



# Confronting the Learning Crisis

Lessons from World Bank Support for Basic Education, 2012–22



This evaluation assesses the World Bank's contribution to improving learning outcomes in basic education from 2012 to 2022.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### Findings

#### → Adopting a systems approach



The World Bank's education portfolio performs relatively well; positive ratings largely reflect achievement of outputs (for example, teachers trained) rather than outcomes (that is, improved learning).



The World Bank provides support for on-the-job training of teachers to improve teaching quality. A greater emphasis should be placed on preservice training or career framework development for teachers to further improve teaching effectiveness.



The contribution to learning outcomes can be enhanced if the World Bank adopts an outcome rather than output orientation at all levels.

#### → Results frameworks and monitoring and evaluation



Reforms in measurement of learning, teaching career framework, equity, and capacity can support the evolution toward an outcome orientation.



Improved learning outcomes are specified in only one-third of project development objectives in the basic education portfolio.



Although gender—at least with reference to challenges facing girls' access to basic education—is fairly well covered in project monitoring, coverage of broader equity-related issues is less extensive.

### Recommendations

#### → Support for basic education needs to be more nuanced, focusing on enhancing learning outcomes and addressing systemic challenges:

- Foster engagement to promote inclusive learning, guided by political and stakeholder analyses.
- Strengthen teacher career frameworks with a systems-based approach that extends beyond in-service training.
- Build capacity at all levels—central, provincial, local, and school—to reinforce the foundation of basic education.
- Strategically sequence interventions over the medium term to support sustainable impact.

#### → Results frameworks and monitoring and evaluation in projects and Country Partnership Frameworks need to be strengthened to incorporate the following:

- Enhanced levels of disaggregated data and evidence that support the efficacy of interventions proposed;
- More developed theories of change that shift the focus from attribution toward contribution;
- Coverage of equality and equity issues, including a more holistic treatment of gender (boys and girls) and other groups such as children with disabilities, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, and children displaced as a result of disasters, conflict, or other violence;
- Incentives and signals to staff and Country Management Units to support more ambitious objectives.

### Methodology

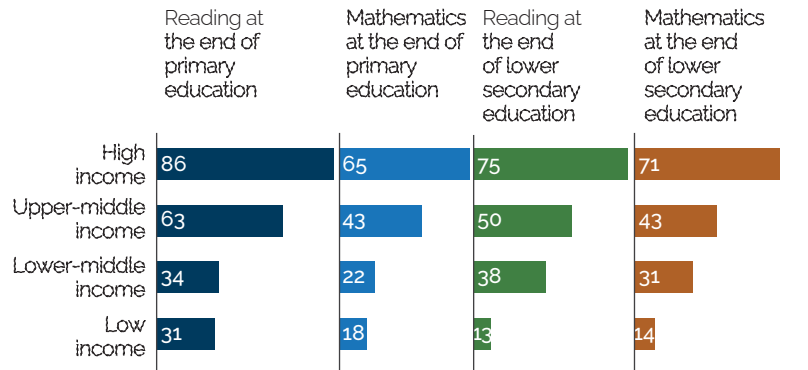
The evaluation used a mixed methods approach consisting of 10 case-based analysis, portfolio analysis of lending and advisory services and analytics totaling 236 projects, 296 interviews, literature reviews, and analysis of secondary data for case countries.

## Context

### → Global level

- The World Bank has helped build awareness, shared knowledge, and convened global stakeholders around a commitment to quality basic education.
- Working closely with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, the World Bank has helped define learning poverty, an easily understood concept.
- The learning poverty indicator has generated global buy-in around the achievement of ambitious targets at the country level.
- Many countries have gaps in the underlying data required to calculate learning poverty. These gaps need to be addressed.
- Key challenges remain in basic education systems globally. These include weak learning outcomes, learning inequity, inadequate teaching quality, and weak governance, accountability, and institutional oversight.

Reading and mathematics proficiency levels of students in low-income countries are much worse than those in middle- and high-income countries.



Share of students achieving at least minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics by country income level (%)

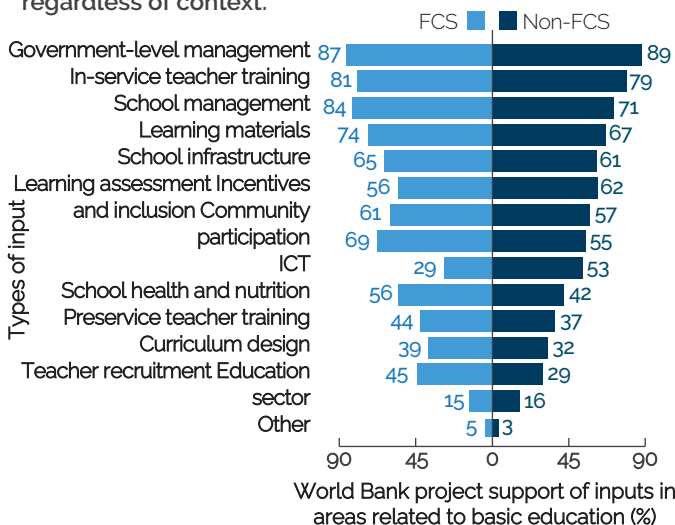
Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, September 2023.

## Highlights

### → Findings at the country and project levels

- Between FY12 and FY22, the World Bank committed \$25 billion for 236 basic education operations in 91 countries—an annual average of 21 operations approved over the period.
- In some countries, support for basic education is sustained beyond the cycle of stand-alone projects. However, in many cases, including in countries with high rates of learning poverty, support has been inconsistent and otherwise not sustained.
- Across most country types, World Bank operations support similar inputs: government-level management, in-service teacher training, and school management. This suggests the need for a tailored approach to address complex and context-specific challenges.
- Progress has been made in supporting systems that help measure learning from national and subnational assessments. Nearly two-thirds of the World Bank's portfolio operations supported learning assessment, learning surveys, capacity building, and dissemination activities.
- The World Bank could focus more consistently on learning outcomes at both the country and project levels. This requires deeper systems analysis to support improved design facilitated by robust monitoring and evaluation.
- The World Bank could also improve its focus on and monitoring of broader inclusion of equity-related matters.

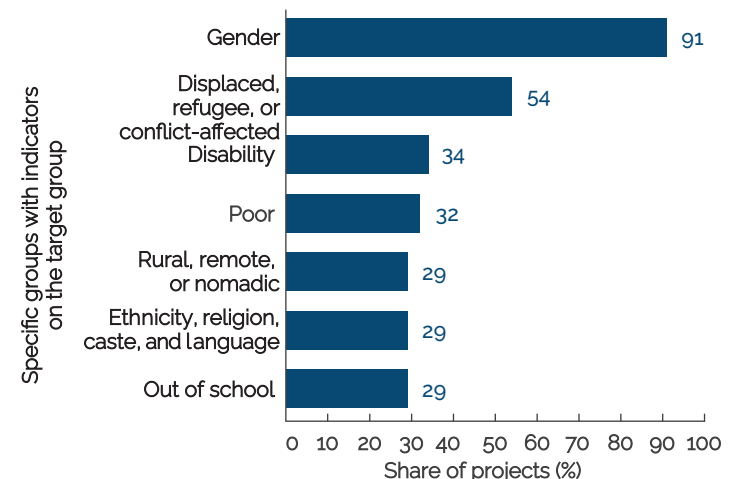
Projects tend to be delivered with a similar set of inputs, regardless of context.



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.

Note: The education sector includes law, policy, and regulation. FCS = fragile and conflict-affected situations; ICT = information and communication technology.

More comprehensive monitoring and evaluation is needed in projects and Country Partnership Frameworks.



Source: Independent Evaluation Group.