

# Evaluation Digest: Mid-term Evaluation of the FCDO Data for Foundational Learning Programme

**This Mid-Term Evaluation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Data for Foundational Learning (D4FL) Programme provides findings midway through D4FL implementation and makes recommendations to improve programme design and implementation. It is the second of three evaluations of the programme and will be followed by a final summative evaluation in 2026/2027.**

## Background

The D4FL programme (2023-2027) aims to contribute to progress against Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1.1 and learning poverty reduction in developing countries by strengthening data generation, tracking and use. It has three objectives that contribute to this ultimate impact: global learning data gaps being filled; more disaggregated learning data being available that can be used to design and monitor foundational learning interventions; and increased capability in priority countries 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 Institute for Statistics (UIS), the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM-R), the World Bank, ACER UK, the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network, UNICEF and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The programme has a budget of GBP 27 million.

Mokoro Limited and Oxford MeasurEd are conducting three rounds of evaluations (2024-2027) to assess the extent to which and how the design and implementation of D4FL supports the achievement of its intended

## Summary of Findings

### Relevance

**D4FL's intended impact and objectives are relevant globally and across low-income and lower middle-income countries (LICs/LMICs).**

Global learning poverty persists, and so D4FL's focus on progress toward SDG 4.1.1 remains relevant for LICs/LMICs and the global education community.

The *Generate* and *Use* objectives align with LIC and LMIC needs, as many countries still lack regular, representative, and disaggregated data on foundational learning and the capacity to use it for monitoring and action.

Persistent global learning data gaps also justify the programme's *Track* objectives. D4FL has

responded to the sector's need for pathways for countries to produce comparable global data, though it has not responded to the specific need for learning data in emergency contexts.

Continuing to balance investment in global reporting with investment in data systems that serve countries' own evidence needs will be essential.

### 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, incoherencies within, and a lack of shared narrative across, the D4FL partnership

risk confusing advocacy efforts, and undermining the value of data produced through D4FL-funded activities outside of national government systems.

Overall, D4FL demonstrates a high level of coherence with other global and national efforts to strengthen learning assessment systems, though this coherence is not yet fully consistent across all contexts. The programme is broadly seen as complementary rather than duplicative, aligning with existing national assessments and collaborating with key actors to support harmonised approaches to foundational learning data.

In several countries, D4FL has added value by filling gaps in technical capacity, promoting alignment with SDG reporting requirements, and contributing to greater coherency. However, coherence is often dependent on strong local relationships and FCDO advisor facilitation, meaning coordination varies across countries.

While global-level linkages are strengthening, room remains for more systematic joining-up of FCDO-funded programmes at country level and clearer pathways for how D4FL and related initiatives should complement one another.

### Effectiveness

**Available evidence indicates that D4FL can deliver on its objective of filling global learning data gaps. To date, the programme has supported the generation of foundational learning data that can be submitted to UIS for vetting for 27 countries.**

In delivering this support, partners have used methodologies that can be replicated to track foundational learning elsewhere. There is, however, still uncertainty about whether the data will be accepted in all instances.

The D4FL programme is likely to deliver on its objective of supporting more or better-quality disaggregated data that can be used to design and monitor foundational learning interventions, and, in some countries, data that are more easily accessible for use, or made more useful for decision-making in country. To

date, however, D4FL has not strengthened capabilities to use data in any significant way.

The programme has made little progress on filling global data gaps on emergency contexts, or country-level gaps on learning data for populations that are often excluded. This is particularly challenging at this point in time, in the context of the disruption to the aid architecture and to the progress being made on learning measurement in EiEPC contexts.

### Efficiency

**Broadly, the D4FL programme's allocation of its resources, both by FCDO and partners, is in line with its aim and objectives.** Although programme implementation has faced delays, these are not concerning as they are being managed and mitigated.

Most resources are ostensibly allocated to the *Track* strand of work, which could raise concern about D4FL's cost-effectiveness in delivering on addressing global learning poverty. However, most D4FL-supported interventions focus on adapting existing national assessments for global reporting, and so also contribute to strengthened country assessments, with links to use of data to develop and monitor education policies and interventions in many. This is an encouraging signal on cost-effectiveness, strengthened by the programme crowding in and leveraging resources from other sources towards its aim.

A potential detracting factor is the extent to which replicating D4FL-supported models would depend on the availability and cost of what is seen as relatively scarce global TA.

### Impact

**There is little evidence on progress toward impact at this mid-term stage. Most data to be generated through the D4FL programme are not yet available, and so it is too early to assess whether data are used to apply pressure at global and country level for action on foundational learning.** Nevertheless, the Mid-Term Evaluation has identified factors that may make impact more and less likely.

Although capacity building of assessment authorities being built into the scope of work in many countries increases the potential for future impact, that impact could be inhibited by the programme’s limited investment in data analysis, dissemination and use. The Mid-Term Evaluation also found limited evidence of partners working to engage and support users of data, although activities that link data generation to data use are part of the intended scope of work in ten countries supported by ACER UK and the World Bank.

Another positive signal towards impact is the intention of the PAL Network, working in 13 countries, to apply pressure for action on foundational learning. The Network has developed detailed stakeholder analysis and action plans, including global dissemination in 2025 and national/regional work in 2026.

### Sustainability

**There is evidence of promise regarding the sustainability of D4FL’s results at country- and global-level, but while the evaluation has**

## Conclusions

### Is the D4FL programme producing the intended results?

**D4FL’s first outcome, “Global learning data gaps filled, including in emergency contexts”, will likely be only partially met.**

The programme will result in more internationally comparable data on foundational learning being generated. It is yet to be seen, however, whether data generated will be accepted by UIS for SDG reporting. There is a risk that D4FL-supported data not being accepted limits their potential for impact. In addition, it is unlikely that the programme will make a notable difference to global learning data gaps for emergency contexts. If these gaps are not closed, this limits the potential for the programme to lead to impact on foundational learning outcomes for all children.

**evidence of several factors likely to support lasting change, it has also identified notable risks.**

Foundations for sustainability are being laid through strong government ownership, the institutionalisation of national assessments, and capacity-building efforts that are strengthening local systems and organisations. However, risks to sustainability include continued reliance on external funding and TA, particularly where item and test development and psychometric expertise and costly software are required; turnover of key personnel, particularly where TA focuses on individuals; and political economy dynamics – such as sensitivity to negative results or shifting priorities.

Overall, while D4FL has set important building blocks for sustained benefits, long-term sustainability will depend on institutionalised resourcing, distributed capacity (beyond individuals) and continued incentives for countries to value and use foundational learning data beyond the D4FL window.

**The second outcome, “More disaggregated learning data available that can be used to design and monitor foundational learning interventions”, will likely be met.**

The programme is expected to result in new, high-quality foundational learning data being generated, and national assessments in several countries being strengthened. These data will have the potential to inform the design and monitoring of foundational learning interventions and policies, with the potential for this to lead to more and better-quality action on foundational learning being strongest where data use has directly informed the design of assessments and assessment systems.

**D4FL’s third and final outcome, “Increased capability in priority countries to use learning data to design and monitor foundational learning interventions”, is at risk of not being**

**met and, if it is met, will likely only be partially so.**

The majority of D4FL-funded TA is focussed on assessment departments and technocrats, with the scope of support being primarily or exclusively focused on data generation and analysis rather than data use. In addition, while data use activities are planned, it is not clear whether and how those activities will strengthen the capabilities of participants to understand and make decisions based on learning data. If capability to use learning data is not improved in priority countries, the intended pathways to impact of increased government action and improved quality of action on foundational learning in priority countries are at risk.

**Is the D4FL programme representing good value for money?**

**In many respects, the D4FL programme presents good value for money.**

Across many countries, D4FL supports the generation of learning data while also building national and regional assessment capacity, including through national assessments, regional institutions, and networks such as PAL. Partners largely respond to country needs, with evidence of country ownership and some prospects for

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: FCDO and implementing partners should deepen the focus on data for in-country use.**

**Rationale:** The D4FL programme has always contained potential trade-offs between producing globally comparable data for tracking and generating better data for country use to improve learning outcomes. The pathway to impact from global reporting relies on global pressure and donor funding driving action. In the current context of shocks and uncertainties in the global development architecture, D4FL should prioritise actions that places country use and impact at the centre.

sustainability. D4FL has successfully piloted replicable methodologies for tracking foundational learning globally, creating potential for wider uptake beyond the programme. Its relatively small, catalytic investments leverage much larger resources, are efficiently used by partners, and complement rather than duplicate existing learning data initiatives.

**Despite these strengths, several features of D4FL's implementation reduce its value for money.**

Progress on the *Use* objective lags behind data generation and global tracking, limiting the programme's overall impact on learning outcomes. In addition, some country investments have prioritised global reporting without sufficiently building national capacity or data use. Expected complementarities with other FCDO education investments were not yet evident at country level at scale. Separately, the reliance on intensive technical assistance raises concerns about scalability and affordability. Sustainability is further weakened by funding uncertainty, staff turnover, limited engagement with data users, and ongoing gaps in partner coordination that risk fragmented or competing approaches to data generation.

**Recommendation 2: D4FL/FCDO should drive alternative options of supporting countries to build their assessment capacities.**

**Rationale:** The D4FL-funded model of providing technical assistance to build national assessment capacity may not be replicable or sustainable in all LICs and LMICs due to cost and limited TA availability. Other models, such as AMPLs and MICS, need less TA but may deliver fewer benefits for country data use. This calls for new, cost-effective approaches that strengthen national data generation and use while still supporting global reporting. Governments may also require support choosing from the approaches available to them, including such new approaches.

**Recommendation 3: Implementing partners should extend their efforts on ownership and use of data in their country-level support.**

**Rationale:** The Mid-Term Evaluation has concluded that D4FL is still at risk of not meeting, or only partially meeting, its *Use* objectives. There is still time for D4FL, its partners and country team leads to build stronger links to data use, where such links are not present in its investments in data generation.

**Recommendation 4: The D4FL programme should seek ways to ensure that learning data are more inclusive, including more data for children affected by emergencies.**

**Rationale:** Expanding global learning data for emergency settings and other often-excluded groups, including children with disabilities, are important objectives for the D4FL programme.

Although recognising that implementing partners have limited influence over whether these groups are included in supported assessments, the MTE concluded that FCDO is likely to only achieve these objectives to a limited extent.

**Recommendation 5: The D4FL programme and its implementing partners should focus on the sustainability of results in the remaining programming period.**

**Rationale:** The evaluation finds that D4FL is likely to achieve its objective of generating more disaggregated data to inform and monitor foundational learning interventions and to help fill global learning data gaps. However, the sustainability of these results beyond the programme is at risk due to contextual and programmatic factors. There remains scope, alongside recommendations 1–4, for further action to mitigate these risks.

## 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.

The evaluation takes place in three rounds: a formative learning evaluation in 2024/25, this mid-term summative evaluation, and a final summative evaluation in 2026/27 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 Mid-Term Evaluation included document reviews and primary data collection at global- and country-level. Data collection took place between 31 March and 05 November 2025. Country cases covered all implementing partners in scope for the evaluation and a range of contexts: Ghana (World Bank, ACER UK), Kenya (PAL Network, NFER), Mexico (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.

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This 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/S30125922.pdf](https://iati.fcdo.gov.uk/iati_documents/S30125922.pdf).