

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS – CASE STUDY ONE

Contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals
through English teaching

EFFECT PROJECT BURMA

The English for Education College Trainers (EfECT) project was initiated following a request from the Burmese government for support with its process of educational reform. With the return to democracy in Burma (also known as Myanmar), the country was beginning to open up after over 50 years of military dictatorship and isolation from the rest of the world. The project was ground-breaking as, prior to this, it would have been impossible to engage with teachers and such a programme would not have been welcomed in Burma.

The project started before the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed and it wasn't designed with the SDGs in mind. However, Ginny Rowlands, the interim project manager who was involved in its design and implementation, points out that the association with Goal 4 Quality education underpins all the British Council's work in English and education in Burma.

This case study looks at how EfECT contributed to the SDGs, despite this not being a specific aim of the project. It highlights elements of the project that link to SDG 4 and to other SDGs. Many of the British Council's aims are echoed in the SDGs and the way in which projects are designed and run reflect an ethos of inclusion and partnership which are also at the heart of the SDG agenda. There is much that the British Council can do to progress this agenda. There is also much that the British Council and its partners can learn from the issues the SDGs set out.

EfECT was implemented alongside The Comprehensive Education Sector Review by the Burmese government which began in 2013 and is part of a wider Memorandum of Understanding on education between Burma and the British Council – the first to be signed by the Ministry of Education in Burma and a foreign institution at ministerial level.

Enhancing the work of teacher educators

'No one could say that it was the start of something big at the time but we sensed that it was.'

Ginny Rowlands, Director of English, Burma, and interim Project Manager

Teacher educators are important in taking forward the national curriculum. The EfECT project trained almost 1,600 trainees in the first year and over 2,000 in the second year. Many British Council projects have delivered a combination of English proficiency and teaching methodology but in this project the amount of contact time for beneficiaries with the trainers is unusual and has paid off. The trainers also lived on site which had benefits in terms of the levels of friendship and trust they were able to establish.

Testimony of an English trainer

In the project my role is training and teaching English to teacher educators who are lecturers at state teacher training colleges. The teacher educators are divided into three groups: methodology, subject content and co-curricular trainers. They teach/train the equivalent of pre-service primary and secondary PGCEs/BAs, as well as in-service training for local teachers and distance learning courses.

Burma is a deeply traditional country and the local culture in the college is fairly conservative so we have to be careful what we say and do. The teacher educators at the college were initially very shy with 'the foreigner': they would walk to the other side of the corridor to avoid speaking to me in English; now the teacher educators are very lively and confident with me.

The teacher educators are very positive and almost all of them are embracing the training and the goals of the EfECT Project. They work extremely hard and it's true to say that the EfECT project is an additional burden on their workload. Before EfECT began, many teacher educators had some theoretical knowledge and had memorised some key terms for approaches to teaching, such as 'Child Centred Learning', but they were not able to apply this understanding. They feel it is good for them to have a native English speaker and they are extremely grateful that someone has come across the world to help them.

Personally I feel an immense sense of satisfaction working here. When I arrived at the college, I would walk around the corridors and just heard core repetition of trainees in the classrooms; now they are working in groups, sharing ideas, presenting to the rest of the class, asking questions and they have produced creative and informative displays on the walls: before there were none.

Meeting local needs

The British Council developed the project objectives in consultation with the Ministry of Education and worked with VSO and other international non-governmental organisation partners in the country. Political and cultural sensitivities were taken into account in the design and implementation.

EfECT's objectives are to improve Burma's teacher educators' ability and confidence in using English, generally and for teaching purposes, to enhance their classroom methodology, and improve their ability to use teacher training resources.

Delivery of the project is through the placement of two EfECT trainers in each of 21 teacher education colleges and universities of education. The trainers are skilled professionals who are also supported in their own professional development and through performance management processes, providing an example of good practice. Good project and people management also enhances the outcomes for beneficiaries.

The value of the project was expressed by one teacher educator receiving training:

'Learning English is important for students as it's an international language and if we are good at it we can study more advanced subjects and can access more on the internet: material, teaching resources and new information. Methodology is also important for us. We were familiar with theories but we couldn't apply them. After this course, teachers have improved a lot, teaching is more practical and when we do practical demonstrations I can see how much we have improved.'

Daw Yu Kyi Swe (trainee teacher educator)

Links between EfECT activities and the Sustainable Development Goals

The impact on SDGs was not a specific goal of the project. However, Ginny Rowlands, the interim project manager, points out that the association with Goal 4 underpins all the British Council's work in English and Education in Burma. Quality teaching is critical to these projects and is central to Goal 4 of the SDGs to: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The project aims to enhance teacher competence which will have a positive impact on learning outcomes for their pupils. The project provides increased opportunities for trainees to access international standard study and skill-enhancing programmes, which will support their future employment. These aims can be aligned with the targets of Goal 4 of the SDGs.

One of the English trainers suggested that the SDGs were first discussed at a higher level in the project and that the information is now filtering down to the teaching level. The trainers have recently been given access to a new online teaching resource on the SDGs produced by a related project, Connecting Classrooms, which has started to operate in 100 schools in Burma.

When they were designing the project, British Council managers were aware that teacher educators had very little professional development in Burma. In the first year of the project the focus of the trainers' work was on improving the English language proficiency of the teacher educators; in the second year it was

to improve the teacher educators' classroom practices. They took into account the age-profile of the teacher educators: almost half (45 per cent) were over 45 years. The older teachers had very few opportunities to develop in their careers since entering the profession. The idea was to give them that opportunity or at least refresh their skills. In that sense, the project is working towards lifelong learning, which is another aspiration of Goal 4.

'Quality education means the teachers. You can do so much in terms of infrastructure, materials and IT but it is the teachers that make the difference to quality in education.'

Ginny Rowlands, Director of English, Burma and interim Project Manager

Examples of EfECT's contribution to the SDGs

EFFECT GOALS	EFFECT ACTIVITIES	SDG TARGETS MET
To improve Burma's teacher educators' ability and confidence in using English. To enhance their classroom methodology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3,600 teacher educators trained. 900 students trained in English language, to enhance their communication skills in the workplace. 	Goal 4 Quality education 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills.
To improve their ability to use teacher training resources and ICT skills to use online resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teaching materials include a module on inclusion which has raised awareness about diversity and discrimination. 	Goal 4 Quality education 4.7 Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote ... sustainable lifestyles and appreciation of cultural diversity ..., human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship.
To improve teachers' ability to use teacher training resources and ICT skills to use online resources; ensure life-long learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of the teaching profession are women. EfECT gives them opportunities to gain new skills and capacities and enhance prospects for promotion. 	Goal 5 Gender equality 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

'Leaving no one behind' is a core principle of the SDGs that is also part of EfECT

One of the institutions included in the project was a university for ethnic minorities, where the teaching is done in ethnic languages (135 in the country). Teachers are learning to teach English in schools which use the mother tongue rather than the national language. They learned English in the first year as this is a common, uniting language. It was possible to instruct them and train students with different languages and to learn the teaching methodology because the common language was English.

'The fact that we have embedded trainers in these far-flung areas has been quite unusual and instrumental in getting engagement and gaining trust and overcoming challenges in a project asking people to completely change their thinking and beliefs about their profession. They have felt supported by the embedded trainers. They haven't found it a threatening imposition of ideas that don't fit. We have gradually got to know them and found a compromise between full-scale change and accepting and integrating their own cultural experiences and beliefs into the training. In that sense we didn't want to leave any region behind.'

Ginny Rowlands

Additional goals to be addressed

Goal 10 Reduced inequalities

Increasing equity and inclusion are standard objectives of British Council projects.

In order to address the lack of equity between rural and urban areas and between areas where there is investment and others that are neglected, EfECT operated in 25 colleges across the country in some very remote and some very neglected areas.

'Equality, diversity and inclusion are tenets of how we work in the British Council. We expect all staff to be aware of our policy and to follow mandatory training in these areas.'

Ginny Rowlands

There are inclusion issues in Burma around ethnicity and disability that need to be addressed sensitively. The trainers have good child protection information that deals with issues such as disability and special needs, and these topics were included in the teaching materials. There is a unit on inclusion and trainers discuss it with the teacher educators. There is scope to develop ideas in the materials, the curriculum design and in assisting pupils with special needs in mixed ethnic and linguistic groups but inclusion should be looked at in other areas, such as technology:

'One of the strands in the project was to include ICT training, which was quite ground-breaking. In this college there are 40 computers in the computer room and they are all trained up to use them. The EfECT project has addressed this long-term continuous goal to some extent. However, many teacher educators are still unable to read or send emails or work with laptops or access the internet so these skills and this equipment are still needed at the colleges.'

Gareth Butt, Teacher Trainer

Goal 5 Gender equality

Additional gender equality issues identified in SDG Goal 5 have emerged during the project and could potentially be addressed in future. In Burma teaching is a largely female domain. EfECT gives women teachers the opportunities to gain new skills and capacities thus enhancing their employment prospects and promotion within the profession. But because it is seen as a female profession, it is low-paid and the salary is not enough to feed a family. A new law is considering improving teacher compensation, so that they can get on to a different scale in the civil service which would increase salaries.

Challenges in demonstrating how projects are contributing to the SDGs

There has been no monitoring of SDG contributions because this was not part of the original framing of the project design or log frame. But this could be changed if a new project is developed as a continuation of the EfECT project and could be integral to the monitoring and evaluation activities.

The EfECT project had a systematic approach to data collection and information management for monitoring and evaluation: two external monitoring reports and a final evaluation were carried out by an external evaluator and quantitative as well as qualitative data were collected on teacher's performance and progress in terms of language proficiency, knowledge of methodology, teaching skills and perceived benefits. The most significant change (MSC) methodology was used as the data collection strategy to complement the large volume of quantitative data with qualitative insight into teacher educators' experiences. Accordingly, 872 written accounts produced by teacher educators in 17 colleges were analysed by trainers and the project team.

Summary

- The project was not designed using the SDG framework but Goal 4 underpins the British Council's work in English and education in Burma: Quality teaching is critical to British Council projects.
- If a future project is developed there is great potential to integrate in the design the targets for Goal 4 and some targets in Goal 5 on Gender Equality, and in Goal 10 on Inequalities.
- The project could give greater emphasis to inclusion issues, such as diversity and disability, and greater emphasis to gender equity and women's empowerment targets.

Ideally, the SDG goals and targets should be integrated into new project designs, with identified indicators to measure the projects' contribution to the SDG targets. It would be useful to link up with other organisations in the country to network and support each other and to work together on the SDGs. Data collected can also be used with project partners, such as the Ministry of Education to identify gaps and areas to be strengthened in taking forward the SDG commitments.

Collecting gender disaggregated data and using intersectional analysis will aid in the analysis and in measuring of outcomes, especially in relation to inclusion, equity and to monitor the leave no one behind commitment enshrined in the SDG commitments.



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