Design Choices for Delivery Approaches in Education

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Key Messages

- Delivery approaches bring together management functions in a new way to shift attention from inputs and processes alone, to a focus on outputs and outcomes.

- Delivery approaches are heavily influenced by their context and the goals and inputs that feed into them. There are many different ways to design delivery approaches and integrate them into the broader education system.

- Policymakers have various design choices to consider, including staffing, financing, the governance of the approach, its location in the government, and its integration within the bureaucracy.

- There is a need for empirical evidence on how these design choices affect the impact of delivery approaches in low- and middle-income countries.

- The core functions of delivery approaches are target setting and prioritization; measurement and monitoring; leveraging political sponsorship; accountability and incentives; and problem-solving and organizational learning. Not all delivery approaches use all of these functions, nor do they use them in the same way.

- The COVID-19 pandemic provides both a challenge to education delivery and an opportunity to reexamine current efforts and streamline policy implementation as we enter the final stretch of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

- When faced with budget constraints, ministries of education can still improve delivery by changing, improving, or strengthening management functions so they are aligned to priorities and expected outcomes.

Core Function of Delivery Approach
Williams et al., 2021

1 Target Setting & Prioritization
Establish key priorities and objectives, create measurable indicators to measure progress, and/or set performance benchmarks to be achieved in a specific time period.

2 Measurement & Monitoring
Establish and use mechanisms to collect and report information about the performance of divisions, districts, teams, schools, and/or individuals.

3 Leveraging Political Sponsorship
The leader uses his/her high-level political backing to enable better policy and delivery. The audience for these signals can be the bureaucracy itself or external stakeholders.

4 Accountability & Incentives
There are implicit or explicit rewards and/or sanctions linked to whether or not the delivery targets are met.

5 Problem–solving & Organizational Learning
Dialogue, coordination, and problem-solving using across individuals, divisions, or organizations to improve performance through sharing of information and ideas..

An urgent need to improve education service delivery

COVID-19 continues to **pose complex challenges to governments worldwide** to deliver quality, inclusive education for all students. At the height of the pandemic, 1.6 billion children globally were out of school, and a year into the pandemic, 26 national school systems remained entirely closed (**UNESCO, 2021**). While the pandemic has created new barriers to delivering education services at an unprecedented speed, *delivery challenges* for education systems have always existed: *How can governments make sure children are not only in school but are also learning? How can governments monitor enrollment and learning data as well as target interventions and investments towards marginalized groups? How can governments empower and support the education workforce to deliver learning outcomes?*

These delivery challenges are particularly concerning as the effects of COVID-19 on education budgets have become clearer. Since the onset of the pandemic, education budgets have been cut in 65 percent of low- and lower-middle-income countries (**World Bank 2021**). While relatively small in nature, these budget cuts may never be recovered as the pandemic continues to take an economic toll. As a result, education decision-makers face increasing pressure to maximize efficiency and demonstrate results despite financial constraints.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused both a crisis and a strategic opportunity for the education sector to rapidly improve education delivery. To overcome these challenges, some governments are adopting delivery approaches to better implement their vision for reform. A *delivery approach* is an institutional unit or process used by governments to improve their performance when delivering services and implementing policy.[1] In education, a delivery approach would typically aim to ensure that policies that begin in the education ministry are implemented and result in better learning outcomes for schools and children who receive them. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of both vertical and horizontal pathways in service delivery. Delivery approaches can help ministries of education build networks with other ministries and organizations to meet common goals. For example, the importance of connecting with the health, nutrition, and child protection sectors has increasingly been recognized during the pandemic to support the well-being of children and families.

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[1] DeliverEd defines a delivery approach as an institutionalized unit or structured process within a government bureaucracy that aims to rapidly improve bureaucratic functioning and policy delivery by combining a set of managerial functions in a novel way to shift attention from inputs and processes alone to also include outputs and outcomes.

A framework for understanding how delivery approaches work

Delivery approaches vary in their staff, structure, goals, and where they are situated within bureaucracies (**Williams et al., 2021**). Delivery approaches often bundle a set of pre-existing functions together in a *new way.* In some cases, a delivery approach may genuinely introduce new practices (such as high-stakes targets, new data collection methods, or more frequent stakeholder meetings) with existing practices, but in other cases, a delivery approach may seek to achieve its effect simply by *combining* existing practices from throughout the bureaucracy into one unit. Our **global mapping of delivery approaches** identified 152 examples in 80 countries, and nearly half of these are in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (**Mansoor et al., 2021**). Despite their diversity, most delivery approaches can be described in terms of three features: (1) the core functions they perform; (2) the level of the system to which these functions are assigned; and (3) the extent to which the delivery approach is integrated with existing bureaucratic structures.

Delivery Approach Design Choices

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Core Functions Any combination of these	Level(s) of Goverment At least one of these	Integration One of these
Target setting & prioritization	National center - of - government	Existing bureaucratic structures
Monitoring & measurement	National ministerial	Hybrid or re-organized structures
Leveraging political sponsorship	Frontline (e.g. school, hospital, etc.)	New structures
Accountability & incentives		
Problem-solving & organizational learning		

Core functions of a delivery approach. There are five functions delivery approaches draw on to achieve their objectives.

1. **Target setting and prioritization**: Establishing a set of key priorities and objectives, creating measurable indicators to characterize progress against these objectives, and/or setting benchmark levels of performance to be achieved in a specified time period.
2. **Measurement and monitoring**: Establishing and using mechanisms to collect and report information about the performance of divisions, districts, teams, schools, and/or individuals across the organization or sector. The data are used to inform evidence-based planning and decision-making.
3. **Leveraging political sponsorship**: The president, minister, or other top leader uses their political clout to enable better policy and service delivery. The audience for these signals can be the bureaucracy itself (to add pressure or legitimacy), teachers' unions, media, and citizens (to increase external pressure on the bureaucracy or help the government to hold itself accountable).
4. **Accountability and incentives**: There are rewards and/or sanctions linked to performance – more simply, the "carrots and sticks" associated with delivery approaches. These can include monetary incentives, recognition and/or other honors, increased responsibility or other professional rewards, the threat of firing or other formal career accountability mechanisms, reporting through high-stakes meetings which create strong reputational concerns, "naming and shaming," etc.
5. **Problem-solving and organizational learning**: The team keeps high-level leaders informed of progress and barriers and works to organize and motivate the bureaucracy around the key priorities and objectives. Routine dialogue, coordination, and problem-solving across multiple individuals, divisions, or organizations can improve performance through better sharing of information and ideas. This includes horizontal collaboration and convening across teams, sectors, or actors, as well as "bottom-up" approaches to catalyzing organizational learning through local problem-solving, adaptation, issue escalation, and feedback along the service delivery chain. Problem-solving sometimes entails frequent stock-takes or similar meetings, which enable a review of performance and on-the-spot problem solving.

These functions are not unique to delivery approaches and often describe what most bureaucracies are supposed to do on a day-to-day basis. While these functions are often intertwined, a delivery approach may seek to improve performance by clarifying functions, roles, and outcomes, executing these functions better, or bundling them in new, unique ways. Monitoring, for example, may bring new data to light which affects target setting. Prioritization may be achieved through collaborative problem-solving and communication.

We consider two connected pathways when analyzing how delivery approaches work to change behaviors and systems. **More accountability- and incentive-type approaches** tend to rely on monitoring routines that involve regular updates on agency performance with the leadership, publication of performance targets, and rewards or sanctions for performance. **More problem-solving and organizational learning-type approaches**, on the other hand, engage in frequent and timely troubleshooting of challenges and use lower-stakes collaborative forums to facilitate collective problem-solving and organizational learning. A delivery approach can use aspects of both types or different approaches at different times. In our global mapping of delivery approaches, we found most (58%)

delivery approaches rely more on accountability and incentive-driven mechanisms, while 11 percent rely more on problem-solving and organizational learning approaches. Nearly one-third (31%) combined both pathways about equally.

System level where delivery approach is based. Delivery approaches vary in where the approach is based in the government and where it may operate. Approaches can be based on one level and aim to influence and work within another – for example, being based in a prime minister's office but collecting data directly from schools. Levels include:

- **National center-of-government:** The top-most level of political and bureaucratic authority, such as a president or prime minister's office.
- **National ministerial:** A national-level sector ministry or other national-level agencies, such as an education ministry.
- **Sub-national:** Any government entity that exists below the national level. This could be states, provinces, regions, districts, or municipalities.
- **Frontline:** The level where service delivery takes place, i.e. where the frontline providers of the service directly engage with citizens. This would, for example, comprise schools in the education sector or basic health units in the health sector.

Our global mapping research found that nearly half (47%) of delivery approaches are set up at the national level in the center-of-government, while 30 percent are set up at the national ministerial level, and 23 percent are set up at the sub-national level.[2]

Integration with existing bureaucracy. There are several options for where the delivery approach is situated in the bureaucratic structure, including:

- **Existing bureaucracy:** Using existing structures within the bureaucracy to execute the key functions of the delivery approach.
- **Hybrid or re-organization of bureaucracy:** A hybrid of existing and new bureaucratic structures, or a re-organizing or shuffling of pre-existing bureaucratic structures into a novel configuration.
- **New unit:** Creation of a new unit that exists outside or in parallel to existing structures of bureaucratic hierarchy and resource allocation.

Our global mapping of delivery approaches found that 80 percent of delivery approaches are housed in new or re-organized bureaucratic structures, while 20 percent are housed in existing structures. How the delivery approach is integrated can depend on the skills and leadership capacity of the staff and the relationships between the delivery approach staff and the existing bureaucracy. Whether the team implementing the delivery approach is assembled from among existing public servants, through hiring external consultants, or a combination is another consideration that can affect the dynamics and effectiveness of the approach.

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[2] As the mapping was global in scale, it was not feasible to search comprehensively for frontline delivery approaches. We identified only two examples of such units, in London, and grouped these together with sub-national units in our figures.

While there are multiple design choices when setting up a delivery approach, we currently lack abundant empirical evidence about which types of approaches are more effective in which contexts. The main goal of DeliverEd is to shed light on whether and how low- and middle-income countries can use delivery approaches to improve policy implementation. There is unlikely to be just one "best" way to do this since the success of a delivery approach depends on the context and people involved.

Contextual and cultural factors influencing delivery approaches

A range of contextual factors can affect policy implementation and interact with a delivery approach's functions, design, and overall effectiveness and impact. While many of these factors are unique to the country, and even within the country to regional or district locations, several important contextual factors can influence delivery approaches. They include the existing political landscape and the nature of rewards or sanctions for public service personnel; whether a crisis occurs, such as the COVID-19 health emergency or a natural disaster or conflict; a country's history of similar reforms, or the presence of competing reforms; and time horizons for political or bureaucratic leaders and institutions. Below, Amel Karboul, the first female Minister of Tourism for Tunisia, reflects on her role as Minister when she knew the goal of her administration was to set up elections and hand over to a new government as fast as possible.

Excerpt from the blog: Delivering reforms for tourism in Tunisia: Amel Karboul reflects on key lessons for policymakers

Looking back, there are several things I would repeat, and several things I would do differently if I were Minister again today. I was able to leverage the fact that I had a high-profile in the media, in part because I was the first female Minister of Tourism. This helped make the reform strategy of the ministry and its delivery more attractive for government officials and citizens to engage with. For the first time, people felt what our ministry did mattered, and the profile of the ministry was more prominent than it had ever been. We were even able to use social media to connect with young people and involve them in the delivery of the reform.

I did learn some hard lessons along the way. Coming from the private sector, I underestimated the nature of politics and the scrutiny that I would face as a public official when mistakes were made. I realized that even when working towards shifting the bureaucracy's culture in positive ways, some would simply not support you, even if they knew the reform agenda and your work was sound and achieving results. Earning trust and having a safe space for trying new ideas, making mistakes, and

learning continuously throughout the process are difficult when the time horizons for a political leader are often short.

-**Amel Karboul**, Education Commissioner and former Minister of Tourism for Tunisia

While empirical evidence on the extent to which these contextual factors influence the effectiveness of a delivery approach is still developing, there is some anecdotal evidence that leadership, culture, and basic human respect play a role in the success of delivery approaches. **When reflecting on his experience in England's National Health Service**, Gwyn Bevan cites the dynamism of the leadership team of then Prime Minister Tony Blair and Sir Michael Barber and the importance of political signaling and trust. He notes, "The PMDU became the most exciting place to work in government with its mix of talent: officials who knew how government worked and staff recruited from consultancies who brought different ways of thinking and fresh, innovative approaches."

In Argentina, Mercedes Miguel also found that leadership, and even emotions, play an important role in whether governments can accomplish what they set out to do.

Excerpt from the blog: *Delivering an ambitious reform agenda for Argentina: How one leadership team shifted the culture towards focusing on learning and investing in human capacity*

I learned so many lessons during my ten years in office, but I would definitely share the importance of bearing in mind that any single educational reform is an *emotional reform*. As leaders, we deal with people – and emotions play a deep, profound role in individuals' attitudes towards "doing" something. Investing in team-building, meeting stakeholders' needs, listening in a deep and honest way, inviting active participation, building collaborative spaces, and co-creating policies is what allowed for creating sustainable public policy. People (public servants, professionals, teachers, principals, community leaders, unions) need to be an active part of the planning, implementation, and assessment process. Then, the public policy and the results achieved belong to them and they feel a true sense of ownership.

The other huge lesson learned relates to team-building. When you are in office for a limited time, accomplishing goals and priorities in a specific amount of time and within budget requires a dream team. Maybe you won't be able to afford the best professionals for each area needed, but make sure you have the most committed, brave individuals who share your vision on your team and who can lead the planning strategy and monitoring of results in order to achieve implementation. Invest time in creating the best team attitude, giving and receiving tough feedback to achieve the plan, and regularly checking in on progress. There is a huge myth in educational systems around the world: *it's all about more money.* With a very good team, clear priorities when planning (I believe less is more), a method for follow-up, consistency, and brave leadership, you will find that it might not be about *more money* needed, but about *more efficiency* in the use of your budget.

-**Mercedes Miguel**, former Secretary of State for Innovation and Quality in Education at the National Ministry of Education, Argentina

Filling evidence gaps to inform future delivery

DeliverEd's research focuses on capturing new evidence on how governments can best execute their reform agenda, moving beyond the current dialogue on what policies that agenda should encompass. At the global level, DeliverEd has undertaken a systematic review and mapping of delivery approaches, seeking to understand which countries have adopted delivery approaches and analyzing patterns and trends with their design. Our **digital map and database of delivery approaches foun**d evidence of 152 delivery approaches in at least 80 countries. Here are three observations we found during our systematic mapping:

- Of all delivery approaches identified, only 18 percent were found in low-income countries, compared to 31 percent in high-income countries.
- The highest number of delivery approaches identified were in sub-Saharan Africa (25% of cases), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (20% of cases), which had the second-largest number of delivery approaches.
- Most delivery approaches (62%) cover multiple sectors across the government, rather than just a single sector; the education sector is frequently a target of delivery approaches.

At the regional level, we are working with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) to learn from policymakers and their top goals in delivering education during the COVID-19 crisis. To date, we have heard that capturing learning outcomes, digitizing the curriculum, and improving management and use of data are three areas where African policymakers are looking to each other for guidance and good practices. Similar efforts are planned for the Latin America/Caribbean, Middle East/North Africa, and South Asia regions.

At the national level, DeliverEd engages policymakers and practitioners to capture how they confront implementation challenges and what information they need to empower decision-making and tackle obstacles to policy delivery. DeliverEd is researching the use of delivery approaches in Pakistan, Ghana, Jordan, and Tanzania to generate deeper and more precise insights into when, where, how, and why delivery approaches are best adopted.

- **Ghana:** The UNESCO Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) at the University of Cape Coast, along with the Blavatnik School at the University of Oxford and the University of Toronto, are conducting a prospective study of the delivery approach at national, district, and school levels. The study includes tracing the background and process of setting up the Reform Secretariat, as well as a large-scale quantitative survey.
- **Tanzania:** Georgetown University and Data Vision are conducting a retrospective study of Big Results Now! at the national, district, and school levels. They are looking at the education sector plus other sectors that were and were not part of Big Results Now! to enable a cross-sectoral comparison.

- **Pakistan:** IDEAS and the World Bank are conducting a retrospective study of the Punjab Monitoring and Implementation Unit, Punjab M&E Reporting System, and Sindh Reform Support Unit using qualitative and quantitative studies.
- **Jordan:** The Blavatnik School is developing a qualitative case study on the delivery approaches established within the Royal Hashemite Court, the Ministry of Education, and the Prime Minister's Office
- **Sierra Leone:** The Education Commission is developing a short policy note on the Delivery Team in the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education, focusing on how the unit has been designed and sustained during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Delivery approaches can help governments shift attention from inputs and processes to outputs and outcomes. A government can make multiple design choices when setting up a delivery approach, and evidence is still emerging on which types of approaches are more effective in different contexts.

We have good examples of successful delivery approaches from inspiring leaders worldwide. We aim to build on these experiences and the empirical evidence generated from DeliverEd to strengthen governments' ability to implement reforms that could improve student learning outcomes and advance progress towards SDG 4.

*We are building a community to learn from the successes, mistakes, and good practices in delivery approaches. To keep up to date on DeliverEd, please email **deliver.ed@educationcommission.org** to sign up for our quarterly newsletter.*