Fit for Purpose?

A Roundtable on Post 2015 Goals, Targets and Indicators for Education

1st May 2014

Report from joint ODI & UKFIET event

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# Session 1: What is proposed as part of the draft post 2015 education goal and targets?

Chair: ***Steve Packer,*** UKFIET

Speakers: ***Gina Bergh,*** ODI – ‘Overview of post-2015 negotiations’

***Pauline Rose,*** University of Cambridge – ‘A critical view on proposals’

***Angela Little,*** Professor Emerita, Institute of Education – ‘A critical view on proposals’

## *Gina Bergh,* Overseas Development Institute – ‘Overview of post-2015 negotiations’

This presentation gave an overview of global post-2015 processes from 2012 with a focus on education:

**Key actors:**

* UN HLP – UN High Level Panel
* OWG – Open Working Group
* SDSN – Sustainable Development Solutions Network
* UNGC – UN Global Compact
* UNDG – UN Development Group
* HLPF – High Level Political Forum
* ICESDF – Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing
* UNSG – UN Secretary General
* EFA SC – Education for All Steering Committee

**Key events so far:**

* 2012
  + UN Secretary General appoints UN HLP
  + Rio+20 summit mandates an intergovernmental Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
  + 11 UN thematic consultations begin, including education
* 2013
  + *March* – UN OWG monthly thematic meetings begin
  + UN HLP report issues
  + Key inputs from SDSN, UNDG, UNGC submitted
  + UNSG produces report drawing from key inputs, including HLP report
* 2014
  + OWG meetings continue
  + OWG produces list of 16 possible goals, education being no. 4

**Key upcoming dates are:**

* 2014
  + *August* – OWG report and financing report due
  + *September* – UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) high-level stocktaking event on SDGs
  + *After September* – intergovernmental negotiations kick off
  + *October-Dec ember* – UNSG reports
* 2015
  + *TBC* – major review of future of development finance, international summit
  + *July* – annual meeting of HLPF
  + SDGs agreed?
* Beyond
  + Monitoring plans: HLPF meetings every 1-4 years under auspices of UNGA & ECOSOC

**N.B [This overview excludes the EFA process led by the UNESCO coordinated EFA Steering Committee)**

**Financing**

* **Review** of the future of **development finance** is also underway in context of **SDGs**
  + **Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing** (ICESDF); and **OWG** are both due to report in **September 2014** (ahead of UN General Assembly)
  + Division among UN member states on whether the discussion should **first clarify SDG financing plans, or if goals should first be defined, and then financing**?
* Likely SDG financing approaches include:
  + **Less of a role for aid (ODA),** but still important especially in LDCs
  + More emphasis on **domestic resource mobilisation**
  + Interest in greater **private sector** investment, **pooled and innovative finance**
* Lack of clarity whether **human development** and **climate financing** will come together
* **International summit** on future development finance to take place in 2015 (TBC timing)
  + Opportunity for **gaps in financing for education to be addressed** through the SDG financing process
  + **Controversy** around implications of interest in **private finance**

### Comments

* Who will provide actual framing of new SDGs? It is a very opaque process.
* What is happening that we can’t see? What is new and different about this process that hasn’t actually happened before? Where is the improvement on Jomtien?
* **Gina Bergh**: There is a financing opportunity to renew support for global goals and for more integrated goals that go beyond sector specificity. Perhaps, the main achievement will be some slight evolution while refreshing key actors’ engagement.
* Who has the power? So many people putting forward goals/frameworks…
* **Gina Bergh**: Officially the separate groups have equal inputs, but the most important actor at this stage is the OWG, which is made up of more than 100 UN member states covering 30 shared seats. It has political legitimacy.
* Where does EFA steering committee report sit? Who will put forward the case for specific education goals?
* **Gina Bergh**: OWG does reference and seek to engage with groups like the EFA Steering Committee.
* EFA steering committee process (with UNESCO and UNICEF leads) is developing a draft document, with possibly some indirect influence on the OWG.
* List of 16 OWG focus areas needs cutting down drastically.
* **Gina Bergh**: Effectively interlinking all goals of human development and environmental sustainability becomes very complicated. The list of could be reduced by fusing some areas but will probably still included between 10 and 16 goals.

## *Pauline Rose, Professor of International Education, University of Cambridge* – ‘A critical view on proposals’

This presentation critically compared the education goals put forward by the EFA steering committee, HLP, OWG, and SDSN with the Dakar EFA goals (2000).

**Key points**

* The key criteria for any set of goals should be that they are **clear**, **measurable**, and **equitable**
* We still need to make sure that education has its **own set of goals** and is not ‘lumped in’ with health.
* **Goals cannot cover everything**, but we are not yet at the stage of identifying precise targets and indicators.
* But **language** certainlyneeds clarifying.

**Goals**

* EFA SC: ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030
* SDSN: Ensure effective learning for all children and youth for life and livelihood – narrower and outcome focused
* HLP: Provide quality education and lifelong learning
* OWG: Provide quality education and lifelong learning for all

**Proposed goals are not revolutionary (compared to Dakar goals)**

* All but HLP combine (pre-primary) primary and lower sec into **basic education** – this narrows targets, and this might lead to neglect of the marginalised
* **Adult literacy** is missing from HLP and SDSN
* There is more of a focus, compared to Dakar, on finance (EFA SC – domestic; SDSN – includes aid)
* EFA SC unique in including a **teacher target**
* OWG most off-track in including **non-measurable targets**
* There have been some attempts to make sure targets have measurable outcomes (some for universal coverage, others to increase by x %)
* X%s need defining
* **Ambiguous terms** need clarification such as ‘able to access’, ‘lifelong learning’, ‘effective learning’, and ‘relevant learning outcomes’. Is there a need for communications specialists to have a look through?
* What are **skills**? Can all these things be measured?

## *Angela Little*, Professor Emerita, Institute of Education – ‘A critical view on proposals’

This presentation critically analysed the current state of the goal setting process for education.

* It is encouraging to see an expansion of learning goals. This is ambitious and problematic, but this does not mean we should not try.
* It is good to see teachers, early childhood and secondary education included.
* While there is high degree of consensus on overarching goals, they are stated so generally and attempt to be so inclusive that it is hard to disagree.
* Are they operational? Plenty of challenges ahead.

**Critical questions**

* **Whither equality?**
  + What about having an equality goal? Should we have one? How do we reduce gaps between the poorest and the richest? Should equality goals be overarching for all sectors?
* Any escape from **silos**?
  + Are goals still too sector-specific? Health and education and poverty reduction are all causally linked. Have things changed? OWG has an produced annex on inter linkages between goals, but this seems a minimal contribution. Should there be multi-dimensional targets? For example increases in both health **and** education outcomes for individuals. This would mean huge impacts on the ground.
* How will **global and national targets** be married?
  + MDG goals were stated as global but interpreted as national targets. What is the process by which national targets should be set in every country?
* Need to *re-*focus on **gender**?
  + References to gender seem to have disappeared from targets; maybe they will reappear in indicators. There is an elision between gender, girls, and women. But girls and women are not always the most disadvantaged. A gender goal should recognise that the issue is not always about girls. There are many other dimensions of inequality in learning outcomes – rural/urban, parental education, wealth, mother tongue etc. that need addressing.
* Can **language** be improved?
  + Does the term ‘quality education’ translate into other languages as well as ‘good quality education’? ‘Equity’ and ‘equality’ might be used as synonyms in English but when translated might have important nuanced differences.
* Do ‘**ends’** continue to overshadow ‘**means**’?

## Discussion

* Skills – Vocational vs life skills: the term “skills” has not been clarified yet. NEETs (people not in education, employment, or training) and decent work are problematic as concepts.
* Learning is welcome, of course, but how will it play out? Measurement problems are immense, and comparability across countries is hugely problematic.
* How do you reconcile learning outcomes with equity? What about children who cannot reach standards of literacy and numeracy due to disability or other disadvantages? How do we focus on the most marginalised first? Measuring the gaps between rich and poor could be a good example of how to do this.
* Higher education and professional education is totally missing from the goals; it should not just be the terrain of the privileged. Gender – by narrowing focus to what you can measure hides real problems of gender. Measuring numbers of girls in schools barely scratches the surface of gender inequalities across societies.
* Issues of language/disabilities/skills are issues of relevance. What is relevant to whom? We need to make decision-making more participatory. How about an indicator around who is consulted when education decisions are made?
* Would minimum standards for all not direct funds to those who are most marginalised anyway? Do we need specific equality goals?
* Disaggregation of indicators is a key development, and one of the strengths of the HLP report. Silos –there is still a risk of education being lumped together with health or other sectors. Should we think about highlighting and framing how education is contributing to rest of SDG agenda?
* UK position is to have a stand-alone gender goal. What is the extent to which universality is really going to apply everywhere?
* **Pauline Rose**: Equity – EFA GMR has done some work on what data looks like for lowest performing groups (overlapping inequalities). Disagrees on minimum standards citing need for more targeted goals.
* **Angela Little**: learning levels were mentioned in 1990, but were forgotten. There is a need for more evidence on whether just being in school leads to learning. The message that kids in school have not been learning is overstated and probably not true. There is the risk of organisations exporting the same tests around the world – a PISA test for primary education around the world is unnecessary. There is a lot of assessment data in developing countries that needs support; developing countries do have primary examination systems!

# Session 2: How can we better gain political traction on new education goals?

Chair: ***Susan Nicolai,*** ODI

Speakers: ***Robin Alexander,*** Universities of Cambridge and York – ‘Indicators of quality in teaching and learning: what really matters?’

***Leni Wild,*** ODI – ‘Role of political dynamics in driving access and quality’

***Ed Barnett,*** DFID – ‘Donor perspective on efforts toward a new goal’

***Paula Lucci,*** ODI – ‘An overview of country level goals and targets’

## *Robin Alexander,* Universities of Cambridge and York – ‘Indicators of quality in teaching and learning: what really matters?’

This presentation critically analysed the term quality in learning targets and the absence of pedagogy.

**Key points:**

* **Quality** has become a mantra in the various targets
* Will the post-2015 account of education quality attend to what in **learning and teaching** really matters?
* Will the **classroom processes** that for children and young people are truly transformative be captured adequately in the post-2015 goals, targets, indicators, and measures used, and in the evidence on which monitoring and policy are based?

**Main concerns:**

* In the input-output model, the learning process and its contributions to outcomes is inferred rather than examined
* EFA quality indicators appear to have been chosen on the basis of their availability and measurability rather than their validity. Vital inputs, processes and outcomes have been ignored whereas they should be tracked and their contribution assessed in shaping EFA.
* Proxies for quality are inevitable but must not be used in excess. Some proxies are highly questionable, for example, survival to grade 5, completion rates.
* The word ‘quality’ itself is used far too loosely
* The terms ‘indicator’ and ‘measure’ are often confused or elided. Measures measure, indicators indicate. They do different jobs.
* The most conspicuous absentee from the entire discourse is pedagogy, or the science of teaching.

**Why are we in this fix?**

* Policy makers tend to be interested in only ‘Type 1’ data that is macro, systematic and quantitative; or in simple and often simplistic cause-effect ‘Type 2’ data extrapolations from data of the kind produced by McKinsey. Such data arise from studies that *infer* process causes from input and output data. There is a vast array of studies that do investigate process in depth (‘Type 3’) but are ignored on the grounds that they are too small, too soft, or both.
* A mere 6% of cited references in the latest EFA GMR 2013/14 deal with teaching and learning as they happen. The majority of cited references are macro-level national or cross-national studies of education policies, programmes, and strategies.
* The main cause of all of this is an agenda dictated by policy and finance. 'Big bucks' needs big data. There is a skewed profile of the expertise that dominates national and international agencies. Economists and policy analysts predominate where classroom researchers are conspicuously absent.

**What is to be done?**

1. Education for post-2015 needs radical and properly informed debate about indicators and measures regarding the black box of teaching and learning.
2. Where an indicator has empirical provenance but cannot readily be translated into a simple measure, other ways should be found to keep it in the frame. Crucial indicators should not be dropped because we cannot yet measure them.
3. Teams working on defining and monitoring quality need to become more relevantly multi-disciplinary.
4. “Type 3” evidence needs to be expanded to more middle and low income contexts and made more reliable.
5. Having identified which processes matter most, “Type 3” research can help illuminate how these processes can be measured.
6. We need to explore targets and indicators for both teaching and learning.

**Dilemma:** there is a need for teaching and learning as they happen and are experienced to gain prominence in post-2015 education. But the prospect of a single global measure of the quality of teaching applied across all cultural and pedagogical contexts is deeply alarming.

Only at the **classroom level** can these processes be monitored. The key is to give the process and the quality of process the prominence they deserve without allowing them to tyrannise and debase what they purport to celebrate; and to find a way to add this essential local dimension to development and monitoring processes.

## *Leni Wild*, ODI – ‘Role of political dynamics in driving access and quality’

This presentation analyses the broader lessons from the MDGs and the governance constraints that impact progress on access and quality.

**Key points:**

* Improvements in outcomes are more than just more money and technical solutions.
* The core of the puzzle is **governance incentives.**
* Political characteristics of the education sector can influence a government’s focus. It is often easier to get children into schools than to concentrate on learning outcomes.
* Education is often a high government priority for reasons of national building, identity, and socialisation
* **Political returns** can be high for leaders and elites; the abolition of school fees often occurs before elections to secure the populist vote (Uganda, Kenya), although often without adequate planning, policy frameworks, and national consultations.
* Some forms of progress are easier for politicians to claim credit for and for citizens to associate to politicians – for example, school building, fee abolition, and numbers of teachers are highly visible. It is harder for citizens to attribute improvements in teaching methods or teacher performance to politicians.
* However, this is not about politician proofing education, rather it is about harnessing the dynamics of politics to raise the profile of various agendas in the education landscape.
* A governance goal? It is unlikely to be a stand-alone goal, but there is debate about how to include this in other goals. Questions remain about what targets around budgets should look like and about birth and registration targets.
* Open data, and feedback loops are other relevant discussions.

## *Ed Barnett*, DFID – ‘Donor perspective on efforts toward a new goal’

This presentation looked at the donor perspective of DFID.

**Key points:**

1. What is the purpose of the whole development process? Eradicating extreme poverty?
   * Goals need to be sustainable
   * DFID wants a stand-alone goal on girls and women
2. How to learn from the past on content and process in education:
   * MDGs were overly simplified primarily to get everyone in to school
   * Measurability – what will we measure on quality?
   * The EFA and MDG process has been confusing, how will this pan out in the future – with one set of goals and a framework for action?
3. What is DFID is doing currently to engage in the process:
   * DFID played a central role in HLP, and is engaged with OWG and EFA on education. This engagement involves more than just DFID. Engagement has come from across the UK government to include, for example, the education and business ministries.
   * How does measurability relate to learning? What measurement apparatus will incentivise action on this? A global learning metric from UIS?
4. How DFID and other donors will try and get traction on the process:
   * DFID and the Foreign Office are trying to get a range of countries to engage in the debate.
   * Civil society engagement is needed
   * How to sell it all? Should there be some kind of catchy 15 goals in 15 years, starting in 2015?
   * There is definitely a need for the continuation of the GMR beyond 2015
   * The Global Partnership for Education and its work on the development of education sector plans needs to integrate with a new set of global goals.

## *Paula Lucci*, ODI – ‘An overview of country level goals and targets’

This presentation discusses initial findings from ongoing ODI research into national level policies in education.

**What?**

* This project takes as its starting point national level commitments. National governments already have policies and targets embedded in sector plans. What do they look like? How do they input into the wider framework debate and relate to MDG goals?
* Research so far has been carried out on various sectors including education.

**Why?**

* To help understand gaps in levels of ambition, and to highlight where more political effort is required.
* Do high-income countries have these kinds of commitments?
* It is interesting to compare how national targets before global frameworks were agreed changed afterwards.
* To analyse the use of quantitative targets to see which targets are most common.

**How?**

* The first stage is to come up with benchmarks with which to compare countries.
* Education – looking at access and completion in pre-primary, primary, and secondary, plus where possible targets and indicators on learning outcomes, and youth literacy rates.
* Analysing a mixture of regions and income levels
* National development plans and sector strategies are the main source. Meta-studies do not seem to exist, but please get in touch if you know of any!

**Findings on education:**

* Have looked at 75 countries. Most of these were influenced by the MDGs with national targets ending in 2015.
* 50/75 had targets on pre-primary going beyond 2015.
* There is very little on learning outcomes/quality.
* Half of the sample have some targets going beyond 2015 – to 2020 and beyond.

The team is very keen to get feedback on this project, especially concerning whether there are comparable efforts.

## Discussion

* Will we make the same mistakes as in 2000? There is a strong political desire for a simplification of the message. Will the message be stripped of valuable meaning to be bite-sized? Could simplistic / reductive message do more harm than good? The temptation for an easy and communicable message is frightening – narrow goals on literacy and numeracy. This is the biggest risk.
* We don’t know much on who’s learning what? Probably more happening than we think. Agree on the politics of goals. How do we make a case, without an evidence base or with a weak evidence base, for an increased focus on learning?
* On integration of global and national targets and the issue of silos; measures and indicators at the national level are very different from global ones. Ambitious global goals can be used to argue for national goals that can be the main drivers for change. This helps integration as at national level governments can have more integrated approaches.
* We need to stand back and ask ‘why are we setting these goals and targets?’ Dakar and Jomtien were to encourage countries and governments to make commitments. Can these goals be used as criteria for measuring progress? We need to find a comfortable level of reductionism. More does need to be said on process, but achievement tests on a wide scale will be hugely useful. Doubts remain over whether qualitative target setting will make any progress.
* Several points:

1. No evidence that expanded access decreases quality
2. Financing: is development something you do to people or people do for themselves? A credible plan is about sustainable financing, fair tax systems, and governments that raise reasonable proportions of GDP and spend 15% on education. This can universalise access.
3. GPE (3.5bn replenishment) will be the main vector for diverting funds to developing countries, the GPE aims do not have anything to do with MDG/EFA.
4. LMTF’s (Learning Metrics Task Force) ‘new paradigm’ of access *plus* learning is not new. The debate about learning goals should be about what is worth knowing? The LMTF does not engage in this debate, but testing and assessment people are already defining the topography/architecture underneath what we are discussing.

* We have got to have a simple reductionist message in the post-2015 framework with broader efforts at national levels. This can be done, details needed on how though.
* Pedagogy is key, but pedagogy is local, so international measures of pedagogy are inappropriate. How do we overcome this dilemma?
* **Leni Wild**: MDGs have not driven progress, but have enabled better collection of data and we can now better measure what is important. Gaps exist at national levels, international survey data is useful, but does not get traction at national levels.
* **Paula Lucci**: Impact of MDGs beyond better data is the accountability and advocacy that it has driven through monitoring.
* **Susan Nicolai**: Three things emerging from this discussion:

1. Incentives, what incentives do global frameworks offer?
2. Measurement matters, what is measured becomes visible.
3. Change, political processes and financing all happen at the national level.

# Key issues needing further attention

* The **process** by which the framing of the Sustainable Development Goals will be completed remains opaque.
* The relationship between the central UN process and that coordinated by UNESCO in support of **EFA** is unclear.
* Much greater precision and **definition** is required in the drafting of an education goal(s), and associated targets and indicators.
* It is hard to disagree with **overarching goal statements** when they are so general and all encompassing.
* Is the formulation of a global education goal statement with injunctions to individual countries to develop **national and sub-national targets** and indicators workable?
* There is a danger that both an oversimplification and a reduction of the meaning and purpose of education results from an overly narrow focus on **literacy and numeracy**?
* There remains insufficient attention to the critical processes of **teaching and learning** relative to focussing on inputs and outputs in the provision of education services.
* Which is better; for education to be represented by a standalone goal, emphasising its priority, or should it be **integrated** within a much more joined up and holistic vision of development?
* How do we harness the incentives politicians have to catalyse the next stage of progress? There should be space for a **governance** oriented target/indicator.

Of key importance is how new frameworks will be influential at the national level in the **financing of education** and sustainable development plans more generally.

# Attendees

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Affiliation** |
| Robin Alexander | Universities of Cambridge and York |
| David Archer | Action Aid / GCE |
| Ed Barnett | DFID |
| Richard Batley | University of Birmingham |
| Gina Bergh | ODI |
| Chris Berry | DFID |
| Lyndsay Bird | IIEP UNESCO |
| Laura Carlisle-Goldthorpe | Note taker |
| Christopher Colclough | Corpus Christi college |
| Lee Crawford | OPML |
| Tom Eats | EdExcel |
| Olivia Faulkner | DFID |
| Anna French | DFID |
| Rosalind Gater | DFID |
| Sébastien Hine | ODI |
| Dan Jones | Results UK |
| Carolina Junemann | IoE |
| Philippa Lei | Save the Children |
| Keith Lewin | University of Sussex |
| Angela Little | IoE |
| John Martin | Cambridge Education |
| Simon McGrath | University of Nottingham |
| Hugh McLean | Open Society Foundations |
| Mary Metcalfe | Open Society Foundations |
| Priya Nath | VSO |
| Susy Ndaruhutse | CfBT Education Trust |
| Susan Nicolai | ODI |
| Steve Packer | UKFIET |
| Annalisa Prizzon | ODI |
| Caine Rolleston | IoE |
| Pauline Rose | Cambridge |
| Terra Sprague | UKFIET |
| Elaine Unterhalter | IoE |
| Joe Wales | ODI |
| Rob Whitby | DFID |
| Leni Wild | ODI |
| Peter Williams | CEC |
| Alex Wright | Open Society Foundations |