

Two Projects in One: Lessons from Jamaica

TWO VERY DIFFERENT PROJECT COMPONENTS SAT uneasily together in a Bank-funded education project carried out in Jamaica from 1988-94. One component, prepared in 1985, was to pilot and evaluate options for restructuring and expanding access to lower secondary education (grades 7-9). The other component, added two years after the first, was to provide loans to low-income students and develop a cost-recovery plan for higher education. An OED audit* of the project found that the two components should have been separate self-standing projects and should have provided greater preparation and support for institutional capacity building.

The secondary education component enjoyed strong government support and was well managed and supervised. The reverse was the case for the student loan component. While the educational component partially succeeded, the student loan component largely failed. The project helped pioneer positive changes in secondary education and helped begin a dialogue between the borrower and the Bank on redistributing subsidies away from higher education and toward basic education. Aside from the issue of packaging two projects into one, the experience provides several lessons on ways to ensure that pilot projects are sustainable when they are expanded countrywide.

Delayed Approval

In 1985, as Jamaica's economy weakened and budgets for public education tightened, the Bank approved the Education Program Preparation and Student Loan project, which was intended to convert all-age schools into separate primary and secondary schools, increase access to grades 7-9, and improve the quality of secondary teaching and learning. Lower secondary education was a potential lever of reform for the entire education system.

The project was to implement and evaluate a new lower secondary program in redesigned school buildings. The 20 pilot schools were to receive intensive support, including in-service teacher training,



advisory services to school principals, new instructional materials, and regular supervision. Community support was strong in some areas. But in others, middle-class parents feared that the new secondary schools catering to low-income students would dilute the quality of education provided for their own children in the elite secondary schools.

In 1987, the Bank added a second component to the project. It wanted to relieve an immediate revenue deficit, develop an existing student loan scheme for higher education, and promote support for a cost-recovery plan for higher education. The borrower reluctantly agreed to the new component as a condition for obtaining \$2.6 million in quick-disbursing funds to recapitalize the student loan fund. During preparation, little attention was paid to ensuring that the Student Loan Bureau had the capacity to implement the planned activities. Implementation of the revised project eventually began in May 1988 and was expected to be completed in less than four years.

Secondary Education

The Ministry of Education performed very well in developing a new curriculum and pedagogical support for lower secondary schools. However, the programs introduced in pilot schools suffered in part because school renovation began very late due to construction delays and a hurricane. The best results were achieved in schools with highly competent principals and strong technical support. There were some gains in student attendance and improvements in teaching methods. But evaluation in the pilot schools was inadequate and did not provide as much policy guidance as planned. Lacking a robust evaluation component, the pilot program did not provide data that typically may have helped convince society at large of the logic of the school reform.

Student Loans

Apart from the injection of a modest amount of foreign exchange and some improvement in loan collection procedures, the student loan component had little positive result. After the funds for the program were disbursed in 1988, the borrower failed to carry out the agreed actions to strengthen the loan scheme. For its part, the Bank failed to take remedial action.

Ironically, the very failure of this component encouraged the government to overhaul the loan scheme. Reform began on a sounder basis in the mid-1990s with Bank support for a student loan project.

Sustainability

The expanded, countrywide, secondary school reform program is currently underway, supported by a Bank-funded follow-up Reform of Secondary Education project. However, the country's own financial resources cannot yet sustain the costly improvements still needed at the school and classroom levels. If the intensive services and inputs to pilot schools are not maintained, teacher and community commitment will decline and erode support for reform. There are signs that locally generated recurrent funds for school operations and maintenance, technical support to teachers, regular supplies of new instructional materials, and intensive school supervision will not be adequate as the program expands across the country.

In the pilot areas, the new schools must achieve standards of performance comparable to traditional schools if they are to win support from all teachers and all tiers of society. However, there is evidence that the original pilot schools now enjoy lower levels of support as the countrywide reform expands.

To ensure sustainability, the audit recommended that education authorities take the following actions:

- Assess recurrent funding needs through on-the-ground assessments of schools' real needs rather than through historic budgetary data.
- Earmark funds to maintain a rich supply of instructional materials and regular supervisory, advisory, and teacher development services.
- Help schools develop and implement workable, cost-effective plans for routine and preventive maintenance, and provide timely funds and technical support for major repairs.
- Establish comprehensive baseline data at school level and track students' progress and performance.
- Encourage teacher and community participation in developing reforms.

Lessons

For the Bank

- When an existing project design is robust, the Bank should resist the temptation to add more fragile components with goals unrelated to the original project's objectives. In this case, implementation of the secondary education component was delayed because of the late addition of the student loan component. Moreover, the latter component deserved to become a self-standing project with far more attention from the bor-

rower and the Bank than it received. Moreover, legal covenants do not compensate for lack of thorough preparation and stakeholders' commitment to achieving results, as the student loan experience shows.

- Pilot projects are not necessarily quick to show results. Complex projects for sector strategy and program development require time to implement and evaluate. In this case, the four years planned for implementation proved too short to show that the innovations were producing results for students.

For the Borrower

- The borrower should not have signed a loan for a project that demanded a level of commitment and administrative capability that implementing agencies did not have, especially in the management of the student loan program. Senior borrower agencies, such as Finance and Planning, should have insisted that the Bank approve a project design simple enough for the implementing agencies to coordinate and manage efficiently.

Précis

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