UNDG MDG NETWORK

Report of the E-Discussion

EDUCATION: CLOSING THE GAP

1 February – 4 March 2011

Hosted by MDGNet (UNDG) in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Moderators
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Summary

The e-discussion on *Education: Closing the Gap* was hosted by MDGNet (United Nations Development Group) and supported by teams from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) from 1 February to 4 March 2011. The e-discussion generated 106 responses from more than 29 countries, presenting an opportunity for the international development community to formulate critical policy messages and an action agenda to the UN Economic and Social Council's 2011 Annual Ministerial Review on education.

The e-discussion was divided into three broad themes – quality, access and innovation – in order to generate participants' perspectives on the ongoing and emerging gaps in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, in the education sector. Although a number of recommendations emerged from the discussion, several cross-cutting key messages include the following: (i) **Improve the transparency and accountability of education systems** at both the national and local levels, focusing specifically on resource allocation, teacher performance and learning outcomes; (ii) **Recruit high-quality teaching candidates** by improving the status of teachers, providing decent work conditions and offering opportunities for ongoing professional development; (iii) **Prioritize early childhood education and development**, which continues to be neglected by education ministries in both developing and developed countries, despite research evidence having established its centrality to long-term learning achievement and human development; (iv**) Increase the relevance of learning throughout the education life-cycle**, focusing on meta-skills such as "learning to learn" in primary grades and the development of 21st century skills at the post-secondary and secondary levels, which will improve the prospects of smooth school-to-work transitions; (v) **Enhance education partnerships with civil society and the private sector** within a clear national framework that maintains the state's principal commitment to education provision while drawing on the strengths of each stakeholder; and (vi) **Build a better evidence base of innovative education strategies that demonstrate both successes and "successful failures"** in order to increase knowledge-sharing of good practices, while at the same time balancing innovation with a sensitivity to local context and community needs.

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Introduction

Background and Purpose

Despite the gains in primary school enrolment over the past decade, a global learning crisis threatens to stall progress on the Education for All (EFA) agenda and education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Recent data on education show that quality and equity have become the most important challenges to education systems, particularly in low-income countries. Although access to school remains a persistent challenge in some developing country contexts – particularly in areas characterized by high levels of horizontal inequality and in conflict-affected and fragile states – it has always been an intermediary means to the overall goal of increasing children's learning, skills development and knowledge. For young people to be enabled to make the transition to adulthood equipped with the competencies needed for the 21st century, a renewed commitment to equitable, quality education that draws on innovative approaches to education delivery and financing is needed.

The e-discussion on *Education: Closing the Gap*[1] was organized in order to bring together experts, practitioners and policymakers, from within and outside the UN system, to exchange ideas and perspectives on the global learning crisis. The e-discussion is one of several consultations that take place in preparation for the 2011 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)[2], which will assess the progress made in achieving the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs) in regard to education. This report aims to provide a synthesis of the e-discussion, including a description of the organization of the discussion forum, a brief overview of relevant trends in education, an analysis of the contributions made by participants, and a summary of key messages for policymakers and other professionals working in the education sector.

Organization of the E-discussion

Hosted by MDGNet (UNDG) and supported by teams from UNDESA, UNESCO and UNICEF, the e-discussion was held from 1 February to 4 March 2011.[3] In order to address the ongoing gap in the achievement of the IADGs in regard to education, as well as growing concerns about the global learning crisis, the discussion was organized around three core topics – (1) quality, (2) access and (3) innovation. In order to initiate and facilitate discussion among participants, each topic was introduced by two guiding questions posed by expert moderators. Over 106 academics, policymakers and practitioners from more than 29 countries contributed, reflecting a rich array of perspectives as well as a number of actionable and constructive recommendations for consideration by ECOSOC and the wider international community.

[1] The full contributions, as well as the background note, letter of invitation, launch message and moderators' messages and summaries, can be found on the e-discussion website at http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/amredis2011.shtml

[2] The AMR was mandated by the Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit. Its purpose is to assess progress on achieving the IADGS that have emerged from the major UN conferences and summits since 1990, including the MDGs. The 2011 AMR will be held during the ECOSOC Substantive Session in Geneva, 4-29 July.

[3] Support provided by Kayla Keenan (UNDG); Gregory Barrett (UNDESA); Elizabeth Fordham, Mariana Kitsiona, Ulrika Peppler-Barry (UNESCO); Barbara Reynolds and Kimberly Gaston (UNICEF).

Part 1: Quality in Education
Moderated by Dr. Mmantseta Marope, UNESCO

Background

Education provision, especially at the primary level, has increased due to the convergence of the Education for All (EFA) movement, the education MDGs and the progressive recognition of the indispensable role education plays in the achievement of other MDGs. Since the creation of the EFA framework in 1990, 97.3 million children have enrolled in primary education[4]. By 2008, primary net enrolment ratios (NERs) of 90 percent and over had been attained in North America and Western Europe, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. The Arab States and South and West Asia reached 85 percent in the same period. Sub-Saharan Africa reached 76 percent, marking an 18 percentage point increase since 1999[5]. Between 1999 and 2008 eligible children who were still out of school declined by 39 million. Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia accounted for 80 percent of this decline.

This progress notwithstanding, the global target of 100 percent primary NER remains a challenge. Currently 69 million children globally remained out of school and though projections are preliminary, 56 million children could still be out of school by 2015[6]. Progress in expanding access to other levels of education has been modest or slow. Globally, secondary gross enrolment ratios (GERs) rose from 52 percent to 67 percent between 1991 and 2008, respectively. From 1999 to 2007, the tertiary education GERs rose from 18 percent to 26 percent worldwide[7]. The global average for access to early childhood education (ECE) remains low at 44 percent in 2008.[8] At all levels of education, access remains significantly inequitable across and within countries based on income levels, location, language and gender.[9]

The undeniable progress in the expansion of primary education access has not been matched by comparable improvement of education quality and relevance. International and regional learning assessments such as PISA, PIRLS, SACMEQ and SERCE concur that an unacceptably high proportion of students complete basic education without having acquired the skills, knowledge and competencies commensurate with their grade levels. Quality is particularly low for children from poor households and from less developed countries. For instance the 2006 PIRLS, which assessed reading skills of grade 4 students in forty countries against four international benchmarks, demonstrated that the vast majority of students in developed countries performed at or above the intermediate benchmark. The 2007 SACMEQ III assessment of learning outcomes in 14 southern and eastern African countries highlighted low levels of learning achievement in most participating countries. In two of these countries, over a third of grade 6 students had failed to acquire even the most basic literacy skills, implying that many were unable to read fluently after five to six years of primary education[10]. The 2006 SERCE assessment, which was conducted in 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries, demonstrated that a high percentage of grade 3 students had low level 1 skills in mathematics with a significant percentage of students registering below level 1 skills[11].

[4] Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2008 and 2011
[5] Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2011, Statistical Tables
[6] Ibid, pp.40
[7] Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2008 and 2011
[8] Ibid, 2011
[9] Ibid, pp.42-47
[10] Ibid
[11] Level 1 students can interpret tables and graphs, recognize the relationship between numbers and geometric shapes and locate relative positions of an object in space, UNESCO-OREALC,2008

Findings from learning assessments, the projected number of out-of-school children and the recorded drop-out rates at the primary level suggest that factors such as household poverty, ill health, rural-urban differences and ethnicity or language-based inequality do not explain these trends entirely[12]. While patterns and reasons for dropping-out differ according to the regional or country context, the role of quality education is now acknowledged as an enabling factor for reducing drop-outs, sustaining retention, increasing survival rates and ensuring the transition from one education cycle to the next. High repetition rates – considered a marker of poor quality – bears a direct cost to poor families and reduces their incentives to keep their children in school. Therefore, poor quality reinforces drop-outs linked to cost, given that household poverty remains one of the strongest predictors of the risk of dropping-out.[13] The SACMEQ 2007 results further support this argument by showing large wealth differentials in student performance in Southern and Eastern Africa. In general, while middle income countries show far better results than low income countries, striking differences can also be detected within countries. Grade 6 children from wealthy or urban South African households are ten times more likely to obtain better test scores in reading than children coming from poor or rural households.[14]

The evidence provided suggests that quality education is inequitable by poverty levels at the regional and country levels. This resonates with the EFA agenda and MDG focus on poverty reduction, in which quality education is set as a target in itself for making progress in education worldwide.

Poor education quality has vast and dire consequences, especially, though not exclusively, for developing countries. It leads to students' disengagement and dropping out of school. For those who persevere, it leads to high repetition rates and ultimately to failure to acquire requisite skills, competencies, affects and values. High dropout, repetition and failure rates result in unaffordable wastage of resources that could have been invested towards improvements in further expansion of access and quality. Because the majority of learners who receive poor quality education are often from marginalized and poorer segments of societies, sustaining current levels of poor quality education not only denies developing countries the opportunity for growth but also the redistributive effects of education. In the longer term, poor education quality risks reinforcing social and income inequalities and sustaining inter-generational poverty and marginalization.

Guiding Questions for Part 1 of the E-discussion

1. Given that the quality of teaching is critical to students' learning, how can the training and working conditions of teachers be improved in contexts with resource constraints?
2. Which interventions are most effective for retaining secondary-age students in school by preparing them with a foundation for lifelong learning and for labour market participation?

[12] Ricardo Sabates, Kwame Akyeampong, Jo Westbrook and Frances Hunt: 'School Dropout: Patterns, Causes, Changes and Policies, 2010 *"Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011, The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education"*

[13] Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2011, pp.49

[14] Ibid, Figure 1.39, pp.87

Discussion Points

Quality teaching is not determined by resources alone

E-discussion participants acknowledged the shortage of resources as a key constraint to improving the training and working conditions of teachers in both developed and developing countries. However, regardless of the level of resources, participants forcefully argued for making effective use of available resources as a critical starting point for improving results. Refreshingly, the debate highlighted that poor management of resources is a more critical constraint than the absolute size of the resource envelope. One participant summarized the main objective of teacher training despite potential resource constraints as follows:

"To improve and support teachers' innovative attitudes and skills, as well as motivating them to be imaginative and creative in all situations."

Francis Saytha

Another contributor highlighted the need to identify or define what constitutes quality teaching prior to developing training programs. This entry point mitigates the risk of inefficiently using resources for teacher training. By determining what quality teaching is and making an initial diagnosis of teachers' skills and competencies, the development of training programs will become more targeted and cost-effective, tailored to the context and made to fit the purpose.

Along these lines, a contributor highlighted the importance of acknowledging the actual work done by teachers under difficult local conditions before "discrediting" their work. The contributor contended that the reality of teaching in schools in given contexts, which is highly variable depending on the location, should not be confused with pre-conceptions of quality teaching by the "elites of the international field" and the "standards of Westernized schools". Related to this, another participant noted:

"I know that in the era of globalization every country is striving to copy global big developed countries and teach to create global citizens. But still I believe that "quality teaching" should remain pegged to purpose of the environment and context."

John-Mary Kauzya

Cost-effective strategies for improving teaching quality

Several contributors suggested mentoring as a simple, cost-effective tool for improving the quality of teaching. Several examples were given as to how experienced teachers can transmit their knowledge to less experienced teachers. Some of the ways described included the use of direct observation in classrooms headed by inexperienced teachers, the creation of small teacher strategy and support groups for addressing common challenges, and the inclusion of senior or retired teachers in classroom sessions at different levels of education. Knowledge and skills transfer through mentoring could be incorporated into in-service training and continuous professional development.

"Informal discussions among teachers help build professional identities and allow the transmission of knowledge. Experienced teachers can help beginners to easily solve a number of difficulties in managing the class".

Anne-Marie Chartier

Provision of teachers' professional support in remote areas was detailed by another contributor, with specific reference to the potential benefit of teachers' professional support networks in conflict-affected and fragile states:

"Save the Children are currently developing a proposal with the regional education authority in Nariño, Southern Colombia to pilot such networks in this remote conflict-affected area."

Tim Murray

In these contexts, the decentralization of support mechanisms would enable more affordable, sustainable and locally responsive professional support opportunities. Examples of such initiatives include building the capacity of local education authorities to deliver professional support to teachers, building "teacher support networks" to be led and coordinated by competent teachers who could be awarded with diplomas as an incentive, and strengthening support networks to promote knowledge sharing, training, the exchange of teaching materials, and in-class support.

Specific attention was also given to the role of quality teaching for rural communities, who, in many parts of the world, continue to face deprivation because of resource constraints and the inequitable distribution of education. In this respect, training for rural teachers is critical and should be prioritized by the respective education authorities, especially in terms of developing training materials and enabling teachers themselves to develop their own teaching materials that are relevant to their specific contexts. Related to this, one contributor described the use of Waldorf Pedagogy in Brazil:

"In our movement in the classroom we use very simple things from the surroundings; we create our own books and materials and so on. What makes the difference is our knowledge and research about how a child develops and what is good and appropriate for each stage of development. If we know that, we can address children's needs in a very economical way".

Ana Luisa Versiani

Another example of good practice concerning teacher training in non-formal settings came from Ethiopia. As described by the contributor from UNDP Ethiopia, a local project revealed that teacher performance in non-formal education programs was of better quality than that of their formally trained counterparts. Teachers in non-formal settings received continuous creative refresher training which allowed them to improve their teaching skills, even if their education background was lower than that of formally trained teachers. This example demonstrates the need to take into consideration such promising practices with a view to enhancing the transferability of these programs while maintaining good results.

In a different vein, several contributors placed more focus on enhancing the transparency and effectiveness of resource allocation for education, making particular reference to the need for reforms that weaken corruption within education systems:

"[E]ducational decentralisation and school-based management is perhaps the commonest approach to reducing corruption (amongst its other governance aims) in the allocation and utilisation of education finance, and teacher behaviour. However, it is no panacea: parent and communities groups can be captured by corrupting forces or may lack capacity to exercise an effective oversight function".

Phil Matsheza and Anga Timilsina

Community participation and teachers' performance

Several participants agreed that teacher motivation is crucial to quality learning, and tends to be higher in contexts where their roles as educators, and education more generally, are highly valued. As one contributor suggested, the solidarity between teachers and local communities can be strong even in contexts with few resources:

"The issue is community respect in exchange for a job well done, and that is not so much affected by resources, because most human communities are willing and able to understand that "a job well done" is relative to resource availability and context".

Luis Crouch

Communities can also ensure accountability for "a job well done" by monitoring teachers' performance and children's learning outcomes within local schools. An e-discussion participant, who recently conducted an evaluation of community-based accountability in classrooms and schools in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, also underscored the community's role in enhancing teachers' motivation in resource-constrained environments:

"When teachers were selected by the community structures and answerable to them; even though these teachers were less well trained (in terms of formal qualifications) their motivation was high and their commitment to developing the children's potential palpable".

Clinton Robinson

Retaining students, especially girls, by increasing the relevance of learning opportunities

Addressing issues of secondary student retention, the e-discussion pointed to several causes for school dropouts and implicitly, to mitigation strategies. In their order of significance, these causes include both direct and indirect costs of schooling, poor quality of education, and thus perceived low value for money. The discussion also identified supply factors such as lack of schools and/or distance away from school. For girls in particular, gender related health issues and safety feature significantly in addition to the aforementioned constraints.

In their majority, the contributions conveyed the critical role of rigorous, relevant and holistic curricula in the retention of students. The training of teachers in this respect is central to successfully translating holistic curricula into education experiences that are relevant to secondary-age students. Such curricula would need to be relevant to labour market requirements, but also would offer a wide range of skills and knowledge that do not limit the capacity of students to evolve throughout their education. Learning assessment should not be restricted to the pure measurement of cognitive skills, but should also take into account elements of multi-faceted knowledge, skills and competencies facilitated through broad curricula.

One contribution pointed to the fact that the provision of structured knowledge alone will not engage learners in the process of life-long learning. The participant therefore proposed the following:

"An approach that is likely to have more impact on learning achievement is to improve conditions that are internal to learners. We can do that by helping learners to develop their learning to learn skills. This is one of the basic pillars of learning advocated by UNESCO. UNESCO's conception of learning to learn is more concerned with the mastery of learning tools than the acquisition of structured knowledge".

Chris Chinien

Another contributor described the transition to knowledge societies, which requires early labour market participation for secondary-level aged students. In this respect, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes are viable tools for retaining students in secondary-level education and training. 'On-site' training and apprenticeships in specific sectors, based on needs assessments of local market conditions, can also encourage young people's school participation and retention. Examples from Save the Children´s projects in Colombia include agricultural training in school farms and the training of students as guides for

the local tourism industry. A related experience in Nigeria proved to be beneficial for secondary school-aged populations:

"Infusing enterprise skills in secondary school curricula has worked excellently especially for boys. This method of suffusing their curricular with income generating skills complete with enterprise education where they are actually taught the art of bargaining and negotiations have kept a good number of them in schools and able to complete their secondary education".

Rosemary Nwangwu

Another example on improving student retention at the secondary level was shared by Mexico:

"Mexico's city local government has incorporated a scholarship for the virtual high school it provides to thousands of students at a time and making a difference in retention rates."

Guadalupe Vadillo

This sort of intervention, which makes use of ICTs to leverage the expertise of the limited pool of qualified teachers while at the same time keeping students engaged in the educational processes by providing them a scholarship as an incentive to continue their education, is a promising and cost-effective solution with a dual impact, as suggested by one of the participants:

"In the context of resources constraints, distance education or use of ICTs are cost effective strategies to upscale teacher training programs."

Arshad Saeed Khan

The context specificity of school retention rates

Numerous contributions pointed out that cultural context – and not only the location or availability of schooling – impacts on school retention at the secondary and primary levels. In particular, girls' retention was said to decrease based on cultural practices such as forced early marriage or unremunerated child care and household work.

These cultural barriers hinder educational opportunities, and can only be broken if the state takes a leading role in promoting the role of education in human development. Determining the value of education can be best aligned with development strategies at the national level, in which education is integral to strategies for attaining development goals. By embedding the role of education in national development strategies, concrete measures can be taken to address cultural barriers keeping children, and girls in particular, from school. Examples given by the Medical Mission Sisters included: law enforcement for the prevention of early marriages, the establishment of childcare centres, and the empowerment of women as agents of knowledge-transfer within families and communities. Imparting life-skills to adult family members and making them aware of the benefits of education enables them to make more informed decisions about the schooling of their children, which eventually improves school retention rates.

Some contributors also referred to the provision of subsidies to families to ensure retention in contexts with multiple education barriers. Where implemented, these interventions have witnessed beneficial results, especially in poor contexts where there are less means for keeping children in schools. However, experiences from an intervention in Mexico suggests that they can also have unexpected adverse effects. Mexico's 'Oportunidades' program provides families in rural areas with conditional cash transfers, food support and basic medical attention, contingent on their children's school enrolment, retention and successful completion. While 'Oportunidades' has been successful in retaining students until the completion of secondary education, a recent assessment also revealed some undesired consequences. In some instances, mothers enrolled in 'Oportunidades' have become:

"*victims of domestic violence, when their husbands have demanded for the grant money to be used for expenses not related to schooling. Another issue has been that the financial incentives provided by the program have encouraged young motherhood and have increased the demographics of the area".*

Rene Armando Hernandez Espinosa

Recommendations emerging from the discussion

Teaching quality

- Improve governance of education systems to ensure resources reach local schools.
- Ensure local schools are accountable to communities they serve by encouraging demand-led accountability measures, such as parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and community monitoring of school learning outcomes.
- Engage teacher unions and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) constructively to improve teacher working conditions and implement the teacher code of conduct.
- As much as possible, recruit teachers from local communities. This improves punctuality and reduces absenteeism. Easy access to schools should improve teachers' motivation by reducing the travel burden.
- Reform teacher training methods toward more participatory and observation based methods as a way to transform teaching effectiveness once they are in service.
- Set common standards for Teacher Training Colleges and appoint independent bodies involving public, private and civil society actors for quality assurance of teacher training institutions.
- Treat teachers as specialized cadres. Reduce the burden of non-teaching tasks common in some contexts, such as census enumeration, election duty and providing mid-day meals.
- Organize teacher training as a continuous process that allows for self paced curriculum through information technologies.
- Use ICTs and distance education to cost effectively scale up teacher training programs
- Appoint committed and strategic leaders to head education systems and teacher training colleges. In addition to their qualifications, recruit teachers for their passion, commitment and love of children.
- Improve revenue collection, such as through taxes, and allocate greater resources to improving teacher training and working conditions.

Student retention, especially at the secondary level

- Promote collaboration between schools and technical and vocational training institutions which provide real 'on site' training in vocational skills. Ensure that such vocational training opportunities are based on a rigorous assessment of local market conditions, include business element in the strategy, are integrated into school curricula, and if possible provide real and immediate benefits to school and students so that projects are more sustainable.
- Encourage partnerships between schools, local trades, industries and employers to create job placements for students and to instil the value of both school and work. At the same time, introduce student support and mentoring systems and create a support system for them to find work placements.
- Support and encourage the use of internet for vocational guidance.
- Include work experience as part of the curriculum and examination grades.
- Improve the perceived value of schooling and of education by improving the quality of learners' educational experience and by changing their perception (and those of their

parents) of their private returns on investment in education. The latter may require public education and awareness raising campaigns.

Part 2: Access to Education
Moderated by Dr. Nicholas Alipui, UNICEF

Background

While significant progress has been made on achieving universal primary education since the Education For All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action was agreed in 2000, an aggregate analysis hides the large and often persistent inequalities, disparities and combined forms of exclusion that continue to leave tens of millions out of school. Low levels of enrolment are concentrated not only in specific regions but also in certain segments of the population. Girls in particular are being left behind. Recent UNESCO analysis demonstrates that 60 percent of countries face gender disparities in primary and secondary education and as many as half will not achieve the goal of gender parity in education by 2015[15]. In addition, progress towards other EFA goals - in particular the targets on early child care and education (ECCE) and adult literacy - has been particularly slow. Access expansion must be equity-based, complemented by targeted interventions to reach marginalized groups.

Exclusion from education is rooted in deeply ingrained social, economic and political processes, and unequal power relationships. While poverty and gender continue to thwart progress on inclusive education, other forms of stigmatization – such as minority ethnic and language status, disability and HIV/AIDS – continue to keep millions of children and youth from attending school. In addition, conflict is a particularly potent source of marginalization worldwide. Over half of the children currently out of school live in conflict-affected fragile states, based on analysis from a recent report by Save the Children[16].

According to UNESCO's 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report, many of the measures which have proven to be effective in reducing inequalities are affordable, even in the poorest countries. The most successful of these have included: lowering financial barriers through the elimination of school fees, bringing schools closer to marginalized communities, developing second chance programmes, improving the learning environment in disadvantaged schools, enforcing laws against discrimination, providing incentives through social protection programmes such as conditional cash transfers, school feeding programmes and school health programmes that help to reduce absenteeism.

Beyond enrolment and quality learning within classrooms, ensuring that children are adequately prepared before they begin school can lead to better learning outcomes over time. Investment in pre-school teaching is a cost effective way to enhance learning in primary school and has great potential equity gains. The degree of pre-school provision varies significantly across countries. Public investment should be geared towards narrowing disparities by targeting marginalized groups, who tend to reap particularly high benefits in relation to pre-school learning.

[15] UNESCO, Institute for Statistics (2010) *Global Education Digest 2010: Comparing Education Statistics across the World.*
[16] Save the Children Alliance (2009) *Last in Line, Last in School 2009*

Maternal education can also bring a major boost for children's educational attainment. A mother's level of education has a strong positive effect on the enrolment of her children, especially that of girls. Implementing literacy programmes for the large number of female adults and out-of-school youth, as well as promoting life-long learning, can therefore make a major contribution to improving access and enhancing learning outcomes.

Guiding Questions for Part 2 of the E-discussion

1. Early childhood care and education (ECE) provides enormous benefits and can mitigate the effects of deprivation and contribute to improved learning. From a local, national and global perspective what policy options have been effective in making ECE a reality for children and reaching the most disadvantaged or excluded children?
2. The benefits of educating women and girls have been widely documented. What experiences can you share on the bottlenecks, policy initiatives, and implementation efforts that have secured increased and sustained participation for girls in school?

Discussion Points

Education as a right

Many participants raised awareness to the fact that ECE is a basic right of children, although one that has not yet been fully recognised. This is especially true in the case of those most marginalised, mainly the rural poor, girls and children with disabilities. However, the case was made to extend further awareness of these fundamental rights outside education fora to include policy makers, families and the broader community. One post from Uganda pointed out that some existing policies are in themselves exclusionary, further marginalising some children despite the intent of guaranteeing their right to an education. Policies that promote the right to education for *all* children, genuinely ensuring access and inclusion of *all* children, especially girls and children with disabilities, was mentioned as a key issue and priority for participants. Programmes and interventions should be centred on a *human* rights-based approach and grounded in existing international instruments and policies such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Education as a 'right' framed the dialogue that ensued.

Inclusive education

Exclusion of the most marginalised children from access to quality basic ECE was a key concern for respondents. Children in poor, disadvantaged communities, especially conflict-affected areas, often face limited access to ECE or receive insufficient services. However, two specific marginalised groups received considerable attention: girls and children with disabilities.

Participants noted that despite progress toward improving girls' access to education, entrenched cultural beliefs and practices, especially surrounding gender roles—where women are inextricably connected to their primary role of caring and providing for children—continued to be primary barriers. For example, in Liberia it was explained that in spite of international efforts to support girls' education, the culture is accepting of certain practices, such as early marriage, which can significantly prevent access to education. The case is similar in Kenya where girls' roles as mothers are "being emphasized over and above their need for education." In addition to policy efforts, respondents reiterated that in order to achieve sustainable change such discriminatory attitudes and practices must be addressed.

The issue of children with disabilities was also discussed extensively in a number of contributions. In addition to the exclusion and discrimination of children with disabilities at the local level, participants also perceived further exclusion at the national and international levels

as well. International and governmental initiatives were flagged as having anaemic information and strategies on the issue of disability, despite recognising it as an area that needs policy attention. These gaps and omissions were perceived as a threat to the overall achievement of educational goals.

"Disability has been identified as one of the least visible but most potent factors in education marginalization which is evident in countries at different ends of the spectrum. And this is holding back countries' national progress towards achieving the goal of universal education for all."

Guozhong Zhang

Quality

While the topic was extensively covered in Part I of the discussion, the issue of quality continued to be raised by several respondents as an important factor in this second part, highlighting the fact that access alone is not enough of an imperative toward a holistic approach to education for all. Quality and access were rather seen as two sides of the same coin, with the understanding that one could not be productive in moving the ECE agenda forward without the other. Despite increased access, without improvements in quality, concerns such as the prevention of school retention and drop out cannot be adequately addressed. The Baha'í International Community summarised this point by emphasising that "the objective is not simply to establish a set number of schools or the imposition of a particular model of education," but is rather about the process of creating a learning environment of high quality and relevance to local communities.

ECE/ECD as a means for economic development

In addition to being a human right, valuable in and of itself, education was also perceived to play a significant role in overall economic development and in achieving multiple policy objectives. Experiences from South Africa and Mexico were shared highlighting how ECE was being used more in these countries as a direct means to address social problems of unemployment and reduce the care responsibilities of parents so as to facilitate their participation in income earning activities. Further to the many social benefits, this link of education to economic development coupled with larger policy benefits, such as poverty reduction, promotion of gender equality and improved outcomes in health and nutrition, was considered important to the achievement of other international development goals.

Policy gaps

"In a recent survey, we asked Plan International staff to list the challenges they faced in the implementation of projects to support the rights of girls. Amongst the 34 responses we received, the most frequent reply can be broadly categorized as 'resistance to change'."

George Anang'a

Another area of concern that was raised by several respondents was "the gap between political will and practices actually observed." While compelling policies may be formulated, there are often implementation gaps in what governments and institutions actually put into practice, this being especially true in the case of access for girls and children with disabilities. This may be partially due to the fact, as one respondent posed, that data on ECE providers, users, and overall access, which could be used to inform policy decisions, is not substantial. Nevertheless, existing policy frameworks and standards are considered weak and do not necessarily guarantee the educational rights that are promised or intended. Additionally, overall enforcement of current policies and legislation was deemed "slow" and "problematic." Finally, the lack of political will is being seen in many countries as national governments fail to commit sufficient resources to ECE and, in addition, are more readily shifting their responsibilities around

education to the private sector. While some participants recommended the development of more effective policies, one respondent debated the issue by discouraging the development of further policies and rhetoric in favour of a more strengthened focus and financial commitment toward the implementation of polices that are already in place.

Ownership by private sector

Uganda, South Africa and Mexico shared specific instances exemplifying the trend of governments to delegate their responsibility for ECE, placing it largely within the hands of the private sector. All countries found this to be problematic in that existing inequalities were multiplied rather than reduced as a result. In these countries private schools tend to be perceived as a privilege of the wealthy, only benefiting those children and families who are more likely to have access to such services, such as those in urban areas and those who are able to afford the accompanying costs, thus further marginalising the rural poor. Furthermore, in the case of Mexico, supervision in terms of monitoring and evaluation of the private sector by government has been poor, potentially placing more children at risk.

"The fact that service provision is left to private proprietors tends to compound rather than reduce inequalities. As a result, the poor fall prey to exploitative proprietors who may focus on maximizing profit rather than benefiting intended beneficiaries."

Hajara Ndayidde

"In rural northern Uganda, ECE is perceived by many as an optional education system meant mainly for children of the urban well-to-do class and many parents in the urban setting unconsciously concur. For instance, such working class women see it as an alternative for hiring baby sitters and only a handful is joining the prestigious wagon of having a child in ECE."

Dickson Wanglobo

Participants shared the view that governments have an obligation to their citizens in terms of ensuring access to quality basic education. In comparison with the private sector, governments were seen as being better able to reach the most marginalised in remote communities, areas where most private sector institutions do not operate. Their ability to strengthen policy and local structures in these areas was considered an added advantage over the private sector.

Cultural dimensions

An overwhelming number of comments centred on the impact cultural traditions, attitudes and beliefs have on the implementation of ECE. Almost more than financial and political barriers, the success of ECE programs seems to hinge on general acceptance of the concept into a country's collective values and principles. "Resistance to change" and deep-seeded cultural beliefs, such as expected gender roles and work ethics, can significantly hinder ECE efforts within a community, especially if certain practices or ideas are not found to be culturally acceptable by the general population – as expressed in the case shared by Liberia:

"The Liberian culture has a deep-rooted belief that girls/women need to be supported by men and therefore, they need not work but be dependent. The marriage system requires the man to pay a dowry (paying for the girl or woman as property). A common saying is that, 'a woman kenyah does not leave by the river side,' which means no matter what, a girl will find a man to take care of her, whether she is educated or not."

Z. Patience Flomol

Sustainable social change for education was considered unachievable "if the attitudes and beliefs that underlie the value system do not change." Still, respondents tended to agree that short term interventions were not enough to prioritise ECE.

"Enduring change depends upon coherent efforts to transform both the individual and society. Social change is neither upgrading the individual (through secular education and training, or religious conversion) nor of an exclusive focus on changing social and political structures. The challenge in getting [children] into school and keeping them there requires a systematic approach to the transformation of attitudes in the behaviours and values of individuals, their families and communities as well as efforts to change institutional structures and norms in a way that promotes…attendance and meaningful educational outcomes."

Bani Dugal

Community and family involvement

As a way to overcome local resistance to change, several of the participants identified direct engagement and involvement with communities and families as being imperative to ensuring sustainability. Parents, in particular, were considered to be key in ensuring girls remained in school. Kenya and Plan UK shared their approaches to ensuring access to ECE, and both countries stressed the criticality of raising awareness and mobilising families and communities to ensure programmes are not merely accepted but integrated into the culture.

In addition to meaningful partnership and a method of working within social structures and local contexts, respondents made clear that communities, including religious leaders and families, must be active participants in all decision making and implementation processes, both at the policy and local levels. Moreover, given the cultural mores involving the role of women in the care of children, specific efforts should be made to include women and their perspectives into policy dialogue.

"It is of critical importance that the person responsible for the ECE programmes be a part of the community and therefore be trusted by the community…An ECE programme cannot succeed without the full support of the families. It is therefore essential to involve them from the beginning…It is critical that [they] be involved in decision making. All too often, programmes fail to make the best use of available resources because they have overlooked some of the obstacles and challenges faced by the families."

Matt Davies

Inter-sectoral collaboration

"The effective provision of services to meet the goal of inclusion requires the combined expertise, experience, and support of a range of individuals and institutions. The benefits of collaboration cannot be overemphasised."

Hajara Ndayidde

Participants acknowledged that ECE goes beyond cognitive development and is also important for the continuum of children's physical, social and emotional development and growth. Clear linkages between education and other sectors such as health and nutrition could impact how children are able to perform not only in school, but throughout the life cycle through enhanced development in these areas. Education must also respond to the emerging social, environmental, and communication trends that learners will face. These factors must be taken into consideration when developing ECE interventions.

Given the aforementioned complexities in addition to added complications—policy gaps, financial constraints, cultural barriers—participants recognized that government funding and programming alone cannot sufficiently support ECE. A holistic, inter-sectoral approach between government departments, international organisations, NGOs, the corporate sector and local communities could better sensitise communities to the educational needs of children and its relationship to their physical and mental well-being. Integrated and comprehensive

education programmes that incorporate nutrition, protection, and hygiene, both in the formal and non-formal sectors, could help to ensure the comprehensive developmental needs of children are met, in turn providing them with a stronger head start in life. Strong relationships at all levels (local, national, and international) in support of a coordinated approach are better able to link these relevant systems and create synergies toward a more inclusive national strategy for ECE and universal primary education.

"A well planned and systematic communication and advocacy effort to market ECCE and to create conditions for its acceptance and implementation in countries needed."

Hajara Ndayidde

Recommendations emerging from the discussion

Inclusive ECE and basic education systems

- In order to secure increased and sustained participation of children and improve learning at the local level, community-based models for ECE must be developed and promoted.
- Capacity building of relevant professionals and community members is one way to raise awareness and implement efforts in local communities. It was noted that training is not only essential for ECE teachers and caregivers, but additionally for professionals in other sectors, as well as community leaders and proprietors who tend to not be equipped with the necessary technical skills and expertise needed to adequately operate and sustain ECE programmes. As mentioned, major shifts in entrenched cultural dimensions and individual attitudes would also need to occur. In order to genuinely address the issue of access to ECE, investments in the local community ought to be "sensitive to the local context," developed on a "local evidence base," and "enhance cultural and linguistic diversity."
- At the national level, political will that is backed by strong leadership is imperative in order to ensure ECE figures more prominently on the global agenda. To this end, greater awareness is needed for policy makers and professionals who design and implement programmes. More socio-economic data and local area mapping of ECE services are needed not only to better understand community needs on the ground, but also to inform new ECE policy agendas as well as strengthen existing ones. This is especially relevant for reaching the most marginalised, in particular to inform policy and programmes that are inclusive of girls and children with disabilities. One specific suggestion from Chile encouraged the use cost-benefit analyses and tools to assist policy-makers in selecting more effective and efficient investments in education: *"Advocates for ECD and ECE have an opportunity and responsibility to better acknowledge and integrate data, design, and implementation factors associated with ECD policy and programming as key preventive, promotive, habilitative, and rehabilitative processes."* Donald Wertlieb
- Despite well-grounded analyses, participants agreed that temporary or fragmented approaches would not be enough to advance progress for ECE. Rather, long-term investments to education that establish clear time-lines and milestones that are monitored and evaluated regularly were recommended.
- In summary, a systems approach emerged as the overarching strategy to achieve both the objectives raised in this second discussion in addition to achievement of universal primary education for all.

Part 3: Innovation in Education
Moderated by Mr. Nicholas Burnett, Results for Development Institute

Background

Education systems increasingly confront challenges to the delivery of quality learning, relevant skills development and current financing models for further enrolment expansion in secondary, tertiary and technical and vocational education. Among education experts – including several e-discussion contributors – there is a growing perception that education systems are evolving more slowly than other sectors, such as health. With the ongoing shift toward knowledge-based economies and persistent barriers to the education of marginalized groups, new approaches to the provision and financing of education are needed in order to hasten progress on the EFA goals.

This is particularly relevant in the current global economic climate, in which some developing countries' constrained fiscal space could impact social expenditure, and as a result domestic resources for education. Simultaneously, a transition to fiscal consolidation policies in many donor countries could translate into cuts to official development assistance (ODA) and the share of ODA going towards basic education, which has stagnated since 2008.[17] While national governments and donors should honour their commitments to support education, there is also an urgent need to look beyond traditional sources of education funding to new partnerships, cost-sharing and innovative financing mechanisms, which could catalyze current spending on education and push efficiency gains. Innovative financing options – such as international financial transaction taxes and education ventures funds – could help raise the profile of education and promote innovation in education while also mobilizing new resources to fill financing gaps.

While national governments retain primary responsibility for delivering education services and ensuring equity and quality, non-governmental (including faith-based) organizations, and private and civil society groups often make significant contributions to the achievement of education goals. Understanding the comparative advantages of each of these non-state actors and harnessing those synergies at the local, national and global levels is essential to improving the coordination among the various stakeholders in education and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of education systems. For example, persistently high levels of youth unemployment world-wide suggest the need for improved school-to-work transitions that supply young people with the skills needed in local labour markets. Public partnerships with the private sector – to identify skills gaps and open opportunities for on-site job training or apprenticeships – have proven successful in countries such as Malaysia and Ghana[18].

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer great potential for innovating in education delivery, as new technologies make available vast digital libraries of knowledge resources to millions of both formal and non-formal users. Through the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and distance-learning opportunities, new ICT developments offer a number of promising developments for enhancing quality and increasing access to education. This has the potential to reach not only those communities in remote areas where education infrastructure might be limited but also learners throughout various stages of their life-cycle. Even in the absence of highly advanced technological infrastructure, mobile devices, internet kiosks, cloud computing and solar-powered devices are making possible various forms of learning and knowledge sharing that is user-directed and supports those outside conventional

[17] 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report. The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education, UNESCO.

[18] See the UNESCO-UNEVOC internet portal TVETipedia for information exchange and knowledge sharing on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes world-wide.

education frameworks. However, little is still known about which mechanisms work most successfully in which contexts.

Guiding Questions for Part 3 of the E-discussion

1. How can non-state actors (including civil society organizations, faith-based groups, private philanthropies and the private sector) best contribute to the achievement of education and learning for all?
2. What innovations, including through the use of technology and new financing arrangements are needed to make education appropriate for the modern world?

Discussion Points

Non-state actors can advance progress in the education sector

Participants broadly agreed that non-state actors are important stakeholders for strengthening education systems, and there was a general interest in increasing their involvement and enhancing their performance within partnerships. In particular, non-state actors were seen as being well placed to bridge gaps between public education systems and marginalized communities that require special interventions. They can in some cases provide education more effectively than state providers, both by being closer to the students themselves, being able to spend resources more efficiently and catering to those households who are able to pay tuition. One contributor summarized the potential roles of the various stakeholders as follows: governments must take an overall coordinating role, ensuring coverage and large-scale impact, while civil society and the private sector are well positioned to ensure quality and the sustainability of policies.

"Ideally non-state actors would best contribute to the achievement of education and learning for all by responding to peoples' needs and priorities that are not covered and financed by formal education and learning."

Noro Andriamiseza

Of the non-state actors discussed, civil society received the most attention from participants. As a number of contributors stated, civil society has an obvious role to play in education innovation because it is often at the vanguard of progressive social reform. In particular, discussants referred to the importance of civil society organizations working as mediators between public education systems and local communities, especially in contexts where local norms might create challenges to ensuring the inclusiveness of education (e.g., in regard to gender or children with disabilities). Similarly, contributors also saw civil society as being uniquely positioned to help implement global education goals – such as the EFA agenda and the MDGs – translating them from international fora into local contexts, drawing on their local knowledge as well as the support of international rights frameworks.

Partnerships between education systems and civil society can be beneficial for their own organizations as well. One contributor highlighted the positive impact of increasing partnerships between educational institutions and civil society organizations as a means of promoting service-learning and capacity-building within communities. Not only do these partnerships help build the capacities of learners as well as the civil society organizations themselves, they also offer alternative forms of education and training for secondary aged students transitioning from school to the world of work.

"I believe service-learning curricula are a very effective approach to incorporating and engaging non-state actors in the education process (to achieve education and learning for all) and at the same time service-learning curricula are an innovative way of making education appropriate for the modern world in 'real-time'."

Although contributors mentioned a number of ways in which civil society could contribute to education goals, one participant highlighted advocacy as its most important function. As identified by a number of discussants, innovation in advocacy for education is needed as it has tended to be too specialist and unpersuasive. Given civil society organizations' linkages to the communities they serve, it was suggested, they are uniquely placed for sensitizing populations to new education initiatives, as well as feeding upwards the priorities of local communities and holding governments to account on their commitments to education.

Although the involvement of private, for-profit actors was discussed to a lesser degree than civil society actors, and was not necessarily viewed favourably by all discussants, several contributors pointed to the need to engage with these actors given ongoing gaps in education financing. As identified in the moderator's closing message, there was little discussion about the role of private schools which continues to be an under-explored component of innovation in the sector.

"We're already well into the 21st century; we have to be realistic about the current funding landscape. It's an era of escalating education needs, scarce resources and shrinking donor pots. New financing arrangements offered by the private sector if carefully cultivated offer one part of the solution. Let's be open to those opportunities."

Vijitha Eyango

"No we don't have [the private-sector partner]'s logo on our primary school textbooks, so we are not naïve about profit maximization agendas in play, but the relationship has been carefully cultivated, managed and Cameroon's most vulnerable children are the ultimate beneficiaries."

Vijitha Eyango

Contributors identified several comparative advantages that the private sector could offer to learners in education systems. In particular, reference was made to the importance of the private sector for partnering on the expansions of infrastructure (e.g., school building in Morocco), the provision of skills and entrepreneurship training for local labour markets (e.g., work training programmes for youth in Pakistan and Madagascar), and communication-oriented education campaigns (e.g., SMS-based school and health campaigns in Cameroon).

Partnerships must be carefully coordinated and regulated

Although generally positive about the potential role non-state actors play in education systems, a number of contributors emphasized the state's central responsibility in ensuring equitable educational opportunities of good quality for all. Partnerships should support, not supplant, state commitments. In order to reap the full benefits of partnerships, clear standards mediated by a national framework for non-state support of public education systems is needed.

Without a clear framework outlining the responsibilities and liabilities of stakeholders in these partnerships, education for all might not be put at the centre of these partners' goals. For example, one contributor discussed the importance of non-state actors in working with learners outside of formal education systems, an area which tends to be low-priority for many governments. From her experience in West Africa, peasant associations and handicrafts federations were untapped entry points for skills and livelihoods development with non-formal learners. These programmes proved most successful in contexts in which certain standards were established by education ministries:

(1) specific programme criteria guaranteeing quality;

(2) clear linkages and synergies between informal programmes and formal learning opportunities;
(3) official recognition by the state education system of non-formal learning programmes with concomitant resources;
(4) a clear outlining of the responsibilities of the state and non-state within the national education strategy.

Mary-Luce Fiaux Niada

If innovative practice within partnerships is not linked to the broader educational framework, results could occur in isolation from the rest of the sector and could fail to be taken up where successful.

"NSAs should not be striving to create islands of excellent that cannot be taken to scale and fizzle out, but rather introduce appropriate, applicable and sustainable changes that have visible impact on education."

Michael Daniel Ambatchew

The possibilities and limitations of ICTs for education

"Children cannot be what they do not see and ICT allows them to see much further."

Madeleine Laming

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) was discussed enthusiastically by most participants, although a few expressed hesitation about their potential in certain developing country contexts. There was broad agreement that ICTs could be used to fill gaps in service delivery for rural communities, non formal learners and illiterate adults, for example, as well as providing greater exposure of the broader world to communities in remote or isolated areas (e.g., the use of mobile phones, radio and television to promote female literacy in rural Pakistan).

The benefits of ICTs were not only discussed with reference to learners but also in regard to teachers and other education professionals. Internet communications facilitate intra-professional support and allow for sharing good practices, as well as extending opportunities for teachers to continue professional development. In India, one contributor described a programme which linked teachers in five states via an ongoing e-consultancy, enabling them to share practices, and importantly, to develop their presentation skills.

However, the limitations of using ICTs in education were also recognized, with concerns ranging from quality issues to more practical considerations such as the lack of infrastructure necessary for the use of the most promising technologies. One contributor exercised caution in trumpeting ICTs as the solution to filling gaps caused by distance or exclusion. The push to use ICTs needs to be tempered by retaining focus on the responsibilities of states and other stakeholders to ensure the provision of basic education. Despite the convenience of ICTs for learners and their importance for 21st century skills development, it is not clear that the quality of learning they offer is higher than more traditional forms of learning.

"New technology has enormous potential to bring education to people who cannot attend classes in the traditional way, but it needs to be used carefully to be effective. The material via electronic media [has] to be of good quality and appropriate to the context – computers are not the whole answer."

Madeleine Laming

With reference to the infrastructure required for making use of the most cutting-edge technologies, one contributor said that infrastructure development should be encouraged but that local schools should also be free to create their own learning resources in their absence.

"Developing countries need to be empowered to develop indigenous materials and technologies which can be used in local circumstances."

Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Iqbal

Successful innovations will be context-specific

Contributors acknowledged the importance of innovations to education systems, but were sceptical about the ease with which these would "travel" between specific contexts. Some argued against the idea that the level of innovation in education is low, stating that because they often occur at local levels and are rarely scaled up, they often go unnoticed. One participant suggested that this was because of a lack of incentives to implement change that was truly innovative, pointing to the incentives in the IT sector as a successful example of how innovation can be stimulated.

"What if governments and donors offered risk capital allowing for an 8 or 9 out of 10 failure rate for start-up innovations (and simple evaluations of them) with another pot of funding available for the successful innovators who want to expand and eventually scale up?"

Ward Heneveld.

Many contributors promoted a range of innovations that did not require an intensive increase in resources or that could, in fact, be used as a catalyst to mobilize additional resources for education. For example, in contexts of resource constraints, practices and resources that are indigenous to certain countries could be adapted and scaled up in a cost-effective way (rather than instituting innovations imported from elsewhere which might not be feasible in certain settings).

There was general agreement among participants that the most successful innovations are those that are tailored specifically to local realities. Even though the EFA goals and MDGs are global in nature, challenges posed by implementation – and the innovations required for responding to these – are likely to be context-specific. To this end, one contributor remarked that discussion of innovation should be more focused on how to stimulate innovation rather than which innovations work, which will differ dramatically depending on context.

Several contributors questioned whether expanding education systems using many of the traditional formal learning institutions was appropriate for certain groups and regions that might benefit from more non-formal education interventions.

"There are contexts and population groups which are manifestly not well served by schooling, and these merit reflection on how quality learning and effective socialisation in the local context might best be structured."

Clinton Robinson

For example, experiences in rural, multi-grade education in Colombia and Mexico have demonstrated that these need not be the "poor cousin" of mono-grade, urban education. As the Founder and Director of Colombia's Nueva Escuela programme argued, while developing countries should make efforts to expand education infrastructure and teacher recruitment to remote and marginalized areas, the reality is that much of the ongoing shortfalls in the EFA goals originate in areas that rely on multi-grade schooling. Rather than wait for education systems to tackle problems of poor infrastructure and teacher recruitment, she suggested the need to train teachers to be more effective multi-grade educators. Nueva Escuela and similar programmes in other Latin American countries are not simply a means for mitigating the impact of multi-grade schooling on learners, but they also rely on "reality-based" learning activities which connect learners to their environments and collaborative knowledge building with a diverse range of learners.

Similarly, a number of contributors pointed to the need for pedagogical approaches to change in order to help learners develop the skills needed for the 21st century, including meta-competencies such as "learning to learn", learning how to synthesize information, developing critical thinking skills and understanding concepts involved in measured risk-taking.

"Although it is urgent to invest in school infrastructure, teacher recruitment and antipoverty strategies, it is necessary to focus more on pedagogical renovation and to improve the way instructions are delivered. More than half of the money is wasted in poor ineffective teaching methods, inefficient training of teachers and the lack of reliable learning materials coherent with teaching training strategies, renovated teaching practices and innovative learning methodologies."

Vicky Colbert

An evidence-based approach to innovation in education

"Probably one of the key variables is the inclusion of research findings concerning what makes solid learning happen. There is an array of knowledge that in general has not been included in the different elements of the education system…"

Guadalupe Vadillo

Many contributors pointed to the need to understand better "what works" when innovating in and reforming education systems, and this was discussed with reference to improving the evidence base in this field. Participants discussed various methods for doing this – increasing the number of impact evaluations attached to innovations, disseminating more widely research results on education innovations, and sharing more informally case studies and examples of good practices. One participant highlighted the need for exchanging ideas not only on successes but also on "successful failures", which could give insight into the potential shortcomings of certain innovations and help to build a better knowledge base.

According to a few participants, the growing evidence base on learning within the field of cognitive neuroscience is one that needs to be explored and better understood by education specialists from more traditional disciplines. Recent work in this field has included brain imaging which demonstrates the level of instruction needed for reading fluency, and cognitive networks research which shows the relative efficiency of instructional methods. At the same time, several contributors questioned whether integrating neuroscience into education policy and research discourses would lead to an over-medicalized discussion of the reform education systems, diminishing the importance of strengthening child-centred education and learning opportunities.

"We need to stop thinking of teachers as teaching machines who deliver a curriculum that covers what we think children need to know, where it is a race against time to cram facts into their young heads. We need education systems that provide second and third chances, and allow plenty of time off task."

David Turner

Although there was disagreement on this particular area, most contributions recognized the need to enhance knowledge sharing and the exchange of good practice by including those outside the traditional education sector in the push for innovation. At the conclusion of Part 3, the moderator highlighted the potential demand for a database of innovations in education that could serve as a global resource for relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations emerging from the discussion

Partnerships with non-state actors

- To create efficient public-private partnerships in education systems, partners / policy-makers need to understand the responsibilities, liabilities and comparative advantages of the various stakeholders. As suggested by a number of contributors, this should occur within a national policy framework in which governments ensure overall coordination, coverage and responsibility for large-scale impact, and civil society and the private sector are critical to ensuring quality and sustainability in implementation.
- Strengthen school-to-work transitions by involving the private sector and civil society in the design of skills training and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. The private sector can work with education systems to identify skill shortages in labour markets and can offer on-site training and apprenticeships to youth in secondary and tertiary education. Civil society can link with schools to implement service-learning curricula, which gives young people experience working on social issues of local relevance.
- Encourage the intermediation between local communities and state education systems by civil society organizations. Civil society organizations can help fill the gaps in implementation that occur between international agenda-setting, national education planning and local households' take-up of educational opportunities. They should serve not just as a supply-side interpreter for state institutions but also as a demand-led intermediary helping to bring the needs and priorities of local communities to state institutions.
- Enhance advocacy to be less technical and specialist in nature so that it links more directly with people, thereby making it more persuasive and raising its profile.

Innovating to make education appropriate for the modern world

- Shift the focus of innovation from teachers to learners. Too much emphasis is placed on the delivery of education by teachers and educators, which puts teachers at the centre of reforms in learning, rather than children and youth.
- Build a better evidence base on innovative education strategies by bringing together experts from diverse disciplines to address gaps in knowledge. For example, greater collaboration between education specialists and researchers from neuroscience and psychology could lead to more informed, innovative solutions to learning challenges.
- In order to improve education quality, encourage pedagogical and curricular innovations that emphasize creative and collaborative knowledge builders – "learning to learn", learning to communicate, and learning to think critically – to address 21st century challenges and opportunities.
- Education strategies that aim to promote the empowerment of children, women and those from other marginalized groups (including children with disabilities and indigenous peoples) should encompass both formal and non-formal strategies. In certain cultural contexts, failure to address inequity and disempowerment in non-formal, community spheres could slow progress in formal settings.
- While investment in the expansion of education infrastructure and teacher recruitment is important, recognize the relevance of multi-grade schooling in many remote and marginalized communities – including those in conflict-affected fragile contexts – and adapt teacher training to improve learning outcomes in these settings.
- Integrate the use of high-quality learning resources through affordable ICT platforms for both students and teachers in order to improve the learning process.

Annex 1

Contributions received with thanks from:

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