

Measuring the impact of citizen-led assessments for improving the quality of education

Mollie Tobin and Petra Lietz

Background

In 2015 and 2016, ACER, through the Centre for Global Education Monitoring (GEM), was engaged by OMAES (Oeuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel), a non-governmental organisation in Mali, to provide support for the development of an internal monitoring and evaluation system. This system will enable OMAES to evaluate the influence of its communication and advocacy activities and whether they will contribute to long-term policy change among education stakeholders in Mali.

In partnership with other civil-society organisations and through funding from the Hewlett Foundation, OMAES manages Bɛɛkunko, which is a citizen-led assessment program in Mali. OMAES also belongs to the **People's Action for Learning (PAL) network**, which currently supports citizen-led assessments in nine countries.

Education in Mali has undergone a long-term process of decentralisation; education decision-making responsibilities have been decentralised over time to various local and regional levels. As a result, local, regional and national stakeholders are increasingly important in education reform and in improving the quality of education.

About the Bɛɛkunko program

Bɛɛkunko is a household-based assessment of children's learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy for children in Mali whether currently

attending school or not, and who are six to 14 years of age.

OMAES' primary aim through Bɛɛkunko is to motivate stakeholders at various levels to take action in schools and communities, and become engaged in education policy reform with the ultimate goal of improving student learning. Its main strategy is to improve awareness among stakeholders about the actual learning outcomes of children in Mali.

This strategy is supported by communication and advocacy activities targeted at local, regional and national levels.

Bɛɛkunko's household-survey approach involves grassroots stakeholders such as parents in the assessment program, with parents being informed of their child's learning soon after the assessment is conducted in the home. OMAES also engages in an intensive communication and advocacy campaign to share assessment results with key stakeholder groups at local, regional and national levels.

Capacity development support for internal monitoring and evaluation

Communication and advocacy activities are important components of the Bɛɛkunko assessment program. There is a need for OMAES to be able to measure and monitor the effectiveness of its communication and advocacy strategies towards achieving Bɛɛkunko's



Figure 1 Bɛɛkunko assessment: theory of change

BEEKUNKO PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

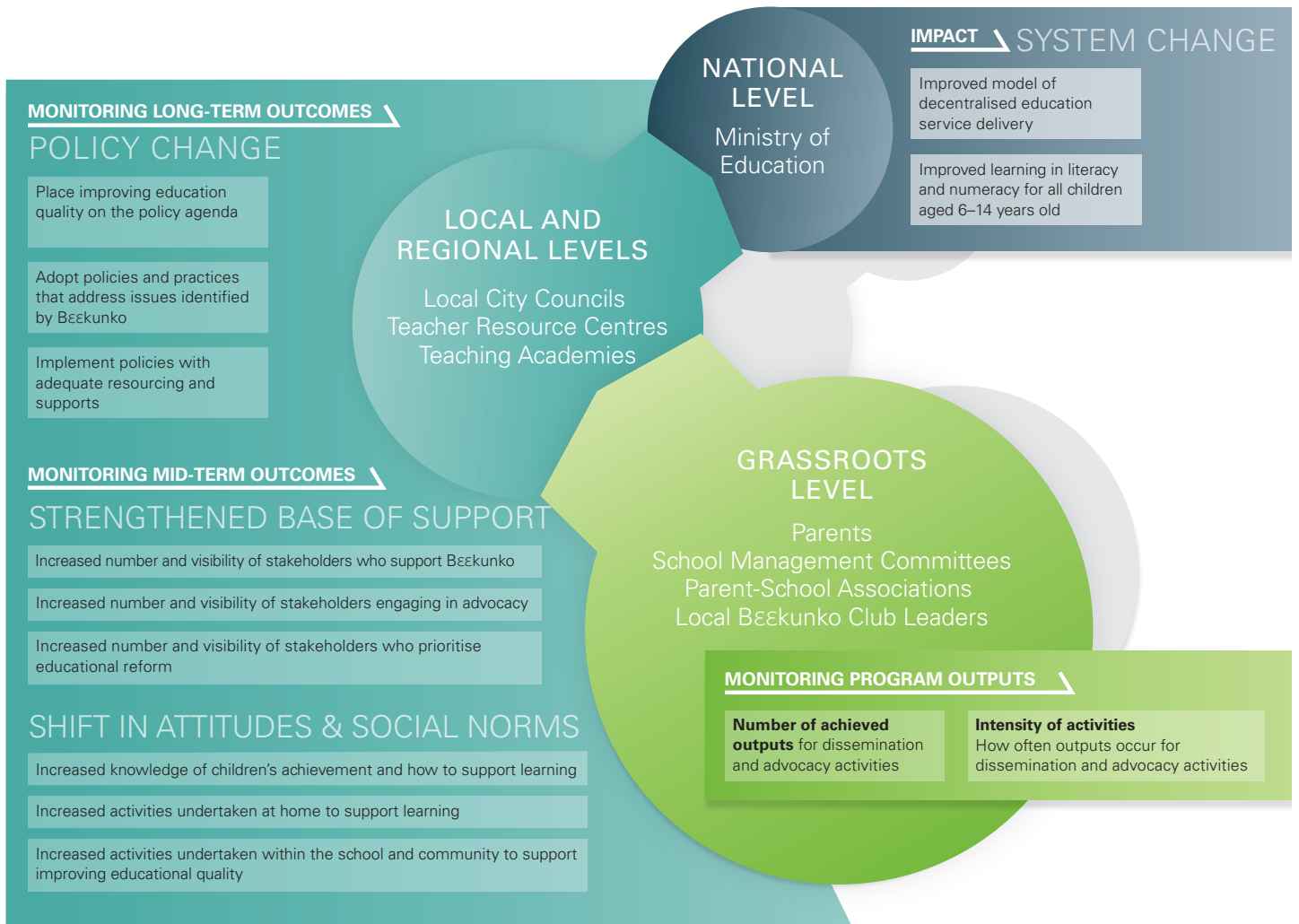


Figure 2 BEEKUNKO program logic model

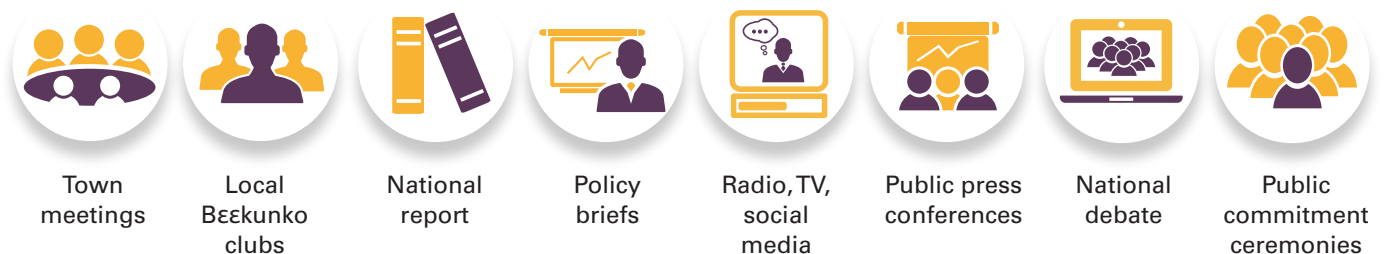


Figure 3 Example program activities and strategies

program and policy goals. In addition, an internal monitoring-and-evaluation approach will help OMAES and its partner organisations to better understand the larger policy context that Beekunko operates within, and to use evaluation data to improve or adjust its ongoing communication and advocacy strategies.

GEM Centre affiliated ACER staff worked with OMAES to clarify Beekunko's theory of change and to develop a program logic model, which provides the theoretical foundation and principles for the development of an evaluation approach. Figures 1, 2 and 3 represent this logic model visually. The theory of change consists of six steps (see Figure 1), linking the Beekunko assessment and OMAES communication and advocacy activities to intended policy impact, to bring about changes in stakeholder attitudes, practices and education policy, resulting in improved educational quality and student learning.

The Beekunko logic model (see Figure 2) identifies key evaluation stakeholders that are the intended recipients of OMAES communication and advocacy activities. Key stakeholders come from the grassroots, or very local levels, such as parents, school management organisations and parent associations as well as local Beekunko organisations promoted and supported by OMAES. Stakeholders at local or regional levels include commune city councils (an administrative unit within Mali), and teacher training and professional development centres, such as teacher resource centres and teaching academies.

OMAES communication and advocacy activities (see Figure 3) aim to inform and influence grassroots and local stakeholders through strategies such as:

- holding and participating in town meetings
- engaging with local Beekunko clubs and opinion leaders who have been recruited to publicly advocate for improving the quality of education
- disseminating regional reports based on Beekunko assessment data, social media and marketing campaigns, among other activities.

The federal Ministry of Education is another primary stakeholder at the national level, and OMAES advocacy activities include public campaigns for the endorsement of the Beekunko national report.

Communication and advocacy activities were mapped to specific stakeholder groups, which helped to clarify the program's theory of change and intended short-, mid- and long-term evaluation outcomes. Specifically, OMAES plans to evaluate the contribution of Beekunko towards:

- changing social norms among identified stakeholders for improving children's learning
- strengthening its base of support among civil society and key stakeholder groups for supporting Beekunko's messages and education reform more broadly
- enacting changes in education policymaking and practice at local and national levels, which are informed by or align with Beekunko assessment results.

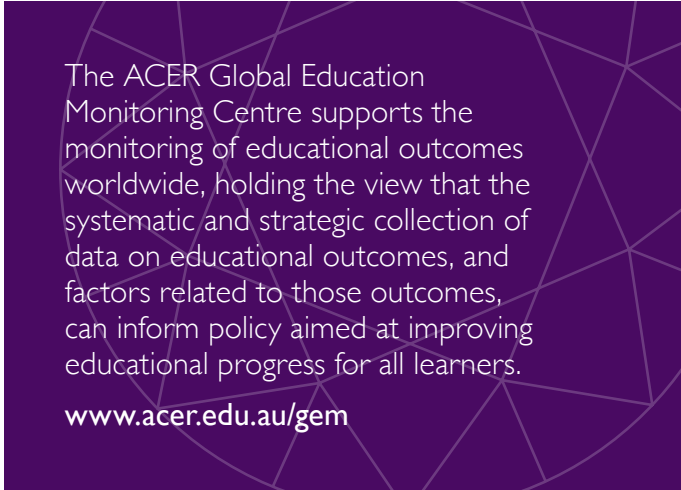
OMAES also developed a framework for monitoring its own short-term program outputs, or achieved communication and advocacy activities using available data, such as monitoring and tracking the number and frequency of activities. Outputs may track, for example, the number and frequency of town hall meetings organised by OMAES, and stakeholder attendance at these meetings.

Evaluation approach

Since Beekunko is an ongoing assessment program, OMAES has identified the need to develop an evaluation approach and tools to enable the ongoing collection of data for evaluation purposes and to inform future communication and advocacy activities. OMAES and ACER have collaboratively determined that a prospective evaluation approach best suits OMAES's information needs. OMAES will collect baseline data with key stakeholder groups and plans to evaluate the contribution of their communication and evaluation activities over time to changes in policy and practice. OMAES intends to use timely evaluation data to inform ongoing communication and advocacy activities. A prospective evaluation approach prioritises measurement for contribution rather than attribution, and is intended to provide useful data to inform the ongoing nature of the program, and recognises that policy change is a long-term outcome.

Using this evaluation approach and logic model, OMAES and ACER staff worked together to develop measurable indicators for identified evaluation outcomes, and evaluation tools for data collection. Stakeholder groups were further identified and defined, and suggested sampling approaches have been included in the evaluation framework, as well as guidelines for data analysis and reporting, and data use. An evaluation schedule was also outlined, with team members agreeing that the evaluation and monitoring system should first be piloted before being brought to scale among Bεεkunko assessment regions in Mali.

OMAES has now adapted this evaluation approach for three prioritised stakeholder groups: parents, school management committees and decentralised education committees at the commune level. OMAES will administer surveys and conduct focus-group interviews to a sample of these key stakeholder groups to pilot this evaluation approach, procedures and tools with these stakeholder groups in 2016, in one region of Mali. OMAES plans to upscale the evaluation framework in 2017, after a review of insights from the pilot, to a nationally representative sample of regions that have participated in Bεεkunko.

The logo for the ACER Global Education Monitoring Centre (GEM) is a purple square with a white geometric pattern of overlapping circles and lines, resembling a globe or a network. The text is white and positioned on the right side of the square.

The ACER Global Education Monitoring Centre supports the monitoring of educational outcomes worldwide, holding the view that the systematic and strategic collection of data on educational outcomes, and factors related to those outcomes, can inform policy aimed at improving educational progress for all learners.

www.acer.edu.au/gem