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Monitoring the Post-2015 Education Targets: A Note on Indicators

EFA Steering Committee

Technical Advisory Group on the post-2015 education
indicators

The Technical Advisory Group for post-2015 education indicators was established to provide technical guidance to the Education For All Steering Committee (EFA SC). It is composed of experts from the EFA Global Monitoring Report, OECD, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. Its role is to provide feedback on the post-2015 targets, to develop recommendations for indicators and to set out a measurement agenda that meets the demands of the new education and development frameworks

Introduction and purpose

The purpose of this note is to provide background information on education indicators to complement the Joint Proposal of the Education For All Steering Committee (EFA SC) on Education Post-2015 (hereafter, the Joint Proposal). Setting measurable, actionable targets is an important element of building the post-2015 global education agenda. Targets that are easily understood, clearly defined, and that can be tracked with existing or newly developed indicators over time help promote action both nationally and globally. In addition, targets can inspire action in new areas for which there are no existing indicators available. This background document to the Joint Proposal provides: 1) a brief summary of the existing indicators which could be used to track progress towards the proposed targets; 2) information on the criteria used to select the indicators; and 3) possible ways towards developing approaches that better address the ambitions of the new post-2015 education agenda.

The targets in the Joint Proposal focus on learning outcomes, i.e. how much people learn coupled with access to and completion of schooling. This represents a shift from previous education targets which were primarily focused on ensuring access, participation and completion in formal education systems. In other words, the proposed targets highlight that enrolment and participation in early childhood development programmes, formal and non-formal schooling or adult education opportunities are the means for attaining learning outcomes at every stage, from school preparedness for young children, basic academic competencies for children in basic education; functional literacy and numeracy skills, and skills for work, global citizenship and sustainable development for youth and adults. The shift towards learning at each stage of education will require new indicators focused on learning to supplement existing indicators that capture progress in education system outputs. While there is no explicit focus on equity in the Joint Proposal targets, indicators should measure and monitor inequality and be disaggregated as much as possible by age, sex, location, socio-economic status and other markers of disadvantage.

1) Proposed targets and possible indicators

For the purpose of this document, **goals** are defined as long-term, aspirational statements that can be used to motivate or inspire action. **Targets** are defined as terms which are used to track progress toward the goals and should be time-bound, quantitative and measurable. The EFA SC Technical Advisory Group (TAG) recommends that the **indicators** that are used to monitor the targets proposed in the Joint Proposal should meet specific criteria and possess certain characteristics that are outlined in this note. In cases where there are no indicators currently available which meet the specified criteria for a particular target, or where the indicator will not be available during the monitoring period even with considerable effort, the TAG recommends that the target should be re-considered.

For each of the proposed targets, the EFA SC TAG recommends considering a strategic set of key indicators that focus on outputs and outcomes and are feasible for global tracking (see **Table 1**). Output indicators measure the functioning of the education system, such as access to, participation in and completion of various levels of education. Outcome indicators refer to the learning or gains in competency that are expected to be acquired due to participation in education systems. As part of this exercise, a small number of input types of indicators have also been included as examples.

2) How the indicators were assessed

To provide accurate, reliable information on progress towards the targets, indicators should possess a range of characteristics, in particular they should capture the key concepts intended in the target, be feasible to collect and be available on a regular basis. Other desirable characteristics of indicators are that they should be: actionable, relevant, predictive, disaggregated when possible, comparable over time and space, technically robust, easily communicated, responsive to local contexts and cost-effective.

In particular, specific characteristics should be stressed for the purposes of global monitoring:

Technically strong. Indicators should be statistically robust and based on good-quality, accurate and reliable data.

Coverage. Indicators should seek to yield information which captures the situation of all learners, including both in- and out-of-school populations (especially for basic education).

Comparable. Indicators should be based on common concepts according to international standards to ensure valid comparisons with ideally an initial baseline (2015) and across countries.

The EFA SC TAG evaluated indicators for each of the targets included in the Joint Proposal and developed options for measuring them. At present, some targets can be measured more easily with existing indicators than others. For example, learning in reading and mathematics can be assessed for children in primary school using existing measures that have been used across a number of countries. These existing assessment regimes measure constructs that are clearly defined and considered relevant across different contexts, and tests have been developed with strong psychometric properties. In other areas, such as global citizenship, concepts and measures are not immediately available and will require significant investment of time and resources.

3) A way forward: the measurement agenda post-2015

The Joint Proposal contains an emphasis on learning both within and beyond formal education systems, which will require the development of new indicators and approaches to measurement. While some of the new indicators are under development now, other important areas, such as global citizenship and sustainable development, are still in the early stages of elaboration and therefore global indicators may not be available in the near future. The process of indicator development requires investment in defining relevant concepts accurately, identifying possible approaches to measurement, testing the technical feasibility of collecting new data within countries, and using that data globally.

Further technical development is required for several targets to ensure that data are available on individuals at risk of exclusion, such as children with disabilities or those who are out of school. Further efforts are also needed to track non-formal as well as formal pathways of learning. Reliable approaches need to be created to draw on existing data, such as preparing learning metrics on the basis of current national, regional and international assessment programmes, calibrating these metrics to set performance benchmarks that are relevant to all countries, and aligning national assessment activities with the metrics. In order to ensure that the targets are focused on inequalities it will also be necessary to integrate household and school surveys with administrative data for certain indicators.

In summary, to be effective in inspiring action and monitoring progress, targets must be measurable. This requires clearly-defined terms and at least some existing indicators that can be used now or in the very near future. Some of the targets included in the Joint Proposal are measurable with existing indicators, but others will require further and intensive development efforts to identify and develop new indicators. Some target areas may not be measurable on a global level yet. While measurement is just one important factor in selecting targets, the investment required to reach global tracking for new indicators is important to recognize.

Table 1. Illustrative indicators for monitoring the proposed EFA Steering Committee targets

Targets (EFA SC)	Input indicators	Output indicators	Outcome indicators
1: [By 2030] Increase the percentage of children who access early childhood care and education to x% and start primary 'ready to learn'.		-Participation rate of 3-4 year-olds in organised learning by sex and wealth (%) -Gross pre-primary enrolment rate by sex(%)	- MICS Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) - Under-5 mortality rate - Under-5 stunting rate
2: [By 2030] All children complete free and compulsory quality basic education of at least 10 years, and achieve relevant learning outcomes.	- Number of countries indicating free and compulsory basic education in their legal and institutional frameworks	- % of children never in school - Adjusted net enrolment rate (NER) for primary education and total NER for lower secondary education by sex (%) - Number of out of school children of primary and lower secondary age by sex - Attainment of primary and lower secondary education by sex and wealth (%)	- % of children who achieve national minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics at the end of 2nd grade; the last grade of primary education and at the end of lower secondary education by sex and wealth
3: [By 2030] Increase the percentage of adults who reach a proficiency level in literacy and numeracy sufficient to fully participate in society to at least x%.			- % of youth (15-24 years) and adults (15+ years) demonstrating proficiency in literacy and numeracy skills by sex and wealth
4: By 2030] Increase the percentage of youth and adults with the knowledge, skills and competences to access decent work to at least x% and y% respectively.		- Upper secondary attainment rate by sex - Tertiary education attainment rate by sex - % of youth (15-24) participating in technical-vocational programmes - Adult participation in lifelong learning (%) defined as ' % of those aged 25 to 64 years in education and training' by sex - % of youth (18-24 yrs.) not in education, training or employment by sex	- % of youth / adults with problem-solving skills by sex and wealth
5: [By 2030] All learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for global citizenship and sustainable development.	No indicators currently exist to monitor this target globally. It could be possible to develop needed conceptual and measurement frameworks		There are potential outcome indicators related to citizenship skills based on household surveys and assessments.
6: Governments ensure provision of sufficient numbers of qualified teachers.	- % of teachers in basic educ. qualified according to national standards by sex - % of teachers in basic education with pedagogical training by sex		
7: All countries progress towards allocating (4-6%) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and (15-20%) of public expenditure to education.	Government expenditure on education - as a % of GDP (Total expenditure if avail.) - as a % of total government expenditure		