

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Institute of Education
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Transforming lives on the Indian sub-continent: the long arm of education research
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The IOE researchers featured in this case study have had a major and sustained impact on education in the Indian sub-continent. Geeta Kingdon has shaped UK government policy on educational aid to India. She has also helped to ensure that millions of poor children in Uttar Pradesh - India's most populous state – qualify for free places in private schools. Angela Little's work in Sri Lanka has raised the profile of primary education, which has been hampered by low status and inadequate funding. She has also done much to improve the life chances of the country's disadvantaged children - particularly those growing up on tea plantations.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Context: The IOE has influenced national education policies in India and Sri Lanka since the 1920s, and has helped to train large numbers of the sub-continent's school leaders and other education professionals. Ninety years on, the IOE is continuing to support the development of education systems in these two countries – and to learn from them. The ambition that drives IOE work in the sub-continent, and the two researchers featured in this case study, is the increase of access to good quality learning among the poorest and most marginalised children - see reference **R1**.

India: Geeta Kingdon is Chair of Education Economics and International Development at the IOE and is also President of City Montessori School, Lucknow - the biggest school in the world, with 47,000 students. Her research focuses on returns to education, low-fee private schools, the role of unions, and teacher performance.

Key findings: *Study 1:* One influential research project that Kingdon directed has highlighted low teacher competence and high rates of teacher and pupil absence in two of India's poorest states – Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The School Teacher Effectiveness and Learning Level of Students (SchoolTELLS) study (**R2**) – found low levels of subject-matter knowledge among teachers, both in literacy and numeracy. Only 25% of teachers could solve a basic percentage problem designed for 10 and 11-year-olds. The researchers recommended that in-service teacher training should identify weaknesses and help improve skills, rather than punishing under-performing teachers. *Study 2:* Research into 'para' (contract) teachers that Kingdon undertook (**R3**) enabled her to acquire a detailed knowledge of earnings levels and income distributions in Indian states. This information later proved crucial as she used it to influence a key school-place allocation decision in Uttar Pradesh (see Section 4 of this case study).

Research methods: *Study 1:* Researchers led by Kingdon and Dr Rukmini Banerji, research director of Pratham, India's largest NGO, made unannounced visits to 160 schools in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (80 in each state) between July 2007 and May 2008. Each school was visited four times. The study tested the competence of 800 teachers and the attainment of 4,300 pupils. The statistical analysis was carried out between July 2008 and September 2009. *Study 2:* In 2009, Kingdon analysed National Sample Survey data for India, looking at wages of regular and contract teachers. Her co-researcher was Vandana Sipahimalani-Rao, an education economist and independent consultant.

Sri Lanka: Angela Little was Professor of Education and International Development at the IOE from 1987 to 2010 (she has been a professor emerita since January 1, 2011). Little has produced a huge body of research on education in Sri Lanka. Between 1993 and 1995, she conducted action research in plantation schools (**R4**). She has also acted as an adviser to the Sri Lankan Ministry of

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Education - contracted through the Department for International Development (1998-2002) or the World Bank and the Australian Government Overseas Aid Programme (2009-2013).

Key findings: Little's research has created awareness of the importance of treating primary education as a separate and foundational stage of education (**R5**), of giving attention to the needs of small schools and of investing in the education of Sri Lanka's plantation communities.

Methods: Her research on plantation communities involved analysis of historical and contemporary policy documents and education records, interviews with countless teachers, principals, parents, students, education officers, plantation managers, trade union representatives and politicians and many hours of classroom observation. Her work on primary education employed similar techniques.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1: Waage, J., Banerji, J., Campbell, O., Chirwa, E., Collender, G., Dieltiens, V., Dorward, A., Godfrey-Faussett, P., Hanvoravongchai, P., Kingdon, G., Little, A., Mills, A., Mulholland, K., Mwinga, A., North, A., Patcharanarumol, W., Poulton, C., Tangcharoensathien, V., & Unterhalter, E. (2010), The Millennium Development Goals: a cross sectoral analysis and principles for goal setting post 2015, *The Lancet*, 376(9745), 991-1023.

R2: Kingdon, G. (2010) Addressing school quality: Some policy pointers from rural north India <http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/pb5.pdf>

R3: Kingdon, G. & Sipahimalani-Rao, V. (2010) Para Teachers in India: Status and Impact, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45, No. 12, March 20-26.

R4: Little, A. W. (1999) *Labouring to Learn: towards a political economy of people, plantations and education in Sri Lanka*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

R5: Little, A., Aturupane, H. & Shojo, M. (2013) Transforming primary education in Sri Lanka: from a 'subject' of education to a 'stage' of education. South Asia human development sector discussion paper series; No.61 Washington DC: World Bank.

Indicative funding:

IF1: India: The SchoolTELLS study was funded by the Spencer Foundation (£55,000) and DFID (£5,500). Kingdon was the grant-holder.

IF2: Sri Lanka: The research for (**R5**) was funded by contracts totalling £50,000 that were awarded to Little by the World Bank and AusAID between 2009 and 2013.

Indicators of quality:

IQ1: Kingdon is ranked in the top 8% of economists in the UK and in the top 5% in the European Union (according to RePEc – Research Papers in Economics).

IQ2: Little received the Tamil Literary Award of the Ministry of Education (Tamil) in 2010 for her outstanding contribution to education in plantation schools in Sri Lanka. The award was made partly in recognition of her 1999 book, *Labouring to Learn*.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)
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Principal beneficiaries: Millions of the poorest children in India and Sri Lanka and governments and international donor agencies that have been able to target funding more effectively as a result of the IOE researchers' work.

Dates of benefit: The benefits of Kingdon and Little's research have been felt throughout the REF period (2008-13).

Reach and significance: Kingdon has improved the prospects of millions of disadvantaged children in Uttar Pradesh, an Indian state that is bigger than most countries (pop: c.200 million). She has done this by:

- helping to ensure that free places in private schools (25% of the total number of such places) are allocated to the poorest children
- highlighting aspects of teacher training that need to be improved (in the neighbouring state of Bihar as well as Uttar Pradesh).

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Little's impact on education in Sri Lanka has also been profound. Plantation communities and primary-age children have gained from government policies influenced by her research and from investment programmes that she helped to plan and implement. Both researchers can point to not only instrumental impacts¹ (influencing policy and/or practice) but capacity-building impacts.

India

Instrumental impact: Kingdon's research has influenced DFID, policy-makers in India, and international organisations such as the World Bank and UNICEF.

Advice to Select Committee: The House of Commons Select Committee on International Development drew on Kingdon's expert knowledge in January 2011 while considering the future of British aid to India. She said the UK should continue offering technical assistance to India and argued that although the cost of such aid was relatively small, it paid for research, "put evidence on the table", and thus made it less likely that policy-making would be based on hunch, opinion, ideology or political expediency (technical assistance can also entail monitoring and reviewing education programmes). Although the UK government decided in 2012 to stop providing financial aid to India from 2015 it will continue to provide technical assistance. A senior DFID official – see impact source **S1** – has confirmed that Kingdon's evidence was one of the reasons that the decision to continue technical assistance was taken.

DFID's use of research: The DFID official also said that Kingdon's work has made a significant contribution to the development of his Department's education portfolio in India. DFID has used her research to support its business cases and has cited it in internal review documents.

Indian teachers: The DFID representative added that the SchoolTELLS study has informed discussions on teacher attendance that both the World Bank and his Department have had with Government of India officials. The latter expressed great interest in the research. In July 2008, Kingdon was invited to present the study's preliminary results to the then Joint Secretary of Elementary Education at the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which oversees India's schools and higher education. This led to two further invitations to discuss the research with senior Ministry officials, who then commissioned a similar UNICEF-funded study in five other Indian states, which Kingdon was unable to take part in.

Influence in Uttar Pradesh: Kingdon made a crucial intervention on July 31, 2012 while sitting on the Uttar Pradesh working group on the implementation of India's Right to Education Act (2009). The Act decrees that children from 'economically weaker' families should be allocated 25% of places in private schools, which are considered of better quality than state schools and cater for about 18 million of Uttar Pradesh's pupils (c.57% of the total). It was originally proposed that families with an annual income of up to 250,000 rupees (just over £3,000) would qualify for these free places. However, having researched income levels in India (**R3**), Kingdon realised that at least 75% of the state's population earn less than that sum. She argued successfully for a lower ceiling of 100,000 rupees, to ensure the subsidy is targeted at the poorest. This new ceiling has been applicable since December 4, 2012. The most senior official in the state's Department of Basic Education has confirmed that Kingdon helped to bring about this important policy change (**S2**), which means that some poor children are able to attend private schools for the first time – even elite high-fee schools. This is hugely significant as even the Uttar Pradesh state website (<http://upgov.nic.in/upecon.aspx>) acknowledges that "due to public apathy the schools are in disarray". It adds that privately-run schools are functional, but beyond the reach of many people.

Capacity building impact: Kingdon has conducted two advanced workshops (December 2009 and April 2010) for 21 senior staff at the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) – the body that advises the Indian government on education issues. She also presented a course on quantitative impact evaluation methods for 24 policy-makers from 17 countries at the Institute of Applied Manpower Research in Delhi in February 2013. Some of the NCERT staff that Kingdon trained have gone on to carry out their own quantitative impact evaluations of government education policy interventions in four Indian states. These evaluations have helped to promote cost-effective interventions and identify unproductive expenditure.

¹ Using Evidence: How Research can Inform Public Services (Nutley, S., Walter, I., Davis, H. 2007)

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Little's findings have been presented to, discussed with and commented on by Ministry and donor organisations on many occasions over the past 20 years.

Instrumental impact: *Influence on donors:* The World Bank's lead education specialist in Colombo (S3) says that Little's work "has been extremely useful in the development of policy, especially in primary education, education in the plantation sector, and in small schools" and helped the Bank to implement the US\$70m Sri Lanka Education Sector Development Project (2009-11). Little has been very involved in the planning of the Bank's latest (2012-17) US\$100m investment in Sri Lankan schooling. In fact, the Bank's representative confirmed that Little was "the main contributor to the design of support for primary education under this project". Little also produced an evidence-based case that convinced the Australian government to make a grant of Aus\$37m for the establishment of a World Bank-managed trust fund to enable further money to be channelled to Sri Lankan education. This is not the only substantial grant that Little has secured for the country. Her deep, research-based knowledge of education in Sri Lanka also enabled her to write the design document for the establishment of the national education research centre, funded by the World Bank and based at the University of Colombo since 2000.

Primary education: Traditionally, primary schooling has not been a separate stage of education in Sri Lanka. It has been an integral part of general education (Grades 1-13). This has exacerbated the status and resource problems of primary education. However, in the recent past - largely thanks to Little's urging - the Ministry has accorded a separate section and, crucially, budget line for primary schooling within its national education plan. The budget line proposal came out of the 2000-2005 plan for primary education, whose drafting team Little led (under a DFID-supported project). Little's book, *Primary Education Reform in Sri Lanka* (2000), has also been very influential. A former director of primary education in the Ministry of Education (S4) said that the book was translated into Sinhala and Tamil and distributed to education officials. "Thoughts shared in this book formed the basis for many policy proposals related to development of primary education between 2006 and 2010," he confirmed.

Plantation schools: This retired Ministry of Education director said that Little's 1999 book, *Labouring to Learn*, had also helped to shape government programmes that have supported education in the plantations since the 1990s. Her work had highlighted the magnitude of the teacher shortage in plantation schools and convinced policy-makers that they should prioritise this issue, he said. It had also provided the rationale for additional funding of disadvantaged schools in remote plantations. The Minister for Tamil Education on the Central Provincial Council (S5) said that *Labouring to Learn*, which was also translated into Sinhala and Tamil, is regarded as a "treasure" by the plantation community. He added that Little has "contributed tremendously" to the development of primary schools in plantation areas.

Technical advice: Little has also drafted highly-valued technical documents for Sri Lanka's education planners. Her guideline for preparing medium and long-term provincial plans is used by planners at national, provincial and zonal levels. Officials have confirmed that she also made important academic and technical inputs to the Ministry of Education's 2012-16 plan.

Capacity building: *Labouring to Learn* also provides key reference material for BEd, DipEd and MEd students at the University of Colombo. Little's publications on primary and multigrade education - and the curriculum materials she has produced - are used by the university's DipEd students.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1: Senior Education Adviser, Department for International Development, India
 S2: Principal Secretary, Department of Basic Education, Government of Uttar Pradesh
 S3: Lead Education Specialist (Sri Lanka), the World Bank
 S4: Former director of primary education, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka
 S5: Minister for Tamil Education, Central Provincial Council