

**Evaluation of the World Bank's Support for Primary Education
Approach Paper
December 11, 2003**

1. The Bank has lent \$10.3 billion for primary education since 1963 in increasing amounts over the decades: from a 5 percent share in the 1960s to a 41 percent share in 2003. The Bank's commitment to improved primary education access and quality is reflected in its leadership in the global Education for All (EFA) movement in 1990 and 2000 and its advocacy of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) covering universal primary school completion and gender parity. Despite such efforts, progress in many developing countries has been slow, with the latest estimates showing 70 of 155 countries unlikely to reach the MDG of universal primary school completion by 2015. In response, the Bank mobilized the international community behind a "Fast Track Initiative" in 2002 to accelerate progress and is seeking other means of scaling up international and country efforts. The OED evaluation will review the experience of the Bank – its policy dialogue, analytic work, and lending – in supporting country improvements in primary school access and learning outcomes, particularly since the beginning of EFA in 1990, with an eye to influencing the design and effectiveness of current and future sector policies and initiatives.

Background

2. Primary education is recognized worldwide as a powerful lever for poverty alleviation and social and economic growth (World Bank, 2002c). Its results can be empowering, enabling graduates to take charge of their lives and make more informed choices, contribute to the building of a democratic polity, increase earning potential and social mobility, and improve personal and family health and nutrition, particularly when participants are females (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). Studies in the early 1980s at the World Bank also showed relatively high rates of return to primary education (Pscacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985).

3. Developing countries have invested heavily in primary education over the past few decades. Rapid enrollment growth in the 1960s and 70s, however, was followed by setbacks in the 1980s brought on by economic downturns, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where enrollment rates stalled or even retreated. By 2002, an estimated 113 million 6-11 year olds in developing countries — or about one in five children — were still not in school. About 80% of these children are from low-income countries in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and 15% from the Middle East and North Africa (World Bank, 2002a). Two-thirds of the out-of-school children are girls, a share almost unchanged from a decade ago (Watkins, 2000). Failure to complete primary education, or "wastage," has been a persistent problem in all regions as shown by the gap between net enrollment and primary school completion rates (Annex 1, Figure 1).¹ Equally persistent have been low – in some cases disastrously low -- learning outcomes which reflect widespread ineffectiveness in teaching and learning processes.²

4. The World Bank's commitment to universal primary education dates back to its 1980 Education Sector Policy Paper, which emphasized for the first time the relatively high rates of return to primary education (World Bank, 1980). The Bank's 1990 policy paper, *Primary Education*, portrayed primary education as the foundation of a country's human capital development (World Bank, 1990). It argued that both quality improvement ("increased learning") and access for all school-age children were needed. In a 1995 sector review, the Bank gave top priority to basic education,³ but in the context of sector-wide policy reform and an emphasis on equity (especially for girls, disadvantaged ethnic minorities, and the poor), and institutional development (World Bank, 1995). By the end of the decade a new Sector Strategy Paper reaffirmed the commitment to basic education — especially for the poorest and girls — and to systemic reform (World Bank, 1999). However, no measurable policy goals were specified. In the following years, as a result of the Bank's participation in the 2000 EFA conference in Dakar and its adoption of the Millennium Development Goals,⁴ a sharpened set of sector goals has emerged which include specific plans for accelerating progress towards education for all.⁵ In October 2004, a Sector Strategy Update will be released. In parallel with this evolution in strategy, the share of the Bank's education lending for primary education has climbed over the past decades (Annex 1, Figure 2 and Annex 2) with a higher share going to quality improvement, policy support, and institutional development than to infrastructure development and hardware (World Bank, 2002c).

Objectives and Rationale for OED Review

5. The objective of this evaluation is to assess the relevance, efficacy, efficiency, institutional development impact, and sustainability of World Bank assistance to countries in their efforts to improve their basic knowledge and skills base through the provision of quality primary education to all children, particularly since the beginning of the EFA movement in 1990. While the global EFA strategy advocates many channels for pursuing its learning goals, including schooling at the primary and lower secondary levels, non-formal education, early childhood development, adult literacy, and life skills programs, this evaluation will focus on primary education (schooling and its non-formal equivalents). This is not to deny the importance of the other channels, but reflects the fact that primary education has been the main vehicle of the Bank's assistance to EFA, and that OED has yet to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of this subsector. Since the Bank's EFA policies have evolved and sharpened over past 10 plus years, the evaluation will begin by constructing, from key Bank documents and practices, a set of measurable policies and policy objectives, and then assess how these have been implemented. Bank implementation efforts will include policy dialogue, analytic work, and lending. Such an evaluation — by applying findings and lessons from past EFA support to the key assumptions and strategies of current EFA and FTI programs — has the potential to substantially influence the strategic agenda and effectiveness of future policies aimed at EFA and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Main Evaluative Questions

6. Based on a preliminary review and discussions with staff of key issues in Bank strategy, the evaluation will focus on the following questions, to be fine-tuned as necessary during the design phase of the study:
- a. What *policies and policy objectives* related to primary education can be derived from the World Bank's major policy and strategy documents and practices against which Bank's effectiveness can be evaluated? To what extent have the policies been implemented?
 - b. Have the Bank's policy objectives in primary education been *relevant* to the needs of recipient countries?
 - c. How *effective* has the Bank's assistance (policy dialogue, analytic work, and lending) to primary education been in helping countries improve school enrollments, completion rates, school quality and learning outcomes,⁶ especially for girls and for the most disadvantaged among and within countries? Have improvements been commensurate with the investments made (*efficiency*)?
 - d. What have been the key factors or *determinants* of the successful implementation and effectiveness of the Bank's assistance to primary education? In particular, what has been the effect of: i) the mix of instruments (specific investment loans, sector-wide approaches, adjustment lending); ii) non-lending channels, such as conditionalities within adjustment loans; iii) Bank supervision of projects and programs; iv) country ownership and the involvement of key stakeholders outside government; v) partnerships with other donors and civil society; and vi) country starting conditions and constraints?
 - e. To what extent has support to primary education promoted *institutional development*? Have improvements and outcomes been *sustainable*?
 - f. Have *monitoring and evaluation systems* in client countries effectively measured the outcomes and constraints of programs assisted by the Bank? How well has Bank assistance supported project/program monitoring and evaluation and use of the information generated by it for more informed decision making?
 - g. What can findings and lessons from past and current Bank programs of support for primary education teach us about the *feasibility and likely effectiveness* of new initiatives in support of increased basic knowledge and skills?

Scope and Methodology

7. These main evaluation questions will be refined into more specific evaluation questions and, for each question, appropriate methodologies will be specified in a design paper to be completed in the fall of 2003. A set of illustrative operational questions and methods can be found in Annex 3. The evidence base for the evaluation will be generated from the following inputs:

- a. A **portfolio review** of relevant Bank projects and programs (completed, ongoing, and planned since 1980), covering funding patterns, instrument mix, project ratings (including supervision), evidence of project/program effectiveness, and country starting conditions. The portfolio review will use both project and country as the unit of analysis. The size of the project sample (near 300) will allow for multiple regression analysis of outcomes and their determinants and an in-depth portfolio review of a sub-sample of projects.
- b. **Literature review:** a) evaluations of external assistance to primary education in improving primary education enrollment/completion rates, school quality and learning outcomes; and b) determinants of learning outcomes in developing countries, including both supply- and demand-side factors.⁷
- c. **Inventory and review of World Bank analytic work (research and ESW) on basic education since 1990.**
- d. **Country Case studies:** focusing on the development effectiveness of the Bank's assistance to primary education at the country level, where Bank support to primary education has been significant and longstanding. The case study methodology will include in-depth data collection and interviews with Bank and local managers, beneficiaries, donors and international agencies, and other stakeholders. It will review the effectiveness of Bank sponsored policy dialogue, analytic work, and lending, in relation to other educational investments in the country. Nine countries have been provisionally selected, based on a set of criteria,⁸ among which at most five will be chosen: Bolivia, India, Guinea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Tanzania, Vietnam and Yemen. In addition, the study will draw from relevant Project Performance Assessment Reports (PPARs), like those just completed in Uganda and Honduras — the latter enhanced to cover the entire primary education subsector — and in other countries yet to be determined (including some from the regions not represented by the case studies), and the forthcoming OED impact evaluation of the Bank's support for education in Ghana.
- e. **Surveys and interviews:** information and opinions from key stakeholders, such as Country Directors, Sector Managers, and Task Team Leaders (current and past), representatives of other development agencies and NGOs, and others, will be gathered via email, personal interviews, focus groups or video conferencing, as appropriate.
- f. **Other OED Assessments:** including recent OED work in other education sub-sectors, such as secondary education and adult literacy, and related fields, such as community driven development, gender issues, social funds, health, nutrition and population, and the Annual Review of Development Effectiveness (2002), which focused on the Millennium Development Goals.⁹

Dissemination

8. The final report will be disseminated widely to internal and external audiences. An opportunity will exist to present initial findings to World Bank staff during Human Development week in the spring of 2005. In addition, plans are being laid to consult during study implementation with partner organizations in the Education for All movement in 2004 and 2005 (e.g., *Working Group on Education for All*). Workshops will be organized in the case study countries and in regional fora, as feasible and appropriate. To keep interested parties informed throughout the study a website will be created and kept up-to-date. Finally, the results will be synthesized in articles for publication in major education and development journals, as appropriate.

Schedule

9. In a first phase, the literature and portfolio reviews will be completed by June 2004 and be available as inputs into a strategy update currently scheduled for completion in October 2004. This will be followed by the in-depth work (including the country case studies) and the full study report will be submitted to CODE by September 30, 2005.

1. The net enrollment rate or ratio is the number of pupils within the official school age who are enrolled in school expressed as a percent of the total population of the age group; the primary school completion rate is the proportion of all children of official graduation age who complete primary school in a given year.

2. National test data from Bangladesh, Brazil, Ghana, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Zambia all show a majority of primary school leavers to be achieving well below their countries' minimum performance standards, with results in many rural areas being "only marginally better than for children who have not completed school" (Watkins, 2000, p. 105).

3. The term "basic education" is used frequently in the Education for All movement, and generally refers to the basic level of schooling considered to be compulsory in a country plus related non-formal education activities such as adult literacy, life-skills education and early childhood education. In most countries in the developing world, it refers largely to primary education and is often used synonymously with that term.

4. EFA was first introduced during a world conference co-sponsored by the Bank in Jomtien, Thailand (1990); the movement was renewed in the year 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, where countries and their sponsors (including the Bank) pledged to reach universal primary school completion by the year 2015. The MDGs in education state that by 2015 all children will complete a full course of primary schooling, and gender disparity in primary and secondary education will be eliminated, preferably by 2005.

5. The Bank's current strategy includes a "Fast-Track Initiative (FTI)," which extends to qualified countries financial and technical support as they reform their educational systems in line with an EFA "indicative framework" (Bruns et al., 2003). As of September 2003, 12 countries had been selected for fast-track support out of 70 "off-track" countries (those projected to fall short of the completion goal by 2015 according to current trends). For that and other recent EFA developments see the Education Sector's

Development Committee Report, *Education for Dynamic Economies: Action Plan to Accelerate Progress towards Education for All* (World Bank and IMF, 2002).

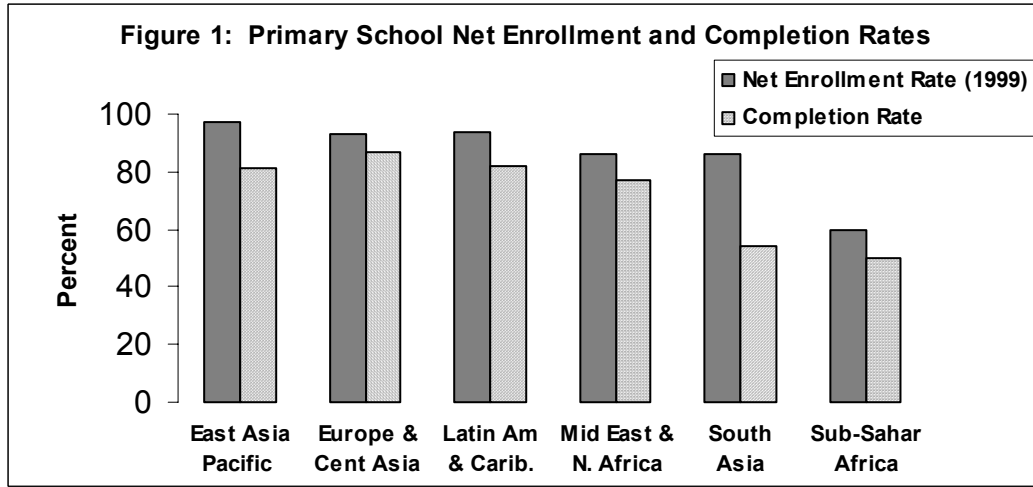
6. School enrollment will generally mean “net primary school enrollment ratio”; completion rates will be the “primary completion rate” (see Bruns et al., 2003) (where possible these will be augmented by estimates of non-formal program enrollment and completion); school quality will refer to those characteristics of schools and programs which influence school learning outcomes (to be determined by literature review); and learning outcomes refer to the basic knowledge and skills expected of primary education completers, however defined by the various countries. (It could also refer to non-academic outcomes such as employment, productivity, and contribution to the community, but these are beyond the scope of the current evaluation).

7. Reports from the portfolio and literature reviews will be issued in June 2004 as inputs into the October 2004 sector strategy update.

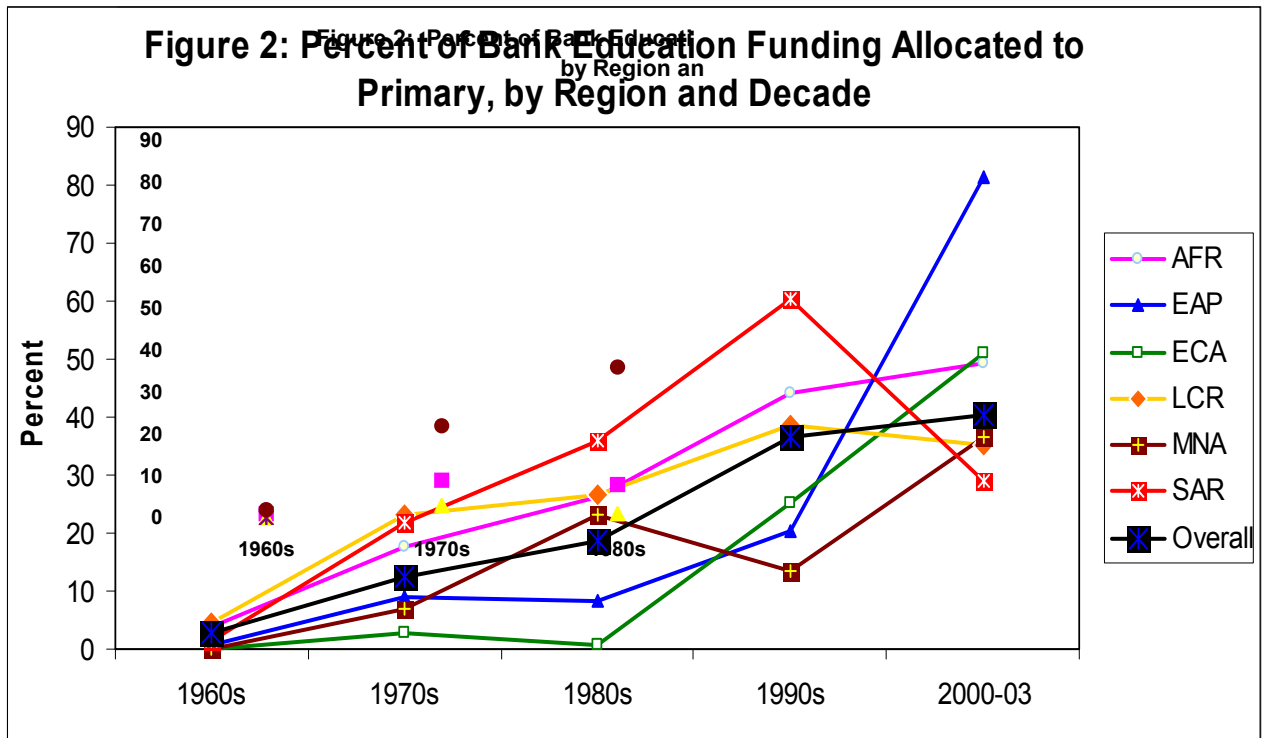
8. Selection criteria were: Region, Income level (lower-middle and lower); Bank’s share of external funding, Bank leverage (Bank’s financing as proportion of total country spending for education); on-track/off-track in meeting MDGs on primary completion rates; participation in the Fast Track Initiative; number of adjustment loans received; and existence of recent national household surveys or comparable data.

9. OED portfolio reviews on *Tertiary Education: Lessons from a Decade of Lending, FY1990-2000* (Berk, 2002); on *Improving Adult Literacy Outcomes* (Abadzi, 2003), and on secondary education (Perkins, 2003, forthcoming), and an OED study of the impact of the Bank’s education assistance in Ghana (White, 2003). Other related studies to be drawn from are: *The Annual Review of Development Effectiveness, 2002* (Carvalho, 2003 — covering MDGs); *Gender Dimension of Bank Assistance (2002)*; *Investing in Health: Development Effectiveness in the Health, Nutrition and Population Sector* (Johnson and Stout, 1999); *NGOs in World Bank Supported Projects* (Gibbs et al., 1999); *Sharing Knowledge: Innovation and Remaining Challenges (2003)*; *Social Funds: A Review of World Bank Experience* (Carvalho et al., 2001); and the ongoing evaluation of Community-Driven Development.

Annex 1: Figures



Source: Net Enrollment Rates: *Global Economic Prospects, 2002*;
Completion Rates: WB Estimates for the most recent year.



Source: WB Edstats, 2003 corrected; Key: AFR=Sub-Saharan Africa; EAP=East Asia-Pacific;
ECA=Europe and Central Asia; LCR=Latin America and Caribbean; MNA=Middle East & North Africa; SAR: South Asia
(NOTE: In East Asia-Pacific in 2000-03 the lending to education was \$174 million, but a single primary

education
project (valued at \$134 million), accounted for almost the full 81% of funds allocated to primary
education.)

Annex 2: World Bank Lending for Primary Education, by region and decade

| Region | 1960s | | | 1970s | | | 1980s | | | 1990s | | | 2000-03 | | | Overall | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Total* | Primary | %** | Total | Primary | % | Total | Primary | % | Total | Primary | % | Total | Primary | % | Total | Primary | % |
| AFR | 94.4 | 3.55 | 3.8 | 610.7 | 107.48 | 17.6 | 1171.4 | 308.36 | 26.3 | 2568.7 | 1130.62 | 44.0 | 905.3 | 447.20 | 49.4 | 5350.50 | 1997.21 | 37.33 |
| EAP | 35.6 | 0.22 | 0.6 | 590.0 | 53.53 | 9.1 | 2733.2 | 230.59 | 8.4 | 4431.2 | 904.49 | 20.4 | 174.0 | 141.34 | 81.2 | 7964.00 | 1330.17 | 16.70 |
| ECA | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 276.8 | 7.39 | 2.7 | 371.3 | 3.14 | 0.8 | 1316.1 | 332.60 | 25.3 | 550.8 | 281.88 | 51.2 | 2515.00 | 625.01 | 24.85 |
| LCR | 55.3 | 2.44 | 4.4 | 357.4 | 82.44 | 23.1 | 901.6 | 240.35 | 26.7 | 5719.6 | 2202.93 | 38.5 | 1967.7 | 691.39 | 35.1 | 9001.60 | 3219.55 | 35.77 |
| MNA | 29.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 525.9 | 35.42 | 6.7 | 1065.7 | 246.51 | 23.1 | 1041.2 | 139.25 | 13.4 | 464.3 | 169.00 | 36.4 | 3126.10 | 590.18 | 18.88 |
| SAR | 29.5 | 0.43 | 1.5 | 114.7 | 24.84 | 21.7 | 821.7 | 295.86 | 36.0 | 3332.4 | 2011.78 | 60.4 | 827.4 | 239.05 | 28.9 | 5125.70 | 2571.96 | 50.18 |
| Overall | 243.8 | 6.64 | 2.7 | 2475.5 | 311.10 | 12.6 | 7064.9 | 1324.81 | 18.8 | 18409.2 | 6721.67 | 36.5 | 4889.5 | 1969.86 | 40.3 | 33082.90 | 10334.08 | 31.24 |

(Source: *WB Edstats, 2003 (corrected)*; Key: *AFR=Sub-Saharan Africa; EAP=East Asia Pacific; ECA=Europe and Central Asia; LCR=Latin America and Caribbean; MNA=Middle East & North Africa; SAR=South Asia*)

* Amounts in millions of US dollars

** Percent is proportion of all educational lending going to primary education.

Annex 3. Illustrative Detailed Evaluation Questions and Methods for Addressing Them

| Evaluation Questions | Method | | | | | | |
|--|--------|----|-----|----|----|----|----|
| | LR | PR | IPR | CS | SU | MR | OT |
| Main Question 1: What explicit and implicit strategic objectives can be derived from the World Bank's major policy and strategy documents concerning primary education development against which the Bank's effectiveness can be evaluated? | | | | | | | |
| 1.1. What have been the Bank's explicit policy and strategy statements about primary education during the past two plus decades? | • | | | | | | |
| 1.2. Have these been confirmed/preempted/modified by implicit policies and strategies based on practice? | | • | | | • | | |
| 1.3. What have the actual policies and strategies been? | | | | | | | • |
| Main Question 2: How well supported has the Education Sector's case for prioritizing primary education been in the face of other pressing education needs? How relevant has primary education development been in the various countries where it has been supported? | | | | | | | |
| 2.1. What arguments have been put forward by the Education Sector for prioritizing primary education and how have they been justified? | • | | | | | | |
| 2.2. What have been the competing priorities and why have they been subordinated to primary education? | | • | | | • | | |
| 2.3. What is the justification for prioritizing primary education in countries where Bank investments in the subsector have predominated? Is this consistent with country development priorities and Bank's country assistant strategies? Were competing investment priorities been considered and eliminated? | | | • | • | • | | |
| Main Question 3: How effective has the Bank's assistance (policy dialogue, analytic work, and lending) to primary education been in helping countries improve school enrollments, completion rates, school quality and learning outcomes, especially for girls and for the poorest among and within countries? Have improvements been commensurate with the investments made (efficiency)? | | | | | | | |
| 3.1. To what extent has the Bank (through analytical work, policy dialogue, lending or conditionalities) leveraged changes in government policies related to improved primary education enrollments, completion, quality and/or outcomes? What might account for particularly strong or weak influence? | | | • | • | • | | |
| 3.2. What components have been covered in the various lending projects/programs (e.g., physical facilities; curriculum/assessment reform; textbooks/other learning materials/distance education; data management/EMIS/School mapping; Governance/ decentralization/community participation/school autonomy; teacher training and incentives; management capacity/M&E; financing/budget development/efficiency) and how effective have they been? Are some kinds of components generally more effective than others? Why? | | • | | • | | • | |
| 3.3. For school systems assisted by the Bank, to what extent are cohorts children graduating with basic reading, writing and numeracy skills? What might account for deficiencies? | | | • | • | • | | |
| 3.4. What efforts have been made in Bank supported primary education projects to increase girls participation and completion and which have been successful (especially since the EFA conference in 1990)? Is there any evidence of project impact on female learning outcomes (completion rates and learning gains)? | | • | • | • | | | |
| 3.5. How much Bank support (financial and non-financial) have the most at-risk countries (very low income and/or wracked by conflict and instability) received for improvement of primary education participation and outcomes? What has been done to address low management and absorptive capacity in such countries? How effective have these measures been? | | | • | • | | | |

| | LR | PR | IPR | CS | SU | MR | OT |
|---|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|
| 3.6. To what extent have primary education projects in the portfolio targeted the poor? How have the poor benefited from the projects/programs (in terms of increased participation and improved learning outcomes)? How to explain strengths and weaknesses? | | | • | • | | | |
| 3.7. Have improvements made in primary education enrollments, completion, quality and outcomes been commensurate with the investments made? | | | • | • | | | |
| Main Question 4: To what extent has support to primary education promoted institutional development? Have improvements and outcomes been sustainable? | | • | • | • | | | |
| Main Question 5: How has the effectiveness of Bank assistance to primary education been affected by: a) the mix of instruments used (sector investment loans, sector-wide approaches, adjustment lending); b) non-lending channels such as conditionalities within adjustment loans; c) Bank effectiveness in supervising projects and programs; d) country ownership of Bank-supported programs and the involvement of key stakeholders outside government; e) partnerships with other donors and civil society; and f) different country starting conditions (e.g., education attainment and income levels) and constraints? | | | | | | | |
| 5.1. Do these mediating variables have differential affects on different measures of project effectiveness (policy reform, institutional development, school enrollment and completion rates, school quality and learning outcomes)? | | | • | | | | |
| Main Question 6: Have monitoring and evaluation systems in client countries effectively measured the outcomes and constraints of programs assisted by the Bank? How well has Bank assistance supported project/program monitoring and evaluation and use of the information generated by it for more informed decision making? | | | | | | | |
| 6.1. How many completed projects have been able to demonstrate school quality improvement and student learning gains through solid monitoring and evaluation data? How to explain any weaknesses identified? | | • | • | • | | | |
| 6.2. To what extent have good monitoring and evaluation systems (including student assessment systems) been institutionalized in countries receiving Bank support ? What kind of capacity building has been done and to what effect? | | • | | • | • | | |
| 6.3. Are there any good examples of monitoring and evaluation data being used to improve decision making and implementation in client countries? | | | • | • | • | | |
| Main Question 7: What can findings and lessons from past and current Bank programs of support for primary education teach us about the feasibility and likely effectiveness of new initiatives in support of increased basic knowledge and skills. | | | | | | | |
| 7.1. What can evaluation results at the country level teach us about effective ways of adjusting MDGs to national realities? | • | | • | • | | | |
| 7.2. To what extent have country starting points and binding constraints (in their reaching EFA goals) been considered in their selection and preparation for Fast Track Initiative (FTI) support? | | | | • | • | | • |
| 7.3. How will new strategies deal with low-income countries which do not qualify for FTI support? | | | | • | • | | • |
| 7.4. What if projected funding gaps for reaching MDGs and funds raised from the donor community are found to be below requirements? What besides external funding is needed? | | | | • | • | | • |

KEY: LR=Literature Review; PR=Portfolio Review; IPR=Intensive Portfolio Review; CS=Case study; MR=Multiple Regression; SU=Survey; OT=Other