

Executive Summary

Educaid.be, the platform for education and development, was established in 2010 and is a national, pluralist platform that brings together institutional players, non-governmental organisations, universities, and individual members, who are all active in the education and training sector in the context of the Belgian development cooperation.

Educaid.be's current grant of € 869,000, implemented by APEFE and VVOB, covers the period from January 2022 to December 2026. In 2024, Educaid.be therefore commissioned a mid-term evaluation to facilitate learning, inform decision making about the implementation of the second half of the programme period (2024-2026) and inspire the formulation and design of a future program.

The main evaluation questions were:

- How do Educaid.be. members experience participating in Educaid.be. activities? What value do they see and experience in being members of the platform? How do they make use of what was shared or learned within their organisation and in their own work?
- What "effects" have already occurred at the different levels, because of members participating in Educaid.be activities? To what level (e.g. member organisations, their representations, or partners in the global South, learners) do the effects extend?
- What is needed and possible to realize more such effects at the different levels and create more value for members of Educaid.be?

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Data collection methods used

The review team used a mixed methods convergent parallel data collection design and method to inform the review. This implied that the review applied the following data collection tools in parallel:

- **An online survey** was distributed among 144 individuals, whose organisations are members of Educaid.be. A total of 36 respondents answered the questionnaire.
- **Key informant interviews** with representatives of organisations defined as 'core members' and new members or supporters respectively. (See annex IV)
- **Field visits to Benin and Cambodia** where Educaid.be partners and members were interviewed and invited to participate in a workshop on Educaid.be's added value and opportunities for improvement. (See annex V)
- **Desk review** of documents produced by Educaid.be, including but not limited to strategies, work plans and minutes from project groups, past evaluation reports, the project document, newsletters, recordings from Connect&Learn seminars/webinars, bylaws etc.

The aim was to collect information about members' aspirations and reasons for being a member, to what extent these aspirations are fulfilled, what value they gain from being members, how respondents interact with knowledge products released by Educaid.be, informants' willingness to contribute to the network – either through a membership fee or through participation in or facilitation of project groups. In addition, the aim was to explore if, and if so *how*, members use knowledge gained from their participation in Educaid.be's activities, and in what way they have or have not transferred knowledge to other colleagues in their organisation.

Key findings

How do Educaid.be. members experience participating in Educaid.be. activities? What value do they see and experience in being members of the platform? How do they make use of what was shared or learned within their organisation and in their own work?

The review finds that Educaid.be is indeed producing value for its members, in particular when members themselves are active and contribute with their time to engage with other members and in the discussions facilitated by Educaid.be. In such situations, Educaid.be contributes to create opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange that deepens cooperation and/or coordination between members on a 'case by case' basis. As such, members use Educaid.be to 'stay informed' about developments and news in the sector, to connect with each other and the seek inspiration for their work and strategic plans.

Partner representatives interviewed in Benin and Cambodia were largely uninformed about Educaid.be's work but expressed an interest in exploring how Educaid.be could support them in their work and serve as a 'hub' for joint (pilot) projects, capacity building and advocacy.

What "effects" have already occurred at the different levels, because of members participating in Educaid.be activities? To what level (e.g. member organisations, their representations, or partners in the Global South, learners) do the effects extend?

While most knowledge shared benefit *individuals* engaging in Educaid.be's activities, the review did identify some examples where effects transcend to the level of member organizations. These include:

- Member organizations who know each other via Educaid.be form a consortium and implement an EU funded project together.
- Member organizations who get to know each other via Educaid.be offer technical support and knowledge to each other's projects.
- Small 'fourth pillar actors' access funding through other members in the network.
- Members join forces and develop a joint country context analysis.

These examples are still largely owned by individuals who were directly engaged.

What is needed and possible to realize more such effects at the different levels and create more value for members of Educaid.be?

The review found that members' own time and willingness to invest in the platform is indeed a factor that must be considered to 'realize more effects' and stimulate further cooperation. Yet, the review also found that this factor is closely linked to members' perception of Educaid.be's relevance to their own work. Factors pertaining to the nature of the platform itself are therefore equally important for value creation and increased capacity and synergy between Educaid.be members. The review found that the following platform-related factors affect value creation in particular:

Sense of purpose: The fact that Educaid.be is a platform with a strong reputation and close cooperation with the Belgium Ministry for Development Cooperation might have contributed to a situation, where members have partly lost the sense of 'purpose' and therefore find it hard to see how the platform may benefit their work.

Relevance of knowledge shared: Some members find the knowledge products from Educaid.be irrelevant to their operational work and struggle to translate the information's theoretical aspects into practical solutions. They

experience a gap between the strategic perspective presented by Educaid.be and their own needs and reality as experienced on the ground and in cooperation with partners in the Global South.

Size and diversity: While the networks' size and diversity are a strength in terms of its ability to represent almost all actors working with education in development cooperation in Belgium, this diversity also presents a challenge to the platform's ability to address the needs, expectations, or aspirations of *all* members.

Meeting culture: The introduction of online meetings is a factor that influences value creation too. While online meetings enable participants outside Belgium to join meetings, they risk adversely affecting the quality of participation, as participants are tempted to answer emails, turn off their cameras and attend to other chores, while formally participating in these types of meetings.

In response, the review recommends that:

Recommendation 1: Explore what and under which circumstances members are truly willing to invest their time and efforts in Educaid.be.

No network or alliance can sustain itself without the active contribution of its members' time, knowledge, and efforts to the cooperation, and without the genuine interest of its members to learn and benefit from each other's support. It is therefore recommended that Educaid.be explores what members are truly willing to contribute with and under what circumstances, as this knowledge will form the basis for a – possible – reorientation or revision of the platform's mission in the years to come.

Recommendation 2: Consider what Educaid.be would want to be in the future.

Facilitate a joint reflection – starting in the steering committee but with engagement of other members in a 'second phase' – about who Educaid.be would want to be in the future, what it wants to achieve, and what it will take from members and from the/a coordination respectively.

Recommendation 3: Consider the representation of different types of members in the steering committee to ensure that the steering committee mirrors the composition of Educaid.be's member base and represents the different needs and concerns of members.

Recommendation 4: Harmonize expectations about the division of roles and responsibilities between the coordination and Educaid.be's members.

A network is only as strong and vivid as the contribution and active participation of its members. If members 'take' more than they 'give', and most work relies on the/a coordinator or coordination, any network runs the risk of soon depleting its resources and losing its attractiveness to members. It is therefore recommended that Educaid.be harmonize expectations with members about the division of roles and responsibilities of members and the coordination respectively.

Recommendation 5: Revitalize project groups, possibly around set of 'how to' questions that represents lived problems and challenges that members and their partners experience in their daily work and which they have in common.

Revitalizing project groups around concrete issues and mandates would be a way to contribute to strengthen a sense of community and shared purpose, and to meet diverging needs and interests of members.

Recommendation 6: Consider the strengths and limitations of online and hybrid meeting formats.

This would entail shifting the balance in favor of offline meetings, where face to face contacts and exchanges appear more rewarding and effective. This could typically apply for project group meetings with action plans that must be created or updated during each meeting and situations, where the 'informal encounters' in breaks or after the formal meetings are conducive to cooperation between members.

Recommendation 7: Create financial incentives for partners' cooperation – e.g. through the provision of consortia grants. Financial incentives are often the most direct and effective way to promote cooperation between organizations and grant criteria can be used to stimulate different types of cooperation and knowledge exchange, in according with Educaid.be's preferences.

The report finally includes 4 different scenarios for how Educaid.be can implement the recommendations:

The first scenario is largely a continuation of the status quo – in recognition of the fact that many members value knowledge exchange as it is, and in recognition of the fact that no network or platform can exist without the active contribution of its members. This implies that any change in the working approaches of Educaid.be depends on the commitment and willingness of the members to invest the necessary time and support the (revised) mission.

The second scenario suggests a revitalization of the "project groups", possibly through the formulation of tangible "how to" questions that can inspire members' approaches and methodologies and, where possible and relevant, also include international partners. This scenario is supposed to respond to the need to strengthen the members' "sense of purpose" as a prerequisite for their willingness to invest more time in the work of Educaid.be, and to the need to further specify why and in which areas Educaid.be should strengthen synergy and coordination between members.

The third scenario is like the second scenario, proposing the formation of national or regional hubs or national "project groups" for organizational capacity building and learning, piloting new approaches, or planning and implementing joint advocacy initiatives targeting national policymakers. Piloting and documenting approaches to education and learning – for example in the field of digitalization or climate education – would further create an opportunity to use experiences and lessons learned in evidence-based advocacy, in the implementing country, at the regional level - for example with the African Union - or in Belgium. As in the "problem-solving scenario", this would involve organizations identifying a common problem, issue, or goal around which to organize their collaboration.

The final scenario proposes to expand the mandate of the platform and the coordination team into a "global hub" for research, innovation, learning and advocacy in the field of education for international development. This scenario responds to and seeks to capitalize on the fact that the Educaid.be platform brings together many academics and representatives of multilateral and bilateral development agencies, INGOs and local practitioners from the Global South, who can contribute to improving access to quality and inclusive education in development contexts if they work together and more systematically.

This scenario involves an expansion of the Educaid.be coordination team, so that it can play a greater role in mobilizing resources, including funding and the resources and knowledge that the diverse membership base represents, and in 'marketing' knowledge products and offering advice to members – as well as connecting members with other members.