



SWAps Policy Brief

Aid effectiveness

Overview of research

Just over a decade since the introduction of education sector-wide approaches (SWAps), CfBT Education Trust has conducted research to review their global progress since the Ratcliffe and Macrae (1999) publication, commissioned by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, entitled *Sector Wide Approaches to Education: A Strategic Analysis*. Since 1999 there has been a lack of rigorous, comprehensive, global analysis regarding the effectiveness of SWAps drawing on the national, international and thematically focused literature. As a result, this research seeks to fill this gap by highlighting key historical trends, presenting new findings from the global literature as well as emerging good practice from the field for the first time. It also looks at the implications of the research for the future of SWAps. The research comprised a desk review of the global literature, as well as the grey literature on SWAps, complemented by stakeholder interviews. The publication, *The impact of sector-wide approaches: where from, where now and where to?* from which this policy brief is taken, analyses the evolution of SWAps and their relationship with: (i) aid effectiveness; (ii) planning and financing; (iii) education outcomes; and (iv) fragility.

This policy brief summarises the relationship between SWAps and aid effectiveness.

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Aid effectiveness has been a strong impetus for SWAps

The development of SWAps has been inextricably linked to the aid effectiveness and good governance discourse during the 1990s and 2000s (Molenaers and Renard, 2008).

The promise of improved harmonisation through SWAps has not been fulfilled

In countries such as Mozambique and Uganda, there have been clear improvements in harmonisation as a result of the education SWAp (World Bank, 2001; Penny, Ward, Read and Bines, 2008). However, there is still an important gap between rhetoric and practice in relation to harmonisation which has served to reduce the impact and efficiency gains that would otherwise have been made through the SWAp. Risk aversion, varying levels of political commitment to SWAps in donor headquarters and broader inter-donor political issues at national and regional levels related to visibility continue to militate against harmonisation. This has resulted in partner governments in certain countries, such as Cambodia and Kenya, still suffering from high transaction costs due to the need to coordinate donors 'outside' the education SWAp (Boak and Brannelly, 2009; Woods, 2007). 'Non-traditional' donors (such as the Hewlett Foundation and Comic Relief) as well as 'pragmatic' donors (such as China and India) who are more interested in commercial and trading interests rather than aid effectiveness, have not engaged with SWAps.

There has been a non-linear trajectory towards full alignment under SWAps

With the development of programme-based approaches and the reduced imperative of alignment, additional more risk-averse donors have been brought on board to support SWAps, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the United States Agency for International Development. Programme-based approaches promote greater harmonisation whilst SWAps encourage greater alignment. However, it is important to note that a country's 'SWAp trajectory' in relation to alignment is unlikely to be linear, since it will be highly dependent upon (i) the political situation and the country's stability; (ii) the leadership, buy-in and continuity of the Minister of Education and senior officials; and (iii) the diversity, capacity and commitment of external partners and their in-country representation.

The political economy is pre-eminent for SWAp effectiveness

The aid effectiveness principles are invariably not the only forces at work guiding partner governments and donors in their engagement in SWAps. Both sides are strongly influenced by wider political forces and governance concerns which may represent disincentives for them to move towards harmonisation and alignment (Molenaers and Nijs, 2008). These incentives are rarely formally recognised or discussed transparently. Nevertheless, they go some way to explain the practical and political difficulties donors face in harmonising approaches despite their stated commitment to Paris and Accra. Evidence shows that rules-based institutional reform programmes have been unsuccessful in low-income countries because they have been based on false assumptions. As a result, there is a growing acknowledgement of the need for sensitivity to the formal and informal incentives and interests as well as existing patron-client relationships leading to greater realism.

National ownership and leadership are critical for effective SWAps

It is widely recognised that SWAps are ineffective without strong ownership and leadership by the partner government. Indeed, the success of the education SWAp in Rwanda has been facilitated by strong leadership in the Ministry of Education (Latham, Ndaruhutse and Smith, 2005; Hayman, 2006). Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge the power dynamics at play between the donor(s) as financier and partner government as recipient. Furthermore, certain donor practices can at best undermine, and at worst directly oppose, the principle of ownership in relation to SWAps. This was the case in the education sector in Tanzania (Kuder, 2005). Fostering national ownership is made more complex since different actors have different interests and incentives in relation to a SWAp. This means that there are often multiple and competing forces at work within a Ministry with which donors need to engage belying the assumption that 'the recipient government behaves like a strong, coordinated and united team' (Molenaers and Renard, 2008: 21).

Partnerships have been strengthened through SWAps but there is room for more inclusion

SWAps have greatly improved partnerships between partner governments and donors as well as inter-governmental relationships. However, the research shows there have been challenges in fostering genuinely inclusive partnerships in the planning of a SWAp, particularly with non-state actors. Meaningful engagement of civil society and the private sector in planning processes is country-specific and has a limited track record. A four-country study (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zambia) undertaken by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003) found that teacher unions, parent organisations and representatives of indigenous groups were often excluded from policy and technical dialogues, particularly in Bolivia and Uganda.

Challenges remain with joint sectoral reviews under SWAps

SWAps have shifted the accountability structure from a situation where donors had the greatest power and influence to a more balanced approach where donors and partner governments have a more equal role (Steer and Wathne, 2009). Joint sector reviews have emerged as a key component of effective SWAps, providing the opportunity to monitor performance across the sector as well as the basis for future policy dialogue and decision-making. These are now commonplace in countries such as Cambodia, Rwanda and Uganda. While donors expound the importance of common reporting mechanisms, they face the demands of their own parliaments and taxpayers to show positive results from their development assistance which may require tracing their aid and demonstrating what it has achieved. This is much more challenging when aid is provided through pooled funding or sector budget support. This illustrates that there are a series of push and pull factors which may weaken the full application of the aid effectiveness principles espoused by a SWAp, especially where the wider governance environment still remains weak.

Key finding

SWAp effectiveness has at times been constrained due to the broader political economy.

Recommendation

Partner governments and donors need to ensure that both the design and implementation of a SWAp draw on comprehensive political economy analysis and are sensitive to existing formal and informal incentive structures and interests.

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This is one of a set of four policy briefs summarising the main findings of a research programme reflecting on and reviewing the global progress of education sector-wide approaches (SWAps) in developing countries since their introduction in the late 1990s. The research analysed the evolution of SWAps and their relationship with (i) aid effectiveness; (ii) planning and financing; (iii) education outcomes; and (iv) fragility. Each policy brief covers one of these themes.

The full report can be accessed at www.cfbt.com

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