

# Evaluation Digest: Formative Evaluation of the FCDO Data for Foundational Learning Programme

**This Formative Evaluation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Data for Foundational Learning (D4FL) Programme is focused on learning, providing findings on the early implementation of the programme and making recommendations to increase the likelihood of programme success. It is the first of three evaluations of the programme 2024-2027.**

## Summary of Findings

### Relevance

**D4FL's impact of improving foundational learning outcomes is relevant globally and across low-income (LICs) and lower middle-income countries (LMICs).**

The objective of more LMICs reporting internationally on foundational learning is relevant given current SDG commitments and monitoring systems, but the global momentum behind international reporting might be waning.

The objective of increasing state capability to use data to design and monitor foundational learning interventions is widely relevant.

The programme's design is largely relevant to achieving its objectives. Most D4FL-supported activities to date are oriented to supporting internationally comparable reporting, taking advantage of in-country opportunities.

The technical assistance provided by partners includes strengthening country learning data systems, even where the primary goal is to support to report internationally.

However, to date, planned activities have not been focused on generating learning data in emergency contexts. There are also gaps around D4FL's equity objectives, and while all partners intend their work to result in data that is usable in-country, there are limited plans to support that use of data.

Current processes for identifying and meeting countries' needs are effective to meet immediate demand and leveraging partner expertise, but may not be fully strategic against the overall D4FL objectives. The balance of activities between strands may also hamper the equal achievement of both the programme's main objectives.

## Background

The D4FL programme (2023-2027) aims to contribute to more low-income (LICs) and lower-middle income countries (LMICs) reporting internationally, and more state capability to regularly use disaggregated learning data. It has three strands of work, tracking learning outcomes to enable reporting on SDG4 learning objectives (*Track*), generating more data (*Generate*), and ensuring data is used to improve foundational learning (*Use*).

D4FL includes activities at the global, regional and country level, implemented with partners including UNESCO, the World Bank, ACER International United Kingdom (ACER UK), and the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network. The programme has a budget of GBP 27 million.

Mokoro Limited and Oxford MeasurEd are conducting three rounds of evaluation 2024-2027 to assess the extent to which and how the design and implementation of D4FL supports the achievement of its intended outcomes. This formative evaluation was conducted between October 2024 and January 2026.

## Coherence

Partners share a unified aim of improving learning outcomes and agree on the importance of quality foundational learning data to drive action towards this ultimate aim. However the *Track* strand faces potential conflicts due to different views amongst partners about data generation for global reporting.

The *Generate* strand demonstrates strong potential to meet the needs of both the *Track* and *Use* strands. However, tensions between global and local priorities, variability in planning and contextual challenges pose significant risks for this to be achieved.

Partners intend to build on and strengthen existing in-country structures. They are actively working to align the logistical features of data generation exercises to ensure compatibility, and in some cases are integrating these with other assessment initiatives.

This said, partners vary in their approaches to supporting government functions and while partners aim to avoid duplication, instances of perceived or actual overlap at country level, highlight challenges in achieving coherence.

D4FL by design complements other FCDO central and bilateral education programmes, but it is too early to say to what extent this complementarity is leveraged in practice.

## Efficiency

The D4FL commitment to work through country structures has mixed implications for timely and efficient use of resources. Even so, early evidence is that partners manage processes well, deliver on time and are efficient.

Working with country structures can cause delays that are not within the control of the programme. Also, political and institutional factors are likely to influence whether supported countries will go on to undertake regular

assessments, track learning, and use the data for improving instruction and curriculum.

FCDO's decision to source partners directly has helped shorten timelines. Partners appear to have internal processes that will help facilitate timely and efficient use of D4FL resources.

ACER UK, the only D4FL partner with a delivery model responding directly to country support requests, has been swift to agree support and implement activities on the ground in line with country priorities and timelines.

While the number of strands, pathways within strands, partners and countries poses a risk that the programme spreads itself too thinly, this does not appear to have materialised to date.

The FCDO's management of the programme is robust relative to the management resources dedicated, and partners are satisfied with the support provided by the FCDO to keep work moving at pace.

## Effectiveness

Partners are making expected progress in delivering activities and outputs, and early results indicate that there will be at least incremental achievement on the programme outcomes within the programme timeframe.

However, some original programme theory of change (ToC) outcomes and outputs are not well supported, and some activities are not well articulated in the ToC, even where they contribute to programme outcomes or impact.

There is mixed evidence on the extent to which D4FL funded activities adhere to the FCDO's guiding principles for *Generate* and *Use* activities. There is more evidence on government ownership and building state capability, than on including teachers and school leaders and providing cost-effective sustainable solutions.

There is also some early progress towards generating better learning data nationally, but less on the use of data.

## Evaluating impact and sustainability

**The formative evaluation provides good pointers on pathways and criteria to evaluate progress on impact and sustainability in the summative evaluation rounds.**

The evaluation did not evaluate the D4FL fully on these criteria, but gathered information on D4FL's conceptualisation of impact and sustainability, for use in in 2025 and 2026.

Partners' plans include some conceptualisation and integration of avenues to sustainable results, and a good understanding of the barriers, but sustainability can be integrated better.

The D4FL can have wider impact if countries supported by D4FL serve as proof-of-concept of the approaches used, and encourage other countries to work on data generation and tracking.

## Recommendations

Based on findings and conclusions the evaluation team made six recommendations which are summarised below, three about programme design and three about programme implementation.

### Design Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Adjust the D4FL theory of change (ToC) to reflect current programme design and intended mechanisms of change**

**Rationale:** An accurate ToC will enable the summative evaluation to evaluate the D4FL against its intended outputs and outcomes. It can serve as a programming tool, helping partners understand how strands of work fit together, and enabling learning conversations.

**Recommendation 2: Articulate the relative importance of national and global programme objectives**

**Rationale:** The programme ToC weights filling global learning data gaps and providing disaggregated data for use at country level equal weight. In practice, there are often conflicts and trade-offs, however. There is also ambiguity about whether filling global learning gaps means UIS eligibility or any globally comparable data. A clear prioritisation of goals will bring clarity on where additional activities are needed and support better evaluation.

**Recommendation 3: Remove classroom use of assessment as an intended activity strand and shift to a focus on teachers as a key stakeholder group for D4FL *Generate* and *Use* activities**

**Rationale:** The current ToC includes an outcome on strengthened use of simple learning assessment in classroom and community interventions. However, there are currently no planned activities to bring about this output. This would be a substantial new strand of work and would likely require bringing in new partners with the right capabilities.

### Implementation recommendations

**Recommendation 4: Increase the focus on the inclusion of EiE settings as a core programme objective**

**Rationale:** The current programmatic ToC forefronts emergency contexts in intermediate outcomes and outcomes. But this was not identified as a particular focus for implementing partners. One solution would be to reorientate current efforts to ensure a more central focus on EiE contexts, but other global institutions hold the remit on this.

**Recommendation 5: Improve joint thinking and cooperation vertically between FCDO and partners and horizontally between partners at the global and country levels**

**Rationale:** A clear strategy by the FCDO on how it will influence programme direction, and closer cooperation between partners (including all

*Track*, *Generate* and *Use* partners) will contribute to the programme's strands working together better.

**Recommendation 6: Partners should actively strengthen how they work politically to shift political and institutional barriers to regular assessment and use of data, and the FCDO and partners should invest in joint learning on how best to do so.**

**Rationale:** Ensuring assessments are sustainable requires addressing political and

institutional barriers to countries regularly undertaking assessments and using the resulting data to design and implement reforms in the instruction core of foundational learning. This recommendation is aimed at leveraging existing D4FL partnerships and contracted activities, to strengthen the links between *Track*, where a lot of investment is, and *Generate* and *Use*, the engine room of learning improvement.

## Overview of Evaluation Methodology

Mokoro Limited and Oxford MeasurEd are undertaking a mixed-method, Theory of Change-based formative and summative evaluation of D4FL. The overall evaluation objective is to assess the extent to which – and how – the design and implementation of D4FL supports the achievement of its intended outcomes: (1) more LICs and MICs reporting internationally, and (2) more state capability to regularly use disaggregated learning data.

The evaluation takes place in three rounds: this formative learning evaluation, a mid-term summative evaluation in 2025 with learning and accountability objectives, and a final summative evaluation in 2026 that will be retrospective and fully focused on accountability. The evaluation covers all three strands of D4FL (*Track*, *Generate*, *Use*), but evaluates the UNESCO activities supported by D4FL only in terms of their coherence with the D4FL-supported work of the other partners.

The formative evaluation included document reviews and primary data collection at global- and country-level. Data collection took place between 1 October and 11 December 2024. Country cases covered all three implementing partners in scope for the formative evaluation, different stages of implementation and a range of contexts: Ghana (World Bank, ACER UK), Kenya (PAL Network), Nepal (World Bank, PAL Network), Senegal (World Bank, PAL Network) and Somalia (World Bank, ACER UK).

## For more information

This research was carried out by the Independent Evaluation Team of the D4FL Programme. The Independent Evaluation Team is a consortium of partners led by Mokoro together with Oxford MeasurEd.

Authors: Alta Fölscher, Lydia Marshall, Christine Fenning, Rachel Outhred, Paulina Valenzuela, Tal Shalson, Sara Bashir-Malik, Anushay Mazhar.

Report date: 12 February 2026

This policy brief is a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the complete evaluation report which is available at: [https://iati.fcdo.gov.uk/iati\\_documents/S30125923.pdf](https://iati.fcdo.gov.uk/iati_documents/S30125923.pdf).