Program Based Approaches and International Collaboration
- Experiences and Lessons from the Education Sector in India

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- Adapting to Diversity –

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Summary

Sector or program based approaches (PBAs) were pioneered in Africa. Analysts have been trying to study if and how PBAs could work in Asia. This paper attempts to present the experience of international cooperation in a PBA mode in the education sector in India. Sector programs in education in India (the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) for primary education and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for elementary education), with an investment of over $3 billion from international agencies, are the largest in the world, with many potential lessons to be learnt. The paper affirms that the PBA concept is valid for India, even though India has low aid dependence, high national capacity, strong government leadership and a vocal civil society, contrary to the picture in many parts of Africa. It is postulated that PBAs in education are in fact emerging as a leading model for international cooperation as they helped to catalyze nation-wide reforms, coalesce donor funds and the tripartite cooperation framework between the Government of India, State Governments and External Agencies brought a unique dynamism and rhythm to educational improvements across the country. It is the PBA type design of DPEP that brought the importance of primary education to center stage and facilitated a virtual explosion of additional education facilities in hitherto remote and isolated habitations of the country.

The example of India illustrates that a PBA is not a static concept but there is a wide spectrum ranging from pre-sector programs to full scale Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs). International cooperation began with a nucleus PBA in the DPEP and moved to a more structured SWAp in the SSA. This calls for greater reliance on sector 'approaches' rather than sector 'programs' and attention to a proper sequencing of reforms to ensure that neither too much nor too little reforms are included in a particular time slice of international cooperation. International agencies need to have a longer horizon through follow-up partnerships. Donors ought to interpret and use guidelines and assessments required for sector programs in a flexible fashion.

Adapting to India’s diversity is a key ingredient for success. While there are States that have reached developed country standards in social indicators, 5 States of India account for over 50% of the out of school children. Unless a special package is designed to bring significant improvements in these States, no great changes in national averages are likely. The uniform guidelines and norms of the DPEP and SSA, while spearheading a range of new activities to improve education, have also constricted opportunities to make a big difference to educational indicators in difficult States.

A key challenge in India is one of scale – in its many dimensions - and a PBA needs to be designed to cope with scale. Experience appears to show that specific targeting is likely to bring stronger results. The first generation DPEP gave priority to girls’ participation and focused on districts that had female literacy below the national average. As a result, gender disparities in enrolment, retention and learning levels were considerably reduced across the entire program - by far the most visible area of success. However, the same success was not forthcoming for children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, which did not receive such specific targeting. In a country like India, planners and managers have been challenged to cope with large scale, and as the PBA expanded from a small nucleus of 42 districts in 7 states to country-wide coverage, many intensive and qualitative inputs lost their edge and the program became more guidelines and norms oriented. Adapting monitoring and evaluation to scale and diversity is a critical need to measure and monitor progress and impact. While considerable progress was recorded in setting up the Education Management Information System (EMIS), unequivocal gains from program intervention could not be established. This highlights the need to agree on a simple and easy to use qualitative and quantitative monitoring system with measurable indicators. The absence of annual milestones and lack of differentiated
targets to account for varying baselines made it difficult to appreciate the quantum of progress or the lack of it. In India, the PBA design needs to be adjusted to cope with scale.

The federal structure of Government in India calls for the PBA design to be adapted so that reforms can be effectively carried out at the most appropriate levels. The two education PBAs in India were centrally sponsored and catalyzed a range of reform-oriented interventions by giving prominence and much-needed additional funds to quality aspects of education. These enabled the importance of primary education to increase substantially in the agenda of the Centre and States. However, State level policy reforms were somewhat neglected, thereby leading to some missed opportunities, particularly relating to policies regarding teachers and alternative schools. With 90% of education budgets coming from the States, the real protagonist for reform and change is the State and this ought to be kept in mind in follow-up PBAs.

An important component of a PBA is institutional development for greater transparency, efficiency and accountability. Review reports indicate that the first generation PBA expanded capacities at the national, State and District levels and that human resources increased in quantity and quality in a range of expertise. However, it has not been possible to objectively set measurable targets and monitor progress in capacity development, as a key program objective. Transforming existing institutions has been far more difficult than creating new flexible forms of institutional arrangements to facilitate planning and implementation. Institutional reforms are critical for long term sustainability. The tremendous progress made in the early PBA of DPEP in harnessing professional resources for education and creating flexible technical support groups at all levels needs to be consolidated in the second generation program through expanding the technical base for the elementary education sector and facilitating institutional strengthening.

The Indian program has relied exclusively on in-house or sponsored monitoring and evaluation. Third party monitoring and evaluation needs to be built in from the beginning to generate a debate on the impact of educational improvements and to bring in critical assessments during program implementation. Monitoring and evaluation should help with result-oriented planning and implementation, which requires both qualitative and quantitative research programs. Although the DPEP and SSA brought about substantial process oriented changes in administration, management and technical resources for primary and elementary education, it has not been possible to demonstrate unequivocal gains in educational indicators. If the EFA goals are to be met by India, a much sharper focus on linking interventions to improvements in educational outcomes is needed.

Sector programs typically span a single sector or sub-sector. However, implementation experience reveals that flanking reforms, for eg, administrative, public finance and governance reforms are needed to strengthen effectiveness and improve the quality of service delivery. Education policies could be tied to policies on decentralization, child labour, recruitment and posting of administrative staff and teachers. The design of a PBA ought to find ways in which such synergies can be actively promoted.

The paper highlights the need for international partners to re-adjust the PBA concept to the realities of India and Asia. The strong policy and implementation leadership in-country implies that international partners need to deliberate on their ‘value addition’ to supporting reforms, beyond finances. International technical collaboration has not been very successful in bringing value addition so far and it is important to search for new models in capacity development and technical collaboration. There is also a significant political process to the partnership, noted particularly in the Government of India’s influence over the aide memoire of Joint Review Missions and strong resistance to international institutional collaboration. This requires international agencies to reflect on their own ways of engaging in PBAs in countries like India and on the means to create specific spheres for value addition to the partnership.

Finally, PBAs in education in India have been addressing sub-sector development in primary/elementary education. It is important to develop a more long term vision for education in the country and to promote full sector reviews and analysis to ensure that the social and economic returns from the investments in elementary education can be fully reaped. This requires greater creativity, innovation to designing partnerships and new paradigms in international financing.
1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to capture the experience of international collaboration in supporting education sector reforms in India through a sector or program based approach (PBA). During the decade of 1994-2004 international funding of the order of about $3 billion has been allocated to support reforms in the elementary education sector in India, making the scale and dimension of external financing to the country probably unparalleled in the rest of the world. (about $2 billion for a first generation sector program called the District Primary Education Program and a recent commitment of $1 billion to India’s Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a Campaign for Universal Elementary Education). These two programs represented a significant departure from previous projects in that they attempted to provide a sub-sectoral canvas to plan and implement reforms in primary education. This paper is prepared in the context of the debate that Asia offers a completely different setting to program based approaches compared to Africa, where these approaches were pioneered. It is from the African region that lessons learnt have emanated so far. The bulk of the guidelines and typology of adopting a program based cooperation model rests on the experience of Africa. This paper is one of a series of efforts in the Learning Network of Program Based Approaches to explore the experience of adopting program based approaches in Asia. The paper attempts to present developments in the education sector in India in order to contribute to this wider debate and to generate perspectives for the future in planning and implementing PBAs in Asia.

This paper is not meant to be a critique of education reforms and their impact in India – several studies carried out by the Government of India and external agencies have attempted to do that. Some of them are referred to in writing this paper, however, the focus here is to explore the evolving nature of international collaboration in supporting reforms in the primary and elementary education sector in the country and to generate lessons for the future in working with PBAs.

A study of India’s experience is illuminating because it typifies a number of large problems. India is one of the E9 High Population Countries which account for over 71% of the world’s adult illiterates. The Fast Track Initiative launched by international agencies in 2002 with the objective of accelerating progress towards Universal Primary Completion, identified India as one of the 5 countries with the largest number of out of school children. India is estimated to account for over a quarter of the world’s out of school children. The UNESCO report on EFA ranks India as one of the countries ‘off-track’ in reaching the goals of EFA by 2015. The education system in India is plagued with many problems, not dissimilar to other countries in South Asia. Nearly a third of enrolled children do not go on to complete the full primary education cycle. It is estimated that the number of drop outs from the primary education system in India is higher than the never enrolled number of children, reflecting poorly on the performance of schools in retaining children. Education provisioning by public sector has enormous importance. Public schools account for 90% of enrolment in elementary education. Nearly 90% of children from the lowest expenditure quartile attend government and local body schools. This reinforces the importance of pursuing reforms for school education in the government sector, while at the same time highlighting the dire need for improving delivery...
and governance using civil society and private sector models. With 646,000 schools, 160 m children enrolled in 2002, 25-40 m children estimated out of school children and the need to enroll over 27 m six year old children annually to meet the goal of universal enrolment, India poses a big challenge to policy makers and external agencies. It is easy to argue that finding solutions in the context of India will throw up lessons for other countries, particularly in the region.

2. EVOLUTION OF A SECTOR APPROACH IN INDIA

The 1990s marked the genesis of a program approach in international cooperation in the education sector. The EC was the first entrant to this mode of cooperation, with an investment of € 150 m to a primary education program, the District Primary Education Program (DPEP). This was the EC’s first sector program in Asia and its grant commitment was the largest that the EC had provided so far. The onset of structural adjustment in the early 1990s and the need to mitigate its negative effects on social sector spending was the backdrop to the primary education improvement program in India. The World Bank’s Social Safety Net Adjustment Program aimed to restore allocations to social sectors, particularly education and health. The DPEP was designed with a systemic and reform oriented approach. It was acknowledged that the agreement between the EC and the GOI in 1993 constituted a landmark agreement in India’s development cooperation, shifting away from project funding to program funding.

Starting with 42 districts in 7 States of India, the DPEP expanded to cover 18 States and 284 districts, thus going on to become one of the largest education programs in the world. The World Bank and the DFID bought substantial additional investments, along with the Dutch Government and UNICEF, eventually leading to an investment of $ 2 b, making it a first-generation PBA. The mode of international cooperation in DPEP was ‘programmatic’ in spirit and over time coalesced to a ‘second generation PBA’ in the form of support to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), India’s national vehicle for achieving universal elementary education. This paper traces the evolution of a first generation PBA, the District Primary Education Program, to a more structured form of SWAp in SSA.

3. DPEP – FIRST GENERATION PBA

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was a PBA, in its early formulation, without being specifically called so. An important feature that made it so was the strong Government leadership in the design of the program, manifested as a clear vision and strategy. The government directed all donors wishing to invest in primary education to put their resources in the DPEP. Clear program guidelines were developed with well-defined implementation/management structures. The leadership and ownership that the GOI was able to provide at the start of the program has been an outstanding feature, the positive effect of which is in evidence even now, a decade later. The donors quickly forged a consortium around the GOI’s program strategy and guidelines.

The clear conceptual design of the program by the GOI gave it a PBA type orientation from the start. A number of systemic changes to the planning and management of education development activities were identified to be implemented through a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS). The DPEP was a tripartite partnership between the Government of India,

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external partners and selected state governments. The DPEP started with an experimental nucleus and expanded to cover two-thirds of India’s school going population, and covering nearly half of the country’s 600 districts. The DPEP catalyzed a wide array of reform-oriented interventions. Its national character brought several backward States of India together for a common agenda to improve primary education. The external agencies thus did very well in signing up to the GOI’s central scheme to catalyze reforms across some of the most educationally deprives States and districts of India.

4. MAIN REFORMS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

4.1. Decentralization.

The DPEP spearheaded decentralized planning and implementation on an unprecedented scale. Districts were made the unit of planning, management and monitoring and this led to a major shift in promoting a bottom-up approach. Perspective Plans and Annual Work Plans and Budgets were prepared at the district level for the first time, using participatory methods. The DPEP led to the creation of innovative and flexible management structures at the State and district levels. Each of the participating States created a State level DPEP Society, an autonomous body for the implementation of the program. This structure provided the means for States and Districts to develop their own Technical Support Groups, using NGOs and institutions, to help the process of educational improvement. The DPEP contributed to the creation of sub-district structures in the form of Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres, and review reports have acknowledged the tremendous value they brought to the technical support functions of the project. In addition to decentralization of administration and management, the DPEP also promoted the involvement of community bodies in the planning and management of the programme at the village level.

4.2 Expansion of financing of education.

Restoring financial allocations to social sectors (in the aftermath of the structural adjustment program) was an important goal of the program at its inception. The DPEP contributed only a marginal share in the total public expenditure on primary education, yet catalyzed major reforms in the primary education sector, as this provided the much-needed funding for the ‘software’ components of education. Historically, State budgets have been inexorably dedicated to recurrent costs of the education system, such as salaries. Incremental funds for experimentation, quality improvements and developmental activities have been forthcoming through the Centre’s contribution (harnessed from external agencies). For the first time financial projections were attempted for meeting the targets and goals set for primary education. The development of 7-year (and subsequently 5-year) perspective plans helped to plan activities within a medium term financial framework. Contributions from external agencies to GOI and State Governments were to be ‘additional’ to ongoing expenditures. The Central and State governments were required to maintain real expenditures on elementary education as a ‘conditionality’ for the release of external funds (EC and others).

4.3 Community mobilization.

The community mobilization component brought parents and villagers closer to the school. For the first time, issues of school education were brought into the ambit of community decision making in an organized and structured manner in programme locations. Over half a million school related community bodies (Village Education Committees, School
Management Committees, Mother Teacher Committees, etc) were formed in programme locations. Activities such as participation in school construction work, use of school grants, community mobilization activities such as fairs and campaigns and micro planning exercises were undertaken by these community bodies. The program also provided substantial training opportunities for these community organizations, contributing to their capacity development. Starting with campaigns to boost enrolments and school participation for first generation learners, the communities over time have expanded their role to include responsibility for civil works in school construction, monitoring teacher attendance and planning and implementation of school improvements. Schools were empowered, through the stakeholders represented in the Village Education Committees (VECs) or the School Management Committees (SMCs), to directly spend resources for the needs of the school. The large scale formation of user groups through VECs and SMCs and their capacity development through training and empowerment to use school grants, etc, led to attention being given to school management issues.

4.4 New strategies for Education Provisioning.

The DPEP provided the States with substantial space to implement innovative models and approaches of their own to increasing access to education. Gearing up for universal enrolment meant that State Governments needed to take urgent steps to locate the out of school children and expand the schooling system. Community mobilization and micro planning exercises revealed that there were many thousands of habitations in remote areas that did not have schooling facilities within easy reach. The State governments were hard put to provide schooling in these scattered and small locations, as the population and distance norms did not permit them to open regular schools there. The high cost of setting up formal schools was a barrier given the budget constraints. Against this backdrop, the Madhya Pradesh government came up with the Education Guarantee Scheme in which the State guaranteed provision of a school within 90 days, as long as a community with 25-35 children came up with a demand to the Government and could provide a local teacher to be trained. This scheme went on to capture people’s imagination and within 2 years, over 20000 EGS centers had been opened in Madhya Pradesh. By close of the program nearly 30000 EGS centers were set up. This model won a UNESCO prize and has been adopted as a national scheme by the GOI, paving the way for its replication country wide. This opened the door to innovation in cost-effective approaches to providing educational opportunity to small and remote habitations and nearly 60000 Alternative Schools of different kinds were opened through the program. A concurrent trend in low cost measures was with the ‘Para Teacher’, who could be paid one-fourth and even one-fifth of the pay of regular teachers. Tackling the problem of 33% average teacher absenteeism rates and learning from successful NGO models of community based local teachers, a new genre of ‘Para Teachers’ was born and this trend also acquired significant proportions within DPEP strategies. Faced with a resource crunch for universalization, States went in for appointing mostly such type of teachers on contract, instead of regular teachers with full pay.

4.5 Quality Improvements.

The program took on a series of quality improvement activities. For the first time, a very large network of in-service teacher training was put in place. There was a strong and visible recognition of the need for continuous teacher development programs. Each of the States undertook curriculum and pedagogical development, textbook revision, testing and piloting of textbooks. For the first time, direct stakeholders like teachers were part of curriculum and
textbook renewal committees. Initiatives were undertaken to empower teachers through grants for teaching learning materials. Curriculum renewal, textbook development and teacher training were components that were not restricted to project districts alone but introduced in non-project districts as well. Child centred teaching learning practices were introduced and classrooms across the country in the participating districts underwent change with children now sitting in groups, learning through materials and having freer interaction with teachers. For the first time, resource support close to the schools was provided through Cluster Resource Centres. The hitherto isolated teacher now came in contact with her peer group and together they tried to find solutions to problems of student learning.

4.6 Institutional development.

This component envisaged strengthening capacity in the areas of program management, improving textbook development and production, improving teaching and in-service training, improving educational planning, management and monitoring and improving educational research and evaluation. The creation of Technical Support Groups (TSGs) at the national, State and district levels enabled education administrators to enhance professional support to the design and implementation of their programs. Major NGO innovations found their way into mainstream education, as a number of NGOs were given substantial roles to contribute to quality improvement activities – from partnering with the Government to make education accessible to the most marginalized communities to jointly running pedagogical renewal activities within government schools. The NGOs contributed a range of intervention strategies, the most notable ones being in the form of para teachers, alternative schools, multigrade schools, bridge courses for school drop-outs and over-aged never enrolled children, initiatives for the urban poor, child labourers, etc. NGOs helped to develop a number of strategies with the government – particularly MV Foundation for child labourers, Rishi Valley for ‘school in a box’ for multi-grade teaching, Eklavya for integrated teaching and learning, Bodh Shiksha Samiti for education of the urban poor, Pratham for pre-school education, etc. All these NGOs played a significant policy advocacy and implementation support role. The DPEP Bureau at the Centre actively promoted such partnerships with NGOs. The World Bank’s Implementation Completion Report (ICR) noted that the education reform program expanded capacities at national, state and district levels and that human resources increased in quantity and in quality in a range of expertise.

The DPEP saw the creation of innovative institutional arrangements to facilitate speedy implementation. Each State set up an autonomous Society charged with the management and monitoring of the primary education reform program under DPEP. The major contributions of such an institutional arrangement were that funds for the programme were routed directly as a priority basis to the Society, bypassing the State Treasury (which historically had trouble in disbursing in time) and the Society was able to access professional resources from outside the Government. For the first time, the education administration took the support of specialist inputs for planning and management, gender, alternative schooling, pedagogy, etc. While such institutional arrangements considerably enhanced the efficiency of funds transfer and quality of professional support to the programme, it also meant that bottlenecks within existing institutions were not addressed directly. Such parallel processes came at the expense of transforming existing institutions. The World Bank’s Implementation Completion Report confirmed that the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET), which have a country-wide coverage, were not much influenced by the DPEP.
The second generation SSA, deepening the sector reform approach has made a clear effort to do away with this type of ‘institutional parallelism’ by relying on the mainstream system to take on the implementation of reforms. Under SSA, the States were requested to integrate district level structures with the mainstream educational administration. While this appeared to weaken some of dynamism that was evident during DPEP, it probably makes for a more enduring solution. The Teacher Education program, however, still remains as a separate program outside the SSA.

4.7 Joint review mechanisms.

The Joint Review Missions (JRMs) carried out twice a year by the external agencies and the Government of India was an outstanding feature of a unified approach in external collaboration. The JRM was the only interface through which the external partners and the GOI discussed progress and development in the program. It provided the opportunity to the donors to interact twice a year with the DPEP Bureau at the Central Ministry, apex educational institutions and a selection of States and Districts. Senior policy makers in the States and at the Centre gathered together regularly at the end of each mission to discuss next steps needed in the program. The World Bank’s Quality Assurance Group acknowledged the quality of DPEP supervision as ‘highly satisfactory’. While the JRMs became a smoothly running instrument over time, they also became mechanistic. They were not fully comprehensive (for eg, detailed financial analysis linking to disbursement decisions) and by their nature could not support in-depth or thematic reviews.

The JRM has been a fairly political process. Considerable preparation was undertaken to develop Terms of Reference for the missions and to find the right balance of experts across the participating agencies. However, the political process required the findings, conclusions and recommendations of missions outlined in an aide memoire to be cast in a form acceptable to the Government of India. The Government of India tabled the aide memoires of these JRMs in the Parliament, and therefore, went to considerable lengths in previewing the document. As the JRM was the only window of engagement between the donors and the Government of India, this somewhat limited the scope of critical assessments of program developments.

5. SSA – THE SECOND GENERATION REFORM PROGRAM

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), announced in 2000 as the country’s new flagship program for universal elementary education, took reforms further to a ‘second generation’ arena. On the part of external agencies, there was a concerted effort to move towards adopting a SWAp model in the design of the new round of external partnerships to support elementary education in India. Three external agencies, the EC, the World Bank and the DFID, will together contribute about $1 billion to SSA in a pool fund modality. The SSA provides for a much wider canvas as a country-wide program (DPEP was implemented in select districts in 18 States), covering children up to Grade 8 (while DPEP covered up to Grade 5) and brings under its umbrella, a number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes. The 86th Constitution Amendment of 2002 makes elementary education a fundamental right of every child, thereby reinforcing strong political commitment to elementary education. A central legislation is currently underway to implement this commitment which can be expected to be followed up by legislation at the State level. With many years of joint collaboration in a consortium, the external agencies made conscious efforts to strengthen sector wide approaches. External
partners will invest about $1 billion in a total program size of $3.5 billion, covering all the 600 districts of the 28 States and 7 Union Territories in the country, making it probably the biggest international cooperation program in the world in size, scope, coverage and nature of partnership.

The SSA’s design has taken forward many of the reform initiatives that were introduced in the DPEP. While the DPEP made the district the unit of planning, the SSA takes this further by making the habitation the unit of planning. The SSA has attempted to unify project and mainstream structures at the district level. The SSA has expanded the financial base of the program where an enhanced support from the government of India will be matched by a higher contribution by the states (while the share of States in DPEP was 15% of the planned budget, the SSA envisages a 25% share during the Tenth Plan period of 2002-2007). The SSA has plans to provide a growing role for communities and intends to strengthen community organizations. More in-depth work is envisaged to improve the quality of education and in particular the program would be extending curriculum, textbook and pedagogical renewal processes to upper primary classes. There is now a clear recognition of the need to broaden the institutional support structures for a nation-wide program such as the SSA. About 40 resource institutions all over the country have been identified to provide technical support to states and districts for appraisal and monitoring. The government of India’s role and leadership has been further strengthened with the balance clearly shifting towards stronger government ownership and leadership. See Annex 1 for a table which attempts to capture schematically the ‘evolving’ nature of a SWAp in elementary education in India.

6. LESSONS LEARNT FROM INDIA’S LARGE PBAS IN EDUCATION

6.1 PBAs are Appropriate for Asia

Typically program based approaches and sector programs have been applied in contexts of high aid dependence and low national capacity, along with a need to coordinate external funding for joint action. India is characterized by a large and diverse population, low dependence on external aid, strong national capacity and government leadership, vibrant and dynamic political processes and a vocal and active civil society, contrary to the picture in perhaps parts of Africa.

The experience of the elementary education sector confirms that program or sector based approaches are not only valid for India, they are in fact emerging as a leading model of international cooperation. While the factors underlying the choice of applying PBAs in Africa do not prevail in India (high aid dependence, low capacity to utilize aid, etc), the use of PBAs for international cooperation emerges as a good principle for different reasons - it supported a coherent nation-wide policy reform process, helped to bring the importance of investing in primary education center stage, coalesced donor resources and provided a unified framework for the Government of India, external agencies and State Governments. National leadership in designing a ‘home-grown’ initiative led external agencies to easily ‘buy into’ a nucleus PBA. In a low aid dependency scenario, the pooling of external resources brought combined weight. The tripartite cooperation framework between the Government of India at the Centre, the States and external agencies brought a unique dynamism and rhythm to planning and monitoring educational improvements with a country-wide reach.
6.2 Large PBAs need to cope with scale and diversity

Adapting to Diversity. A key challenge of a large country-wide PBA is adapting to diversity. PBAs in large countries need diverse action plans. The disparities in India are quite severe. While some States have social indicators on par with developed nations, 5 States of India (out of 28 States), Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa account for 50% of all out of school children. States with severe educational deprivation need special packages if there is to be an improvement in the national educational averages. States that are relatively better off with a conducive environment for reform need to be supported to push the frontiers of excellence and to set standards. A nation-wide education reform program thus needs to be geared to effectively address this diversity. Uniform financial ceilings to all participating districts in DPEP, irrespective of their size, was found to be restrictive. In SSA, this has been somewhat corrected and although no financial ceilings are provided, a number of norms have been specified for planning and budgeting, which are rigorously followed. The standard guidelines and norms of DPEP and SSA have constricted opportunities to support such need-oriented financing. A PBA needs to build in an incentive system for performance but also a tightly managed plan for technical support to weaker states.

Targeting for Effectiveness. The India experience shows that the ability to address the challenge of scale is critical to success - it is probably so in other Asian countries as well. The program was explicitly targeted at districts with below average female literacy. A raft of intervention strategies were adopted for improving girls’ access and retention in school. Reducing gender disparities in enrolments, retention and learning achievements was a special goal. This focus has brought dividends and gender disparities across all participating districts reduced and met the program targets. However, the same positive results were not forthcoming in reducing social disparities, between Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children as compared to other children. (The World Bank’s ICR for DPEP points out that although significant progress has been achieved to address gender parity, the same gains were not visible for the social category groups). In SSA once again, girls have been given targeted preference. The National Program for Girls’ Education, a special initiative to supplement SSA interventions, targets about 2000 blocks (administrative unit below the district) with incremental support to address gender parity and to ensure an affirmative policy towards the participation of girls in education. A similar strategy has not been formulated for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children. Large PBAs in India and in other Asian countries need to have adequate mechanisms for targeted and differentiated strategies.

6.3 Public policy choice and reforms

Recognizing potential trade offs. Governments are the preponderant providers of elementary education in most of Asia. Appropriate choice of public policy in educational provisioning thus impacts millions of children. Given the inherent lack of financial resources to fully fund education, there is a growing need to recognize potential trade-offs and to make appropriate choices and to put policy development over a medium to long term horizon. The explosive growth of low cost options of the Alternative School and Para Teacher has been responsible for accounting for the bulk of the expansion of education provision in the form of new schools (nearly 60000 country wide) and children enrolment (over 2.2 million children). The bulk of new teacher recruitment is a variant of a ‘Para Teacher’. While these models brought clear short-term returns, a well-thought out long term strategy has been lacking. This is quite obvious in the case of teachers – a key stakeholder in the education system – with regard to policies concerning teacher development, recruitment, deployment and career management.
The Central management of the DPEP or the SSA has not actively promoted long term policy developments in the States with regard to teachers and the new breed of Alternative Schools. Policy reforms with a medium to long term outlook are the need of the hour for sustainability.

Promoting concurrent and integrated reforms. Implementation in India, and most likely elsewhere, shows that reforms in a sector need flanking reforms in related and connected areas for greater effectiveness. During DPEP, the important area of teacher education remained outside the purview of donor engagement. This is covered under a different Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the District Institutes of Education Training (DIETs) and could not be brought into the ambit of dialogue and review. Other examples are early childhood development (under another department), programs to fight child labour (under another ministry), mid day meals (which account for a substantial proportion of funds allocation to elementary education) etc. Present legislation on child labour does not cover 85% of earning children – they work in the unorganized informal sectors in urban and rural areas. While DPEP had interventions both for early childhood development and to combat child labour, the opportunity for synergizing with other ongoing programs was not optimized. This was particularly true for interventions for combating child labour through education, as the Labour Ministry were running their own schools, and often with conflicting strategies.

There is also clear evidence of need for flanking reforms in governance, public finance and delivery and administrative systems. Decentralization in the country has come a long way with the Constitutional Amendment empowering local governments. However, a recent study found that even in Kerala and Karnataka, two states perceived to be ahead on rural decentralization, the fiscal role of Gram Panchayats, the village tier closest to the people, is negligible or very small. The study concludes that despite India’s commitment to rural decentralization, Panchayats cannot live up to their potential because the structure of the fiscal decentralization system is flawed. If programs like the DPEP and SSA aspire to use decentralization as an effective tool to empower local bodies to plan and implement their own development, this aspect cannot be ignored. While one cannot overload a reform agenda in a sector, it is obvious that poverty and deprivation are multi-dimensional. Therefore, it might be worthwhile to explore PBAs that have concurrent and multi-sectoral reforms.

Finance as a tool. Much work is needed in the area of costs and financing to understand the value and impact of money. It has been argued that countries like China and Sri Lanka spend less than India on education as a share of GDP and as per child expenditure, yet have demonstrated much better results. Issues of financing have so far revolved around ensuring the release of an advance and the accounting of expenditure rather than using budgets and expenditures as an effective tool for policy directions and implementation control. In the case of approval of district plans and disbursement of funds, attention has been concentrated around accounting for expenditures without focus on the specific outcomes from each expenditure item. Results oriented budgeting, targeting public spending on the most urgent priorities, striving for cost efficiency and cost effectiveness (rather than just low cost) are areas where analysis is needed.

6.4 Monitoring and Evaluation in Large PBAs

Adapting monitoring and evaluation to scale and diversity. Large PBAs require special strategies for monitoring and evaluation. The DPEP enabled the education administration

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system to capture data on an unprecedented scale across the country through the Education Management Information System (EMIS). In addition, the focus on out of school children through community mobilization efforts led to the development of large scale household and micro planning data. In addition to the national EMIS, different States also developed their own information systems. This sometimes resulted in an overload of information from systems that were often incompatible with each other. Moreover, efforts to analyse such data effectively to guide program implementation and adjust strategies were weak. Monitoring was not linked to milestones (specific and annual) of goals and targets. The overall goals and objectives were set uniformly across the program, irrespective of baselines in different States and districts or the level of difficulty (eg, socio-economic-cultural barriers, administrative constraints to improving education). The absence of annual milestones made it difficult for Joint Review Missions to determine whether progress was on track. Apart from enrolment increase, no unequivocal gains have been demonstrated through the MIS.

The donor agencies did not coordinate a common framework for the mid term review or the final evaluation. During the course of DPEP, over 180 studies were undertaken on various themes, however, they did not form part of an organized mass of information. The World Bank ICR concluded that there have been no real ‘evaluation studies’ of the DPEP. While SSA is attempting to address donor coherence, there is still a lot of room for further in building reliable high quality data and information systems. Practical and measurable indicators of results and outcomes is crucial for disbursement of external finances in a sector approach.

Monitoring quality initiatives. Planning, measuring and monitoring quality improvements present huge challenges in a large PBA. The results from DPEP have not been able to unequivocally demonstrate quality improvements. Assessing student performance has had many methodological problems. There is growing recognition of the importance of school quality but not enough understanding on the precise influence of different interventions on specific aspects of quality in education. When a district plan provides for an entire range of interventions, it becomes difficult to discern the most effective components that contribute to school effectiveness and educational quality. Given the complexity and diversity that India represents, there is need for a variety of approaches for quality improvement with specific measures to track quality improvements. Setting targets and milestones for quality and monitoring them is probably the most challenging feature of large PBAs.

**6.5 Role of International Agencies in Large PBAs in Asia**

The experience of the education sector in India demonstrates that it is necessary for international partners to re-adjust the PBA concept to the realities of India and Asia. Sector programmes ‘grow’ and evolve over time (See Annex 1) and flexibility is required in adopting a suitable variant of a sector approach. The DPEP pre-dated formal guidelines on sector approaches, however, the programme evolved by taking on systemic issues in the sub-sector. A sector program is not a ‘static’ concept, but encompasses a wide spectrum ranging from pre-sector approaches to full scale SWAps. For international organizations, this means taking cognizance of the ‘generational’ aspect of programs and giving greater prominence to ‘sector approaches’ than ‘sector programs’. This recognition enables practitioners to plan a proper sequencing of reforms and to ensure that neither too much nor too little reforms are included in a particular time slice of international cooperation.
Exploring sub-national PBAs. The DPEP and SSA are both Centrally Sponsored Schemes. Indeed, the Ministry of Human Resource Development at the Centre has shown exemplary leadership and ownership in the design and implementation of the program. However, with 90% of the total budget for education spending coming from the States, more focus could have been put on State level reforms. While central funding through donor supported programs played a major contributory role in expanding resources available for innovation and ‘software’ components, such a ‘central’ framework missed the dynamics of State level policy making and reforms, specific to each State. A conducive regulatory and enabling framework can be provided at the State level, but many of the State level policies have remained outside the ambit of discussions – policies with regard to teachers (recruitment, deployment, training, career development, etc), alternative schools, NGO participation, private sector involvement, etc. Most guidelines and assessment procedures for PBAs are around ‘national’ PBAs. While decentralization is usually a reform item under a PBA, agencies can also work with ‘decentralized’ PBAs where States/Provinces become hubs for independent policy reform programs.

Long term perspective and commitment to education. International financing partnerships are typically in the 4-5 year time horizon, and getting shorter. A long term perspective on partnerships for education is important to reap the full impact of education on growth and poverty reduction. Middle and higher education reforms are needed to avoid low growth paradoxes. The classic case of Kerala shows that despite its high social indicators, the State has suffered from low growth. Higher education produces dynamic externalities that are important for the development of societies. While supporting elementary education, it is worthwhile to promote an ongoing debate on issues concerning higher levels of education, else the large investments made at the elementary level may not bring optimal returns in the long run.

Despite recent international focus on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, there is still a large gap in linking investments in education to poverty reduction (acknowledging that this is a long term process). All international agencies stipulate poverty reduction as a central aim for international partnerships, yet analytical links for understanding and monitoring the same are rather weak, nor has there been a long term commitment to educational improvement. It is apparent in India that it is the poorest of the poor who use government schooling facilities. Only about 42% of children in the 6-13 age group attend school regularly in rural areas, the proportion being as low as about 28% for the very poor. Enrolling and retaining girls from poor and deprived families in school is a huge challenge. While education is expected to contribute to ‘social mobility’ it has been observed that schools could actually represent and reinforce existing social and gender divides. While the large number of EGS centers in Madhya Pradesh increased enrolments of tribal children, these Centres, away from the main village, located in the habitations of tribals, reinforced their separation from better off children. There has been considerable criticism that the Government’s per child investment in Alternative Schooling facilities catering to the poorest is a fraction of its investments in the formal school. International financing partnerships need to support well formulated studies on the impact of educational improvements on poverty reduction.

Broadening the scope of International Partnerships. International collaboration in PBAs is with national governments. In India, as in many other countries, the government is the preponderant provider of education. The debate on the role of the State when the market fails

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and the responsibility of the State for education as a ‘merit good’ is well known. But it is also important to discuss what should be the approach when the State/public sector fails? The World Development Report 2004 points out as per current rate of progress, universal primary completion in South Asia would be attained only in 2030. There is an obvious need for a re-thinking on the role of governments and for promoting plural partnerships.

While GO-NGO cooperation has grown substantially in education in India, NGOs have typically been ‘contractors’ to the Government to implement agreed strategies. One-fifth of government expenditure on elementary education in India goes as a subsidy to private schools. 50% government expenditure on secondary education goes to private schools. And there have been a number of major private sector initiatives to improve the quality of education. However, there have been no major public-private partnerships for education or efforts to actively enhance private sector contribution to increase the resource envelope for education, which would allow governments to concentrate on the most deprived sections of the population. In this context, there is need for a high quality regulatory framework to ensure a certain basic minimum provisioning for all – eg, the Common Schooling System. International cooperation in a sector framework is not geared to provide for an inclusive but independent partnership with NGOs and civil society within current financing modalities. Stakeholders other than the Government need to be included more integrally into the scope of partnerships than hitherto. This calls for re-thinking instruments of cooperation and financing.

Re-inventing capacity development measures. Implementation of PBAs in Asia, where substantial internal capacity exists, needs to develop new paradigms for capacity development. The case of India is an ideal example in this regard. Although capacity exists, the important challenge is to harness it at the right levels. The two education programs have contributed substantially to enhancing capacity for primary education, however, far-reaching changes in professional capacity development within institutions has been a difficult process – most of capacity enhancement happened through a flexible and informal mode. Capacity development is linked to promoting incentives for performance and greater accountability for results within public service delivery systems. The programmes have so far not set standards in accountability and delivery.

Value addition of International Partnerships. Working with programs in a country like India where there is strong policy and implementation leadership by the government, external agencies need to think through their ‘value addition’ to the partnership, beyond financial resources. While sector program collaborations entail dialogue on policy, there has been a clear ‘political stance’ in India of not allowing influence over policy. There has been strong resistance to international collaboration for capacity development, technical assistance and institutional collaboration with the international partners. Apart from the review missions and participation in annual workshops of national institutes, capacity support from external agencies was not taken up. The EC’s Technical Assistance program for capacity building through institutional twinning between India and Europe, based on mutual interest, was a visible failure as a suitable administrative arrangement to implement this component could not be worked out. International cooperation programs through PBAs in Asia, therefore, need to search for new models in capacity development and technical collaboration. This requires international agencies to reflect on their own ways of engaging in PBAs in countries like India and on the means to create specific spheres for value addition to the partnership.
### Annex 1. The Evolution of SWAp in Education in India

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<td><strong>Coverage</strong></td>
<td>Selected States and districts, gradually expanding with external financing. (starting with 42 districts in 7 States to 294 districts and 18 States). Specific targeting on low female literacy districts</td>
<td>Country-wide coverage. SSA is India’s national vehicle for achieving UEE and EFA goals. All 600 districts in 28 States and 7 Union Territories covered in the programme.</td>
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<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td>Primary education sub-sector. (Grade 1-5) Implementation of the program triggered a number of far reaching reform interventions, some of which were also extended to non-project areas, eg, teacher training and new textbooks.</td>
<td>Elementary education sub-sector. (Grade 1-8) Implementation of a holistic program, which on the one hand, combines all centrally sponsored schemes and, on the other, introduces new reform measures for improving delivery of elementary education services. Builds on the reforms and gains from DPEP.</td>
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<td><strong>External Funding</strong></td>
<td>IDA - $1.34 b Other partners - $ 866 m (EC - € 150 m) State Governments - $ 192 m External funds provided as an ‘additionality’. Domestic resources, maintained in real terms at agreed baseline levels. States contributed a share of 15% of total costs. DPEP expanded as external financing increased.</td>
<td>Total cost of $ 3.5 b Government of India : 45% External Partners : 30% ($ 1 b; EC: € 200 m) State Governments : 25% External funds provided as an ‘additionality’ to a projected baseline of domestic allocations.</td>
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<td><strong>Financing Modality</strong></td>
<td>Parallel financing by individual donors. EC the only one to adopt unearmarked sub-sector funding. All other agencies earmarked funds to specific States. (State DPEP Projects)</td>
<td>All external agencies contribute to a common pool. (unearmarked support to the national program, to be disbursed by the program authorities in line with approved plans and budgets) External pool size : $ 1.046 b</td>
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<td><strong>External Financing and program Implementation</strong></td>
<td>The release of external funds not aligned with release of domestic financing for implementation. (EC funds not linked to specific plans; released in tranches against satisfactory review of progress; other donors made reimbursements against agreed activities)</td>
<td>Disbursements from external agencies will be fully aligned and coordinated with domestic budgeting and financing cycles. Disbursements linked to annual cycle of budgetary outlays and sector review outcomes. Not linked to specific activities but to (agreed) program plans and with outcomes and results.</td>
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<td><strong>Appraisals of the program</strong></td>
<td>Individual donors undertook specific appraisals of State plans to be financed by them. No assessments for adopting a sector approach were undertaken. The DPEP pre-dated formal guidelines on use of a sector approach.</td>
<td>All external partners promoted the SWAp concept, using certain standard procedures. 6 assessments were undertaken to pave the way for using a SWAp approach and a pool fund modality. The external agencies divided up these assessments according to their areas of competence (eg, the World Bank took up Economic and Financial Assessment, the DFID undertook Institutional Assessment, and the EC took up Social Assessment).</td>
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<td><strong>Institutional and Technical Support</strong></td>
<td>Institution building and capacity development was a program goal. Apex educational institutions and other technical organizations were drawn in to provide technical and resource support to DPEP. The most impressive part of capacity development was in the form of teacher</td>
<td>The experimental creation of resource support structures at the block and cluster level in DPEP would be consolidated and mainstreamed. Community bodies would continue to be strengthened through training and empowerment. The merger of district and State level societies with mainstream education</td>
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<td>Resource centres at block and cluster levels for on-site support for quality improvement and child-centred pedagogy. Strong focus was also put on putting in place community organizations – helping their formation, training and empowerment. NGOs were invited to collaborate. The formation of Technical Support Groups provided flexible and professional support at all levels. However, no targets or milestones were set for this component. As a program objective, the component was not be tracked for performance.</td>
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<td>administration may constrain the availability of adequate professional staff. Teacher development scheme continues to remain outside the purview of the partnership, like DPEP. Also like DPEP, no institution building targets and milestones have been agreed between the GOI and the external agencies.</td>
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| M&E | Brought tremendous developments in data and monitoring systems through EMIS, PMIS, household data, etc. However, the super goals were not broken up into milestones with measurable indicators nor did they fully reflect the wide variations of baseline situations. Unequivocal evidence on all the super goals of DPEP has not been forthcoming. Progress overviews have been mostly covering processes and activities rather than on outcomes. | Strong focus on developing a robust national M&E. EMIS intended for country wide coverage and to be the basis for comprehensive reporting by the GOI on educational progress. For external financiers, the M&E could capture specific pre-agreed sector performance benchmarks and results. The annual progress on agreed indicators would be tracked through the EMIS and other data sources. Community based monitoring included. 93% of monitoring resources allocated to sub-district level structures. However, clear annual milestones on educational progress and impact indicators not agreed to so far. |

| Coordination of external agencies | For the first time, such a large program of external financing came together under a common umbrella of a consortium of external agencies. But no MOU was established between donors. Release of funds/disbursement was not coordinated among the agencies. | The consortium approach in external collaboration is being strengthened as all agencies sign up to common program objectives. An MOU to be established among donors and the Government of India. External partners will coordinate the disbursement of funds. A common pool fund will be created. While the three donor accounts will be monitored separately, disbursements to the program will be coordinated on pre-agreed principles. |

| Joint Review Missions | Twice a year undertaken jointly by all financing agencies, including the GOI and led in rotation by one agency. Visits to States and districts and discussions at the Centre. No overall monitoring guidelines or M&E plan agreed between donors for the program period. Annual milestones and indicators were not worked out for JRM to review. JRM did not have a direct link with disbursements and did not explicitly sanction or withhold funding. (except for ‘special watch’ instrument to highlight problem States used). | Twice a year jointly by all external financiers and the GOI. The coordination and leadership will be by the GOI. The missions will be linked to the budgetary cycle of the GOI and to the EMIS reporting cycle to track annual performance reports. Independent M&E also foreseen with a number of institutions. Further consolidation expected for a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative monitoring program. |

| Joint Review Mission process | By far the most stable instrument in the program for donor/GOI/State Government coordination. Allowed cross-sharing | Donors will have an agreed M&E framework with the GOI, with indicators. Reviews will be directly linked to the disbursement of funds. |
amongst donors, GOI and States (donors not restricted to only those areas financed by them but had access to the whole externally financed portion)

The JRMs have been a political process in which the Government influenced the content and language of aide memoires. In-depth reviews have not been possible in this process.

| Procurement | EC : agreed to use the GOI procurement procedures (but no prior procurement assessments had been undertaken to look into the robustness of national/State procurement procedures)  
WB : WB procurement procedures  
Others : GOI or WB procedures | Quarterly reports from the monitoring agencies will be provided to the JRMs and annual progress on agreed indicators in terms of EMIS data. The JRMs will also review Financial Management Reports, audited accounts in a more structured way.  
The political dimension of JRMs expected to continue. The leadership of JRMs is now with the GOI, making their influence even stronger. Critical external reviews do not appear to be part of the process.  

| Audits | EC : agreed to use audit accounts and reports prepared under the statutes of the State societies. The EC reserves the right of audit of use of EC funds by the European Court of Auditors (statutory requirement). While the GOI and State Governments regularly shared their audit reports, there were no agreed systems/timelines or a specific agreed format for the audit reports by GOI/State Governments. | All external agencies will agree to the use of GOI and State Government procurement rules and procedures. A detailed procurement capacity assessment study confirmed that the existing procurement legal framework is adequate to guarantee transparency. GOI and external agencies have agreed to Post Review of selected procurement contracts. The GOI has prepared a Manual on Financial Management and Procurement that will be used by all the States. The external agencies have discussed areas for improvement and these are expected to be implemented.  
The European Court of Auditors reserves the right to conduct sample audits |
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