

Plan UK Experience of Child-Led Evaluation in Kenya

PPA programme

Introduction

In 2011 Plan International UK secured a Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) with the Department for International Development (DFID). This strategic funding has been used to develop the Building Skills for Life Programme. The programme seeks to empower adolescent girls and address the unique challenges they face in accessing quality education across seven countries:¹ Cambodia, Mali, Malawi, Kenya, Pakistan, Rwanda and Zimbabwe.

After three years of programming, in May 2014 a new Outcome Monitoring System (OMS) was developed for the PPA programme. OMS combines quantitative with qualitative data, sourced from all the programme's stakeholders, on the factors identified as key barriers to adolescent girls' education. The inclusion of more child-centred methodologies for collecting data is a key feature of OMS, which has helped to lay the foundations for piloting child-led evaluations (CLE) in three of the participating countries: Cambodia, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

This report presents the methodology and findings from the third of these CLE pilots. This experience took place in Kenya where the programme's progress was assessed against the five DAC evaluation criteria,² with the addition of equity.

The programme in Kenya has the following objectives:

Quality of education:³

To increase school enrolment and reduce dropout and to improve the quality of education.

SRHR:

To increase knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and access to sexual health information.

Accountability and participation:

To increase school accountability and involvement of girls and boys in decision making.

¹ During the first phase of the programme (April 2011 to March 2014) the programme was implemented in nine countries and included, in addition to the current seven, El Salvador and Sierra Leone.

² <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

³ Plan UK's Operational Definition of Quality Education refers to the quality of the schooling experience and not to educational attainment or curriculum content. The definition reads as: 'One that is grounded in respect for human rights and gender equity, that is accessible to all children without discrimination, and one in which all children are encouraged to fulfil their capabilities. It includes a learning environment that is learner-friendly, safe and healthy for all children with mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence. A quality education is accountable to children through the participation of children, families and communities in school governance and decision-making.'

Reduce violence and corporal punishment:

To reduce violence in school and in the community and reduce acceptance for corporal punishment.

Economic barriers to girls' education:

To support poorer households pay for educational costs through access to funds, improved savings and business skills.

Extensive desk research into previous experiences of evaluations led by children revealed that despite many policies suggesting strategies for beneficiary involvement in monitoring & evaluation (M&E), children are rarely involved in evaluations. When they are, they are generally only asked to evaluate the level of child involvement rather than the entire projects or programmes. Conducting a full CLE therefore presented a unique opportunity to strengthen Plan's ability and capacity to meaningfully involve children in M&E, generating learning and recommendations for similar activities in the future.

Methodology

Ten child evaluators (CEs) were selected to lead the evaluation from among the programme beneficiaries – five girls and five boys. They received initial training in one day, familiarising them with each of the programme objectives. This process also enabled them to define the evaluation questions and select those they wished to use from a list of child-friendly data collection tools.

Facilitation of the process was delivered by the Enabling Adult Team (EAT).⁴ The EAT only made decisions in relation to: logistics (which villages or schools to target for data collection, the venue of meetings etc.), start date and duration of the process, compensation for the CEs' time and other administrative processes.

In addition to choosing the questions and data collection tools, the CEs took all decisions in relation to how information was analysed, the level of achievement under each evaluation criterion and how to present the findings during the final meeting with stakeholders.

Six focus group discussions (FGDs) with girls and six with boys were conducted and entirely facilitated by the CEs. In addition, one FGD with mothers and another with fathers were conducted. Key Informant Interviews with three community leaders, three interviews with teachers and four with Plan staff also formed part of the evidence collected. In addition to this qualitative data, the analysis and assessment process was also based on OMS data to ensure a broader base of evidence.

The choice to enable the CEs to take all the important decisions required the development of tools, methodologies and processes that would enable their full understanding of abstract and sometimes complex concepts. These can be broadly organised into:

1. Facilitation methodologies for training the CEs
2. Methodology to enable CEs to make evaluative judgements

⁴ The EAT comprised of Laura Hughston (author), Learning and Impact Assessment Officer at UKNO, Victor Kosi, PPA Monitoring & Evaluation Officer and Purity Nduyoh Nduyo, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for Kilifi

1. Facilitation methodology for training the CEs

The one day training for the CEs included:

a) The problem tree and shadow analysis

The CEs were introduced to the programme objectives and logic, findings from the baseline and other learning using a re-worked version of the well-known **problem tree**. They were then asked to discuss the issues that cause children to drop out of school (or fail to enrol), and consider whether there were any other significant problems not tackled by the programme.

b) Ranking barriers to adolescent's education in order of priority

The CEs **ranked all of the problems** identified through the problem tree, including those they identified themselves, in order of their importance for keeping girls and boys in school. This exercise was also repeated during the FGDs to validate the weight of each problem from the perspective of the different categories of beneficiaries.

c) Who carries the biggest burden?

This exercise focused on equity and identifying those most vulnerable in communities.

d) Defining the questions

The CEs **developed questions for each stakeholder category** (adolescents, parents, leaders and teachers).

e) Selecting the data collection tools

The CEs selected **a method to collect information** for each of the questions they planned to ask the stakeholders, from a list of child-friendly data collection tools. These had been preselected for offering two advantages:

- A more visual and interactive format that would better enable engagement with children and less-literate adults
- Minimal requirements for note taking

This formed a package of activity-based debates for the FGDs that alternated questions with discussion-stimulating activities. A pilot was conducted where the CEs ran the entire exercise, followed by a reflection session. This focused on verifying that the data collected answered the objectives, and on the CEs' application of the different techniques.

2. Methodology to enable child evaluators to make evaluative judgements

The CEs were helped to fully understand each DAC evaluation criterion and produce a modulated judgement with a series of tools, broadly falling into two categories: visuals and rubrics.

Visuals are essentially images or visual exercises used to represent concepts that might otherwise be difficult or abstract. Visuals also help to make the information more appealing for children.

Rubrics present different levels or degrees of achievement, clearly describing each level. For the entire evaluation fourteen rubrics were created. To make the process more child-friendly, the rubrics' levels were designated by an animal: the bigger the animal the higher the level of achievement. In ascending order the animals we used were: lizard, goose, deer, cheetah and cow. Visual exercises were sometimes used to introduce concepts and ideas or to pre-select a starting level on a rubric. The CEs would then confirm or disprove this after examining the entire rubric, using evidence collected.

Once the CEs had examined each evaluation component in detail, they combined all the elements together into a global overview. This was achieved through the methodology of the Apodeixis Ornithorhynchus⁵ - a fantasy animal with five body parts: head, body, front and back legs, tail; each corresponding to a DAC criterion. In addition, the head is adorned with a feature representing equity.

Limitations

The limitations of the study can be summarised as follows:

- The number of respondents consulted during the course of the evaluation was relatively small and selected only from the easier to access locations. This limits the possibility of generalising the results to the entire programme.
- The design of this study is primarily qualitative and does not follow previously used methodologies. Therefore, the findings cannot easily be compared to the baseline or previous evaluations of this programme.
- The fact that school principals were responsible for the selection of respondents for the adolescent FGDs could potentially have introduced a bias. However, they were asked to select participants at random, and frequently did so in our presence.
- The data collected by the CEs and the OMS data was collected in communities where Plan Kenya and partners implement several projects and other NGOs are present. Consequently it might be difficult for respondents to discern between providers for each activity, or directly link changes observed to the work of a precise programme.

Findings

Results

Overall achievement level for results: Cheetah

To evaluate the programme's results, the CEs considered the evidence gathered for each programme objective in turn, and assigned an achievement level using a rubric.

Quality of education – achievement level: Cheetah

The CEs supported this choice with evidence from group discussions of raised levels of awareness and commitment to quality education among the parents and adolescents. They reported that the adolescents interviewed were committed to continuing their education and parents were also supportive. The adolescents they interviewed also said that in some schools grades had improved. The students felt this could engender a virtuous cycle towards increased quality of education, as they believed better performing schools were more likely to attract increased funding from the State.

Sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) – achievement level: Cheetah

In support of this assessment the CEs presented evidence from adolescents whom they felt had been exposed to the information and mostly had assimilated the message. Girl respondents reported a decrease in dropout rates due to pregnancy. Adolescents also reported having learned how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases. Many knew their own HIV status or where and how they could be tested.

⁵ Evidence platypus

Whilst the CEs presented evidence of broad support among all stakeholder groups for the awareness raising work conducted by Plan, they also reflected evidence from the OMS indicating extremely low levels of actual knowledge acquisition.

Economic barriers to education – achievement level: Cheetah

The CEs reported that in most cases the strategy to address economic barriers had been successful, and parents were now able to allocate part of their increased income to education. Whilst the programme was well on the way to addressing the issue of educational costs, the CEs noted that the opportunity cost of education remained a challenge for many. Students of both sexes reported spending much time on chores and work in support of their household. This distracted them from their school work and eventually drove some to abandon their studies all together.

Participation and accountability – achievement level: Cow

The CEs observed how every group interviewed had made reference to at least some level of change. However, in line with the OMS findings, the CEs also found that girls were more satisfied with the new opportunities for participation and school accountability than boys. The CEs also observed that girls had reported a greater increase in confidence, although both sexes had developed greater assertiveness. Greater participation in decision making by girl and boy students through the representation mechanisms was reported in every school visited. According to the CEs the teachers also remarked that the training provided to children had produced a change in their behaviour.

Reduce violence and abolish corporal punishment – achievement level: Cheetah

Whilst all CEs agreed that progress had been achieved, there was also wide recognition that corporal punishment was still occasionally practiced by some teachers. Most students had reported that indiscriminate and disproportionate punishment had largely stopped. Some students also stated that corporal punishment had been completely abolished from their schools. Adolescents believed this was due to the programme, as the changes happened after the training. Increased school accountability was also cited as a reason for the decrease in corporal punishment.

To return their overall assessment for the programme of cheetah level of achievement, the CEs calculated an 'average' of all the animals. This was verified with the corresponding rubric.

Relevance

Overall achievement level for relevance: Cow

The CEs considered two elements of relevance:

- Alignment of programme objectives with the needs identified by beneficiaries
- Transparency and accountability

The CEs observed a very high level of alignment, with quality of education ranking first for both the beneficiaries and Plan. They also found that everyone interviewed was well informed about the programme and its objectives, and had been consulted. Respondents felt that decisions had been taken collectively.

Effectiveness

Overall achievement level for effectiveness: Cheetah

To assess the effectiveness of the programme, the CEs looked at the depth of transformation and coverage in relation to the needs and aspirations expressed by the beneficiaries through the ranking exercise. They also explored the extent to which the programme had engendered statutory changes.

Efficiency

Overall achievement level for efficiency: Deer

A visual exercise, using a traffic light matrix, enabled the CEs to arrive at a general score for the efficiency of the programme. They compared the level of achievement from their evaluation of the programme results with the level of budget allocated for each result area.

Sustainability

Overall achievement level: Cheetah

To assess sustainability, the CEs considered three dimensions: people's motivation, means and ability to sustain the changes achieved by the programme.

- Motivation – achievement level: Cheetah
- Means – achievement level: Cheetah
- Ability – achievement level: Cheetah

An 'average animal' was drawn between these three dimensions to assign an overall level of achievement for sustainability.

Equity

Overall achievement level: Deer

The CEs' deliberations on equity were guided by a rubric with visual representations of various possible combinations of the effects the programme could have had on disparities within the community.

Conclusions

Finally, after assessing the level of achievement under each criterion, the corresponding 'apodeixis ornithorhynchus' was created, to the CEs' great amusement: an animal that has the body (results), forelegs (effectiveness), and tail (sustainability) of the cheetah, the hind legs (efficiency) of a deer, the head (relevance) of a cow and horns of a deer (equity). The CEs named this fantasy animal **Okiko** which translates as "mixture of all things".



Their overall assessment of the programme was broadly positive, with the majority of the ornithorhynchus being assessed as 'cheetah', indicating an achievement level of four points in a five point scale. This is in line with expectations for the fourth year of a five year programme.

The process also revealed that the programme's diagnosis of the barriers faced by adolescents in accessing and remaining in education had been entirely accurate. All the programme stakeholders felt that additional issues raised by the CEs, whilst holding some validity, were not as important as the issues tackled by the programme.

Substantial gains in beneficiary confidence and school accountability also emerged through this process. This had only in part been detected through other sources of programme data.

The most interesting finding is probably the remarkable gains made by the programme in empowering girls and boys. The programme's focus on good governance and accountability was clearly reflected in the CEs' understanding of the objectives and can be seen in their choices of questions, in particular for leaders. The assessment of the programme's sustainability was also very encouraging and highlighted the significant progress made to empower the communities, especially adolescents.

Finally, the assessment of the programme's achievement under an equity lens was also very positive. This demonstrates that Plan Kenya not only accurately diagnosed the barriers faced by adolescents in their pursuit of education, but was also able to target the support to need, equalising disparities without engendering resentment.

Learning and recommendations on the child-led process

The child-led process used for this evaluation was a fascinating experience for all those involved and undoubtedly demonstrated that **children have the ability to deliver a credible and nuanced evaluation with integrity and analytical ability**. Of particular note is the very short training time that was required for them to fully perform their function. The total cost of this process was also very modest: approximately US\$5000. All the methodologies developed for this research worked superbly and even beyond expectation, demonstrating the feasibility of involving children in evaluations.

However, the data collected by the CEs was entirely qualitative. Prior to launching the OMS, this exercise would have been limited in its scope. Several insights revealed by the OMS shaped the analysis in this evaluation. Some of the weaknesses in the programme's approach would not have surfaced with the exclusively qualitative research carried out by the CEs.

The methodologies developed for this research also demonstrated children's ability, with the right facilitation, to deliver nuanced assessments that are not simply either positive or negative. Their insights greatly enhanced our understanding of the programme.

If intending to continue involving children in M&E activities, the learning from this experience suggests the following considerations:

- Where there is no OMS equivalent source of quantitative data on programmatic outcomes, it might be more appropriate to have a mixed-team evaluation comprised of adults collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data whilst children conduct their evaluation in parallel.
- Where programme staff are not fully convinced of the validity and use of qualitative methods, there is a risk that an entirely qualitative evaluation conducted by children may not be regarded as credible. Therefore staff and donor confidence in qualitative evidence should be developed prior to routinely pursuing a child-led process.