



4. Macro-Policy Level



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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 highlights

- 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.

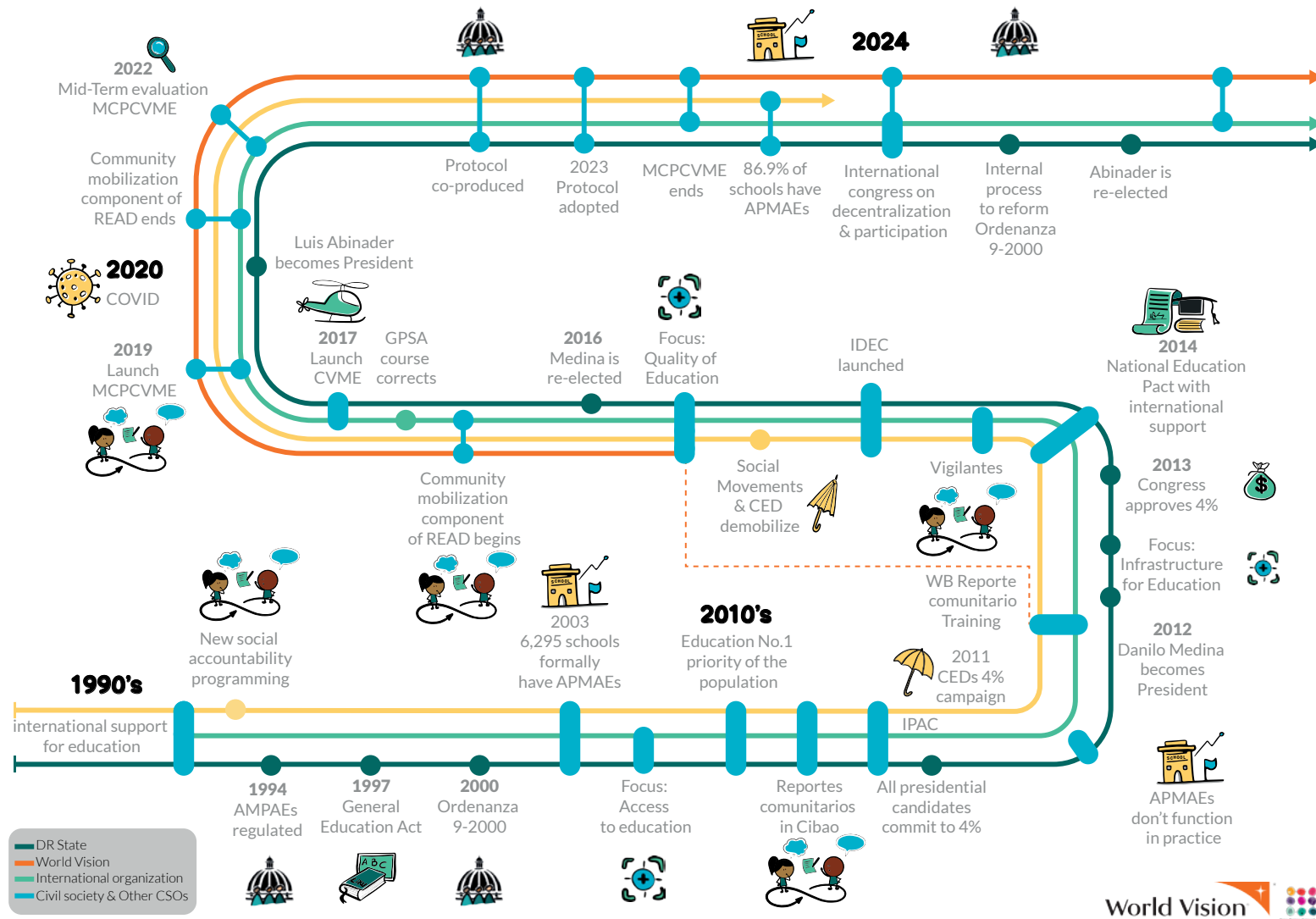
In short, many actors and factors in the local education system appear to change constantly, while other long-standing practices, norms, power asymmetries, and political economy dynamics seem to remain the same. Amidst this systemic dynamic, this evaluation looked into whether and how two relatively 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

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 social*" (social accountability) with a specialization in Community Reports (*Reportes Comunitarios*) or community scorecards in 2011 (see **Figure 5**)²⁵

Figure 5: The Dominican education system's trajectory



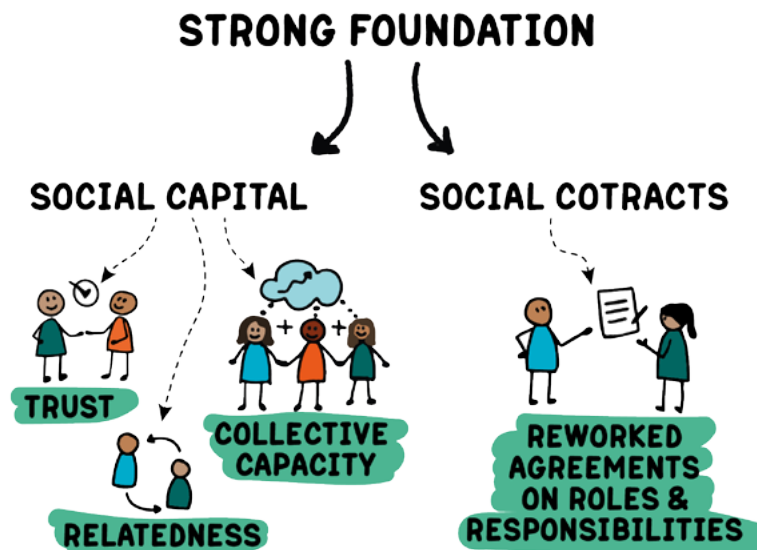
Layering social accountability to strengthens local systems * Guerzovich & Aston

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 remainder 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

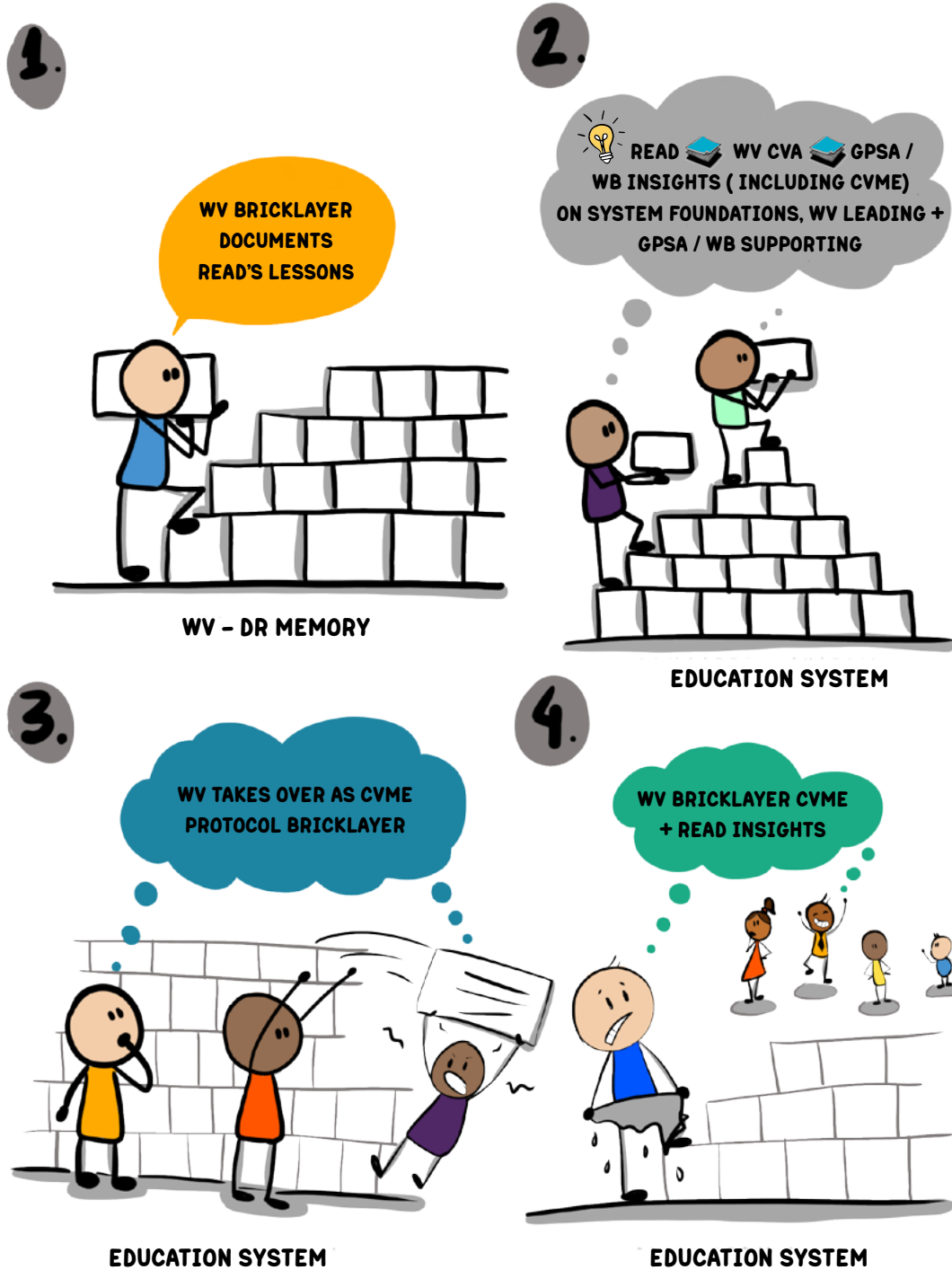
Eventually, these relationships would also open opportunities for layering at the top.

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 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.

Figure 7: Layering with “The” Protocol: Alternative Meanings



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.

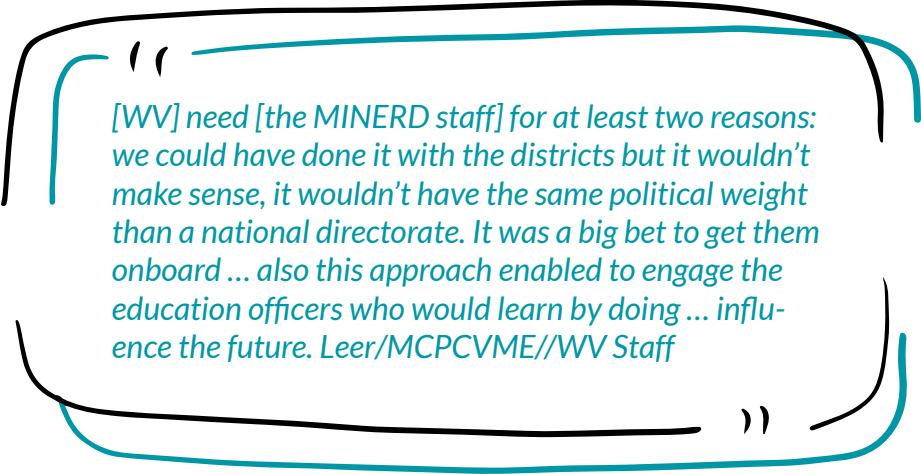
Others seem to have imagined more positive interactions, as both were framed and funded within the broader World Bank–USAID-funded Coalition Building Facility for Participatory Governance Reform Program. In fact, some interviewees considered that certain MINERD officials had some degree of receptiveness 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).

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

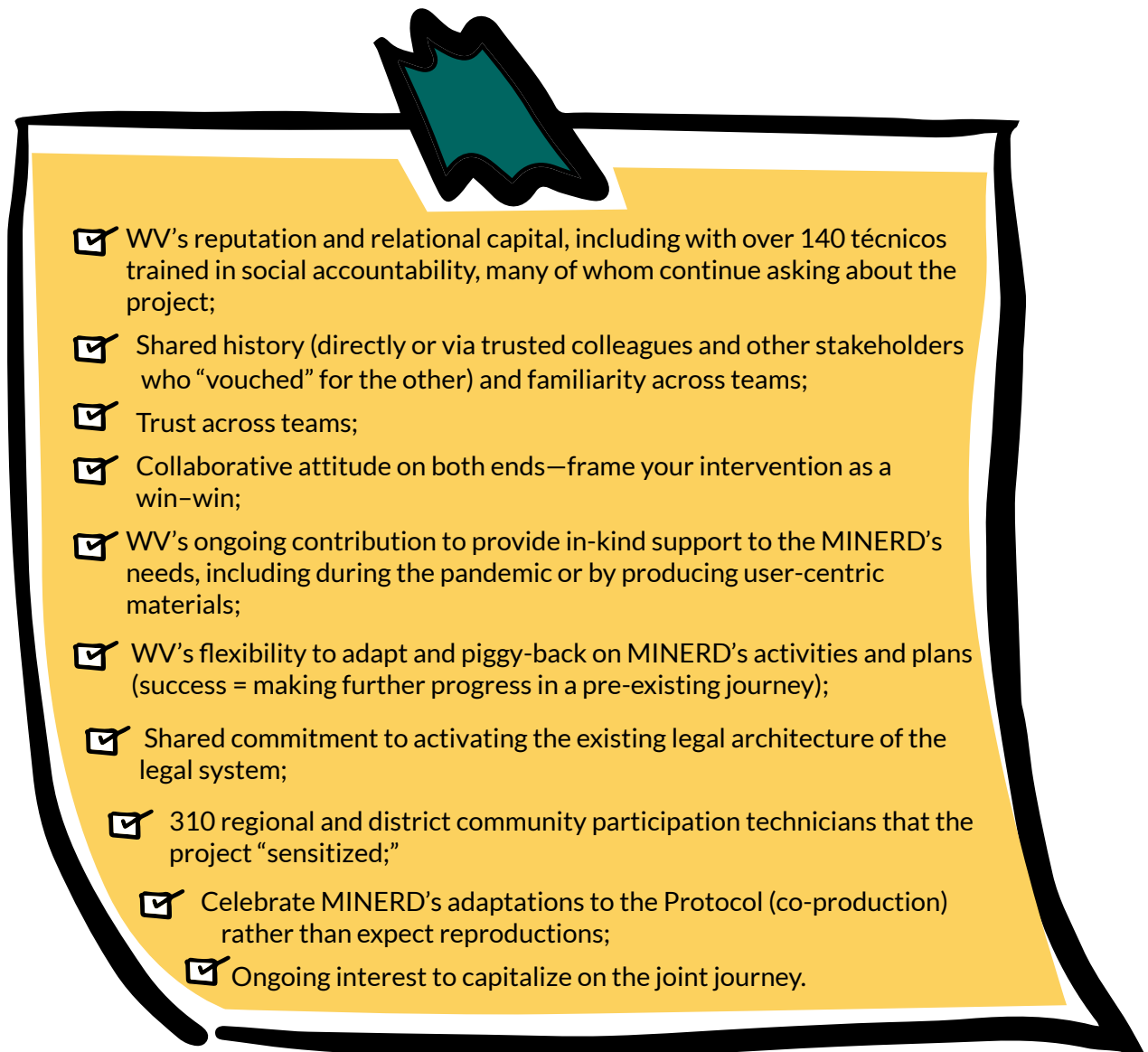
2. Relationships created a context in which World Vision bricklayers could have conversations with the MINERD staff. For example, in September 2022, Ligia Pérez, who had had good past experiences with World Vision, was appointed as Vice Minister for Decentralization and Participation. This long history 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.

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



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 projects³¹—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

1. **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.**



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.

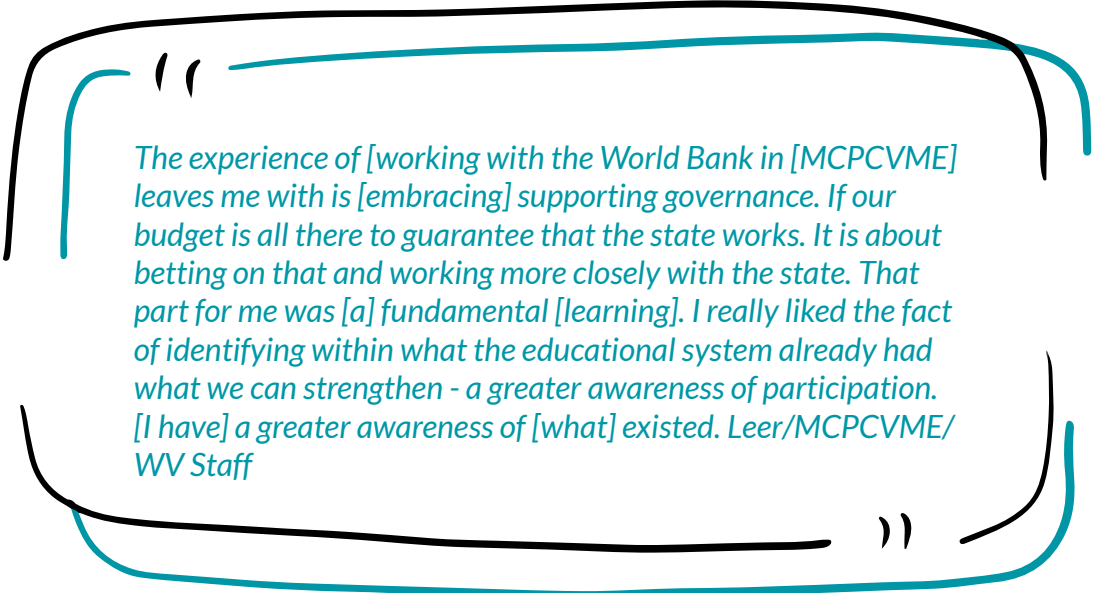
It is an open question whether the MINERD team will advance with this reform instrument on its own or whether it will wait to make it part of a broader effort to update the education system’s architecture. Either way, informing the new Ordinance has now emerged as the most organic pathway forward for 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

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.