

The Millennium Villages Project: What was the impact on education?

This Briefing Paper is the sixth in a series to communicate key points from the independent impact evaluation of the Millennium Villages Project (MVP). The MVP aimed to demonstrate that rural Africa could address poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through low-cost, science-based interventions at the village level.

This mixed method impact evaluation of one MVP site in Northern Ghana took place over more than five years. The evaluation consisted of a statistically representative survey of over 2,000 households within 35 villages in the project site and 68 comparison villages. It also included three longitudinal qualitative studies that collected evidence on institutional change, a range of welfare measures and local perspectives (see MVP Briefing Paper 8). Undertaken by Itad, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Participatory Development Associates Ltd (PDA Ghana) and commissioned by DFID, it is anticipated that the findings will be of interest to a wide range of people in the development sector.

Millennium Villages Project

Beginning in 2005, the MVP aimed to overcome the 'poverty trap' facing some countries by applying an integrated strategy for health care, nutrition, education, water supply and sanitation, infrastructure, agriculture and small business in clusters of villages. The idea was to achieve the MDGs by undertaking simultaneous investments, rather than the usual sectoral or step-by-step efforts. The synergies from these multiple interventions were intended to have a greater impact than that of separate interventions.

By 2016, the project had been implemented in 14 different sites in 10 African countries, reaching approximately half a million people in 79 villages. The MVP sites cover different agro-ecological zones and together represent farming systems used by 90% of the agricultural population of sub-Saharan Africa.

What did the MVP achieve against the education MDGs?

It was hoped that an integrated approach to education would improve school attendance and learning outcomes, and improve parents' views and expectations of the benefits of education. The project expected to reach intermediate outcomes that 'ensure universal primary education, increase the quality of education overall and increase access to secondary education, especially for girls.' The MVP was evaluated against the MDGs as this was the original aim of the project, and for which the activities were designed.

Key evaluation findings against the education-related MDGs

Goal 2

To achieve universal primary education

The MVP increased primary school attendance by 7.7%, although completion rates did not improve.

Goal 3

To promote gender equality and empower women

This goal is partly assessed through gender parity in primary schools. In the area previously, more girls attended school than boys, and it appears that the project increased boys' attendance.

The MVP in Northern Ghana

From 2012–16, the £11 million MVP in Northern Ghana targeted a cluster of 35 villages of up to 30,000 people in the West Mamprusi, Mamprugu Moagduri and Builsa South districts. This is an area of extreme poverty, with 80–90% of the population living below the national poverty line. The project was spearheaded by the Earth Institute (Columbia University), with operations overseen by the Millennium Promise and the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), a semi-autonomous Government of Ghana agency.

How did the MVP invest in education?

The MVP invested in education in key areas through an integrated approach. Investments included the construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, school toilets and playgrounds, and refurbishing schools. There were also incentives for teachers such as the construction and rehabilitation of teachers' quarters, teacher training, and salary top-ups for supervisors.

Community education workers were hired and trained as part of a strategy to sensitise communities and parents. To increase the attendance of girls, school

toilets were built specially for them, sanitary pads were supplied, community awareness-raising about the importance of girls' education took place, and scholarships were provided for girls' secondary school education.

However, these incentives were based on the incorrect assumption that fewer girls attended school than boys. The project also tried to increase school attendance in general by supporting the provision of school meals and establishing real-time monitoring systems in schools.

Key messages about education achievements

School facilities: The MVP interventions led to improvements in school facilities, with more classrooms classified as being in 'good condition' and an increase in the number of qualified teachers. More schools in the project villages have toilets, and all schools with toilets had toilets for girls. Schools in the project villages were generally better funded, with more meals served than by schools in comparison villages.

Staffing: The ratio between students and qualified teachers improved in the project villages. This was achieved mostly through the hire of teachers plus the recruitment of community education workers to help reduce teacher deficits. However, teacher recruitment seems to have been at a cost to schools in the comparison villages, which experienced staffing challenges.

School attendance: There was a modest progress in attendance ratios in primary schools. Gender parity improved, although it is worth noting that more girls than boys attended before the MVP started, and afterwards it appears that the project increased boys' attendance. There was an insignificant increase in junior high school attendance, and no change in senior high school attendance. The project did not improve completion rates.

Motivations for schooling: The motivation of children to attend school, and by implication learn, did not seem to change in the project villages. Indeed, the MVP did not change the wage expectations of children, but it did increase parents' wage expectations as a result of schooling.

Learning outcomes: The evaluation found that the MVP did not improve children's cognitive skills, an important indicator of educational quality. Although it is still early to judge results, this suggests a significant gap in the education system between children attending school and the quality of their learning.



The MVP Endline Summary Report and MVP briefings can be accessed from www.itad.com/knowledge-and-resources/MVEval

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Credits

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