

Evaluation of the three Education Programmes delivered in Sub Saharan Africa

Executive Summary

Tribal Education Ltd

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose of the report

This report was commissioned by BIS to evaluate the strategy on partnerships between English and African universities or colleges. It covers three main areas:

- The England Africa Partnership (EAP) programme 2006-2008.
- The Education Partnerships in Africa (EPA) programme 2008 onwards.
- The Africa Unit, mainly focusing on 2008 onwards.

1.2 Methodology

Tribal used a range of approaches to gather data and perceptions, which were relevant to the programmes' objectives. These included desk research of documents supplied by the Joint International Unit (JIU), the British Council and the Africa Unit, including analysis of internal evaluations and progress reports, online survey of successful and unsuccessful applicants for EAP and EPA and users of the Africa Unit, as well as semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and beneficiaries.

1.3 Evaluation of EAP

The aim of the England Africa Partnerships scheme was to increase the capacity of the African higher education system through partnerships between English higher education (HE) institutions and universities and colleges of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. While the majority of EAP projects report significant immediate achievement in terms of the planned outcomes, these were often limited to the process, infrastructure or capacity building aspects. The wider benefits or outcomes will, in most instances, take longer to be achieved and evaluated. However, there were important examples of the projects having a wider impact beyond the institutions or universities that were directly involved in the partnership or who led the project. The development of local networks was a valuable feature of many of the EAP projects and these warrant follow up and support in the future, as a potential key agent of sustainability.

Recommendations

1. Developmental activities are more likely to succeed when they are carefully planned over an extended timescale, set within existing partnerships and focused on achieving mutual benefits. Ensure that this experience and insight gained from the EAP is available and utilised for future initiatives.
2. The current state of local networks developed in response to the EAP should be investigated further to establish if they are a key agent of sustainability. Criteria should be developed which include the creation of networks as an explicit feature of shorter-term projects.
3. There should be follow up evaluation work in 2010-11 of the 32 EAP projects that completed in 2008. This should be set alongside a broader follow up of DeIPHE and EPA, to ascertain whether allocating small packets of funding in this way does produce sustainable impact.
4. BIS should jointly review, with other government departments, the optimum funding levels and different timescales for future projects to ensure there is a range of options, which are tailored to different needs.
5. In future programmes, undertaking an assessment of the factors associated with achievement / success as part of the initial project submission could be a useful tool to provide an indication of centres' ability to 'cope' and the likelihood of achieving their goals.

6. For any future streams of work, BIS should require these to be administered in a more integrated way, using existing systems within the British Council and DFID for monitoring and evaluation.
7. The usefulness and quality of mid-term reviews should be reviewed by the British Council to ensure these are fit for purpose and linked to active intervention or support for projects. An active link, with in-country British Council staff, should be a consistent feature of future projects, ensuring all projects are visited at least once during their lifetime.

1.4 Evaluation of EPA

In contrast to the original EAP, the EPA also included the FE sector and sought to involve local employers in the partnerships. EPA is generally considered a success story so far, by all those who have been directly involved in the projects. EPA has built closer links with DelPHE, which has led to increased synergy in countries where both programmes work, increased FE involvement and brought in new HE institutions that had not participated before. However, the EPA has also faced a challenge to involve major employers in Africa and there is evidence to indicate this may have been more limited (to local employers).

Recommendations

1. The EPA programme should be continued. It should maintain its distinct criteria in relation to bringing in new institutions, encouraging FE involvement and a link to employability.
2. As far as possible, the EPA should be amalgamated with DelPHE as part of a coordinated strategy on partnership work. This would provide one front portal for partners, so that, as far as they are concerned, it is one process for application. It is only when an application reaches the joint selection committee that it should be decided which fund best suits the projects' objectives.
3. The Department should review its policy aims in respect of partnerships and determine how it will judge success. This should be done in conjunction with DFID and the British Council, in order to foster coordination.
4. The partnership model promoted by EPA in terms of the number of projects funded grant allocation should be carefully evaluated as part of a comparative evaluation of alternative models. This should also focus on longer-term outcomes of projects with differing lengths to establish clear evidence on optimum approach to achieve value for money.
5. As part of this review, consideration should be given to the concept suggested by the Africa Unit of creating 'institutional partnerships'. This should also explore the feasibility of developing four-way partnerships, which link FE and HE institutions in both Africa and England.
6. The progress of new institutions and the 15 FE colleges involved in EPA should be monitored very carefully given the potentially higher risks associated with projects without previous experience of partnership work.
7. There is a need for greater flexibility in terms of project timescales, to allow English and African partners to determine the optimum approach (18 – 36 months), which best fits their needs. The Department needs to work out a way of negotiating their current funding restrictions (possibly through a pooled fund with DFID), so that this becomes possible.
8. More structured feedback should be required via the mid-term reports, so that they identify remedial actions as well as problems and provide a clear basis to summarise progress across all 72 projects. The completion reports for EPA should maintain similar criteria, standards and format to those established by EAP, to enable comparative evaluation of outcomes.

1.6 Evaluation of the Africa Unit

The original vision for the Africa Unit was to liaise across Departments bringing Government partnership programmes together, but it has not come close to achieving this. Instead it has fashioned a new *raison d'être* for itself, particularly in championing the role of FE and employability. However, the real potential for a long-term future for an Africa Unit is not on a narrow niche task in supporting FE or promoting employability, but on the wider role to coordinate the partnership intervention in Africa between different government departments. It is unlikely it can achieve this under the sole sponsorship of BIS, with its current levels of funding and in its present location. It would need agreement between all sponsoring departments, on the role such a unit can play and commitment over the long term to support such a unit.

Recommendations

1. Clarify the future of the Africa Unit and establish with other departments (DFID, Health etc) whether there is a need for a unit to coordinate government funded projects in Africa to obtain best value and synergy.
2. Continue the Africa Unit but on a more secure basis, with a clear and agreed remit to coordinate across departments with the resources and long-term time frames necessary to achieve its objectives.
3. If an Africa Unit continues to operate, establish whether there could be benefits from locating this in the British Council both in terms of reduced overheads and encouraging synergies with other programmes.
4. If BIS is to continue with a distinctive approach to partnerships focused on skills development, then they should ensure that this element is clearly built into the contract with the British Council or other providers.
5. BIS should identify the most appropriate provider for supporting FE colleges, or other new institutions, in becoming engaged successfully in international partnership work.

1.7 Overall Conclusions

Overall the partnership landscape has been significantly enhanced by the involvement of BIS. Alongside DelPHE, the EAP and EPA schemes have brought many new UK institutions into partnership activity with African universities, HEIs and FE. On the basis of this evaluation, BIS is fully justified in continuing this work, if the British Government continues to provide support for capacity building with African partners.