Towards effective and co-ordinated donor support to countries

Summary and points for discussion

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1. Background

The quality and quantity of UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) educational data, despite the progress, is still heterogeneous in terms of coverage and quality, suggesting several issues at work: (i) many countries produce scant data because they do not have the resources or internal, national incentives to support enough trained personnel to produce good quality data on a regular basis for many key indicators; (ii) other countries produce data that they do not use for education policy decisions, but do so because of external funding obligations, and/or to comply with specific agendas of external agencies, and this is a weak incentive; (iii) some countries fail to produce data they could use for policy decisions because their limited resources (especially human resources) are being crowded out by the production of data that disproportionally benefits the global commons, such as international tests or large education surveys.

Data production needs a clear purpose and the SDG agenda has given that purpose. The situations just noted have developed over time, reaching a point where development agencies and catalogues disseminate massive amounts of data, but without a clear idea about their purpose, their use, and their impact on education policy decisions.

There is clear need of both funding and coordination. In that sense the Second UN Data Forum has ended with a call for them. The Dubai Declaration aims to establish a funding mechanism under the mandate of the United Nations Statistics Commission to raise resources to address the data needs for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and support national statistical systems.

SDG4 is not the exception. Funding gaps for SDG4 monitoring that locates the overall costs of producing data per year as 280 USD million and requires extra 60 USD million in financial aid for low and middle income countries data production. The issue is not only how much support but the way it is provided. The current set-up resembles a fairly disorganized ecosystem where actors do not have full information on needs, capabilities, and so on. A first need therefore is to order the ecosystem for data using information sharing, networking, and coordination of support by both donors and recipients of aid for education statistics, so as to better mobilize existing funds.

The Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) and the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) have proven to be strong vehicles to address technical solutions and strong political tools for collaboration and consensus driving but there is a need to add extra functions to better support countries. The UIS is proposing to expand the current work of the Secretariat adding an "ecosystem shaping" (or brokerage) to the current functions of the UIS in order to better guide and coordinate donors and countries' investment.

The document intends to make the case by first addressing why change is needed in section 2. Section 3 elaborates on change by discussing the different elements that need to be modified. Sections 4 elaborates on proposed actions for a more effective coordination of the education data ecosystem.

2. Why we need a change?

There is currently an ecosystem (suppliers and demanders of data and funds for data, interacting) for education data, but it needs improvement. For example, there is currently no efficient clearing house

for data being produced and the data being demanded by different donors. A quick characterization of the market suggests the following:

1. There is an ecosystem for data, with countries with education data needs, and other, often richer, countries and agencies willing to pay for their supply.

2. This ecosystem is not functioning well because countries and agencies willing to pay for data systems do not know well the type of data demanded by different recipient countries. External funding may be associated with:

    i. Data that are excessively detailed but of little use to assisted countries

    ii. Non-sustainable production of excessively detailed data. Data production stops once external funding stops.

    iii. Highly demanding data that exceeds the technical and managerial capabilities of recipient countries.

    iv. Data that are tied to specific initiatives of donor countries and agencies but that have limited relevance to recipient country needs.

    v. Data that provide a global public good but that have low cost-efficiency for the recipient country and tax their resources (especially human resources).

    vi. Data that is cost-efficient and of high relevance, which are produced and used by the recipient country and there are often not known outside the recipient country, and so are not often adapted to the benefit of others.

Funding Data in the SDG era

Trends suggest that the share of ODA for data and statistics:

✓ Aid for statistics, averaged 0.33 percent of total official development assistance (ODA) between 2013 and 2016 (about USD 623 million per year). (PARIS21, 2018),

✓ A large share of global support to data for development comes from a small number of providers: in 2016, five providers of development co-operation (the World Bank, Canada, the United Nations Population Fund, the European Commission/EUROSTAT and the African Development Bank) accounted for 75% of official development assistance for statistics (PARIS21, 2018).

✓ Since 2012 the pool of donors is tending to expand and diversify. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Omidyar Network, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation are the leads in the philanthropic sector.

✓ In 2015, USD 181 million was committed as bilateral aid for statistics. This aid accounted for one-third of total commitments to statistics. The top five bilateral providers by size of contribution are: Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Korea and Australia (78% of bilateral aid. (PARIS21, 2017).

✓ Demographic and social statistics takes a third of all ODA for data. The support tends to focus in some specific sectors instead of taking a structural approach to national statistics.

✓ ODA in education accounts to around USD 14 billion per year. The United States, United Kingdom, and the World Bank are the largest donors to basic education. The United Kingdom and Germany are the largest two donors to secondary education (GEMR, 2018).

✓ Aid to education data is estimated (probably under-estimated) at USD 30 million. If underestimated let's assume it twice that amount still the help to statistics it is not yet 1 % of ODA.

A demand-driven approach

One of the main issues that characterizes the education data ecosystem is that mandated agencies aggregate and disseminate massive amounts of data with no clear connection with the users' needs - basically countries and other stakeholders (donors among others). They represent one of the suppliers of the ecosystem. The countries are producers of data (to some extent suppliers) but they are basically the demand that needs data (along with development partners and other stakeholders) for policy and other decisions. Summarizing the complexity, countries are suppliers of data (to themselves and the global commons) but demanders of funding. While the donors and development agencies are demanders of data and suppliers of funding and technical assistance.

An understanding of the education data eco-system

Specifically, more (or better) information is needed on two issues:

i. What are the most essential data items that data-supplying countries are willing to produce on their own, as they reflect information considered crucial for the proper functioning of their education systems, and which require technical capacities they do not have and, hence, require donor support; and

ii. What are the key incentives and restrictions that donor countries and agencies face when deciding on what kind of data they are willing to fund and that make it difficult for them to act in a coordinated way in providing for data that countries produce.

An update of the capacity development approach

Ensuring and maximizing the effectiveness of financing for capacity development is essential for the success of implementing the SDG4 agenda. Support to statistical capacity building has been supply driven and piecemeal, with little emphasis placed on partner countries' demand for data in many cases more focused on external stakeholders needs. Resources are a problem, but also the approach is somewhat flawed. In many cases, external consultants carry out the job of the statistical agencies and OECD describes the approach as "fix a broken piece in the data machine" without laying out the ability of the system to self-repair in the future (PARIS21).

This has changed since 2015, with the United Nations (UN) Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (UNSC, 2017) that defines the role of development co-operation providers with a demand driven approach supporting better coordination. The CTGAP proposes action in six strategic areas, each associated with several objectives: 1) co-ordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development; 2) innovation and modernization of national statistical systems; 3) strengthening of basic statistical activities and programmes; 4) dissemination and use of sustainable development data; 5) multi-stakeholder partnerships; and 6) mobilization of resources and co-ordination of efforts for statistical capacity development.

Integration of data sources

The data collection systems in education include various data sources—administrative data, socio-demographic and population data, households surveys, learning assessments and some special surveys that are in general fragmented and not used in a productive way. A needed step is clearly an

integrated approach that countries can use, that includes different sources of information, to guide countries' maximum utilization of their data.

Development of an integrated management system of education that maximizes the use of existing education data in order to reduce the data burden and weed out those data that have little impact on education policy as well as taking advantage of the different sources of information is key.

Filling the gaps in funding.

The gap or investment (cost above ongoing cost) needed for tracking SDG4 over the remaining SDG period (from now until 2030) is around USD 2.8 billion. This implies an increase in aid from $31 to $93 million per year.

But, with an innovation component

Data innovations that are part of a clear system that sets numerical goals, exerts specific actions to achieve those goals, measures, refines, and re-measures. The innovations will be classified into three categories (report, empirical studies and methodological studies). These can focus at first on key areas in the SDGs and in specific regions, and not limit to "tech" innovations but more fundamental systems issues. Innovation includes the involvement of the private sector.

3. What and how?

The UIS is proposing to upgrade its role in order to make Education Data, in general, and SDG 4 data in particular, more *integrated, better quality and cost-effective, and timely statistical data, for education available to make progress in the 2030 agenda a reality.* Although the TCG and GAML have proven to be a strong vehicle to address technical solution*s* and strong political tools for collaboration and consensus driving, there is need for a stronger coordination as both an active broker and passive clearing house of needs and possibilities. This implies to add an "ecosystem shaping" (brokerage) function to the UIS current functions, that the UIS could assume as custodian agency of mot indicators in SDG4 and the role given by Paras 98 and 100 of the FFA.

Coordination is always voluntary but a coalition such as the ones existing in health (GAVI) and agriculture (CIGIAR) would serve to make data collection easier. The goal would be to align both domestic and international funds behind the same goal, and activate public-private partnerships. The collaboration will reduce fragmentation in efforts from all partners adding value via collective action. It will re-direct funding from its existing individual approach to a coordinated collective action towards building sustainable data within the SDG context.

Taking advantage of UIS's mapping of data sources, it could be based on a vision of a within-country integrated data ecosystem that maximizes the use of existing education data so as to reduce reporting burden (from schools to governments and from governments to the international community).

The idea is not to provide funding as a primary function, but mainly to share information and broker between users, innovators, suppliers, and funders. It is expected that funders would continue to fund as present, and recipients would continue to receive as at present, but in a more efficient, intentional, and coordinated manner. To bring some order into the ecosystem for educational data it is necessary to follow a long term plan with four important components:
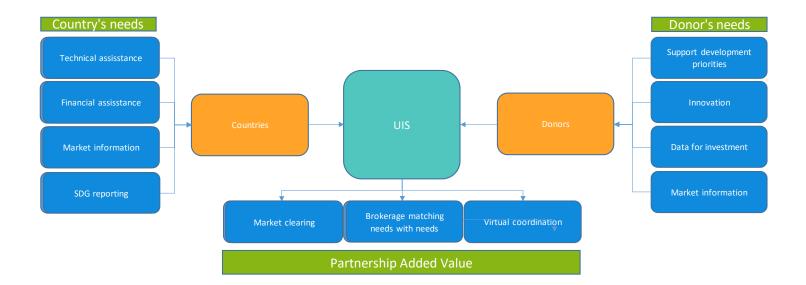
- **A quick assessment of data demand** among recipient countries, country by country, rather than to develop an "average" sense of needs to support countries in their efforts and provide information about practices;

- **A mapping of donor agencies and** and donor countries **programs and policies** to assess the incentives and constraints in their support of data production and dissemination at three levels: (i) recipient countries, (ii) international organizations in charge of multi-country initiatives, and (iii) bilateral arrangements.

- **Increased value based on improved dissemination** aimed at:

  - ✓ **guidelines for investment** with alternatives in cost, funding and options;

  - ✓ clearinghouse for **technical guidelines**

- *TCG Regional and* **National** *engagement strategy* Map of national SDG4 and SDG4 focal points and involvement with countries and regional organizations working at the regional level.

A graphical representation and summary of the idea.

Please provide your feedback by completing the questions that follow. Thank you.

Your name (please print): _____

Your organization/country: _____

1. **Do you agree with proceeding with a consultation for countries about:**

a. Funding needs and modalities?
☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

b. Technical assistance needs and practices?
☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

c. Capacity development inventory?
☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

We would appreciate any comments that you may wish to make:

2. **Do you agree with proceeding with a consultation for donors about:**

a. Funding policies and programs?
☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

b. Data and data products needs
☐ Strongly agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly disagree

We would appreciate any comments that you may wish to make: