

STAR-School as an approach to quality improvement for basic education.

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Since many years, Edukans is involved in improvement of programmes and projects for quality of basic education. Programmes and projects are formulated along three intervention strategies: direct poverty alleviation (DPA), civil society strengthening (CSS) and lobby & advocacy (LA).

- On the level of DPA, the focus is on investments in physical infrastructure and facilities, school materials, teacher training, literacy, life skills education, improvements in the teaching-learning process and school management.
- CSS is about parent and community involvement (e.g. School Management Committees, Parent Teacher Associations), capacity building of NGO's and other stakeholders to claim quality education and hold government bureaux accountable for proper delivery of education.
- Lobby and advocacy (LA) is needed, to influence government, get structural support, force them to invest more in education, hold them accountable for quality standards and sustainability of education for children and youth.

In a recent basic education review of the Inspectorate of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in draft), but in other evaluations as well, one of the major conclusions was the lack of evidence on outcome and impact of basic education programmes financed by the Dutch organisations. What about effectiveness? This is a challenge Edukans takes up very seriously. As a tool to develop projects for education quality improvement, we developed a simple, outcome-oriented model: the **STAR School**.



The STAR School

Several models for education quality have been developed, e.g. the UNESCO-framework for understanding education quality (Unesco, 2005)¹. Models like this are very helpful, but a bit complex to translate into concrete interventions. Starting point for quality education is the school. There is one relevant question: ‘What makes a school a good (or complete) school’?

Edukans focuses specifically on the teaching and learning process and school management. What is actually happening in the classroom?

A good school has five dimensions, making up the Star:

1. an adequate, safe learning environment (infrastructure & facilities, accessibility)
2. pupils learning in an effective and joyful way (relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes)
3. qualified teachers teaching effectively, with high commitment (knowledge, skills, attitudes)
4. capable school management, with vision, monitoring capacities and maintaining good relations with parents, communities and other stakeholders.
5. parent- and community involvement in governance of the school (and not incidentally, when work has to be done)

The five dimensions of the star can easily be operationalised in basic indicators. These can be found in a spreadsheet.

The model can be used in three different ways:

1. for identification of projects on school level and making a school improvement plan with local stakeholders (main results to be achieved, activities needed, corresponding budget allocations).;
2. for assessment and monitoring of existing situation and reporting on yearly progress made. Specific elements can be picked out - e.g. teaching, learning and school management – and linked to Edukans’ exchange programmes (World Teacher, Education Experience).
3. for communication and fundraising purposes, both for the implementing NGO as for Edukans in the Netherlands. We have to show outcome and impact to our backdonors (institutional financiers, companies, foundations, participating schools, private contributors).

Advantages of this model:

- Implementing or supporting NGO’s can plan quality improvement of education in a simple, structured way by using the model.
- For school management, parents and communities it is easier to determine their co-responsibility in making School Improvement Plans and running their school
- Reporting can be easy and dedicated, especially when using the spreadsheet with indicators on the dimensions.
- Concrete data on outcome level facilitate more thorough evaluation on impact later on. Hence, this model is helpful for Edukans as for our partners. We are in the same chain of showing results!
- Edukans uses the STAR-school for communication and fundraising purposes as well, to raise more funds for basic education and become less dependent on subsidies.

¹ http://www.unesco.org/education/gmr_download/chapter1.pdf

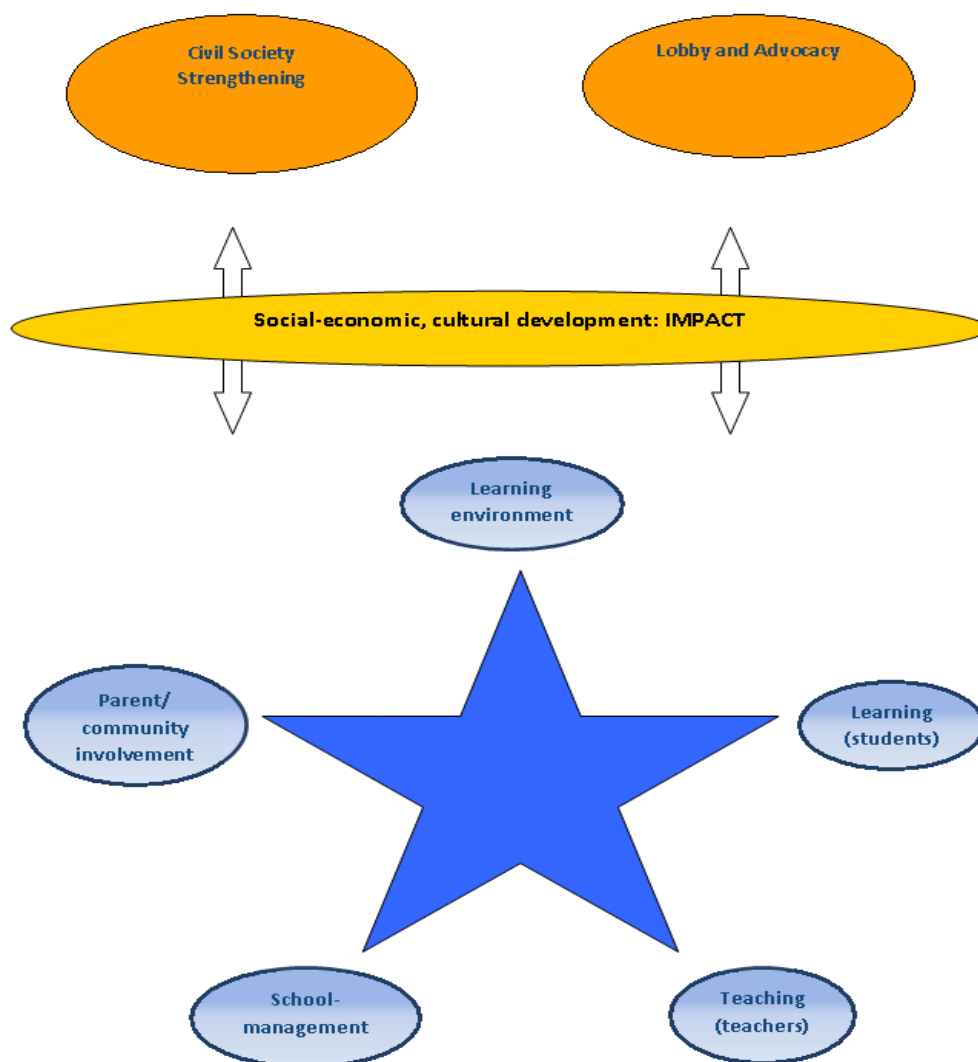
Underlying is Edukans' vision document on teaching and learning², on which we make a specific contribution by organising linking and learning exchanges between:

- teachers from the Netherlands and the South (World Teacher programme);
- TTC students from the Netherlands with teachers from the South (Education Experience)
- Secondary school students with their peers in the South (Going Global)

We start with the school, but from there, education impacts to social en economic empowerment. In her funding strategy, Edukans will explore the link with other themes like fair economic development, conflict transformation, health, sexual reproductive health and rights (including hiv/aids prevention), water & sanitation.

The school is the locus of intervention, but for basic education to become truly sustainable and for more structural 'system change', the wider environment has to be included. This includes civil society strengthening (capacity building) to enable CSO's to claim the right to education and hold governments accountable. Lobby and advocacy are indispensable means to that end. But for lobby 'hard evidence' on effectiveness is a prerequisite.

This can be visualised in an extended model, as follows:



² Forthcoming, to be finalised by September 2011

Regional approach

The strategy is to work in a region or cluster of districts, from a programmatic approach, where different actors complement each other in their strengths:

- capable and dedicated NGO's (implementers, supporting organisations, network and lobby organisations)
- identification of a number of schools (8-10);
- including a teacher training college
- link with vocational training institute
- involvement of Regional Education Bureau
- link with community (information) centres (Connect for Change Alliance)
- knowledge centres
- other relevant actors, institutions or donors

Link with Communication and Fundraising

In order to secure subsidy from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Edukans has to raise at least an own contribution of 30% of the subsidy. But – as subsidies substantially went down since the period 2007-2010 - Edukans strives to raise more funds.

To that end, the STAR-school also serves as a fundraising model. Different groups of supporters can choose either a school or dimensions of the model for funding via Edukans. Good quality information is an absolute requirement to get different parties in the fundraising market involved.

Raising extra funds means that projects are identified and agreed upon within the limits of the Country Education Programme Plan, but for many projects, Edukans can only guarantee funding only if and when funds are available in Edukans' account. Edukans can only be successful in communication and fundraising if supported NGO's deliver quality reporting. Well-performing NGO's can even directly raise their income from successful fundraising by Edukans.

Links between partner & project and Dutch public will become very direct. A special on-line reporting module is being developed. Private foundations, private enterprise and other market parties in the Netherlands will be enabled to participate in projects supported by Edukans. We expect our partners to be open for 'co-creation' in direct cooperation with partners in the Netherlands. There are many benefits to this new way of development cooperation. It also enables the partner organisations to share their work with a wider audience. Nowadays, development organisations both in the North as in the South have to prove their legitimacy!

Annex 1:

UNESCO-framework for understanding education quality (Unesco, 2005). Volledige document, zie http://www.unesco.org/education/gmr_download/chapter1.pdf

