TCG4:
Development of SDG thematic indicator 4.b.2

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> **Thematic indicator 4.b.2**
> Number of higher education scholarships awarded, by beneficiary country

Target 4.b: By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

Introduction

Within the sustainable development agenda, target 4.b is unusual for a number of reasons. It targets specific countries, which may be inconsistent with the universality of the agenda. It may also run counter to the equity orientation of the agenda, as beneficiaries are likely to come from well-off backgrounds with easier access to information about scholarship programmes.

Indicator 4.b.2 should have normally been the global indicator, as it corresponds directly to the target formulation. However, data on the number of scholarships are not immediately available. As a result, indicator 4.b.1, which is the volume of aid to education that is allocated to scholarships, was proposed as a shortcut solution for the global indicator – which amounted to US$1.15 billion in 2015. However, this is not a satisfactory solution. Many donor countries do not include scholarships in their aid programmes. In addition, 37% of the total volume of aid on scholarships cannot be assigned to individual countries. In any case, the volume does not provide information on the number of people reached. Therefore, the quest for a robust estimate of the number scholarships through indicator 4.b.2 needs to continue.

Conceptual definition: what is a 'scholarship'?

Defining the scope of indicator 4.b.2 is not straightforward and requires consensus. A close analysis of target 4.b raises many questions and finds its formulation to be lacking in several respects. The target refers to scholarships being 'available' rather than 'awarded'. An agency in a developed country may advertise a scholarship to everyone in the world but award it to a student from a developed country, or target a scholarship to candidates from developing countries but not award it. Target 4.b should therefore be interpreted to mean that (i) scholarships are available to students from developing countries, (ii) these scholarships are awarded, and (iii) the offers are accepted.

It is important to specify the source of the scholarships. The target states that scholarships must be 'available *to* developing countries'. This wording suggests that they do not originate in developing countries and thus would exclude cases where developing countries fund scholarships out of their own resources for their citizens to study abroad. That in turn raises questions beyond the traditional concept of aid flows from one country to another. For example, should the government of Indonesia or Tajikistan or Zimbabwe expand the number of scholarships for their citizens to study abroad or instead invest these resources in their own universities?

Not only the source country of a scholarship but also the type of provider matters. Even if we limit attention to scholarships made 'available to developing countries' from external sources, should all scholarship programmes based in developed countries be counted equally? Government and

public higher education institutions are not the only providers; corporations, foundations, non-government organisations, philanthropists and other individuals also donate scholarship funds. For example, the MasterCard Foundation announced a US$500 million programme of scholarship support for students from sub-Saharan Africa in 2013.

The history of target 4.b suggests that the emphasis is on public providers. The target reflects one of the commitments of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, which pledged to '*[c]ontinue providing, and encourage, as appropriate, higher education institutes to allocate, places and scholarships for students and trainees from least developed countries, in particular in the fields of science, technology, business management and economics*'. It would not make sense to expect non-state scholarship providers to 'substantially expand' the number of scholarships they provide when they are not signatories to the agreement for the sustainable development goals.

Even so, government scholarship programmes can have a mix of funding sources. For example, the two main government scholarship programmes in the United Kingdom that are open to students from developing countries are the Chevening Scholarships (funded through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and the Commonwealth Scholarships (funded mostly through the Department for International Development) but both actively solicit co-funding from private and philanthropic interests.

The target states that scholarships must be tenable 'in developed countries and other developing countries'. 'Other' is the keyword here. The target refers to scholarships for students who cross a border to study at a higher education institution in a country other than their own. Just as the target does not mean scholars who are supported by their own government to study abroad, it would also exclude programmes that sponsor nationals of developing countries to study in their own country, such as USAID scholarships in Pakistan. The Fulbright programme, which offers scholarships for post-graduate study in the United States, would qualify under this target, while a larger programme that in 2015 offered 3,000 university scholarships for study in Pakistan, half of which to women, would not[1]. It is also unclear whether the target includes scholarships for study by distance learning, which is increasingly popular. 'Split site' arrangements allow developing country students to be registered at a home university but have their research supervised by staff at a university in a developed country.

Scholarships must be 'for enrolment in higher education' but enrolment is not equivalent to graduation. Although many scholarship programmes track success rates as far as graduation, few go beyond that. The number of scholarships awarded does not indicate the completion of a degree, or whether students return to their home countries.

Additional questions related to duration and size of the scholarship. For comparability purposes, scholarships would also have to be specified in terms of year-equivalents to ensure that short-term placements are not counted as equal to longer ones, and to prevent incentives against scholarships

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[1] Even if non-government scholarship programmes funded by developed countries were to be counted for this target, issues would remain unresolved. The MasterCard Foundation scholarships are applicable at a range of schools and universities, in developed and developing countries, including a recipient's home country. Under this programme, a Ghanaian student could study in Ghana, Nigeria or the United States. In the second and third cases, these scholarships would qualify under target 4.b, because the recipients are studying 'in developed countries' (United States) or 'other developing countries' (Nigeria). But the student studying in Ghana would not qualify.

for longer programmes. In addition, the amount awarded may cover full or partial tuition as well as living expenses. It is not clear how such options would count in terms of their contribution towards the target.

Other methods of support besides scholarships cannot count, even though they may serve the same objective. For example, the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, a consortium of funding bodies from the United States, dedicated US$640 million towards higher education initiatives in nine African countries between 2000 and 2010. While it did not provide scholarships directly to individuals, it did include grants, usually to universities, through which scholarships were awarded. But as a subsidiary part of the programme, these scholarships may not have been reported as such, and would have been difficult to track.

It is **recommended** that scholarships should be eligible under target 4.b to the extent that they:

- are taken up by (not just made available to) students from developing countries (available to 'students', not just 'countries').
- refer to study at higher education institutions in countries other than the students' home country, including those by distance learning.
- require no further contribution from the student to meet study, travel and living costs
- are, at least partly, publicly funded and accounted for as a scholarship in the public accounts of the donor countries (including scholarships co-funded by private interests).

Consensus would be needed with respect to this definition.

There should be a clear distinction between which scholarships should count towards the target, a definition which may be narrower than the total number of scholarships on offer. A narrow definition will exclude many scholarships, especially from private and philanthropic providers who are under no obligation to sponsor scholarships in the first place. This does not mean that these other scholarships should not be monitored, since their availability can influence the policies and actions of donor governments, which might spend less on scholarships in response.

Operational definition: how do we count the 'number of scholarships'?

The indicator could be an absolute or a relative number. An *absolute* number corresponds exactly to the target but it may be more interesting to know the *relative* number, in other words the share of the target population, i.e. the number of internationally mobile students in higher education, which is reached through scholarships. For example, in 2013, out of 148 million students from developing countries, 2.5 million were studying abroad. With respect to the three country groups specified in the target, there were (i) 235,000 students from least developed countries, (ii) 271,000 from sub-Saharan Africa and (iii) 106,000 from small island developing states. Among the 90 countries belonging to these three groups (some belong to two or all three of them), there were 451,000 mobile students.

The target population is therefore relatively small. The outbound mobility ratio, i.e. the number of students from a country studying abroad, expressed as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment in that country, was 1.8% for developing countries. However, in some countries, notably among small island developing states, the ratio is considerably higher. For example, in Comoros and Saint Lucia,

there are six nationals studying abroad for every ten students in the country. In Seychelles, there are almost five times more tertiary students abroad than at home.

Even with a narrow definition of scholarships, an operational definition is challenging. The monitoring and reporting systems of scholarship providers are not necessarily aligned to the target. There are no common or shared standards for publicly reporting scholarship programme data.

Data may not be collected for several dimensions of interest listed in the target:

- While many programs make available information on the number of planned awards, data on the actual number of scholarships awarded and on the final recipients of these awards is limited.

- Unless certain countries or regions are the sole target of a program, most such interventions do not provide clear data on the specific countries from which they invite applications. Hence, the scholarship is open to students from all countries and it becomes increasingly difficult to assess to what extent students from the developing world applied for such opportunities and, more importantly, how many actually received scholarships.

- Basic demographic data on the characteristics of recipients, such as gender are frequently not available or programmes may be reluctant to share it if they consider it confidential and proprietary, in the same way that some higher education institutions do not disclose how admission decisions are made.

Despite these constraints, it is possible to estimate a baseline. A mapping carried out by the International Institute of Education for the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report identified 111 international scholarship programs in 51 countries that either targeted students from developing countries or targeted students from all countries (including developing countries). Of those, 54 were funded by government entities and offered at least partly by developed countries. While 24 programmes (or 44%) did not indicate the total number of awards that were provided for their recipients in the past year (2014/15) or the total number of awards that are anticipated for the upcoming year, using the donor country as the unit of analysis, 84% of countries provided scholarships with some level of data regarding the number of awards provided or anticipated.

Overall, public providers offer a small number of scholarships. Information collected from these 54 government scholarship programmes, of which 15 were based in developing countries, indicates that some 22,500 scholarships were offered in 2015, corresponding to 1% of the number of mobile students from developing countries.

The number of scholarships may itself be only one measure of interest. In addition to the number of scholarships awarded, a more informative set of indicators would include: the number of scholarship years awarded; the number of scholarship recipients who complete their studies; and the number of scholarship recipients who return to their country. All indicators would be disaggregated by country origin of beneficiary, sex, field of study, level of study, mode of study (e.g. on site vs. distance) and country of study.

The way forward

More research is needed into the characteristics of scholarship providers' monitoring and reporting systems. A pilot study carried out by the International Institute of Education for the 2017/8 Global Education Monitoring Report evaluated how data are collected by three scholarship management agencies, three scholarship programmes and one funding organization in Australia, Canada, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, offering about 9,600 grants per year through 17 programmes. Not all of those would count toward target 4.b, as some provide scholarships to a mix of students from developed and developing countries and current reports do not separate out the data by the country of the recipient.

The evidence suggests that the key data tends to be available, even if not currently reported in a way that helps monitor target 4.b. All programmes reviewed collected data on recipients' countries. Most agencies also collected other relevant student information, including sex, field of study or receiving institution. Field of study data provide information on students studying 'information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes', as specified in the target formulation. In other words, it is possible to develop a direct measure of the number of scholarships for target 4.b. However, this will require a global endeavour to standardize data points, build capacity and facilitate collaboration among data managers.

Information collected on scholarship recipients by selected agencies, funders and programmes in five high income countries

	Australia Agency **DET**	France Agency **Campus France**	Germany Agency **DAAD**	Germany Funder **BMZ**	Canada Programme **PCBF**	Canada Programme **ALT**	UK Programme **Chevening**
Sociodemographic characteristics							
Gender	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Race							
Age	X	X	X		X	X	
Health status on entry							X
Origin							
Country of origin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Destination							
Country	X	X	X	X	X		
State/province	X	X	X			X	
Institution/school	X	X	X	X		X	X
Programme							
Type of education (e.g. higher)	X	X	X	X	X		
Field of education (e.g. engineering)	X	X	X	X		X	X
Level of study (e.g. bachelor, master)	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Learning arrangements (e.g. remote)	X	X					
Scholarship							
Type (e.g. grant)	X	X	X	X			X
Source of funding (e.g. public)	X	X	X	X			
Coverage (e.g. full vs partial)			X	X			
Year of disbursement	X	X	X	X			
Length/duration of the scholarship					X		

Notes: ALT = African Leaders of Tomorrow; BMZ = Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development); DAAD = Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service); DET = Department of Education and Training; PCBF = Programme canadien de bourses de la Francophonie (Canadian Francophonie Scholarship Program).

Some data collection options may not be recommended. For example:

- While governments of developing countries could monitor and report the number of their tertiary-level students receiving scholarships from domestic or external sources, this miss individuals not enrolled in their home country who receive scholarships to pursue full degrees overseas.

- Higher education institutions in developed countries could be engaged by their supervising authority to gather and report data on foreign students as to whether they use scholarship funds. For example, in the United States, the Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System could require all accredited institutions to report the

number of students from other countries pursuing studies on scholarship. But that would require a costly system of managing information from too many data providers.

It is recommended to identify an independent entity that would incorporate scholarship information into existing student mobility data collection efforts. Many scholarship recipients are already captured in such data. For example, the Institute of International Education operates Project Atlas, which brings together 25 national-level mobility data collection agencies from around the world that annually share data on the number of internationally mobile students they receive. Project Atlas includes all major host countries of globally mobile students, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Given that a new entity may be involved and that scholarship providers are likely to adjust their reporting mechanism, there will be cost implications. These cannot be estimated as part of this work but it is possible that a clear communication of the objectives of this exercise may encourage many of these agencies to share some of the costs involved.

Scholarship providers should be encouraged to collect and report data on intended and actual recipients by their country of origin. UNESCO and other international higher education stakeholders need to facilitate a debate on standards and best practices for scholarship data. Dissemination of best practices requires establishing a network or community of practice that allows scholarship programme managers from all countries to engage directly with each other. An online platform or regular meetings are critical to identify and address common challenges and share best practices. This community should build on existing efforts to work across student exchange agencies, such as Project Atlas. Scholarship programmes need to more openly share information that can lead to better understanding of how they contribute to SDG target 4.b.

References

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