key lessons learned from cascade training (BLISS and MPQAF)

1. It is important to take time to define what is meant by training and to then proceed iteratively.
2. BLISS reconceptualised the concept of training and developed a continuous professional development model, with formal face-to-face training being just one component
3. MPQAF had a predesignated cascade model. However, the training was improved iteratively through consulting stakeholders and deliberately linking it to a financially sustainable system.
4. The breadth of the design of training is critical. In the case of MPQAF, the model could have been more sustainable and effective had the training for assessors been broadened to include much more emphasis on the theory and practice of pedagogy, and had more attention been paid to the implications for classroom observation. However, this model would have cost more money than appeared to be available.

5. Monitoring & evaluation is vital. BLISS showed that well-conceived process indicators can be measured over time to track the progress of building capacity and changing classroom practice. MPQAF failed to engage in serious monitoring or evaluation so the concept of that assessment model is not yet proven.

Source: Evaluation Team

Training, and cascade training in particular, has been a key feature of DFID India's TA support to the education sector. Two short case studies, for BLISS and MPQAF, are included as Annex 4.

3.3 How has the development of data systems been supported by TA?

Improved data systems are critical in achieving better focused policy and planning. India has useful examples of TA in this area. The questions we asked were:

■ Are there processes developed by TA in India that appear to be effective in developing data systems?

■ What is the relationship between system development and capacity development when improving data?

■ Can data development be viewed as a purely technical exercise or are there broader cultural issues in the workplace that need to be considered?

Key lessons learned from data systems:

1. TA can play a key role in improving the technical design of complex information systems when local specialist knowledge and understanding is not available. This is particularly the case when the TA is building on endogenous efforts in–country and within an overall framework provided by the national government.

2. A TA agency can play a valuable role in supporting intermittent work of top technical specialists, by keeping processes moving and resolving organisational problems.

3. DFID has done well to support the evolution of national assessment systems for the past eight years in India. Complex system development can only be supported effectively if DFID is prepared to stay for the long term.

4. System development and the capacity building of individuals to service the system must progress in tandem. System development without concomitant individual capacity building will not be sustainable. TA agencies must monitor technical specialists accordingly.

5. Development of education management systems should take into consideration the administrative culture in which the information system is embedded. If not, the tendency to reinforce existing administrative practice will restrict the full potential for using information systems to explore new policy and planning options.

Source: Evaluation Team

One of the key thematic areas of RMSA-TCA was the development of data systems at national and state levels as a contribution to improved planning. We present analysis of one example from each level as Annex 5 to illustrate the issues arising from the evidence.

3.4 How has planning been supported by TA?

The India programme offers only one relatively small example of a contribution to improved planning processes, but it an instructive one, with lessons that are applicable in contexts outside of India. It was therefore selected as a case study.

Key research questions asked were:

- Are there any preconditions required before commencing the process of building planning capacity? What happens if all the requisite conditions are not in place?
- Are there approaches to training planners that appear to be effective within a simple system of cascade training?
- Are any systemic changes required for effective training in planning techniques?

Key lessons learned about how planning can be supported by a TA agency:

1. Often the role of TA is to re-introduce good practice from earlier, and even existing, programmes (such as DPEP and SSA, in the instance of RMSA-TCA)

2. There needs to be agreement with key participants at central, state and district levels (in the planning process) before the TA training process starts. Cooperation between agencies is required later.

3. RMSA-TCA has technical expertise in planning and the skills required to train education planners. An understanding of, and expertise in, the use of soft skills is also important.

4. Training itself is insufficient to ensure that ideas and practices have a long-lasting, sustainable and beneficial effect. Embedding lessons requires institutional commitment and reform.

5. It is possible for a professional TA agency to act as an intermediary from outside when it can bring management expertise in the private and public sectors.

6. Most importantly, budgeting needs to accompany the process for decentralised educational planning to have any real meaning i.e. Districts need to have a say in what is realistically needed and how funds can best be spent. This, of course, would not be in the remit of the TA itself.

Source: Evaluation Team

3.4.1 How has RMSA-TCA shed light on key TA aspects in education planning?

A key thematic area of the RMSA-TCA has been the piloting of exemplar practices aimed at strengthening the capacity and systems for results-focused planning. From the report on the medium-term planning pilot (RMSA-TCA, 2014g) we learn that, during the RMSA planning process, a major weakness in the current planning framework was the absence of a longer-term vision and objectives for the period up to 2017. Guidance for RMSA planning was provided by NUEPA's Secondary Education Planning and Appraisal Manual (Zaidi et al., 2012), very much in the manner given for DPEP and SSA. This was geared predominantly towards completing the Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWPB) at district and state levels. This manual is technically robust and theoretically sound but has been criticised, by people on the ground, as non-implementable. For example, it assumes that district planning committees comprise full-time professionals with the technical capacity and competence to carry out or delegate all the activities necessary in completing a

comprehensive AWPB. In practice, the District Education Officer (DEO), possibly with some assistance, almost single-handedly completes the AWPB, more or less in the form of a line item budget, in continuation of the previous AWPB. This is then submitted to the state authorities where it is combined with the other district and project AWPBs. It is completed with analyses and diagnoses, often outsourced or cut and pasted from other documents, to form the State AWPB of some 200 pages. The report (RMSA-TCA, 2014g) continues, 'The current annual planning process works in a vacuum and would benefit from a three-year planning cycle, reviewed and revised annually. This in turn requires the completion of the proposed state and district perspective plans, but to be referenced annually and not be a one-off exercise.'

3.4.1.1 *The nature of TA support*

To address the above challenges, two areas of support were suggested:

- Reviewing ways in which RMSA-TCA might support states and districts in preparing perspective plans, aligned to the AWPB; and
- Guiding a pilot decentralised planning process in a few states.

Decentralised planning was introduced under DPEP (Mercer, 2001) and was maintained under SSA. However, it appears that only through the intervention of RMSA-TCA was decentralised planning seen to be the way forward in RMSA. This means that one of the frequent roles of TA is to re-introduce previous good ideas.

Please see Annex 6 for more details.

Sustainability is dealt with in the chapter on sustainability.

4   Policy Dialogue

Successful policy dialogue that creates space for new ideas and practices is an essential pre-condition for TA. The India programme showed many successful examples of dialogue that moved the boundaries of discourse and was therefore selected as a thematic area to investigate.

Key evaluation questions were:

- Are there any preconditions for successful policy dialogue?
- What is the role of proven technical expertise in creating the potential for policy dialogue, particularly with regard to defining the nature of the development problem being addressed?
- Are there any inter-personal processes that seem to be effective in creating the trust essential for dialogue?
- Are institutional arrangements a significant factor in generating dialogue?

Key Lessons learned about Policy Dialog:

1. Policy dialogue is an iterative process which reflects changing personnel, governments, priorities and processes.

2. Evidence from India highlighted at least two preconditions for TA to engage in policy dialogue;

   (a) a clear policy framework for TA operations agreed between DFID and government (either at a federal or state-level);

   (b) TA products that are not pre-defined. A tight definition of the results of an intervention inhibits policy related discussion.

3. Policy dialogue does not occur by chance. Space for dialogue has to be proactively created. An example from India is the Joint Review Mission mechanism in which DFID and the TCA participate together with government and other donors. The practice is worthy of more universal application.

4. Research is vital to establish the credibility of the TA as a participant in policy dialogue, and helps create the options within which that dialogue is created. Trust is also needed, in dealing with sensitive issues (such as national assessment).

5. A blend of specialised in-house technical personnel and specialist external technical inputs is needed to generate appropriate products for the policy dialogue. This also helps by combining an understanding of the local context and of practice in different countries/regions that could be adapted to the local situation.

6. Governance structures are significant in creating platforms on which policy dialogue can take place. DFID should carefully consider governance models in each context if it wishes to engage in policy discussion. This has been done in India. The Joint Review Missions of India are a proven formula that can be replicated elsewhere.

7. The policy brief is an excellent instrument for disseminating ideas and generating policy debate. However, the TA needs to develop a sophisticated understanding of how to interpret research evidence for briefs are to serve a positive purpose. This also helps DFID support disseminating the brief to the

> most receptive audience in the most appropriate way and at the most appropriate time.

Source: Evaluation Team

Policy dialogue is the process in which TA personnel (including DFID advisers) engage in discussion with decision makers about changes to policy or practice. Evidence presented by the agencies and other informants suggests that the process is more complex than it might appear. We will focus below on RMSA-TCA and MPQAF as offering the most instructive forms of policy dialogue within the portfolio.

4.1 What are the necessary preconditions for policy dialogue?

The India programme suggests that two preconditions are significant.

I.   *The TA agency needs to be working within a broad policy framework.* For example, discussions between DFID and the GoI had established a broad policy framework within which the RMSA-TCA could be accommodated. According to a senior government source:

> *"MHRD had to set a framework based on our own analysis of what we could and couldn't do. MHRD required a more demand driven, hands-on policy driven engagement, with great emphasis on contextualisation… What I couldn't do, they (the TA) had to do."*
>
> *Senior Government Source*

II. *It is important to define areas of activity rather than final products.* RMSA-TCA and MPQAF were able to enter into policy dialogue because, although their areas of activity were defined, their final products were not. A relatively tight definition of the anticipated product of the intervention, as in the case of OGIP or TESS, possibly inhibits the scope for policy discussion. By contrast, while the products of RMSA-TCA emerged from consultation with the GoI on the thematic areas in which they could engage, the final products were not initially defined. These could emerge from the process put in place by the agency. There was a parallel situation with QAF. The Government of Madhya Pradesh was committed to raising learning achievement and saw the creation of an assessment system as integral to the achievement of a broader policy goal. Moreover, within the broad policy remit, the government was open to ideas on how an assessment system might be developed. For both TCA and MPQAF therefore there was a *policy space* they could inhabit.

4.1.1 Example from the TA support to MoTA about changing and embedding policy institutionally

> **Changing and Embedding Policy**
>
> **TA agency IPE Global worked closely, and iteratively, with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), to support a paradigm shift in how education for tribal children was conceived, delivered and managed.** The TA team aimed to improve the planning and use of the MoTA's limited resources, through increasing convergence with other national programmes, such as

SSA and RMSA, and systematically measuring tribal children's educational outcomes.

The earlier process was the implementation of several small, stand-alone schemes, with inadequate management and monitoring mechanisms. While states are the implementing agencies for the MoTA's education related programmes, the Ministry did not put in place systems to witness the implementation of those schemes and track the benefits flowing from them. Implementation of about 11 MoTA education-related schemes experienced the following challenges:

- Scheme outlays were too small for any visible impact;
- Multi-year funding was not on offer;
- There was duplication of schemes by line ministries; The number of schemes confused both beneficiaries and field-level bureaucrats. Funds under various schemes are released by the Ministry at different points in time, reaching state governments and, ultimately the field offices, at different times and often very late. Sometimes funding reached the implementing levels as late as the third or fourth quarters of the financial year, which could defeat the purpose and objective of the scheme.

The re-engineered scheme was to holistically plan for education of tribal children and optimise the use of the MoTA's limited resources. In doing so, the TA agency recognised there was a crucial need to increase convergence with the MHRD and between state Departments of Education and Tribal Welfare. Ideally, both the MHRD and MoTA should work jointly towards developing comprehensive tribal education plans. In time, this is likely to evolve into joint planning, appraisal, approval, implementation and monitoring processes. Such collaboration at the national level should resonate at the state level as well. While the bulk of funding would come from SSA/MDM/RMSA/Teacher Education, MoTA interventions will focus on critical gap-filling in TSP areas.

The TA Team worked with the Ministry to utilise the experience gained in the course of implementing integrated education programmes (SSA and RMSA). These indicated that umbrella schemes enable improved use of funds, better holistic planning, appraisal and approval, efficiencies in management, monitoring and supervision and better financial discipline. Thus replacing the MoTA's existing multiple schemes with an Umbrella Scheme was proposed, designed and is being implemented. This provides opportunities to:

- Optimise the use of funds available for education in the MoTA;
- Cater to the diverse needs of states;
- Rationalise the schemes to streamline management, monitoring and supervision;
- Reduce administrative effort and costs;
- Bring fluidity in inter-component fund flows, and
- Embed systems of financial control and discipline.

The umbrella scheme was institutionalised, given that time-bound systems for formulating plans by states, and their appraisal and approval by the Ministry, had been established. All components plans

are sanctioned together at a Project Approval Committee, headed by the Secretary. This includes education-related and other plans. This discipline, and the consequent timely authorisation and earlier release of funds, allows multiple schemes to be subsumed under one umbrella. Management (including technical support for planning & appraisal), monitoring, supervision at implementation level, impact & process evaluation and research activities are also being supported through the TA agency and the Ministry.

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4.2 How can research play a vital role in creating space for policy dialogue?

Policy dialogue is a deliberate product of TA agency strategies supported by DFID advisers. According to a senior government source, the TCA have *"created their own platform for policy dialogue and the introduction of new concepts in the policy debate.*" QAF's range of policy discussion is more limited, being restricted to the design of an assessment system, but is still important.

In order to enter into policy dialogue, agencies had to establish professional credibility across the portfolio. *Trust*, in addition to technical understanding, had to be established. The MHRD had to be convinced that the TCA 'understood our needs' and was willing to stay within the overall framework and regulations, as determined by the Ministry.

Providing trust had been established, research was vital. Both agencies undertook extensive research prior to entering into discussion with stakeholders or prior to implementation. Research and prospecting for ideas was the foundation for policy dialogue. RMSA-TCA undertook extensive needs analysis in each of their agreed thematic areas. This involved identifying, in consultation with local specialists, key systemic issues for attention and the design of processes and sequences of activity to take matters forward. Thus, the development of the NAS was proceeded by a set of incremental steps that were technically justified and feasible to undertake.

Key to the process was:

■ The ability to strategise;

■ The freedom to identify opportunities for systemic change; and

■ The capacity to persuade others of the desirability of the strategies proposed.

Position papers were frequently produced at the end of needs assessment or at crucial junctures in the subsequent process.

MPQAF offers a simple model to surface ideas globally and provide a platform for policy discussion. The Government of Madhya Pradesh was well aware that learning attainment in the state needed to be improved, but had conducted a lot of experimentation without visible results. They wished to address the causes of low levels of learning attainment and were open to evidence as to how inspection regimes might help. The TA team laid the foundation for policy dialogue by conducting a global and national search of approaches to assessment and by studying the means by

which OFSTED models could be adapted to Indian conditions. They were then in a position to offer the government an informed view, with alternative policy options, based on a wide range of evidence.

4.2.1 How the research was generated: the role of specialist technical consultants

The research was not necessarily undertaken by the core TA team. Both agencies employed consultants linked to the core team. For QAF, the most fundamental work was research into assessment models throughout the world. For TCA, the needs assessment process generated a detailed understanding of the current context and of the strategies that could be prioritised. Needs assessment therefore was the tool by which the TCA responded to the MHRD's wish for contextualisation. In both cases, the research process was undertaken in close collaboration with the GoI/state government – research was commissioned, with government consent, and often involved government research institutions. It aimed to promote greater shared ownership and more chance of acting upon findings.

The TCA also employed quality consultants over considerable stretches of time, as part of its research based strategy to establish credibility. This allowed the consultants to:

- Consolidate their own relationships and understanding of context;
- Work closely with the TA team and built their technical understanding; and, most importantly
- Deliver quality, policy-relevant research.

An example of the manner in which extended involvement of key consultants enhanced the policy dialogue is Keith Lewin's work (RMSA-TCA, 2015a) on the implications of demographic trends for school planning. The results of this were used by the TA team in dialogue with the government.

4.2.2 The roles of the core in-house TA team

The RMSA-TCA in-house national consultants also played a crucial role. Stakeholders appreciated their trustworthiness, flexibility, technical competence and willingness to work within agreed frameworks. National TCA staff understood both the technical issues and the evolving national context. They were able to mediate effectively between international consultants and senior stakeholders.

The RMSA-TCA team also understood the next incremental steps in the system improvement process and had a longer-term perspective on the process of change in each of the major thematic areas. This lent credibility to the suggestions they fed into the policy debate. The TCA team considered that an important function of the Team Leader was to be strong technically and to have the capacity to understand how the reform process might evolve over the medium term. The TCA was able to inject ideas into the policy debate by:

- Feeding off the technical ideas of its specialist consultants,
- Having the technical capacity to translate those ideas into policy suggestions and processes, and
- Having the credibility gained by its research products and day to day interactions with partners.

It had earned the right to do this, and a number of its important suggestions have been accepted.

MPQAF: The TA itself did not have research expertise but ensured it was available. There are differences in scale here – the RMSA-TCA was an investment in the millions, whereas MPQAF was in the thousands. They used consortium members, including OFSTED and their in-house consultant, to review the global evidence on inspection, including reviewing the impact of OFSTED style systems across geographies. They combined international expertise with local experience of defining rating systems, using a local consortium member. They used the practical experience of another consortium member (CFBT) to review the results. The research was very specific. It was also designed with the intention of producing a practical outcome acceptable to policy makers. The research results were used by national and international specialists to brainstorm an inspection framework for Madhya Pradesh that took into account both international evidence and local context. The research did not define the final product, but provided a basis for several experimental iterations of the possible model before an acceptable product was defined. The government of Madhya Pradesh was closely involved in all stages of the research and field trialling. Policy options were given to the government at each stage.

4.2.3   The importance of governance structures

The RMSA-TCA benefitted from institutional mechanisms that provided platforms for policy dialogue, including:

- The biannual Joint Review Mission (JRM), discussed above. The importance of the mechanism for both DFID and the TCA was underscored by a senior government informant who stated that "*whatever DFID or TCA stress in the JRM we try to translate into practical realities*". While this may be overstating the position, it illustrates the importance of the platform provided by the JRM.
- An Executive Committee, composed of senior stakeholders, which is used as a forum for discussing ideas and proposing agendas. The TCA annual workplan is discussed by this Committee and this provides an opportunity for wider discussion.

4.2.4   The Policy Brief

RMSA-TCA has used research findings to establish their technical credentials. It has also used research to feed into the policy debate more directly. Position papers and reports have been used to discuss and summarise policy options, particularly for advancing the debate on system change (as for Madhya Pradesh data development). However, the RMSA-TCA team was strongly encouraged by DFID's Education Adviser to focus on concise and challenge-focused policy briefs. These were to be non-prescriptive in offering recommendations but to suggest options from other international contexts couched as short-, medium- and long-term options to policy makers and planners.[7]

> **The Policy Brief: A Key Instrument for Promoting Dialogue and Disseminating Ideas**
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> The TCA has employed the technique of policy briefs to advance the policy discourse. The briefs are concise statements of significant policy problems or issues. They are well illustrated with infographics. The text is modest in length. The conclusions, based on substantial research, are clearly defined.

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[7] See http://www.heart-resources.org/blog/researchers-asboth-do-better/

The briefs enable planners and policy makers to consider issues that might previously have passed them by. In some cases, planners might be introduced to new concepts or fresh evidence against to use in conducting their activities.

The technique is simple but extremely effective. The briefs are prepared with clarity and precision, and constitute an important means of bringing research and the policy agendas closer together.

The translation of, often complex, multi-faceted and ambiguous, research findings into policy briefs is not easy. The TCA issued an important paper demonstrating that small schools performed below the level of larger schools. This may well be true and, if so, is an extraordinarily important finding for planners. If translated into practical realities it might result in substantial efficiency gains – especially in a country where the future cohorts are not going to increase markedly. However, it was not clear whether size or associated factors (rural locations etc.) were behind poor performance. The paper drew attention to the fact that small schools are not able to command adequate resources and this would contribute to low levels of learning. A full understanding of these issues would require careful multivariate statistical analysis.

Source: Evaluation Team

5 Gender and Social Exclusion

Key evaluation questions were:

- How did the programme context enable a focus on gender and equity issues?
- How was the programme designed to incorporate gender and equity issues, at both a targeted and universal level?
- What were the key aspects in programme implementation that were particularly important to address challenges around gender and social exclusion?

5.1 What was the programme context?

The DFID education portfolio in India was designed in response to DFID's operational plan for India, the GoI national frameworks and priorities and state government priorities, normally selected from national priorities. The areas in which DFID could work in India were very much a result of a continuing dialogue between the GoI and DFID. The degree to which gender and equity concerns were explicitly built into the programme resulted from this dialogue. Perhaps as a result, gender and equity issues do not feature as centrally in the India portfolio as in some other DFID programmes. However, some projects within the portfolio have a significant focus on gender and social exclusion, especially the OGIP programme, which was explicitly designed to support girls and children from scheduled castes and tribes.

Key Lessons learned about gender and social inclusion:

1. Political compromise is often necessary to translate ministerial ideas into practice. Gender and social exclusion norms & policies differ between DFID, the GoI and states. Securing a viable set of compromises between key stakeholders is an essential role of advisers.

2. OGIP was specifically targeted both to support girls and also the most marginalised communities (schedule tribe children) in communities in Odisha and the TA agency's efforts to have highly dedicated local block co-ordinators living in their communities and actively working with individual families and parts of the communities to work through the challenges of registration for the certificate were impressive, and indicates the scale of committed and contextually-aware locally-based labour required to target the hardest to reach children.

3. Even sound pedagogically materials may not be neutral in their impact across different ethnic and socio-economic groups. Proving the efficacy of the materials in a range of school settings should establish that their introduction will not widen existing disparities. Ameliorative strategies may need to be attempted.

4. TA can contribute to developing data systems that provide an evidence base for policies and planning initiatives in favour of disadvantaged groups. Purely technical solutions need to be complemented by changes in the planning culture.

5. One of the most intractable issues of secondary education is the relatively high proportion of students who enter secondary school with inadequate knowledge and skills to benefit fully from what the school has to offer. Adjusting secondary school norms, procedures and expectations, to meet this

problem, is a major challenge, if equity issues are to be addressed. TA under TESS India engaged in a major experiment in Odisha to mitigate this problem. It has:

- Demonstrated that better, culturally sensitive materials can attract marginalised groups and lead to better pedagogy in some classrooms.
- Not succeeded in integrating the scheme into government policies and priorities, although this is essential in achieving such difficult reform.
- Not succeeded in finding a cost-effective means of building teacher capacities to cope with students with inadequate knowledge and skills.

Source: Evaluation Team

5.2 How was gender and social exclusion incorporated into the overall portfolio design?

Successful programmes respond to wider (e.g. national and donor) policy frameworks. Programme designs which address issues of gender and social exclusion are best supported by more focused social analysis including, where possible, evidence from research and piloting which help to define practical programme approaches. Programmes respond to wider development policy frameworks such as the international Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or within national or donor strategies. In the case of DFID India, the framework is the DFID Operational Plan for India whilst the national frameworks are the Government of India 5-year Plans, national sector strategies and the specific State policies.

The strategic approach of DFID's education portfolio has been to address both demand-side issues (largely barriers to access to education) and supply-side issues (largely quality and infrastructure involving planning and training). RMSA-TCA is an example of a supply-side programme and OGIP focuses on addressing demand issues.

Likewise, within the portfolio, there are programmes which *target* the needs of specific gender and social groups and *universal* programmes which provide for all social groups within the beneficiary population. OGIP is an example of a targeted programme (for children from scheduled caste and tribal communities) and TESS is an example of a universal programme.[8]

The DFID business case for OGIP contains a focused analysis of a key development shortcoming highlighted in national policy i.e. the deficiencies in education outcomes for children, especially girls, from scheduled caste and tribal communities. The analysis considers the reasons for disadvantage including the double disadvantage suffered by girls from SC/ST communities (Business Case and annex on gender discrimination). Specific intervention design was supported by focused research in Madhya Pradesh which backed up arguments for targeted top-up amounts for girls; and a pilot project in Rayagada District in Odisha which provided 'proof of concept' including important lessons on the level of payments needed, the frequency of payment and the need for financial literacy learning for girls.

In the case of universal programmes, such as RMSA and TESS, the amount of targeting varies. For RMSA, the business case analyses social differences in

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[8] In many cases, universal programmes may also have targeted outputs or activities within them. In addition, all DFID programmes are advised to ensure that their monitoring data is gender-disaggregated and, in some contexts, to ensure that data for specific social groups e.g. ethnic or religious minorities, are also disaggregated.

educational attainment. It incorporates targeting of DFID resources in low enrolment/low income states and seeks to influence the national programme with gender and social inclusion objectives derived from the analysis e.g. recruitment of women teachers and drop-out rates of children from scheduled caste and tribal communities. TESS is similarly geographically targeted located in seven focus States. The contextual analysis in the business case does not include analysis of social differences in educational performance nor the impact of differing social, linguistic and economic conditions in different geographical areas. It is understood that there was no input from a social development adviser in the design of TESS.

The DFID business case also requires a risk assessment, which raised the potential risk of societal opposition to the targeted OGIP programme. This assessment presumably helped to reinforce the need for a community awareness component within OGIP focussing on raising awareness about the scholarships, the importance of regular school attendance and seeking to influence traditional gender attitudes towards education.

5.3   What was learned from programme approaches?

Programme approaches require negotiation to ensure shared ownership and commitment; and negotiation may dilute contested objectives such as those addressing gender and social exclusion. The approaches adopted by the programmes have clearly been developed beyond the business case and ToRs. This has been a negotiated process (between the TA, DFID, GoI and the State governments). This seems to have been particularly important in the case of the targeted programme OGIP where there seems to have been some ambiguity or lack of a shared vision on the component for learning hubs. For some the focus was to be on girls' empowerment (e.g. confidence, financial literacy), but for others the focus was more on academic achievement and remedial learning for boys and girls. The current approach is based on a revised concept which was developed through a workshop of stakeholders during the inception phase. The workshop helped formulate a concept paper which provided three strands i) to provide remedial learning in 5 subjects (English, Oriya, Physical Science, Life Sciences, Mathematics) covering grade 5 to 8 and providing a bridging course to Grade 9; ii) Training in use of audio-visual techniques and computer aided learning; and iii) improving the soft skills of girls (debates, reading clubs, career counselling, cooking). There were 100 learning hubs for boys and girls (rather than the envisaged 1000 girls' clubs).

Programme approaches can be and have been further refined through research components within the programme, although these may need a longer programme duration to learn lessons from implementation. The OGIP has a research component including studies on i) learning levels of tribal children (sample studies in 10 States); ii) on the status of multi-level language education across the States and the inclusion of tribal languages; iii) facilities available to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in schools and hostels supported by Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA); iv) dropout of ST students; and v) best practices in education of tribal children.

Clearly these represent important evidence-gathering for future programme approaches and for policy influencing: however, it is unlikely that the studies were be able to benefit OGIP that substantially given the end-date of 2016. The questions for future evaluation will be i) how, and the extent to which, the TA team can use the research results; and ii) what is the impact on the programme in terms of ensuring that resources have been directed where most needed. The question also arises for DFID whether in future such research can be conducted during project

design or inception in order to better influence resource allocation during programme implementation.

Programmes support the development of governments' own analytical tools and evidence-gathering: these can be successful in influencing policy, planning and more equitable resource allocation. The RMSA-TCA team demonstrated the importance and use of data as a means of examining *inequity in education outcomes*, and not only for standard administrative tasks, such as infrastructure planning or the monitoring of scholarship schemes**. All data sets developed by RMSA-TCA have disaggregated data by gender and socio-economic groups. Social variables can be associated with learning outcomes that, in the case of NAS, are robust.

In principle, this socially sensitive approach allows planners to identify the degree to which boys and girls, and different socio-economic groups are progressing over time, as well as their relative levels of academic performance. This constitutes a sound basis for subsequent evidence-based planning in favour of disadvantaged groups.

However, data collection and analysis has not yet been taken to the micro-level. The processes of teaching and learning have not yet been examined to determine the degree to which the quality of teaching acts as an independent variable. While the NAS has sound academic data, this is not the case for state-based MIS systems. Work remains to be done on changing the culture in which data is used and analysed. However, RMSA-TCA is building foundations for a data system that can be used to plan for reductions in inequity.

5.4 What was learned from performance monitoring, evaluation and programme response to M&E?

Disaggregation of performance monitoring data is critical to distinguish varying performance among different social groups or geographic areas. This disaggregation is critical to support gender and social inclusion objectives and recommendations for corrections to programme approaches. The OGIP has monitoring data which is disaggregated by social group and geographic area and a research component. Both of these are enabling the programme to identify some important causes of exclusion. The flexibility of the TA team (supported by flexible management from DFID) has meant that it has also been able to quickly develop responses. The issues and responses have included:

- Drop-out of students, particularly girls from tribal communities, at Grades 6-8 (before the scholarship scheme at Grade 9). The TA team suggested raising awareness of the scholarship scheme by advertising on the back cover of Grades 6-8 textbooks, which was done.

- Dropout of girls identified the need for girls' toilets and girls' safety initiatives. A toilet construction and maintenance programme was initiated.

- A pilot programme for safe transport to school has revealed public transport with chaperone to be the preferred option (this avoids staying away from home and the risks for girls associated with hostels). These results were shared with state government.

- The school-based data for scholarship payments has helped to pick-up drop-outs and out-of-school children. The OGIP Block Coordinators reported that "block officers follow up on students after 3 months below 70% attendance".

The regular annual reviews required of DFID projects have provided the occasion to make some important practical recommendations with respect to gender and social exclusion. In the case of OGIP, the reviewers analysed the monitoring data (MIS) and identified that *"there are still pockets where the drop-out rates of girls and boys continue to be high, such as in the coastal regions with high job opportunities; children of parents engaged in migrant work; street children in urban areas and children with disability".* The recommendation was for the development of *"a clear strategy and mechanism to target specific pockets of children at high risk of falling through the cracks like children belonging to migrant workers, child labour, tribal girls".* In practice, this mechanism was largely fulfilled by the exertions of block officers.

DFID's oversight has also been important in negotiating politically difficult issues, in order to enable the issue of caste certificates by the District Education Officer for OGIP, which was the key document required before a scholarship could be provided. More broadly, the state-level DFID office was able to advise the TA team on local politics and especially caste politics in Orissa, where some sensitivity is required.

5.5 Expertise and composition of TA teams in regard to gender and social inclusion

The effectiveness of TA teams, particularly with regard to gender and social inclusion issues, is likely to depend on having a gender-balanced team including social analysis and gender expertise The pilot of the cash transfer programme undertaken prior to inception of the OGIP enabled the TA team to plan adequately with local knowledge and gave them a reasonable understanding of the core expertise that they needed. The OGIP TA team has engaged local staff and therefore had a very good capacity for community engagement (based on interview with Regional, District and Block Coordinators). However an absence of women or staff from tribal communities may hinder engagement with key beneficiaries. Whilst the Block Coordinators felt that it was important for men to be able to speak to parents and elders, they acknowledged that it was less easy for men to involve girls.

A core of local consultants is also important to ensure understanding within the TA team of local social and political contexts and to help engagement with local partners and beneficiaries. The RMSA-TCA team has been able to engage closely with government and, by providing the relevant expertise and advice when required, is finding some success in the introduction of more robust tools for planning and budgeting, and particularly in the provision of evidence of inequitable education outcomes and distribution of resources. The TESS India team, on the other hand, took some time to realise the importance of local expertise to ensure that advice given by TA is relevant and appropriate (e.g. teaching materials appropriate for local languages and culture), and the programme was therefore slow to be able to engage government adequately in the programme.

Please see Annex 8 for the case study for more specific details on gender and social exclusion in the portfolio.

6 Value for Money

Value for money is a key DFID tool, but from the evidence of India, the review team consider that the concept of VfM needs to be made more relevant to the design and implementation of TA.

Key questions were:

- Can global research assist DFID to identify and measure the VfM of education programmes and projects?
- What are the difficulties in defining and measuring VfM in education projects?
- Can formative and summative evaluation assist in evaluating VfM, particularly its effectiveness?
- Does the quality of an adviser important affect VfM?

Key Lessons learned from Value for Money:

1. Recent research has demonstrated a strong link between cognitive improvement and economic growth. Reverse causality does not apply. This suggests that measured learning gains would be the single most important proxy for estimating an education project's contribution to poverty reduction and VfM effectiveness.

2. VfM analysis is inhibited in the present study by:

   (a) the relative lack of relevant formative evaluation;

   (b) the slow speed with which education results mature; and

   (c) the inherent difficulties of estimating the contribution of a TA project to a wider result (such as learning gains).

3. TESS India has the greatest potential for substantial VfM effectiveness. It will be possible to construct a robust statistical model to measure learning gains and therefore imputed economic growth in ex-post evaluation.

4. Gains to cognitive achievement can probably be accelerated by DFID, but the India programme suggests that the degree to which this can be the case depends upon credible, experienced advisers who are allowed reasonable time frames to assist complex processes to come to fruition.

Source: Evaluation Team

In this section, we use data from India in order to illustrate some of the difficulties in applying the concept of VfM to TA in the education sector. We also suggest potential means of resolving at least some of the problems raised by reference to research on the relationship between cognitive skills and economic growth, with particular reference to effectiveness and cost effectiveness.

6.1 What is DFID's approach to VfM?

DFID's Approach to Value for Money (VfM) (DFID 2011a) is the only general document available that attempts to describe what VfM is for DFID. It uses three examples from education. **Its 3Es framework outlines the parameters for measuring VfM**. We look briefly at each of these in relation to DFID-India TA programmes, in order to draw some general conclusions. Particular questions asked are:

- **Economy:** Are we or our agents buying appropriate quality inputs, at the right price? (Inputs are things such as staff, consultants, raw materials and capital that are used to produce outputs).
- **Efficiency:** How well do we or our agents convert inputs into outputs? (Outputs are results delivered by us or our agents to an external party. We or our agents exercise strong control over the quality and quantity of outputs.)
- **Effectiveness:** How well are the outputs contribute to poverty reduction? (Note that in contrast to outputs, we or our agents do not exercise direct control over outcomes.)
- **Cost-effectiveness:** How much poverty reduction does an intervention achieve relative to the inputs that we or our agents invest in it?

6.2 Difficulties in applying the concept of VfM to TA

The India programme illustrates the typical issues that arise in applying VfM to TA in the education sector:

- **Definition of outputs and outcomes**. The terms used by DFID to describe VfM are closely linked to the logframe approach to project or programme planning. This stresses the initial clarity needed on realistic outputs and outcomes achievable from an intervention – the value in the equation. The effectiveness of the India programme is hard to measure given how variable outcomes and outputs are specified. Partial definitions of intended outputs or outcomes make it hard to analyse VfM efficiency or effectiveness, as it is not clear how to interpret the result.

- **Causation is difficult to justify when using multiple intervening variables.** As already stressed, TA normally makes a contribution to an educational result, but is not normally entirely responsible for the result. A strong form of causation (A causes B) is therefore unusual. Together with lack of clarity in the definition of outputs and outcomes, partial causation is difficult to identify within a VfM framework. It is not clear what proportion of any measured result can be attributed to the expenditures incurred by the intervention.

- **There is only a loose association between expenditure and performance in the education sector, in both developed and developing countries.** The evidence suggests that just increasing spending within current education systems is unlikely to enhance student performance. Expansions of inputs, such as physical expansion of educational facilities and increased spending per student, do not appear to enhance student's competencies or cognitive skills. The effects of lack of substantial resource in general, and class size in particular, have been found across the developing world, including in Africa (Kremer 2003), Latin America (Mizals and Ramagura 2002) and East Asia (Wossmann 2005). These findings do not imply that resources do not matter. The availability of textbooks, for example, has been shown to make a difference to student learning. They do imply however that VfM in the education sector cannot be assumed. The basic problem is that the pathways to change in the education sector are not always clear, partially because of difficulties in establishing causation. This leads to difficulties in targeting resources where they can make a measurable difference.

- **The results of education projects and programmes are often slow to mature.** Even if outputs and outcomes are clearly defined, and causal links plausibly identified, the time taken for results to appear in the education sector means that valid VfM analysis is rare in the lifetime of a TA. In the case of the India

programme, only OGIP has sufficient partial data to allow preliminary judgements to be passed on its efficiency and effectiveness.

6.3 How can research findings in the economics of education contribute to resolving these problems?

Successfully applying VfM concepts to the education sector requires operationalising the concept of effectiveness. Effective educational interventions are necessary to achieve economy and efficiency. Since the DFID definition of effectiveness is appropriately linked to poverty reduction, a link between educational and economic growth and income distribution is essential.

Recent research has provided robust evidence of the link between education and economic growth.[9] In contrast to former research, which focused on the relationship between school attainment and economic growth, more recent research has examined the long-term relationship between cognitive skills (as measured and defined by international achievement tests such as PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS) and economic growth. The main findings are as follows:

- **There is a very strong relationship between the level and development of cognitive skills and economic growth.** Cognitive skills are important in explaining international differences in long run growth rates. The data derives from estimates for 50 countries with cognitive skill and economic data from 1960-2000. Cognitive skills were measured by taking simple averages of all observed maths and science scores from 1964-2003. One standard deviation in test scores is associated with a two percentage point higher average annual growth rate in GDP per capita over 40 years. The association holds even if the effect of institutional economic frameworks is taken into account. Reverse causality was shown not to apply (i.e. that economic growth promoted an increase in cognitive performance). There is a relationship between the quality of schooling and school attainment. Enhanced cognitive development is associated with greater attainment. Moreover, the greater the cognitive development early in school, the greater the subsequent gains.

- **Both basic skills and higher cognitive achievement**, defined as 400 and 600 on the international test scales, **contribute to economic growth**. Although the patterns are consistent, the relative strength of the relationships, and their circumstances, warrant further investigation.

- **There is no similarly consistent relationship between school attainment (i.e. the average number of years spent in school) and economic growth** While increases in the quantity of schooling appear to be associated with enhanced economic growth, the strength of the association approaches zero once the effect of cognitive improvement is taken into account.

6.4 What does this mean for VfM analysis in the Education Sector?

- **Measured learning gains are a secure proxy indicator for VfM effectiveness.** The most important implication of the research is that cognitive gains resulting from a project are a reasonably secure measure of effectiveness, defined as

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[9] See for example, Acemoglu et al 2001, 2005; Barro 1997; Glasner et al 2004; Hanushek and Kinko 2000; Hanushek and Zhang 2009; Hanushek and Woessmann 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Sala-I-Martin et al 2004 Vandenbussche 2006; Woessmann 2003a, 2003b

contributing to poverty reduction. Not every education project will result in a standard deviation increase in learning achievement, but the research cited above suggests that even a quarter standard deviation gain will result in cumulative gains of 0.5 % per annum. Only a few countries in the group studied have achieved a full standard deviation gain.

- **Attributing learning gain to any DFID intervention depends on the context.** Given the arguments advanced in this report, it is unlikely that the full extent of any learning gain could be attributed to a project, but at least the process for making VfM judgements is placed on a sound empirical footing.

- **The process of reform leading to enhanced cognitive achievement can be lengthy.** Moreover, if the reforms succeed the impact of enhanced cognitive achievement on economic growth will not be immediate. However, if the impact on the economy is proportional to the increase in learning achievement (an assumption yet to be validated) even relatively modest gains in cognition can, in principle, be modelled in terms of their economic impact. Cumulative economic impact over the years will generate substantial VfM effectiveness if the current models prove to be robust. The length of the processes involved reinforce the arguments advanced above of the need to engage in well targeted and strategic ex-post evaluation, combined with other forms of longitudinal research.

6.5 How can the Research findings be used to generate VfM Analysis of the India Programme?

6.5.1 Economy

The evaluation team are aware of the total amounts committed by DFID to each of the TA programmes for the purchase of inputs. The team was not familiar with how the TA agencies were selected or how decisions were made on how exactly the funds were to be spent. These issues did not fall within the team's ToR, which focused more on what worked rather than how economical a use was made of resources.

VfM does not mean that the inputs are the cheapest available in this instance. It is a question of matching an agency with the best track record or the greatest potential in carrying out the TA project with the best price. Nearly all the India-based agency staff were Indian nationals, demonstrating that excellent work can be achieved by the use of (presumably) cheaper local consultants. Possibly of greater significance is that each agency was able to demonstrate a convincing rationale for employing a blend of national and international expertise. This should be the most economic option, as it blends scarce global expertise with nationals who have a firm grasp of the cultural and institutional context of the country.

DFID India proved itself to be skilful at leveraging support from other agencies. In the case of BLISS, one third of project funds (0.5 million out of 1.6 million) were provided by the British Council, which will continue to support the project (with assistance from the government of Bihar) after DFID's support terminates. For MPQAF, DFID has effectively provided seed money for an extensive pilot, while the Government of Madhya Pradesh will finance the scaled up project. OGIP will largely be taken on and funded by the Government of Odisha, which was built into the project from the design phase. However, while desirable, leveraging alone does not satisfy the economy criterion. Ineffective projects would mean that both DFID and other agencies have failed to purchase appropriate resources – whatever the price.

6.5.2   Efficiency

Efficiency is a comparative term used to describe the relationship or ratio between inputs and outputs. A more efficient system either:

- obtains more output for a given set of resource inputs, or
- achieves comparable levels of output with fewer inputs.

In DFID (2011a) the example of efficiency in the educations sector, namely 'Improving the efficiency of education systems', uses teachers' absence from work (e.g. not in the classroom) as a measure of low VfM. This is certainly justified given the strong association between teacher absenteeism and (lower) student learning. However, India illustrates the complexities of seeking to demonstrate the concept of efficiency on a set of TA programmes. The examples below illustrate different facets of the problem.

RMSA-TCA; Institutional Development

The RMSA-TCA set out to improve the quality of information systems, amongst other objectives. This objective should be closely related to the concept of efficiency in VfM, as the intention of the interventions was to enhance the quality and quantity of information available to policy makers at different levels without state governments incurring additional recurrent costs (despite the need for additional staff in the NCERT to manage the NAS effectively).

The NAS intervention illustrates the difficulties in making VfM judgements. A system has been created, at little additional recurrent cost, which holds the potential for enabling planners to pull policy levers more effectively in raising learning achievement. Both efficiency and effectiveness could therefore be positive. Indeed, given the link explored above between learning gains and economic growth, the contribution to poverty reduction per unit input cost could be immense. However, there are two problems. Firstly, can the current sophisticated system be fully maintained, regardless of the level of capacity created? NCERT staff will have to have developed a sophisticated set of skills to sustain the current system in its present form. Second, the contribution of NAS to enhancing learning achievement is impossible to estimate at present. This is, in part, because the data appears to have been little used as yet for policy change directed at enhancing learning achievement. In addition, a culture of evidence based policy making will be slow to mature. VfM can therefore only be estimated to the degree possible in 3-5 years' time.

Interventions to enhance the quality of EMIS are more easily analysed for VfM. This is primarily because they are less ambitious than the NAS initiative. Advances in EMIS have been achieved, with few, if any, additional recurrent costs incurred. The intervention has been efficient. It has also been economic, because the blended use of national and international expertise allowed both the injection of new ideas and effective management of a process of change by national staff. However, is difficult to judge the effectiveness of the interventions at this stage, without a greater change in the culture of data use.

Source: Evaluation Team

6.5.3   Effectiveness and Cost Effectiveness

The association of cognitive gains and economic growth is crucial in analysing the effectiveness of an education sector intervention. However, as we note below, the matter is not straightforward. Three brief cases studies are presented to

demonstrate the range of issues involved. The case studies will then be used, together with the research findings presented above, to consider how VfM might be tackled effectively in the education sector.

Key Lessons learned from MPQAF

The VfM issues in MPQAF can be easily stated, but are less susceptible to definitive judgement. If changes do not occur in schools as a result of the revised assessment system put in place (for the reasons specified earlier) the intervention cannot be said to be effective. If it is not effective, the fact that it was economic is not an important consideration. However, an overly pessimistic judgement would be premature.

The only research to test the basic hypotheses of the project was carried out by the review team. This is not definitive and may not have picked up changes that are slowly maturing. Of potentially more significance is that the new form of assessment may be necessary, but insufficient, to achieve learning gains in Madhya Pradesh. It may be that the assessors should have been offered more training in how to assess teaching and learning. Had this been done, in addition to a well-focused teacher training programme, progress towards enhancing learning might be made. The lack of research conducted by the TA agency makes judgements about VfM particularly difficult.

Source: Evaluation Team

Key Lessons learned from OGIP

OGIP will be subject to ex-post evaluation, and it should prove relatively straightforward to develop a set of metrics against which to judge the efficiency and economy of the project, if the number of additional students, or additional student years, enabled by the project is set against total expenditure. As with all TA, the further along such judgements are made, the more likely they are to prove reliable. In particular, the capacity of the state government to replicate and sustain the work of the TA agency is not yet established, and it will undoubtedly have a bearing on future student flows.

However, the research findings reported cast doubt on the effectiveness of the project in reducing poverty, if the ratio of economic growth to school attainment is low. An increase in enrolment alone is likely to be of limited VfM effectiveness. It will be important to determine the extent to which students who would not otherwise have enrolled in school manage to acquire new cognitive skills. The evidence suggests this will lead to enhanced private and social benefits. While it is important in a country such as India to attract the relatively small (but especially hard to reach) out of school population to school, the investment would likely to be more effective (in the VfM sense) were simultaneous attention paid to policy levers that promise to improve the quality of education. The low level contact between the project and the planning department of the state education ministry would not have helped in this respect.

The example suggests once again, as with MPQAF, that:

- VfM is difficult to estimate when TA is providing part of an answer to a complex issue, as is almost always the case, and
- The design boundaries of a project may well be crucial to the VfM secured, particularly with regard to the effectiveness criterion.

Speculatively, too narrow a definition of the project scope may well prejudice the VfM effectiveness of the investment.

Source: Evaluation Team

Key Lessons learned from TESS India

TESS is the project in the India portfolio that promises to directly enhance learning achievement, and therefore the one which holds out the greatest promise for VfM effectiveness. The original business case showed that the process of teaching is fundamental to raising learning achievement. It argued that the Open Education Resources to be developed by the project would enhance the quality of the teaching process. The project should result in gains to learning achievement (although the speed with which this can be expected is not clear).

If this argument holds, it will be possible to assess the VfM effectiveness of the project. Indeed, given the magnitude of the intervention in a country as important as India, and the centrality of the issues raised in understanding how learning might be enhanced, a review of VfM would seem essential. The lack of any effective trialling means that we do not have an understanding as to how the materials might be received and used in the vast range of Indian cultural and institutional conditions.

It would be necessary to determine the degree to which the Open Education Resources were responsible for a sustained increase in learning achievement, at least in the subjects shown to be associated with economic growth (maths, science and literacy). While the precise statistical relationship between enhanced cognitive skills and economic growth may not be known in any given Indian state, overall consistency of the relationships was uncovered by the research. Given that the NAS has precise data on both student learning and school characteristics, both capable of being compared over time, it should be possible to construct a statistical model incorporating NAS and pedagogic data (to be generated separately from a sample of schools), to determine the impact of TESS on learning. This will be essential for any VfM analysis. It will, more importantly, generate hard evidence of the relationship between classroom process variables and student learning outcomes, the crucial contribution of education to the reduction of poverty.

Source: Evaluation Team

6.6 The role of the education adviser

While other DFID India advisers have been involved in the India programme, including leading on OGIP, it is the role of the education advisers that was more significant across the portfolio as a whole. The advisors pursued three optimal VfM strategies:

(a) **They leveraged contributions from other sources** (Government of Bihar and British Council in the case of BLISS; Government of Madhya Pradesh in the case of MPQAF; and the Government of Odisha for OGIP).

(b) **The Senior Education Adviser, Colin Bangay, sought to implement systematically an approach that seeks to use DFID TA projects as pilots before being disseminated elsewhere to other Indian states**. India is well suited to this strategy, being a federal country with well-developed systems for sharing education experience between the states, but the strategy could also be

applied in several of DFIDs other priority countries such as Ethiopia and Nigeria. It is too early to judge the success of this policy, partly because the concepts are not yet proven and partly because the strategy requires a longer time frame to bring to fruition.

(c) **By far the greatest VfM (and educational) significance has been the persistent efforts of the education advisers to place cognitive achievement at the centre of the policy and planning debates by means of long-term support for the development of a National Assessment System and the introduction of Open Education Resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning.** Our discussions suggest that the former has focused decision makers on learning to a greater extent than previously, while the latter has potential to enhance cognitive achievement by improving classroom processes. It is impossible to quantify the potential economic benefits, but in the light of the evidence presented above they might be considerable. However, two points can be made.

Firstly, DFID has shifted the policy debate to the extent that it has because the Senior Education Adviser was experienced, knowledgeable and respected. A figure of lesser experience would be unlikely to have made an impact in the Indian environment.

Secondly, even a highly competent adviser requires a suitable policy framework within which to operate. In particular, the timeframe needed to achieve sustainable gains to cognitive achievement is clearly far longer than the three years allowed to TA on the India programme.

6.7 What lessons can be drawn?

Drawing together the strands of the foregoing discussion, we suggest:

(a) **The strength and consistency of the association between economic growth and cognitive skills means that the case for investing in education is very strong…however, more work is needed to identify who benefits.** While the research suggests that there are gains at all stages of the learning spectrum, it does not address how a spectrum of gains contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction in different institutional contexts.

(b) **VfM in education is likely to be most significant in projects that contribute to cognitive gains, but the most effective means for so doing are still not entirely clear.** Recent trends justifiably place greater emphasis on learning outcomes than on enrolment.

(c) **The relative weakness of formative monitoring & evaluation systems was a serious impediment to evaluating VfM of the portfolio.** The requisite data was simply not generated by some of the projects. If MPQAF, and TESS in particular, had undertaken robust trialling important evidence would have been in place. In the case of TA sound formative evaluation is an essential foundation for VfM analysis. Of greater significance, such work would constitute important research in understanding the most effective policy levers to pull for enhancing learning.

(d) **TA will almost always make a contribution to a wider reform process.** It will therefore be rare in the education sector to derive unambiguous data on VfM effectiveness. It is all the more important therefore to identify cases, such as TESS, where robust statistical data can be collected ex-post.

7   Sustainability

Sustainability could be said to be more discussed as a concept than applied to guide operational practice in TA. However, all agencies implementing the India programme were very conscious of the importance of incorporating sustainability into their efforts. This was often conceptualised in financial terms, but there was also a strong awareness of the importance of building sustainable capacity, whether expressed as individual or systemic capacity development.

Key questions were:

- What is sustainability?
- Can we define a broad range of sustainability indicators to help guide operational practice?
- Are the India projects and programmes sustainable? What kinds of evidence would enable us to provide a plausible answer?
- Is a concern for sustainability sufficiently embedded in DFID systems?

Key Lessons learned about Sustainability:

1. **One of many definitions of sustainability, in the context of TA, is:**

   "TA sustainability is achieved when systems or behaviours are firmly established and owned by sufficient key stakeholders at all necessary levels, and where benefits are equitably distributed in terms of gender or socio-economic status."

2. **Indicators of sustainability (or unsustainability) are more helpful to practitioners than an overall definition of sustainability. Indicators help to assess the performance of TA projects. The following indicators, applicable to TA, have emerged from a review of the India programme. Not all indicators will be equally applicable to all TA projects.**

   Professional and political support:

   - Is there support for the innovations at all necessary levels of the bureaucracy?
   - Is there informed professional support at all key levels?
   - Is there managerial support within the school?
   - Has the model been adopted by government?

   Adoption of the innovation:

   - Has capacity been built as intended and as necessary?
   - Has the innovation been established in a critical mass of cases?
   - Have stakeholders noted initial positive results and do they perceive these as relevant?
   - Is there time series data on behavioural or institutional change?
   - Is the innovation integrated into day-to-day work patterns?
   - Is the model or the innovation financially sustainable?

   The future:

> - Is there evidence that the equitable distribution of benefits is assured?
> - Is there an exit strategy, for both the donor and, as appropriate, for the government? (This is particularly important for cash transfer schemes).
>
> 3. **Evidence collected by the review team on the degree of sustainability of TA projects in India was often ambiguous. This will often be the case, requiring fine judgement by DFID and TA managers. More time series data would help judgements.**
>
> 4. **There is a case for systematising sustainability analysis in the review process. The penultimate review would seem to be particularly important in this respect.**

Source: Evaluation Team

7.1 What does the concept of sustainability mean?

Sustainability has come to be regarded both as a goal in development programmes and an approach to policy and programming. However, in the context of TA in India, benefits may not continue after project support had been withdrawn.

The particular characteristics of TA make both the definition of and planning for sustainability especially problematic. In this section, we will consider what sustainability means in the context of TA and analyse the lessons that can be derived from the India TA programme.

7.1.1 How can sustainability be defined in a TA context?

There are many definitions of sustainability. The World Bank defines sustainability as 'the ability of a project to maintain an acceptable level of benefit flows through its economic life'. UNDP defines sustainability as 'the ability of a project to maintain its operations, services, and benefits during its projected life time.'

However, it is hard to apply these definitions to TA. Firstly, the definitions imply that a project can be detached from its context and its effects isolated. While true of some projects, it cannot apply to TA as it is a contribution to a wider process of reform in which multiple actors have an influence. TA is part of a continuous process of change so is difficult to define with terms associated with a lifetime of benefits.

Our definition is therefore as follows:

TA sustainability is achieved when systems or behaviours are firmly established and owned by sufficient key stakeholders at all necessary levels, and where benefits are equitably distributed in terms of gender or socio-economic status.

The results of TA are changes in systems and behaviours. TA is concerned with making change, even painful change, acceptable to stakeholders and owned by them. Unless stakeholders own the results of TA there is no sustainability. By 'own' we mean understand the need for the changes promoted by the TA, and demonstrate their acceptance of these through sustained chances in their behaviour and in their systems. There changes should be visible before project expiry for there to be a reasonable expectation of sustainability. It can never be expected that the behaviour of all individuals will change. What is required is that a 'sufficient' number i.e. a critical mass of individuals, at all necessary levels of the education hierarchy, have made the necessary change of behaviour or attitude.

Ideally, sustainability should be regarded as both a goal and an approach to policy and programming (as is the case with RMSA-TCA).

7.2 Measuring and describing sustainability: cases from India

Measuring or describing TA sustainability is not straightforward, as it may require interpretation of conflicting evidence. The issues confronting those planning for sustainability, or those seeking to assess the degree to which sustainability has been achieved, are illustrated in the annex in a series of small case studies. The aim has been to develop two sets of indicators:

I.   positive signs of sustainability; and

II.   warning signs that sustainability is unlikely to be achieved.

The evidence presented on the sustainability of TA was largely collected by the review team. Much of the data will be new to the agencies themselves.

The data was often ambiguous. This is not surprising, given both the nature of TA and the relatively brief time period projects, such as TESS, have had to make their impact. However, demonstrating the sustainability of most TA will require the collection of relevant data (which, in India, is not always done) and a fine judgement on the part of both DFID and TA managers in interpreting the data.

More time series data would help form judgements. If time series data on relevant behavioural or institutional change was available, it could suggest a degree of sustainability (although not conclusive in itself). Such data would need to be melded with other data on the political and managerial support for the changes attempted.

There would seem to be a case for systematising sustainability analysis through the annual review mechanism. This would need to be done in the penultimate review, order to allow mitigating strategies to be put in place if the findings were negative or ambivalent.

8 TA Management

The questions that we asked were based initially on a modified set of the issues raised by outcome mapping to investigate the quality of organisational practices and supplemented by questions pertinent to the specific objectives of this enquiry. The overall purpose was to identify what worked well and not so well in TA management systems, in order to derive lessons that might be applicable to other agencies.

Key questions were:

- What kind of programmes were they? Our assumption was that differing kinds of programmes would require differing management or organisational practices
- How did the TA agencies structure and create their teams? What kinds of skills were required? What balance was optimal between in-house and outsourced expertise? Was gender important?
- Is team leadership important?
- Is the governance of TA agencies important?
- What working methods were employed by agencies managing very different kinds of TA projects or programmes?
- Were there processes that proved particularly effective at different stages of the project cycle?
- How did the TA agencies plan for and implement monitoring & evaluation? How can evaluation be conceptualised when the TA is contributing to a wider reform process and causality is difficult to determine? Are there kinds of formative evaluation in which TA agencies should be engaged? Are there examples of good and no so good practice on the programme?

8.1 What programme management approaches were used by the TA Agencies?

8.1.1 What varieties of TA are there?

> **Key Lesson learned about TA management:**
>
> 1. There is no single best means of conducting TA. A strategy to deliver TA is most effective when it matches the conditions and the project or programme objectives.
> 2. More emphasis on supporting quality improvement than on enhancing education access will deliver incremental, non-linear change that is slow to mature.

Source: Evaluation Team

In the course of the evaluation, the team considered possible matrices or typologies for the portfolio. A schematic matrix of project types in the DFID education portfolio is set out below, categorised in terms of the levels of change attempted against two key globally-recognised components for the education sector – enhancing access and quality improvement. There appeared to be three types of change attempted by the projects against those two components.

Table 8.1   India TA Programme – Project Typology

		Level of attempted change		
		Pre-defined discrete system change	**Open-ended discrete change**	**Progressive innovation**
Education components	**Enhance access**	OGIP	TESS India BLISS	MoTA RMSA-TCA
	Quality improvements	MP-QAF		

Source: Evaluation Team

The three levels of attempted change are:

i.   **Pre-defined discrete system change – a strategy that is designed to effect a single major pre-defined change to the education system.**

Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme (OGIP) has introduced a cash transfer system into the state of Odisha aiming to improve access. The School Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) seeks to introduce a school assessment system into the state of Madhya Pradesh to improve quality. For both projects, the aim is to establish a single best system although, in the case of QAF it is recognised that subsequent improvements will and should be made.

ii.   **Open-ended discrete change – a strategy designed to introduce a single major change in the education system, but one which requires both system and behavioural change. There is no one best solution for implementing the desired change.**

The Teacher Support Programme (TESS India) and BLISS projects are examples. TESS is introducing new materials for use by teacher training institutions and teachers, while BLISS is developing systems for training English Language teachers.

iii.   **Progressive innovation – a strategy based on a number of successive modest but cumulative changes, resulting in considerable overall changes in time. The long-term objective is comprehensive and large scale reform.**

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan TA Fund (RMSA-TCA) and technical support to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) appear to fit within this category.

Each of the TA projects and programmes identified above have their own characteristic implementation strategies and objectives, which are outlined in Table 8.2 below.

Table 8.2 Characteristic Implementation Strategies

	RMSA-TCA	TESS India	MoTA	OGIP	MPQAF	BLISS
Goals	Emerge	Predefined	Emerge	Predefined	Predefined	Emerge
Coverage	National	7 States	Federal	1 State	1 State	1 State
Type of change anticipated	Incremental changes to large systems	Disruptive Unpredictable	Incremental changes	Closed system; one best solution	Closed system but open to improvement	
When will results appear?	Long-term	Long-term	Short- to medium- term	Short-term	Short- to medium- term	Short- to medium- term
Management	Directed from Delhi; regional hubs	Directed from UK; Delhi and State offices	Office in Delhi	Directed from Delhi; state office	Directed from Delhi; state office	Directed from Delhi
Skill mix in TA team10	Specialised technical knowledge in –house, supplemented by associated technical specialists	Managerial skills in Delhi. More recently also specialist technical.

Technical lead from UK | Specialised technical and managerial skills in-house | Specialised Technical and managerial skills in-house – supplemented by international technical specialists | Specialised technical knowledge in –house | Specialist technical knowledge and managerial skills in – house |
| Relationship to past systems/ processes | Build on existing systems | New approach. Do not attempt to draw on previous Indian initiatives | Build on existing systems and processes | New system but also in conjunction with GoI initiatives | Build on past government initiatives but with adapted foreign model | Little to build upon so new systems. Use systems proven in India |
| Knowledge base for implementation | Needs analysis with stakeholders | Pedagogic theory. Limited experimentation in Indian schools | Iterative adaptation, incorporated work from other ministries | Pilot | Researched foreign systems. Iterative adaptation | Needs analysis proven in Indian context. |

The table illustrates that the different TA agencies are facing substantially different challenges (top two rows)**.** They have therefore adopted different managerial approaches to achieve their objectives, although there are important similarities across most of the agencies.

A single, best means of conducting TA does not exist. Our basic assumption is that a high outcome strategy will best match strategic decisions with contingency variables.

8.2 How did the TA agencies structure and create their teams?

Key Points:

1. TA teams that blend specialised staff in country with national or international specialists function most effectively. Both perform better with long-term involvement.

2. Specialised staff have good project management skills and a sound working understanding of the technical language and issues in their area of responsibility. This allows them to engage in informed discourse with high grade technical specialists and stakeholders with little or no technical knowledge, and to interpret technical issues taking into account local cultural and the institutional context.

3. A TA team that relies heavily on external specialists for its technical understanding does not function effectively. Lack of technical understanding undermines the authority of the team and limits interplay between the technical and the cultural/institutional - a prime role of TA to create.

4. TA specialised staff should have the soft skills required to establish and sustain relationships of trust with a wide range of stakeholders.

5. International or national technical specialists should be regarded as TA team members and included, whenever possible or appropriate, in planning and strategy meetings, but under the direction of the TA Team Leader.

6. Pairing specialised TA staff with technical specialists establishes confidence and facilitates exchanges of understanding, to enable the political economy context locally to be better fused with good practice internationally.

7. The quality of the Team Leader is critical. S/he should have the qualities outlined above, but also a sound understanding of how the government functions.

8. Authority should be located in the TA team in country, under the leadership of DFID. The TA should not be led by specialist consultants who direct the TA team.

Governance is important. A TA team benefits from formal mechanisms that enable it to relate to its higher powers on a regular basis. This is in addition to the standard DFID review process. The Indian Joint Review Mission (JRM), of government and donors, in which both DFID and one of the TA teams take part, is a successful and replicable practice.

8.2.1 In–house and external technical capacity

Examples are provided below – it is not intended to be an exhaustive review of each TA agency, or each project in the portfolio.

RMSA-TCA

The RMSA-TCA, managed by a consortium led by Cambridge Education, built its core in-house capacity by identifying the issues to which it had to respond. It did so progressively, as the focus of its activities broadened. The strategy was to create a mix of contextual and technical knowledge within the overall team, as well as planning and management capacity and a sound understanding of the manner in which government functions.

The technical knowledge within the team was not intended to be at the level of international consultants. However, some team members, particularly in Delhi, have very substantial technical knowledge in their discipline and a well-rounded understanding of education sector issues. All staff at the centre and at state level have sufficient technical knowledge to:

1. Conduct an informed discourse with top specialists, to assess the nature of their contribution and to complement the specialists with their knowledge of local culture and institutions.
2. Conduct technical dialogue with project counterparts in the absence of technical specialists, with reference back to the specialist as necessary.
3. Mediate when there are disputes or lack of clarity, and take informed decisions on how best to proceed, based on both their technical and cultural/institutional knowledge.

The blend of technical and cultural understanding is critical. The process of teaching is not merely a technical act, but one informed by cultural understanding. This applies both to the teaching that can be observed in the classroom and to the implicit values that underpin the practice of pedagogy (Robin Alexander) as well as to how schools are managed. Even the upstream strategies pursued by both RMSA-TCA and QAF have to take these factors into account.

The team had to be capable of managing emergent thematic areas progressively defined and developed, in conditions of uncertainty. International specialists were able to bring fresh perspectives that challenged the status quo. The TCA complemented its in-house capacity on the ground by recruiting highly skilled international technical specialists with proven, on-the-ground capacity, to adjust to local circumstances and to handle the complexity of the political, social, and educational environment.

A critical issue was how in-house and external technical skills were best brought together to achieve the most promising outcomes. Firstly, *international and national consultants were regarded equally as members of a united team*, built on the mutual respect and understanding of the value that each brings. Secondly, *international and national consultants in the same technical areas were paired and worked as mini-teams* under the overall direction of the Team Leader.

8.2.2 MPQAF

The TA managing agency (ARK) had also considered their capacity strategy at the outset of the project. They realised that, in the initial stages of design, specialist technical competence was crucial and that, later, sound piloting and scaled-up project management skills were required.

The process of building a team was similar to RMSA-TCA: an in-house manager and facilitator was paired with an external specialist international consultant who was also regarded as a member of the core team for operational purposes. While the in-house manager was not expected to be technically specialised, at least initially, she acquired substantial expertise as the project proceeded. The core team therefore had a combination of specialist technical knowledge, understanding of context and planning & management capacity. It did not however have any specific skills in monitoring & evaluation.

The core team was supplemented by a consortium that provided specific specialist technical skills. In combination the in-house team and consortium members constituted the TA group. However, as with the RMSA-TCA, the activities of the consortium were directed by the core team.

8.2.3   TESS India

The TESS project provides an instructive contrast to the other two agencies. As with TCA and MPQAF, TESS is a team of specialists, resident in the UK, and project managers and facilitators based in Delhi and the states. The project has been managed from the UK by Open University (OU) staff. Open University has also deployed the specialist expertise required to generate the materials required by the project.

By contrast, less attention was paid to the specifically technical capacity of the Delhi office, which has only recently recruited a first class Indian technical specialist. The current Indian field manager had to develop an understanding of the Open Education Resources (OER) paradigm while on the job. The overall TA was therefore somewhat unbalanced, with considerable technical resource in the UK and relatively little expertise in India.

The consequences of this structure have been important:

■ The Delhi TA team has had neither the technical capacity nor the acknowledged management role to allow it to have directed the project in the same manner as other agencies have done. This may now be changing with the strengthening of capacity in the Delhi office and a shift in the focus of activity from technical design to implementation.

■ The capacity of the Delhi TA office to mediate between OU specialists and Indian stakeholders has therefore been more limited than in the case of the other agencies. It similarly lacked capacity to explain the project to stakeholders. The crucial blend of cultural and technical understanding may have contributed to the implementation problems discussed below.

A more coherent balance might have been achieved if an OU specialist had been seconded to Delhi, with adjustments to incentives in their organisational culture. Key technical decisions could have been made by a staff member resident in Delhi, who could have developed a better understanding of local cultural and institutional factors than intermittent visitors did. However, it appears that the OU (UK) does not have a mechanism for seconding members of staff without detrimentally affecting their career paths.

As with MPQAF, TESS did not initially employ any monitoring & evaluation expertise and therefore missed opportunities to devise and implement a coherent strategy. A monitoring & evaluation cell was created in the last year of the project, but too late to have the desired effect.

8.2.4   In-house capacity - soft skills

Successful TA requires both '*competence and character', a*ccording to the RMSA-TCA team, and echoed by others, including the teams operating OGIP and the MoTA. 'Competence' refers to the technical skills and knowledge required to create credibility and 'character' to the soft skills needed.

According to TA agencies through interviews and the participatory workshops, particularly important soft skills included:

1. The ability to listen;
2. A willingness to allow others (especially government stakeholders/ national entities) to take credit;
3. Constant personal and professional engagement with key stakeholders, particularly at the central level. According to GoI informants, this was greatly assisted by the co-location of the TCA and the central apex institutions;
4. A clear understanding of the role of the TA and persistence in pursuing TA objectives, combined with flexibility of response to stakeholder requests.

> *"TA is a small wheel which makes bigger wheels move."*
>
> *RMSA-TCA team member*

One of the most important soft skills exercised by both central and state teams has been the exercise of fine judgement on the tempo of the project. This ranges from judgements as to how long it is necessary to prepare the preconditions for successful implementation, to the speed at which incremental advances in project scope or policy dialogue can occur. TA implementation can only be achieved if the stakeholders are thoroughly understood.

The MPQAF TA was also successful in developing effective relationships with their stakeholders. According to a senior government official, the TA offered an:

> *"excellent response right from the beginning. They worked with us…...sat down and understood our needs… they went to the field to conduct needs assessment… returned from the field so that we could integrate findings from the field and the State… at every step we went hand in hand."*
>
> *Senior Government Official*

Several features of the TA were responsible for these success relationships. According to the TA team for MPQAF, the key elements were 'patience, respect and persistence', with a clear understanding of their role and the boundaries of their activities. These features were clearly present in the government's own analysis cited above, but they also stressed the importance of co-location in government offices in Bhopal and the importance of the Steering Committee as a forum for consultation and decision making.

The soft skills capacity of TESS India has been weakened by frequent changes of staff in the Delhi office, especially in the role of field manager. This has resulted in the loss of institutional memory, at least in Delhi, and has not been appreciated by external stakeholders. According to a senior official in Madhya Pradesh, TESS staff have been 'very co-operative', but there have been 'far too many changes' of staff in Delhi, leading to 'a lack of continuity and direction' in the project. The current team are skilled in building trust and relationships as well as in constructing dialogue to advance the project. The current manager in Delhi is a former

Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, with a sound understanding of how government works and an instinctive feel for government cultures. However, previous instability means that lost ground has to be made up.

Soft skills are also very important for DFID advisers. The mixture of technical and persuasion skills is vital at every stage of the process but particularly during the evolution of project/programme design, when there is a need to liaise with federal and state government stakeholders. Technical knowledge of education, and the history of its development in India help gain credence. It is also important to understand the historical legacies which affect current policy choices. However, technical knowledge only goes so far, as does understanding the political economy. DFID advisers stressed the need for flexibility, influencing and persuasion skills to be able to work effectively with a range of stakeholders at different levels.

8.2.5 Is gender important in terms of recruitment of TA teams?

Key personnel for the education programmes in the portfolio included both men and women. The Team Leaders of RMSA-TCA and MPQAF projects were female. The other programmes were led and predominantly (but not exclusively) staffed by men. The key DFID advisers were predominantly female, although the key role of senior education adviser was not.

To what extent has the gender of TA personnel been a factor in the success of the programmes? Very little of the India TA activity engages directly with poor women or girls. Even the OGIP project engaged with girls from very poor families through contracted intermediaries, although a number of block officers and district co-ordinators were women, but the main factors in recruitment were around the local contextual understanding and commitment.

Given the nature of the project portfolio, the review team considers that the personal qualities and range of expertise of the TA teams were of greater significance than gender *per se* (while recognising that different education projects or management arrangements might require a more proactive gender bias in recruitment).

8.2.6 What is the importance of Team Leadership to TA?

Of all the agencies interviewed, only one stressed the importance of team leadership. However, the issues raised have applicability to all reasonably sized TA.

The team leadership qualities they outlined were very similar to those of a good education adviser, as recognised by DFID. They were:

1. A strong grasp of political economy, in being able to judge current political situations and to set current work within a broader understanding and conceptualisation (often tacit) of long-term strategic needs.
2. An awareness of what can be achieved within the lifespan of the TA.
3. Vision, to understand the big picture.
4. Technically strength, in all the core areas of activity, to grasp the political economy and to appear credible.
5. An ability to form and lead partnerships and manage the expectations of stakeholders at all levels.
6. Skills in communication and conceptualisation.

In very small teams the concept of leadership is less applicable, but even in larger teams the Team Leader can only function effectively if backed by both the team and DFID.

8.2.7 What is the nature of governance of TA?

The governance structure of TA was a critical factor contributing to success. TA teams with more developed governance structures suffered fewer problems with key stakeholders, especially the higher powers. This stems from different forms of governance and their use by TA teams.

Of all the TA teams, the RMSA-TCA benefits most from its governance structure. All TA teams have a steering committee that has proved a useful device for securing consensus and accelerating progress, but only the TCA enjoys membership of Joint Review Missions (JRMs). The JRM was a mechanism developed by the GoI and donors initially for the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and subsequently for SSA and RMSA. It is a biennial review over 15 days in which a 'minute review' of progress is jointly undertaken by key stakeholders. It has proved a very successful mechanism in providing a platform for the interchange of key ideas and emerging strategies. Both DFID and the TCA are members. According to a senior Indian government adviser – *"Whatever DFID or TCA stress in the JRM, we try to translate into practical realities".* Not all government officials might express themselves as unambiguously, but the statement from a senior figure illustrates the importance of the platform.

By contrast, the TESS team are not members of the JRM, even though the implementation of the project will have to be channelled through the national schemes (RMSA and SSA) that are subject to JRM guidance. TESS therefore has to work principally through informal channels at state level. It loses the opportunity to present its ideas and develop joint strategies with the highest levels of government, and the substantial political advantages of embedding the results of such discussions in JRM recommendations to the states and national programmes.

8.3 What working methods were deployed by TA agencies?

> **Key Lessons learned about TA methods:**
>
> 1. There is no formulaic way of implementing projects and programmes. Success comes from matching working methods and strategies to the nature of the intervention being attempted, and rooted it in the political economy context.
>
> 2. All agencies, however, found it necessary to spend considerable time undertaking a preliminary technical needs analysis and building relationships of trust and understanding with key stakeholders. These were the necessary preconditions for effective activity to take place. Relationships with stakeholders needed to be proactively sustained during the course of the project.
>
> 3. The time invested in these activities was not fully reflected in either the logframes or the Theories of Change. DFID management approaches need to be modified to recognise the importance of these 'soft' activities to the success of TA.
>
> Iterative approaches, in which implementation was developed in close consultation with stakeholders, proved to be successful operational strategies, although they took different forms to match the overall design of the TA.

Source: Evaluation Team

'Soft Activities' and creating the necessary preconditions for effective TA implementation

All TA agencies found it necessary to spend considerable time on 'soft activities'. These proved to be necessary preconditions for any formal inputs to take place in an effective manner. This is not surprising. The often painful and difficult processes that accompany institutional and organisational changes have to be accepted and understood by all stakeholders.

All agencies invested a lot of time initially and throughout project implementation in building stakeholder relationships. The purpose corresponds to the qualities of 'competence and character' referred to above, and are to establish credibility as technical specialists and to develop relationships of trust with their stakeholders.

Most agencies also found it necessary to invest considerable time at the beginning of each project or programme component on needs assessment and problem definition. The form this took depended on how the TA had been set up by DFID. In particular, the degree to which the TA task had been predefined was a critical variable. However, even when the task had been defined (as in the case of OGIP), it was still necessary to build on the preparation work of DFID in order to:

■ Define the development problem in greater depth or with greater precision

■ Assess the institutional context in greater depth

■ Reconsider the assumptions underpinning the project design

■ Design a process by which the project could proceed.

Agencies went about needs assessment and problem definition in different ways:

OGIP started with a product that had been agreed by all major stakeholders, after intensive liaison between DFID and the Government of Odisha. However, it had to find a means of defining the most appropriate way of embedding the product (the cash transfer scheme) into the local context. A pilot was conducted in one state district, to test the principle design assumptions and parameters.

The RMSA-TCA was given a national mandate, with a brief to accelerate RMSA implementation, by making its practice more efficient and effective. Initially the areas of focus were not defined. The TCA did not start with a product. The products emerged as a result of a collaborative process. Initial scoping was undertaken to translate the fragmented wish lists of states into coherent thematic areas. These were set within a broader understanding and conceptualisation (often tacit) of long-term strategic needs and an awareness of what could be achieved within a three year time span. Thematic areas were agreed within a set of priorities proposed by the GoI.

Strategies within each thematic area were generated in iterative steps by:

1. Building on systems or capacities already in place, to enhance acceptability and convey respect for what had already been achieved.
2. Including an inception period, in which robust needs assessment was undertaken to identify:
   a. what already existed;
   b. the most important gaps; and
   c. the critical areas where the TCA could provide high level technical support.

The process of needs assessment was also used to build relationships with critical stakeholders at central and state levels. The inception period proved lengthy (six months), leading to a degree of anxiety in the TA agency, but stakeholders, including

DFID, were mollified by (a) the production of research products following the needs assessment process, and (b) the evident relationship building that was taking place.

Unlike the RMSA-TCA, MPQAF implementation was based on a proposal submitted to DFID prior to project start-up and agreed by all parties. The sequence of activities outlined in the proposal was followed during implementation. This differed substantially from the process followed by the TCA, where the detail of each thematic area emerged as an iterative process. The project was to introduce a QA system into a single state (Madhya Pradesh). It was therefore more limited in geographic scope and thematic range than the RMSA-TCA. It was dealing with a well-defined problem. The policy was fully endorsed by the state government. There was also general agreement that the OFSTED (UK) model was an appropriate source of ideas. However, a prolonged period of negotiation and experimentation was needed to agree on:

■ the means by which a foreign product was to be reconceptualised to fit the local context,

■ how a cadre of assessors was to be created, and

■ how the assessment system was to be institutionalised within the state.

In total, these processes lasted approximately eighteen months, although this allowed relationships with the state authorities to be soundly cemented.

Although the 'soft activities' outlined above were crucially important, they were insufficiently acknowledged in several ways, and with important consequences:

■ *They were hardly referred to in any of the logframes or Theories of Change. This meant that DFID's prime management and review tools did not usually address activities and processes that were found to be essential in ensuring adequate implementation.* The TCA partially bypassed the problem by producing reports that served as milestones for contractual and review purposes. However, the more fundamental problem, of building necessary processes into DFID monitoring and review procedures, was not resolved.

■ *The time frames for all TA contracts were of roughly equal duration, approximately three years: all agencies were acutely conscious that their soft activities left them with inadequate time to complete their implementation processes in the time available.* TA contributes to a wider reform process, and will therefore always have unfinished business at project expiry. A time span of three years for TESS was never sufficient to enable the full implementation process to take place. The contractual time frames designed by DFID should take into account the prolonged periods of time often required to set up conditions for project inputs to start effectively.

8.3.1 The processes of implementation

The processes followed by each project varied according to the nature of their programme.

RMSA-TCA was an iterative process which was developed in consultation with stakeholders. The TCA was obliged to work with numerous stakeholders at both central and state levels. It contributes to RMSA, which is a centrally sponsored scheme in which programmes are planned in partnership with the states. The centre (the MHRD) cannot tell the states directly what to do but it can exert influence, by withholding approval of plans and budgets. The MHRD also works through apex

institutions (NCERT and NUEPA), which provide professional and technical frameworks within which the states have to operate.

Implementation was based both on the technical needs analysis and the relationships built during needs assessment. Understanding was slowly built amongst stakeholders. New ideas and technical concepts were gradually introduced into each thematic area, as a means of extending the scope of the reform process. A senior official in the GoI described this process as 'scope creep', contending that the government well understood what was happening but welcomed the extension of TA responsibilities, as they lay within government frameworks and priorities.

The RMSA-TCA was unique among agencies in having no predefined programme. The programme emerged from gradual clarification of the thematic areas. Two modes of working were found to be necessary in this circumstance:

- As the RMSA-TCA stressed, this did not imply that anything was possible. In such circumstances the TA had to be particularly clear about its mission, its boundaries and the range of initiatives that it could reasonably accept. The DFID Adviser had an important role in helping to shape and confirm the definition of the scope and mission of each agency, and protect reasonable boundaries.
- As clarity emerged in each of the thematic areas, the TA accepted that processes had to be kept flexible, but the final product or objective had to be fixed.

For MPQAF, an iterative process was developed that followed a predefined project plan. ARK, the agency responsible for MPQAF, had submitted a proposal to DFID prior to project inception, which set out the principal project implementation processes and sequence of activities. Apart from external and unexpected political shocks, the plan was followed throughout project implementation. This did not imply that a blueprint approach was followed. The shape and content of the assessment system was not predetermined, but emerged out of interaction with stakeholders.

8.3.2 Design Phase – Technical and managerial issues

MPQAF example– the design was a process, not a predefined product. There were substantial disagreements on the detail with stakeholders during the process of adaptation. These were resolved primarily by resorting to global evidence, but also by presenting alternative policy options to senior government officials. The consortium led in the design phase, and was supported by ARK, whose task was to bring expertise together, keep things moving, manage stakeholders and ensure that decisions were reached in a timely fashion. The core team divided responsibilities among team members for technical and managerial functions. Both members of the core team conceptualised the assessment system with stakeholders in the Government of Madhya Pradesh, but the international consultant led on developing the assessment framework and on developing the specific tools to be employed. He was brought to India for all technical workshops. The project manager had technical competence but also provided and understanding of context and built relationships. The ARK manager and the in-house specialist mediated between experts with different perspectives.

In contrast, the project concept for TESS India was based on successful experimentation in Bangladesh (and in Africa with TESSA), which appeared to demonstrate the viability of the Open University OER approach in the context of South Asia. A proposal submitted by the Open University outlined the rationale of the project and cited successes in other parts of the world, but did not investigate the Indian context in depth. It dealt only briefly with previous Indian efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and did not consider the reasons why sustaining

improvements on a large scale had proved so difficult. Both these omissions were to prove important in the implementing the project. The possible problems of transferring practice to a very different environment were not perhaps considered in sufficient depth.

For twenty years prior to the initiation of TESS, India had been experimenting with different innovations in teaching and learning, primarily at primary level. However, TESS was the first national effort to enhance teaching and learning at both primary and secondary levels through the introduction of materials based on a robust understanding of how children learn. In total 105 Open Education Resource (OER) packs were produced in four key subjects (mathematics, sciences, English, and the primary mother language of each state). This contrasted markedly with the project in Bangladesh, which had focused on changing practice in one subject in the equivalent of a one large Indian state.

The introduction of OERs was meant to be disruptive in challenging teacher practice. Adoption of the materials by classroom teachers implies both a change in their knowledge and skills set, but also in their understanding of what it is to be a good teacher. Similar considerations apply to head teachers. The project therefore addressed a relatively narrow, but unpredictable, technical focus, which disrupted stereotypic practices and attitudes.

The process of project implementation can be divided into three phases;

      a. **design of the OERs;**

      b. **'localisation' of the OERs; and**

      c. **implementation and diffusion.**

The first stage was led by the Open University. A considerable achievement was the development of a set of materials that is appreciated by policy makers and teacher trainers, down to the level of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs). As with MPQAF, the project took an existing concept and set of practices and sought to adapt them to local conditions. The process was not immediately successful. According to a senior figure in the MHRD, initial sets of materials were subject to 'stringent criticism' by Indian specialists, who considered them insufficiently adapted to local conditions. A crisis was averted, but the root causes are important to consider:

■ *The Open University (OU) was well aware that its product had to be adapted to the local context, but it did not follow an incremental approach that has worked well for the TCA and QAF.* Efforts to use local experimentation to guide the development of materials were relatively slight and did not involve substantial school based research.

■ *Evidence from previous Indian efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning should have been taken into account and subject to in depth investigation.* The original proposal submitted by the OU was relatively sparse in its references to Indian quality improvement initiatives and further research did not seem to have been carried out as part of a robust needs assessment exercise at the beginning of the TESS project. An essential bridge between UK and Indian specialists was therefore not put in place. The review team found that at least one SCERT was exploring means of integrating their previous work with OERS delivered by the project.

■ *Initial problems of contextualisation could be attributed, at least in part, to the structure of the overall TA team.* Discussions with the review team revealed that there are still residual tensions between the UK and Delhi TA teams, possibly resulting from the capacity issues discussed above. The lack of credible OU

technical expertise in Delhi and with frequent changes in visiting staff undermined continuity and was felt by many to have seriously inhibited TESS progress.

■ *The TA process may also have suffered from the lack of a formal governance structure to mediate conflict and take timely decisions.* The lack of a Steering Committee at the centre meant that there was no regularly recurring formal forum for meeting key stakeholders. The same was true in the states. The lack of a State Steering Committee was noted by senior government personnel in Madhya Pradesh and contrasted unfavourably with other DFID supported projects.

8.4   How did TA agencies plan for and implement monitoring & evaluation?

Key Lessons learned about TA monitoring and evaluation:

1. Monitoring & evaluation was one of the weakest areas of implementation of the India programme.

2. The objectives and design of monitoring & evaluation on a TA programme should reflect the characteristic features of TA. Monitoring & evaluation will therefore often be to;

   ■ Understand and learn, rather than measure impact. This includes progressively investigating the validity of the assumptions made in the TA approach

   ■ Measure or describe the contribution of the TA. Attribution will rarely be possible.

   ■ Focus on upstream changes to boundary partners, which is mainly formative.

3. Good practice identified in the monitoring & evaluation of pedagogic change included;

   ■ Blended use of general theory and previous country experience, to define intended change to pedagogies of teachers and teacher educators

   ■ Specifying Intended outcomes in detail. The design of monitoring & evaluation systems hinge on defined outcomes

   ■ Indicators of change expressed in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The latter enables change over time to be measured.

   ■ Data used for enhancing programme effectiveness.

4. Proof of concept must be established to the degree possible if a TA model is to be scaled up or replicated. Proof of concept involves demonstrating that intended changes can occur and be sustained over a reasonable time period in a wide spectrum of representative environments.

5. Monitoring & evaluation practice might be improved if;

   ■ DFID's education advisers were all offered a tailor-made course in monitoring and, especially, evaluation, to allow them to manage TA agencies in a very well-informed manner. This would enable education advisers to complement DFID's own evaluation specialists by mixing specialist education expertise with an informed understanding of evaluation issues.

- DFID should develop and make a database of monitoring & evaluation specialists with experience of the education sector available to all education advisers
- Contracting TA agencies should pay particular attention to the research capacity available to bidders, especially when it is anticipated that the TA will be scaled up or replicated.

Source: Evaluation Team

With one notable exception, monitoring & evaluation is one of the weakest areas of TA implementation in India (although the experience of the team suggests that India may be better, or no worse, than many other places). We consider that this is partly because of the inherent difficulties in devising robust systems to evaluate TA processes and results. We therefore start this section with a brief analysis of the issues involved. We then consider three cases of monitoring & evaluation practice, to illustrate actual and possible practice so as to derive a range of lessons on improving the practice of monitoring & evaluation of TA.

8.4.1 What is monitoring & evaluation in a TA setting?

The purpose of monitoring & evaluation is to have management and programming decisions based on systematically collected data and to reduce decision making based on perceptions and assumptions. It may also be an important means of satisfying DFID's accountability requirements.

The particular characteristics of TA monitoring & evaluation have implications for the manner in which its methodologies can be applied in TA settings.

Table 8.3   Monitoring & Evaluation of TA: summary of key issues

Characteristics of TA	Consequences for monitoring & evaluation
There is a high degree of uncertainty and many untested assumptions at the initiation of TA, due to the specifics of its context and problems of transferring even proven ideas to new contexts	Role of monitoring & evaluation is primarily a) to understand and learn, in order to enhance the effectiveness of programme delivery and b) to convert assumptions into demonstrated or proven facts
TA is a contribution to a broader process of change. Change will continue after the end of TA	Attribution is rarely possible. There is a need to describe and measure specific TA contributions.
The influence of TA is strongest in individuals, organisations and groups with which it is in direct contact. The further downstream, the weaker the influence of TA and the more unpredictable the results. There is a disconnect in the results chain between immediate- and long-term goals	To achieve maximum face validity, monitoring & evaluation should focus on upstream partners and organisations and less on downstream impact. It should be formative, not summative.
Much of TA is catalytic. Preparation for scaling up or replication is necessary	There is a need to provide an evidence base on the degree to which a TA model is effective and share these understandings with government

It is difficult to predict levels of sustainability of the changes induced by TA.	Greater use of ex-post impact evaluation would be a helpful contribution to learning about TA.

Uncertainty is inherent in TA design, planning and implementation. Global evidence can identify promising avenues for TA support but even when an idea has been proven elsewhere it still needs to be adequately contextualised and subject to sound management by a TA agency. Thus the TESS programme in India was inspired, in part, by the success of the 'English in Action' programme in Bangladesh. However, the India programme was more ambitious, was to be implemented in several contexts, distinct from each other, and all different to the institutional and cultural context of Bangladesh. It was to be implemented by a different management team.

At the initiation of a TA programme there are many explicit and implicit assumptions about the how the change process will operate. These assumptions need to be tested by the TA programme, as a means of progressively reducing levels of uncertainty and providing data against which more informed programming decisions can be made.

8.4.1.2 Contribution, Attribution and focus on upstream results

TA in the education sector makes a contribution to much broader government sectoral strategies that will continue well after the TA has been concluded. It therefore comprises only part of a set of ongoing activities even when it is in operation, and may well depend upon the success of other reform initiatives to achieve its own results. At the same time, however long a TA programme might be, it is rarely sufficient to complete a process. Education change is slow to mature, due to the sheer size and complexity of an education system. The results of a TA initiative in education are therefore often incomplete (as with all examples on the India programme) and influenced by endogenous activities outside the control of the TA programme itself.

All components of the India programme are subject to the conditions described above, with the partial exception of OGIP (which is a relatively self-contained initiative). For example, MPQAF is merely one element in the efforts of the Government of Madhya Pradesh to enhance levels of learning attainment. In order to achieve this broad objective, other strategies have to be put in place (pedagogic training for teachers, ensuring teacher attendance, improving school facilities and so on). Even within its own field MPQAF is merely a stage in the process of improving the effectiveness of school assessment. Similar principles apply to TESS. Downstream results for these projects will therefore depend upon a multitude of factors, many of which are beyond the control of the respective TA teams. TA projects such as TESS or MPQAF may make a contribution to enhancing learning attainment in the medium term, by establishing some of the necessary preconditions, but the link between upstream contributions and downstream goals can be tenuous and has been little explored, even though it has long been recognised.[11]

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[11] In 1967, Edward Suchman stated: 'The extent to which immediate and intermediate goals can be divorced from ultimate goals as valid in themselves poses a difficult question. Certainly there is a tremendous amount of activity, perhaps the largest portion of all public service work, devoted to the successful attainment of immediate and intermediate goals which appear to have only a very indirect bearing upon ultimate goals'.

If-then logic can still be applied or attribution still attempted. The normal linear logic underpinning the logframe is far more secure when applied to immediate or intermediate results upstream. In practice this means:

Focusing attention on the degree to which the TA achieves its intended results with its immediate boundary partners – i.e. the individuals, groups, or organisations with which it is in direct contact. Although the possibility of external influences impacting on TA relationships exists, the possibility of a direct causal relationship between the TA input and the development result means that attribution is sometimes possible.

Defining the intended results with some precision, to enable any evaluation to describe and measure any changes that have occurred, as well as to demonstrate links between project inputs, outputs and outcomes.

Building a time series data set to track changes in the results. Sustainability is a key issue for TA. Good time series data, from a robust evaluation system can indicate the degree to which benefits are likely to be sustained after project expiry. For example, time series data showing sustained behavioural change in key partners as implementation proceeds is necessary (if not sufficient) for sustainability. Constructing a time series data set has the additional advantage of helping to demonstrate the validity of the evaluation methods employed.

8.4.1.3 Scaling up and replication

Much TA aims to have a catalytic effect. In VfM terms this may be one of its more attractive features, as it has the potential to achieve considerable change at relatively low cost, as a result of the activities of TA boundary partners.

In India the manner of conceptualising the portfolio strategy has been significant in securing robust evaluation data on boundary partners. The ToCs for two projects (OGIP and TESS) explicitly link the collection of data to proving the worth of the models being adapted to the Indian context. This is in order to encourage their subsequent replication to other parts of India after TA completion. The design of the MPQAF project does not specifically focus on establishing proof of concept through research or evaluation, but the fact that it was essentially a pilot preparing the ground for scale up by the Madhya Pradesh government suggests that a similar approach would be appropriate.

There is an important methodological issue here. If attribution is possible primarily in the relatively limited case of the influence that a TA has had on its boundary partners, what kind of evidence can be uncovered to support scale up or replication, without incurring undue risk. In principle it should be possible to demonstrate:

a) that the innovation has worked as intended, for a reasonable period of time or for a reasonable number of cases, in a typical range of conditions;

b) an understanding as to why the innovation has worked and of any remaining limitations. These limitations could be related directly to the design or implementation of the innovation or of the need to put in place complementary reforms.

The approach taken by the BLISS project is particularly important: it is an example of formative monitoring & evaluation that seeks to measure and describe the effect of a complex continuous professional development programme on both classroom and teacher training pedagogy and practice. The good example of BLISS is provided in annex 10.

Weakness of monitoring & evaluation: suggested systemic solutions

In spite of the robust monitoring & evaluation system developed for BLISS, the India TA education portfolio, as a whole, was weak in its development and use of monitoring & evaluation data. The nature of the RMSA-TCA programme was such that standard approaches to monitoring & evaluation were not required. The evidence of success could be obtained by examining systems and documentation, and by receiving feedback from stakeholders. However, the other projects would have benefitted from more systematic approaches. Given that the education adviser in India is highly experienced and proficient, it is unlikely that monitoring & evaluation in other countries that performed in India.

There appears therefore to be a need to strengthen DFID systems in order to ensure that appropriate monitoring & evaluation systems are put in place. This will be particularly important in

a. safely scaling up or replicating projects, thereby enhancing VfM while protecting DFID's reputation; and
b. contributing to DFID's institutional learning.

Our suggestions are:

Run a brief course for all education advisers in monitoring & evaluation methodologies. The principal objectives of such a course would be

- to provide advisers with an informed understanding of the main methodologies and issues;
- to enable them to advise TA agencies on the main approaches to be adopted and how to critique strategies developed by the agencies.

Provide all advisers with access to a database of sound monitoring & evaluation specialists whom they can contract directly or via the TA agencies. Evidence from the India programme strongly suggests that TA agencies will not necessarily have the in-house skills to design appropriate evaluation strategies, nor the capacity to identify suitable outside specialists themselves.

When contracting, DFID should pay particular attention to in-house research capacity and how it is complemented by external specialists. Not only is this important for monitoring & evaluation, but also, as we have seen, for establishing the technical credentials of a TA agency. If TA agencies are required to demonstrate their research capacity in the selection process, this would help to ensure that DFID's professional reputation is protected when a TA model is scaled up or replicated.

9 DFID Tools and Management

TA agencies felt that modifications were required to DFID tools and management systems to reflect the particular characteristics of TA.

Key questions were:

■ To what extent are the logical framework (logframe) and the ToC fit for purpose on TA projects and programmes?

■ Are there modifications to the theory of practice that would enhance the quality and manner of DFID's management of TA agencies?

■ What are the challenges for DFID and the agencies in implementing results based management approaches? Can the approach be made to work more effectively?

■ What is the role of the education adviser in TA and what skill sets are required for optimal delivery?

■ Given that DFID India has experimented with portfolio management, are there lessons to be learned from India as to how the technique can be applied effectively?

■ How can DFID learn from TA? What lessons are there from India?

9.1 How can the logframe be best used for TA?

9.1.1 Logical Framework

Key Lessons learned about TA logframes:

1. The logframe provides a discipline in thinking through a project and a tool for reviewing activities and achievements over time and a mechanism by which DFID can assess TA performance.

2. However, for projects which are TA or largely TA in nature, the usefulness and applicability of the logframe is undermined – it does not easily capture qualitative indicators, it assumes linear progression, it does not easily capture changes in enabling conditions over time and between 20-50% of work done by TA agencies in India was not captured in logframes. That is a very significant proportion considering that the logframe is the key tool to measure performance and results at annual and mid-term reviews.

3. The logframe needs to be a joint exercise at every stage, to ensure clarity and agreement on the objectives and processes of a project.

4. However, ultimately it is a tool which is unlikely to be tailored enough to work well for TA projects.

Source: Evaluation Team

The following is a synopsis of reflections, generated at the workshop held with all of the TA agencies delivering the projects in DFID India's education portfolio. The workshop was held on 24 November 2015 in New Delhi. The logframes developed by the four TA groups (RMSA-TCA, TESS, OGIP and MPQAF) were presented to the evaluation team, not to be reviewed but to allow aspects of them to be used to illustrate particular points.

Participants were asked to discuss seven questions, as given in the box below.

Questions on the logframe discussed by workshop participants

1. How useful have you found your logframe and in what ways. If it has not been useful, why not?
2. What proportion and kinds of your necessary work is not captured in the logframe? Could they and should they be included in the logframe?
3. To what extent were your development problems defined in your Terms of Reference, logframe or when you started work?
4. TA is very much about managing processes. To what extent have process approaches been captured in your latest logframe? If poorly, how could they be captured?
5. Many logframe indicators are quantitative. Much of your work is about qualitative change. Do your logframe indicators capture qualitative changes? If not, how could this be done?
6. The logframe assumes that it is possible to define a logical results chain. Is this possible in TA in which neither the sequence nor the nature of change can be predicted?
7. Do your logframes adequately describe what learning strategies you should implement as part of your management tasks? If not, could you give examples of how what you have learned could have been included in a logframe?

Source: Evaluation Team

Responses were mixed about the usefulness of the logframe. It depended very much on how it was developed, with whom and how frequently it was amended to reflect changes in the project. In some cases, *the usefulness appeared to be restricted* because a project was working across a number of states in which the expected outputs and activities differed. Elsewhere its usefulness was restricted by changes of officers in the boundary partner – people who had not been involved in designing the initial logframe and saw little use for it. Overall, it was found that where objectives remain the same, pathways to reaching them changed, as did the milestones.

There was a debate as to whether the logframe was a static or dynamic tool. This may have been as a result of poor or no training in the construction and expected uses of the logframe. Participants who felt that designing the logframe was a one-off exercise, to satisfy DFID's requirements, thought that it was of little use during the project. It was felt that the *logframe does not have a mechanism for capturing changes in enabling conditions over time*.

For two of the projects (RMSA-TCA and TESS) it was felt that about 50% of the work done was not captured by the logframe. Others estimated that proportion to be 20-40%. Processes and soft skills, such as continuous trust-building, getting team members on board, communicating and developing context, are not captured. Similarly, variations in the different states, and the many miscellaneous tasks asked to be carried out by boundary partners and other agencies (or relationship-building), are not captured. Frequently revamping the logframe was thought to be a challenging exercise, but it helped those involved in thinking hard about the programme. This process was felt to be much more important than the tool itself.

Important activities, such as needs analysis or piloting, were reported by some not to have been included in the logframe. However, this may have occurred as a result of not knowing how to complete a logframe. It could also be an integral fault of the revised DFID logframe, where the Means of Verification (MoV) column has been replaced by boxes that give the source(s) of information for the achievement of milestones. But MoV is much more than just a source of information and used to indicate the type of research activity to be conducted to get the necessary information,

such as a needs analysis. MoV also need to be costed, whereas costing a source of information is not so obvious.

With regard to managing processes, TA agencies considered the logframe to be of mixed usefulness. Processes themselves can be described and, to some extent, quantified. However, there was general agreement that the logframe does not easily capture qualitative indicators, since all indicators are supposed to be quantitative. It is important to include qualitative indicators, such as the tasks that trained teachers are expected to perform and their degree of excellence (rather than just the output "teachers trained"). This might be more easily done through the ToC.

There appears to be a fundamental tension between the logframe, which assumes that things proceed logically, and TA, which may not be so predictable. The logframe, by definition, captures results, not processes. A separate tool (such as ToC) needs to be used to capture and measure TA effectiveness.

In summary, the logframe was considered to be a useful tool for initial project planning, particularly in the process of developing it, but it tended to be disregarded after a certain period of time. There were more immediate activities to be concerned with as the project proceeded other than revising the logframe. As such, limited use was made of the logframe as a monitoring tool.

9.1.2 Weaknesses of the Logframe

In the logframes given to the evaluation team, a further weakness is the poor use of the column (boxes) dealing with Assumptions or Risks. These are supposed to be reasonably substantive in nature and not generalisations which may or may not affect a project. Also they need to be beyond the manageable interest of the project but of such a nature that they can be monitored by project management and appropriate action taken when necessary to keep the project on track.

However, the main weakness is the assumption that everybody knows how to construct a logframe, what the functions of a logframe are and how necessary it is to review the logframe as the project progresses. A logframe may look simple but the logframe of a project in the education sector is far from easy to construct. Another aspect that needs to be addressed is ensuring that the narrative summary (of impact, outcome, outputs and activities) and the accompanying indicators are at the right level.

In future, it would suggest that in the first instance, development of a logframe needs to be a joint effort between DFID and the partner government department – the MHRD in the case of India – at the time of preparation of the Terms of Reference. This means that representatives of both departments need to have a clear idea of the development and utility of a logframe.

Secondly, construction of the logframe can help in clarifying and reaching agreement on the objectives and the processes of a project. Once the contract has been awarded to a TA agency, then the process needs to be repeated between the TA agency and the different stakeholders. It is not something to be done by a couple of people only in a closed room just to satisfy DFID requirements, but an opportunity for TA to exercise "soft skills" and establish its credibility.

Finally, it would be useful to expand the logframe to have a more descriptive content as well as measurable content. Since much TA is about behaviour change we can measure it by the number of people who have observably changed behaviour for the better or in terms of what is intended by TA.

9.2 How can the Theory of Change be used for TA?

Key Points:

1. Theories of Change (ToCs) are used in many different ways but the following have been identified as key features of any ToC:
   - They involve contextual analysis
   - There is a definition of the long-term changes that are sought and a sequence of change required to achieve the defined set of changes
   - Assumptions underlying conceptions as to how change will happen are defined
   - A diagram and a narrative summary are included.

2. All TA programmes in India have ToCs. They are often diagrammatic representations of the logframe. Many finished states are thinly described. There is lack of reference to changes in behaviour or underlying assumptions.

3. ToCs can be a useful tool if:
   - TA agencies are obliged to engage in ToC thinking.
   - Outcomes are specified in rich detail.
   - Processes of change are comprehensively specified.
   - Assumptions about the process of change are transparent.

4. Advantages of ToCs
   - A more comprehensive analysis of TA activities and processes is possible. The 'soft' activities and the 'missing middle' of the logframe can be included. Currently 20-50% of the time spent by TA agencies is not recorded on the logframe or on their current ToCs.
   - Greater flexibility of process can be agreed with DFID. For example, the ToC can specify possible different routes to the same outcome.
   - Strategic planning can be helped.
   - A sound heuristic framework for monitoring & evaluation can be developed.
   - DFID's review process can use the additional tool.

5. A ToC that is tailored for TA would include:
   - A focus on the immediate- and medium-term changes in the individuals, groups and organisations with which the TA is in direct contact. Detailed descriptors of these changes will be provided. This is not to exclude reference to longer-term outputs, outcomes or impact;
   - Descriptors of processes as well as states;
   - Explicit assumptions contained in an accompanying narrative; and
   - A life beyond the TA. This recognises the catalytic nature of TA and lays down markers for any possible ex-post evaluation.

DFID should issue a guidance note on ToCs. This would explain the advantages of ToCs to TA agencies, and set out DFID's approach to ToC thinking.

Source: Evaluation Team

9.2.1 What is a ToC?

Stein and Valters (2012:5) concluded that:

'There is a basic problem that different organisations are using the term ToC to mean very different things. If there is no consensus on how to define ToC and it has endless variations in terms of style and content, how can anybody successfully grapple with it? Critics have argued that the failure of ToC proponents to tie it down to any tangible meaning has led people to make unrealistic promises on its behalf. If ToC is to be more than another development 'fuzzword', then greater clarity is needed on a number of levels, starting with common terminology, use and expectation of ToC approaches.'

However, many development agencies see value in the ToC. Vogel (2012) has identified the following as key features:

- They involve contextual analysis
- There is a definition of the long-term changes that are sought and a sequence of change required to achieve the defined set of changes
- Assumptions underlying conceptions as to how change will happen are specified
- A diagram and a narrative summary are included.

A ToC is an essential tool for analysing how and why a programme or project will work in a specific context, despite its limitations. ToCs are particularly important for TA, which typically relies quite heavily on adapting foreign models to new national contexts.

9.2.2 How have ToCs been designed and used in India?

The India TA programme has a comprehensive set of ToCs. These include:

- ToCs to support the business case for the major projects (RMSA, TESS and OGIP);
- ToCs developed by each agency during the course of implementation; and
- A portfolio ToC developed retrospectively by the agencies in a participatory workshop with DFID India.

ToCs were developed by each TA agency in compliance with DFID requirements. Most of the agencies did not appear to consider that the ToC assisted their implementation, and none appeared to use their ToC after it had been designed (even though they all recognised that it should be used as an evolving and flexible tool).

The design of ToC instruments inhibits their use in India. All the ToCs examined had certain common characteristics:

They are primarily diagrammatic representations of the logframe. The language employed is similar to that of a logframe, with a stress on defining inputs or activities and finished states. Descriptions of the processes that translate inputs to finished states at output or outcome levels are largely omitted. Indeed, there was no place in the structure of ToC diagrams for processes to be identified and defined. The only partial exception was in the business case for OGIP, where an additional column was

inserted to identify the brokering responsibilities of the DFID adviser. TA processes were neither identified nor defined in any of the ToCs.

Descriptions of finished states are often limited and use the language and conceptualisation of the logframe. Examples include: *'Disadvantaged girls identified for support'* and *'Strengthened community demand for improved service delivery'* (OGIP); '*Better* MIS' (RMSA) and *'Enhanced delivery of quality teacher education to more people'* (TESS). Each of these statements rests upon a modifier that lacks any significant meaning. The nature of the changed state to which project activities and processes are intended to lead are never given. We cannot therefore compare the situation before and after the intervention. A ToC should carry a description of the change that the project is attempting, within its diagram and any accompanying narrative. A rich description of the changed state is needed to define the nature and magnitude of the change that is being attempted.

A partial exception was the TESS ToC, which did introduce brief descriptions of finished states in its description of short- and medium-term outcomes.

For example:

Short-term outcome	Medium-term outcome
A common OER teacher education framework for Elementary being used by writing teams and to facilitate embedding	OER school-based teacher education to help deliver national and state priorities embedded in policy and practice
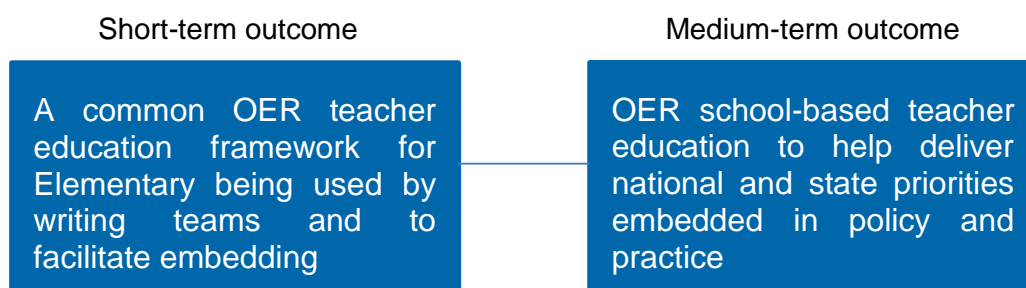
This is a more promising approach. The brief description of the short-term outcome at least partially defines the nature of the change expected from project activities, although it would have been more useful if the nature of the use was specified. A change of behaviour is also specified, so can be monitored and evaluated to assess the degree to which the project is achieving a short-term result, which is a precondition for both internal learning by the TA agency and external assessment by DFID.

Lack of reference to changes in behaviour. While states or events were defined as changes in the behaviour of individuals, institutions or organisations were not typically included in the ToCs in the portfolio. However, this is a fundamental omission given that TA is about capacity building, and particularly about changing the behaviour of institutions with which a TA has direct contact. Changes in state are important. However, for any change in state, there is a correlating change in behaviour to achieve sustainability. Toilets may be built in a school, but unless behaviours and systems are put in place to use and maintain the facilities, their long-term use is doubtful. Moreover, the TA may see early indicators of programme impact from these changes in behaviour.

Lack of reference to underlying assumptions. Identifying and questioning assumptions is central to the process of articulating a ToC. However, there is little evidence as to how this process has influenced the design of any ToC in the India programme. Exclusive focus on inputs and outputs/outcomes prevents the situational analysis that identifies "the underlying conditions or resources that have to exist for planned change to occur".

> **Underlying assumptions in the TESS project**
> - All teachers will be able to read and fully comprehend the materials in their local (state) language.
> - The OER materials are consistent with existing concepts of what it is to be a good teacher.
> - School management will be supportive of their use.
> - Actual time taken to use the OERs will be roughly equivalent to that allowed in the curriculum for a given unit of work.
> - All schools have got Internet access via computer or mobile.
>
> Making the assumptions explicit at an early stage would enable a pilot to be designed to test whether the assumptions hold and under what conditions.

Source: Evaluation Team

9.2.3 How can ToCs be a useful tool for TA agencies and DFID?

Despite a lack of consensus on the meaning and use of ToCs, and their limited use in India, there is sufficient evidence of their utility to development agencies to warrant their use as a standard DFID tool in the context of TA.

■ *Compliance can encourage ToC thinking.* Vogel's informants considered that the ToC should not be a prescribed methodology, used as a thinking tool throughout the project cycle. However, at least one of the agencies in India that had initially developed a ToC to comply with DFID's requirement, said they found it a useful process for clarifying their conceptualisation of the process of change.

ToC thinking can be very useful for TA, by requiring agencies to define their intended outcomes in detail.

The approach used by outcome mapping methodology is helpful. Under outcome mapping outcomes are conceived as changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities and actions of individuals, groups or organisations. They use active verbs and stress behavioural change. The outcome statement will usually incorporate multiple changes within the overall description. Detailed outcome descriptors should be required by DFID to encourage agencies to consider exactly what they are trying to achieve. All agencies stressed that the final products should remain invariable even if the processes leading to them were flexible. Therefore, the descriptors could be built into DFID's review processes.

Requiring agencies to define their anticipated process of change would promote multiple benefits.

First, a more comprehensive analysis would result, addressing two current omissions in current logframes and ToCs in India:

■ the processes that TA agencies are obliged to undertake as preconditions for effective activities and

■ what has been termed 'the missing middle' (Vogel 2012) or how the immediate results of the programmes influence changes at other levels to influence outcome and impact in the long term.

These activities are a necessary element of the process of change and should be included, explicit and transparent**.**

Flexibility can be built into programme implementation and agreed with DFID. Processes can change and may not occur in the sequence anticipated. This is

particularly important for the non-linear character of TA. Moreover, alternative processes could be specified in a ToC diagram and narrative, allowing for experimentation and the identification of possible mistakes.

The ToC is an aid to strategic planning and should make assumptions explicit and define the changes that the project is attempting to introduce. Making assumptions explicit is an extension of the traditional logframe. It should also be underpinned by a systematic analysis of the conditions necessary to achieve success. This should include the actions that need to be undertaken by the TA agency in order to secure those conditions, to the extent its own contribution allows.

Comprehensive change analysis can be used as a heuristic framework to develop a robust monitoring & evaluation system. The change analysis will serve as a basis for agreement between DFID and TA agencies on the nature and scope of the monitoring & evaluation investigation. The monitoring & evaluation should test the validity of the assumptions in the ToC. If it shows that a planned ToC result has not been achieved, the TA should challenge the assumptions and strategies deployed to achieve the result.

ToCs can assist DFID's monitoring and review process. The greater the degree of intended change specified, the less inference needed by DFID staff in assessing the quality and impact of the TA work. This will lend a greater degree of objectivity in the process of reviewing TA. A more flexible ToC tool allows easier adjustment by DFID's management and review processes in the incremental, adaptive strategies that many TA agencies need to follow.

A simple ToC diagram, accompanied by a meaningful narrative, can succinctly communicate change strategies. Judgement should be used in communicating the ToC to external partners, given the sensitive, and often political, nature of TA activity.

9.2.4 What would a TA ToC look like?

Given the variety of types of TA, it would not be appropriate to be prescriptive, but the following will need to be included in TA ToCs:

- **Detailed descriptors, which define how the behaviour, relationships and activities of individuals, institutions and organisations will change, for the project or programme to be successful.** Detailed descriptors would help to define change. They reflect the fact that development is complex and that, for a given state to be achieved, (say, enhanced community participation) a complex set of changes will have to be put in place to enable the desired state to be achieved and be sustainable. Detailed descriptors are likely to encourage more realistic analyses of the assumptions underpinning the project or programme. Detailed descriptors can also guide the design of monitoring & evaluation instruments. In the absence of detail, the evaluator will either assume the nature of change and design instruments accordingly, or be obliged to spend considerable time in dialogue with project staff eliciting the specifications of intended changes.

- **A focus on immediate- and medium-term change in the partners, groups and organisations with which a TA is in direct contact.** This does not preclude consideration of long-term outcomes or impact but the face validity of formative monitoring, evaluation or DFID assessment/review would be much higher if the greatest attention were paid to issues within the control of the TA itself. The further downstream the analysis is made, the more uncertain will be the relationship between the activities of the TA and the changes that are being observed. Moreover, it is probably true to say that if the immediate intended changes are not

observed, then it is unlikely that the downstream effects or impact will be significant.

- **Process descriptors.** This recommendation flows from the nature of TA as well as reflecting that changes in behaviour are fundamental to development. Unless processes are also included in the theory of change, it will be an incomplete reflection of the TA role, and the means by which inputs are translated into desired outputs will be left unexamined.

- **An accompanying narrative with explicit assumptions.** Each of the ToC diagrams supporting a business case was accompanied by a narrative (which was not the case for theories of change developed by the TA agencies in India). The assumptions drew heavily (and rightly) on the lessons that could be drawn from international evidence, but were not accompanied by an equally detailed reflection on the degree to which the context in which the TA would be operating raised specific issues that might have a bearing on the change process.

- **The capacity to remedy deficiencies, for ToCs developed by the TA during implementation.** This would be achieved by drawing on the contextual analyses generated towards the start of implementation. These ToCs should be consistent with those developed previously by DFID during project preparation, but be much more specific about context, assumptions and, therefore, the processes/strategies required to successfully achieve outputs and outcomes.

- **A life of the TA. All TA projects and programmes in India form part of a longer and broader process of institutional and behavioural change managed by central and state governments.** Their full contribution is likely to be only be fully realised after project closure. It would be useful to extend the ToC beyond project closure, as TESS has done, in order to read the ToC logic backwards. Specification of the intended changes to be brought about by boundary partners, after the end of TA, will help clarify the capacities the partners require.

9.2.5 Recommendation: DFID should produce a guidance note on ToC

ToCs have not been used to great effect in India. Some of the weaker elements of the programme might have been avoided or mitigated if a greater clarify had been in place on the nature of the change process.

There is sufficient evidence to justify increased stress on ToC thinking by TA agencies. In order for this to happen, TA agencies must be aware of its potential value. Agencies in India do not all appreciate the value of the ToC tool, but are all acutely conscious of the need to develop change processes appropriate to their contexts.

This suggests a guidance note should be issued by DFID. This will be similar to the 'How To' notes. It could:

- stipulate that design of ToCs is mandatory;
- provide a framework within which ToCs can be designed,
- emphasise the challenges around TA, but not make any specific form mandatory; and
- explain the relevance and importance of ToC thinking, and relate this discussion to its suggested framework.

9.3   What are the challenges for TA in Results-based management?

> **Key Points:**
>
> 1. **TA is not readily compatible with results-based management:**
>   - **Impact is often downstream**
>   - **Cause and effect approaches are often too simplistic.**
>   - **Results-based management is easier to apply to linear systems, which much TA is not.**
>   - **Too much focus on bureaucratic procedures could inhibit building strong partnerships and engaging stakeholders.**
>   - **Specifying TA results is difficult.**
>
> 2. **The problem can be mitigated, although an inherent tension remains:**
>   - **Use the ToC as a management tool for monitoring, assessment and review of TA agencies.**
>   - **Take account of the 'soft' activities and processes of TA.**

Source: Evaluation Team

9.3.1   What is the issue?

Characteristic features of TA are not easily compatible with a results-based management approach.

- The identification of impact is an important element of DFID discourse, but there are several challenges when this is applied to the management of TA. Firstly, impact is often found downstream and might be slow to appear. Secondly, cause and effect ways of thinking, which stress identifying a problem and proposing a solution, are too simplistic. TA operates in an open, unpredictable environment, in which the eventual impact is 'caused' by other actors as well as the TA itself.

- Management by results is easier to apply in linear systems, where the sequence of change processes is predictable and logical (as in logical frame theory). TA does not always function in this way. The contextual complexity of TA has to be taken into account. Application of simple linear models may mask how learning, and why change, take place.

- Some claim that appropriately completed and updated planning & reporting documentation inhibits the formation of strong partnerships and the involvement of stakeholders, both key to successful TA. This is because this documentation increases the influence of managers over the achievement of results. (Earl, Carden & Smutylo, 2001).

- It is sometimes difficult to specify what a meaningful result is. Merely having trained a certain number of a target group has not necessarily changed anything at all. If TA agencies have effectively trained a target group, the results and the processes should be understood by managers if the work of the TA is to be adequately assessed.

DFID advisers and TA agencies in India have found means of circumventing some of the above problems. In agreement with DFID, the RMSA-TCA, for example, links its results and payment milestones with the production of reports. The production of reports is within the control of the agency, while the processes that drive the TA are not. However, it is not an ideal solution, as it promotes bureaucratic accountability over the change process.

9.3.2 Approaches to mitigating the problem

DFID will continue to apply some form of results based management. How can it be made more compatible with TA?

- *Use the ToC as a management tool.* Understanding processes is central to the assessment of TA. Amongst DFID's major tools, the logframe is not perhaps ideally designed to capture process. The ToC, however, should capture the processes of change and provide a description of what that entails. In principle it could be used alongside the logframe for assessment purposes. This should prove to be a more robust form of assessment than one which relies solely on results at the end of a process chain.

- *Take account of the 'soft' activities of TA* by including them in both the logframe and the ToC tools, and making them part of the assessment process. Even in India, the TA agencies felt that they had to justify such work through the production of reports (e.g. for needs assessment findings). Recognising the value of, and need for, soft activities would reduce the anxieties of TA agencies and lead to the most relevant form of assessing TA.

9.4 What is the role of a DFID Education Adviser in Ensuring the Effective Delivery of TA?

> **Key Points:**
>
> 1. This review suggests that an education adviser should possess three sets of knowledge and skills;
>   - technical knowledge and its application;
>   - soft skills; and
>   - management expertise and skills.
> 2. Technical expertise includes:
>   - A grasp of the main drivers of education reform, from international research. There is also an increasing need to understand intervention strategies for enhancing learning.
>   - A knowledge of what is applicable, practical, and affordable in current political, managerial and economic circumstances (and flexibility to revise these if circumstances change). This includes being responsive and spotting opportunities that arise with change.
>   - The ability to interpret, apply and contextualise technical knowledge.
>   - Capability in analysing the main dynamics of a given education system and agility to prioritise accordingly.
>   - An understanding of TA processes.
>   - An ability to devise and manage strategies, to ensure that learning takes place during implementation. This should be underpinned by an informed understanding of the ToC of monitoring & evaluation.
> 3. Soft skills include:
>   - an ability to develop and sustain professional relationships and trust with key stakeholders;
>   - negotiation and political skills; and
>   - the wisdom to understand the tempo of change.
> 4. Generic management skills (including the ability to refrain from micro-management) are also needed. These include:

> - the capacity to manage, sometimes painful, change; and
> - the understanding, interpretation and use of key DFID tools.
> - an appreciation of contracting processes, ideally.
>
> The firm conclusion of the team is that, in the light of the experience of TA in India, an experienced and weighty adviser is required if the TA programme is to continue to be well selected and managed.

Source: Evaluation Team

The comments below, on the role of an education adviser and on the type of person who would be able to manage a TA portfolio effectively, might well have resonance beyond the borders of India.

The account below selectively highlights issues that have emerged during this review. Evidence from India suggests that the education adviser should have:

- technical expertise;
- soft skills and
- management expertise.

We consider each in turn below.

9.4.1 Technical Expertise

The technical expertise required to effectively and efficiently delivery TA is varied;

- The post holder needs to have a *sound grasp of the main findings of international research on the key drivers of global education reform*. An impending revision of global education development goals will incorporate targets for learning for the first time. It will be ever more essential that the adviser understands international research findings on how children learn, under what circumstances, and is reasonably aware of the relationships between pedagogy and culture. The adviser should also be aware of the issues covered in this review

- The adviser will also need to be able to *interpret the findings of research and apply such interpretation to specific contexts.* A central feature of TA is the transfer of models from one context to another, as exemplified by all projects or programmes in the India portfolio with the possible exception of the MoTA. Interpretation will also be needed on the management of analogous projects as well as an appreciation of the strength of the evidence from international findings.

- Account should also be taken of what is feasible in particular contexts, which will require prior international experience.

> **What is feasible in the context? The example of boundary partners.**
>
> **Choosing boundary partners is not easy. The outcome mapping manual makes slight reference to the difficulties involved. However, as the case of the NAS demonstrates, it may sometimes be necessary to choose a boundary partner unable to deliver at the end of the project, in order to grasp a particular strategic opportunity. Selecting a boundary partner often involves weighing up conflicting criteria and making the best reasoned judgement.**

- An education adviser will also need proven *capacity to analyse the present state, dynamics and political economy of a given education system,* to identify the most appropriate opportunities for DFID, and enter into an informed dialogue with the host government. India is particularly challenging in this respect.

- An *understanding of TA processes* is also important, for projects or the portfolio to be managed effectively.

- An *informed understanding of monitoring & evaluation methods, systems and processes* is a vital part of the role, precisely because this is often a weakness in the TA agencies themselves. The adviser will need to ensure that measures are put in place to ensure learning during implementation takes place. This will safeguard DFID's professional reputation when scale up or replication occurs and will enable DFID to accumulate learning of how TA functions in different contexts.

- A capacity to *review a portfolio and identify points of synergy or convergence* would be a useful asset in larger countries. In a country such as India, the education adviser has had to demonstrate the kinds of technical expertise identified above to very senior and competent central and state government officials, and very informed professional cadres.

9.4.2 Soft Skills

The capacity to exercise soft skills effectively is a crucial part of the job of an education adviser. These soft skills are similar to those required by TA agencies and include the capacity to:

- Develop and sustain professional relationships and trust with a wide range of stakeholders, including government partners and TA agencies.

- Negotiate with senior officials, in order to reach satisfactory political compromises. The eventual design of the OGIP cash transfer and learning hubs programme is an example but disruptive political change was experienced by all agencies over the course of the last three years. While DFID will expect agencies to build their own political coalitions, as an insurance against political disruption of programmes, the adviser has a role, which he has effectively exercised, of being an agent of conflict resolution, when necessary.

- Understand the tempo of change and prioritise accordingly. This requires varied career experience but is essential. The adviser will be effective if s/he can understand how key stakeholders view change and the priorities of change. This will sometimes require selecting, what might appear to be, a sub-optimal solution, but is the best in the circumstances. Continued support for the NAS development is a case in point. Direct intervention, to enhance learning, might have appeared to be a more attractive option. However, the NAS is laying foundations for a more informed policy and planning debate in the future on intervention strategies to improve learning. Its development also aligns well with the framework the Government of India wishes DFID to work within.

9.4.3 Management Expertise

The management expertise of a DFID adviser is more critical to the success of a TA portfolio than might be expected. DFID advisers in sensitive and complex countries, such as India, will preferably need to have demonstrated their management of change skills before being put in post. Management expertise is the capacity to;

- *Manage change, particularly in TA agencies.* This requires the ability to see when change in an agency is needed and to exercise soft skills in ensuring that often painful changes are put in place. Although the adviser is in authority over the

agencies he or she still needs to exert considerable skill in managing changes from the outside on a contracted agency. DFID advisers in India had to manage protracted and difficult change in the TESS project, before satisfactorily resolving implementation problems.

- *Understand and manage DFID's main tools, the logframe and the ToC,* to ensure their effective evolution as planning tools for TA agencies and their fitness for purpose in monitoring or reviewing agency performance. While the logframe is, at least, familiar to most agencies, it was evident the TA agencies did not have a firm grasp of the ToC or its potential to assist their management processes. The adviser will therefore not only have to understand the theory and practice of the tools, but be able to mentor agencies as well

- *Demonstrate generic management skills.* The agencies particularly appreciated not being micro-managed by DFID in India. Micro-management is an inefficient waste of scarce resource, although DFID has had to intervene in India on important matters and take care to ensure that it understands/acts upon the evolving big picture.

- *Understand the implications of contracting processes.* An education adviser does not need to be a contracting specialist but does need to be involved in the contracting process. In particular, the adviser will wish to ensure that agency teams have the right composition of technical and management expertise. The lack of evaluation expertise, for example, demonstrated by some of the agencies, has inhibited learning during implementation.

9.4.4 Conclusion

The role of a DFID adviser requires a challenging knowledge and skill set. The competence and experience of senior government officials and academic educationalists in India will require the presence of an internationally experienced, technically competent and authoritative adviser. This is even more the case as DFID moves to a TA-only approach. Impacts will be more dependent on the ability to introduce new ideas, convene, broker and influence at the highest levels of government.

9.5 What Portfolio Management has occurred?

Key Points:

1. Portfolio management can promote the achievement of strategic objectives and be a means of identifying synergies between portfolio components in improving overall performance.

2. DFID India has retrospectively designed a ToC for the portfolio (which did not exist as a DFID tool when the portfolio was developed). This could be consolidated by:

   - Using the tool as a framework for the selection of new projects aligned with country objectives
   - Providing incentives for TA agencies to review their ToCs regularly and better aligning them with their logframes.
   - Linking overall strategy to operational performance, by ensuring that learning during implementation is designed to discover the extent to which strategic objectives are to be met.

3. DFID education advisers have an important role in identifying synergies between projects Mutually reinforcing effects should be created and advisers

> could be encouraged to find time to help identify them, and to improve the liaison between TA agencies working on the synergies.

Source: Evaluation Team

9.5.1 What is portfolio management?

**Portfolio management is much more than simply managing multiple projects.**

> *'It is the management of the entire project portfolio in a way that maximises the impact of projects to the overall success of the organisation.'*
>
> *PWC, 2012*

DFID's support to the education sector in India was not initially designed as a comprehensive and inter-linked portfolio. The driving impetus from the GoI was to use DFID to fill some of their most important human resource gaps. Other components of the portfolio developed in different ways – e.g. OGIP was designed as a one-off initiative, following a UK Ministerial visit.

However, DFID advisers made efforts retrospectively to frame their programme as more than a collection of projects. This included considering the degree to which it could, in its totality, drive towards well specified strategic objectives. As part of this process, a ToC for the whole programme was developed in an active and participatory workshop with all the TA agencies, which resulting in the diagram shown below.

Figure 9.1 Education Portfolio Theory of Change
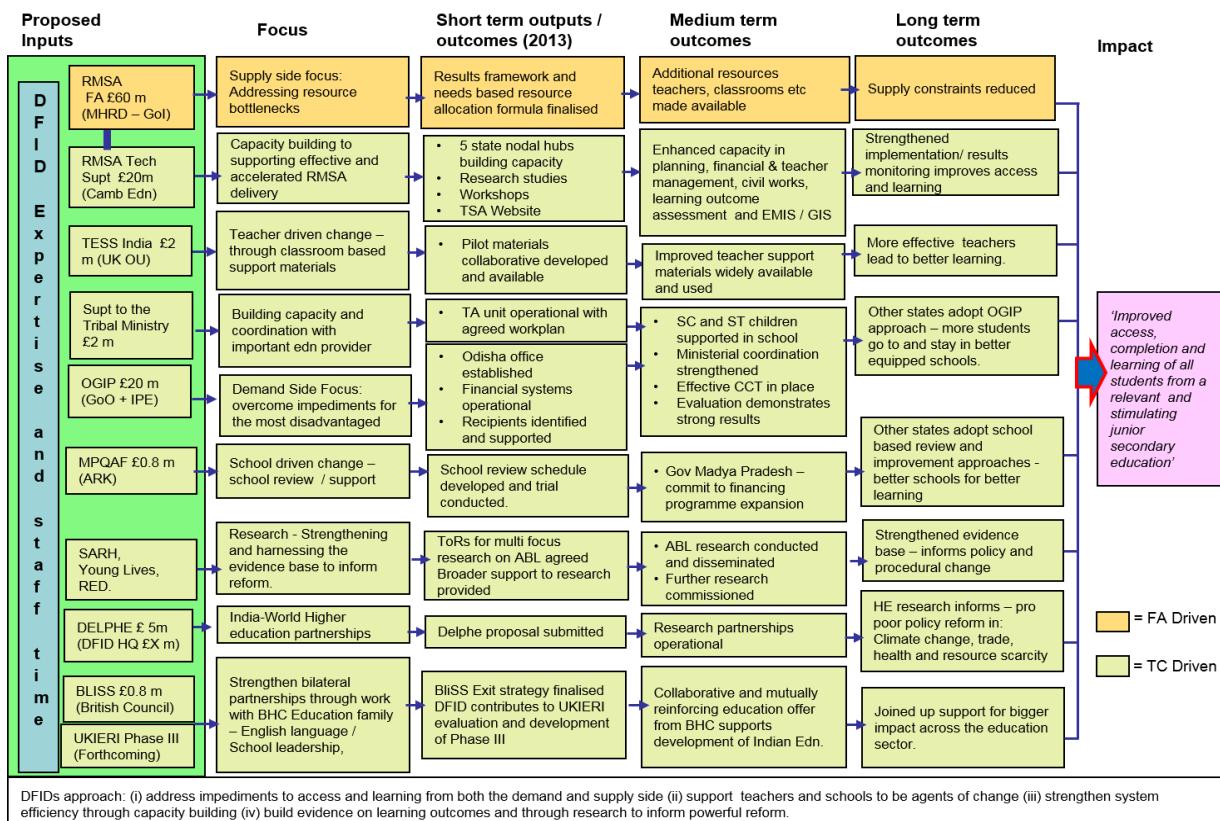
Source: DFID advisor

Portfolio management can be considered from two perspectives, the degree to which active portfolio management can:

I.   **promote the achievement of strategic objectives and**

II. **assist the development of synergies or inter-linkages to improve project performance.**

9.5.2   How did the DFID portfolio promote strategic objectives?

The ToC developed in India recognised the importance of defining strategic objectives to which all projects or programme components could contribute. It was a relatively straightforward concept. Each project or portfolio sub-component had its own outputs and outcomes, which collectively contributed to one broadly specified impact objective. The entire portfolio is summarised on one page. This is good practice.

However, the portfolio model could have been, and still could be, developed further. Private sector theories of portfolio management need to be adjusted to account for DFID's objectives and, crucially, DFID's work in consultation with host governments. It is not entirely free to select its own portfolio as, in theory, would be the case with a private corporation. However, certain approaches from the private sector could enhance the use of portfolio management techniques to promote DFID's strategic objectives. These include:

■   *Policy framework.* A mature portfolio management approach would ensure that global and country policy objectives are aligned with the selection of projects. A portfolio management strategy would provide a formal framework that identifies processes for selection and prioritisation. These would clearly have to be linked to the priorities of the host government.

■   *Linked overall strategy and operational performance.* If strategic objectives are defined for the portfolio, and the contribution of each project towards the overall strategy specified, a framework exists to define what has to be learned during the course of implementation. Monitoring & evaluation design could take into account the framework provided by strategic country objectives, as well as the more detailed requirements of the project itself.

Following the example provided by DFID India, DFID overall may wish to explore the degree to which more formal methods of portfolio management could be used to enhance the management of overall country and thematic portfolios.

9.5.3   How did the DFID portfolio promote synergies to improve performance?

An important role of the DFID adviser is to promote synergies between projects to create mutually reinforcing effects. In India, the DFID adviser brought agencies together to design the portfolio ToC collaboratively. Emphasis was placed on showing how each sub-component contributed to the programme's strategic objective.

However, this could have been taken further, by identifying synergies across the portfolio and actively supporting cross-working on these, aiming at adding value and leverage across the portfolio. Important synergies between the projects, which were largely missed or developed on an *ad hoc* basis, included:

■   The videos of classroom practice produced under the TESS project, but which were also very helpful for training assessors under MPQAF. Similarly, training assessors in the classroom interaction favoured by TESS could have created an enhanced enabling environment for TESS practice.

- TESS approaches might well have been usefully employed in developing materials for initiatives taken by OGIP (e.g. learning hubs) and RMSA-TCA, to promote the knowledge and skills of pupils entering secondary education insufficiently prepared.
- Three projects were using cascade training on a large scale, while both OGIP and RMSA were engaged on a small scale. Sharing experiences and methods might have been mutually beneficial.

Practice in India has indicated the potential of portfolio management, but it has been limited by the amount of time available to dedicate to the task. Advisers could be encouraged to spend more time developing the practice of portfolio management. This could:

- clarify the definition of strategic objectives,

- ensure that all parts of the programme are making a contribution to the achievement of the strategy and

- identify important synergies between components of the programme.

There could be a stronger role to support very practical sharing of project development across different parts of the portfolio, including approaches, processes and specific material development.

9.6   How can DFID learn from TA?

Key Points:

1. It is not always easy to measure the results of TA. Outcomes and the sequence of processes are sometimes poorly specified and this can be exacerbated by weaknesses in formative monitoring & evaluation and by the marketization of specialised TA knowledge. Possible ameliorative measures include:

   - Building the capacity of education advisers in monitoring & evaluation through a generic course. This could generate informed oversight and management of TA monitoring & evaluation activities, by sensitising advisers to the processes and metrics required of TA. The degree to which an adviser has promoted learning during implementation could be built into performance assessment.

   - Paying more attention to building expertise in monitoring & evaluation when contracting TA. This could be either within the team or sub-contracted. Providing guidance to contracting staff on how to recognise and score such expertise would also help.
     – Institutionalising learning from TA by:
     – developing a global strategy for ex-post evaluations, selecting those from which key lessons are likely to be learned in relation to DFID's global education agenda;
     – developing a database of learning from TA.

Source: Evaluation Team

9.6.1   Why is it difficult?

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact considered that DFID gave insufficient priority to learning during implementation. As a consequence, DFID

was not able to build on experience by turning learning into action and thereby managing activity in a more informed manner.

Learning from TA is particularly difficult. The characteristic features of TA make it difficult to conceptualise the precise nature of the development challenge. This makes the change process required to meet the challenge hard to define. The behaviour change process central to TA, even when clearly conceptualised, is unpredictable. These factors make the interpretation of the results of TA problematic, given the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory results that are often found (as we saw in the section on sustainability above)

Problems are exacerbated by weaknesses in the design and implementation of monitoring & evaluation. This was seen as the weakest area of TA implementation in India. The experience of the team suggests that this might also true elsewhere.

A further factor is the nature of contracting for TA, which inhibits the systematic accumulation of understanding in two respects:

- There is a lack of institutional continuity. TA teams are formed and then disperse, taking their understanding with them. Teams are often required to summarise lessons learned but there may not always be an incentive to reflect profoundly on these issues towards the end of a contract.

- In the free market of TA agencies, knowledge is a marketable commodity. Whatever agencies might say, they are not necessarily committed to sharing knowledge and insights – especially with potential rivals.

9.6.2   What can be done?

We can identify two forms of learning:

- learning about a **specific programme or project** during the course of implementation;

- the accumulation of learning from all TA programmes or projects, in order to develop an evidence base for **enhancing the design and management of future TA.**

9.6.3   Better learning during implementation

TA agencies will need to design and implement an appropriate monitoring & evaluation system. DFID has a professional responsibility to ensure that this happens, particularly in cases where scale up or replication is being considered. Given the catalytic nature of most TA, this is likely to include most TA programmes or projects. DFID will also need to ensure that the TA monitoring & evaluation design is fit for purpose and implemented in a robust manner methodologically.

9.6.4   Build individual capacity and modify the assessment system

DFID advisers have a responsibility to ensure that contracted agencies learn during implementation. Such oversight requires an understanding of how TA may best be monitored and evaluated, in a manner consistent with its particular characteristics. We suggest:

(a) A tailor-made monitoring & evaluation course be commissioned for the education adviser cadre, to include:

- An introduction to quantitative methods, including sampling. This should emphasis statistical methods (monitoring & evaluation specialists have this understanding),

particularly the circumstances in which quantitative methods can be best applied and institutionalised for the formative and summative evaluation of education projects

■ An introduction to qualitative methods, which are more important for TA, to include:
  – methods,
  – the formulation of research questions,
  – data categorisation and analysis; and
  – drawing conclusions.
■ Specific issues of importance for education advisers, such as:
  – the design and conduct of pilots; and
  – monitoring & evaluation of classroom practice
■ Relationship of monitoring & evaluation to key DFID tools;
  – The logframes and
  – The ToC.

(b) A standard assessment criterion, based on the degree to which an adviser promotes learning during implementation.
■ This would require evidence that an adviser had exercised effective oversight over the contracted agency/agencies under his or her management. The evidence could consist of:
  – efforts to promote the design of systems,
  – the analysis of results or
  – the use of monitoring & evaluation evidence to adjust project or programme processes.

9.6.5 Build into contracting the need for monitoring & evaluation expertise

TA agencies may need to have more capacity to develop sound formative evaluation systems.

In contracting TA agencies, DFID could routinely consider what monitoring & evaluation skills will be required, to learn from programme implementation and to contract teams which can either demonstrate sufficient skills in-house or through the use of associate consultants. Proven experience of quantitative and qualitative methods will usually be required, with particular emphasis of process evaluation in the fields of institutional or behavioural change.

9.6.6 Institutionalising learning from TA

There is a need to accumulate an understanding of how TA may be rendered more effective. This is more than the sum of the lessons from individual projects. While these are necessary, DFID should also consider:
■ planning proactively for ex-post evaluations of selected TA projects or programmes;
■ building a database of learning from TA.

9.6.7 Planning for ex-post evaluations

Formative monitoring & evaluation will help contribute towards DFID's understanding of how TA works, but the results will only be partial.

- The timescale for TA is not usually long enough for the full process to have been implemented.
- As a result, the India programme shows that sustainability signals are ambiguous at the end of most TA programmes. Whether or not the programme has lasting impact, as predicted in its ToC, cannot be known until more time has elapsed. This point may be particularly pertinent in India, where many initiatives appear to have foundered after a promising start.
- Much TA is catalytic in nature, which implies that an important element of its eventual impact will take place after the TA has completed its activities.

If DFID wishes to accumulate understanding as to how and in what circumstances TA has a positive impact, it could plan a global ex-post evaluation strategy in the education sector. This would entail selecting a few key ex-post evaluations of projects or programmes that had dealt with themes or issues of strategic importance for future TA. Given that the 2015-30 education goal will be the first United Nations development goal, to include targets for learning outcomes, TA projects or programmes closely or directly aligned with enhancing learning will be obvious candidates. In India, the prime candidate for ex-post evaluation is TESS.[12]

9.6.8 Building a database of learning from TA

The TA database could include reports, case studies, reviews and evaluations pertaining to TA. However, to be really valuable it would need to adopt some of the methods of qualitative research and develop sets of categories from the material, in order to organise the disparate materials thematically.

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[12] *An ex post impact evaluation of TESS would be both feasible and desirable. It is a highly significant project addressing pedagogic processes that will require increasing attention in the future (see Alexander, 2008). The project itself is operates in a highly open and uncertain environment. Subsequent evaluation could tease out some of the underlying project assumptions. A quantitative impact evaluation could be designed that translates classroom behaviour into values, and then to associate the resulting data with that from NAS learning. The sample chosen for ex-post TESS impact evaluation could use the same NAS representative random samples. The great benefit of NAS is that it is now capable of developing time series data for analysis of learning trends, which could be related to trends in the use of TESS materials and resulting pedagogic changes in the classroom.*

10   Conclusions and Recommendations for DFID

10.1   What are the key findings from India?

The key findings show high levels of impressive TA delivery, and lead to recommendations for DFID around operating models, metrics, and communication

The overall quality of TA delivery in India was very impressive, with considerable commitment shown by both DFID and the agencies in seeking to resolve issues confronted. The combination of good practices and significant weaknesses makes India a suitable case study to address DFID's wider concerns.

These findings are pertinent to the India programme but most will have resonance elsewhere. They have been reviewed by and discussed with the DFID education adviser and the TA agencies. A broad measure of agreement was reached. Any disagreements are indicated in the text.

The study findings provide important insights with implications for operating models, induction, utilisation and deployment of DFID advisers, metrics for impact and communication of results.

Section A: The Nature and Characteristics of Technical Assistance

5. The key conditions for successful implementation of TA are:

- Effective identification of key strategic areas to target need to be negotiated up-front between the DFID Education Adviser and central or state governments, and may require subsequent negotiation.

- An iterative implementation process, consistent with the nature of the project or programme, with sustained stakeholder involvement.

- TA agencies with:
  - specialised technical staff in-house, with external specialists blended into the team;
  - sufficient management expertise to act as successful intermediaries and manage change processes;
  - sufficient research expertise to handle needs assessment and monitoring/evaluation;
  - the soft skills required to sustain stakeholder relationships; and
  - a strong understanding of the local context as well as DFID's operating context.

- Technical specialists employed by the TA agency who pay attention both to the technical task, the political economy and the process of individual capacity building.

- Emergent, detailed definitions of TA outcomes. For most of the projects and programmes under review, it had not been possible or desirable to define outcomes too precisely at the beginning. However, it still proved necessary to develop a clear and rich description of intended outcomes as a guide to implementation and strategies to test the change logic underpinning the project design.

- Knowledge in the TA agencies of their mission and scope, and the capability to restrict their activities, to avoid spreading themselves too thinly and not achieving their core objectives.

- Strong TA agency leadership, located in-country. External consultants, while invaluable, should not lead the project.

- Sufficient time for the project or programme to create the minimum conditions for sustainability. For complex education projects such as TESS, with a long developmental stage and complex localisation and cascade training processes, three years is insufficient.

6. **The generic characteristics of TA determine how it should be implemented and managed.**

There is no single form of TA and nor should there be. It varies according to need, scope, context and implementing agency, yet all TA has certain characteristics in common:

- A convincing narrative of change is key to successful TA.
- TA agencies contribute to but do not fully control the processes or sequences which lead to outcomes.
- The TA team needs to earn credibility and trust with stakeholders through a display of technical competence, timeliness and responsiveness, with a substantial investment of time early in Inception and Implementation.
- Soft skills need to be deployed by the TA agencies in dealing with behaviour change in individuals, groups and organisations.
- Developing and sustaining relationships with existing and new stakeholders should be a major focus.
- Data generation is vital in understanding the nature and functioning of the models of practice developed by TA, to allow for replication or scale up.

7. **There is no simple cause and effect relationship between TA inputs and final outcomes.**

- TA activities are non-linear and unpredictable, making them hard to capture in linear-based tools (such as logframes), and to measure through results-based management, especially where results are overly defined.
- Attribution is difficult to measure in TA. The contribution of DFID or other donors through TA agencies might be indirect or catalytic or a combination of both but is not controlled by them.

8. **A proposed schematic matrix of DFID Education project types could be used as a basis for further investigation in other education projects.**

- Projects were categorised in terms of the degree of change attempted against two key globally-recognised components for the education sector – **enhancing access and quality improvement. There appeared to be three types of change attempted in these projects against those two components: pre-defined discrete system change, open-ended discrete change and progressive innovation.**

Table 10.1   India TA Programme – Project Typology

		Level of attempted change		
		Pre-defined discrete system change	**Open-ended discrete change**	**Progressive innovation**
Education components	**Enhance access**	OGIP	TESS India BLISS	MoTA RMSA-TCA
	Quality improvements	MP-QAF		

Source: Evaluation Team

The three levels of attempted change, as shown in Table 1.1, are:

iv.   **Pre-defined discrete system change – a strategy that is designed to effect a single major pre-defined change to the education system.**

Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme (OGIP) has introduced a cash transfer system into the state of Odisha aiming to improve access. The School Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) seeks to introduce a school assessment system into the state of Madhya Pradesh to improve quality. For both projects, the aim is to establish a single best system although, in the case of QAF it is recognised that subsequent improvements will and should be made.

v.   **Open-ended discrete change – a strategy designed to introduce a single major change in the education system, but one which requires both system and behavioural change. There is no one best solution for implementing the desired change.**

The Teacher Support Programme (TESS India) and BLISS projects are examples. TESS is introducing new materials for use by teacher training institutions and teachers, while BLISS is developing systems for training English Language teachers.

vi.   **Progressive innovation – a strategy based on a number of successive modest but cumulative changes, resulting in considerable overall changes in time. The long-term objective is comprehensive and large scale reform.**

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan TA Fund (RMSA-TCA) and technical support to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) appear to fit within this category.

Section B: Educational issues of Global Concern

5. **TA can be used effectively to develop cash transfer systems on a sustainable basis. Key findings to emerge in relation to Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme (OGIP) include:**

   ■ Demand has to be promoted as part of the scheme to accelerate take up, particularly amongst the most deprived groups, through intensive efforts with localised and highly dedicated staff.

   ■ Conditionality did not appear to have been strictly enforced nor to have materially affected attendance.

   ■ A minimum of three years is required to establish the scheme after a pilot has demonstrated the feasibility in principle of the technical solutions proposed.

   ■ TA did enable extremely deprived groups to attend school but the capacity of the state government to maintain the level of effort required has yet to be tested and is unlikely to replicate the level of intense support by dedicated block officers employed the TA agency.

6. **Creating innovative approaches to meeting the needs of students entering secondary education with inadequate knowledge and skills is an increasing challenge, and one of the most important equity issues.**

   ■ Both the RMSA-TCA and OGIP sought to address this issue, but neither have definitive or replicable results as yet. OGIP showed that culturally sensitive and attractive materials were part of the answer. It also found out that unless innovations are embedded in government policies and strategies – that is, wider institutional and organisational reform – small scale experiments are likely to founder.

7. **TA can be used to develop complex systems, but purely technical solutions are not enough without a more robust emphasis on sustainability, cultural change and capacity transfer.**

   ■ One of the prime advantages of TA is that it can be used to deploy highly specialist expertise that is not available in-country to accelerate the advance of technical systems. DFID India's support for the development of a National Assessment System (NAS) and state-level Education Management Information System (EMIS) illustrates this. A further example is the pedagogic and materials writing expertise brought by the Open University for the TESS project which systematised the production of pedagogically-sound and imaginative learning materials which rapidly advanced previous Indian initiatives.

   ■ Over-reliance on technocratic approaches causes problems without a greater focus on sustainability, cultural change and capacity transfer. For example, if capacity is to be built in new areas, such as NAS, MoTA, or OGIP, then there needs to be a commitment by the government to provide and employ identified expertise who will be trained up and take on the new roles.

8. **A focus on pedagogy is central to educational change and the achievement of enhanced and more equitable educational outcomes. Other systemic reforms are weakened if pedagogy is not taken into account.**

   ■ It is challenging to improve teaching and learning processes through a better model of school assessment in the absence of corresponding support for pedagogic change, as illustrated by the MPQAF project.

- The learning hub experiment of OGIP demonstrates that with external support to schools and better quality materials, adjusted to some extent to the culture of the disadvantaged children, improvements to pedagogy can occur. However, in the absence of policy change in favour of more varied pedagogies and a more systemic approach to pedagogic change embedded in organisational and institutional reform, the experiment does not seem sustainable. This has important equity implications.

Section C: Issues of Cross-Sectoral Concern

Gender and Social Inclusion

7. **Gender and equity issues are still crucial to TA practice even when the majority of a programme is universal.**

   - Within the portfolio, there are both programmes that are targeted to address the needs of specific target groups (such as OGIP which focused on providing cash transfers to boys and girls from scheduled tribe and scheduled castes in Odisha) and universal programmes which provide benefits for all social groups within the target geographic areas. Most of the DFID programme in India is in the latter category. The specific lessons that can be derived from the programme are therefore relatively slight.

   - Comments relating to gender and equity issues have already been made above (5, 6 and 8). In addition;

   - Materials development for teachers needs always has equity implications. It is too early to assess the impact of materials produced by TESS in terms of either their overall impact or their differential impact upon children of differing socio-economic groups. However, while many stakeholders considered that the materials produced would be suitable for all schools a significant minority disagreed.

   - Planning for equity and social inclusion can be assisted by sensitive data system development. The data systems developed by TCA-RMSA in India provide policy makers and planners with important data sets disaggregated by gender and socio-economic grouping. This provides an essential foundation for planning, but will not be fully effective without paying attention to the bureaucratic culture in which the data is embedded.

   - There are ways in which TA agencies can insert important gender and equity issues into advice and implementation focus, as was done in the MoTA project on specific areas of engagement such as hostel reform.

Policy Dialogue

8. **Policy dialogue is not a one-off action but an iterative process over time, which also changes with the turnover of different policy makers. The preconditions for successful policy dialogue in India are:**

   - A clear policy framework agreed between DFID and the GoI defining areas of TA operation but without predefining the eventual products.

   - Initial research into the development problem, to establish the credibility of the TA agency and provide both data and a framework with which to enter into dialogue.

   - TA products that are not too precisely pre-defined by DFID in the ToR/scope. Precise definitions of the results of an intervention inhibit policy discussion.

■ Managed policy dialogue. Space has to be created by the DFID Adviser and the TA agency for discussion to take place with government counterparts and other policy-makers. Formal structures such as the Indian Joint Review Mission can provide good opportunities for structured and intense policy dialogue.

■ Policy briefs, as a means of crystallising debate. Interpretation of data in the policy brief has to be refined, given the sophisticated nature of the Indian client.

Sustainability

9. **Sustainability is achieved when systems or behaviours are firmly established and owned by sufficient key stakeholders, at all appropriate levels, and where benefits are equitably distributed.**

■ The degree to which a project or programme has achieved sustainability is complex and often requires careful weighing of conflicting evidence. It is often challenging to determine whether sustainability has been achieved within the traditional timeframes of DFID project completion reviews (PCRs). Indicators of sustainability that have emerged from the India programme include:

– *Professional and political support:* is there enough support at all relevant levels of the bureaucracy; informed professional support amongst academics, teacher trainers and national professional institutions; managerial support within the school? Has the model been adopted by government?

– *Adoption of the innovation:* has capacity been built as intended? Has the innovation been established in a critical mass of cases? Are there initial positive results (at least) and are these confirmed by time series data on behavioural or institutional change? Is innovation integrated into day-to-day work patterns?

– *Is the model financially sustainable?* Has it been built into government budgets?

– *Is the equitable flow of benefits demonstrated?*

– *Is there an exit strategy?* Has this been agreed with the government in advance, in particular, for cash transfer schemes? Does this include not only financial aspects but also aspects around the type and nature of labour support?

Learning during implementation

10. **The nature of TA requires learning during implementation.**

■ TA is innovative and therefore needs to define the development challenge through research and analysis in order to work effectively and secure credibility. It is also inherently experimental and frequently catalytic at least in aim. These factors suggest that all TA has to be data rich and that learning during implementation is vital.

■ There were excellent examples of innovative means of learning during implementation although the quality of formal monitoring & evaluation systems was variable, suggesting the need for institutional support of TA agencies. Useful indicators have been developed in India on teacher's capacity to reflect, the proportion of timer spent on teacher talk and the manner of classroom organisation.

■ Changes in pedagogy can be successfully measured as well as described.

■ Useful indicators that have been developed in India include:

- the teacher's capacity to reflect;
- the proportion of time spent on teacher talk; and
- classroom organisation.

11. Proof of concept should be demonstrated before scaling up or replication is attempted.

- Given the expense and consequences of introducing ineffective systems into government practice, it is essential that DFID ensures that proof of concept is demonstrated to a reasonable degree before scale up or replication is initiated. Proof of concept entails demonstrating that the innovation can operate effectively in a typical range of conditions with no more external assistance than can be sustained after the expiry of TA. TA is often a stage in the process, requiring further work by local stakeholders after TA expiry.

- The cash transfer system established with DFID support in Odisha was initially piloted, which showed the feasibility of the TA approach taken. It now appears to be established, and will largely be sustained after DFID's exit, and is replicable, although there will be less dedicated support at a block level to ensure that the hardest to reach beneficiaries are registered and supported through a bureaucratic process.

- In contrast, neither the MPQAF nor the TESS projects had demonstrated proof of concept. QAF had not assembled evidence to show (at least plausibly) that the new form of school assessment would succeed in catalysing improvements to teaching by means of better school planning. TESS had not shown that the cluster of practices associated with the introduction of Open Education Resources (OERs) could be operated successfully in a given range of school types.

- Demonstration of proof of concept is also important for equity and gender considerations. If educational innovations such as OERs are taken up solely by schools with particular characteristics, differences in learning outcomes between boys and girls, or, more probably, different socio-economic grounds might be magnified.

12. The marketisation of TA knowledge and expertise indicates an important role for DFID advisers.

- Problems are exacerbated by weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems and the perceived value of specialised TA knowledge, which is not readily shared. DFID India advisers have made efforts to act as knowledge sharing brokers between contracted agencies as well as encouraging a broader open community of practice amongst government, civil society and NGO actors working in secondary education. This catalytic networking role could be developed further. However its success would depend on a greater allocation of time by hard-pressed DFID advisers. This role is currently seen as an 'add on', offered by dedicated advisers who viewed this as both beneficial to all and strategic for DFID, rather than as a mainstream activity of a DFID adviser.

Section D: DFID Management, Tools and Systems

It is the contention of the evaluation team that current DFID tools and management systems need to be modified to reflect the particular characteristics of TA. A workshop was held with all TA agencies in India to explore their views on the appropriateness of current tools and systems. While there was not

universal agreement on all issues the analysis below represents the broad consensus which emerged.

9. **The exercise of 'soft' skills underpins successful TA but is not adequately recognised in DFID management and review tools and systems.**

- 'Soft' skills are those concerned with developing and sustaining relations of trust and credibility with stakeholders and partners, such as negotiation, listening, facilitation and problem-solving skills. Credibility is typically demonstrated by providing specialised technical knowledge informed by research into the development problem being addressed, and doing so in a timely and responsive manner. Trust is essential because TA often involves dealing with sensitive issues and underpins working relationships. Evidence from India suggested that credibility and trust have to be established before effective inputs can be delivered, which has implications for the expectations of what can be realistically delivered in the early stages of TA projects by both agencies and DFID advisers, as well as the length of timing of TA projects. It has further implications on the duration of a DFID advisory posting, given that advisors can be more effective once they have built networks and established credibility.

- *TA agencies managing the projects of DFID India's education portfolio estimated that as much as 20-50% of their time was spent on activities or processes that were not included in their logframe, and yet it is their performance against the logframe that is managed in the Review process and is the determinant for payment by results.* DFID's monitoring, management and review processes would be more comprehensive if soft skill activities and processes were included in the management tools and fully incorporated into monitoring and review of TA.

- Soft skills are equally critical for DFID advisers managing and supporting TA projects as for the teams delivering TA. These soft skills include navigating the art of the possible between what DFID desires to implement as a donor, and what the counterpart (the Indian government in this case, at both federal and state levels) requests on the one hand; and what the TA agency is capable of delivering on the other hand.

10. **The logframe has inherent challenges as a tool for TA projects.**

- The logframe provides a discipline in thinking through a project and a tool for reviewing activities and achievements over time and a mechanism by which DFID can assess TA performance.

- However, for projects which are TA or largely TA in nature, the usefulness and applicability of the logframe is undermined – it does not easily capture qualitative indicators, it assumes linear progression, it does not easily capture changes in enabling conditions over time and between 20-50% of work done by TA agencies in India was not captured in logframes. That is a very significant proportion considering that the logframe is the key tool to measure performance and results at annual and mid-term reviews.

- The logframe needs to be a joint exercise at every stage, to ensure clarity and agreement on the objectives and processes of a project.

- However, ultimately it is a tool which is unlikely to be tailored enough to work well for TA projects.

11. **The Theory of Change (ToC) is very relevant to TA but needs to be adapted to fit the particular needs of TA.**

- The ToC is a tool well suited to TA: it can be used to illustrate process as well as outcomes. It allows for both pathways, rich descriptions of the changes that are being attempted and can readily include the 'soft' activities of TA. As such, it complements the logframe as a management tool for both the TA agency and DFID.

- ToCs are a relatively new concept for DFID and were introduced to India after many of the projects were operational. Most ToCs developed by the TA agencies were devised retrospectively, as well as the overall portfolio-level ToC. ToCs in India for the education portfolio tend to be diagrammatic representations of the logframe. Many (but not all) finished states are thinly described. Changes in behaviour and assumptions are under-analysed. Most TA agencies did not look at, or revise, the ToCs over the course of the project.

- ToCs would be a useful tool if all agencies engaged more in ToC thinking, and described both processes and outcomes in richer detail, including specifying the soft skills to set up and sustain the preconditions for effective TA. There could be more intense focus on immediate and medium-term changes to boundary partners and on immediate and medium-term changes. Assumptions could be made transparent and could be specified in an accompanying narrative. Alternative strategic options could be specified in ToCs. ToCs should also be regularly updated (as logframes are) in order to specify how assumptions around change have evolved in the course of implementation.

- Improved ToCs might avoid implementation pitfalls and would give DFID a more comprehensive set of monitoring, assessment and review tools, thereby reducing the level of inference required to make fair judgements. There also appears to be a need for the development of smart monitoring tools and metrics (including ToCs) from DFID centrally, to provide a more uniform approach and stronger guidance with the emergence of a greater focus on TA-only approaches.

12. Value for Money analysis is difficult to apply to TA, but the measurement of learning gains could serve as an adequate proxy for poverty reduction due to the consistent long-term association between cognitive improvement and economic growth.

- The India programme clearly illustrates the methodological problems associated with the application of VfM analysis to the education sector. Formative evaluation data is not always available to underpin VfM judgements, particularly for assessing effectiveness and cost effectiveness. Key data, such as gains to learning (directly relevant to elements of the programme such as the TESS or BLISS projects) are not available due to the length of the processes required compared with the limited time frame of the projects. It is not always possible to identify the specific contribution of TA to wider processes of change, given the actions of multiple other actors.

- In spite of the methodological issues, the well targeted interventions in the education sector have enormous potential for reducing poverty and therefore for VfM effectiveness and cost effectiveness. The evidence suggests that there is a consistent, statistically significant relationship between gains in cognitive skills and economic growth which is both long-term and applicable across countries.[13]

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[13] Cross country longitudinal studies involving 50 countries between 1960 and 2000 suggest that a standard deviation increase in cognitive achievement is associated with 2% additional GDP growth per year. Reverse causality does not apply. Increases in enrolment per se do not have a strong effect on economic growth (See especially Hanushek and Woesmann 2008 and 2012).

- The India programme demonstrates impressive VfM in some areas. EMIS has been substantially improved as a data system without incurring additional recurrent costs for state governments, which makes it highly efficient, but lack of attention to how data might be used has reduced its potential effectiveness. The OGIP project has targeted equity issues with hard to reach deprived children in ways that are effective. The TESS project is potentially of considerable significance for effectiveness and poverty reduction if learning gains result, but the lack of a pilot to demonstrate proof of concept and the length of the processes required to design and institutionalise Open Education Resource materials means that VfM judgements cannot be passed at present. While economic in design and implementation, MPQAF has not demonstrated that the model will change school practice sufficiently. The project illustrates that VfM may not be achieved if a project concept is too narrowly drawn.

- If the education sector is to realise its VfM potential, DFID needs to:
  - secure a better understanding of the policy levers that will have most impact on raising learning achievement. The India programme suggests that improved formative evaluation to generate initial data and selected ex-post investigation are key to building such understanding;
  - use only high quality, experienced advisers, working within an appropriate policy framework, particularly one that allows time for cognitive gains to come to fruition.

13. It is not always easy to measure the results of TA.

- **There is a real tension between the way in which results are required by DFID, in part to provide clear statements to the British taxpayer to justify and be accountable for aid spending, and the characteristics of TA.** The impact of TA is often downstream, so linear cause and effect models do not always work. There are often difficulties in defining a 'result'. These problems may be partially mitigated by:
  - Taking account of the exercise of soft skills, and including the deployment of soft skills more explicitly in DFID management and review processes.
  - Defining a wider range of processes (including alternative strategies and processes) in the ToC, making greater use of detailed descriptors of intended changes that will enable more refined judgements to be made about the degree to which change has occurred as planned.

- In combination, these changes could provide DFID with a more comprehensive and more richly described sets of results against which to monitor, review and assess the TA agency. However, more work overall would be needed to reduce this tension around results-based management.

14. Portfolio management can promote the achievement of strategic objectives and be a means of identifying synergies between portfolio components.

- Multiple attempts have been made by DFID's education advisers – including convening all the DFID funded TA agencies to collaboratively develop a retrospective ToC for the whole portfolio (see Figure 9.1) – which encouraged the TA partners to view their contributions within a broader context and to explore how their work interrelated with each other, with focus on a common ultimate goal. However, it should be recognised that TA agencies are measured and managed on delivery against their own challenging logframes and ToRs rather than in support of a collective portfolio. The TA agencies are not always best placed to know what synergies there are, or could be, between different aspects

in the portfolio. In addition, commercial TA operations are inherently competitive and are not incentivised to share and collaborate.

- Further, such work requires considerable input from the education adviser. Informal collaboration between the TESS and MPQAF projects (notably both accountable grants and not competitive tenders) showed the potential for projects to have mutually beneficial reinforcing effects. However, time constraints and competition do seem to have restricted the degree of collaboration. There is clearly more that could be done in this area – but impact would be dependent on addressing the incentives for TA agencies to collaborate and time allocations and support given to advisers.

15. The quality and experience of a DFID Education Adviser are critical determinants of TA effectiveness.

- **TA has enormous potential for achieving real impact and, if so, high VfM returns. However, this is heavily dependent on the careful selection of strategic interventions, and the management of TA agencies to ensure quality products and processes.** Unless there is technical competence informed by institutional and cultural understanding at all stages (including in designing the concept, throughout Inception and Implementation, and project close), the impact of TA will fall well below its potential. In combination, these factors suggest that a DFID education adviser has to be technically credible, with management expertise and interpersonal soft skills of a high order. Small additional increments of expenditure on advisers of sufficient seniority and knowledge/skills levels are essential, as well as ensuring that there is high enough staffing levels.

- There is also a need to ensure that there is a sufficient level of DFID staff resource to cover the size and ambition of a portfolio. DFID India's education portfolio was initially managed by a Senior Education Adviser and an Education Adviser. However, this was reduced to only one Education Adviser, which seems inadequate for a portfolio of such magnitude.

16. DFID's management of TA would be improved if management tools and contracting criteria were modified.

- The ToC is a tool well suited to TA: it can be used to illustrate process as well as outcomes and allows for both alternative pathways, rich descriptions of the changes that are being attempted and can readily include the 'soft' activities of TA, thereby complementing the logframe as a management tool for both the TA agency and DFID. The development of smart monitoring tools and metrics (including ToCs) from DFID centrally to provide a more uniform approach and stronger guidance with the emergence of a greater focus on TA-only approaches.

- The emphasis on longer-term inception planning for TA agencies to refine design and build trusted relationships with both the government stakeholders and DFID often runs counter to an emphasis on pre-defined activities, and the demand to show 'quick wins'. If DFID were to embrace the findings of this evaluation, it would imply longer Inception plans, less detailed prescription on activities and more on outcomes, while recognising that TA agencies only have limited impact as they do not own the changes but aim to facilitate change. It would require much more emphasis on adaptive programming, learning, detailed

experimentation, a focus on change, and a willingness to 'fail' fast and alter course.

10.2 What recommendations are there for DFID?

The recommendations set out below are for DFID unless otherwise specified. No recommendations have been included for the Government of India as DFID made it quite clear that the review was an internal enquiry**.**

7. Project design should be driven by the overriding objective of enhancing learning achievement.

The Senior Education Adviser in India pursued a consistent strategy of trying to ensure that cognitive achievement was central to the policy debate. This should be emulated in other programmes, particularly given the association of cognitive achievement with economic growth. Amongst the practical implications of this recommendation are:

Project/programme design should focus on pedagogy to support educational change and to achieve both enhanced and more equitable learning outcomes.

Given that improvements to cognitive achievement are central both to the role of the school and to poverty reduction, the processes by which learning is achieved should lie at the heart of DFID's education strategy by:

- **Making improvements to pedagogy central to most project designs**, using Theories of Change to analyse how learning will be improved, and providing for explicit and detailed formative evaluation.
- Establishing a data bank of research that illustrates the process pathways to improved learning (including pedagogy, materials and institutional frameworks). This should be updated, drawn to the attention of all education advisers, critically reviewed in adviser meetings and used to shape business cases advanced for new projects.
- Ensuring that annual and 'output to purpose' reviews explicitly analyse how interventions are contributing to improved classroom processes, which, in turn, should enhance learning achievement. The global shift towards a learning and enhanced learning achievement will be reinforced if DFID adopts explicit mechanisms for highlighting these issues.

Metrics used in TA projects should reflect both the characteristic nature of TA and the centrality of learning achievement. Our suggestions include:

- **The timeframe for most TA projects will be in excess of three years.** Given the relatively long period required to secure sustainable gains to learning achievement, more attention could be paid to planning for **long-term engagement** with specific countries or regions.
- **Metrics for projects designed to enhance learning achievement should always specify the anticipated learning achievement gains.** These metrics will normally include:
  - the overall gain or target;
  - reference to standard deviation, to ensure that the distribution of gains is tracked; and
  - a breakdown, both by gender and by socio-economic standing.

While a focus on gender is still appropriate for all countries and, in particular for those with poor gender parity indices, it should be acknowledged that, in many other countries, including India, socio-economic status is a more powerful determinant of educational participation and performance. The example of India shows that the metric is a powerful means of achieving policy focus.

- **Good use could be made of intermediate indices** to measure or describe pedagogic change (as in the India BLISS project), in conjunction with learning outcome targets. Examples include the proportion of time spent on key characteristics of classroom practice, such as on whole class teaching or, crucially, indicators to measure the quality of dialogue in the classroom (such as the nature of teacher response to student questions or the frequency of questions) and the quality of teacher reflection on their performance in a lesson.

- **Logframe metrics could usefully reflect the above, but also some of the characteristic features of TA,** such as:
    – the more significant implementation processes and changes;
    – the initial time required to determine the precise nature of the development problem through field research (which should be reflected in the milestones); and
    – descriptions of monitoring & evaluation tools and processes required to track/measure the agreed indicators.

8. **A guidance (How To) note on the Theory of Change (ToC) should be developed and issued, with the aim of developing more nuanced thinking about the Theory of Change. There should be a more systematic application of the ToC tool.**

For DFID

- The guidance note **should not be prescriptive in detail, but provide a sound framework within which agencies can develop their own analyses of change**. The note should cover improvements in the quality of thinking about change, improving both project implementation and the quality of tools available to DFID advisers to monitor and review TA agency performance.

- DFID can ensure effective use of the ToC by requiring each TA agency to hold a workshop to design a ToC tool to specifications agreed with DFID. The timing of this workshop could be agreed with the agency, but would be expected to take place after the development problem to be resolved has been broadly defined and agreed with all stakeholders. While the process should be mandatory, the format of the ToC could be flexible.

For TA Agencies

- Within the framework provided by DFID, **agencies should provide: clear descriptors of outputs, outcomes and processes (especially TA processes); a robust statement of underlying assumptions, and a framework for the design of monitoring & evaluation systems.**

- The ToC should be linked to the logframe and reviewed on a regular basis throughout the programme.

9. **DFID Education advisers charged with managing complex TA programme should be experienced and credible practitioners, able to demonstrate technical competence and soft skills.**

- **Using cheaper but less experienced advisers is a false economy, particularly when the government counterparts are particularly highly skilled (as in India).** High quality inputs are required to realise the considerable potential social and economic benefits of TA in the education sector. This is especially true with a change in emphasis from raising enrolments to one of cognitive achievement. Successful strategies to raise learning are necessarily complex, context specific and require high level technical and analytic qualities. High quality advice will allow DFID to add value, complement knowledge and skills already possessed by Ministries of Education and protect its TA investments.

- This task of identifying synergies and enhancing value will best be done by experienced advisers with substantial technical competence.

10. A functional review should be conducted, to ensure that advice of the right quality is provided.

- The review would consider the education (and possibly other cadres) to determine its role, functions, size and composition. If necessary, subsequently take action should be taken to ensure that adequate staff are in place, with both strong technical (sector and management) and soft (including negotiation, facilitation, and networking) skills.

- Recruitment support, to allow appropriate skillsets to be found, should be provided, followed by tailored training and mentoring.

- The duration of DFID advisory posts may need to be lengthened for certain TA projects, given the time needed in the early stages to build credibility and trust.

- It is also important to have enough staff as well as high quality advisers: this will enable a higher likelihood of finding the time to enable the development of a portfolio approach to the management of multiple projects and programmes.

11. Systems for monitoring and evaluation, consistent with both the characteristics of TA and a shifting focus towards learning achievement, should be strengthened.

For DFID

- **Develop a global strategy for selecting ex-post evaluations of TA:**
  - A systematic strategy for selecting and implementing ex-post evaluations will help to determine the conditions in which impact is achieved, the sustainability of any impact and therefore the VfM derived from TA, given the time that is often required for TA to bear fruit. The strategy should primarily focus on projects or programmes that contribute to improving classroom processes and learning outcomes, and should examine the association between observed changes in process and trends in learning achievement. From the current India portfolio, the TESS project would be very suitable for ex-post evaluation.

- **Build in contractual conditions requiring TA agencies to demonstrate proof of concept for projects that will be replicated or scaled up.**
  - Currently, the reputation of DFID is somewhat exposed by TA projects being scaled up without adequate research being put in place to demonstrate that the concept and practice are viable over a reasonable range of conditions. Contracts should specify what has to be demonstrated by the project and bidders should be asked to specify how they would carry out the research to demonstrate proof of concept.

- **Commission a tailor-made course on monitoring & evaluation for DFID advisers, linked to new DFID operating metrics and guidance on TA.**
  - A tailor-made course on monitoring & evaluation for DFID education advisers would improve the oversight effectiveness by sensitising them to the operational metrics characteristic of TA and to their methodological implications.

For TA agencies

- **Develop access to expertise in quantitative and qualitative monitoring & evaluation appropriate for TA, focused on improving the quality of education.**

This recommendation has two parts:

- TA agencies should be able to provide DFID with monitoring & evaluation expertise capable of handling specific TA problems. A high proportion of TA projects are and will probably continue to be large scale experimental pilots (as were the majority in the India programme), It is essential that each project has the capacity to demonstrate that the pilot concept is proven to operate successfully in a representative range of contexts.
- Proof of concept will have to be demonstrated in projects for which quality improvement is increasingly important. This implies that TA capacity will have to be such that it can handle the measurement and description of process change, particularly, but not exclusively, in the classroom.

The above will have obvious consequences for DFID contracting.

12. The global education research strategy should include investigation into the conditions for optimising VfM

This research could focus on:

- How VfM might best be conceptualised in the education context. The association between learning achievement and economic growth appears to be established in broad terms. However, a more detailed understanding is required, such as the conditions in which it is preferable to focus primarily on a given level of education and cognitive achievement – i.e. the role of institutional and political factors in determining the degree to which enhanced cognitive achievement translates into economic growth.
- Specific strategies for enhancing learning achievement amongst students with low social capital at secondary level.
- Relationships between culture, pedagogy and economic impact of education.[14]

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[14] See, for example Robin Alexander, 'Culture and Pedagogy' in which the author warns against 'a definition of globalisation that focuses only on its economic and informational aspects as seriously deficient and in need of extension' (p. 19).