

Meta-Evaluation Report on Education Programmes 2011-2015

September 2015



Photograph: Kadiatu Kamara (10), Malone RC Primary School, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2014

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1. Introduction

This meta-evaluation documents findings from evaluations, reviews, reports and results frameworks between September 2011 and September 2015. Findings are collated and analysed against the Global Education Policy and Global Education Strategy 2013-2017. Concern currently operates education programmes in thirteen countries, directly benefiting 600,000 children and young people, and 2.2million indirectly in 2014. Fifty per cent of beneficiaries were female.

Previous meta-evaluations were assessed against the 2003 Basic Education Policy, the 2005 Global Framework for Basic Education, and the Education Strategy 2007-2011. In 2011 a process of global consultations and sector analysis led to the development of a new Global Education Policy and Strategy, including a results framework for achieving the strategy. This was approved by Council in 2014 and has been rolled out in all education programme countries.

The Global Education Policy aims to improve the lives of extremely poor and vulnerable children in a sustainable way by increasing access to high quality primary education and supporting child well-being. The policy commits to targeting the poorest and most vulnerable children, applying a principled approach to the right to education in both development and emergency contexts. Three global outcomes are identified – the improvement of access to education, quality of education and support to child well-being – forming holistic education responses. A rights-based approach to education underpins this policy, with a commitment to education system strengthening through government partnerships.

The Global Education Strategy identifies niche areas in which Concern can develop expertise, and through which we can add value to the education sector. The first of these is a commitment to support children in situations of fragility and crisis, where others may not respond and where humanitarian needs include education support. The second is a commitment to focusing on early grade literacy skills, recognising that low educational quality is a major risk factor affecting the learning potential of the poorest children. The third is a commitment to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence, protecting children from abuse and exploitation within and around education systems. Underlying principles of equality, disaster risk reduction, HIV education and integrated programming are provided.

Reports, reviews and evaluations used for this meta-evaluation are provided below. Findings from external evaluations are considered as the primary source of information. However, only three evaluations were conducted during the reporting period (Burundi, Somalia and Malawi). The Malawi report is not strong and was not approved by the regional director or country director at the time of submission due to the overly positive findings without reference to strong evidence, so is not included in this report. All reviews/reports by external consultants are marked in bold with a grey background in table 1, for clarity.

Table 1: Evaluations, reviews and reports included in the meta-evaluation

Country	Report	Author	Date
Rwanda	Education Support Visit Report	Jenny Hobbs	October 2013
Rwanda	Education Support Visit Report	Lincoln Ajoku	September 2014
Haiti	Education Programme Review	Jenny Hobbs	November 2011
Haiti	Education Adviser Visit Report	Jenny Hobbs	July 2013
Haiti	Education Support Visit Report	Lincoln Ajoku &	July 2015

		Jenny Hobbs	
Malawi	Education Programme Mid-Term Review – Concern Worldwide Malawi	Jenny Hobbs	April 2012
Somalia	Accelerated Primary Education Support Project – Draft Final Evaluation Report	Europe Aid (EC)	April 2013
Somalia	Concern Education Visit Report	Amina Osman Haji	October 2014
Burundi	Improving Access for Extremely Poor and Marginalized Children 2008-11 – Final Evaluation Report	Dr Lesley Casely-Hayford	February 2012
Burundi	Education Support Visit Report	Lincoln Ajoku	September 2014
Liberia	Concern Education Programme – Safe, Equitable Access to Quality Education (2008-13) – Mid Term Review	Mike Kiernan	March 2012
Liberia	Education Advisor Report	Lincoln Ajoku	June 2014
Liberia	Education Support Visit Report	Lincoln Ajoku	April 2015
Liberia	Education Support Visit Report	Lincoln Ajoku & Jenny Hobbs	May 2015
Niger	Education Support Visit Report	Jenny Hobbs	October 2014
Kenya	Education Adviser Visit Report	Jenny Hobbs	January 2014
Afghanistan	Education Adviser Visit Report	Jenny Hobbs	April 2013
Lebanon	Education Adviser Visit Report	Jenny Hobbs	April 2014
Lebanon	Education Programme Visit report	Nic I’Anson	September 2014

As can be seen from the table above, most reports are written by Concern’s education advisers – Jenny Hobbs and Lincoln Ajoku. Although these can be more critical than evaluations (for purposes of learning and programme strengthening), it is not ideal to rely on internal documentation for this process. Irish Aid Programme Funding Results Frameworks are also used throughout this report as a key source of evidence on programme progress.

2. Are our programmes targeting the extreme poor?

The profile of Concern’s countries of operation has changed during this reporting period. The reporting period for the 2011 education meta-evaluation included operations in twelve countries, eleven of which were active by the end of 2011. This report includes our operations in thirteen countries, all active, with the inclusion of some new countries. Education programmes in Mozambique and Ethiopia ended in 2009 and 2011 respectively. In 2012 we started working on education in northern Afghanistan. As the Global Education Strategy was approved to support education responses in humanitarian contexts we opened a programme in Lebanon in 2013 to focus on Syrian children living as refugees in need of education support, and we expanded this response to Turkey in 2014.

Applying Concern’s classification of countries under our understanding of extreme poverty, most of our countries of operation fall into stream one (most difficult countries of operation – Somalia, Niger, Haiti, Afghanistan) or stream two (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Malawi, Burundi, Rwanda and Bangladesh), with only Kenya in the stream three category of least difficult countries. In Pakistan the

team has committed to opening an education programme for marginalised children in Sindh Province and planning has started but no funding has been secured to date. The education programme in Burundi is included in this review due to the final evaluation of a full education programme in 2012, but it should be noted that education activities there are minimal since 2013 due to a lack of funding.

Poor/vulnerable Streams	2011	2015
New humanitarian countries		Lebanon, Turkey
Stream 1 – Most difficult	Somalia, Niger, Haiti	Somalia, Niger, Haiti, Afghanistan
Stream 2 - Difficult	Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Malawi, Burundi, Rwanda, Bangladesh	Sierra Leone, Liberia, Malawi, Burundi, Rwanda, Bangladesh
Stream 3 – Least difficult	Kenya	Kenya

In Niger, Kenya and Sierra Leone changes in targeting within the countries were documented during the reporting period. In two cases this was linked to findings of the contextual analysis and prioritisation of children in an area identified as more poor or vulnerable than previous operations. In Kenya this involved the expansion of the education programme to pastoralist communities in Marsabit.

In Sierra Leone a capacity assessment was conducted in 2011 to identify school communities ready to ‘graduate’ from support following a positive end-line evaluation, allowing entry into poorer communities. Thirty schools were exited in 2012 and an extended exit strategy was implemented in thirty-six schools to ensure gaps identified were addressed in 2013. A similarly planned exit strategy for Niger demonstrated some level of sustainability from previous supports to the school management committees:

“The withdrawal of education support from Ilella provides an excellent example of how to scale out of an area...already the majority of activities are managed directly by the CGDES at micro-level and by the FCC at meso-level. The process of phasing out will be complete in 2014 by which time all functions and services that had been directly provided by Concern will be handed over to the Ministry of Education in Ilella and to school management committees to run directly.”

Findings from reviews and evaluations

- Somalia: The programme remained operational in both Mogadishu and Lower Shebelle despite significant security challenges. Responses to IDP movement due to food crises, conflict and poor weather included education through targeted, age-appropriate education services. *“The action successfully intervened by providing an opportunity and solution to the exclusion of children in difficult circumstances such as the rural poor, IDPs, returnees, nomads...in the education system”*. Similar comments confirming that programmes target the extreme poor are found in reports for Afghanistan and Kenya.
- Burundi: The final evaluation of the 2008-2011 programme noted specific targeting of Batwa children. *“There is no question that one of the greatest achievements of the education programme was that the number of Batwa children who enrolled in primary*

school...increased and a higher level of awareness was raised among government and civil society to include Batwa children in school across the Cibitoke province.”

However, there is evidence to question the effectiveness of strategies to keep the Batwa children in school due to the poor quality of education provided and high repetition rates: *“The Concern support has helped decrease the number of marginalised children who would not likely enrol in school...Unfortunately the evidence suggests that this has not been enough to fully retain them over the cycle of primary school.”* The report notes that primary schools sampled had an average dropout rate of 11%, rising to 25% in grade 4. This is coupled with very high repetition rates – up to 54% of children repeating a grade – leading to many children spending six years in primary school and then dropping out in grade 3.

- Niger: The move from Ilella to Tahoua is noted as appropriate targeting: *“Community selection is clearly aligned with Concern’s understanding of extreme poverty and the integrated approach will start to address some of the household-related barriers to education, including poverty and gender inequality. The particular risks and vulnerabilities...were clearly visible during my visit – lack of basic services, harsh environments, visible child stunting and mass displacement of families to follow agriculture opportunities.”*
- Lebanon: The Syrian education response targets both Syrian refugees and extremely poor Lebanese families, aligned with UNHCR targeting. However, two reviews were conducted in 2014 which question the exclusion of a large group of marginalised Syrian children from Concern’s programme. Parents of many children have enrolled their children in unofficial schools using the Syrian curriculum but the Ministry of Education and UN actors in Lebanon do not recognise these schools, denying any level of financial or technical support, or any form of child protection strengthening. As stated in the April report: *“Why should Concern target these schools? Currently the schools and the children are invisible, unrecognised by UN and INGO agencies. They lack financial stability and they do not benefit from teacher training or school management supports. Equally, parents of children who are currently out of school would like to send their children to these schools – and Concern highly values parental choice in education for their children”.*

The need to target these children is again raised in the October report by a consultant. The management response from the Lebanon team commits to examining the issue but recognises that there are complex political implications (not limited to the support these schools may receive from political groups), stating “we will need to ensure that we are strategic with this manoeuvre to understand and mitigate any repercussion”. Such caution is merited based on possible political affiliations of the school, and aligned with the Country Security Plan. Steps have been taken to work with high level partners to learn more about the schools and how to support them, including a proposal to UNHCR to fund a study which was unsuccessful to date.

Conclusion – Targeting for education programmes is aligned with Concern’s understanding of extreme poverty. Following reviews and contextual analyses there is evidence of improved targeting within countries.

3. How do we know we are adding value in this area?

As outlined in the Global Education Strategy, our education programmes focus on three niche areas: improving early years literacy, addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), and addressing education needs in fragile contexts where others are not responding. These niche areas were identified through an analysis of gaps in services, root causes of education failure for the poorest children and realisation that Concern’s work in education should have a narrow scope within which we can develop expertise and share learning. The global interest and demand for the information generated in these areas over this reporting period demonstrates that Concern is adding new learning and informing planning at global and national levels. Examples of these are the invitations extended to Concern as representatives of NGOs on three best practice bodies developing global guidance:

- Global Partners Working Group on SRGBV – hosted by UNGEI and UNICEF
- Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies - Education and Fragility Working Group
- USAID Education in Crisis and Conflict Network (ECCN) Steering Group
- UNESCO Global Practice on Early Grade Reading Assessment Focus Group

Details on global learning contributions and national-level technical support to education ministries are provided in section 8, so are not included here. One thing to note here is the reference to Concern’s increased collaboration with other NGOs and agencies at national levels to avoid replication and ensure appropriate programme focus. Consortium-based programmes in Rwanda, Kenya and Sierra Leone have facilitated our work to be implemented at scale, while limiting our role to geographical and technical areas aligned with our understanding of extreme poverty.

In Sierra Leone this facilitated Concern’s leadership of technical support to the Ministry of Education during the Ebola crisis to develop radio-based programmes, while partners IRC led protection working groups for the same target children. Similar networks were leveraged in Liberia for the Ebola response. In Lebanon collaborative planning with other NGOs allowed for age-appropriate targeting by different agencies within the same geographical areas, which enabled Concern to secure funding for our target group – primary school aged children – as others responded to youth needs. However, such collaboration to ensure appropriate programme design is not practiced everywhere – particularly where Concern works in remote areas with few resources for national-level engagement (Malawi, Haiti, Afghanistan) – which creates challenges accessing national-level platforms, identifying partnership opportunities or accessing strategic information.

Review findings in Niger, Liberia and Haiti questioned the added value of school construction activities by Concern. The rationale for questioning this in the three countries was the heavy investment in school infrastructure leading to no measurable changes in student participation or learning in school – particularly in terms of drop-out rates and repetition rates in the first four years of school. These recommendations were found in earlier reports (2011/2012) and school

construction activities were no longer features of these three programmes following the introduction of Early Grade Reading Assessments and the roll-out of the Global Education Strategies. However, some contexts continue to focus on school construction (usually as an emergency or DRR response) and these activities are not generally complimented with child-focused education programmes.

Conclusion – Programmes add value and have shifted their focus to align with Concern’s three identified niche areas – early grade literacy skills, SRGBV, contexts of fragility. This has provided strategic opportunities for Concern to enhance these agendas. Significant shifts away from infrastructure-based programmes have been made in development contexts.

4. Are our programmes having a positive effect on the lives of the extreme poor?

This section is presented under three outcomes to align with the Global Education Strategy: improved access to education, improved quality of education, and improved well-being of children. An analysis of results frameworks from the multi-annual Irish Aid Programme Funding (IAPF) is taken from eight countries (Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Somalia, Burundi, Bangladesh and Afghanistan). This is used to identify progress not only in reaching outcomes, but also in the measurement and analysis of these outcomes to inform programme design. Annex 1 provides consolidated tables of all education indicators included in the IAPF results frameworks, to illustrate the shift in capacity over the past four years in monitoring and evaluation. Points to note (visible in the full version in annex 1):

- Many baseline values were not available in 2012 (or even 2013 in some cases) due to delayed surveys and low capacity to collect data on attendance, learning or well-being. In 2012 and 2013 all eight programmes were supported through technical visits, a global workshop on implementation of reading assessments (2012), global workshop on reading interventions (2013) or international conference participation on technical education issues (Rwanda – All Children Reading 2012, CIES 2013, CIES 2014) to address technical needs of programme staff.
- Changes to baselines and targets are marked in strikethrough font or in the “original target” column. Measurements of being “on track” towards targets should be read in the context of the targets set, questioning if they are sufficiently ambitious and examining the lowering/raising of targets in 2014.
- Following each country’s own monitoring and evaluation plan not all indicators are reported against in 2014. Also, some integrated programmes have fewer education indicators at outcome level, but retain detailed targets at output level (e.g. Sierra Leone, Haiti).

Findings from reviews and evaluations are included in addition to the IAPF analysis.

Improved Access to Education

Table 2: Consolidated IAPF Results Frameworks relevant to student attendance

Country (Programme)	2012 (Baseline)	2013	2014	2015 Target	Assessment
Attendance rate of students					
Afghanistan		Boys: 84% Girls: 43% Total: 60%	Boys: 85% Girls: 72% Total: 79%	Boys: 90% Girls: 80% Total: 85%	On track
Haiti	68.3%	Boys: 63% Girls: 59%	Boys: 71.08% Girls: 69.87%	73%	Boys on track Girls off-track
Liberia	Boys: 67% Girls: 66%	Boys: 83% Girls: 80%	Boys: 66% Girls: 60%	Boys: 67% Girls: 65%	Off-track
Niger	70%		83.2%	85%	On track
Niger (head-count)	59%	Total: 48% Boys: 48% Girls: 48%	Total: 72%	75%	On track
Niger (household)	Total: 69% Boys: 72% Girls: 64%	Total: 76% Boys: 74.8% Girls: 76.6%	Total: 76% Boys: 78% Girls: 73%	78%	Off-track
Burundi (household)	Cib Boys: 56% Cib Girl: 52% Kir Boys: 62% Kir Girls: 55%		Cibitoke Total: 67.5% Kirundo Total: 64.5%	Cib B: 73% Cib G: 68% Kir B: 62% Kir G: 55%	On track

The most significant outcome indicator for improved access to education is the **attendance rate of students**. Six of the eight IAPF countries report attendance data, with the exclusion of Bangladesh and Sierra Leone. This is reported in two ways – at school level or at household level. School-level data is collected from school registers and should be triangulated with regular head-count checks. In Niger this triangulation is provided in the results framework although it should be added that Afghanistan has provided documented evidence of their headcount monitoring in the narrative report. Triangulation is necessary to avoid the inflation of attendance by school staff observed in reviews of Liberia, Niger, Kenya, Afghanistan and Haiti. Attendance of students collected at household level (Burundi and Niger) provides powerful evidence of our ability to achieve results for the poorest, not just the general school population. In both cases this is linked to the Graduation Model to address household poverty. In all countries the primary mechanism used by Concern is to engage with parents and communities to identify and address poverty-related barriers to education by applying community-led mechanisms.

Countries on-track and achieving increases are Niger, Burundi and Afghanistan. Haiti is on track for boys, but off-track for girls attendance targets. Successful increases in Burundi are attributed to improved health status of children and reduced demand for child labour at household level due to the graduation model. However it should be noted that but increases in attendance in programme areas are comparable with non-programme areas and not attributable to IAPF interventions,

suggesting that root causes of poor attendance must be addressed within the education system in addition to at household level for significant gains.

Findings for Niger are interesting because of the **triangulation** provided. The 2013 Adviser Visit Report documents extremely low levels of attendance for all students and inactive schools one month into the academic year. Subsequently the programme achieved significant gains in overall student attendance, verified by both school records and headcounts (from 59% to 72% in two years). This was attributed to their work with the Ministry of Education to ensure school materials are in place on time for school opening, and engaging parents in mobilisation on the importance of sending children to school on time. Importantly, the programme has not achieved increases for the poorest students still, as shown in data collected at household level. Seasonal migration needs of families remain the biggest barrier to progress – a challenge that will require systematic change (flexible school services to meet the needs of displaced children) rather than community sensitisation. Recognition of this challenge and planned strategies to address this are provided in the IAPF report.

Programmes off-track towards their targets (Liberia and Haiti) both show significantly lower attendance rates of girls. This is important to note as national enrolment data for these countries indicates gender parity, but attendance data demonstrates persistent gender inequalities in access. Reduced attendance rates in Liberia in 2014 and 2015 are attributed to the Ebola crisis, staggered school re-opening and a lack of parental trust in the education system – a problem also reported by Sierra Leone. The gender gap in attendance was evident prior to the Ebola crisis and may be exasperated by increased vulnerability of girls during and post Ebola. In Haiti the gap between the attendance rates of girls and boys is narrowing, but the 2015 Adviser Visit Report recommends increased focus on gender equality and child protection moving forward.

A final note on this results framework is the absence of regular tracking of **teacher attendance**. This is only tracked in Haiti, although teacher absenteeism is noted as a problem in reports on Liberia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Kenya and is cited as a challenge in the Niger Results Framework. If all children are present in class but the teacher is absent, there is no access to education. The Haiti team has made considerable progress in improving teacher attendance in 2013 (from 60% to 83%) but this dropped slightly to 77% in 2014. It is noted by the team:

“This indicator only measures presence on the days when schools were open, worryingly teacher strikes and school closures have had an impact in 2014 partly in response to the changes brought in by the Ministry. The schools were closed for 42% of the days since the opening of the school year. Concern continues to advocate for the schools to be kept open and to ensure teachers are present. Having this monitoring information available helps provide the evidence to continue this advocacy.”

This presents a strong case for all programmes to systematically measure and respond to teacher attendance – although it is possible that it is currently collected and reported against as an output indicator.

Findings from reviews and evaluations on improving access

- Somalia: Both the final evaluation and review in Somalia noted the effectiveness of community engagement in school management. Our programme in Somalia is managed in a different way to any other development programme – as there is no significant Ministry of Education system to strengthen, we directly support Community Education Committees

(CECs) to run schools, while also partnering with the Ministry of Education and supporting each process of expansion. The 2014 review notes the appropriateness of this strategy, which is further supported by the EC evaluation: *“Our opinion is that the project was very relevant: the action sought to tackle real problems in the education sector in Somalia – limited access and low participation of children.”* The considerable security challenges, including periodic withdrawal from programme areas due to conflict, were noted as mitigated by Concern’s approach as they *“used the well-established and committed CECs to voluntarily manage project activities”*.

- Burundi, Haiti: The 2012 evaluation noted a similar strength in Burundi – promoting community ownership of school management as a mechanism to expand schools and include more children. Conversely, the 2011, 2013 and 2015 Haiti reports repeatedly question the effectiveness of community engagement in school management – each review found initiatives to establish new structures and train participants on roles and responsibilities, rather than supporting action and change. The 2015 report recognises that clearly something is not working and the strategy should be changed.
- Lebanon: The consultant noted the positive effect the programme had in providing education opportunities to refugees within a safe and child-friendly environment. An observation was made that the opening of new classes, which had been delayed due to funding disbursement delays, could be speedily opened. *“The programme is now in a position to expand and needs to put the pieces in place as soon as possible so more children are attending school.”* The comment is mirrored in a previous review (May 2014), which requests bringing forward school opening dates due to the urgency of the humanitarian situation. The management responses for both reports state why the dates recommended were not achievable, which include lengthy legal requirements to rent land and seek approval for new sites, but the starting dates were brought forward as much as possible. The challenges and delays reflect how difficult it is to operate a humanitarian education response in Lebanon, with increased tensions and stresses on the host community, however we should identify ways to speed up humanitarian education responses for future operations.

Improved Quality of Education

The most significant changes in our education programmes can be seen under this outcome. The 2011 meta-evaluation found that *“weak monitoring and evaluation systems have hampered our ability to demonstrate effectiveness in improving quality”*. Since the approval of the Global Education Strategy all education programmes are now required to focus on improving early literacy skills in students, and strengthening systems to improve teacher training and curricular content on literacy. All programmes are required to measure student progress in reading fluency using appropriate standardised tools, such as the Early Grade Reading Assessment.

It should be clearly noted that EGRA is not a high-stakes test for students – results are anonymised and cannot be attributed to any school, student or teacher. Instead the results form an assessment of the service provision of education, providing a diagnostic assessment of the early literacy skills

that children are not learning in school. The table below summarises progress against education quality – specifically literacy – under Irish Aid Programme Funding.

Table 3: Consolidated IAPF results frameworks relevant to literacy levels of students

Country (Programme)	2012 (Baseline)	2013	2014	2015 (Target)	Assessment
Average reading fluency score (correct words per minute)					
Afghanistan			G2 boys: 4 G2 girls: 15 G2 Total: 6 G3 boys: 12 G3 girls: 8 G3 Total: 9	G2 Total: 20	Off-track
Niger		G2 Fr : 0.05 G3 Fr: 0.25 G2 Hau: 0.001 G3 Hau: 0.025	G2 Fr: 0.12 G3 Fr: 3 G2 Hausa: 0.1 G3 Hausa: 1.4	G2 French: 3 G3 French: 5 G2 Hausa: 1 G3 Hausa: 3	Off-track
Somalia	Boys: 97% Girls: 82%	G2 Boys: 20 G2 Girls: 12 G3 Boys: 35 G3 Girls: 28 G4 Boys: 51 G4 Girls: 50	G2 Boys: 28 G2 Girls: 18 G3 Boys: 48 G3 Girls: 41 G4 Boys: 59 G4 Girls: 56	G2: 30 G3: 50 G4: 60	On track
Haiti	Total: 9.6 Boys: 11.3 Girls: 7.6	Total: 10.11 Boys: 10.11 Girls: 8.53	Total: 20.59 Boys: 19.35 Girls: 21.91	23	On track
Liberia	G2 Total: 33 G3 Total: 39	G2 Total: 31 G3 Total: 54		G2 Total: 45 G3 Total: 52	
% Students achieving minimum standards of reading fluency and comprehension in a standardized test					
Bangladesh	G2 Boys: 0% G2 Girls: 2% G4 Boys: 11% G4 Girls: 10%	G2 Boys: 15% G2 Girls: 7% G4 Boys: 13% G4 Girls: 10%	G2 Boys: 34% G2 Girls: 29% G4 Boys: 17% G4 Girls: 15%	G2 Boys: 35% G2 Girls: 32% G4 Boys: 20% G4 Girls: 20%	On-track
Sierra Leone		P2: 3.4% P4: 7.3%		P2: 3% P4: 7%	

Seven of the eight IAPF education programmes assessed student learning using an **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)** - the Burundi programme does not have a significant education component and does not address quality. Data is presented in two ways – the average reading fluency of children measured in correct words per minute; and the percentage of children achieving a minimum standard of reading fluency. For all reporting formats there is a caveat – the international standard of reading fluency required for comprehension at grade three is 60 correct words per minute – much higher than the targets set by country programmes except Liberia and Somalia. While interim targets are acceptable in the short term, we must retain the meaningful target of reading fluency for comprehension as our minimum standard moving forward.

As can be clearly seen from the results framework in annex 1, the **introduction of the assessment was challenging to programmes** – most programmes did not complete the assessment until late 2013 and Afghanistan was delayed in the baseline until 2014. That said, the process provides much more clarity on our starting point within programmes – initial proxy values provided by programmes as baseline figures were later shown to over-estimate student learning in all countries.

More importantly, the process of designing learning assessment tools for young children was beneficial to highlight the scale of the learning crisis. Early childhood education is generally not prioritised in developing countries, but these assessments brought shocking evidence onto national and international agendas, **proving that education systems are failing** to teach children the foundational literacy skills required for learning success. Working in partnership with ministries of education to design, apply and interpret these assessments has enabled us to challenge education policies and curricula that fail the poorest children. Extremely low literacy levels in these assessments should not be interpreted as programmatic failure by Concern, but instead that we have identified and are now addressing a crucial issue – programmes are now moving in the right direction and can add great value to education system strengthening.

In 2014 results from EGRAs were collated into the *Lost for Words* learning brief to bring increased attention to the low levels of literacy among the poorest children living in extremely poor countries – this provides a unique perspective on the factors affecting learning in the most impoverished pockets of the world, with clear recommendations of actions. Contributions to global and national conferences support our teams in making space on national agendas to influence change based on learning within small-scale programmes.¹

Programmes are now more informed about the actual learning within classrooms which has resulted in a **change in programme focus**. Four of these countries, for example, recruited international staff with literacy expertise to support teacher training design for 1-2 year contracts (Liberia, Afghanistan, Haiti and Sierra Leone). In 2011 over 70% of the expenditure for Niger was dedicated to infrastructure support – building schools – but following their EGRA the team has re-focused expenditure on teacher training, the provision of teaching and learning materials and in-classroom monitoring and support *“Concern is currently in discussion with the Ministry of Education to advocate for the government to take over construction projects in Concern’s target schools to enable Concern to focus increasingly on improving education quality.”*

Afghanistan and Niger are off-track in the pathway to achieving targets. The baseline in both countries provided shocking findings. **In Niger 94% of the 790 students assessed scored zero in all ten sub-tests (five sub-tests in Hausa, five in French)**. The sub-tests required students to identify letter sounds, familiar words, unfamiliar words and a grade two level reading passage. These are the lowest documented scores on an international EGRA to date – the lowest in the world – which indicates the challenges children and their families face in rural Tahoua. The team report *“important incremental progress in 2014”* but they note the gender difference and the very low standards. They report the introduction of a Hausa curriculum (mother tongue) and the introduction of an individual teacher professional development package to support teachers work towards their goals.

¹ Davidson, M., Hobbs, J., Delivering reading intervention to the poorest children: The case of Liberia and EGRA-Plus, a primary grade reading assessment and intervention. Int. J. Educ. Dev. (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.09.005>

Progress in Afghanistan will be assessed as future assessments are conducted, but the challenges in conducting a baseline until 2014 due to *“challenges identifying a Dari phonics expert”* indicate that all improvements will provide valuable learning to the wider Afghanistan context. As the intention with small scale literacy interventions is to pilot test initiatives, prove effectiveness and then influence national curricula and teacher training colleges, it is important that Afghanistan continue to engage with experts at national and district levels.

Somalia, Haiti and Bangladesh are **on track** to achieving targets. The targets in all three contexts should be raised, but this is still considerable progress. 2014 EGRA results in Haiti are higher than those achieved by other actors in the country, indicating effective programme delivery of the nationally designed TOTAL Creole reading intervention. Progress is attributed to *“The work that the programme has done to support the Ministry, teachers, schools, parents and students on mother-tongue literacy.”* Closing the gender gap in reading performance is a particularly important accomplishment in Haiti – in Concern-supported schools average reading scores for girls are no longer lower than boys.

In Bangladesh progress is attributed to the introduction of supplementary reading materials in 2013/2014 based on learning by *Room to Read* (education NGO) which had a positive impact on students in both grades 2 and 4. In Somalia the team attributed changes to an adjustment in methods used to teach reading through the inclusion of a literacy consultant to support programme planning and phonics instruction.

It should be noted that the Kenya education programme has also introduced EGRA for their new mother-tongue literacy intervention in Marsabit, but this does not feature yet in reports due to the reporting timeframe. Lebanon and Turkey have not used any standardised learning assessment tools to date but have developed plans to introduce these in the late 2015, adapting them for the context. This was recommended in the October 2014 review for Lebanon: *“the outcome is learning outcomes, so the indicators have to be improved learning – i.e. something like EGRA”*.

Findings from reviews and evaluations

- Liberia: The 2011 MTR noted appropriate entry of teacher training meeting the needs of volunteer and unqualified teachers but states the long-term nature of this strategy: *“The education programme had to focus on building from a very low threshold and while this has greatly increased teacher confidence, it will be some time before classroom performance is adequate to ensure better student achievement.”* However, the consultant notes the appropriateness of the intervention design to date: *“The main findings are a) the teacher training is well designed; materials are relevant (using those of a national teacher training programme) and school follow up by CEP trainers is excellent.”*
- Haiti: The Saut d’Eau education programme had three reviews during this reporting period. **This tracks a story of change in their programming quality.** The first report questions programme design and the appropriateness of teacher training approaches: *“Progress towards the programme goal has been limited by its ambitious scope. Teacher training intended to reach all teachers with few staff to deliver the training...the training provided appears unsuitable for the learning needs of students.”*

The 2013 report noted significant changes in programme design and implementation: *“The education programme in Haiti is well-designed and well implemented. It is impressive that the programme has taken on board findings in the evaluation (2011) and contextual analysis (2012) by completely re-shaping the programme and recruiting a dynamic new team of educators”*.

The 2015 visit again noted significant progress – this time reflected in changes in student reading levels following 1.5 years of literacy interventions. *“The TOTAL intervention has led to significant improvements in reading levels for some students. It seems the materials are suitable for the context, and that to some extent, they are being used effectively by some teachers. The results for children at the 75th percentile are very promising.”* However, students in grade 1 and the poorest students were not achieving any increases in reading levels – it was recommended that the programme focus on mechanisms for teachers to support children at risk of being left behind.

- Kenya: The 2013 review recommended the introduction of a **mother-tongue literacy** intervention in Marsabit. It was noted that this would be a considerable challenge for the Kenya team as activities at the national level (advocacy) were strong but skills to work with teachers inside the classroom had not been required for the last phase of programming. The report notes the positive shift the programme was willing to take when presented with evidence of a more appropriate strategy for Marsabit: *“It is the openness of the Education Manager and SMT to new directions that sets this programme apart – once the rationale for mother-tongue literacy was made the team moved very quickly to take action and commit to this.”*

Improved Well-being of Children

This is a new outcome – previously Concern focused on ‘improved equality’ but in the revision of the Global Education Strategy it was decided that equality underlies all outcomes. The inclusion of student well-being provides space to meet the social and emotional education needs of children through the provision of safe learning environments, teaching life skills and preventing school-related gender-based violence. Many aspects of our work under this outcome overlap with barriers to access to education and quality of education.

Country (Programme)	2012 (Baseline)	2013	2014	2015 (Target)	Assessment
% of women reporting influence and engagement in household decision making – child's education and child marriage					
Bangladesh	Child Ed: 60% Child Marriage: 40%	Child Ed: 78% Child Marriage: 40%	Child Ed: 81% Child Marriage: 42%	Within overall index	On track
% boys and girls using sanitary latrines in community based learning centers and schools					
Afghanistan	Boys: 25% Girls: 15%	Boys: 46% Girls: 46%	Boys: 35% Girls: 32%	Boys 70% Girls: 70%	Off-track
Number of target schools meeting locally established 'safe schools' standards					
Niger	0%	7%	7%	20%	Off-track
% Community Education Committee members and % children know that corporal punishment is a form of violence that should not be tolerated in school					
Somalia	CEC: 84% Children: 10%	CEC: 89% Children: 12.2%	CEC: 97% Children: 67%	CEC: 98% Children: 75%	On track

This section of the results framework reflects two issues. Firstly, the outcome is subjective and each context will identify specific issues to be addressed, such as earthquake preparedness in Haiti, or flood preparedness in Bangladesh. Secondly, the issues to be addressed are sensitive and approaches often need to be incremental and culturally appropriate – for example the Somalia team initially had an indicator to directly measure children's experiences of corporal punishment, but found it unusable in the context and needed to refine to the above, weaker indicator (knowledge that corporal punishment is a form of violence).

For these reasons there is a **lack of standardisation within our core indicator list for child well-being**, which makes organisational learning more difficult and often leads to weak indicators at output level. This weakness will need to be addressed through a review of all indicators used across Concern's education and protection programmes, and those of other organisations, to develop guidelines for measuring improved well-being. Learning can be taken from Lebanon and Turkey where joint education and protection programmes are trialling new, innovative indicators to measure well-being of vulnerable boys and girls.

It must be noted that our **monitoring and evaluation of this outcome is weak** at present and this hampers our ability to measure progress against specific aspects of child well-being. In the same way that outcomes for access and quality have been strengthened, we need to invest time and training to strengthen monitoring of this outcome. Globally this is a common challenge – Concern was requested to suggest indicators to the UN Girls Education Initiative for a submission to the SDGs in 2015 – there are no standardised indicators from which to work. The Safe Learning Model, if funding is secured, will contribute to this enormously within Concern and externally (see page 24).

Another shortfall is the **absence of any reference to sexual and reproductive health or HIV** within these indicators, or within any programme evaluation. An indicator on HIV and AIDS knowledge for children (rejection of myths and knowledge of ways to contract HIV) is included in the core indicator list for education but is not included in any of the results frameworks (where they were included in

2011 they have been removed by programme managers in subsequent years). Training has been provided through country support visits on mechanisms and tools for reproductive health education and HIV education, but there is little evidence of their use in reviews or evaluations. Cultural barriers to discussing HIV and sex education often drive the subject underground, but it is an essential life skill considering the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases in our operational contexts. Sierra Leone and Malawi now have programmes specifically addressing this, but neither programme was reviewed within this reporting period.

Addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) was identified as a niche area in our work in 2011. Under this outcome we also include work to address underlying power imbalances, many of which manifest in the home and community. Clear evidence of this approach being followed holistically was not found in any reviews or evaluations. Integrated programming provides an opportunity to address these issues at household levels and indicators specific to women's empowerment or adult HIV education represent increases in the voice of marginalised groups – women and community members – in Bangladesh and Haiti, to influence education decisions.

For Bangladesh this measures women's influence within the home on child marriage and children's education. The changes in influence relating to children's education are attributed to the engagement of women in income-generating activities (through the livelihoods programme) and engaging men in activities relating to women's decision-making. It is noted that very little change has been achieved in women's influence over child marriage – a major risk for children and barrier to education – and the results framework commits to focus on women's influence over the marriage of daughters in 2015.

The engagement of Community Education Committees in Somalia is documented under "improving access" and very little is noted in the reviews or evaluation that indicates the involvement of the CEC in raising the voices of women or addressing inequality within the schools. The Somalia programme is currently contracting a research agency to study the prevalence of and underlying causes of school-related gender-based violence in Somalia (which will be the first such study in Mogadishu) to inform programme and policy planning.

In Niger the composite indicator of measuring 'Safe Schools' masks some progress made by the team in this area. It is noted in the 2013 review that SRGBV is a major issue in Niger but is currently not adequately addressed at national level or by NGOs. Gender inequality leads to significant disparities in access to and completion of education, and the reviewer struggled to hear the voices of women in any meeting that was not gender disaggregated. Issues of gender inequality are a widely recognised in programme design and among the team, but change will take considerable investment of time and resources.

Findings from reviews and evaluations:

- Somalia: Both the review and evaluation noted the positive, child-friendly atmosphere in schools supported by Concern. The review notes: *"In schools where Concern had been present for more than two years, there was a noticeable difference in terms of cleanliness, organisation of students, separate facilities for boys and girls, and sufficient areas for play and recreation."*

Further, the reviewer was a woman of Somali background with more access to female students and teachers than previous reviewers. She notes: *“It was clear that females are sometimes made to feel unequal, [this] was not a prevalent issue at all in the schools that were visited in Mogadishu. Teachers and learners communicated openly...children were observed as generally confident.”* This was reiterated in the final evaluation by the EC, noting that children were confident both in and out of the classroom.

- Liberia: Training of community leaders on *“innovations such as democratic elections and gender equality”* were deemed as both relevant and impressive in the 2011 MTR. Gender equality training promoted community leaders to become ‘community counsellors’ in the referral pathway for SRGBV responses, through the USAID Doorways initiative.
- Haiti: The 2015 review found that while quality interventions focusing on improving literacy were strongly implemented, the programme had lapsed on commitments to increasing access and well-being of students: *“there has not been sufficient emphasis on the other two components which are also important to this holistic education programme”*. The review found that education technicians (responsible for teacher training and community engagement) were focusing only on academic interventions and not engaging sufficiently with issues within the community or child well-being. Training on sexual and reproductive health and child rights for children was planned for the summer holidays – it was recommended that this should be strongly supported by the technicians and that their performance development plans be adapted to include objectives to student well-being.

Conclusion: Our programmes demonstrate positive changes in the lives of the extreme poor in terms of access to education – this is a combination of improved monitoring and improved responses to poor attendance through the community structures supported for many years.

The most significant change found across programmes was the focus on student learning outcomes which leads to school success and real returns on education for the poorest. All countries have shifted their focus and are resourcing this area, with strong monitoring through EGRAs, identifying the severity of the learning crisis and driving change in education systems. Already some programmes are demonstrating promising results. Levels of literacy in Niger and Afghanistan are so low that targets are unlikely to be reached under the current IAPF cycle and will require significant system strengthening.

Improving child well-being is difficult to measure from reviews, evaluations or results frameworks. We are left questioning if the measurement tools are inadequate, or if both measurement and implementation are inadequate – the learning is not currently available to analyse this. Global partners are struggling to measure and improve this very important outcome – renewed focus is needed through the roll-out of the Safe Learning Model and partnership with an academic institution to improve our programme design.

5. Are our programmes the most appropriate ones?

Adviser reports in Niger, Haiti and Lebanon found that programme design was aligned with the Global Education Strategy. In Liberia the review found that programme focus on quality improvements through teacher training was well designed, using relevant materials and in-classroom support. The Somalia evaluation identified contextually sensitive approaches to improve education access which enabled increased enrolment in a very challenging setting. In Burundi the evaluation noted that the programme was “*well suited to the education policy context in country and built close working relationships with all levels of government*”.

Many of the findings presented in section 4 illustrate the appropriateness of programme focus. In particular, the low baseline figures identified for education access and quality indicate that programmes have identified true issues affecting educational success for the poorest. Measuring progress against these indicators ensures that programmes need to continually question the approaches used to effect change. While progress against the third outcome, improved well-being of children, is difficult to measure, there is clear evidence in reports and evaluations that gendered violence, corporal punishment and disaster-related risks are major barriers to education success. This evaluation confirms that maintaining a focus on this outcome is appropriate, but that strategies to address issues such as gendered violence are not yet clearly identified.

While the expansion of education programmes into emergency contexts signifies commitment to the Global Education Strategy targeting of fragile contexts, the inclusion of education in emergency responses is not uniform and is informed by both assessments and capacity. In the Philippines Concern supported Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities with schools including the construction of cyclone resistant school buildings, also serving as community shelters. Similar efforts are currently in planning for Nepal which will provide school spaces and community shelter support during crises. However, these do not include holistic education responses to meet the access, quality and well-being outcomes provided in the Global Education Strategy so are not classified as education programmes within this report.

Where emergency education programmes are planned and delivered in a holistic way, there is good evidence of appropriate programming. In Afghanistan the team supported IDP families and orphaned children to relocate to temporary shelter following landslides. Immediately the programme included the provision of temporary learning spaces, providing safe spaces for children to benefit from psycho-social support, protection services and the return to a sense of stability through positive learning opportunities. Programmes for Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon serve the immediate needs of children with temporary learning support and transitional mechanisms to help them enter the formal system in their host country. Partnerships with other agencies – UNICEF and Right to Play – were established to ensure that programmes appropriately addressed the social and emotional needs of traumatised, vulnerable girls and boys.

Overall, the design of education programmes is found to be appropriate to address the needs of our target group, aligned with the Global Education Policy. Responses to humanitarian education needs mark significant programming change to fragile contexts, but this could be strengthened with more consistent humanitarian needs assessments and responses through education.

6. Is this impact being sustained or is it sustainable?

The Global Education Strategy clearly states the importance of partnership with governments to contribute to education system strengthening. Similarly, by stimulating the demand for high quality education for all, education systems are more accountable to citizens leading in service provision.

Education system strengthening demonstrates the greatest promise for sustainable change in our education programmes – particularly in the area of student learning. Teacher training has been a strong feature of programmes for over forty years, and is now refined in focus to influence literacy within national curricula and teacher training colleges. This was identified as a long-term strategy with great promise in the Liberia review. Results frameworks and documentation of learning (see section 8) indicate that programmes are contributing to national-level planning. Piloting mother-tongue interventions in Kenya, Niger, Liberia, Haiti and Afghanistan will provide evidence for system-level change. However, as can be seen from our progress on quality of education, we are at an early stage (albeit at the forefront of the global literacy focus) and it is likely that findings on sustainability of these efforts will only be visible in the next reporting period.

As documented under the effectiveness of outcome one, many programme evaluations recognised the sustainability of Concern’s engagement with communities in school management. The withdrawal of Concern from Ilella in Niger, or from schools in Sierra Leone, was deemed effective due to the strong community-based management structures established there. In Niger it was noted that these community structures were then linked directly to local ministry of education offices, which enhanced sustainability.

In South Central Somalia, where security remains a challenge, Concern works through partners and through community management structures. The evaluation notes strong capacity-building of these structures which can outlast our presence. “There is consensus among stakeholders that should EC funding...not be forthcoming after the project period, the [intervention] has already played a very important and beneficial role that can be sustained by MoE, CECs (community education committees)...”

It must be noted that the sustainability of our approaches in contexts where the government cannot or does not provide education spaces (Somalia, Lebanon) or where we enter a partnership agreement with the ministry of education to co-fund interim services (Turkey, Afghanistan) is fully dependent on recurrent funding. On one hand our Global Education Strategy compels programmes to find mechanisms for system strengthening, rather than setting up parallel systems. On the other hand we recognise a need for humanitarian education responses which are temporary in nature. Given that the crises in Somalia, Turkey, Lebanon and Afghanistan are already protracted we must continually question our strategy and challenge programmes to identify more sustainable approaches.

Finally, Liberia, through a Concern-funded education programme implemented by ChildFund offers mixed results from community involvement, with issues of sustainability from a government perspective. An intervention to create seven new “feeder schools” began in 2013, to address the needs of out of school children. Although there is local community support through the growth in attendance of the feeder schools, the risk is that a parallel schooling system is being set up. The

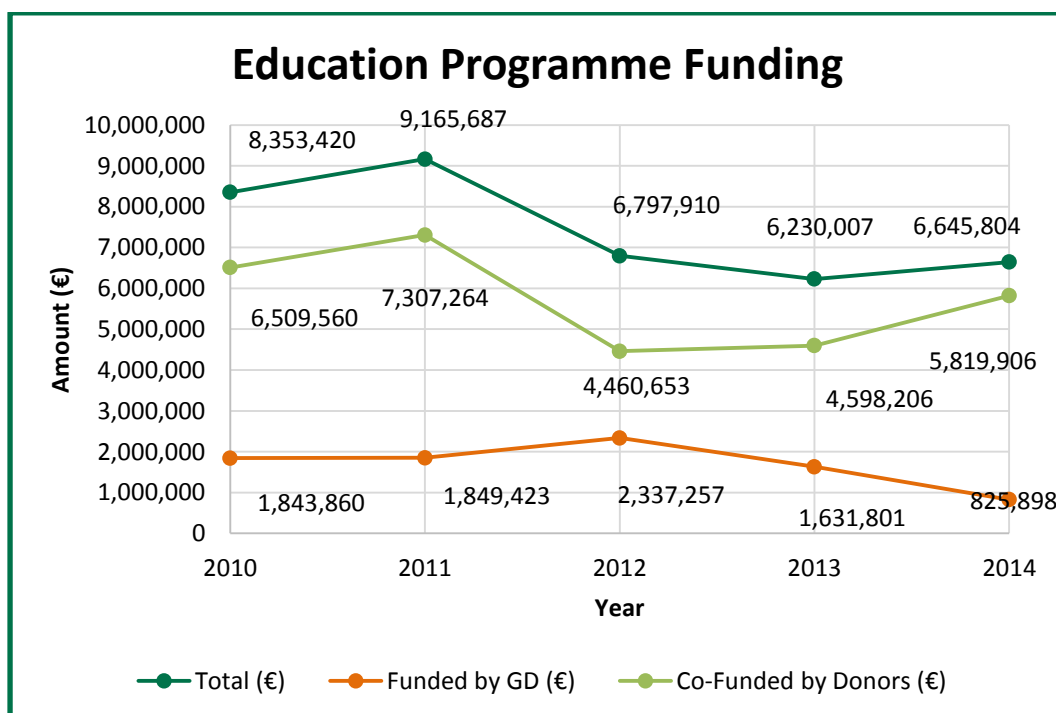
intervention may not be sustainable in the long term because beyond the local level, MoE engagement has been low and the MoE has not formally committed to assuming control of the schools after funding for the programme ends. Similar findings were documented in the last meta-evaluation for Haiti and the recommendation is for Liberia’s feeder school support to cease following the current funding cycle.

Conclusion – Programmes in development contexts have shifted towards an education system-strengthening approach which should demonstrate sustainability in the next reporting cycle. Reviews and evaluations to date focus on community-led sustainability (addressing the demand side but not the service delivery perspective). In general, empowering community engagement in school management is deemed to create sustainable impact, but the evidence of this being sustained is questionable if funding is withdrawn from humanitarian education programmes.

7. Are these programmes as efficient as possible or providing good value for money?

At a global level, there has been **positive growth in education funding** since 2012. Note, figures for 2010 and 2011 spiked due to funding for education in Haiti following the earthquake, including general donations. With funding constraints and the withdrawal of heavy GD support, education programmes have secured significant institutional funding from DFID and USAID, and managed to sustain and even grow operations. New operations in Lebanon and Turkey have been successful in identifying funding with minimal GD reliance, from ECHO, UNICEF and BPRM (US Government), which will lead to more confidence in responding to humanitarian contexts with education. In this context the ratio of GD to co-financing has reduced significantly from 0.52 in 2012, to just 0.14 in 2014.

The table below provides our funding expenditure since 2010:



The budget for Haiti in 2011 and 2012 included heavy infrastructure investments, with an overall expenditure of €2million, €2.1 million and €1.3 million in 2012, 2011 and 2010 respectively. However, the profile of countries with highest expenditure has now moved to those contexts in which we secure large, multi-annual grants from DFID or USAID (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya), or with emergency funding through ECHO (Somalia).

Table 4: Four countries with highest education expenditure per year

2012		2013		2014	
Haiti	2,005,780	Somalia	1,066,532	Liberia	1,160,482
Somalia	1,118,552	Liberia	909,025	Sierra Leone	1,124,292
Mozambique	608,330	Kenya	780,588	Kenya	1,093,746
Sierra Leone	568,298	Sierra Leone	737,563	Somalia	564,702

Education expenditure was projected to grow to €7.3 million by 2017 in the Global Education Strategy. Growth towards this target has been stronger than projected – in 2014 expenditure reached €6.6 million. This demonstrates small but steady growth, while some countries have developed plans for more substantial, large scale grants. In 2013 Pakistan led a consortium bid with IRC to apply for a DFID contract (over £20million) to address education needs through innovations, but due to internal financial risk analysis the process was stopped to allow Concern develop financial capacity for contract applications.

In 2013 Concern applied to the **Global Partnership for Education** to become an eligible partner in the supervision or management of country-level grants. Following a World Bank audit only two NGOs were approved – Concern and Save the Children – and in 2014 Concern signed a contract of pre-approval to access up to €5 million to support Ministries of Education, which would be accompanied by a country-specific audit for eligibility for further funding. In Liberia Concern is positioning the organisation to become the ‘managing entity’ for the GPE grant through partnership with the Ministry of Education. While this would provide access to more significant grants, the strategic advantage of contributing to system strengthening at a national level with education ministries is the main advantage.

Staffing challenges have continued throughout this reporting period. While our international staffing profile has increased considerably – from two international education coordinators to eight positions currently – vacancies have been difficult to fill with qualified technical experts willing to travel and live in challenging environments. We have increased SAL adviser support from one education adviser to a senior education adviser plus a second education adviser based in New York. National staff profile varies across countries. Some contexts have retained staff for many years, bringing in additional technical experts to support where necessary. Other programmes have had complete staffing change-overs (in some cases due to internal investigations) and continue to recruit and lose staff on a continuous basis. This has negatively affected implementation in both USAID funded programmes, along with frequent restructuring of the team to better match programme needs.

An analysis of the **value for money** provided by our education programmes is limited by a lack of reference to this in evaluations and reports. During the reporting period we have committed to one *payment by results* programme funded by DFID in Kenya, which will provide interesting findings in 2016 and 2017. In Lebanon, funding has been restricted by a *cost per child* limitation which prescribes minimum and maximum inputs per student in addition to overhead limits. Similarly, in Liberia the USAID-funded EQUAL programme is negotiating to maintain scale and our focus on the poorest and most vulnerable children when faced with cost-per-child barriers. Provided with a more prescriptive funding market, increasing our capacity to measure value for money is a priority moving forward.

Findings from reviews and evaluations

- Malawi: The midterm review of the rural education programme in Nsanje questioned the programme's value for money. *"In summary, the current initiatives to improve access to education and the quality of education are not sufficient to address the current issues and the programme is not likely to achieve its goal without adjusting this. However, the programme has budgetary constraints and unless additional, large-scale funding is secured, these changes are not feasible."* The staffing structure was cited as *"insufficient to ensure quality programme implementation."*
- In Burundi the evaluation found that the programme would need to focus on quality of education more extensively to increase its impact: *"Deepening the Education programme's programme strategies for quality and ensuring cost effectiveness and sustainability of the outcomes of Concern will also require that much more work is done in identifying viable options for parents and children in extreme poverty."* Among the author's recommendations was the need for Concern Burundi to *"focus on ways to empower the provincial and commune education levels to develop cost effective models for reaching the final 20-30% of out of school children with both supply and demand side approaches."*

Conclusion – Our education programmes are successfully securing large scale, multi-annual institutional grants and humanitarian funding, with reduced reliance on general donations. Funding growth has exceeded targets in the Global Education Strategy. Value for money reporting is anecdotal in evaluations and reviews, leading to a lack of clear information on progress. However, funding mechanisms have become increasingly focused on value for money, payment by results and cost per child limits so we will need to improve our measurement and planning on this issue.

8. How is the impact being brought to scale by others? Are we achieving systemic change? What evidence or learning are we contributing? How are we learning from success and failure?

Increased engagement in education system strengthening through efforts to improve early grade literacy, strengthen curricula and lead national-level coordination of the education sector can be seen over this reporting period. Reports and evaluations, in addition other documented evidence (report launches and national consultations), cite evidence that our education programmes use programme data to influence change at national level and work in partnership with ministries of education at district or county levels. This is less visible in results frameworks, with a small number of macro-level indicators maintained or correctly reported since 2012 – our capacity to measure and demonstrate system strengthening in such frameworks seems very limited.

The increased voice of our programmes at national level is most visible through technical leadership of the sector. Concern is represented on the GPE Local Education Group (LEG) in nine countries, which is a small group of donors, NGOs and ministry officials mandated to approve decisions on GPE expenditure in-country. In Liberia Concern was elected to chair the national-level NGO Education Forum and represent NGOs to the Ministry of Education. In Sierra Leone the education programme was requested to lead technical development of the Ebola-response radio education programme which was rolled out at national level (this role is continuing still). In Kenya, Concern hosts and leads planning for the Ministry of Education's registration process for urban slum schools – a process which is now bearing fruit following a five year advocacy strategy by Concern in Kenya to bring these schools into the national system.² In Malawi, Concern's work on SRGBV and HIV education is feeding into the curriculum for teacher training and police training institutes.

² Gabrielle Appleford, Victor Odero & Wendy Erasmus (2015) Pro-poor budget analysis of Kenya's free primary education policy, *Development in Practice*, 25:4, 587-593, DOI:10.1080/09614524.2015.1026879 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2015.1026879>

Evidence and Influence – Improving Access

- Attendance monitoring within programmes has provided evidence of poor time on task, weak education system management of school calendars, attendance registers etc. Triangulation of school registers through head-count attendance and spot checks has been built into school visits in Afghanistan, Niger, Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- Identifying the poorest and most vulnerable children and tracking their attendance has become part of household support visits in Niger and Burundi – both by programme staff and parent-teacher associations. Reviews and evaluations from Niger, Burundi, Somalia and Liberia identified PTA support as effective mechanism to sustainably improve school management and address barriers to education access.
- We have mixed experiences in national-level advocacy on access. In Liberia and Kenya programmes have targeted advocacy strategies (automatic admittance to school at age six in Liberia, recognition of slum schools in Kenya). Kenya’s five years of advocacy on this issue is bearing fruit, with the registration and provision of capitation grants to some slum schools in 2014 and 2015. In Haiti, where the government provides direct support to less than 15% of primary schools nationally, Concern has been found to work at micro-level only, encouraging parents to pay fees, rather than taking a more rights-based approach and advocating for the government to provide education services to all children. This was recommended as the way forward in the long term, learning from Kenya and building up networks at national level.
- Teacher attendance continues to be a major barrier to access – reviews and programme reports consistently find high absenteeism of teachers. Few programmes are tracking this at outcome level, which indicates a lack of consistency in responding to the problem. Somalia, Lebanon and Turkey monitor teacher attendance well as they have teacher incentives (payments) built into the school support model. Haiti monitors and reports teacher attendance during monthly teacher coaching visits and attempted to build in a system of community-based monitoring, but initial attempts have failed as parents felt powerless to challenge school management.
- In Kenya, the team recently commissioned a study on “time-on-task” in Nairobi and Marsabit. The study will be presented at national level in September to train Ministry of Education staff on barriers to learning time and mechanisms for monitoring this.

Most visible leadership at national and district level can be found from the work on early years literacy instruction. As documented earlier in this paper, EGRA tools have been used as a diagnostic tool to measure how well an education system is supporting reading attainment for children in early primary school. In many contexts Concern has led the development of an EGRA tool for the first time, providing Ministries of Education with new evidence and using this to start national-level dialogue on barriers to learning achievement.

Evidence and Influence – Improving Quality

- EGRAs have been used by Concern in Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Somalia, Kenya, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.
- In three of these countries the tools were pioneered (developed, tested and shared) by Concern for the first time (Sierra Leone, Niger, Somalia) while in others they were refined and used to document the relatively *lower* levels of literacy in the poorest parts of the country – Afghanistan, Kenya, Liberia, Haiti and Bangladesh.
- In all contexts EGRAs were planned and conducted in partnership with Ministry of Education staff (as supervisors and assessors), allowing joint results ownership and dissemination. This is important to note given the low results of EGRAs – results are likely to be dismissed or contested by education officials if they are not jointly collected. In Sierra Leone, for example, results were used to challenge utility of the National Primary School Examination results which are used to decide if a child can proceed to secondary school or not.
- Results have been shared globally (UKFIET Education Conference presentations 2011, 2013, 2015; International Journal of Education and Development publication 2012; CIES Education Conference presentation 2014; SAL Learning Paper and University of Limerick learning event 2014), and nationally (presentations to education ministries, partners and donors in Niger, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Haiti, Somalia, formal meetings and document sharing in all countries with EGRA).
- UNESCO invited Concern to contribute two papers on our EGRA use in conflict-affected countries – Somalia and Afghanistan – for their global guidance paper on EGRA due for publication in 2016.
- Internal learning from these assessments has changed the profile of our education programmes to prioritise student learning in early primary school. As discussed earlier, the process of planning and conducting EGRA was challenging and resulted in reporting delays. However, following the assessments significant shifts are visible in our staffing profile and programme activities. Evidence from EGRAs and a more technical focus on why children are not learning has led to advocacy and piloting of mother-tongue literacy interventions in Niger, Liberia, Haiti, Kenya and Afghanistan. In Liberia Concern is piloting the introduction of the Bassa language in primary school – this is the first mother-tongue initiative in formal primary school sanctioned (and closely monitored) by the Ministry of Education.

The third programme outcome, improving child well-being, presents challenges. In some ways Concern's programming on SRGBV is ahead of the curve – our pioneering work on SRGBV has led to increased profile UN agencies and donors at a global level and our input is sought on key policy documents. On the other hand, our practical implementation of work relating to child well-being is falling behind – the Safe Learning Model remains unfunded and country programmes struggle to find ways to change entrenched gendered violence or harmful practices, while also struggle to effectively measure these changes. There is need for increased support and investment in this outcome at country level if Concern is to capitalise and build on the global profile we have developed.

Evidence and Influence – Improving Well-being

- In 2012, Concern commissioned a study by the University of Sussex on promising practice in school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) response and prevention programming globally. The study was used to inform the development of Concern’s Safe Learning Model and study findings were shared at learning events and conferences in the UK (Oxford and London), Ireland and the US.
- We are represented at the UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI)-led Global Partners SRGBV Working Group in which Concern is one of only three NGO representatives. In this forum we work closely with USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO and DFID on global guidance on SRGBV in addition to global advocacy. Our engagement in advocacy to date on this issue is positioned under equality advocacy events, such as International Women’s Day.
- During this reporting period studies on SRGBV prevalence in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Malawi were completed and disseminated at national and international levels (CIES 2014, Oxford 2013, national learning events and photo exhibition) to increase policy and planning dialogue on the issues.
- When schools re-opened in Sierra Leone following the Ebola crisis, Concern played a leading role in a national-level advocacy campaign for pregnant girls to be permitted to sit examinations. The networks, evidence and capacity to effectively advocate for the rights of these vulnerable girls (who had become pregnant during the crisis when they were most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse) was already established through the SRGBV work ongoing in the country. The advocacy campaign was successful to some degree, although there remain key barriers to their return to school. This is a good example of the returns on years of capacity-building, research and community-based interventions, leading to capacity to respond to national issues quickly. Irish Aid and DFID were key advocacy partners on this issue.

Conclusion – System strengthening through evidence-generation on best practices is currently the focus of our work at national and global levels. We are increasingly succeeding in generating profile, documenting learning and contributing to global guidance. Specific to our niche areas, we have identified strong networks and are well represented. For quality of education we have strong programme data to contribute to these groups. For SRGBV we need to renew country-level implementation and learning through the implementation of the Safe Learning Model to maintain our credibility moving forward. For education in fragility we are growing our influence, but need to ensure this is supported by emergency responses to education for new crises.

9. Conclusion

The revised Global Education Policy has provided a framework for Concern to engage in the education sector in appropriate and manageable ways. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, education is the smallest sector within Concern's work, so the narrowing of the scope of work to primary school system strengthening enables the organisation to specialise and offer depth in niche areas. Secondly, education is identified as a key strategy to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty, so the education policy outlines pro-poor principles committing us to respond to the right to education of the most vulnerable children in fragile, impoverished and disaster-affected communities. This meta-evaluation finds that the policy focus has identified appropriate points through which Concern can realistically and meaningfully engage in the education sector at a scale possible within the organisation.

Based on the analysis provided in this report, a summary evaluation of programmes against the Global Education Strategy is provided below under the DAC criteria.

Relevance

Targeting for education programmes is aligned with Concern's understanding of extreme poverty. Following reviews and contextual analyses there is evidence of improved targeting within countries. Programmes add value and have shifted their focus to align with Concern's three identified niche areas – early grade literacy skills, SRGBV, contexts of fragility. This has provided strategic opportunities for Concern to enhance these agendas. Significant shifts away from infrastructure-based programmes have been made in development contexts.

Effectiveness

Our programmes demonstrate positive changes in the lives of the extreme poor in terms of access to education – this is a combination of improved monitoring and improved responses to poor attendance through the community structures supported for many years.

The most significant change found across programmes was the focus on student learning outcomes which leads to school success and real returns on education for the poorest. All countries have shifted their focus and are resourcing this area, with strong monitoring through EGRAs, identifying the severity of the learning crisis and driving change in education systems. Already some programmes are demonstrating promising results. Levels of literacy in Niger and Afghanistan are so low that targets are unlikely to be reached under the current IAPF cycle and will require significant system strengthening.

Improving child well-being is difficult to measure from reviews, evaluations or results frameworks. We are left questioning if the measurement tools are inadequate, or if both measurement and implementation are inadequate – the learning is not currently available to analyse this. Global partners are struggling to measure and improve this very important outcome – renewed focus is needed through the roll-out of the Safe Learning Model and partnership with an academic institution to improve our programme design.

Overall, the design of education programmes is found to be appropriate to address the needs of our target group, aligned with the Global Education Policy. Responses to humanitarian education needs

mark significant programming change to fragile contexts, but this could be strengthened for more consistent humanitarian needs assessments and responses through education.

Efficiency

Our education programmes are successfully securing large scale, multi-annual institutional grants and humanitarian funding, with reduced reliance on general donations. Funding growth has exceeded targets in the Global Education Strategy. Value for money reporting is anecdotal in evaluations and reviews, leading to a lack of clear information on progress. However, funding mechanisms have become increasingly focused on value for money, payment by results and cost per child limits so we will need to improve our measurement and planning on this issue.

Impact

System strengthening through evidence-generation on best practices is currently the focus of our work at national and global levels. We are increasingly succeeding in generating profile, documenting learning and contributing to global guidance. Specific to our niche areas, we have identified strong networks and are well represented. For quality of education we have strong programme data to contribute to these groups. For SRGBV we need to renew country-level implementation and learning through the implementation of the Safe Learning Model to maintain our credibility moving forward. For education in fragility we are growing our influence, but need to ensure this is supported by emergency responses to education for new crises.

Sustainability

Programmes in development contexts have shifted towards an education system-strengthening approach which should demonstrate sustainability in the next reporting cycle. Reviews and evaluations to date focus on community-led sustainability (addressing the demand side but not the service delivery perspective). In general, empowering community engagement in school management is deemed to create sustainable impact, but the evidence of this being sustained is questionable if funding is withdrawn from humanitarian education programmes.