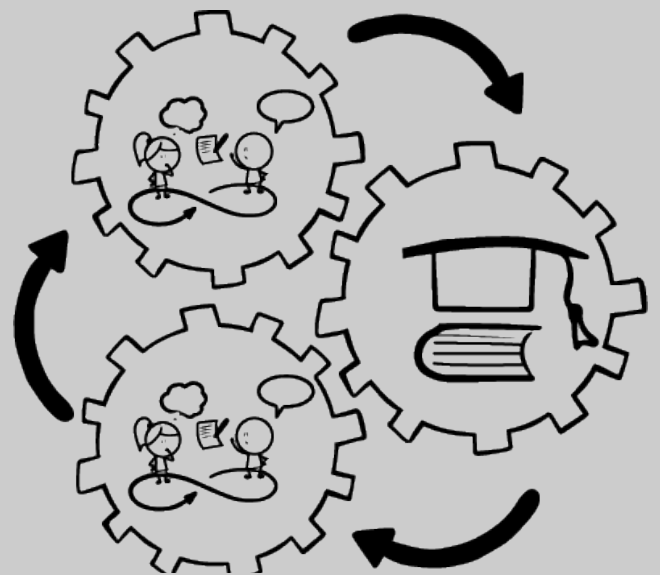Ex-post evaluation of USAID- and World Bank-funded social
accountability programming in the Dominican Republic

Layering **Social Accountability** Interventions to Strengthen Local Education Systems

September 2024
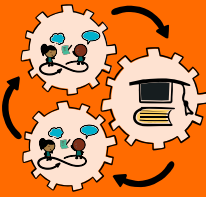

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Acknowledgements and Disclaimers

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Executive Summary

HOW DID TWO SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECTS CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

NEW APPROACH TO EX-POST EVALUATION CHAPTER 2

1. Put front and center the people & relationships that are:
   - The interventions
   - The thread that ties the system together
2. Bring intertemporality
3. Think of outcomes as moving and modulating targets that contribute to systems strengthening thanks to their coherence

GLOSSARY

Layering: is a strategy that works within the parameters of a system by placing new elements on top of old ones in the hope that their interactions gradually shift the way the system functions over a period of time

Resonance: Change happens by finding resonances with system change makers through deliberation, compromise & coordinated collective action

CONTEXT

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC SINCE THE LATE 1990s:

- Low quality education is a constant
- Key stakeholders are moving across the system all the time
- Short-term reform efforts are everywhere

FINDING

TWO APPARENTLY SILOED WORLD VISION PROJECTS:

READ + [image] = **3**

COMMUNITY COMPONENT USAID - FUNDED 2016 - 2020

WORLD BANK/ GPSA – FUNDED 2019- 2023

ADDED UP TO SUM OF THEIR PARTS

BRICKLAYERS EXERCISE THEIR AGENCY BY LAYERING SHORT-TERM PROJECTS & REFORM EFFORTS ON TOP OF EACH OTHER

At the school level, layering was used to strengthen relational infrastructures as well as to recombine and rearrange social accountability tools methodological principles and practices

Layering helped to dynamize, stretch and provide new meaning to existing laws regulating participation in school-based management

Contributed to strengthening school-based management, new practices in some schools communities (i.e. emergent outcomes which are effectively adaptations of the original input original intervention, CHAPTER 3)
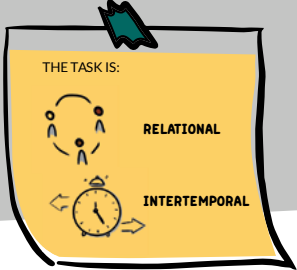
Strengthening the system was about enhancing the functionality and leveraging the plasticity of some of its parts

Key MINERD authorities and staff re-imagine and reach an agreement about how existing participatory structures might be put to work better in practice. Those agreements are codified in a MINERD / World Vision document that continues to inform discussions about reform efforts (CHAPTER 4 for Resonance at work via layering)
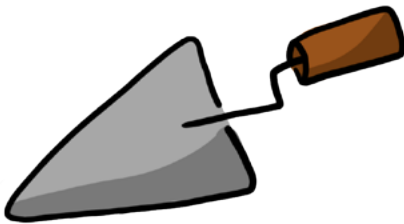
THE TASK IS:

RELATIONAL

INTERTEMPORAL

World Vision

3

Contents

Layering social accountability to strengthens local systems * Guerzovich & Aston

1. Introduction

1. Introduction

Strengthening education systems is a challenging endeavor, especially when partial decentralization has co-existed with a plethora of short-term reforms and persistently low-quality results. This is the case of the Dominican Republic, where this ex-post evaluation traces the gradual contributions of what appear to be fragmented social accountability interventions to systems strengthening.

The main finding is that it is possible for different stakeholders working toward a common objective of systems strengthening to layer short-term reform efforts on top of each other and in so doing bring new functionality. Layering can dynamize, stretch, and provide new meaning to existing components of a local education system, whether at school or policy levels. Interactions and the relational infrastructure that underpins them help to uncover the conditions under which the whole adds more than the sum of the individual interventions in strengthening the local education system.

This finding has important implications for evaluating and learning about relational and intertemporal system-strengthening efforts.
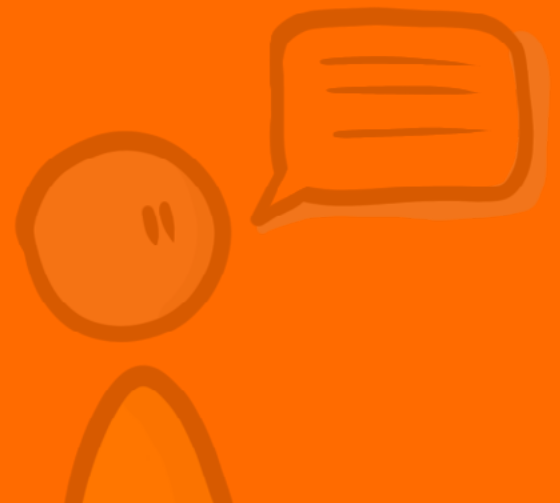
1.1 Transforming Education Systems Sustainably

Continuity and change are inextricably intertwined in education systems the world over. Some students can be trapped in low-performance equilibria while others benefit from where learning, or its determinants, are markedly improving—even within the same educational system.

Partial decentralization and participatory reforms interact with long-standing rules that seem dormant, while change-makers leading these interventions often move around the education system. The leaders and members of relevant civil society organizations (CSOs) often change during projects and beyond while the sector is a half-empty political space relative to others (children's voices are not salient, parents dispersed and face high barriers to participation, business focused elsewhere, etc.). Clientelist practices persist while key actors in education, from government ministers to school principals, change places with every electoral cycle. In this case, we saw volunteers become teachers, teachers become principals, principals become district education officers (técnicos), education officers become vice-ministers, and even non-government organization (NGO) workers become school staff.

In this kind of education system, many investments that may look like "best buys" in the short term, such as building teachers' capacities with tried-and-tested pedagogical tools, as well as those of school managers and supervisors, or producing data, may ultimately be less than ideal. The political dynamics of the systems mean that such investments may not fit well with it over time. When people who receive training are likely to be replaced before, during, or after an election, they take away such investments with them. Education ministries have to start from scratch and reinvest all over again. This is the case of the Dominican Republic, discussed in Box 1, where the challenge is not simply a matter of identifying short-term "best buys" or issuing stroke of the pen decisions. **The challenge is not to "make" others do what we want them to do.** It is about ensuring that external investments are useful, in the sense that **they strengthen abilities and capacities** among local actors who collectively will lead the work towards unlocking and sustaining positive outcomes. The test is as much about preempting a vicious cycle of repeated ineffectual short-term spending patterns as it is about enabling the education system to interact with local governance in a coherent way.

As *USAID/UNIBE Leer (hereafter READ)*'s[1] formal evaluation which took place several years after World Vision's part in it had ended also shows, that if limited attention is given to a particular area, such as community engagement and the functionality of APMAEs, it is possible to miss key elements that may contribute to sustainability.

Under these conditions, how, if at all, would social accountability interventions contribute to change intentionally and collectively? Can such changes be resilient in the longer term? What would evaluators find should they come back years later and look at sustainability?[2]

This evaluation is anchored in "**systems practice**". **A key point of departure is that, to understand systems strengthening, people and relationships (or relational infrastructures) are the thread that ties the system together in the long term.** This ex-post evaluation seeks to address this issue by taking sustained change seriously, by going back and looking at how what might have seemed to be disconnected projects were implemented in different moments in order to see whether and how the whole may add up to more than the sum of its parts.

The evaluation also puts emphasis on the connective tissue across projects over time, i.e., the overlapping sets of actors embedded in the evolving relational infrastructure. When relationships of a different quality (or **soft governance**) are **activated** at a particular level or across different levels, both the system and its outcomes become stronger (i.e., we are looking for **relational outcomes**). In placing the emphasis on the relational and temporal dimensions of strengthening education systems, this ex-post evaluation thus seeks to help improve evaluation theories and methods to provide evidence of how **interventions can contribute to local systems change over time**.

> The political, institutional, and technical dimensions of reform efforts over two decades is that for effective and durable reform, all specific interventions, policy reforms and project activities - decentralization, service delivery, dialogue, information and analysis, teacher training, workshops, textbooks and testing - must be understood and strategized in the context of longer-term goals and trends (**Gillies, 2010**)

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1.2 An intertemporal theory-based approach to evaluation

This evaluation is about two strands of interventions—education and social accountability—that jointly contribute to shifts (intentionally) happening. There is no ready-made framework to assess this kind of complex change, but there are many useful theoretical building blocks that we can put together.[3] The evaluation discusses some of those propositions, emphasizing those that are uniquely related to its interest in better pay-offs in assessing interventions in their temporal context.

The evaluation builds on the growing consensus that theory-based evaluations are well suited for ex-post evaluation of complex, political processes.[4] **The theoretical anchor for this exercise is a nested theory of change (ToC) that maps alternative pathways to scaling up of social accountability efforts as well as the conditions under which each path holds most promise** (see Figure 1). This emergent theory of change, produced in collaboration with World Vision, highlights how different types of social accountability practitioners shape and navigate three distinct pathways to scale. These are the replication of "best practice," through leveraging the countervailing power of resistance, and seeking resonance with existing public-sector efforts.

Figure 1: A nested theory of scale-up
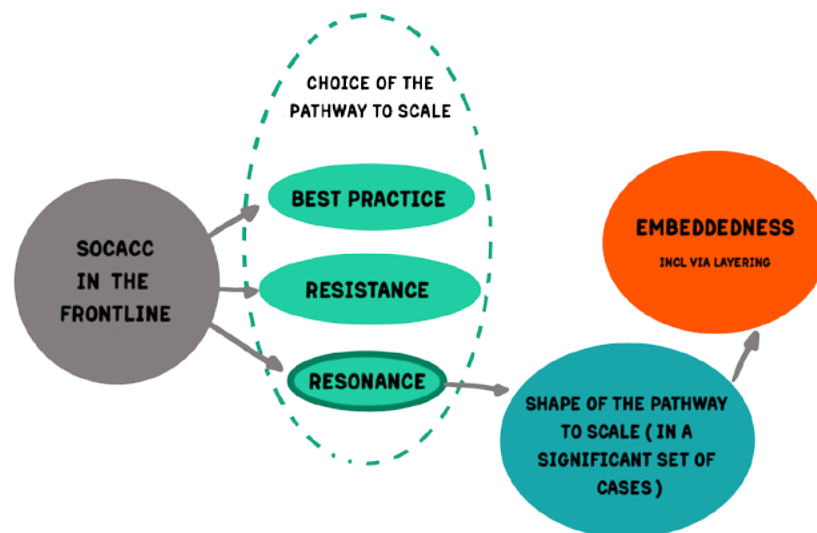
Source: Adapted from Guerzovich, et al.2022

At the core of the evaluation's ToC is the notion that social accountability interventions can contribute to strengthening education systems via <u>resonance.</u>[5] Resonance is a change pathway in which we expect agents to identify, pick up, and adapt *elements* from their own and others' efforts. A relational process—**<u>social learning</u>**—helps connect and reflect on different experiences, types of knowledge and perspectives across the education system. Within this process, coordination may be loose and emergent and does not presuppose harmonization of interests; compromises are called for to enable synergies with new elements of the education system. These processes—who takes part and how interactions happen—influence what resources are available for action and what the outcomes of action look like.

Resonance does not have one single way of materializing in an education system, or a single direction of travel. There are many common assumptions about and examples of replication and adaptation **<u>side-ways</u>**, for example from one school to another. There are **<u>good theoretical explanations </u>** in the broader literature about institutional change to assume that other **<u>causal pathways </u>** are possible. Thus, this evaluation continues the exercise of striking a balance between further testing and validating paths identified in the social accountability literature as well as surfacing previously existing pathways, which often remain a blind spot in evaluations and research.

In particular, the evaluation focuses on what has been defined as a "*<u>causal hotspot</u>*": **understanding the pay-offs and mechanisms of a more integrated and <u>coherent </u> approach to systems strengthening by focusing on the trajectory of <u>layering social accountability interventions and reform efforts</u> over time. The evaluation calls the agents of change who carry out this layering, "bricklayers."** These are discussed in greater depth in Box 2.[6]

1.3 Evaluating the change-making efforts

To advance this approach to evaluating local systems strengthening, this evaluation focuses on two separate World Vision interventions that sought to contribute to the quality of learning in the Dominican Republic: USAID READ (or Leer in Spanish) and Community Participation in How is My School Doing (MCPCVME is the Spanish acronym used hereafter). Box 3 introduces both projects.

The evaluation was conducted between April and July 2024. It was sponsored by World Vision-US Accelerator Fund and the cases, tools, and approaches reflect the desire to build the evidence base for the organization's social accountability approach as well as support innovation in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) for stronger programming on local systems. For additional information on the analytical framework the evaluation used, see the Annexes.

1.4 Findings

1. **Projects did not Replace the Rules but Introduced Adjustments to Make the Rules Function Better**

The evaluation's main finding is that local education system strengthening can happen when new reform efforts, such as the two World Vision projects evaluated here, help to dynamize, stretch, and provide new meaning to existing components of a local education system. The participatory architecture of the education system in the Dominican Republic was established in the 1990s and re-regulated in 2000. These **collaborative social accountability** interventions did not seek to overhaul the regulation, but rather experimented with an approach to bring in parents into schools' existing participatory structures (APMAEs) through social accountability processes and documenting emerging lessons. As a result, they made old components of the education system interact with new ones. New practices stretched these structures, filled regulatory gaps, and added greater direction to ambiguous statements in the law, changed practices in some schools' communities, and helped other key stakeholders across the system, Ministry of Education (MINERD) authorities and staff, including education officers (*técnicos*) from regions and districts re-imagine and reach an agreement about how APMAEs might be enabled to work better in practice. Those agreements are codified in a MINERD/World Vision document which MINERD's public officials continue to use to inform their internal discussions about how to reform and strengthen the functioning of APMAEs.

Social accountability interventions contributed to a milestone that few have achieved: a document co-produced between authorities and civil society that is used to inform policy discussions to strengthen the education system.[7] This document combines insights built by improving how participatory school-based management works in a set of schools and those of officials across the system. The document is a relational outcome, which is best understood as moving, or modulating targets, which evolve with the system and its needs. It is not about finite projects which on their own achieve change according to their own lights.

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2. Win-Win Results: Adaptations Rather than Reproductions

At programmatic and school level, it is also possible to observe the contribution of World Vision's interventions to emergent outcomes that are effectively adaptations of the original input or intervention. They are neither wholly new creations nor faithful reproductions of the past. As with other forms of collective change, combined learning across interventions such as those that informed World Vision's project proposals, community report manuals, approaches to get on the good side of principals and parents, or school's action plans, were not completely flexible. Experiences in *READ* and the World Bank-funded CVME project (discussed below) informed the conclusions reached in MCPCVME and, in turn, its results. For example, a school that had participated in *READ* learned the value of having a teacher to provide extra support for learning and added that goal to its action plan. Other schools reached the same conclusion but used other tools (e.g., diagnostics), or compared the education officers and school communities who had good and poor relationships with CVME. MCPVME took advantage of the layers left by the *READ* intervention to advance, but left CVME to one side while often trying to overcome unintended consequences of "helicopter research" that damaged communities' trust in external projects.

3. Projects Capitalize on the Past and Create Resources for the Future

Enhancing the plasticity of parts of the education system by stretching its boundaries is an intertemporal endeavor. The interventions opened a new range of possibilities within a pre-existing path and became a precedent for processes that continued after projects closed. In retrospect, the World Vision projects were anchored in and influenced by a series of reform efforts in the education and social accountability sectors. If the World Bank's reform efforts in the early 2010s had introduced Dominican change-makers to Community Reports (*Reportes Comunitarios*) rather than other social accountability tools, for those actors that had embraced and made their own adaptations to Community Reports by 2014 or 2020 the costs of changing again would have been high. The challenge was to use new short-term interventions to introduce a complementary, yet innovative, approach that could move reform efforts forward. World Vision's build-up of lessons from its two projects seems to have this intertemporal quality that enables other actors to continue using (or being interested in using) the project's outputs and outcomes after the interventions had come to an end. This includes people such as the volunteer who became a teacher and who

continues to implement and disseminate lessons in her school community, or the bureaucrats, politicians, donor staff, and former World Vision local staff who do the same from their respective positions in the system.

4. Investing in People and the Quality of their Relationships Pays-off

This is a story of people making contributions to a collective trajectory of change. Their agency is critical for these individuals to make choices given their personal motivations, skills, experiences, and from their place in the education system at any given point (and which may change over time). And yet, their agency is most effectively exercised when these actors draw on, build, and develop relationships with others who are also pushing in a similar direction. The pre-existing relationships of trust with World Vision's local staff and World Vision as an organization with MINERD officials, much like that of World Bank staff, opened doors to other colleagues and schools. Relationships between World Vision's local staff and school staff built during *READ* seem to have enabled them to implement a collaborative approach to social accountability, while overcoming challenges during the transition to MCPCVME. These two sets of relationships came together when advancing the co-production of a MINERD/World Vision Protocol for social accountability. Their successful contribution to the system does not reflect the individual rationale of an organization implementing its own approach to social accountability in isolation, but rather lies in the collective rationale of the relational infrastructure in which its staff and allies were embedded.

5. Bricklayers put Interactions Between Old and New in Motion

The main way through which these agents contributed to incremental change was by layering interventions at school, programmatic, and education system-wide levels, which we call bricklayers, and who performed a function that activates positive interactions (or mitigates negative ones) among components of the education system over time. In the case of this evaluation, for example, in 2024 it identified processes that leverage training from the 2010s and the cumulative lessons of projects implemented in the preceding years. The Protocol used in these processes is not a

wholly new set of rules, but rather aims to amend, revise, or add to the existing Ordinance (*Ordenanza*) by filling gaps. Moreover, the Protocol is influential because MINERD officials incorporated it into materials they put together to inform discussions about how to update the Ordinance. It is the interaction of the old and the new layers that imprints gradual movement of the system in the direction change agents had hoped. All these processes embody the way bricklayers advanced along the resonance pathway to change, i.e., privileging social learning, deliberation, compromises, and collective action.

6. Working Relationally Smooths the Path To Strengthen Responsive Systems

Bricklayers advanced change across all layers of the education system, but they focused mainly on the micro level where they reworked agreements between citizens and school authorities on their mutual roles and responsibilities and, in turn, contributed to responsiveness. In schools, as at the national level, the denser the bricklayers' relational network infrastructure established with the relevant communities, the greater seems to have been their ability to advance change (or overcome problems). This is partly why schools that had been part of *READ* seem to have had a smoother transition to MCPCVME than non-*READ* schools, despite contextual and programmatic obstacles.

7. Findings can be Useful for Education Systems with Similar Political Economy Dynamics

While our findings are not generalizable[8], they are transferable to similar settings. In triangulating bricklayers' insights and trajectories and the literature on the political economy of the local system, it is possible to infer the potential transferability of findings by identifying key moderating factors which could be tested in a comparative assessment. These characteristics include a combination of three interrelated characteristics: a) a highly hierarchical education system—where the top has to signal acquiescence for action at the frontline and those in lower systems face high barriers to feed insights back up the system; b) a system where there are frequent change initiatives and changes in actors in the public sector and civil society, if not cyclically associated with elections and projects, and that change coexists with long-term stability of low-equilibrium outcomes and clientelist practices; and c) a system that is disposed against transformative change

because it includes **many actors who would block innovation (implicitly or explicitly) and the actors across the system have little space to reinterpret the rules and go their own way**. Many education systems remain hierarchical, there are often frequent changes with electoral cycles due to political clientelism, and indeed many also have strong blockers. So, the case of the Dominican Republic is not wholly unique.
In education systems with other characteristics, other strategies may be more promising to advance along the resonance pathway to change and/or other pathways may be riper for action.

8. Evaluations can be More Useful when they Align with Lived Experience

In paying attention to these functions in theoretical and methodological design, evaluators can better observe patterns and outcomes that might otherwise remain unnoticed or be misconstrued. For example, an evaluator's initial hunch may be to assess whether participants mastered new technical competences. However, if the most important function of the training is actually to convene civil society actors and public officials, so that the latter learn about, trust, and build a relationship with the former, **assessing participants' technical competencies might miss the point.** A public official might score low in the training's final test, and yet the intervention may be more productive if they can spot an opportunity to bring new trusted relationships with civil society into a discussion about a reform effort where they can share the technical details. These observations can shift evaluative judgements as well as the nature of the story an evaluation tells. In particular, by focusing on causal pathways that matter in the lived experience of change agents, evaluators can produce insights and recommendations that are more **useful and empowering** to change-makers.
If bricklayers think that their effort is not about a specific brick, tool, document, or personal style, but rather about how those collectively make the system work over a longer period, then evaluators may also benefit from embedding "cathedral thinking" to evaluative judgements.

1.5 Outlines

This evaluation presents a story that focuses on the pay-offs of investments that jointly made a strategic contribution in actors, relationships, and relational infrastructure in schools and the national education system. These investments turned out to be strategic because they have mattered, cumulatively, over the last 20 years. Assessing and conveying **this complex system strengthening story is harder than telling one focused on how some external actor came and "juiced the system today to work for a while**." To do so, the evaluation presents three key types of insights about local education systems strengthening over time, which can be read as stand-alone chapters. Each chapter is color-coded to help readers find the entry point of interest:

CHAPTER 2 Methodologies fit for evaluating layering interventions in specific levels of governments and across levels of government over time. (purple)

CHAPTER 3 Layering effects at the micro level or school level. (green)

CHAPTER 4 Layering at the macro level or education policy level. (blue)

Collectively, these insights inform the analysis and key findings of this evaluation, which are recapped in the conclusion in **CHAPTER 5** (color-coded in orange as the introduction).

ANNEXES include additional details on the evaluations' analytical and methodological framework as well as a glossary.

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Box 1

The Education System in the Dominican Republic

Learning is a team effort. No single actor, approach, or intervention can address the "learning crisis" in the Dominican Republic on its own, a crisis which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A **2024 Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)-World Bank report** shows that only 10% of Dominican students attain basic competences, overall lagging seven years behind the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Of the 81 countries where students take the standardized Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, the Dominican education system ranks 79th in providing quality math education and 74th in reading.

Interventions can contribute to learning outcomes by addressing proximate and systemic causes as well as creating positive synergies with other efforts and factors in the system. The **World Development Report of 2018** identified entry points for systemic reform, which include financing or school-based management, among others.
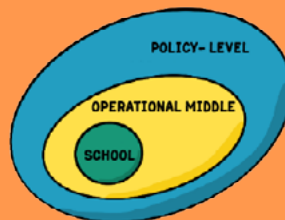
These entry points can be addressed at macro, meso, or micro levels of the education system, where there can and have been efforts to promote stronger school-level management/social contracts for quality education as well as healthier, more effective, and democratic decentralized governance:

• **At the macro level,** policy-making, where trends and guidelines for the education system are **negotiated and set**—from the priority of the education sector, to a shift toward improving access to quality education, to the level of commitment to decentralized and participatory governance in a context of a clientelist **political settlement** where there are gaps between public speeches, law, and practice.

• **At the <u>meso level</u>**, the stakeholders, processes, information, and technical insights as well as resource flows, rules, and incentives that govern the implementation of policy guidelines, set the context for a particular sector's frontline delivery. They can include, for example, definition of portfolios that prioritize and enable **<u>interventions expected to target proximate and/or underlying factors that collectively may or may not contribute towards improving learning</u>** and other policy objectives in the education system's bureaucracy, such as organization-level dynamics.

• **At the micro (school) level**, interventions, such as *READ* seek to improve local governance and/or quality education via parent–teacher associations (APMAES is the Spanish acronym used hereafter) and other participatory and accountable school-based management mechanisms that engage stakeholders, including citizens.

In the Dominican Republic, in 2003, 86.9% of schools had legally mandated APMAES (since 2000—*Ordenanza* 092000) (MINERD, 2023) and 2.5% of the national education budget is allocated to school management committees to increase local-level oversight and accountability (World Bank, 2015, 2020). As elsewhere, APMAEs and other school-level governance bodies (e.g. *<u>Juntas de Centro</u>* **<u>in the Dominican Republic</u>**) **<u>have emerged as an operational entry point</u>** where these micro- meso- and macro-level dynamics interact, often in a **<u>partial</u>** and adaptive manner. Efforts to enable and strengthen school-level management or rework parents' engagement in education processes and systems as well as in the life of the school are some of the initiatives by which this happens.

Box 2

Layering and bricklayers

Layering is a strategy that works within the parameters of a system by placing new elements on top of old ones in the hope that their interactions gradually shift the way the system functions over a longer period of time. Layering can happen, for example, when bureaucrats place administrative decisions on top of conflicting or ambiguous laws or when they use a forgotten rule for a new purpose. It may happen when change-makers employ **short-term projects as part of longer-term efforts** or when they take advantage when different actors understand something different by a milestone or indicator to gradually revisit its meaning and alignment with their purpose.

This ex-post evaluation defines bricklayers as skilled change-makers who embark on processes that will take a long time to complete. We chose this metaphor because of its relationship with notions of layering. Bricklayers advance change by placing new reform efforts on top of or alongside others that already exist. The assumption is that by layering the new onto the old they can introduce meaning, and new functionality to the system—i.e., new room for others' gradual innovation—without breaking entirely with the past.

While bricklayers are not the primary actors in accountability relationships that interventions seek to transform, they play an important role that enables others to lead and live change. This ex-post evaluation is unusual in placing bricklayers in the spotlight. This points to the fact that without understanding these efforts, the evaluation would have had significant blind spots and miss important causal links in the process toward understanding the conditions under which system strengthening is possible.

Bricklayers exercise agency in the short term. Successful layering often depends on the individual perspective of agents who interpret and influence the system from the position they occupy at a particular time (a Vice Ministry, or NGO or donor agency staff) and how they use it.

These change agents are embedded in an intertemporal effort with boundaries. The old layer has legacies and lessons that enable and bound change, the new one builds without replicating the earlier layer or continuing a linear trajectory. As with institutional change more broadly, the process of layering can slowly stretch goals and help actors move toward more meaningful change to the point where something functionally new emerges. And a future generation may do something outside the agents' control. In this sense, these are in practice collective and relational efforts, rather than top-down interventions or policies that assume full control.

Box 3

World Vision's programming and evaluations in the Education Sector in the Dominican Republic

Between 2015 and 2020, the **USAID-funded the _READ_** project was implemented by the Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE) as the main contractor. World Vision was a sub-grantee leading its community mobilization component. Between 2019 and 2023, World Vision also led the Community Participation in How is My School Doing Project (MPCVME).

READ worked across eight regions (San Cristóbal, La Vega, Santiago, Puerto Plata, Santo Domingo, Mao, and Cotuí) and 47 districts in 387 schools across the Corredor Duarte, reaching 136,975 primary school pupils (UNIBE, **n.d.**). One of World Vision's key roles in the READ project was leading the **community mobilization component**, which was implemented in **198 of the 387 schools, (52%), which included setting up reading clubs in 64 schools**. World Vision focused on strengthening the leadership of APMAEs, accompaniment of the execution of action plans, and sensitization campaigns aimed at parents about children's rights and the importance of reading.

World Vision implemented the MPCVME project between August 2019 and April 2023 in 60 schools across the same seven provinces of the Duarte Corridor. Nine of the 60 schools in the MPCVME project were also part of the _READ_ project. It developed an adapted version of World Vision's **Citizen Voice and Action** (CVA) methodology, which incorporated scorecards and repurposed the format of action plans from _READ_.

These two projects may seem siloed, sectoral interventions, stemming from the same macro context but with distinct and disjointed meso-level operational logics. Yet, the MPCVME project (which one of the two evaluators conducted) hypothesized that _READ_'s implementation may have laid the relational foundations for effective citizen engagement and responsiveness, which, in turn, can help the system's ability to achieve locally led and sustainable child wellbeing (i.e., quality education).

However, the MPCVME evaluation:
1) Looked at only four of the nine schools in which _READ_ and MPCVME were implemented.
2) Was unable to look at the sustainability of school-level results over time, ex post.[11]
3) Was unable to explore in depth whether uptake beyond schools may have created systematic conditions for sustainability via scale-up.

Bringing in Intertemporality

2. Methodological Innovations: Bringing in Intertemporality

The operationalization of system-aware MEL approaches with causal ambitions can benefit from:

a) Focusing on relationships as a key driver of systems strengthening;

b) Zooming in and out of hotspots;

c) Exploring the (loose) connective tissue between micro-and macro-level change;

d) Extending time horizons to look beyond individual project cycles (e.g., ex-post evaluation, portfolio evaluation).

This chapter underscores key methodological choices associated with the implementation of a theory-based ex-post evaluation through a "systems-practice" lens. These methodological choices are particularly salient for this evaluation because they enabled us to observe emergent outcomes and understand mechanisms that we might otherwise not have seen (see Figure 2 and read more in Box 4). For those interested in other, more "conventional" aspects of the methodological framework of the ex-post evaluation, see Annexes.

Figure 2: What are "Smart Buys"?

TRADITIONALLY		BRINGING IN TIME
Data / Tool / Methodology as solution	**Interventions**	Local agents as problem-solvers leveraging their relationships
Model fidelity and control, whether investments fit with political dynamics or not	**"Good" results**	Adaptation and compromises strengthen abilities and capacities for local networks to advance what they find useful
Short-term results, provided all things remain constant	**Time-horizon**	Allow for emergence and potential for longer-lasting results
Expect lack of sustainability and resilience as people and things change	**"Good" Results revisited**	Capitalize on the power of relationships and networks

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World Vision

1.1 Transforming Education Systems Sustainably

1. Spell out your theory-based approach

In Chapter 1 we set out our approach, discussing:

a) Why the evaluation took a theory-based approach to systems strengthening, i.e., the assumptions about the nature of the education system it is assessing, how it may become stronger (or not) with reference to the literature on the political economy of education and the assumptions of change-makers, and what may be right tools for evaluators under those conditions;

b) What specific theoretical assumptions underpin the evaluation and which "causal hotspots" it is most interested in exploring—resonance via layering;

c) How the evaluators approach and relate to theory-based evaluation for local systems strengthening by combining theory building, refinement, and testing.

2. Proactively identify the temporal boundaries of the system

What period should be covered by an evaluation? The timeframes of most evaluations are determined, by default, at the starting date of a program, project, or intervention. In particular, the moment when the main implementers of an intervention receive the funds and officially start the work is considered a critical juncture. Indeed, the timeframe typically ends when the project officially winds up and/or the funds run out.

A system lens calls for looking at the intervention in a (temporal) context. For most interventions, there are numerous prior decisions that are meaningfully part of the process which constitutes **the intervention** (which includes the people as well as their actions and resources) and, therefore, we should proactively question whether the benefits of assessing them as part of a single story outweighs the added costs.

The World Vision team made significant decisions before funding was disbursed to the projects (e.g., selecting partners or key personnel). Furthermore, other (supporting) actors such as donors also made important decisions—from the framing of the intervention to the targeting of regions and schools. Indeed, when these supporting actors made decisions and had either breakthroughs or failures in other projects in their portfolios, or these had direct consequences for the opportunity structure of the projects.

Collectively, as will be discussed in other chapters, these decisions opened or closed doors to the very possibility of layering World Vision's efforts in specific instances. The resulting blind spot would have been causally significant and biased the assessment.

Furthermore, we had to be open to listening and triangulating what actors in the system told us were the "right" spatio-temporal boundaries. Building on <u>Poli et al., 2020</u>, the evaluators had a timeline of possible key milestones dating back more than a decade—long before even the first project, READ. During interviews, however, the evaluators identified a specific event that was not part of our timeline. Had we chosen to leave out this event and of the story by fixing the temporal boundary when the intervention started, or even when the donor decided to open the call for proposals, we would have missed the opportunity to interrogate, observe, and assess whether contributions have been coherent and <u>added up to more than the sum of their parts</u> over time.

3. MEL from different organizational and spatial perspectives

Evaluators' experiences and beliefs shape our understanding of how an intervention or series of interventions may contribute to strengthening a system. The dynamics we were looking for in the local system might reasonably differ. A single perspective may bias our assessment. For example, building on his previous work, one of the evaluators (Tom) was zooming in. He focused on how layering might have been happening at the micro or school level and how, if at all, approaches, methods, or tools might have trickled up or side-ways across the Dominican education system. Flor, on the other hand, was zooming out. She was focused on layering at a macro and programmatic level, how decisions about the scaffolding trickled down and side-ways, and what discontinuous feedback loops and opportunities for uptake might have been influenced, if not opened, by the loose alignment of actors operating there. As such, she was putting greater emphasis on the long-term trajectory of development partners' dialogue in the education sector in the Dominican Republic. Associated with these different perspectives there are also slightly different approaches to process-tracing used at different levels of abstraction.

Secondly, the evaluators chose to look beyond direct contributions within the spatio-temporal boundaries of the two projects studied. They could have delimited their search to what might be directly attributable to the two projects, as others might. For example, the interview questionnaire used for the <u>final evaluation of READ</u> suggests that it is unlikely that it could have surfaced insights discussed here (also see Box 4).

Instead, however, in recognizing that <u>**contextual f(actors) can contribute to system strengthening criteria with different shapes—some are straight lines, others may look like a J and still others can look quite different,**</u> the evaluators were open to the contributions of actors before the official project boundaries and at adaptations that were made after the projects had ended. When evaluators are looking for a square peg (or linear or J-curve), they can miss the round hole (or the trajectory that has fits and starts, loops, and a different shape).

Thirdly, the evaluators avoided the lures of organizational-anchoring and credit-claiming, prioritizing the notion that system strengthening is a result that no single organization can achieve on its own. They considered and valued the contributions of World Vision during, before, and after the two projects had ended. They also explored the role of the two donors that financed and influenced the two projects. Some USAID and World Bank contributions beyond those projects were also considered as part of the overall trajectory of change. More importantly, the contributions of MINERD officials, including national, regional, and district staff, also featured in the analysis. Had they not looked beyond organizational boundaries, the evaluators would have missed the collective nature of the story. This is particularly important in the multiple junctures when staff from one organization move to another that enables (or blocks) the multiplication of insights, cross-learning, opens (or shuts out) opportunities for collaboration, among other functions that are essential for any given organization's effectiveness at a particular moment.

In complex, <u>nested</u> processes, the two perspectives (zooming in and zooming out) would have been incomplete on their own. Engaging diverse temporal, organizational, and spatial perspectives enabled the evaluators to understand each level better, questioning each other's prior assumptions, and paving the way for adapting and improving their understanding of the levels of the system. Zooming in and out of nested spheres of influence over a long period also helped the evaluators to grapple more systematically with understanding who, how, when, and why might these levels have been threaded (or not) and what (loose) connective tissue between micro- and macro-level changes might look like.

4. Frame the story in terms of the outcomes that matter most

Systems-aware social accountability *<u>"aims to contribute to a local system that can address problems as they emerge and evolve to respond to new challenges"</u>* rather than *<u>"for a permanent solution that directly tackles a known problem."</u>* In this context, the evaluators had to reconsider the weight we gave to different <u>**system outcomes**</u>.

While conventional assessments would have paid most attention to tangible and easily observable outcomes—such as whether an official policy document copied language from a project document and has been adopted, or whether the project's tool is replicated without being adapted—this evaluation also pays attention to the intangible factors such as relationships, mental models (e.g., new understandings of stakeholders' roles or what is valued), and power asymmetries that influence whether and under which conditions such language works (or may work) in practice. These intangibles matter in order to understand what it takes for a disengaged parent or guardian to embrace a new role in the school community and participate in action planning, a principal to overcome mistrust of World Vision staff and support the celebration of APMAEs, or for bricklayers to pick and choose which layers they build on and which they discard.

At its core, this evaluation's theory of change expects to tell a story that spans multiple project cycles, and one of these intangibles seems to carry much causal weight. The golden thread is a group of people with relationships doing things based on what they know, who they know, and how they leverage their knowledge and relationships at critical junctures—which may or may not fit with the conventional timelines of individual projects.

Relationships and the relational infrastructure fuel dynamics in the local system. They help actors (and evaluators) identify and take advantage of what they believe to be leverage points in the local system. They also matter because they shape change -makers' experiences, knowledge, and other factors which, in turn, inform how they go about adopting and adapting relevant tools and documents as they navigate changes across the local system. For example, when people implementing a social accountability intervention move to another post within the local system, they may become ambassadors and multipliers for learning from a particular element of an intervention or process implemented in their former job in their new position. When relational dynamics stall, such as when people in government and civil society move to new posts, change-making trajectories often stall (at least temporarily) as a result. When relational dynamics are not included in an evaluation, key aspects of the story are omitted, biasing evaluative judgements.

5. (Re)baseline as relevant

When evaluators change the focus from a view of project interventions promoting and decision-makers simply adopting tools at scale to change-agents "co-producing change" embedded in a relational infrastructure, the pre-implementation state in which

they need to test a ToC and assess outcomes also changes. In the case of this evaluation, the team had to reconsider the baseline parameters used for *READ* and MCPCVME. Most baselines begin when the contract is signed, thus ignoring the causal significance of previous actions that may have a bearing on project outcomes. For example, while MCPCVME's baseline evaluation (which Tom did) identified numerous potentially relevant causal factors as part of a realist approach, the quantitative data used at the school level to identify the "baseline" came from the endline survey of the CVME project to understand things such as whether school actors participated in the election of the school council, for example. It did explain the context-stretching back to the 1997 education law but made only two brief references to the fact that some of the 60 schools had also participated in the USAID-funded READ project. The evaluator was indeed unaware that most members of the MCPCVME team had worked in the *READ* project (until the mid-term evaluation) and thus did not know about the potential relevance and extent of prior actions and relationships within World Vision. These insights emerged and became salient during this ex-post evaluation. When the evaluation is about change-makers exercising their agency, their prior experiences, and the relational infrastructure in which they are embedded, what really matters is to understand the nature of those factors at the point of establishing the baseline. To observe whether key change agents are part of a group that is able to loosely collaborate, solve problems, and collectively drive change, **is only possible when one knows what one is looking for.** Only then it is possible to begin observing how the connective tissue of that relational infrastructure (e.g., shared trust, values, experiences, knowledge, goals) is evolving at specific moments and over time.

6. Set reasonable expectations

When evaluators define criteria to assess a process or an intervention, they pre-determine what does or does not count in their evaluative judgements. Often, evaluations define such limits against an ideal state of an education system—for instance, if 89% of schools in the Dominican Republic have formed APMAES one could aim for 100%, and then expect them to work out fully functional participatory mechanisms that contribute toward every child's quality education. But that kind of change of the education system, as described in Chapter 1, has been unrealistic for at least the last 20 years in the Dominican Republic, regardless of the contribution of World Vision's interventions assessed here. Expecting that kind of unrealistic change (i.e., perfect functionality—all parents in every school fully participating, all APMAES formed and working as they are supposed to do) in any education system would pre-define an

intervention as a failure before the evaluation even started to explore the evidence. Instead, *"expectations should be tempered given the timescale and resources of a given (project) as well as the nature of progress—often incremental."* Just as importantly, unrealistic expectations can obscure the kinds of learning about plausible, **partial, and fuzzy results,** which can be more helpful to the intended users of this evaluation and the decisions that they can and do make. It can also lead to hyperbolic **tales of triumph and disaster** that might do harm to those advancing change.

7. Understand how the nature of the process may influence evaluative thinking

Evaluators' own thinking about the nature of causal pathways and their interaction with other components in the local system also factor into evaluative judgements. Often, evaluators expect homogeneous results (full reach, wholesale adoption). A good result is one that shows fidelity in the adoption of a tool (e.g., an app), model (e.g., Citizen Voice and Action), language in a document (e.g., use of the term scorecards in Malawi's **National Community Health Strategy,** see **Box 5**) regardless of process and context. At the top of **Figure 3**, if the intervention looks like a white circle with black borders in, what comes out should also be a white circle with black borders (the process does not matter, which is part of a "black box").

In other cases, evaluators may assume that the local system is characterized by uncertainty, and we know a black circle will go in but cannot know or even predict that what will emerge is a purple star, an orange square, or a blue heart—the quest for assessing contributions to systems strengthening is futile (the bottom of **Figure 3**). In fact, a good result may be one that is substantively different and fully fits the system's ever-evolving characteristics.

In line with these assumptions, the evaluators took **a middle route.** We expected good outcomes to have a *partial* continuity with the intervention—whether in function, form, spirit, thrust or other ways—but they also embraced the way the interaction with other actors and elements of the local system might inform emergent adaptations. In fact, adaptations that fit the context might be considered a desirable feature of the process, as is social learning that informs the re-use of bits of the intervention that are most helpful to the actors trying to make new models, approaches, and tools fit with existing ones. As a result of the interaction of process and context, these **results are, by design, expected to be heterogeneous, though similarities in the process may produce buckets or types of outcomes that can be meaningfully compared**. In the middle of **Figure 3** when the multi-colored network

comes into dialogue with the original intervention, some aspects of the original remain in place (in this case the shape), but others change (in this case the colors and sizes). The net of potential outcomes needs to be cast sufficiently wide to avoid overlooking results that should be taken into account, but not so wide that we cannot find identifiable patterns that connect to the interventions.

Figure 3: Comparing expectations of outcomes
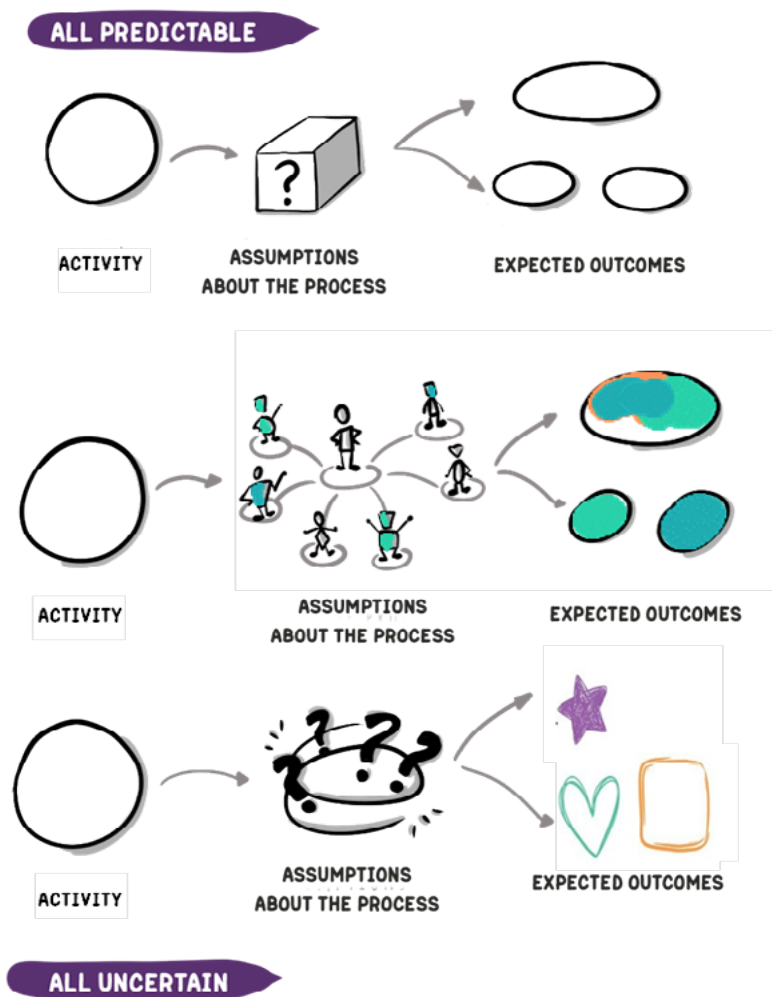
Source: Adapted from Guerzovich and Wadeson (2024)

8. Evaluate [Coherence over Time](#): Retrospectively and Prospectively

Local systems strengthening is a moving target. No matter when it is evaluated, things may continue to grow stronger or become weaker in the future. [The movie continues and a snapshot does not do justice to complex processes and outcomes.](#) When evaluators fail to pay attention to the ways in which change-making processes are bound by the past, but also continue in the future, rather than paying attention to the patterns and opportunity structures shaped by time, the quality of their judgments suffers. Furthermore, changes evolve and mutate, so evaluators constantly need to question whether/if this is related to something we did or chose not to do. At some point (with dissipation) it may seem entirely unrelated. But this is easier said than done, especially if the terms of reference for the evaluation do not call for this kind of analysis.

Retrospective analysis: There are practical risks to setting out to look backwards, such as potential dissipation of effects. Key informants' and organizational memory loss is also a reality. People move from one job to the next or leave for other reasons —a situation that is particularly acute in education systems where staff, including at school level, change with electoral results—and parents stop engaging in the school when their children graduate. [People might only remember parts of the story](#) or remember aspects of it differently than they would have done had they shared it in real time, underplaying, or over-playing events and their and other actors' roles in these. So, looking backwards often requires [investing more](#) by critically assessing what informants remember and the documents they can access, as well as t riangulating these and various other sources, before reaching an evaluative judgment.

In addition, one might take steps to focus on cases with the potential for generating data about a longer arc of history or [trajectory of change](#)—a factor that was critical in determining the selection of these two interventions and the specific schools to visit in this evaluation. But many key actors in a project, organization, or school several years ago may no longer still be in the same place at the time of the evaluation, especially if this is many years later. These risks need to be taken alongside risk-mitigation strategies, such as using emergent interviewing strategies and snowballing to find the quantity and quality of relevant sources to make credible analysis and interpretation possible.

Prospective analysis: While this is an ex-post evaluation, results are likely to continue to change in the future. According to the [OECD-DAC, evaluators can and should think creatively about the future when assessing complex change over time](#), rather

than making evaluative judgements based on what could be observed at the time when the data were gathered. To do so, it suggests two possible and complementary routes:

a. Focus on conditions for future outcomes: *Examine if and how opportunities to support the continuation of a process or outcome and its ongoing adaptation have been identi-fied, anticipated, exist and/or have been planned for, as well as any barriers that may hinder the continuation of positive trajectories and/or effects.*

b. Assess whether processes in the system are on the right track to produce those future outcomes: *Assess how likely it is that any planned or current positive processes and effects will continue, usually assuming that current conditions hold.*

Conclusion

A way to recap this discussion may be to state that evaluating layering in the longer term calls for adding an element of <u>cathedral thinking to evaluative judgements</u> of processes over a longer period of time (more than a decade). Like those laying bricks in a medieval cathedral[13], bricklayers often have a particular understanding of their place in the temporal context. Those who started building those cathedrals knew they would never see the end of the project in their lifetime, somewhat as many of those who use social accountability to contribute to a stronger education system know that they will never transform systems on their own over the course of a three-year project. The previous generation (or an earlier project) might have laid the groundwork and, ideally, the next ones will take the building (process) further. Often architectural tastes, and insights about what makes education systems perform, also change over the generations (in this case project-based interventions that generally last for three to five years; and presidential periods in the Dominican Republic that last from four to a maximum of eight years). When the newer builders might have preferred a baroque cathedral over the gothic one for which walls had been built, they rarely destroyed what had already been done (and they hope those in the future would not destroy their work). Thus, many cathedrals combine different architectural styles, and in much the same way many education systems reflect trends of different periods.

The trick to assessing these efforts thus relates to the function (e.g., whether this still a place of worship, or whether this intervention contributes to learning) rather than form. It is not about a specific brick, tool, document, or personal style, but rather about the effects of the collective rationale and vision that emerge from the various components that people find, along with those they add when exercising their agency. It is not, then, about assessing one person or intervention in isolation but their spatio-temporal interaction within a wider trajectory of sectoral reform. In these cases, evaluation may require a different lens for making judgments, one in which the outcome is assessed in relationship to the abilities of these agents to collectively act, and the <u>**cumulative enabling positive momentum in their desired direction of travel.**</u>

Bricklayers or stonemasons are similar to makers of an open-ended movie rather than photographers who produce stills. They are anchored in the past, but are building forward. In this open-ended plot change-makers cannot expect all outcomes to be possible as the past takes certain options off the table. Nor can change-makers fully determine how the plot concludes—which is why evaluators and observers cannot fully foresee where the system will "end up" at some future point, leaving questions unanswered. When evaluators are assessing this kind of relational change over time, incorporating "cathedral thinking" into evaluative judgements can support more useful evaluations.

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Box 4

Smart or best buys?

In the education sector, the idea of <u>smart buys</u> has become influential. The basic notion is that it is a straightforward empirical task to point governments and other stakeholders in low-and middle-income countries to interventions elsewhere that are cost-effective in improving learning and education outcomes at scale. As a result, there has been an <u>**over-investment in narrow experimental educational research in the Global South, while knowledge about key pivotal political actors and processes is limited.**</u>
A recent publication from the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel convened by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) classifies "buys" from great to bad, providing a powerful tool to justify decision-making and investments in the education sector.

The *"involving communities in school management"* section, which encompasses the kind of interventions covered in this evaluation, is promising, but presents limited evidence. It notes that providing feedback to schools through community involvement and gathering better data on teachers and students has often had little impact. However, the Panel sustains that where involving community members in school management has worked it has been very cost-effective. It cites five locally bounded short-term interventions assessed through Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) from Gambia, India, Indonesia, and Kenya on what constitutes the evidence.[14] In fact, what the Panel did is simply to cherry pick their preferred studies.

Firstly, its assessment relies upon a flawed evidence hierarchy which, by design, <u>excludes most of the relevant evidence</u> in the sector. A wider review of the evidence of <u>**157 interventions**</u>, a <u>**systematic review**</u> of 17 interventions in the sector, and a <u>**realist systematic review**</u> of 30 interventions in the sector, tell a different story. The effects of social accountability initiatives in the education sector are mixed, but they are broadly positive. But such positive effects are predictably hardest to attain in the most difficult contexts, and are more likely to be achieved when there are various support factors in place.

Others have argued that the "best buys" approach is a <u>misleading way</u> to assess the true value of interventions. The best of the "best buys" are those that the Panel most studied in its preferred research methods.

These include teaching teachers how to teach and at the right level. The "best buys" publication itself recognizes that interventions are not the only thing that matters and that systemic reform, which their chosen methods are incapable of assessing, is also crucial. There are serious concerns regarding the lack of external validity of empirical estimates of cost-effectiveness, and indeed the lack of scalability of several preferred interventions (e.g., contract teachers).

Indeed, it has even been argued that there is a lack of intellectual coherence **in making recommendations based on the assumption that all interventions were trying to achieve the same thing** (e.g., improve literacy and numeracy test scores). In these, empirical estimates are themselves part of the evidence that rejects the positive model. Hence, the Panel's recommendations are speculative, decontextualized, guesswork.

It is also reasonable to expect mixed results of transaction-intensive (i.e., complex) intervention contexts outside laboratory (or RCT) conditions. Several replication studies of accountability efforts in the health sector have had different results (positive and negative) because of changes in the underlying contextual conditions in which those interventions were embedded. The very premise of "monocropping" change, which the "best buys" approach exemplifies, works only in conditions where everything else is the same. Once we add change over time, replication studies make little sense. Instead, as has happened in practice in most cases, tools and tactics need to evolve and adapt to respond to the challenges of the day.

Finally, recent pitches for moving from impact evaluation to implementation research in global education seemed to be based on a similar notion, rather than the one that underpins this evaluation:

"*a low level of activity on how to respond to real-time implementation challenges using evidence has left international education practitioners with a lack of tested multi-stakeholder models of feedback loops. Without evidence to inform contextualization and adaptation during implementation, donors and governments fund, implement and study the impact of proven solutions again and again but scale with learning has eluded us. This has limited our efficiency in addressing the learning crisis and has delivered more benefits to researchers and donors than children and teachers. We know what education interventions might work at scale but not enough about how to consistently use evidence to adapt and iterate on these solutions to expand their reach with impact. The focus on impact studies has handicapped the use of evidence to explore mechanisms, troubleshoot glitches, and ensure equality in outcomes.*"

The present exercise is an effort to put this into practice.

Box 5

An example of <u>uptake</u>

CARE first designed the Community Score Card as a social accountability tool in the Local Initiatives for Health (LIFH) project in Malawi in 2002. It was partly based on **community report cards** carried out by the Public Affairs Centre in India and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods. For several years, CARE Malawi sought to **replicate** the model faithfully in other projects in the country, and as many as 75 other CARE projects **adopted** the core of the scoring approach by 2016. CARE USA even copyrighted the term and conducted an RCT of the Maternal Health Alliance Project (MHAP) between 2011 and 2015, which found positive results in various health outcomes such as post-natal and **home** visits and an increase in the use of modern family planning. However, efforts to scale this up nationally in Malawi's health sector struggled to find financing, but Ntcheu district partially took up a lighter version of the scorecard model at a reduced scale in five rather than 10 facilities between November 2016 and February 2020, and the district development plan mentions scorecards, service charters, and Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS).

3. Micro-School Level

3. Micro-School Level

This chapter presents bricklayers at work at the school level. It identifies and traces how they layered existing components of the education system on top of *READ* and both on top of MCPCVME. Layering, in turn, enabled them to contribute to the functioning of school-based management in the short term as well as equipping some local actors to become agents of the intervention's sustainability.

The chapter highlights:

- The ways in which layering was used to re-combine and rearrange the principles, tools, and practices of social account ability so that they were feasible and contributed to change.
- The ways in which bricklayers focused on strengthening their and the school communities' infrastructure as well as how their relational approach to social accountability interacted with their methodological choices.

These elements help account for how *READ* and MCPECVME contributed to subtly introducing innovations toward strengthening school systems, as well as mitigating negative interactions with other interventions in the system.

3.1 Introduction

> The law is there with the APMAES and action plans included in the ordinance. There is a difference between theory and praxis. Teaching the ordinance was the starting point. So why would I try another approach when the training and monitoring of the APMAES is already It is in the law?
> Leer/WV Staff
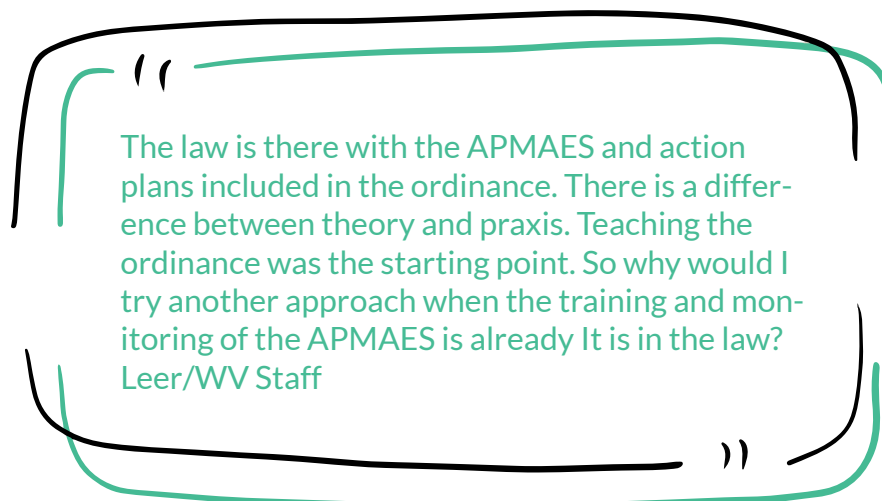
This chapter discusses key insights into how World Vision's *READ* and *Mi Comunidad Participa en Como Va Mi Escuela* (MCPCVME) used social accountability to achieve interrelated outcomes. These include greater responsiveness to parents' and students' needs as well as helping them improve how they worked with principals at the school level and staff from MINERD. Together, they renegotiated roles and responsibilities, and their regular, facilitated interactions helped build new levels of trust and other resources that enabled joint action to reach goals that they could not advance on their own. In other words, finding a way to rework each school social's contract (i.e., the agreement between parents and the authorities on their roles and responsibilities) was part and parcel of obtaining more tangible wins—whether a roof or teaching materials—as well as strengthening individual school-level systems.

World Vision's bricklayers layered READ on top of existing components of the education system (Box 6), and MCPCVME on top of both. How, where, and when bricklayers opted to layer goes some ways toward illuminating the methodologies they bricolaged, the relationships on which they built and also strengthened , as well as how these two components interacted in specific schools and across schools (see Chapter 4 for the effects at the policy level). Figure 4 synthesizes bricklayers' tricks of the trade at the school level, which is consistent with World Vision and its local teams' disposition to take a collaborative approach to social accountability. It also shares key components of a new generation of social accountability that contributes to responsiveness and is an operational means to rework social contracts and support democracies that deliver (Box 7).

Layer & adapt on top of what is in the organization, relational infrastructure & system
- WB training APMAESs structure & the reality of education
- Timelines of project & school year calendar
- READ for MCPCVME
- Mitigate negative interactions with unhelpful layers
- Etc.

People with relational capacities & capital = Smart Investments
- Recruit staff & volunteers who can imagine, develop, adapt & implement these and other relational tactics
- Support staff's agency
- Value & nurture their relational capital & infrastructure

Customize to meet school communities where they are
- Learn the reality of children and their families
- Tailor outreach to communities

Accompany & Follow up
- Coordinators were "attentive" and "they were always there"

ACTION PLANNING : AT THE ♥ OF RELATIONAL TACTICS TO STRENGTHEN THE QUALITY OF ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIPS

Find pretexts for celebration & engagement
- APMAEs, Family days & Bizcochos

Learn & course correct
- Adapted post COVID
- Adapted post midpoint evaluation

Provide support valued by stakeholders
- Advice
- Books
- COVID kits
- Etc.

Bricolage methods & tools
- CVA
- Reportes Comunitarios
- More

Simplify for feasibility
- Training
- Reportes Comunitarios
- Etc.

Layering social accountability to strengthens local systems * Guerzovich & Aston

3.2 Layering during *READ*

The *Reportes Comunitarios* **(Community Reports) and, in particular the action planning moment, is the basis of READ's methodology. As the quote above notes, it was not designed, iterated, or implemented in a vacuum.** It was layered on top of regulation that requires schools to set up APMAES—by the end of 2022, 229 schools had an APMAE that received training and support from *READ* and 87% kept a work plan. It built on a tool for which the World Bank had trained a group of civil society organizers, who in turn adapted the community score cards from Malawi and later Peru (see more in Box 5 as well as in Chapter 4). The following section highlights key adaptations.

1.

The tool was tailored to meet school stakeholders in their "real-life" communities. The generic *Reporte Communitario* was customized to the Dominican education sector. To do this, the team layered it on top of the sector's legal infrastructure by anchoring the social accountability process in APMAEs and focusing on making them work in practice. A total of 7,469 members of APMAEs and Centre Committees were trained in how to develop an action plan, 4,980 participated in talks regarding the roles and functions of APMAEs, 2,311 participated in talks on the importance of education and the role of the family, and 197 APMAEs developed action plans to promote families' participation in school planning. To make this possible a key principle of the READ team was to make training in accountability as accessible as possible.

> *In the first year of [Leer], the community report was all structured based on what we learned from the World Bank, but the reality of education, of community leaders, was that it [the report] was not going to work in the time they had. We changed it, we made it simpler, because it was not viable. The important thing is the most basic. Use ideas to involve the family in school with simple things that would make a difference. … The changes to the community report [we introduced over time]. We did it with fewer lines. The important thing is to have an action plan, support from the management team, have a deadline—which is what the ordinance says you must have.*
> *Leer/WV Staff*

Layering social accountability to strengthens local systems * Guerzovich & Aston

2.

The simplified training helped APMAEs to better understand their roles and become more propositional. For example, in Alma Rosa Chotén, the APMAE president said in 2024 that "*they helped the AMPAE better understand what it was supposed to do and to better understand the needs.*" In Los Conucos, the principal said that the "*community was more active*" thanks to the training, and the APMAE "*became more propositional: they changed from just criticizing to proposing solutions.*" This reflects the **collaborative framing of social accountability efforts** which the World Vision Dominican Republic team consistently used in both projects evaluated and which was particularly valued by the school stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation. This is a relatively common framing in World Vision beyond the Dominican Republic.

3.

What the training modules achieved was about much more than technical expertise—also strengthening relational capacities which help school communities to build social capital and rework their social contracts on the roles and responsibilities of citizens and the state. Many school stakeholders compared World Vision's interventions favorably with others, especially government interventions that were focused on control and oversight, owing to their ability to support problem-solving. Interviews validated the findings of the final evaluations of *READ* and MCPCVME projects. Both of these identified that parents valued the organization of meetings to address school issues or the ability to mobilize parents in activities to support the school—which are locally significant given the perennial challenges in engaging Dominican parents in school life, let alone to meet often unrealistic expectations of what such engagement should look like.[15] These also reflect a **common finding** in social accountability interventions beyond World Vision which provide the time, focus, and leadership to support a new quality of relationships: once community representatives co-construct their understanding of what their role is and reflect on what service providers are actually able to achieve, they can develop new relational capabilities and, generally, become more constructive. No single actor can produce this new agreement, but once it exists in a school it can become a critical resource for collective improvement.

4.

This was seen as part of a wider package of support in several schools visited with intrinsic value that also contributed to World Vision's reputation and social capital (i.e., networks, norms, and trust). Several respondents also recognized the benefits of the reading clubs set up during *READ*, which World Vision also facilitated. In some cases, school stakeholders were able to make the most of *READ* materials as well as experience the value of having personnel dedicated to helping children read in the classroom and after school. In the school libraries we visited, there was ample evidence of *READ* materials still in use. In Anibal Ponce, the librarian noted that children need new *READ* books because they already know their favorites by heart. These anecdotes suggest that the relationship between World Vision and stakeholders in those school communities has elements that survived long after the implementation of activities ended.

5.

A key aim of the coordinators interviewed was to "meet schools where they were," and schools' stakeholders highlighted these efforts and their pay-offs. This meant including new activities as part of the intervention. Among them, additional relational tactics stand out. In El Quemado, the evaluation interviewed a former *READ* volunteer who then became a project mobilizer (*movilizadora*) and is now a teacher in the school, and still uses what she learned in *READ*. She recalled that she began providing reading support for children who had difficulties, which required parental approval. If the parents did not come to the school, teachers would make home visits. This helped them get approval but also "*learn the reality of the children and their families.*" She then reflected, "*I feel the other projects has that essence from READ.*" In meeting school stakeholders where they were, the *READ* team directed tailored outreach to communities that did not typically engage in school management. For example, what they found out helped them identify better hours to hold meetings, among other adjustments. A strategic decision that prioritized relationships underpinned this approach. World Vision's leadership explicitly incentivized, opened space, and valued the time and resources staff needed to make these calls, and find out how to do so. This differs substantially from the "best practice" logic where all schools and families are expected to be treated as if they were the same (i.e., where intervention homogeneity and fidelity are key).

6.

Related to this, a crucial element of World Vision's approach in both *READ* and, later, MCPCVME was accompaniment, or follow-up. In the ex-post evaluation, we found that follow-up was fundamental to maintaining momentum in schools. All the schools visited conveyed this message. In *READ*, each community coordinator was responsible for work in six to ten schools in a single region. As a result, the coordinators were regularly present in the schools. School stakeholders interviewed highlighted that the coordinators were "*attentive*" and "*they were always there for us.*" As the APMAE president in Alma Rosa Chotén mentioned, "t*here was good follow-up, weekly*" during *READ*. Relational work is transaction-intensive, but this is partly why communities viewed the work positively and why in schools such as El Quemado they distinguished it from other reform efforts.

7.
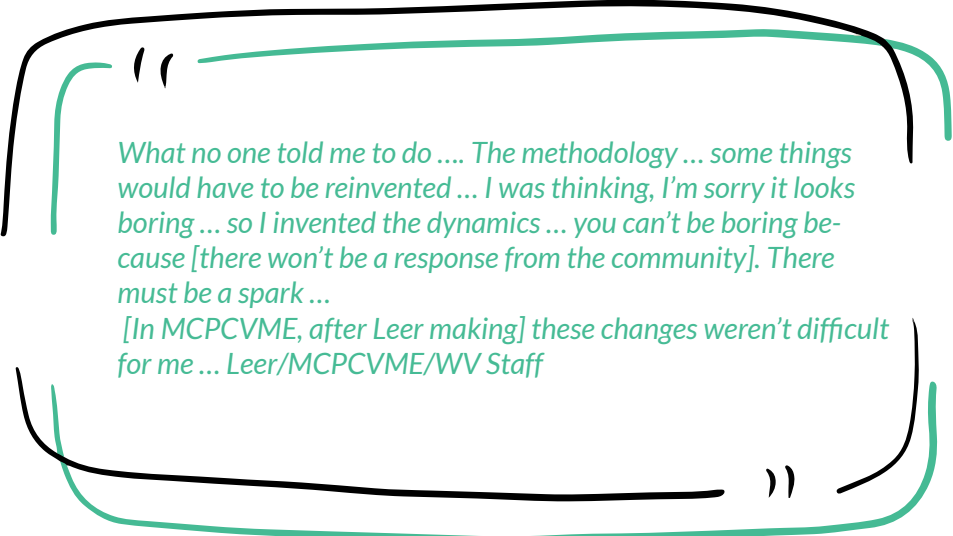
Another key relational tactic was finding pretexts for celebration, which could engage more reluctant families in school life and motivate them to become part of the community. Numerous schools that the ex-post evaluation visited mentioned *Bizcochos* (cakes). The team believed that APMAES should be valued and celebrated and March 3 was determined as the day to officially celebrate APMAEs—"*no one was doing that at the time … everyone still does it today.*" Whether on March 3 or other days, *Bizcochos* have become celebrations where the aim was to bring the school community together, and to inspire school stakeholders to value the work of the APMAE—they were mentioned spontaneously in most if not all schools visited. *Bizcochos* were how the World Vision team was able to do this in a contextually grounded way. Relational tactics like these built trust with the schools in a durable way, which enabled the team to lay lasting foundations with school counterparts to resolve collective-action problems. Celebrating success is also a key part of the **CVA field guide** recommendations after action plans have been implemented.

8.

The relational capacities of the World Vision team were instrumental in imagining, developing, adapting, and implementing these tactics. They were also a key feature that the schools highlighted when asked about the value of *READ* and MCPCVME. What made the community component *different*, therefore, was the community coordinators' soft skills. Many school stakeholders interviewed believed that the World Vision READ project's community component was the "*bright spot.*"[16] The praise of these relational capacities can be summed up as: "*very nice,*" "*very dynamic,*" "*good communicators,*" "*accessible;*" they "*brought energy.*" These capacities were deployed during *READ* and over the course of MCPCME, as captured in the project's final evaluation. World Vision's project management, unlike others', seems to have explicitly hired staff with these soft skills, which staff also appreciated finding in their colleagues. These skills and their relational effects are often overlooked by the research that informs "smart buys" and other studies, yet they are central to both effectiveness and sustainability of resilient public service organizations, i.e., those that thrive thanks to their ability to use social capital to enable ongoing improvement and high performance.[17]

3.3 Hiring for and Implementing Relational Change-making

By the end of 2019, it was clear that the MCPCVME—a World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA)—project would shortly begin and *READ* was soon coming to an end. One of World Vision's key aims was to retain as much of the *READ* field team as possible. As the GSPA project was slow to commence (originally intended for 2019), it was felt that there was an opportunity. The *READ* management made the case to senior management that for the MCPCVME that they should ask the coordinators to apply. "*These coordinators] believed [in the mission], they came from community spaces, they have been leaders, they worked with APMAES, they got into dangerous places. Our position is that this, above all, is community work, and they gave themselves [with a committed and honest attitude] to get the results*"—school stakeholders used similar language to refer to these coordinators. World Vision's management argued that retention presented a challenge, but there was at least some intention to do this, and created an administrative bridge with unrestricted funding. Although there was a formal process that attracted dozens of applications, the successful candidates were *READ* coordinators. This meant that there were relational skills and prior relationships that could be layered upon.

What no one told me to do .... The methodology ... some things would have to be reinvented ... I was thinking, I'm sorry it looks boring ... so I invented the dynamics ... you can't be boring because [there won't be a response from the community]. There must be a spark ...
[In MCPCVME, after Leer making] these changes weren't difficult for me ... Leer/MCPCVME/WV Staff

This relational approach to hiring staff for the MCPCVME project, and the relational infrastructure in which World Vision's bricklayers were embedded, would inform the MCPCVME's team's subsequent decisions. This included many moments in which there were trade-offs between adaptation to context and the relational aspects of the intervention and technical aspects, but the team always tended toward the value they gained by working with others and/or enabling others to draw on and improve the quality of relationships. This would become clearer in view of the (often negative) interactions with the World Bank's *Como Va Mi Escuela* (CVME) project (Box 8)—which seems to have built on the assumptions of a "best practice" replication pathway rather than one based on resonance.

Key parts of READ's methodological architecture directly informed MPCVME's approach. Yet, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and as discussions with CVME were unfolding, the MCPCVME team had to regroup and reconsider which parts of its planned methodology might be used and which new components might be necessary (Box 9). Since the project team spent much of the year in lockdown, they focused on designing the MCPCVME course (published in August 2021). The course was partly based on the action-planning guide in the *READ* project, but in the spirit of making the training as accessible and relevant to nurturing relational capacities and resources as possible, the project team came up with a simplified version. Similarly, the simple summary of what APMAEs had to do came from *READ* teaching materials. In addition, the team managed to unlock funds to distribute COVID kits throughout lockdown to let communities know that their relationship was meaningful and that they still cared about them.

Thus, when they were eventually able to go back to schools, bricklayers built on the relational tactics they had adopted during *READ*. The evaluation identified a consistent use of "*Bizcochos*" to celebrate moments of success and to broaden community participation in schools. One key moment was celebrating the "APMAE's day," but the team also organized a Parents' Day in one (non-*READ*) school, Mercedes Altagracia Cabral de León, to mobilize additional resources to upgrade dangerous iron railings in the school buildings. Similarly, numerous schools consulted underscored the importance of sustained, regular accompaniment from the World Vision team.

3.4 MCPCVME Facilitating Action Planning: School Management that Can Deliver in Practice

The project team saw the mid-term evaluation as a turning point. The MCPCVME was far from reaching many of its log-frame targets, as many other interventions were affected by the pandemic, so it was covered in red.[18] However, the project team took this as an opportunity to pause and reflect, and they decided to prioritize two things they wanted to turn green: (1) ensure that the model could be extended to all 60 schools and (2) ensure that there was a workable protocol derived from the model that could potentially be adopted and adapted by MINERD—this latter point is discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Feedback on the MCPCVME project is overwhelmingly positive. The project website has a space for feedback and of 2,394 ratings on Google reviews, the average rating was 4.8 out of 5. Given that the project estimated that it engaged 21,000 students and parents, this unprompted response rate is extraordinary. Indeed, many of these responses were made after the project's final evaluation.

Since then, and a year after the project ended, the evaluation found the following results. **Like *READ*, and building on it, MCPCVME helped school stakeholders to see community participation in school management differently. At the heart of these results, as in other social accountability interventions, is the facilitated action-planning process when actors come together and engage in a new form of deliberation that strengthens their relationships and capacity for joint problem-solving, in addition to presenting particular solutions.**

So, as in READ, MCPCVME layering, bricolaging, and relational tactics were able to help motivate school stakeholders to commit, create plans, and work collectively to achieve change to improve the quality of education in *READ* schools. As one APMAE representative in Danilo Ginebra mentioned in the evaluation, "*the action plan motivated us to do something*." Indeed, this action plan was clearly displayed on the wall

World Vision hired for, customized, and implemented a collaborative approach to social accountability anchored in enabling, facilitating, and following up joint action planning among different stakeholders in school communities. These bricklayers betted on layering their projects on the education system and win–win results from making it work better. They also banked on the potential of people coming together to improve the quality of relationships and, then draw on those social resources to solve specific problems in each school.

The *READ* and MCPCVME team cumulatively developed and used a long set of tricks to pull off this approach, even when the communities they met posed challenges, donors prioritized technocratic design to interventions, or COVID-19 put the onus on building relationships. Results included re-sponsiveness as well as increased social capital (networks, shared norms, and trust) and reworked social contracts (agreements on roles and respon-sibilities). The relational outcomes (and the gradual development of the guide to enable them) help to understand the significance of layering one project on top of the other.

While unevenly, different schools continue to benefit from the parts of the process that make most sense for them.

of the school's library at the time of the final evaluation, as a regular reminder for the school management team and APMAE to press on. The principal said that: "*World Vision taught us that one has to look for a solution.*" Or, as the principal of Los Conucos also said: "*having World Vision was helpful because it can help when someone external pushes an agenda. It brings credibility.*" This suggests that the World Vision's accompaniment model, while stretched on a smaller budget, was able to motivate schools to drive forward action-plan commitments. Just as importantly, the team was able to provide continuous support and motivation, which school communities valued and have missed since the end of the project.

Many of the *READ* schools visited had conducted some additional actions from action plans after the close of the project. For example, the biggest achievement for Danilo Ginebra school was rebuilding the roof, and the same engagement process with MINERD described in the final evaluation helped them to refurbish other parts of the school, and they even introduced internet in an area where there is almost no coverage. Alma Rosa Chotén built a cafeteria and some benches. Clearly, some issues remained unaddressed from action plans (e.g., El Quemado still lacked a shaded area of its courtyard). In Anibal Ponce, the community had learned the value of a person dedicated to providing support for reading during *READ*. The gap was noted in the action plan. So, when a new teacher was appointed, they freed another teacher to provide supplementary reading support.

The road was not smooth for these schools. Several of the READ schools, Emma Balaguer and Alma Rosa Chotén, and to a lesser degree Mauricio Baez, struggled more than most in the MCPCVME project, despite having been positive cases in *READ*. Emma Balaguer, for example, was considered a "model school" in *READ*, but was one of the most challenging schools for the MCPCVME project. Nonetheless, in all cases, these schools were able to carry out all three phases of the model, develop action plans, and implement these partly during the project and partly after it ended. For example, by the final evaluation, some members of senior management in Mauricio Baez expressed relatively lukewarm support, given their perceptions of relatively limited progress related to a change in the parents' contributions to school management. However, by the ex-post evaluation this perception had markedly improved. The school team brought the materials from the project, discussed the progress in action planning, and mentioned that they valued and missed MCPCVME approach to "*acompañamiento*" both in the sense of the team's support and its ongoing nature while it lasted. Indeed, despite the challenges in Alma Rosa Chotén, the principal noted that the APMAE was "*empowered*" and "*the work plan was helpful.*"

Given that formally APMAEs have to change each year, the sustainability of capability in the APMAEs is very challenging and the role played by World Vision's bricklayers in promoting continuity has had uneven outcomes. In Alma Rosa Chotén, where we attended a hand-over meeting between the old and new APMAE, it was clear that the latter was not up to speed. Similarly, in the Los Conucos school, the APMAE President noted that "*this year the APMAE was less active.*" She attributed this to the new members. Or, as a teacher in the same school said, "*the APMAE was more present in the school than it is today. It was more active in 2018, better integrated.*" This suggests that continual efforts are required to train and support APMAEs either from within the school or through external support. In Anibal Ponce, they noted that the Parents' School (*Escuela de Padres)* performs some of these functions.

In Danilo Ginebra, the Junta de Centro introduced its own specific modules for handover of APMAEs. Elsewhere, such as in Alma Rosa Chotén, this was much less clear.

At the same time, the evaluation identified individuals, members of the network, who continue largely on their own trying to layer what they learned through their engagement in these interventions from the where they are in the system, which in some cases has changed from before. In addition to the case of the El Quemado teacher, another volunteer, later a coordinator turned técnica, shared her commitment to layering these efforts.

The projects have given me not only professional but also personal growth. Sometimes I cried when I saw the situation since I saw a child, a vulnerable family with no possibility of being literate, of being listened to. And these projects, both reading and MCPCVME, taught me to see more of the human side …. I think that here where I am currently [a MINERD staff position] and I look back from a distance because I never thought I would grow so much in these 7 years of projects and that is why I feel proud of what I have achieved... that It filled me with joy, I said, but look, it's worth the effort... that I want to continue growing and that there are families who remember it and I know that one of them marks people's lives and that they come back as the mark in a positive way. Leer/MCPCVME/WV Staff

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Box 6

School-based Management in the Dominican Republic

The *Ley* General de *Educación* 66-97 sets the basic parameters for school-based management in the Dominican Republic. For the purposes of this evaluation, two bodies are particularly relevant: APMAEs and *Juntas de Centro* (School Committees). These are where parents and local community members can participate in school-based management.

APMAES were first regulated by Ordinance (*Ordenanza*) 3-94, stating their mission as "*assisting, strengthening, and supporting teaching and administrative work in schools, thereby ensuring institutional development of schools and the best education for children.*" In 2000, a **USAID-sponsored study** found that schools were disconnected, parents disengaged, and that politicians, principals, or teachers were willing to change things and improve school-based management or education quality. That year, a new Ordenanza 9-2000 amended the egulation of APMAEs.

Decades later, government data shows that there are APMAES in 89% of the country's schools. The question is whether they function in practice. A World Bank study that will be discussed in greater depth below (CVME) found that 96% of those they surveyed in schools knew what an APMAE was. Of course, this is a shallow indicator of whether APMAEs function in practice because knowing what an APMAE is says nothing about whether it is effective (see also Chapter 4 on the political economy context which informs this interpretation).

The other key component of the school-based management system is the Centre Committee—which according to the Education Law 66-97 and **Ordenanza 02-2008** is an organization for school management and administration in which teachers, students, APMAEs, and representatives of civil society participate. The CVME study found that 95% of schools (i.e., all but three) selected the Centre Committee by assembly or via elections, although again this is a very shallow measure of functionality.

In practice, the functionality of these bodies is heterogeneous. Some parents in the APMAE are registered but inactive, in others active members change every year and everything from recruitment to training must start from scratch—which can have knock-on effects on the APMAEs' representation in the *Juntas de Centro*—and everything is complicated when the principals, teachers, and members of the other key school management bodies themselves are replaced and sent to serve in other schools.

In some, however, such as Danilo Ginebra, teachers in the Centre Committee had been at the school for years. The current principal has been in post for 18 years and there has been a functional parents' group ever since. Many members of the teaching staff had previously attended the school, and/or were from the community. So, they knew the context very well. In 2016, the Junta de Centro had a program with the Ministry of Public Administration, in which they included criteria to assess education quality. They even have a system of internal assessment based on quality criteria against which they systematically gather evidence. Danilo Ginebra had its own systems and processes in place to strengthen students' and parents' literacy and to build the capacity of APMAEs even before *READ*, and said that they chose parents to participate in the APMAE who shared the same vision to promote quality.

Box 7

A New Generation of Social Accountability

A **recent macro-review** of 20 years of evidence and tacit knowledge of social accountability approaches in over 150 cases found that: "**The main thread of social accountability 3.0 and what distinguishes it from previous generations is a focus on its contribution towards more responsive systems and accountable social contracts. Social accountability should be considered as an operational means to rework social contracts**".

Thus, the approach to social accountability implemented by the projects evaluated here and their outcomes share characteristics of an emergent generation of social accountability, adapted to World Vision and the education system in the Dominican Republic. Other pillars of this Social Accountability 3.0 seem to be: systems awareness; *Realpolitik*; leverage points; sector-specific approaches; bricolage; layering and time; and transferable learning and portfolio approaches. Many of these are identified throughout this evaluation, with greater attention to layering and time as well as the outcomes of interest.

Box 8

Como Va Mi Escuela: Relationships mitigate the negative interaction effects with <u>helicopter research</u>

Como Va Mi Escuela (CVME) took place between 2018 and 2020 and focused on improving government accountability in 180 public schools in the Corredor Duarte (Puerto Plaza, Santiago, La Vega, Monseñor Nouel, San Cristóbal, Santo Domingo, and the Distrito Nacional). CVME was funded by the World Bank and USAID. The original idea was to support MINERD to build a statistical database of education indicators that monitored school progress. This then evolved into a proposal to include families as well as teachers and that would be something simpler than indicators to make the process accessible for family participation in school management, using a form or report card.

The World Bank and (indirectly) USAID funded MCPECVME under the same umbrella, as part of an approach that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. So, in **addition to building on the foundations of *READ*, MCPCVME was also intended to build on the CVME project.** A key consequence of this expected layering with CVME is that the World Bank decided in which schools MCPVME would be implemented, prioritizing criteria relevant to CVME's impact evaluation over relational criteria. The schools were chosen for World Vision rather than allowing the organization to choose where it had the best background (e.g., where it had area programs). Unlike in *READ*, the schools were spread out across various regions and each field staff member had to cover as many as 30 schools rather than six to ten in *READ*.[19] This evidently made it harder for the team to provide the previous level of accompaniment.
In these schools, World Vision was expected to take this change in CVME's emphasis on including families in school management as their main guide. The World Bank hoped that there would be productive synergies between the two similarly named projects, especially as CVME had a reduced in-country operational team during COVID-19, and hoped that World Vision might fill some gaps.

However, as the MCPCVPE evaluation explains further, World Vision both found it difficult to make fruitful connections between the two projects owing to issues with how CVME was designed and implemented, and also had to mitigate the negative effects in schools that CVME's "helicopter approach" created. Methodologically, the World Vision team perceived the tool the CVME team used as being too complicated—the scorecard asked for too much informa-

tion (including an extraordinarily long survey for principals) and not all relevant or accessible to school stakeholders. While these requests may have seemed reasonable from the perspective of researchers trying to acquire statistical information (and test a system for doing so), they contradicted the lessons from *READ*. Recall that the World Vision team had simplified the Community Reports to adapt to the context and that the relational approach had paid off.

Another related problem was the perception in many schools regarding the CVME project. While not the World Bank's original intention, the project turned into "helicopter research" from the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) team. Helicopter research is a term used in Global Health Research to refer to projects where external researchers (usually from the North America or Europe) land in a "partner country" and conduct their work with little or no involvement from the local communities. Indeed, and unlike *READ*, the CVME team provided very limited accompaniment or follow-up in the schools.

The World Vision team resisted this role and had a difficult relationship with the World Bank's DIME team and its RCT. Partly as a result, as reported in the baseline, midline, and endline evaluations, several schools remarked that they felt "abandoned" by the project, which led to high levels of dissatisfaction. CVME's endline survey found that less than half of parents and guardians felt that the CVME action plans made a positive difference. Indeed, when the last scorecard was presented, 50% of principals said they did not know, or did not answer. So, by the time MCPCVME began in January 2020, many of the schools were already rather negatively disposed to it.

Even so, both the final evaluation and this ex-post evaluation found that none of the *READ* schools had significant problems with these negative interaction effects of CVME. The trust built with schools during *READ* enabled them to buffer the resistance the CVME project created that many non-*READ* schools experienced. In some cases, such as in the Danilo Ginebra school, school stakeholders argued explicitly that "*the MCPCVME project felt like a continuation of READ.*" This was largely due to continuity of World Vision staff who were able

Box 9

What are effective components of a Social Accountability Intervention?

COVID-19 hit shortly after the project started and the team had to revisit its entire plan, which was contingent on visiting schools, either to build relationships or to merely implement activities, such as data collection. In other words, during the height of the pandemic, a key component of the intervention could not perform important functions assumed to make the intervention work.

Furthermore, the World Vision team was worried about new and existing relationships. So, the team came up with a new, albeit unusual, intervention component: they sent hygiene kits to the schools to ensure people remembered that the organization had not abandoned them, both providing value to the schools while showing MINERD their contribution. In the words of a team member, "*going to schools in a time of precariousness … [eventually] led a lot to the dialogue in schools having greater openness.*"

From an evaluation standpoint, an organization providing a hygiene kit is not normally considered a part, let alone an important part, of a "technical" social accountability intervention and, taken out of context, might seem a bad way to invest an intervention's time and money. However, in this specific context, with a **functional approach** to social accountability and its implementation, the "innovative" intervention component was relevant because it played a relational function. In this case, the question is whether it helped strengthen relationships between World Vision and the school community in ways that at least partly replaced the regular visits that were not possible during the pandemic. World Vision team members and some of the school community members we interviewed seem to believe so.

4. Macro-Policy Level

4. Macro-Policy Level

This chapter presents bricklayers at work at the policy level. It identifies and traces how they used World Vision's projects to learn how the micro-level dynamics contribute towards strengthening APMAE's regulation in a context where "everything seems to change so that nothing changes (*gatopardismo* [meaning that a leopard doesn't change its spots]."

The chapter highights

• An approach to contribute to change within the boundaries of the system: layering of elements of *READ*'s community component into MCPCVME and of both projects atop and alongside complementary, conflicting, and ambiguous layers laid by others.

• A small number of turning points (the adoption of regulation in the 1990s, a seemingly inconsequential training in the 2010s, and a "win–win" arrangement between World Vision staff and MINERD staff).

• The relationships and relational infrastructure in which these brick-layers and their layering is embedded.

These elements help account for how and under which conditions *READ* and MCPCVME contributed to subtly introducing innovations toward strengthening the education system.

4.1 Existing Rules can Provide Leverage for Strengthening the System

Over the decades, the Dominican Republic has made various efforts to address historical deficiencies in public education. After a multi-stakeholder consultation process, the 1992 Plan *Decenal de Educación* (Ten-Year Education Plan) established strategic lines of action for the sector, which included decentralization measures and mechanisms to promote local communities' participation in decision-making processes and school management.[20] Most of these initiatives were legally enacted through a new statute, passed in 1997 (*Ley General de Educación 66-97*).[21] The law provided for the creation of an Office of Decentralization within MINERD and the establishment of school boards and other institutional spaces where community members were invited to participate to support school-based management.

As discussed in Box 6 in Chapter 3 **although APMAEs were first regulated by Ordinance** *(Ordenanza)* **3-94** and then by *Ordenanza* 9-2000, they were not immediately established or functional. Many development agencies offered funding to create APMAES and try to make them work in practice. By 2003, the World Bank's Basic Education project had contributed to the establishment of APMAES in 6,295 schools, most of which were notional and there were no resources provided to activate them (e.g., no models for promoting community participation or training of parents; no APMAE projects approved for financing) or ineffective (e.g., trained staff were replaced with changes in government).[22]

Research carried out by one of the evaluators found that by 2011 many APMAEs seemed to be used to mobilize resources for political parties via friends of the school—as resources for the sector were contested (Box 10).[23] Yet, much decision-making remains highly centralized in practice, despite the adoption of the new **Strategic Plan for Education (2021–2024)**, the creation of a new **Vice Ministry for Decentralization and Participation in late 2021**, and the fact that by 2023, according to MINERD, 86.9% of schools had legally mandated APMAEs established. What matters, in practice, is that APMAEs meet their function of strengthening and supporting schools' teaching and administrative work and institutional development, and most of all to help ensure that schools better provide a high-quality education for all students and their families.

In short, many actors and factors in the local education system appear to change constantly, while other long-standing practices, norms, power asymmetries, and political economy dynamics seem to remain the same. Amidst this systemic dynamic, this evaluation looked into whether and how two relatively small World Vision projects might have contributed to turning APMAEs from being another example of *gatopardismo* (a leopard doesn't change its spots), i.e.,"reformers" creating the illusion of change leaving the underlying reality intact;[24] or, along with

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other school-level governance bodies, APMAEs may have become an operational platform where the micro-level islands discussed earlier meet macro-level efforts for stronger school-level management/social contracts for quality education.

4.2 A Project that Produces Social Capital may Seem Insignificant, but is it?

Perhaps surprisingly, the event that encouraged bricklayers to realize APMAE's potential through social accountability is easy to overlook or underestimate: a World Bank training in so-called "*auditoria socia*l" (social accountability) with a specialization in Community Reports (*Reportes Communitarios*) or community scorecards in 2011 (see Figure 5)[25]

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Figure 5: The Dominican education system's trajectory

2022
Mid-Term evaluation MCPCVME

Community mobilization component of READ ends

2020
COVID

2019
Launch MCPCVME

Luis Abinader becomes President

2017
Launch CVME

GPSA course corrects

Protocol co-produced

2023
Protocol adopted

MCPCVME ends

86.9% of schools have APMAEs

International congress on decentralization & participation

Internal process to reform Ordenanza 9-2000

Abinader is re-elected

2024

2016
Medina is re-elected

Focus: Quality of Education

IDEC launched

2014
National Education Pact with international support

Community mobilization component of READ begins

Social Movements & CED demobilize

Vigilantes

WB Reporte comunitario Training

2013
Congress approves 4%

Focus: Infrastructure for Education

New social accountability programming

2003 6,295 schools formally have APMAEs

2010's
Education No.1 priority of the population

2011 CEDs 4% campaign

2012
Danilo Medina becomes President

1990's
international support for education

1994
AMPAEs regulated

1997
General Education Act

2000
Ordenanza 9-2000

Focus: Access to education

Reportes comunitarios in Cibao

IPAC

All presidential candidates commit to 4%

APMAEs don't function in practice

Legend:
- DR State
- World Vision
- International organization
- Civil society & Other CSOs

World Vision

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Some of the staff of what would become the *READ* and MCPCVME projects were part of the training, as was another person who later joined World Vision's team. Some in the group specialized in "Community Reports" and have applied this knowledge in several projects and organizations since then.

Participants in this training also built relationships with a small number of like-minded individuals who would occupy different positions and expand a loose network across civil society, development agencies, and the government over the next 15 years. Long histories of personal and institutional links also helped the connections made with individuals within the *READ* and MCPCVME projects. These laid foundations of trust. Actors within this network emerge at specific junctures of this process—as bricklayers' political allies and bridgers, or as technical consultants, but also as designers of alternative interventions that proved, in practice, hard to fit with World Vision's projects (see below).

> *[In 2011], I fell in love with community reports … I've used them every time I could … I've adapted them to what we found [each time] Leer/WV Staff*

Figure 6: Social Relationships are a Resource for Effective Action
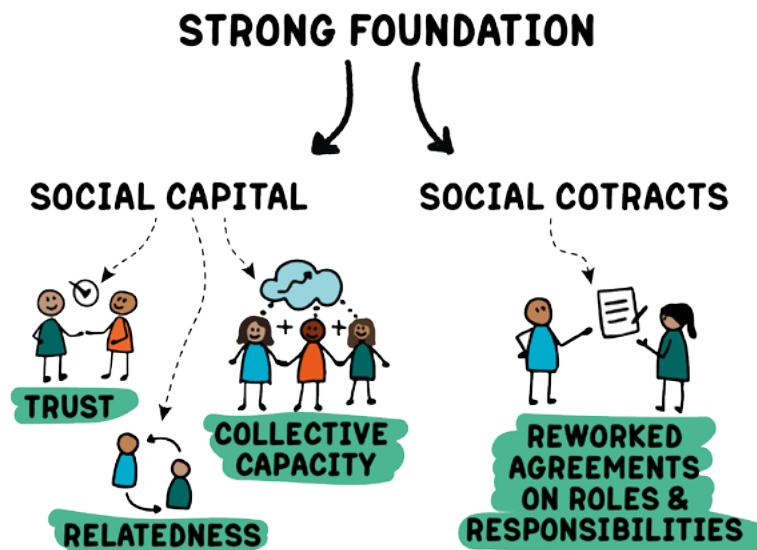
Source: adapted from Bevan (2024)

For them, these social relationships and capital became resources for improving the performance of the system (Figure 6). They carved out the space and focus and (when up to them) the leadership to invest in these relationships and reflect with one another, expand those networks, shared norms, and increase trust with colleagues who worked in (or might work in) MINERD, World Vision, and other donors and implementing partners as well as those who were engaging in the schools, among others. They patiently created value (i.e., social capital), which would be the foundation on which the strategies and tactics to manage the teams working in the schools discussed in Chapter 3 were grounded. This approach to creating value by enabling people across organizations, the state, and civil society to work well together was also instrumental for the performance of the collaborative trajectory discussed in the reminder of this chapter.

4.3 Systematizing World Vision's Lessons on Strengthening School Systems

In 2014, USAID issued the *READ* Request for Proposals (RFP) and a few years later the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), housed in the World Bank, issued a call for what would become the MCPCVME project. While each project was anchored in a different donor's country strategy, both USAID and the World Bank largely shared a key concern: access to and financing of education had improved, but the quality of education remained poor. Funding and projects had to contribute to addressing this shortcoming. Both donors opened the door to engage communities in schools as a vehicle for strengthening the quality of the education system.

Dominican experts in social accountability saw the links between the funding opportunities, theories of change in the education sector, the legal architecture of the system, and community reports. "*In theory, the [General Education] law was there …. When we went to the schools, we found that the APMAEs and the rights were there … and they are key in the educational process to work with families and the school community for quality education … We had to strengthen them [to close the gap] between theory and praxis.*" The tool of choice to turn APMAEs from *gatopardismo* to leverage points were customized, stripped-down Community Reports with a major dose of relational tactics at different levels of the system.

As can be inferred from the previous paragraph, project leads had an implicit assumption that put the micro level front and center of the work. And yet, they also realized that they were working in a highly centralized system, in which MINERD, the national education ministry, had a key role in unlocking the door to hierarchical regions, districts, and schools. Formal stakeholder meetings at all levels in the capital, Santo Do-

mingo, or an agreement with and letters from MINERD signaled to actors at lower levels of the system that the project had the blessing of the top—despite lukewarm support at some points in the process.

In addition, the team introduced itself as a source of support and win–win solutions for actors who could veto or stall project implementation in each layer of the education system from the top down (regional, district, and school directors or whoever is in practice the center of power at a school). *"We cannot go against the grain … In my house, I don't want someone from outside to tell me what to do, we need to go to the person that exercises the power first."* In addition, if staff from the Ministry of Education or the schools happened to need support in an area where World Vision had access to buildings, vehicles, know-how, or relationships, World Vision supported them. **These interactions nurtured relationships that, at the very least, seem to have (intentionally) shielded the team from crossfire from the top and the bottom of the system.** [26] Eventually, these relationships would also open opportunities for layering at the top.

4.4 There are Many Ways to Progress

By the end of *READ*, the remaining World Vision team had acquired significant insights into how to do its work across a variety of schools and was concerned with what the future might hold within the organization. As one team member put it, *"if I leave the organization, this has to be documented for this or the future teams."* This is the first way in which bricklayers understood the meaning and function of a Protocol. They needed to strike a balance: enough codification to avoid reinventing the wheel on what may travel from school to school without straitjacketing an intervention that at its core is depends on the contacts and connections of the field team with schools, among other relationships, and would need to be adapted to each community (see Chapter 3). At the time, World Vision International's CVA systematization did not feature strongly, but bricklayers would work with its interactions over time.

This same idea of systematization and knowledge transfer (which did not materialize) informed the team when they suggested that the GPSA include a revised Protocol as a key outcome indicator of the MCPCVME project, which might also be advanced along MINERD and the *Iniciativa Dominicana por una Educación de Calidad*—Dominican Initiative for a Quality Education (IDEC) or Socio-economic Forum, although it was not clear to the project team (or the evaluator) what the oversight, or follow-up, the Protocol was intended to be until the mid-term evaluation when project manager shared the first draft. Furthermore, the GPSA and other World Bank stakeholders might have had something else in mind regarding the potential role of a Protocol in terms of their own theory of action. [27] For example, the Protocol could be identified as a proxy for a mechanism to inform uptake of key elements of the intervention and/or scale-up for sustainability.

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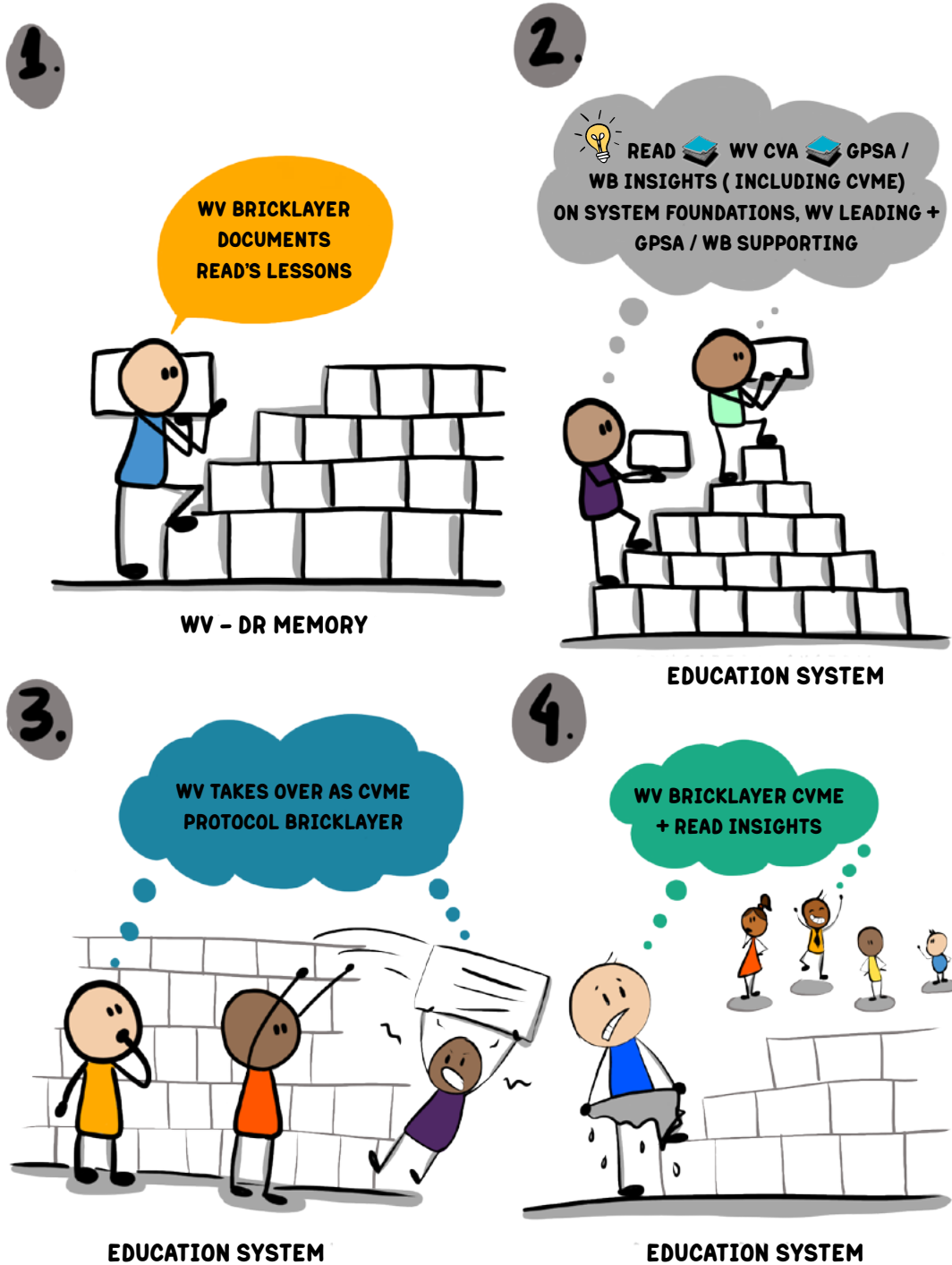
Over time, the idea of an oversight Protocol written into MCPCVME and related documentation acquired a broad range of meanings. Different actors envisaged its contents and possible effect, interpreting its ambiguity through the lens of other layers that were salient to them. Figure 7 synthesizes the range of possible roads taken and not taken mediating these two original purposes of the layer (Figure 7-1) and (Figure 7-2), and the outcome identified at the end of this evaluation: the lessons from *READ* informed MCPCVME and the latter co-produced a Protocol approved by the MINERD that had different possible uses.

Alternative layering combinations were championed by other stakeholders and, at least temporarily, created detours on the road from 1 to 2. Some actors in the World Bank and World Vision seemed to have conceived and expected the MCPCVME Protocol **to support the uptake** of the World Bank project discussed in Box 8 (CVME) and promote its priorities—as if World Vision would merely take on the World Bank's baton (or layer) with no additions from the READ layer (Figure 7-3). However, when the World Bank approved MCPCVME, CVME seemed to have lost its appeal within MINERD; and the different World Bank teams engaged in CVME and MCPCVME did not agree either with each other or with MINERD. In addition, the anticipated support for a multi-stakeholder coalition in the Oversight Committee of the Education Pact was, at least temporarily, a dead end. [29] Plus, the CVME impact evaluators had made a bad impression on several school communities. So, it is unsurprising that World Vision's incoming MCPCVME leadership did not share the same view of or appetite to use MCPCVME's indicator to advance CVME's oversight Protocol.

Others seem to have imagined more positive interactions, as both were framed and funded within the broader World Bank–USAID-funded Coalition Building Facility for Participatory Governance Reform Program. In fact, some interviewees considered that certain MINERD officials had some degree of receptiveness toward the new World Vision project with an adapted name, although others differ. And yet, there were too many tensions between the resonance pathway that World Vision bricklayers preferred and the "best practice" replication model that CVME embodied. There were different interpretations of the importance of context and adaptation as opposed to the fidelity of the tool used across schools. There were also different perceptions about how complex the tool should be or the importance of the role of relationships. These pathways and operational choices were also associated with a nother divergence: CMVE and some MINERD authorities prioritizing data for oversight rather than the school-strengthening dynamics that *READ* originally proposed. According to a former World Vision staff member, there were *"[READ's] community reports and* [WV-branded] *CVA which could contribute to a functional version of APMAEs with additional requirements of CVME … and unfortunately very dispersed schools picked by donors again* [to meet research criteria] *… There were things we said it's madness* [budget, evaluation, timeline, human resourcing, school selection] *but we kept going ahead."* In practice, it was not possible to create a single document synthesizing both pathways to change (see Figure 7-4).

Layering social accountability to strengthens local systems * Guerzovich & Aston
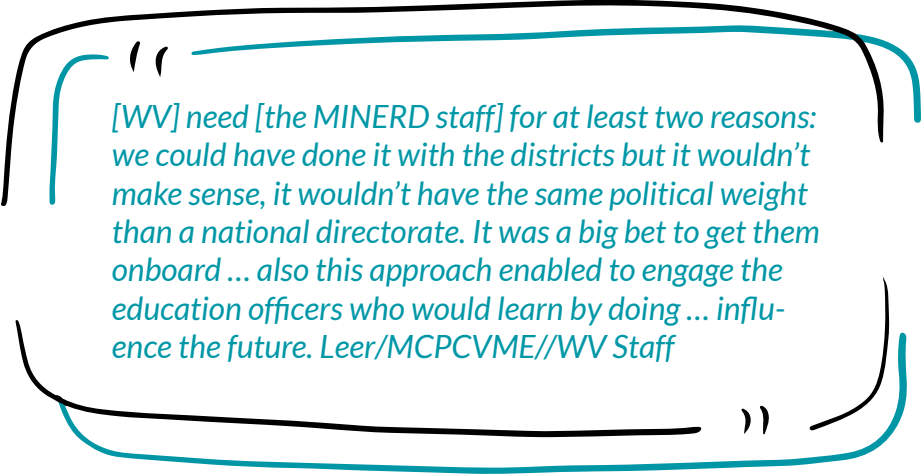
Whatever the interpretation, all plans to advance uptake were disrupted by COVID-19 and by the foreseeable electoral cycle in the Dominican Republic, with many changes coming in with a new President (staff in the system, relationships with World Vision and donors, signature initiatives, etc.), while the education system apparently remained on the same axis. In this context, USAID extended *READ* but not the community component. The World Bank's internal dynamics made it hard for the GPSA team to provide the kind of support anticipated to help the World Vision team to advance uptake, for example by connecting MCPCVME to the Bank's operations in the education sector and its dialogue with the government. The GPSA team did nonetheless provide some targeted financial support for MINERD events where the MCPCVME work and the Protocol would be showcased (see below).

In this context, while the original "layering" within World Vision had taken place (see Figure 7-1), it is not surprising that team perceived the mid-term evaluation as pessimistic. Options 2, 3, and 4 in Figure 7 had not been possible and no alternative seemed promising with the team largely focused on work at the school level. At the same time, the multiple layers of documents referring to a Protocol with ambiguous meanings attributed to it presented the kind of context that bricklayers can use to contribute to strengthening the system. After all, [layering](#) happens when agents of change take advantage of the ambiguity behind the many possible interpretations of multiple conflicting rules, put a new layer on top of them, and in so doing provide a different direction to the education system without disposing of the old components. It would take bricklayers with new impetus to walk that road.

4.5 Win–Win Mindset at Work: Fueling MINERD's Direction of Travel

1. **The mid-term evaluation's findings and the shifting context put the World Vision bricklayers into action.** "*At that point, it was the protocol we have to do it no matter what … in [3] months as the school year is closing.*" To do so, the World Vision team sought resonance between their objectives and those of key stakeholders in MINERD's secretariat in the Vice Ministry. The discussion below highlights key steps on this path.

[WV] need [the MINERD staff] for at least two reasons: we could have done it with the districts but it wouldn't make sense, it wouldn't have the same political weight than a national directorate. It was a big bet to get them onboard … also this approach enabled to engage the education officers who would learn by doing … influence the future. Leer/MCPCVME//WV Staff
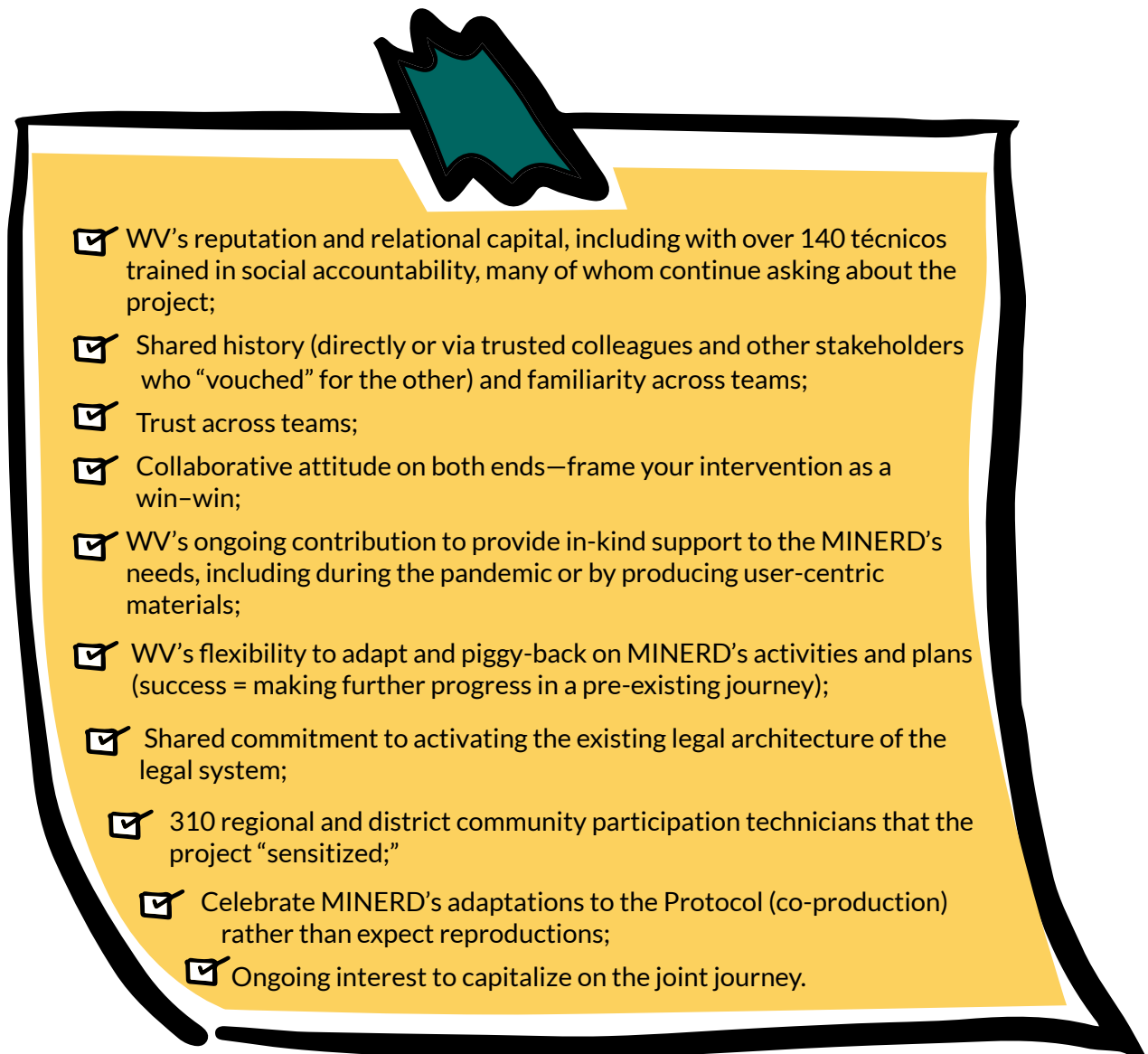
2. Relationships created a context in which World Vision bricklayers could have conversations with the MINERD staff. For example, in September 2022, Ligia Pérez, who had had good past experiences with World Vision, was appointed as Vice Minister for Decentralization and Participation. This long history of institutional relations helped the personal connections made with individuals within the READ and MCPCVME projects, and laid foundations of trust. Yet, there is also something very much related to perceptions of soft skills and understanding (Figure 8).

3. Revisiting old layers in the education system with a new lens was instrumental to opening an opportunity for a revamped interpretation of the idea of a Protocol. The Vice Ministry's staff had a mandate in a formal plan that set out to develop systematic operational tools to meaningfully oversee the implementation of the Ordinance (*Ordenanza*) and the APMAEs' work. Amid staff changes and the consequences of a pandemic, public officials did not seem to have a specific plan to fill regulatory gaps and fulfil their mandate. World Vision's proposal of an oversight Protocol was an opportunity to support the substantive advancement of that goal and World Vision could bring additional resources to the effort. In a typical bricklayers' move, the MCPCVME team and the Vice Ministry's staff team connected each other's layers to fill gaps and give new meaning to their mandates.

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4. With the promise of a win–win result, World Vision and MINERD co-produced the process to finalize the Protocol. They shared timelines, plans, and were able to better understand each other's assets and needs. They decided jointly who had to be part of the revision of the Protocol; suggestions for each of the steps of the process were presented, justified, and agreed. Formally, MINERD issued the invitations to its staff and MCPCVME led on the presentation as well as financing the process.

Figure 8: Think Like a Bricklayer and Produce Relational Capital

- ☑ WV's reputation and relational capital, including with over 140 técnicos trained in social accountability, many of whom continue asking about the project;
- ☑ Shared history (directly or via trusted colleagues and other stakeholders who "vouched" for the other) and familiarity across teams;
- ☑ Trust across teams;
- ☑ Collaborative attitude on both ends—frame your intervention as a win–win;
- ☑ WV's ongoing contribution to provide in-kind support to the MINERD's needs, including during the pandemic or by producing user-centric materials;
- ☑ WV's flexibility to adapt and piggy-back on MINERD's activities and plans (success = making further progress in a pre-existing journey);
- ☑ Shared commitment to activating the existing legal architecture of the legal system;
- ☑ 310 regional and district community participation technicians that the project "sensitized;"
- ☑ Celebrate MINERD's adaptations to the Protocol (co-production) rather than expect reproductions;
- ☑ Ongoing interest to capitalize on the joint journey.

5. Then World Vision and MINERD, including 56 education officers (técnicos), also co-produced the Protocol. Many interviewees believed that the document's strength and potential lay in the deliberation, compromise, and coordinated collective action that shaped it—from sessions with 18 people working simultaneously on the detail to feedback from the Vice Minister—all features of a resonance pathway to scale. For instance, one key informant noted that the Protocol included contributions from técnicos and was "based on consensus." Another noted that técnicos were able to "put their grain of sand" in the process.

> *It's super important, and it aids the level of adoption. It was good for all those involved, and representation from parents. It's not common to involve so many people. MINERD official*

6. In December 2022, the Vice Minister **officially** received the draft Protocol. In March 2023, the Ministry approved the **Protocol for Following Up the Spaces of Participation in the Education System**—a product co-produced with MCPCVME and a rare win for social accountability projects[31] —which was disseminated at the **National Congress of Good Practices of Community Participation in Support of Educational Quality** (which the World Bank funded). *"We presented it to the [MINERD's] staff … It was a formal protocol. By that point, … we were working hand in hand."*

> *[The Protocol] shows a path to follow... It guides teachers, parents, principals, and Juntas de Centros ... It provides guidance about how to participate ... It systematizes experiences in a way that ... enables any management team to lead the process with education stakeholders in a more effective way - It doesn't say it's obligatory ... it induces how to advance. MINERD official*

> *We are interested in having APMAEs that work ... We didn't have instruments for monitoring and follow up [before]; the protocol gave us that ... We are committed to applying the protocol."- MINERD official*

7. **The dynamic was reproduced months after MCPCVME ended during the** [**First International Congress on Decentralization and Participation**](#) **in January 2024,** which Tom attended on behalf of World Vision as a keynote speaker. At this event, the World Vision team presented learning from the project to community participation technical experts and school principals to facilitate the process outlined in the Protocol. Like *READ* and **MCPCVME, World Vision was directly requested by MINERD to publish copies of Ordinance (*Ordenanza*) 09-2000** to share with district and regional *técnicos* at this event. Both events seem to have increased goodwill toward the Protocol among key stakeholders.

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World Vision's projects contributed to the co-production of a Protocol between authorities and civil society—this is a milestone that few social accountability interventions can claim. The Protocol is not about replacing existing rules but about making win–win adjustments to a pre-existing law, with a commitment to implementation over time (i.e., "cathedral thinking" at work).

Social relationships were a resource with **an outsized relevance** for this achievement. Whether looking backward or forward, the Protocol is the product of a small number of bricklayers who persevered and capitalized on their loose relationships, their trust, and the value produced thanks to those ties to reach collective goals. Neither World Vision nor any other entity could have attained those results on their own. The staying power of this network, whose members changed roles over a 20-year period, is a key linchpin to cumulative results via short-term interventions. [32]

4.6 Projects and Relationships: An Open-ended, Collective Trajectory of Change

The macro-level achievements of World Vision's social accountability projects in the education sector should be assessed in their spatio-temporal context—a multi-decade set of fits and starts to activate APMAEs that no single actor or intervention can claim, nor expect to turn them around on its own. This dynamic is common in Latin America. As Ben Ross Schneider explains, those who provide continuity by locking in reforms over time and filling in their details can make significant contributions to strengthening education systems.

In this context, the Protocol has become a new layer in the local education system that other actors can choose to adopt and adapt, today or in the future. For the MCPCVME team, after the project ended they shared the Protocol with the authorities, and most then left World Vision. Several members of MINERD interviewed during an electoral period, however, argued that for these bricklayers, the Protocol became "a

point of departure" for adapting Ordinance (*Ordenanza*) 09-2000. At the time of writing, MINERD had almost completed a draft and various staff in MINERD viewed the Protocol as an important input to inform the proposed reform.

It is an open question whether the MINERD team will advance with this reform instrument on its own or whether it will wait to make it part of a broader effort to update the education system's architecture. Either way, informing the new Ordinance has now emerged as the most organic pathway forward for activating APMAEs based on their own experience. The specific aims are to amend the length of time AMPAEs serve to two to three years and to legalize the Parents' Federation (*Federación de Padres*).

A prospective assessment of sustainability should also consider that different pathways seem to have varying odds of leveraging the Protocol to support APMAEs to fulfill their purpose, as of the time of writing. Ongoing capacity building and support seem critical to ensure that *técnicos* and actors across the system implement the Protocol, or some lighter version, especially in schools that were not included in World Vision's projects. There is an example of this: on February 6, 2023, the Director of Education for Region 15 in Santo Domingo wrote to the project team requesting support for the Unión Panamericana school to provide guidance regarding the role and administration of oversight spaces for teachers and managers. The National Directorate of Orientation and Psychology asked World Vision to conduct a workshop on March 8, 2023 for 16 national *técnicos*. After this the Directorate team carried out the CVA process in the Unión Panamericana school.[33]

Government counterparts were, however, unclear about whether or not the Protocol had to be implemented directly with World Vision. So, when the project ended the Protocol was left on the "maybe pile." For example, conversations with the Vice Minister's team during the **congress on decentralization and participation** revealed that it was an instrument that they could potentially exploit, but they had no concrete plan for how to operationalize its use without World Vision. Staff changes in World Vision have undermined the level of communication with MINERD, meaning that the organization has failed to capitalize on this interest. In other words, in the absence of bricklayers, this pathway is stalled, although it is restarting by connecting and empowering current World Vision staff, former staff currently working for MINERD, and/or champions in the cadre of 56 *técnicos* who participated in designing the Protocol to play that role seems plausible and promising with relatively limited and domestic resources. Interestingly, in asking questions about the Protocol and offering preliminary answers, this evaluation process seems to have prompted some stakeholders within MINERD to consider whether and how they may open a new opportunity for actors to revisit that "maybe pile" and advance the effort.

The path that evaluations typically hope to find is a replication mindset. Would a linear uptake trajectory in which the Protocol is implemented by MINERD at scale in a wholesale fashion in a short period of time be likely without direct support from World Vision? As the final evaluation of the project stated, independent replication without the support of World Vision seems less likely as there are too many factors in the local system that would impede this trajectory from materializing in practice.

Equally importantly, the process refocused and increased the density of the relational infrastructure of local actors that can strengthen the education system, so that they are able to continue problem-solving into the future from different places in the system. This evaluation is a story of the power of capitalizing on interconnected networks and the trust and resources associated with them. Relationships have been valuable resources for action and results that are more than the sum of the individuals connected through these relationships. In this context, the density of these networks that connect individuals needs to be understood as an important forward-looking investment in the continuity of the collective journey

> *The experience of [working with the World Bank in [MCPCVME] leaves me with is [embracing] supporting governance. If our budget is all there to guarantee that the state works. It is about betting on that and working more closely with the state. That part for me was [a] fundamental [learning]. I really liked the fact of identifying within what the educational system already had what we can strengthen - a greater awareness of participation. [I have] a greater awareness of [what] existed. Leer/MCPCVME/ WV Staff*

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Box 10

The Education Budget

The General Education Act included the stipulation that 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be allocated to pre-university education, but the law was not implemented as intended (Dotel, Lafontaine, and Melgen, 2015).

In 2008, the teachers' union, *Asociación Dominicana de Profesores* (ADP) tried to raise awareness about the budgetary shortfalls in the sector, but were unable to mobilize other stakeholders to the cause.

In 2010, civil society groups and other stakeholders formed the *Coalición Educación Digna* (CED, Coalition for Education with Dignity) and attempted to secure the 4% GDP to be allocated to the sector. The CED quickly grew to include more than 200 CSOs and became a social movement called "the 4% Campaign."

Since 2013, the main reform in the education sector included doubling the education budget to 4% of GDP and the establishment of the National Education Pact, aligned with the National Development Strategy 2010–2030 and the Ten-Year Education Plan.

5. Conclusions

The evaluation's main finding is that systems strengthening is a story about the contribution of agents, relationships, and relational infrastructures who are at the core of systems dynamics (Figure 9). Education systems strengthening is not about interventions and the faithful replication of their tools. These bricklayers include a small number of loosely networked, closely connected, actors in civil society, donors, experts, and reformers in government, many of whom changed their positions in the system during the period covered by the evaluation. Collectively, bricklayers have staying power and embark on a process that they know will take others and time to complete—but that illustrates how social accountability projects can be a vehicle to strengthen a democratic system that achieves its main objectives.

1. Bricklayers are Backbone Actors. This Work is a Strategic Investment

Bricklayers are not the main protagonists of social accountability relationships in APMAEs, nor in ensuring that an individual child gets a quality education. Even so, their "**real work**" as secondary actors has strengthened the school communities and/or the education system in which those primary relationships are embedded. The nature and extent of their contribution becomes a strategic investment only when it is considered in interaction with others who strive to co-produce quality education over time.

2. Layering Enables Cumulative Results

For them, layering seems to have emerged as a promising strategy to walk along the resonance pathway in ways that advance change amid discontinuities in the local education system. As **elsewhere in Latin America,** collectively they figured out the details of policies and regulation, implemented reforms in the General Education Law, learned by doing with others how to fine-tune reforms, and fed back their collective insights to the policy process. In so doing they, bolstered much-needed continuity and ongoing improvement of reforms to strengthen the quality of education.

BRICKLAYERS (WV STAFF + PARTNERS) LAYERING

DIRECTION & FUNCTION TO SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT REGULATION
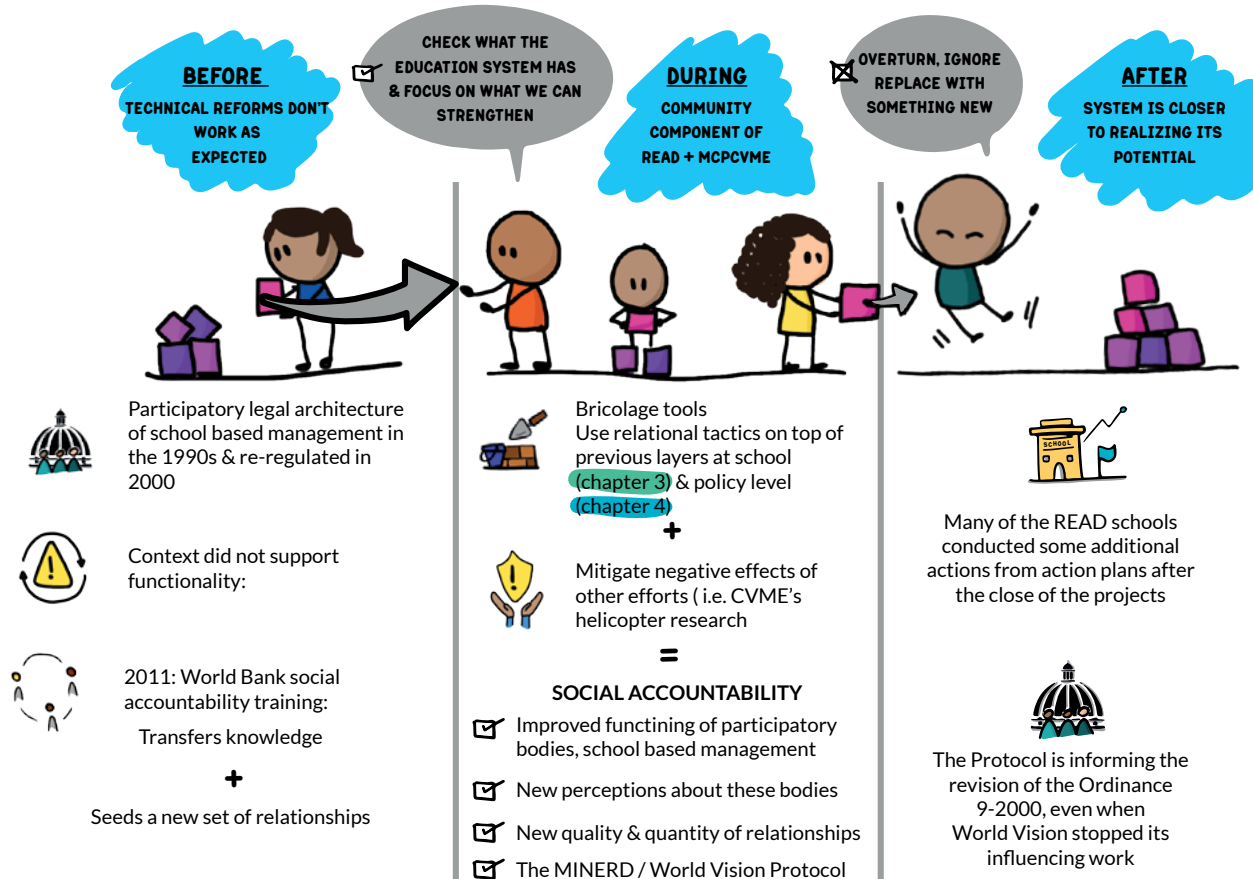
SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTED TO EDUCATION SYSTEM STRENGTHENING VIA A RELATIONAL AND INTERTEMPORAL PROCESS

BEFORE TECHNICAL REFORMS DON'T WORK AS EXPECTED

CHECK WHAT THE EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS & FOCUS ON WHAT WE CAN STRENGTHEN

DURING COMMUNITY COMPONENT OF READ + MCPCVME

OVERTURN, IGNORE REPLACE WITH SOMETHING NEW

AFTER SYSTEM IS CLOSER TO REALIZING ITS POTENTIAL

Participatory legal architecture of school based management in the 1990s & re-regulated in 2000

Context did not support functionality:

2011: World Bank social accountability training:

Transfers knowledge

+

Seeds a new set of relationships

Bricolage tools
Use relational tactics on top of previous layers at school (chapter 3) & policy level (chapter 4)

+

Mitigate negative effects of other efforts (i.e. CVME's helicopter research

=

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

☑ Improved functining of participatory bodies, school based management

☑ New perceptions about these bodies

☑ New quality & quantity of relationships

☑ The MINERD / World Vision Protocol

Many of the READ schools conducted some additional actions from action plans after the close of the projects

The Protocol is informing the revision of the Ordinance 9-2000, even when World Vision stopped its influencing work

FOR EVALUATORS ASSESSING

$1 + 1 = 3 ?$ over time?

☑ Consider theory-based methods for casual evaluation of systems strengthening

☑ Refocus from interventions as tools & methods to interventions as people & relationships that bricolage and use those tools & methods

☑ Grapple with contexts where change, continuity, predictability, uncertainty & ambiguity coexist

☑ Cathedral thinking might help: a collective movie with moving targets and changing leading actors, rather than a single win attributed to a single actor

☑ Zoom in & out of casual hotspots to look at the loose connective tissue between micro and macro levels (chapter 2)

World Vision

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3. Making Progress with Pre-existing Rules and Interventions can be an Effective Approach

Layering, the core strategy of World Vision staff and its allies in the READ project's community component, first, and MCPECVME, later, was to amend, revise and add to the formal and informal rules of the education system, especially Ordinance (*Ordenanza*) 9-2000. Effectiveness was about influencing the course of a reform that had been adopted years before the projects were approved. To paraphrase one participant, World Vision staff in the Dominican Republic saw their role as strengthening APAMAEs and the rights and opportunities embedded in law that are not fully functional. It was never the intention to instigate a new reform, overturn, or ignore institutional arrangements in the Dominican education system and create something anew.

The community component of *READ* and the MCPECVME did not introduce direct changes to the existing rules of the education system. Rather, it focused on using and iterating social accountability processes to catalyze and/or change the quality of relationships in school-level management and participatory bodies. The result was of activating relationships of a different quality (or soft governance) in practice.

To do so, they built on and adapted insights from social accountability system-level capacity-building efforts seeded by the World Bank, which strengthen individuals' knowledge, but critically their relationships within schools and across the local education system. These insights were meshed with those of actors across the education sector through *READ* and systematized in a first iteration of a Protocol. Those insights, along with World Vision's CVA package, further informed the pre- and post-COVID iterations of the social accountability intervention through MCPECVME. The emergent revised systematization of these experiences with a broad new set of stakeholders across the education system informed, in turn, the process of co-creation of a Joint Protocol with MINERD. In schools where *READ* and MCPECVME were active, and some additional schools, these insights are unevenly but continuously implemented. Each school has embraced parts that make sense for its context.

4. Using Social Accountability to Strengthen School-based Management and the Social Contracts that Make them Function

At the micro level, the evaluation identified and traced how *READ* and MCPCVME were layered on top of each other and the education system, which enabled them to contribute to the functioning of school-based management in the short term. The collaborative social accountability intervention was an operational means to support more responsiveness as well as to rework agreements between parents, school staff, and others on their mutual roles and responsibilities (i.e., their democratic social contracts, one school at a time). Mitigating negative interactions with CVME was also important. The projects further equipped some local actors to become agents of sustainability of the intervention, although the effectiveness of these local actors is uneven across schools.

5. Invest in and Capitalize on Relationships for Ongoing Policy-making

At the macro level the World Vision/MINERD Protocol is the result of leaders who opted to carve out the space and focus to invest patiently in building relationships and encourage teams and colleagues who could take on the baton to do the same. Relationships, networks, and trust are a critical resource for using implementation over time as a resource to build insights from implementation happening across the system into policy-improvement routines that long outlive the original projects.

Even as World Vision stopped working on policy-influencing processes, actors within MINERD have continued to use the inputs to inform a process to update *Ordenanza* 9-2000 and have expressed interest in taking the process further. For these actors, the Protocol is the beginning of a process rather than its end. In other words, as individuals and their networks enabled the loose continuity of the effort to strengthen APMAEs wherever and however possible, they provided direction to strengthening that the system on its own would not have had. **"Each new element may be a small change in itself, yet these small changes can accumulate, leading to a big change over the long run"**—in this case, a 20-year-long process anchored in implementation.

While the World Vision team had to confront spots of resistance, their strategy— which combined layering with other benefits for stakeholders across the system— preempted potential large-scale confrontation or resistance from beneficiaries of the status quo. Generally, powerful opponents may be able to protect rules that are critical to enable them to reap benefits from the system, but are unable to stop the

addition of piecemeal changes to the operation of APMAES, which the World Vision team and others hope will eventually tip the balance. In producing a Protocol that brings together the insights of *READ* and MCPCVME, along with insights from key stakeholders in all levels of the education system, which is now informing a revision of Ordenanza 9-2000, reformers seem to be closer to realizing this potential. The new co-created insights would alter important aspects of APMAEs, which have been instrumental in reproducing the status quo. **Among these changes, MINERD is now pushing to change *Ordenanza* 09-2000 to increase the length of time APMAEs' members can serve from one to two or three years**. In Danilo Ginebra, the *Junta de Centro* is already considering doing this for the same reason. They are proposing to change things so that they do not have to have a new APMAE every year, but every three years like the Junta de Centro.

6. Layering can be Useful for Education Systems with Similar Political Economy Dynamics—but there are Many Other Paths to Rome

Readers of World Vision's social accountability evaluation in Bangladesh or our work on resonance pathways to scale might be surprised that this evaluation does not center on trickle-up or other roads to scale up over time. Theoretically and in some isolated cases outside the evaluation's sample there were sideway scale-up and trickling up. For example, select district and regional officials went to schools, picked up lessons, and took them to other schools in their district or regions. But these cases were exceptional, and do not seem to be the most promising pathway to change in a system like that of the Dominican Republic. This is a hierarchical education system, where change from the bottom or the middle upward, without signaling from the top, is unlikely. Whether organically or by design, those who sought to advance change generally took an alternative political path. This incipient comparison suggests that while more research is needed to identify types of education systems structures where some pathways might be more promising than others, identifying them could enable more meaningful cross-learning across local education systems where findings are transferable.

7. Time Matters to Meaningfully Evaluate Systems Practice

From a theoretical and methodological perspective, the evaluation's analytical innovations and findings provide important insights for intertemporal causal evaluation of systems strengthening by putting people and relationships front and

center. This theory-based evaluation sought to grapple with a local system (and its components, causal pathway, strategies, and outcomes) where change and continuity, predictability, uncertainty, and ambiguity co-exist. The evaluation refocused attention from interventions as tools or methodologies to interventions as people and their relationships as the force driving the bricolage, adaptation, implementation, and contribution of those tools and methodologies.

The evaluation also made a bet and showed the value of identifying key causal hotspots and zooming in and out of these over time. It explored the development and loose connective tissue between micro- and macro-level change-making efforts and their effects over a long period of time. In so doing, the evaluators were able to observe patterns and outcomes that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Collectively, the interaction of the micro and macro and of interventions over time tells a story of the system that is stronger than any narrower account—whether focused at a level or at a specific point—might produce. This new systematic insight affected evaluative judgements about the accomplishments and limits of two seemingly siloed projects as well as preceding and emergent reforms and project cycles.

In short, the evaluation's approach and findings are consistent with and complement USAID's draft Local Systems Policy Paper, which was issued for comments as the evaluation was finalized. The evaluation illustrates some of the paper's key points about evidencing systems practice and the contributions that matter most over time, without ignoring the critical role of agents (or bricklayers) and relationships:

> *Recognizing that change can be slow does not mean there is nothing to be done in the meantime; rather it is an opportunity to reframe and focus short-term efforts in ways that are most likely to generate the longer-term, sustainable outcomes that local communities desire .... the "how" matters just as much, if not more, than the "what." Remember: the process is the product (USAID, 2024).*

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6. Annexes

Evaluation Analytical Framework

The ex-post evaluation seeks to bring together multiple strands of local and global bodies of evidence as well as tacit knowledge emerging from practice, using a local systems lens. This Annex discusses key components of its theory-based (Figure A) a nalytical framework.

Evaluation Principles

Utilization-focused: The evaluation seeks to facilitate decision-making among specific users and uses. These stakeholders' needs, along with available resources, time, and data, will inform the evaluation process from inception to final deliverables.

Complexity-sensitive and systems-aware: The evaluation focuses on the interface of multiple processes in the Dominican Republic and the many World Vision projects that have been used to contribute to a range of complex outcomes—from responsiveness and strengthening the social contract at the school level, to quality education and its determinants, to more participatory, effective and democratic decentralization. These outcomes are important in their own right, but can also be leverage points to support broader local systems change over time. The evaluation is not an assessment of individual projects.

Methodology

Desk review of relevant bodies of

In-depth interviews in select schools to trace possible layering and its

In-depth interviews beyond schools to trace possible scale up via

Data analysis and synthesis to communicate findings to targeted audiences

Lemire (2020)

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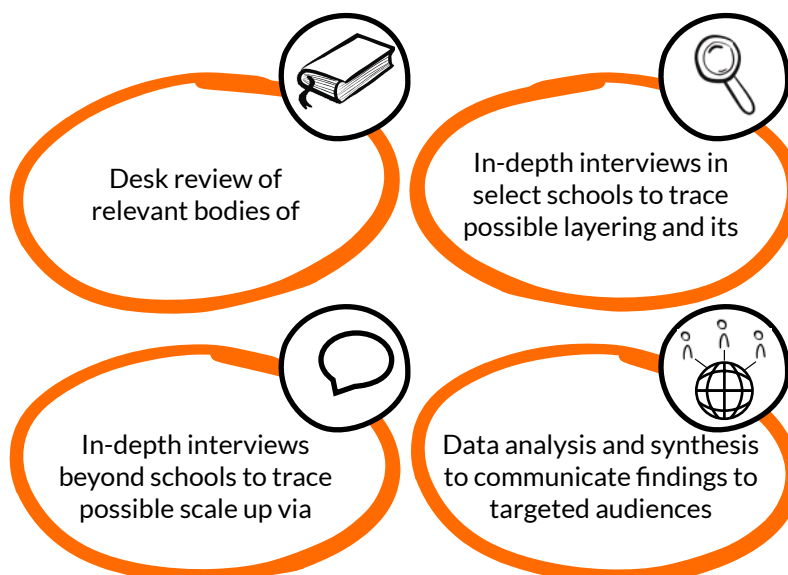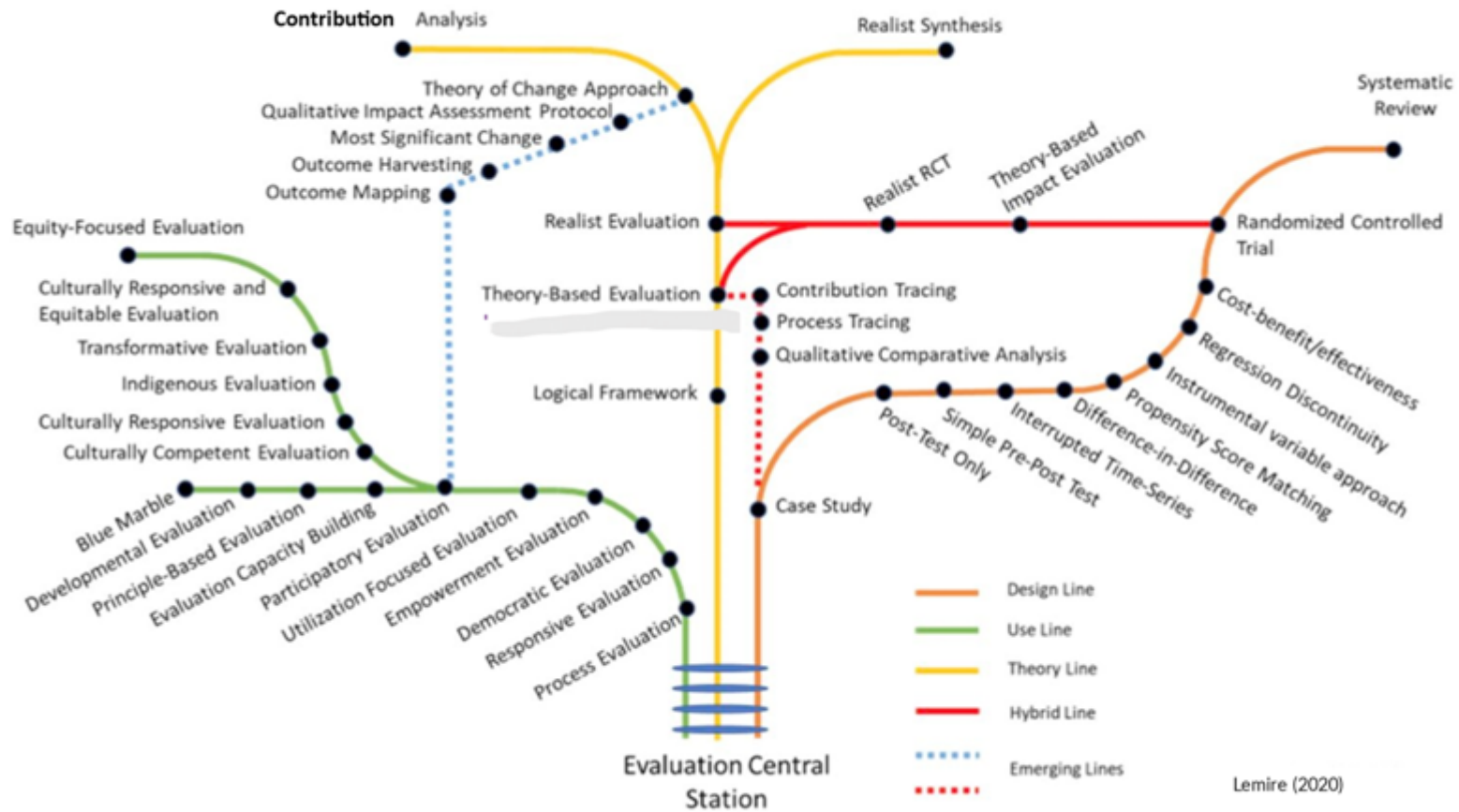
The deliverables will result from four deductive components, which will inform each other as relevant.

The methodology was informed by the main question as well as expected users, uses, timeline, and sources, available for this exercise.

The team expects to complement existing qualitative and quantitative data collected by World Vision teams with carefully selected in-depth interviews.

Emergent insights may be included in updated versions of the methodology as the evaluation progresses.

Desk review of
relevant bodies of
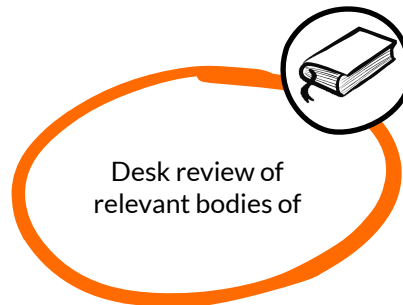
The main body of the evaluation draws on a diverse set of bodies of literature which were used to inform its design.

The exercise also includes data and literature from other CVA programs in different sectors to discern any patterns of layering, and adaptive management that may complement in-country data collection and inform evaluation conclusions and strengthen World Vision's CVA theory of change.

In-depth interviews in select schools to trace possible layering and its

In-depth interviews and focus groups were used to collect data where World Vision implemented two projects (*READ* and MPCVME), focusing on tracing the processes that span across both interventions. The objective was to capture how the second project may have linked to the lessons and results of its predecessors and, in so doing, contributed to strengthening the local system and its outcomes over time. This is a theory-based exercise using a systems lens, bricolaging, process-tracing, and other relevant methods such as comparative analysis (Box A). A key outcome of interest is the nature of relationships within and across school-level management and participatory bodies, including APMAES. Key sources include: principals, members of APMAEs and *Juntas de Centro*, *Técnicos*, Teachers' Union Representatives, and World Vision's country team, among others.

The final project evaluation team visited four of the nine schools across four regions where both *READ* and MPCVME were implemented. The ex-post evaluation visited seven of the nine schools. Between the final evaluation and this ex-post evaluation only one school was not visited (Cabirmota).[34] The team conducted interviews and small group discussions in the schools with principals, *Juntas de Centro*, and APMAEs. The focus was on tracing the processes that span across both interventions. The objective was to capture how the MPCVME project may have linked the new project to the lessons and results of its predecessors, such as *READ*, and, in so doing, contributed to strengthening the local system and its outcomes over time.

Figure B: Schools in the universe of cases, by Educational Region

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Of the 60 schools in the MCPCVME project (2020–2023), nine were also in the *READ* project (2016–2020) in which World Vision ran the community mobilization component. These are presented in Table A below.

The ex-post evaluation interviewed a total of 48 people. The evaluators interviewed or held small group discussions with 25 people at the school level. They spoke with six District and regional *Técnicos* for Community (region 4, region 6, region 15), six members of World Vision staff (management and field team), five members of the World Bank team, two Ministry of Education representatives, and members of the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo*, *Foro Socioeducativo*, *Iniciativa Dominicana por una Educación de Calidad* (IDEC), and USAID (see Table B).

Table A: Schools visited

	Visited in evaluation baseline,* mid-term, endline	Visited in ex-post evaluation**
Emma Balaguer (Santo Domingo, region 15)	✓	
Mauricio Baez, Santo Domingo, region 15)	✓	✓
Aníbal Ponce (Santo Domingo, region 15)		✓
Alma Rosa Choten (Santo Domingo region 10)		
El Quemado (La Vega, region 6)		
Cabirmota (La Vega, region 6)		✓
Danilo Ginebra (San Cristóbal, region 4)		✓
Los Conucos (San Cristóbal, region 4)		✓
Club Rotario Km 4 (San Cristóbal, region 4)	✓	✓

*Emma Balaguer was not visited in the final evaluation owing to logistical issues
**Cabirmota was not visited because of a teachers' strike in La Vega

Table B. Stakeholders Interviewed

Level Stakeholders	Micro Principals (5), APMAE members (8), of Juntas de Centro members (12)	Meso District and regional Técnicos for Community Participation (6), World Vision (6)	Macro World Bank (5), Ministry of Education (2), others (Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, Foro Socioeducativo, IDEC), USAID (1)

In-depth interviews beyond schools to trace possible scale up via
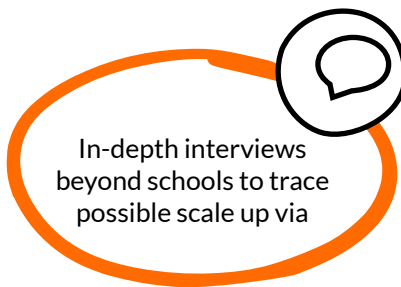
In-depth interviews included the staff from MINERD, World Vision, and USAID to capture how bilateral donors and World Vision may be contributing to systems strengthening for sustainable outcomes via the resonance pathway to scale over time.

Data analysis and synthesis to communicate findings to targeted audiences

As part of its utilization-focused approach, the evaluation included an evolving engagement plan.

Limitations and constraints

- This is a rapid, highly targeted, evaluation. It will not provide a comprehensive review of the projects that have already been covered in previous evaluations. Rather, the evaluation focuses on a specific question identified as being relevant for the intended audiences.

- The team prioritizes timeliness over the extent or extension of the exercise. It is important to collect data during this school term. This requires prioritization and accepting trade-offs in terms of breadth, depth, and corroboration of the data sources, among others.

- The evaluation will be limited by existing data sources, the memory, openness, and availability of key informants—especially given that many of them are no longer in (the same) post. The electoral period also adds to the challenges to ensuring fast-paced scheduling of relevant interviews, and support from the World Vision team will be essential in mitigating this risk.

- The composition of the evaluation team seeks to take advantage of individual member's prior engagements in the Dominican Republic as well as to mitigate personal biases and the team will take specific steps during data collection, triangulation, and analysis to add checks.

Box A

Interviews

There are many types of interviews, which should be chosen on the basis of the objectives. The **approach** to interviews we used considered that interviews are a way to establish a two-way dialogue—a **relationship** between interviewer and interviewees. The goal of the **in-depth interview is to obtain detailed knowledge from a relatively small number of individuals through well-thought out process that ensures the story is credible and analyzable.**

This evaluation combines insights from:
Process tracing—a single-case, theory-based method, which can use interviews to systematically collect and analyze information in light of theoretically informed research questions about how, when, and where specific changes came about.

*An emergent approach to interviews—which considers interviews as an inher*ently uncertain process. The interviewer needs to listen, learn what people are saying, and think as she goes, including whether to shift or stay the course. Adjustments can be made, e.g., the order and wording of questions as well as follow-up questions can be changed to support the dialogue.

With this in mind, interviews require a focus on those issues that matter most. Some interviews conducted in the course of this ex-post evaluation were about approaches to layering among project teams, in others they were about processes and outcomes at the school level and, in others, about uptake via resonance processes. These are related, but distinct, processes; and different actors' current position in the system means that they may be better placed to answer questions about one issue and not another.

The **interview guide** provides a starting point to make decisions because if the interviewer asks for one thing, she may not have the time to ask about another. Interview guides can help keep the spotlight on key issues in each case.
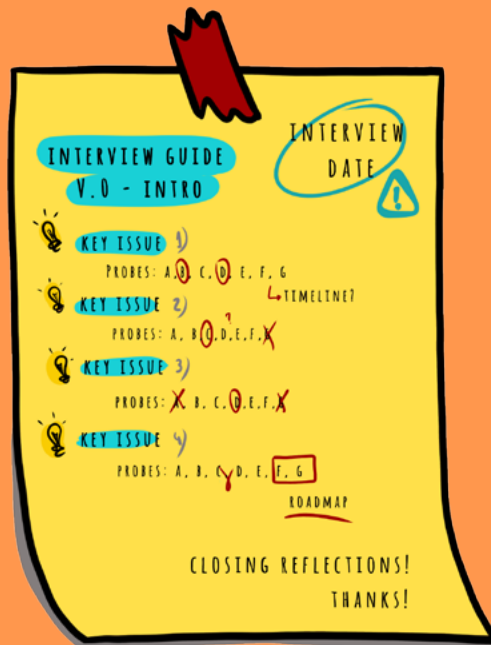
The guide is a loose combination of a series of elements that requires real-time analysis and a flexible stance:

💬 A small number of open-ended questions. These are questions that require more than a one-word answer and have no right or wrong answer, such as
When and how did you engage this community process?
What happened next?
When did the World Vision team come back (e.g., after the pandemic)?
What were the interactions with other interventions?
How did this intervention compare with others?
What are you doing now?
What are the future plans?
What do you know now that you did not know when you started?

💬 Probes help the interviewer guiding the interview to provide details and deeper meaning on issues that are key to building the story as well as checking the quality of the evidence and plausibility of any emerging relationship between cause and effect (e.g., ask the interviewee to illustrate with examples, clarifications on potentially contradictory answers, specifics on timing and sequences of events, details about entry and pressure points that may probe the logic of the answer, test counterfactuals and alternative explanations, etc.)

💬 Other *notes* to help the interviewer remember tips, such as which visual tools may be useful at particular points (e.g., are you familiar with this booklet about the Ordinance or this poster about roles?).

End Notes

[1] The project started as "LEER" and midway through was then changed to "READ". It continued to go by both names depending on the language context, but READ was the official name.

[2] Ex-post evaluations of sustainability are very **rare** in the development sector.

[3] Our starting point is that, for the purpose of this evaluation and its intended readership, it is possible and desirable to focus on the more predictable dynamics of the education system—while **many colleagues but not everyone shares** our view, a debate on the matter is outside the scope of this evaluation. Among those who do share our view there is growing agreement that **politically informed, theory-based methods** are especially useful for evaluations.

[4] Figure A in the annexes, developed by Lemiere (2020), maps theory-based evaluations in context.

[5] This statement is based on a review of World Vision's evaluation evidence of 20 years in the social accountability sphere, as well as the final of one of the interventions that are the subject of this ex-post evaluation.

[6] In the literature on systems change, there are many labels that describe actors who perform a similar function to bricklayers. They are typically secondary actors who look across the system and do whatever it takes to help disparate protagonists of change and their change-making efforts to identify synergies and produce more than the sum of their parts. These terms include **orchestrators, system conveners, catalysts**, or **nodal actors**, and many others. Most of these efforts take place among diverse actors working simultaneously. In focusing on bricklaying and layering, the evaluators understand that these other secondary actors can and often do play this asynchronous, intertemporal function, but this role is rarely given the credit it deserves.

[7] Other examples can be found in CARE Malawi's contributions to the **National Community Health Strategy** or the TAME project's **results** in Mongolia, which contributed to the government's approach to strengthening school-based management.

[8] Generalizability implies that one approach will work everywhere, independent of context. We argue instead that findings are transferable based on **proximal similarity**.

[9] The Dominican Republic was the only country in Latin America and the Caribbean where the study registered a "considerable improvement" in student performance between 2018 and 2022, albeit from a low baseline.

[10] Between 2009 and 2015, USAID funded the Effective Schools Program (ESP), whose **final evaluation** informed LEER.

[11] READ's final evaluation was carried out three years after the project ended. It found

that many school-level interventions were sustained over time, but the focus was more on Homework and Reading Clubs, with less on APMAES or the interaction with MCPCVME. We thank Mike Greer for highlighting this point.

[12] A discussion of the broader principles and notions underpinning our approach is beyond the scope of this evaluation and ill-suited for its intended readership. For those who are interested, previous and forthcoming blog posts can be found **here** and **here**, where we discuss our evolving thinking on relevant matters.

[13] This paragraph builds on and adapts a metaphor used by **Carlos Santiago Nino**.

[14] India, Indonesia, Gambia, Kenya, and Uganda.

[15] The **final evaluation of Leer**, for example, found that "*some parents also expressed satisfaction with their APMAEs and believe that it has achieved positive outcomes*" including relational ones.

[16] Some felt that other parts of the Leer project raised very high expectations that were not fully achieved, but as one principal put it, the World Vision team "*were committed… they fulfilled their promises more.*"

[17] This bet on **the potential of people who interact with others to be better able to problem-solve seems particularly important when financial and human resources are limited.**

[18] The project's monitoring system used a traffic-light or Red, Amber, Green, scale to track its results.

[19] There were long discussions on where World Vision should intervene within the sample of CVME schools, looking at the control and treatment arms of the impact evaluation.

[20] **Sanguinetty and Fernández 2000**

[21] It stipulated that 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be spent on education—which in practice was achieved only after social mobilizations in 2011 (Dotel, Lafontaine, and Melgen, 2015).

[22] **https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/193371468771725238/text/274520DR.txt; https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/dominican_republic_plan_estrategico_de_desarrollo_de_la_educacion.pdf**

[23] Also see, **https://www.intered.org/sites/default/files/boletin_20_fse_juntasescolares.pdf**

[24] A Dominican expert went further, arguing that this is purposive "*gatopardismo.*" **https://acento.com.do/opinion/dieciseis-anos-de-gatopardismo-educativo-8863103.html**

[25] At that time, the World Bank was investing in **IPAC** and other collaborative actions to support engagement among different stakeholders, which in the education sector seeded the multi-stakeholder Dominican Initiative for a Quality Education (IDEC in Spanish) with broad-based participation of CSOs, among others. A small component of these efforts

was the "social audit" training tailored to a small group of practitioners, including members of CSOs. We thank Roby Senderowitsch for providing background.

26 World Vision team members spoke of the **Dominican arepa metaphor**: change-makers should expect (friendly and enemy) fire to come from above and below. Steps had to be taken proactively to prepare for that understanding of the political economy of the system.

27 In the **GPSA Theory of Action** and, later in the **projects' independent evaluation**, the protocol indicator was taken as a localized measure of the **collaborative social accountability project's prospective scale up for sustainability**—a viewpoint that was consistent with the ambitions of the World Bank's country office to work to support MINERD, whether in 2011, 2013 or 2017.

 28 As discussed in Box 8, well before MCPCVME, the members of the 2011 training cohort and of the World Bank's Dominican Republic Team had been working in CVME with MINERD to pilot and institutionalize the use of citizen scorecards to establish a measurement system to monitor progress against the goals established by the country's National Education Pact.

29 The Committee disbanded in 2019 and was not reestablished until 2021. So, there were very limited opportunities to make connections during the project.

30 World Vision had provided in-kind support and, in her experience, reflected "respect for people," passion, "a disposition to shared learning, all of which gave the organization credibility."

31 The evaluation team reviewed over **157 cases** and identified less than a handful of functional equivalents of this achievement worldwide over the last 20 years.

32 The finding is thus consistent with the literature on relational approaches to sustainability change, which suggests "practices of sustainability transformations [look **like people] 'walking together in a world of many worlds**'"—which underscores the power of stability as relationships **hold a space** where sources of dynamism can be introduced in the system to strengthen it.

33 In addition, the final evaluation of READ assessed positively how the movement of trained teachers and principals to new schools, which might have exposed a broader set of communities outside the scope of the project to its ideas and techniques.

34 The two remaining schools were not visited due to logistical issues: namely, a teachers' strike in La Vega, and a poor response from Emma Balaguer school.

Glossary

Cathedral thinking "long-term projects or goals realized for the sake of or for benefit of future generations."

Collaborative social accountability processes that engage citizens, communities, civil society groups, and public-sector institutions in joint, iterative problem-solving to tackle poverty and improve service delivery, sector governance, and accountability (Poli and Guerzovich, 2019).

Layering is a gradual mechanism of change by which change-makers **use short-term projects to play the long-term games**. Old projects and programs leave legacies and lessons that enable successive amendments, revisions, and additions to slowly stretch goals and move toward more meaningful change, while at the same time considering and navigating changes in the context.

Local system refers to those interconnected sets of actors—governments, civil society, the private sector, universities, individual citizens, and others—who jointly produce a particular development outcome. The "local" here refers to actors in a donor agency's partner country. As these actors jointly produce an outcome, they are "local" to it; and as development outcomes may occur at many levels, local systems may be national, provincial, or community-wide in scope. According to USAID, sustaining development outcomes (such as children's wellbeing or quality education) depends on sustaining healthier local systems.

Relational infrastructure refers to the social connections, interactions, and collective intelligence that underpin the ability of a community, network, or group to collaborate, solve problems, and drive change. It is an emergent framework of trust, shared values, and common goals that allows individuals, groups, and organizations to work together effectively, pool their resources, and amplify their impact.

Responsiveness means that governments identify and then meet citizens' needs or wants.

Resonance: change happens by finding resonances with system change-makers through deliberation, compromise, and coordinated collective action. It tends to entail working with "development entrepreneurs" via insider approaches to influence. Adaptations are a critical part of these processes. Resonance is a theory from governance and accountability sectors which emerges chiefly from low- and middle-income countries, but which resonates with US scholarship on collaborative governance. Relevant scholarship on "**collaborative governance**," "**co-production**," and "**working with the grain**" inform the theory.

"**Social accountability** aims to ensure that communities are leading agents in their development story by: (1) improving the quality of goods and services, making providers more responsive to citizens' needs (2) primarily through monitoring and oversight of those goods and services (3) citizens' collective efforts to hold power-holders to account (4) providing a concrete mechanism to rework the social contract and strength-

en local systems." **CVA** is World Vision's approach to Social Accountability.

Social Capital refers to "features of social organization such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." It captures the idea that when individuals both have and draw on interconnected networks of relationships and the trust and resources associated with these relationships, they are better able to work together towards win–win results that they could not obtain on their own.

Social contracts are understood as a "dynamic set of agreements between citizens and the state on their mutual roles and responsibilities." Key dimensions to consider include: the (1) process of formal and informal bargaining mechanisms that mediate civil and state interests and capabilities; (2) outcomes—the extent to which they achieve developmental policies and outcomes; and (3) resilience—the extent to which they are responsive to and aligned with citizens' expectations.

Systems practice, according to USAID, "is the intentional and holistic application of systems thinking [used] to better understand challenges and work with local systems to unlock locally led, sustained progress. Systems practice is a long-standing discipline that can serve as a powerful tool for understanding and working with local systems. It has roots in indigenous ways of thinking and being that emphasize community, place-based awareness, and interdependence."

System strengthening means building up the capacities of local actors—governments, civil society, and the private sector—and the system as a whole—so that those local actors are better able to use the system to solve problems and generate outcomes.

Systems-aware social accountability is an approach to programming that operationalizes how and the conditions under which a social accountability intervention works with and through a system to catalyze more responsive and accountable governance.

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Acronyms

ADP   *Asociación Dominicana de Profesores* (Dominican Association of Teachers)

APMAE   *Asociación de Padres, Madres, Tutores y Amigos de la Escuela* (Associations of Mothers, Fathers, Tutors, and Friends of the School)

CARE   Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere

CED   *Coalición Educación Digna* (Coalition for Education with Dignity)

CSO   Civil society organization

CSSF   Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (UK)

CVA   Citizen Voice and Action

CVME   *Cómo Va Mi Escuela* (How Is My School Doing)

DAC   Development Assistance Committee

DIME   Development Impact Evaluation (World Bank team)

ESP   Effective Schools Program

FCDO   Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

GPSA   Global Partnership for Social Accountability

IDB   Inter-American Development Bank

IDEC   *Iniciativa Dominicana por una Educación de Calidad* (Dominican Initiative for a Quality Education)

IDS   Institute of Development Studies (UK)

LIFH   Local Initiatives for Health (Malawi)

MCPCVME *Mi Comunidad Participa en Cómo Va Mi Escuela* (Community Participation in How is My School Doing)

MEL   Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

MENA   Middle East and North Africa

MHAP   Maternal Health Alliance Project

MINERD   Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic

NGO   Non-government Organization

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OSF   Open Society Foundations

PERL   Partnership to Engage, Learn and Reform

PETS   Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys

PISA   Program for International Student Assessment

PRA   Participatory Rural Appraisal

RCT   Randomized Control Trial

RFP   Request for Proposals

ToC   Theory of change

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

USAID   United States Agency for International Development

WV   World Vision

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Florencia has a PhD from Northwestern University in Political Science and Government and is a Member of the Independent Evaluation Panel of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and a Collaborating Researcher of Grupo Politeia at the University of the State of Santa Catarina. She is Argentinean and lives in Brazil.
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