

Terms of Reference

A Synthesis of Existing Evaluations of Dutch Spending on Education in ODA countries

2023

Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1. Introduction

Dutch development cooperation policy on education has several objectives: to strengthen education in ODA countries in order to contribute to increasing opportunities and prospects for young people; to increase the number of well-trained professionals; and to promote policy-relevant research.¹

To achieve these goals, the Netherlands (co-)finances a number of global and bilateral funds and programmes. Between 2015 and 2023, the total development cooperation expenditure on education was over €800 million.² The Strategic Evaluation Agenda announced that a synthesis study on education funding will be undertaken in 2023:

"Synthesis of evaluation research on major initiatives (such as Education Cannot Wait and Global Partnerships for Education) to which the Netherlands has contributed financially in recent years [...] Synthesis of existing evaluations".³

The synthesis contributes to the Periodic Review of Article 3, Social Progress, of the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation budget. This Periodic Review will be completed in 2025. In addition to the synthesis research, a study on the impact of long-term support for higher education will be carried out⁴ and will contribute to the Periodic Review.

This Terms of Reference document describes the purpose of the synthesis study, its design and methodology, and organizational aspects of the study.

2. Purpose of research and research questions

Purpose

The aim of the research is to make a synthesis of the findings of existing evaluations of Dutch-funded initiatives for education in ODA countries, in order to account for the expenditure and to inform future policy choices.

¹ [Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat](#) voor Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking voor het jaar 2023, p. 57.

² Source: MIBZ. This not only includes expenditure under Article 3.4 (Education) of the budget, but also expenditure towards education goals that fall under another budget article. The sum is the aggregate of all actual expenditure between 1 January 2015 and 12 December 2023 on the programmes listed in section 4 of this ToR. It excludes subsidies of less than €5 million to education programmes or projects, which are excluded in the synthesis study. For the Prospects partnership programme, only the contributions to UNICEF have been included in the sum, even though the other partners in the prospects programme also have activities aimed at education (see section 4). Hence, the true figure on education expenditure between 2015 and 2023 may be higher than €800 million.

³ [Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat](#) voor Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking voor het jaar 2023, appendix 4, p. 84.

⁴ [Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat](#) voor Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking voor het jaar 2023, p. 57.

Research questions

1. What do existing evaluations of Dutch-funded initiatives for education in ODA countries say about the extent to which the initiatives were effective in achieving their goals and about why this was the case?
2. What do existing evaluations of Dutch-funded initiatives for education in ODA countries say about the extent to which the initiatives were relevant, coherent, efficient and sustainable and about why this was the case?
3. Based on this, what lessons can be drawn for future Dutch policy around education in ODA countries?

3. Research methods

The synthesis research will consist of the following steps:

a. Identifying existing evaluation reports

Identifying all existing evaluations of the initiatives that meet the inclusion criteria (see section 4 'Scope'). For this the search system of the archive of the ministry of Foreign Affairs ('Sophia') will be used, as well as google and websites of the organisations involved. In addition, the Department for Social Development (DSO) within the ministry has been asked to provide evaluations known to them, and to facilitate contact with evaluation officers at the organizations involved.

b. Assessing the quality of the evaluation reports found

Determine the quality and objectivity of the evaluation reports found and, based on this, select which reports are included in the synthesis. The following 'knock-out criteria'⁵ of IOB's [quality criteria for evaluations](#) will be used for the assessment:

- Independence of evaluators
- Research design is clearly elaborated and methodology is transparent
- The methods are appropriate to answer the research questions
- Indicators or result areas are appropriate to capture the planned results
- Sampling strategy minimizes selection bias
- Appropriate analyses for the chosen research design
- Adequate discussion of the limitations of the study
- Adequate description of the intervention and validation of assumptions of the ToC
- Use of independent information sources

⁵ The original document lists thirteen knock-out criteria. Here, some of these have been combined, such as 'clearly elaborated research design' and 'transparent methodology'. Moreover, criterium 11, 'The methods are appropriate to evaluate effectiveness' and criterium 12 'The methods are appropriate to evaluate efficiency' have been combined into 'The methods are appropriate to answer the research questions'. Finally, criterium 22, which states that all research questions need to be answered, has been left out: if an evaluation does not answer one of its research questions, but its methodology is otherwise of high quality, its findings will be taken into account in the synthesis.

All reports that score at least 'sufficient' on these criteria will be included in the synthesis. At the same time, *only* reports that score at least 'sufficient' on these criteria will be included. However, for the criterion 'The methods are appropriate to answer the research questions' four separate assessments will be made: for research questions on, respectively, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and all other research questions. This is because it is possible that an evaluation's methods are not appropriate to draw conclusions on, for example, effectiveness, while the methods are appropriate for drawing conclusions about e.g. relevance or sustainability. In such situations, the synthesis will incorporate the findings on the questions for which the methods are appropriate.

c. Summarizing the findings of the evaluations

This will be done on the basis of the following questions:

Per initiative (that is: per fund or programme):

1. Factual description

- a. What were the goals of the initiative?
- b. How/with which input and activities did the initiative try to achieve the goals?

2. Effectiveness

- a. To what extent, according to existing evaluations, was the initiative effective? That is: to what extent did the initiative achieve its goals at output⁶ and outcome⁷ level?
- b. According to existing evaluations, which factors contributed to the effectiveness of the initiative?
- c. According to existing evaluations, which factors hindered the effectiveness of the initiative?

3. Impact

- a. To what extent, according to existing evaluations, did the initiative contribute to achieving its goals at impact⁸ level?
- b. To what extent, according to existing evaluations, did the initiative have any unintended effects at impact level, positive or negative?
- c. According to existing evaluations, which factors contributed to the intended or unintended impact of the initiative?
- d. According to existing evaluations, which factors hindered the impact of the initiative?

4. Efficiency

⁶ The products, capital goods and services which result from development interventions (OECD, [What are results?](#)).

⁷ The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term change and effects of intervention outputs (OECD, [What are results?](#)).

⁸ Primary and secondary, long-term, higher level effects produced by development interventions (OECD, [What are results?](#) and OECD, [Evaluation Criteria](#)).

- a. To what extent was the initiative efficient according to existing evaluations? That is: to what extent did it deliver its results in an economic⁹ and timely¹⁰ way?
- b. According to existing evaluations, which factors contributed to the efficiency of the initiative?
- c. According to existing evaluations, which factors hindered the efficiency of the initiative?

5. Relevance

- a. According to existing evaluations, to what extent was the initiative relevant? That is: to what extent did it meet the needs of the target group, was it focused on tackling the causes of the problem and was the approach based on what has been proven to be effective before?
- b. According to existing evaluations, which factors contributed to the relevance of the initiative?
- c. According to existing evaluations, which factors hindered the relevance of the initiative?

6. Coherence

- a. According to existing evaluations, to what extent was the initiative coherent with other interventions? That is: to what extent did other existing interventions support, undermine or duplicate efforts of the initiative, and vice versa?¹¹
- b. According to existing evaluations, which factors contributed to the coherence of the initiative?
- c. According to existing evaluations, which factors hindered the coherence of the initiative?

7. Sustainability

- a. According to existing evaluations, to what extent was the initiative sustainable? That is: to what extent will the benefits of the programme or fund continue, or to what extent are they likely to continue, into the future?
- b. According to existing evaluations, which factors contributed to the (likely) sustainability of the initiative?
- c. According to existing evaluations, which factors hindered the (likely) sustainability of the initiative?

8. Overarching

- a. Based on the findings for each of the initiatives, which overarching statements can be made about the degree of effectiveness, impact, relevance, coherence, efficiency and sustainability of the initiatives funded by the Netherlands?
- b. Based on the findings for each of the initiatives, which lessons can be learned for future policy?

⁹ 'Economic' refers to the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts, in the most cost-effective way possible, compared to feasible alternatives (OECD, [Evaluation Criteria](#)).

¹⁰ 'Timely' means within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the evolving context. This may include assessing operational efficiency: how well the initiative was managed (OECD, [Evaluation Criteria](#)).

¹¹ This includes both internal coherence and external coherence. Internal coherence is about the compatibility of the programme/fund with other interventions carried out by the same institution/government. (This also includes the question of to what extent the intervention was coherent with the Dutch Policy objectives at the time.) External coherence is about the consistency of the programme/fund with other actors' interventions in the same country, sector or institution.

4. Scope: Initiatives that will be included in the research

Research period

The synthesis study is one of the building blocks for the 2025 Periodic Review of Article 3 of the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation budget. The Periodic Review will cover the period from 2015 onwards. This synthesis study will therefore include evaluations published in the past nine years: from the 1st of January 2015 to the 31st of December 2023. Expanding the research period to before 2015 would make the number of potential evaluation reports to include in the synthesis too large to be manageable in the available time for the study. At the same time, an evaluation on the impact of the long-term Dutch investments in higher education is set to take place in 2024, so those investments from before 2015 will be evaluated separately.

Initiatives to include

The synthesis focusses on programmes and funds aimed at improving the provision or quality of education in ODA countries. This includes primary and secondary education, as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training/Higher Education (TVET/HE). It excludes programmes that are not primarily aimed at improving the provision or quality of education in ODA countries, but that involve providing training or education in order to further a different aim. For example, training programmes funded by the Netherlands on business skills, cyber security or human rights.

Within the ministry of Foreign Affairs, all subsidies above 5 million euros are required to be evaluated. The synthesis will include evaluations of all programmes and funds aimed at improving education in ODA countries with Dutch contributions above 5 million euros. For the period 2015 – 2023, these are the following initiatives.

Global funds

Global Partnership for Education

The largest global fund and partnership for education, co-founded by the Netherlands. It supports national governments in around 90 lower-income countries in reforming primary and secondary education. Funds are managed by the World Bank.¹²

- Between 2011 and 2023, the Netherlands contributed in total around €275 million.
- The Dutch funding will end in 2025.¹³

Education Cannot Wait

¹² [Global Partnership for Education](#)

¹³ [Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat](#) voor Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking voor het jaar 2023, p. 60.

A relatively new global fund that focuses on education in emergency situations, such as conflict, natural disasters and epidemics. The fund provides emergency aid but also focuses on the longer term, with the aim of preventing a 'lost generation'. UNICEF and UNHCR are the main implementing organisations.¹⁴

- Between 2016 and 2022, the Netherlands contributed more than €22 million.

Generation Unlimited

A public-private (multi-stakeholder) youth partnership with the aim of strengthening young people's skills and employment opportunities.¹⁵ Generation Unlimited works at country level; the Dutch funding is partly earmarked for Niger and Kenya (2020-2025). It focuses on increasing opportunities for vulnerable young people, especially young women, with an emphasis on digitisation.¹⁶

- Since 2020, the Netherlands has contributed more than €8 million.

Dutch programmes

Nexus Skills & Jobs

A fund for activities that promote links between education and employment. The available budget is allocated through Dutch embassies in nine countries in focus regions.¹⁷

- Since 2019, the Netherlands has contributed a total of €50 million.

MENA scholarship programme

A scholarship programme for higher education specifically aimed at the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁸ The programme is managed by Nuffic.

- Between 2013 and 2023, the Netherlands contributed over €12 million to this programme.

Prospects

Prospects is an international partnership programme initiated by the Netherlands, aimed at supporting refugees in their region of origin. The partnership is active in eight countries, and

¹⁴ [Education - Rijksportaal \(overheid-i.nl\); www.educationcannotwait.org/about-us/who-we-are](#)

¹⁵ [Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat](#) voor Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking voor het jaar 2023, p. 60; [What We Do | Generation Unlimited](#)

¹⁶ [Education - Rijksportaal \(overheid-i.nl\); BEMO - GenUnl- MINBUZA-2020.383800 4000003838_EN publieksbemo.PDF \(buzaservices.nl\);](#)

¹⁷ [Vaststelling van de begrotingsstaat](#) voor Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking voor het jaar 2023, p. 44.

¹⁸ [MENA Scholarship Programme \(MSP\) | Nuffic](#)

includes different programmes, amongst which programmes aimed at education for refugees and their host communities.¹⁹

- Since 2019, the Netherlands has contributed a total of over €400 million to Prospects. This was not all for education programmes, but given that the work of the different organisations is interlinked, it is difficult to specify the exact amount spent on education programmes. Within the Partnership, especially UNICEF focuses on providing education and child protection for children. UNICEF has received over €140 million as part of Prospects since 2019. Yet the other partners also have activities that contribute to education.²⁰

Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP)

Successor of the NICHE and NFP programmes (see below). OKP involves both institutional collaboration projects and scholarships for mid-career professionals from partner countries. Its aims are capacity strengthening of TVET (technical and vocational education and training) and higher education systems, developing individual and institutional knowledge, and improving bilateral contacts and cooperation between higher education institutions in the Netherlands and those in the partner countries.²¹ The programme is managed by Nuffic.

- Since 2017, the Netherlands has contributed a total of nearly €280 million to the OKP.
- Dutch funding will stop in 2023.

Netherlands Initiative for Capacity development in Higher Education (NICHE) and Netherlands Fellowship Programmes (NFP)

NICHE and NFP were earlier programmes for higher education, also managed by Nuffic. The aim of NICHE was institutional strengthening of higher education in partner countries. 'NICHE I' started in 2008/2009, 'NICHE II' ran from 2013 to 2017.²² NFP was a scholarship programme for people from partner countries. It ran from 2002 to 2017, referred to as 'NFP II' in later years.

- Since 2013, the Netherlands contributed in total almost €400 million to NICHE and NFP.²³

5. Scope: evaluations that will be included in the synthesis

- Only evaluations of the above programmes and funds will be included in the synthesis.
- Only evaluations carried out by an independent party will be included. These may include independent evaluations that were financed by the ministry of Foreign Affairs and independent evaluations that were financed by the organisations responsible for the funds or programmes.

¹⁹ [Refugees and migration | Development cooperation | Government.nl](#)

²⁰ BEMO Prospects, p. 7 'SDG 4: Quality Education'

²¹ [Education - Rijksportaal \(overheid-i.nl\)](#); www.nuffic.nl/en/subjects/orange-knowledge-programme

²² [NFP and NICHE | Nuffic](#)

²³ After 2013, contributions to NFP were budgeted and recorded jointly with contributions to NICHE. Before 2013, contributions to NFP were budgeted and recorded jointly with contributions to NPT, the predecessor of NICHE.

- Only evaluations at the level of the programme or fund will be included in the synthesis, not evaluations of individual projects or country-studies within the programme or fund. An initial scoping of the existing evaluations shows that for almost all of the initiatives to which the Netherlands contributed, the only independent evaluations that exist are at the programme- or fund-level. One exception is Global Partnership for Education, but if we were to include all GPE evaluations in the synthesis, the synthesis would not be comparing like with like.
- Only evaluations with sufficient quality and objectivity will be included in the analysis (see above under 'research methods').
- Both final evaluations and mid-term evaluations can be included.
- Activities/countries: Where Dutch funding for certain initiatives is earmarked for certain countries or activities, only evaluations about those countries or activities will be included.

All existing evaluations that meet these criteria will be included.

6. Limitations

The study only consists of a synthesis of existing evaluation reports and no additional new (primary) research will be carried out. It will not be possible to check or triangulate findings from the evaluation reports. Consequently, the study depends on the quality of the existing evaluation reports and limitations of these reports will have implications for the limitations of the findings of the synthesis study.

The study also depends on the availability of evaluation reports of sufficient quality. For some of the programmes described, the number of reports available may be limited or the number of reports with sufficient quality may be limited.

Finally, the study depends on the scope of and the topics addressed in the existing evaluation reports. Consequently, it is possible that not all the questions mentioned in paragraph 4 can be answered in the synthesis report.

7. Ethical considerations

Because the research only consists of a desk-based synthesis of existing reports, it is not associated with special research ethics risks. The reports incorporated in the study will all be publicly available. This also means that only the final published versions of reports will be used, not data sets on which findings in the reports were based.

8. Organization

Research team

The evaluation is managed by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This department has an independent position within BZ and operates

independently of the ministry’s policy directorates. The synthesis is carried out by Claire Helfrich (IOB) and an external consultant, supervised by Wendy van der Neut (IOB).

Internal IOB sounding board group

Every IOB study is peer-reviewed by a ‘sounding board group’ with IOB employees not directly involved in the study. For this study, the sounding board group consists of Charlotte van Eijk, Caspar Lobbrecht and Johannes Claes, and it is chaired by Rob van Poelje. The research team and the sounding board group meet around once every six weeks.

External advisory group

The quality of every IOB study is further checked and helped by an advisory group with representatives of relevant policy directorates as well as independent experts. For this study, the members of the advisory group are:

Name	Role/organisation
Theodore Klouvas	Team lead Education, Department for Social Development (DSO)
Max Kuipers	Advisor Monitoring Evaluation and Learning at DSO
Dr. Miguel Niño-Zarazúa	Department of Economics, SOAS University of London
Rob van Poelje	Head cluster Developmental Cooperation, IOB (chair advisory group)

9. Risks

The main risks of the study are as follows.

Risk	Mitigating actions
Not enough existing evaluation reports are available and/or the quality of the existing reports is insufficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations in the available evaluation reports will be described in the methodology section of the synthesis report. • We may choose not to answer certain research questions, or not to include certain initiatives in the study if it turns out there are no available evaluations of sufficient quality addressing these questions or initiatives. • In the unlikely event that the availability or quality of available evaluation reports is so poor that no research questions can be answered, the synthesis will not be carried out. In that situation, we will only write a report on the quality and availability of the evaluation reports, explaining why the study could not be carried out.

10. Reporting and publication

The study will result in a report and a summary. They will be sent to the House of Representatives and published on the IOB website. Both the report and the summary will be written in English; a translation in Dutch of one or both can be made if necessary.

11. Budget

IOB will finance all research costs from its own budget.