

**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)**

**SUSTAINABILITY OF NATIONAL
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

**Education Sector Bureau for Programme Co-ordination
(ED/BPC)**

References

This brief is a synthesis of largely unpublished materials made available by UN-family members over the last several years to the UN's Inter-Agency Advisory Working Group on Evaluation (IAWG) on the occasion of many debates concerning project sustainability. Particular mention should be made of materials provided by JIU, UN/DTCD, UNICEF, and UNDP. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland, OECD/DAC, and WHO/GPA are other major contributors to the development of the "art and science" of sustainability, whose various manuals and guidelines, etc., also have been drawn upon. UNDP, CIDA and BMZ, in particular, have elaborated terms of reference for evaluating the institutional, socio-cultural and economic sustainability of TC projects that can be adapted to most national circumstances and UN Agency requirements.

Dossier compiled by A. Pokrovsky
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INTRODUCTION

A study of the sustainability of UNESCO-implemented cooperation for development projects between 1986 and 1995 (Source: external consultant project evaluation reports entered into the BPE/CEU " Database on the Evaluation of Development Cooperation Activities") concludes that project achievements and outputs were:

ASSESSMENT	HOUSE-WIDE	ED and EPD
Sustainable	29%	38%
Conditionally sustainable¹	30%	24%
Not sustainable²	15%	14%
(No conclusions drawn)	26%	24%

This brief summarizes the major issues and factors to be taken into consideration for the design, monitoring and implementation of sustainable national educational development projects and programmes.

Indeed, "A project may meet the cardinal criteria of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, and may have been executed in the most appropriate manner and on time ... but nevertheless deteriorate very rapidly and lose all its impact because the recurrent expenditure that it entails is too heavy or not provided for in the beneficiary country's budget, because the political intentions of the government have changed, because the socio-cultural environment nullifies its medium-term effects, or because the administrative and technical means employed or the human resources used are unable to ensure the managerial follow-up which is the responsibility of the recipient state." (JIU)

¹ In most cases, sustainability was identified as being conditional on the continuation of external assistance by means of project extensions, or new phases and new projects (maintaining momentum, consolidating gains ...), and/or a strong government commitment to institutionalizing mechanisms for achieving the objectives set, and allocating sufficient national resources to that end.

² The major factors for the non-sustainability of projects were social anomies; the lack of clear national policy and/or infrastructure and/or legal frameworks in which to implant projects; the lack of political will to pursue or finance project activities at the expiration of external funding; the lack of mechanisms to monitor and follow-up project achievements so as to ensure their regular re-adaptation to changing national circumstances; and, in some cases, the failure of donors to continue or renew assistance where such action might have been able to ensure sustainability.

GENERAL DEFINITIONS

“A development programme is *sustainable* when it is able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial and technical assistance from an external donor is terminated.” (OECD)

This sustainability will depend on “the extent to which the groups affected by the aid want to ... take charge themselves to continue accomplishing its objectives” (OECD), and on “the capacity of the target groups or institutions assisted ... to use project results effectively” (UNDP).

Project beneficiaries are motivated to sustain technical cooperation (TC) efforts that have had a visible and positive *impact* on personal or social well-being. Such impact can be promoted by designing projects that are *relevant* to personal and national socio-economic aspirations (i.e. taking into account the *cultural dimension of development*).

Sustainability may be considered synonymous with *institutionalization* and *viability*, the interchangeable and/or preferred terms in a number of countries.

Donors are increasingly demanding that Project Documents include strategies, activities and benchmarks for promoting the sustainability of cooperation for development efforts; that project Progress and Terminal Reports monitor progress towards achieving sustainability; and that sustainability be assessed during external evaluations, and project execution and management partners be held accountable for any related successes and shortfalls.

SUSTAINABILITY - PROJECT DESIGN PREREQUISITES

Two pre-requisites are (a) the design of clear and realistic objectives and time-frames regarding the project components/outputs to be sustained, and (b) the availability of data and indicators permitting a monitoring and evaluation of progress towards achieving sustainability and, when possible, the appropriateness and quality of that progress.

Issues to address during project design (Examples):

Project objectives: Is the scale and/or level of sophistication proposed for the project in keeping with the host country's capacity to sustain operations once technical assistance ceases?; will the achievement of the immediate objectives contribute to the achievement of the development objective in a sustainable manner? (UNDP)

Government commitment: Link firmly project objectives to national development objectives and sectoral development objectives. Project documents should assess the capacity and commitment of the host Government or institution to provide the inputs and support necessary for the project's successful operation and to sustain the results at the end of the project. Depending on the nature of the project, this may include such matters as the provision of full-time professional and lower-level staff, premises, office and other types of equipment including vehicles, consumable supplies, etc. (UNDP)

Economic self-sufficiency: Identify the recurrent and foreign exchange cost, etc., implications of sustaining project achievements and management structures (maintaining/replacing facilities, personnel, equipment, reproduction and distribution of outputs...), following the conclusion of projects, and assess the ability and commitment of host countries to assume the costs. Focus in design on reducing foreign exchange costs through reliance on technologies appropriate to the economic and social conditions of the host country (equipment able to be maintained and repaired locally; local materials production services, income-generating activities ...)

Project staff: Describe any legal arrangements necessary to assure that staff trained by the project will remain in their posts for a fixed period after their training. (UNDP)

Internal and external monitoring and evaluation: The system should have an important responsibility for alerting programme managers rapidly to factors that affect sustainability. (OECD)

SUSTAINABILITY - INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Government commitment

to, active interest in, and involvement with, educational institutions receiving TC assistance. Continuity in such support following political shifts is particularly essential, as are mechanisms for allowing public demand for TC services to be expressed and taken into account. Initial commitment often can be demonstrated through the establishment of government-funded project offices, and counterpart posts within the Ministry of Education; and by the institutionalization of recurrent costs, such as for the regular revision, reprinting, and redistribution of any textbooks produced by a project.

Obtaining executing agency/donor commitment

to harmonizing and coordinating their educational TC programmes and inputs; and to continuity in technical and financial support, particularly for projects, the benefits of which may become evident only in the long-term. (Evaluations demonstrate that agency/donor short-falls in financial commitment, and need to demonstrate personalized, short-term results in order to justify investments, are an under-rated factor in TC sustainability. It is noted also that donors did not always offer to continue or renew assistance in cases where such action might have been able to ensure sustainability.)

Suggestions: Firmly linking project objectives to national and sectoral development objectives; to national and sectoral public investment plans; and, where applicable, to national technical cooperation programmes (NaTCAPs). And donors and executing agencies need to be more sensitive to needs for follow-up support of successful projects.

Community and target group participation

in the selection, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of TC programmes. Participation creates a sense of responsibility for, and ownership of, project results, and can mobilize community and target group enthusiasm and resources for ensuring sustainable project results.

Key players to involve – in addition, of course, to direct and indirect project beneficiaries - include:

Community groups and networks,

both public and private (including parent/teacher associations, student clubs, etc.) able to mobilize local understanding of, and support for project activities;

Local leaders

able to inspire and mobilize general social and community support for project objectives;

Media

able to articulate public demands, and to publicize project achievements and benefits;

NGOs

able to bring to bear, and mobilize national, grass-roots talents and resources in favour of educational development efforts;

Volunteer and other auxiliary workers

able to disseminate project benefits in remote communities, to special groups, etc.;

Women

able to motivate family participation in the educational process, particularly that of girls

Attention to these institutional factors will help to ensure the compatibility of project endeavours with the socio-cultural and economic environment, a key factor in promoting sustainability.

“Closely linked to the above consideration is the need to look at project activities not in isolation, but in the context of all related activities in an entire sector. Technical assistance can be meaningful only if it is linked to a sector strategy ... In practice, very little is gained in terms of progress towards self-reliance if incentive payments to teachers or trainers of teachers in any project are not linked to a gradual adjustment of teachers’ service conditions in general.” (UN/ACC)

Illustrations from external evaluation reports

<p>PROJECT: Polytechnic Institute</p> <p>FACTOR: Government commitment</p>	<p>The technical assistance provided was appropriate to the country’s organizational and development needs and context and therefore contributed significantly to the sustainability of the project. There is little doubt that the Government views the project favourably and is committed to on-going support for its long-term continuation and growth.</p>
<p>PROJECT: Inter-agency education sector management capacity-building</p> <p>FACTOR: Executing agency/donor commitment</p>	<p>In view of inconsistencies in Agency policies, and duplication of Agency efforts, the goal of developing sustainability is jeopardized. The Inter-agency Project Implementation unit will be abolished at the end of the project, and there should be a strengthening of management capacity in line Ministry directorates, from the central to local levels, but this cannot be done under present circumstances.</p>
<p>PROJECT: Expansion of rural primary education</p> <p>FACTOR: Participation of women</p>	<p>The participation of women and young girls is real and determinant, and the sustainability of the results achieved thereby seems assured.</p>
<p>PROJECT: Primary curriculum improvement and teacher education</p> <p>FACTOR: National ownership</p>	<p>The project belongs to the nation, and will have associated with it more and better than any other project the main partners in the educational system.</p>

SUSTAINABILITY – ECONOMIC FACTORS

Adequacy of financial resources:

Limited resources for the counterpart funding of TC projects limits the types and amounts of TC that can be extended by development partners. The greater such restraints, the more important it becomes to ensure that the procedures and technologies, etc., promoted by the external partners can be sustained and afforded over the long run.

Provision for local and recurrent cost requirements:

At the design stage, long-term national budget implications need to be taken into account and, particularly, foreign exchange needs and costs; and the costs of absorbing - and retaining - counterpart staff, maintaining equipment and facilities (including vehicles and consumable supplies), and institutionalizing training programmes.

Anticipating that such costs can be met or deferred through project extensions, additional project phases, or other TC partners is an increasingly less likely perspective, and such anticipation can be responsible for the abrupt collapse of significant national efforts.

Illustrations from external evaluation reports

PROJECT: National education management information system	NEMIS was not established as an integral part of the government structure and will not be sustainable as government commitment to financing future activities is problematic. The need for sustainability dictates that reliance on external support be phased out at the earliest opportunity.
FACTOR: Adequacy of financial resources	

<p>PROJECT: Improvement of science teaching and secondary teacher training</p>	<p>The impact of the project on students will be felt only in the long-term, and will depend upon continuous up-grading of teachers and constant improvement of school facilities.</p>
<p>FACTOR: Local and recurrent costs</p>	

SUSTAINABILITY: TECHNICAL FACTORS

Training and participation of national staff:

The retention of government personnel trained locally or abroad to work for development, rather than to join the brain drain or to defect to higher rewards in the private sector, is a major challenge. Promotions, jumps in salary scales, and career advancement schemes can act as incentives to retain successful trainees, and can be provided for, or be built into Ministerial recurrent cost budgets.

Retention may be promoted also by building the **personal commitment** of key project staff through allowing them to participate fully in project events and decision-making processes, etc. However, high personal commitment does not obviate the need to establish a lasting *institutional* base (critical mass of skilled personnel; in-service up-grading schemes; legal arrangements for retaining staff for fixed periods after training; institutional memory ...) for sustaining project achievements and outputs.

Appropriate utilization of international expertise:

Technology and know-how transfer from international staff to national counterparts needs to be a major role of TC consultancies, etc.

The provision of advisory services, along with an equal duty to develop the local capacity to provide such services, should feature prominently in TC mission Terms of Reference.

Choice of appropriate technologies:

Factors to be taken into consideration when determining project equipment needs include the national and/or institutional capacity to maintain and repair imported equipment after project completion (preferably without the need to depend on foreign exchange); the feasibility of developing the capacity to produce locally widely required, standardized project materials (and thus also promote income-generating activities); and the need and feasibility of hiring and training personnel to repair and maintain facilities and equipment.

Implementation modalities and mechanisms:

Factors promoting sustainability include authoritative and stable project management teams; project management mechanisms allowing rapid adjustment to changing circumstances; and mechanisms for ensuring effective networking between all concerned project partners, and continuous dialogue with, and feedback from project beneficiaries.

Internal and external monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems:

M&E, by means of a continuous generation, collection and analysis of accurate and timely project data, including the results of socio-economic and cultural field research, is the critical tool for tracking

the success of efforts to ensure project sustainability, to alert policy-makers and project managers to potential problems, and to indicate possible measures ("*lessons learnt*") for adjusting project strategies, etc., and thus for *managing sustainability*.

Comprehensive M&E systems preferably need to be designed on a case-by-case basis, and take into account not only the socio-cultural context of a project, but also the human and financial resources that can be devoted to their operation.

Post-completion monitoring, however, is essential in order to ensure that vocational training programmes, for instance, remain relevant to long-term changing socio-economic needs and circumstances, are adapted and adjusted accordingly, and not dispense out-of-date learning and skills.

Illustrations from external evaluation reports

A recent evaluation of a completed rural press and rural library development project noted that the sustainability achieved by the network was an undeniable success, but that 10 years after the end of the project, programmes and activities were no longer relevant to changed national needs and requirements, and notably as concerned contributing to the achievement of new literacy policies. Indeed, the very stability of the network obscured its need to take bold new initiatives.

<p>PROJECT: Renewal of educational content and methods</p> <p>FACTORS: Retention of personnel; utilization of international personnel; choice of appropriate technologies</p>	<p>Results may be difficult to sustain following the withdrawal of foreign expertise (lack of internal resources to continue/extend activities at the same tempo and level of financing, etc.). Retention of trained teachers will be a problem unless incentive and/or bonding schemes are implemented; sustaining use/maintenance of equipment will also be difficult to ensure.</p>
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<p>PROJECT: Training of trainers in educational planning, administration and management</p> <p>FACTORS: Commitment; follow-up</p>	<p>The project has been credited with the building of a core group of competent trainers ... and the establishment and/or strengthening of sub-regional and national resource centres and training institutions/units. Continuity and sustainability of the project results have however been limited by lack of commitment to the project's goals ... on the part of participating countries and, to some extent, to the lack of post-project back-up support and feedback mechanisms from UNESCO.</p>
<p>PROJECT: Community participation in planning and management of educational resources</p> <p>FACTOR: Implementation modalities and mechanisms</p>	<p>The project provided a bottom-up mechanism enabling local government offices and personnel to better understand the concept of planning. The practical application of the concept, the associated training, next-level-up support and locally produced informal planning documents revealed acceptable options to traditional top-down planning that suppresses local initiative,</p>

CONCLUSION

Sustainability is now an obligatory factor to be taken into consideration when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating cooperation for development projects, and this document has attempted to synthesize the major materials currently available on the issue from UNESCO' s UN, FIT and other development partners.

If required, colleagues are invited to contact ED/BPC/EXB to obtain practical guidance and tools for the design of sustainable projects and, in particular, for the design of indicators and instruments for monitoring and evaluating project sustainability.