



SWAps Policy Brief

Fragility

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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 fragility.

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There are multiple challenges in supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS)

The main challenges include: (i) the absence of formal and recognised authorities, resulting in a legitimacy deficit; (ii) a dearth of capacity and management and financial systems; (iii) high levels of non-state provision; (iv) the non-functional nature of the public financial management system outside the capital and main towns often due to insecurity in parts of the country; and (v) the pressure on donors to generate timely results. These issues make implementing a SWAp problematic (but not impossible). There are additional constraints to supporting a SWAp since the forces at work within the political economy are even more pervasive in FCAS than in other low-income countries (Pavanello and Darcy, 2008). The politicisation of all levels of decision-making in the education sector presents formidable challenges to the stable delivery of education in FCAS as well as for donors' engagement with partner governments. There are also implications for the design of SWAps in contexts where there are high levels of political polarisation within and between line ministries responsible for education such as in Zimbabwe. Owing to the pervasive mentality of aid dependence and the skeletal capacity of partner governments in FCAS, there is a strong likelihood that donors will control the objectives and timeframes for the SWAp by default (IHSD, 2003). This is compounded by the fact that donors often disagree on approaches and offer contradictory advice to partner governments. The marginal share of public provision and the poor regulation of non-state provision make providing aligned support through country systems problematic. Working through national systems is also challenging in countries where the government is not sovereign in all areas or where it has no representatives or public services.

Despite these challenges, SWAps are relevant as an approach to planning and financing education in FCAS

The cessation of formal hostilities can offer an opportunity to reform the education system (Pigozzi, 1999; OECD, 2008; Ghani and Lockhart, 2008). New SWAps can be synonymous with national education reform programmes; moreover their approach to broad-based planning and inclusive service delivery makes them pertinent in FCAS. There is an urgent need to make a definitive break with historical patterns of exclusion and discrimination and to support the delivery of inclusive education services at scale and in the most efficient and sustainable ways, developing the necessary policy and legislative frameworks and regulation to enable this.

SWAp-like approaches can provide the framework for enabling the development of inclusive policies as well as targeted approaches to geographic areas or linguistic groups which have historically been denied political representation or equal access to public services which is a key component of state-building.

Country evidence from Somalia shows that it is possible to embark on SWAp-like approaches in FCAS through the adoption of 'low-level' approaches such as developing mechanisms for engaging with local administrations and coordinating and sharing data collected by NGOs and donors (Smith 2009). This indicates that even in conditions of worsening fragility, donors should secure some form of state involvement (OECD, 2008). Following the development of Sierra Leone's sector-wide Education Sector Plan four years after the end of the conflict, an Education Sector Support Fund was eventually established to improve sector dialogue between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and donors and to strengthen steps towards a SWAp. At the time of writing, the following donors have pooled funds: DFID, the Fast Track Initiative Partnership, Sida and UNICEF (Boak, 2010).

SWAps are well placed for scaling up education provision

SWAps are relevant in FCAS due to the need to improve the availability and quality of education service delivery at scale in order to meet citizens' expectations, thus increasing confidence in the government. Given the plethora of actors involved in the provision of services in FCAS, the development of nationally applicable and widely accepted regulatory and accountability frameworks through a SWAp provides a basis for increasing the visibility and legitimacy of the state, both in the eyes of non-state providers and community members and children. Identifying a sustainable way of financing teachers' salaries (often strongly supported by community financing) is generally a priority in FCAS given teachers' pivotal role in providing quality and protective education (INEE, 2009). Securing consensus across a broad range of stakeholders with diverse interests around a new, inclusive and appropriate curriculum which fosters social cohesion and develops relevant knowledge and skills is also a priority.

Designed well, a SWAp provides a real opportunity to address these issues. In addition, in light of the numerous donor agencies and non-governmental organisations supporting education in FCAS, SWAps are extremely relevant as a principle for organising and scaling up bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Indeed, the early SWAp in Nepal demonstrated the feasibility of donor harmonisation within a context of heavy aid dependence (Rose and Greeley, 2006).

Where stability allows, SWAps can play an important role in state-building

Donors are increasingly recognising the importance of linking their sector-specific support in FCAS to broader state-building and peace-building initiatives (OECD, 2008; DFID, 2010). Country experience from Rwanda shows that where there is sufficient stability and will, SWAps can be an effective way of building the legitimacy and capacity of the state while also strengthening accountability. This is due to the fact that by their very nature, SWAps ensure a strong partnership between donors and partner governments and when designed well, result in: (i) the strengthening of national systems and capacity, including regulation; (ii) improved governance, accountability and monitoring by civil society; (iii) enhanced inter- and intra-ministerial working relationships; and (iv) greater efficiency in the allocation and channelling of national and international resources. These are necessary, although not sufficient conditions for broader state-building. Citizens often have high expectations of state delivery of public services, the fulfilment of which can determine short- and long-term stabilisation.

Where SWAps improve the availability and quality of education service delivery, this can increase citizens' confidence in the government and positively influence their perception of its capacity to provide basic services (Eldon and Gunby, 2009; Pearson, 2010). Indeed, the state's ability to meet these expectations is vital to its own credibility and legitimacy (DFID, 2010; OECD, 2010). As a result, in this regard donors can play a key role in shaping the future legitimacy of the state through effective support to a well designed SWAp. Linked to state-building, the research also showed the importance of providing financial aid 'on budget' in order to strengthen the political processes and policy trade-offs regarding the allocation of resources through national systems, as well as state-citizen accountability (OECD, 2010).

SWApS when supporting decentralised systems in FCAS can contribute either positively or negatively to state-building, depending on the context

Centre–periphery relations are particularly important in FCAS given that sub-national authorities may have secessionist roots or aspirations. During conflicts, community members may have had more contact with rebel groups and non-state actors than with the formal, national authorities, as was the case in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As a result, such bodies may have more perceived legitimacy. State-building has traditionally focused on the centralisation of the state (DFID, 2010); nevertheless, evidence from the health sector reveals that state–society relations improve more rapidly at sub-national levels where there is robust national-level support for decentralisation (Pearson, 2010). Consequently, the management of centre–periphery relations have the potential to either enhance or undermine state-building objectives (OECD, 2010).

Key finding

SWApS are relevant in FCAS and implementing well-designed SWApS contributes positively to state-building.

Recommendation 1

Donors need to conduct political economy and conflict analyses in FCAS prior to designing SWAp-like approaches, in order to ensure they address the underlying causes of conflict and are sensitive to the context of fragility, particularly in relation to support for decentralisation.

Recommendation 2

Where political stability, government will and capacity allow, donors should support the preparation of SWAp-like approaches as early as possible in FCAS including targeted approaches to areas which have historically been denied access to education.

Recommendation 3

Donors need to work to strengthen the state’s regulatory capacity through a SWAp within the context of improving the short route of accountability while identifying mechanisms to support the long route of accountability.

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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 (SWAs) in developing countries since their introduction in the late 1990s. The research analysed the evolution of SWAs 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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