

# Policy-Practice-Results Linkages for Education Development of Good Quality and International Cooperation in the Post-2015 Era<sup>8</sup>

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## ***Abstract***

*Education 2030 adopted in September 2015, as fourth of SDGs emphasizes quality education, above all, learning outcomes. Meanwhile, aid increasingly uses results-based financing, moving away from conventional projects in favor of program approach in line with principles of Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, although evidence suggests that budget support has failed to achieve learning improvement. Emerging approaches to the new education agenda are characterized by emphasis on system and assessment.*

*The paper covers issues of educational development and aid after Jomtien World Conference on Education for All of 1990 and (1) re-contextualizes significance today of SDG4 and clarify challenges, (2) examines features and identifies gaps of the 'mainstream approach' of international cooperation for educational development, in comparison with existing and emerging alternative approaches, and (3) present actions needed to ensure policy-implementation-results linkage that will more likely achieve learning improvement and its outcomes.*

## **1. Introduction**

Education 2030, a new global education agenda following the Dakar Framework for Action, corresponds to Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4) adopted in September 2015. It emphasizes inclusion, equity and quality education, especially learning outcomes. This is a natural course of educational development, reflecting the realities, especially of developing countries. Behind the scene of improved access to primary education, acute and different types of disparity and exclusion continue to exist. Learning outcomes of pupils are not up to the standard set by the country. Expansion of primary education system gives increased pressure to junior secondary schooling which is for the vast majority of students in developing countries the terminal stage of education.

Meanwhile, international aid that most developing countries rely on increasingly uses results-based financing, moving away from conventional projects in favor of program approach in line with principles of Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. This is despite the fact that evidence suggests that budget support has failed to achieve learning improvement. Donors are adding pressure on countries, for their sake of accountability to taxpayers, to show that money spent by aid is producing acceptable results. Emerging approaches to the new education agenda are characterized by emphasis on system and assessment.

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<sup>8</sup> This article is an extended version of Yoshida, K. and van der Walt, J.L. (2017).

The paper 1) re-contextualizes significance today of SDG4 and clarify nature of challenges; 2) examines features and gaps of the ‘mainstream approach’ of international cooperation for achieving the new educational development agenda, in comparison with existing and emerging alternative approaches; and 3) present actions needed to ensure policy-implementation-results linkage that will more likely achieve learning improvement and its outcomes.

## **2. From EFA to SDG4: Run-up to the Year 2015 and (Renewed) Emphasis on Learning Outcomes: Significance and Challenges**

### **2.1 Achievements and Remaining Issues**

**Access improved:** Education is often cited as a sector that has made significant progresses among Millennium Development Goals (sources). This is primarily because of dramatic reduction in out-of-school children of the school age: from 105 million in 1999 to 64 million in 2017 (UIS website). Gender parity in primary enrollment also significantly improved during the period (UNESCO 2015a). Biggest gains were made by countries in the South Asia and the Sub-Saharan Africa which had lagged much behind the other regions. To make this achievement possible, governments increased public education expenditure with a pace that surpassed that of economic growth on average across the global regions, and per-pupil real spending increased in most developing countries, and aid money also significantly increased (UNESCO 2015a). However, there were many countries who did not follow the same pattern and where primary education share in the education expenditure did not increase (*op. cit.*).

**Equity and inclusion remain as issues:** However, even in countries that have made a considerable progress in universalizing access to primary education, huge challenges remain in assuring equity, inclusion, and learning improvement. Inequity issues are found not only as gender disparity, but in the manner of internal inefficiency (such as repetition and drop out) and various forms of disadvantages. Children from household with low socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, mother tongue language that is different from the official national language, religious or social values, living in remote areas and in conflict-affected areas are known to have disadvantages in accessing and completing education. Multiple interlocked barriers persist, and their post-school-age life faces continued difficulties. Countries have to be determined and innovative in addressing these issues, because reaching the unreached is usually more costly than what the usual unit cost asks for; new and innovative activities are to be sought. However, it is not acceptable to leave them behind.

**Learning has not improved:** Evidence after evidence has shown that even if children complete primary school, too many of them have not attained learning to the mastery level as set by the country, or left far behind by internationally comparable data on learning achievement. A limited number of countries that participate in PISA find their performance far below the OECD average - lower-middle income countries of Indonesia and Kyrgyz, for instance, scored 402 and 314 respectively for the 2009 reading results against the OECD mean score of 500 (OECD 2010). In Kenya that has seen a major increase in primary completers after the introduction of free primary education in 2003, learning was stagnating. Over the decade of 2001-2011 more than

fifty percent of primary schools consistently scored on average below the pass rate of 250 at the terminal examination, showing huge disparities between regions and schools with different characteristics (Oketch *et al.* 2013:16). The issue of equity is also prevalent here.

**Demand has increased for secondary education.** To accommodate increased number of children graduating from primary schools, countries have invested a huge amount in this subsector which saw a surge of enrollment during the past decade or so. For the vast majority of students at junior secondary education, it is their terminal stage of education despite their aspiration to continue to upper secondary and higher education. This gives dual challenges to lower secondary education, since a big chunk of school leavers have to be ready to work, while others need to continue upper secondary education. In reality, options for vocational education are open in most countries only at the upper secondary schools which is not reached by most of the youth at that age.

## 2.2 Examining Features, Context and Significance of SDG4

SDG4 addresses these remaining and emerging new issues. The key message of SDG4 is captured by its overarching goal statement: ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.’ Several features are noteworthy for the purpose of this paper.

**Scope.** While the previous rounds of EFA, since its inception in the Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and its successor Dakar Framework for Action both primarily focused on the universalization of primary (or in some cases basic) education<sup>9</sup>, SDG4 encompasses the entire scope of education: from early childhood development to primary, secondary, and tertiary education, including vocational, non-formal, and adult education, that is education throughout life (UNESCO, 2015b).

**Emphasis on results.** The new education agenda has a clearer emphasis on results. This is conspicuously described in the target statement. The sentence of Target 4.1 begins by stating that ‘all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education’. It then describes the results by qualifying the ‘quality’ which should be ‘leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes’ (Table 1). Results are stressed in the construct of other targets of SDG4<sup>10</sup>. Emphasis on learning outcomes is indeed found consistently in Jomtien and Dakar frameworks<sup>11</sup>, but in practice the emphasis during the implementation was given to universalization of primary education, and quality aspects were found in inputs such as school infrastructure, textbook, trained

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<sup>9</sup> UNESCO in its EFA Global Monitoring Report acknowledges that UPE ‘was the most prominent’ of the EFA goals (2015a:77).

<sup>10</sup> In fact, the target statements in Muscat Agreement which was adopted in the 2014 Global EFA Meeting in Oman and served as the basis of the Incheon Declaration, had this feature consistently over the entire targets (UNESCO 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Goal 6 of Dakar Framework for Action states ‘-- so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all --’ (UNESCO 2000) and a proposed target in Jomtien Framework for Action goes: ‘Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement’ (UNESCO 1990).

teachers, and so on. However, Education 2030, in the key documents of Incheon Declaration and its accompanying Framework for Action, does not define what ‘learning outcomes’ mean. Much stronger emphasis could have been given to teaching and learning processes. The statement of Target 4.1 extends free education from primary to secondary, a major change from the previous Goal 2 of Dakar Framework for Action, signifying the magnitude of challenges, but at the same time the word ‘compulsory’ has disappeared. Discussions on the indicators that measure progresses and achievements of the targets are ongoing and currently focus on a global level pending a decision to be taken at the UN-wide exercise, while each country is expected to identify its own indicators at the country level to reflect its own education goals.

**Table 1: Comparison of the primary/basic education-related goal**

Education 2030 (SDG 4)	Target 4.1 by 2030, ensure that ‘all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality <b>primary and secondary</b> education <u>leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes</u>
Dakar Framework for Action	Goal 2: ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and <b>complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality</b>

Source: UNESCO 2015b and 2010

**Philosophical and developmental discourses.** SDG4, as was the case with Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks for Action, is strongly driven by a human right discourse: education is a human right. Education is also taken as public goods. It follows naturally that the government should take a primary responsibility to ‘ensure’ that the targets are achieved. Concurring with the widened scope of SDG4, results of quality education are expected to shape other forms of results beyond a narrowly defined learning outcome. Targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 touches upon vocational skills development which should result in employment and decent jobs.

Another, and probably most prominent aspects of learning outcomes is a visionary orientation embodied in Target 4.7. This target spells out that education should equip all learners with ‘knowledge and skills<sup>12</sup> needed to promoting sustainable development.’ Furthermore, it tries to present the concept of what constitute sustainable development by specify means to achieve it: education for sustainable development (ESD), for sustainable lifestyle, human rights, gender equality, and promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, and global citizenship. Thus, this target can be interpreted to expresses our determination that education should be a foundational driving force for the entire SDGs in transforming the world in a way we want it to be and into the sustainable future.

Overall, SDG4 coincides with the broad direction of SDGs that is **transformational, aspirational and universal**. Transformational in a sense that we must revisit the ways we use knowledge and skills toward commonly shared values and attitudes. Aspirational in that achieving goals and targets require utmost efforts by everyone with innovation and decisive commitment.

<sup>12</sup> Muscat Agreement of May 2014 in the corresponding target referred to values and attitudes in addition to knowledge and skills.

Universal because all the countries in a global community must take it as our concerns, not as a matter in developing countries or in particular regions. It is worth adding that the education community primarily through EFA Steering Committee made its best efforts so that we have **one education agenda**, to avoid having similar but slightly different goal statements as happened in the past between Dakar Framework for Action and education related goals of Millennium Development Goals.

### **3. Global Responses to Educational Challenges**

Global agenda for educational development discussed in the preceding section was translated and incorporated into education plan of respective countries, and the stated progresses were made possible by continued efforts of countries, and in the case of most developing countries with utilizing international cooperation or aid. This section discusses how the external partners in the name of aid have played their part by examining features and identifying gaps of the ‘mainstream approach’ of international cooperation for educational development, in comparison with existing and emerging alternative approaches,

#### **3.1 From Projects to a Program-Based Approach**

Education aid has a long history of helping countries implement projects. Typically, a project addresses a relatively small set of related issues, designs and implements a measure to solve them. For instance, using data, the government of a developing country identifies provinces where enrollment rate of girls is particularly lower than that of the national average, analyzes its contextual background and reasons, and introduces a policy reform such as fee abolition, or provides a targeted scholarship to compensate for opportunity costs of sending girls to school. During the 1990s, donors, bilateral and multilateral, conceived and implemented such projects with the government, using the expertise and experiences the donors had. This had resulted in running a number of, or in some cases over a dozen of, education projects running in parallel in the same country, taking enormous administrative time and costs of the government, with duplication of areas of support, pockets of gaps unaddressed. Countries became dependent on aid with less sense of ownership, while donors became skeptical about aid not being able to achieve satisfactory results. Development Assistance Committee of the OECD has been a main arena to discuss ways to improve aid effectiveness, and the second highest level forum held in Paris in 2005, after the Rome meeting in 2003, Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was endorsed. The declaration emphasizes five principles of country ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability for results. These principles have been monitored and discussed in the subsequent meetings at Accra (2008) and at Busan (2011).

#### **More harmonized and aligned**

In line with the principles, an international aid increasingly shifted to using a sector-wide approach. This was especially true in the case of education, taking the education sector comprehensively as a target instead of working on a specific set of issues. Under a program-based

approach (PBA), a sector program developed by the government was implemented with aid from various agencies that was coordinated and harmonized by the government, using as much as possible the country systems of procurement, financial management, accounting and reporting. Pooling financial contributions of donors into a common basket was encouraged. Gradually budget support, general or sector specific, gained preference by both the government and by donors, especially European ones, for its alignment with the country system, while projects were labeled as a fragmented piece-meal and discouraged. (IDD and Associates 2006, European Commission 2014 ). PBA has gained popularity in the education sector, and became a norm of the education aid modality (UNESCO 2009:222). Those aid agencies who believed in the project approach made sure that such an intervention corresponded to the government's education policy and the sector plan.

### **Failure of Budget Support**

In the early round of PBA, budget support was preferred as an instrument that was deemed to be most aligned to the country system and nurture the country ownership. However, after years of experiments, evaluations found that while this modality of aid was instrumental in reducing out-of-school children and gender disparity to some effect, it had yet to be proven that the approach was effective for improving learning achievement. The evaluation on DFID's major education programs using budget support in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Tanzania found that while enrolment increased substantially, 'actual learning outcomes to date are poor' (ICAI 2012:14). In Zambia, the evaluation recognized increased public spending on education, improved enrollment and gender parity, but 'the quality of education remained low' noting that 'improved access among underprivileged groups changed the composition of classrooms of primary schools, which had an impact on average examination results.' (de Kemp et al. 2012).

The experiences suggest that problems that could be solved by increased resources with collective and harmonized aid were successfully addressed by PBA in its early phase of implementation. However, modification to the modality became necessary so as to work on more complicated problems of addressing children with marginalized conditions in a multi-faceted difficulty or leaning improvement that requires various combination of measures. There is no one-size-fits-for-all solution.

### **Results-based financing (PBA2)**

Facing such a challenge, a more recent round of PBA began to reinforce results orientation, by linking the release of aid resources to the recipient government based on the accomplishment of agreed results. This modality is generally called Results-based financing (RBF<sup>13</sup>). The World

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<sup>13</sup> Some donors, notably DFID, distinguish results-based financing (RBF) from results-based aid (RBA). In the latter the donor fund is released to the government against agreed results produced by the government, whereas in the former, the fund is released from the government to the service providers (Pearson 2011:3). However, the schemes actually used can be a mix of these, with outputs/results found at various levels. Other major donors including the World Bank and GPE tend to use RBF to refer to both above-mentioned

Bank began to use indicators to measure achievement of results, giving them a price tag, and disburses fund against verified achievement of the indicators called disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs). This modality began as an innovative application of their existing lending instrument, initially for Brazil's education project in 2009, and later was formalized as a new instrument: Program for Results (PforR). The share of RBF in the World Bank's education portfolio has since increased to take up over twenty percent by 2015 (Holland 2016). Furthermore, the World Bank president Jim Yong Kim announced that it would double RBF for education to US\$ 5 billion over the five years into 2020 (World Bank Website).

A World Bank review of PforR covering its initial experiences found that over two-thirds of DLIs measure intermediate outcomes and less than one fifth directly deals with final outcomes or project objectives (World Bank 2015b). This finding is consistent with the comparative analysis of Yoshida that looked into types of issues addressed by three categories of aid operations. The first operation category that corresponds to the first generation of PBA discussed above promote policy and legal reforms and systemic reforms at the national level or with nation-wide implications. The second category that is made up of six RBF operations encompasses issues from macro to local levels while commonly emphasizing institutional reforms. The third group is the mix of projects assisted by the World Bank that address both systemic and institutional reforms as well as field level results, and the other projects assisted by JICA that have primary interest in achieving improvements on the ground (Yoshida 2015).

The World Bank used to takes a position under the policy-based lending to avoid using process conditionality (such as action plans) for prior actions for the board approval (World Bank 2007:v). Instead, a reform process is monitored through benchmarks. They point out that 'the direct attribution of outcomes to policy changes is difficult' (op cit:24). Using DLIs at the intermediate results level is, in this sense, a progress toward results-orientation, shedding light to implementation of policies.

A similar evolution is found in the case of Global Partnership for Education (GPE). GPE is a multi-stakeholder global initiative building on its preceding experiences under the name of EFA Fast Track Initiative. It provides financial and technical assistance, working on the principles of Paris Declaration<sup>14</sup>, originally to low-income countries and currently expanded to include lower middle-income countries as well for their quality of basic education to improve. The review of GPE found that out of 68 grants for education sector program implementation, 51 or 75 percent were provided via projects and 17 were for a pooled fund or a sector budget support during its fiscal year 2015 (GPE 2015a:22) though it consistently encouraged the use of a more aligned modality. GPE has since taken a bold step to introduce a new funding model which is to be applied to all the program implementation grants to be newly approved. After meeting a set of the entry

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operations, but mainly to RBA as defined above (World Bank 2015a, GPE 2014). The present study uses the term RBF, but is more concerned about the results to be produced on the ground, especially inclusion and learning outcomes at the individuals' level.

<sup>14</sup> As set out in EFA FTI Charter (2011:1).

requirements<sup>15</sup>, the country when their application is approved by the board, receives the grant in two parts: fixed (70%) and variable (30%). Payment of the variable part is ex-post and is subject to attainment of verifiable results in areas of equity, efficiency and learning outcomes. The results could be processes, outputs or outcome targets of the sector plan (GPE 2014). Indicators used by the first three countries that have received the grant under the new funding model show that these are mostly for interim results toward final outcomes (Table 2).

**Table 2: Initial examples of GPE indicators for verifiable part of grant**

	Equity Indicator	Efficiency Indicator	Learning Indicator
Mozambique	# of districts with Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTR) above 80	(a) # of primary school managers who participated in management training; (b) % of trained school managers evaluated based on performance	Number of teachers (1st and 2nd grade) participated in new in-service teacher training program.
Nepal	Targeted interventions implemented in 10 most disadvantaged districts according to the newly developed equity index, and OOSC reduced by 20 percent in these 10 districts.	Single subject certification implemented in School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations and approved for Higher Secondary Examinations.	Standardized classroom-based EGRA for grades 2 and 3 are conducted with parent observation, and results are shared and discussed with parents in 3000 schools/communities.
Rwanda	Gross enrolment rate (GER) for pre-primary increased to 20.2% by October 2017	Education Statistics 2016, disaggregated at district level, published by April 2017	Learning Assessment in Rwanda Schools at Primary 2 (P2) and Primary 5 (P5) conducted by GoR in 2016 and data used inform teaching and learning.

Source: GPE (2015b)

Under the PBA and its second phase by way of RBF, a sector program is developed by the country with technical assistance from participating donors. Meantime, the actual implementation of the program is done by the country. This approach assumes that the country has sufficient information that is needed to inform program designing, that the country's education system

<sup>15</sup> The country has to have a credible education sector plan that is endorsed by its development partners, to allocate at least 20% or more of domestic resources to education of which at least 45% allocated to primary education, or commit to meet this requirement, and to have critical data system (GPE 2014).

during the stages of policy making, implementation, and producing results is capable to translate the policy intents into actions that work. It also assumes that all the stakeholders endorse the program orientation, understand their (additional or changed) roles, and fulfill those roles. Whether this is the reality or not determines real effectiveness of the new modality. Given that the post-2015 education agenda of SDG4 emphasizes solving the most challenging issues of inclusiveness, equity and learning outcomes, which will clearly cost more, it is important to seriously examine if these assumptions and prerequisites stand to be real.

### **3.2 Analysis of the Mainstream Modality**

The aid modality discourse, guided by the five principles of Paris Declaration, has apparently advanced alignment encouraging to use the country systems, and promote harmonization of aid by development partners, under the increasing use of PBA. This section examines why we have kept failing to achieve the fundamentally same goal of universalizing education of good quality.

#### **Strengths and limitations of PBA: top-down process**

In the PBA approach, taking up the case of GPE for instance, the country wishing to apply for the grant has to get its education sector plan (ESP) appraised and endorsed as a part of the requirements (see footnote 3) following the guidelines. By emphasizing the policy cohesiveness, the guidelines specify the check points of preparing the sector plan, beginning with sector analysis and including policy priorities, program designing, implementation arrangements, costing and financing, and a detailed action plan with monitoring and evaluation (UNESCO-IIEP and GPE 2012).

Stakeholders are to be involved in the planning as well as in implementation, but the entire process is usually carried forward in a top-down and hasty manner. This has, as a recent independent evaluation has shown, helped strengthen capacity of the country for evidence-based sector planning in some cases, but it concludes that ‘whether sound ESPs lead to improved learning outcomes --- has not yet been tested’ (Universalialia and Results for Development 2015:xii). Difficulty of attributing the positive change, if any, to this type of aid has already been indicated by the FTI evaluation presented years ago (p34) that concluded that ‘the FTI’s intervention has focused strongly on the endorsement process and been very weak after this’ (Cambridge Education *et al.* 2010:xxi) and the initiative appeared to emphasize ‘measuring’ the learning outcomes, but less on ‘ensuring’ quality education (op cit 44). The GPE quickly responded to the messages and produced a theory of change and results framework paper, which still heavily focuses on policy fronts and is less vocal on process, assuming that a stronger education system (with capacity, resources and data) will enable improved student learning outcomes (GPE 2015c).

Another study was conducted in Rwanda to determine any contribution of a DFID-assisted pilot financial aid provided against increased education outcomes at key grades. Payment was made to the government based on the improved completion at the sixth grade of primary and at the third and sixth grades of the secondary cycle, measured annually over 2011/2012 and

2012/2013, though performance was uneven by grades. Using an econometric analysis combined with qualitative interpretations, the study could not ‘confirm any additional benefit as a result’ of this pilot since the aid ‘supported the pre-existing emphasis on completion rather than providing an incentive for additional action’. The evaluation also questioned the use of completion rate as an incentive for the country to improve equitable learning outcomes (Upper Quartile et al 2015: ii and 46)

The fore-going arguments present that an effectiveness of PBA has been positively assessed in terms of policy and governance domains, but whether this has translated into effective implementation to produce results on the ground (improving inclusion and learning outcomes) have not been proven. The evaluations of PBA simply have not been able to identify causality relationship of aid and learning results, not to mention barriers to producing results. Although existing literature does point to disconnects in the results chain between the policy intent, its implementation, and the results, it does not provide concrete solution.

### **3.3 New Responses and Alternatives**

#### **3.3.1 Systems for Learning**

It seems there is an agreement that the current approach being taken by PBA2 that builds on the previous experiences is not by itself sufficient to achieve educational objectives in front of us. Recognizing the weaknesses, a couple of notable actions are emerging in an effort to help bridge the gap, by undertaking to devise a complementing mechanism to bridge the gap between the education policy and results on the ground, in particular, learning outcomes. One of such actions is paying particular attention to education system for learning improvement.

The World Bank launched a SABER initiative in 2011 to advance its education sector strategy objectives. SABER, Systems Approach for Better Education Results<sup>16</sup>, is a diagnostic tool for a country to evaluate policies and institutions of its education system, and ‘benchmark them against evidence-based global standards’ around factors that matter most for improving learning (World Bank Website on SABER). Currently SABER has developed framework papers for 13 domains of levels of education, resources, governance, information and others to diagnose policy intents to be expanded to cover policy implementation. Likewise, USAID states that ‘achieving and sustaining any development outcomes the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors’, and ‘the incentives that guide them’, together constituting the local system (USAID 2014). It includes all actors ranging from governments, civil society, private sector, universities and individuals. It reiterates the need to ‘recognize local systems everywhere’ and tap into local knowledge’ for locally owned, locally led and locally sustained development. The present education strategy of USAID covers only 2011-2015 and its new strategy is yet to be published. Therefore, it is not known how the corporate focus on the local system is translated into its education sector operations.

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<sup>16</sup> It began as System Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results, but was later renamed.

On the same wave length, efforts to achieve learning outcomes have spurred research on the object: learning itself. As captured in SDG4, quality education should produce learning outcomes that are responding to social and economic needs. But the global community has not been clear about **what those learning outcomes are and how international cooperation can help to achieve them**. The Delors report, submitted to UNESCO twenty years ago by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century convincingly summarized four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (UNESCO 1966). Although the messages are valid today, the challenge we have is not only to use them as a philosophical guiding tool, but to actually deliver them, together with measurable indicators. In partial response to this challenge, Learning Metrics Task Force, convened jointly by UNESCO Institute of Statistics and Brookings, identified eight domains of learning for measuring learning outcomes. These are: physical well-being, social and emotional, culture and the arts, literacy and communication, learning approaches and cognition, numeracy and mathematics, and science and technology. The task force then proposed six learning indicators<sup>17</sup> that encompasses readiness to learn, proficiency in reading and foundational skills, and values and skills needed for citizens of the world (UIS et al, 2013). After the task force completed its task of the first phase, instead of exploring in detail into these domains, their work in the second phase focuses on strengthening assessment systems.

Further work on learning attempts to build up stock of evidence and relevant information around what works. The UK government, through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and DFID have launched a UK £20 million research funding program in 2014 with an aim ‘to provide policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning’ (ESRC website). UNESCO-IIEP has opened an online portal that compiles links on improving, planning for and monitoring learning.

### 3.3.2 Assessment

International and regional assessment of student learning gathered momentum over the past decade. In addition to PISA and TIMSS in which most of participating countries are from high-income countries, regional initiatives with increasing participants from developing countries is mushrooming: SACMEQ in Southern and Eastern Anglophone Africa, LLECE in Latin America, and PASEC in Francophone Africa, among others. While national assessment enables the country to examine the extent of attaining curriculum and other domestic objectives, regional and international assessment allow the participants and researchers to benchmark the relative position of the country and comparative analysis across the countries. So far, however, participation in PISA has been strongly skewed in favor of higher income countries for its associated costs and capacity constraints (Lockheed:28-29, 37). This in turn has a potential and incentives for developing countries to participate with anticipated capacity building for nurturing assessment

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<sup>17</sup> However, the latest discussions on the global indicators to monitor the achievement and progress of SDG4 (UNESCO 2015x) do not seem to build on the recommendations.

culture, aligning assessment with learning goals, and ensuring the technical aspects of the assessment from designing to utilize results (Lockheed:54). OECD is piloting PISA for Development to invite more developing countries to join PISA, enabling them to monitor ‘progress toward nationally-set targets’, using instruments that are more relevant to their country context (OECD website).

The internationally comparable assessment seems to be gaining momentum, with a notable spread of the early grade reading assessment (EGRA). EGRA is ‘an oral student assessment designed to measure the most basic foundation skills for literacy acquisition in the early grades’, developed by USAID in early 2000s. It is used in 11 developing countries in 19 languages, adopted by more than 30 other countries in over 60 languages (USAID website).

With these developments of increasing use of assessment, there is a movement to analyze the comparability of these instruments toward adopting a universally comparable indicators of learning achievement as a part of Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO 2015d).

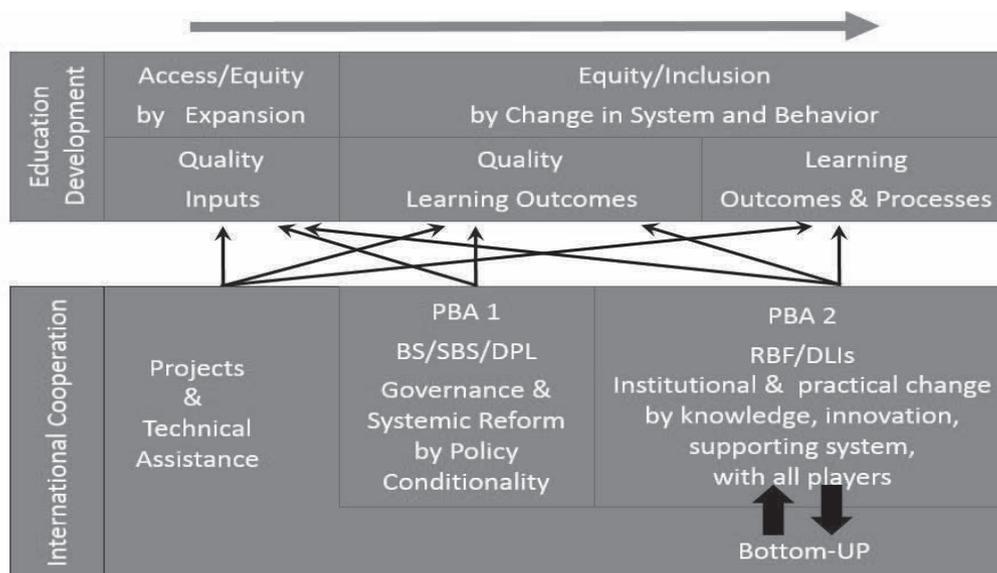
### 3.3.3 Bottom-up Approach

Some aid agencies that have technical strength, or trust, in projects rather than budget support have aligned their support to the sector program of the country. Typically, a project provides a package of assistance to solve a specific subset of development issues aiming at realizing visible outcomes that directly result from the intervention. Japan International Cooperation Agency, JICA, is one of those agencies. JICA uses a technical cooperation project as a common instrument for education sector, to support, for instance, teacher professional development in science and mathematics, often using a lesson study approach, and for promoting school-based management in basic education. A typical approach JICA uses is a bottom-up approach. It begins the project relatively on a small scale, builds a working model (of in-service on-site teacher training, for instance), expands the model on a larger scale, often by using the resources of other development partners, to be eventually adopted by the government as a nation-wide policy.

The advantage of this approach is that tangible results are achieved on the ground, and all stakeholders participate in the local level. On the other hand, it takes several phases before the approach gains critical lessons for an institutional and/or system-wide reform, if at all. Thus, potentially important messages emanating from practical experiences that are relevant for policy dialogue are seldom transmitted (Yoshida 2012, 2015).

Recognizing such constraints, JICA now intends to utilize the achievements obtained on the ground to inform education policy and plans (JICA 2015). This will require its massive efforts to identify institutional and systemic bottlenecks and explain ways to address them using the knowledge they have accumulated working with the countries and partners. If JICA, and even better if the country, develop capacity to translate the field-based knowledge into messages for policy processes, this will significantly complement the effectiveness of PBA by complementing the top-down process through bottom-up.

#### 4. Discussions: Toward Closing the Gaps



**Figure 1: Evolution of education development issues and aid modalities**

**Aid and Education Development to be fully integrated.** In the early stage of the EFA era since 1990s, educational system was underdeveloped in most developing countries and they gave priority to universalize primary education, to begin with. Investment in education was made largely to extend the coverage to the maximum, mostly by providing more inputs. The shortage of domestic resources was supplemented by external resources, primarily using projects and technical assistance. This approach was useful until the enrolment has reached the plateau, leaving two issues unsolved: reaching the unreached and improving learning outcomes.

To advance educational development while tackling the remaining challenges requires, it was believed, a comprehensive sector-wide approach, ensuring policy cohesiveness, to get the governance structure right and promote reform encompassing the entire education system. The Program-based Approach was increasingly applied, above all to primary education aid in line with the Paris Declaration principles for aid effectiveness, which resulted in strengthened country ownership, and harmonization and alignment of assistance. Looking at the period after the year 2000, education resources combining the government budget and donor resources increased, more and diverse partners including civil society, private sector, emerging donors as well as the South-South cooperation joined their hands. Nevertheless, old issues of equity, inclusion and learning outcomes remain posing challenges. PBA responded by moving to its second stage (PBA2) having recourse to results-based financing with a view to increasing the likelihood of attaining objectives.

As we enter into the new post-2015 era and commit ourselves to a new set of development agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, education sector faces persistent challenges – inclusion, equity and learning improvement, and added challenges: education to provide knowledge and skills beyond basic levels and to serve as a foundation of transforming our global and local society.

The scope and roles of ‘*education for sustainable development*’ have expanded from the discussions within education to serving the whole systems. This paper has presented a number of important challenges and concerns as summarized in Table 3:

- Reaching the unreached requires good understanding of the multi-faceted and inter-twined factors lying at the background and new measures, to address poverty, ethnic and language minorities, cultural and religious barriers, orphans, internally and externally displaced people, and so on, often having to go beyond the boundary of education administration.
- Improving learning outcomes requires new knowledge and approach. To fill this gap, providing more inputs into the system and being bound for results are not sufficient to achieve learning improvement. However, effective solutions are not readily available for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, where ‘quality’ is viewed in terms of learning outcomes.
- The meaning of ‘learning outcomes’ has not been globally shared, but a set of global monitoring indicators are soon to be adopted and will likely dictate our efforts.
- A financial need to achieve new education goals is huge, and yet means to fill it has not been found. The latest estimates require a daunting amount of US\$ 21 billion annually for low-income countries only to universalize education up to secondary education over coming years to 2030 and US\$ 39 billion including lower middle-income countries (UNESCO 2015c).

**Table 3: Gaps and Bottlenecks for Education Development and Aid Effectiveness**

<b>Gaps</b>	<b>Bottlenecks</b>
Failing to reach the unreached to achieve equity and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to address intertwined bottlenecks</li> <li>• Weakness in going beyond education boundary</li> </ul>
Absence of knowledge on how to improve learning outcomes and its systemic /institutional perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing knowledge not used for practice and for policy dialogue</li> <li>• Knowledge not interpreted with systemic and institutional perspectives</li> </ul>
Lack of common understanding of ‘learning outcomes’ and globally comparable indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment culture predominantly focused on knowledge</li> <li>• Weak consultation</li> </ul>
Financing SDG4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak broad-based participation, innovation, and efficiency</li> </ul>
Policy-implementation-results linkage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-down approach does not produce expected results on the ground</li> <li>• Bottom-up approach fails to present messages for timely policy dialogue</li> </ul>

Meanwhile, education aid apparently stands to rely on PBA2(RBF) to address a new and old set of education challenges under SDG4, despite the fact that the effectiveness of RBF’s top-down approach has not yet been verified. True, aid has become more efficient, but the efficiency demands itself to be linked with results.

- Now, the emphasis on the sector-wide, policy cohesiveness, systems, incentives has to find a way to produce results on inclusion and learning outcomes. There is a Missing link between policy objectives, implementation and results.

For instance, the need of results chain to ensure this interlinkage is stressed and it is increasingly introduced in the aid operations, for instance in the World Bank project appraisal and at GPE Strategic Plan and in the aid strategy of many donors. But a proven process of operationalize the results chain has not established or practiced under the PBA. As noted, DLIs typically adopts intermediate outcomes (such as number of well-trained teachers), and the local system is left to produce results (i.e. learning outcomes) not knowing exactly how. A top-down PBA does not directly touch them.

- A bottom-up alternative has not found its way up, because its attention to broader institutional and systemic issues is paid only after some rounds of projects and becomes available ex post of the operation, not embedded in the design of the original model to be rolled out. This too often results in missing opportunities to use lessons from the practical experiences for upstream policy process in a timely manner.

By focusing on inclusion, equity and learning outcomes, discussions on the challenges of educational development and the argument in the aid effectiveness discourse finally seem to have begun talking with the same language. The evolution of aid architecture discourse has gradually paved the path leading us closer to the goal of education development objectives. We now have identified where the gaps are and what are the bottlenecks. In finding concrete ways to remove the bottlenecks, we need to further nail down why those bottlenecks persist.

Booth, in synthesizing the study on public service delivery in African countries, claims that ‘policy-driven institutional incoherence’ is one of commonly observed reasons why governments fail in delivering public goods, mandates of players and organizations are ill-defined or overlapping (2012:ix, 36). Building on his findings, a subsequent study looked into design and implementation of aid programs for improved service delivery by shedding light on governance. It stood on the premise that the budget support has been ‘unable to change the incentives facing those delivering services at the front line’ because it has given little attention ‘to the processes of managing, delivering and accounting for resources’ (Tavakoli et al 2013:16). As known governance constraints, it examined incoherence between policies and institutional set ups, poor top-down performance disciplines and bottom-up accountability mechanisms, and limited scope of problem-solving and local collective actions (*op. cit.*). In its conclusion, the study report reiterates the importance of bridging the gap between the policy and practice. But this study stops short of discussing how the gap can be filled.

Already twenty years ago, Fullan claimed that ‘top-down strategies have consistently demonstrated that local implementation fails in the vast majority of cases’ (1994:7). He cited the findings of Cobett and Wilson study on the impact of compulsory statewide testing in Maryland and Pennsylvania, US, (1990) saying ‘the diversion of attention and energy from more basic reforms in the structure and practice of schools, and reduced teacher motivation, morale, and collegial interaction’ as unintended consequences of the top-down reform. He added that ‘neither

top-down nor bottom-up strategies for educational reform work’ and ‘a more sophisticated blend of the two’ is required (*op. cit.*).

Alleged effectiveness of RBF is undermined because it has left the missing links unfilled, most notably presenting knowledge on how to improve learning and how to systematically address it. These insights offer useful inputs in considering how to fill the gaps. A promising development is taking place in this regard. This comes mainly by emphasizing ‘process’. The World Bank in 2015 launched Results in Education for All Children (REACH), a multi-donor<sup>18</sup> trust fund scheme to build evidence on effective RBF with a systems approach to education reform, with complementing SABER. The assessment of the first-year trust fund operation noted that ‘Rarely have we seen schools or teachers able to improve their students’ learning simply by being left to their own devices, and given the autonomy to act as they see fit. Rather, improvements require new tactics, such as pedagogic interventions that help teachers teach at the level of students, training teachers in applying assessments’ (Holland 2016:5).

REACH is a promising combination of systems approach (SABER) with practical field-based evidence toward learning objectives, but it still heavily relies on the top-down approach. A knowledge-stocktaking to fill the process gap is also ongoing by the initiatives of the donor community.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has examined the gaps and challenges associated with the top-down approach taken by international aid organizations for educational development in their endeavor to contribute to improved learning outcomes. It has explained why the top-down approach has failed to produce learning outcomes by pointing to weak focus on the process, especially after achieving the intermediate results until the learning outcomes are achieved, and where critical knowledge on how to deliver results has not been widely made available. It also analyzed why the bottom-up approach has failed to capitalize on knowledge and experiences to inform policy processes.

In fact, both the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach have respective advantages and in real cases, the mixture of both is necessary for expected results to be achieved. In application, experiences and evidence from researches should be utilized so that the debates that focuses on “system” are bridged with those debates and knowledge on effective pedagogies. Education system has multi-layers: policy, institutions, schools and classrooms. A mechanism has to be constructed for tapping into the huge pool of comparative knowledge on education for application in education aid. This information should inform efforts to promote the mixed approach to international aid and the educational work on the ground. In doing so, collaboration between scholars of educational development and the aid community is essential. The real work of making this connection for the purpose of informing and reengineering the mainstream aid modality is about to begin. We are faced by the challenge to bridge the gaps discussed in this article for the purpose of achieving the objectives of *Education 2030*.

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<sup>18</sup> Presently, Germany, Norway and US contribute over US\$14 million together to the trust fund.

On more practical front, knowledge on how to make it work (from practical experiences and research results) is (a) not shared among teachers and practitioners and their supporting systems, and (b) not sufficiently utilized to spur the interaction between the field-level practices and meso/macro institutions to support them (Yoshida 2015) (in other words the interaction between top-down and bottom-up approaches).

- A huge stock of knowledge existing in the ‘mainstream academia’ remains untapped into aid.

In both cases, new knowledge, proven cases of effective measures need to be shared, and systemic reform has to take place which requires innovation and changes in roles and attitudes of all stakeholders concerned. Unless something fundamentally different is done, SDG4 will not be achieved for mutually reinforced effects of lack of resources and for failure of aid effectiveness.

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