



## II. Senior expert’s discussion on Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 on Education).

### 5. Questions/Comments from floor

#### a) Q&A on Presentations of Professors Yoshida and Edwards

Introducing the Q&A, Professor Williams thanked Professors Yoshida and Edwards for their provocative presentations and observed that it seemed we did not hear everything they had to say, so the Q&A would provide them with the possibility to elaborate on their presentations. He also noted that for him the Top-Down Bottom-Up topic is precisely the issue of policy and implementation and he was not sure any country had solved it very well, though some countries do it better than others. He also noted the messy politics of SDG4 but observed that, while politics can be bad if it derails initiatives onto particular groups of people, they can also be uplifting and bring people together towards positive outcomes. Professor Williams also noted that the Fast Track Initiative/Global Partnership for Education was established to get money quicker to countries that had good education plans.



There followed four questions from the floor:

- 1) What did the speakers think about the rapid turnover of education leaders in

- developing countries at all levels, including districts and provinces?
- 2) What were the implications of different power dynamics on conditions on the ground in different places?
  - 3) What was the speakers' view of the Learning to Become by 2050 initiative?
  - 4) What did they think of the World Bank's Learning Poverty initiative and what is its relationship to the SDGs?



In response, Professor Yoshida noted that there was a lot of power politics involved in the whole process of formulating the global strategy as well as identifying the key issues, as this is a very strong and weak process, starting from the school level to the country to the region to the UNESCO ministerial meeting and then the Education 2030 Steering Committee at global level. UNESCO has a strong influence on the process that is more vision, human rights and philosophy-oriented, while the World Bank and GPE strongly promote the financing aspect. However, the two approaches don't always follow the same direction. In addition, some of the World Bank's positions such as promoting the private sector face very strong criticism from UNESCO because privatization is making education less accessible to the poor. A lot of things are taking place at different levels and this makes it difficult to say what is not working. For example, would it be better to abolish UNESCO as it is not making much of a contribution or should we trust in it for leading, convening and coming to a global agreement? This is why UNESCO has now decided to launch a new flagship future of education exercise, following the 1990s Delors Report that will



now be updated. Challenges for education are today heavier than they used to be, e.g. Artificial Intelligence, making the future of education an important theme.



In his response, Professor Edwards observed that he thought of the three levels (global, national, local) as spinning gears, that sometimes all aligned but usually do not. Even if the language of global goals is included in national policies, there is still nothing to say that they will be implemented in practice. Studies by Unterhalter, for instance, showed that the EFA goals were largely unknown below the national level (Kenya, South Africa). He appreciated Professor Williams' comment that politics could be uplifting because of his work on civil society e.g. the Global Campaign for Education funds national coalitions of education-related NGOs, an important example of all three levels being involved, with international funding for local level NGOs to influence national policy. With regard to power dynamics, Professor Edwards had studied El Salvador from 1990-2005, where the country was engaged with the World Bank, UNESCO and a UN campaign to do with women's rights but where all the ministry's time was taken up with dealing with the World Bank and its processes rather than with the other two organizations' projects. There was also an alignment between the politics of the national minister and the World Bank. Therefore, it is very important for us to think what it means for national engagement when, as with the SDGs, there are multiple organizations involved with the government. Regarding turnover in leadership, at all levels, there are problems but there are also success stories, especially with networks of civil society organizations.

Responding to the fourth question, Professor Yoshida complained that the Learning Poverty index still focused on a narrow definition of learning in terms of reading, whereas the SDG calls for a broader definition of learning, including social-emotional and non-cognitive skills. We are limited in which skills can be measured in a meaningful quantitative way.

Professor Streitwieser then remarked that in the course GWU offers on UNESCO (all sectors, including Education, Science, Social Science and Culture) the overall message of all the speakers and the course participants is around the question of whether UNESCO is trying to do too much with little, in a resource-constrained environment. Some have suggested, therefore, that UNESCO should either focus only on education or should abandon education to other organizations. He wondered about the presenters' views on this.



Professor Yoshida observed that we put too much emphasis on policy and planning and not enough on implementation, including who would implement it. Thus, for instance, every year we add more to the workload of teachers and every year we have new initiatives and new reform agendas. This is the challenge for UNESCO in setting a global agenda as the realities are so different between countries. Yet it is exactly why UNESCO and others must rely on leadership within the country.

Returning to the question of awareness of the global goals, a speaker noted that, even when those at subnational levels were aware of the global goals including SDG4, they did not necessarily find them relevant at the subnational level. Professor Williams returned to the question of whether the goals should be aspirational; but Professor Yoshida noted that the goals



## CICE Policy Brief

were never realistic. He and Professor Streitwieser noted that the goals may still be desirable but that there is a danger of it appearing always that the goals have not been met when they were not even realistic from the start.



## b) Q&A with all Panelists

Professor Williams then invited all the panelists to come to the front of the room for a final overall Q&A session. The initial questions were as follows:

- 1) Socio-emotional skills are very important, but already the curriculum is very full - what approach towards SES skills is it best for teachers to take?
- 2) Missing from all the presentations has been how the local and the national meet - we have small local interventions focused on change at the micro level but then we have policies at the national level. How should they meet?



In response, Professor Williams said that it was, of course, difficult to add new material to an already busy curriculum but he felt SES content was not exactly a new subject but rather could be taught as part of existing subjects. In addition, he hypothesized that if students have an adequate SES base, then they will learn the cognitive skills better. Moreover, he thought that much of the curriculum is already too difficult to teach and instead teachers should be supported to teach subjects in an appropriate socio-emotional way. The questioner emphasized the problem of the curriculum, for instance in his country there is no place in the curriculum for gym or for arts. Again, Professor Williams noted that it was possible to teach socio-economic skills when teaching other subjects. Professor Yoshida noted an initiative in a well-known



Japanese school where the principal and all the teachers reviewed the entire syllabus for the year, to identify all the elements of ESD, and then they related all those separate elements. So, throughout the year, every teacher of every subject knew what learners had learned. So this school had tried to include some socio-emotional development in every subject, making it all very visible to everyone in the school.

Professor Yoshida also touched on the scale issue, which has also been one for the international agencies as well as for countries. He referred to a visit he had made to two Tanzanian village schools where the teachers had not had communicated new national education policies yet still prepared school improvement plans; he returned a year later and one school had acted on its improvement plan but the other school had not done so. A complication was that the performance of the two schools was not related to whether they had acted on their school improvement plans. More generally, schools' performance on test rankings reflected the role of individual teachers very much – some schools changed a lot in the rankings from year to year whereas good schools performed consistently over the years. His point was that with this type of school-based initiative, it was important to identify what worked so that we could learn from it and try to scale it up. However, this process was not quick and took several rounds of studying success and failure in different places; if this happens, learning organization can take place and be spread quickly, as for example neighboring principals are always keen to pick up what works.

Professor Kusakabe thought there were several ways to make connections between the top and the bottom levels. Only local people know what works locally, as he illustrated in terms of buying goats or taking local taxis! Between the top and the bottom levels, mediators are needed, that can include local governments and NGOs and universities.

Professor Williams then invited all the panelists to make final remarks. Professor Edwards referred to Professor Yoshida's mention of a systems perspective, noting John Gillies of FHI360's work that acknowledged that there are many pressures on systems pulling them in different directions but that to the extent possible we should attempt to align the political, technical and institutional directions of policy. The technical dimension is just what did the policy say, is it clear what people are supposed to be doing? Institutionally, do you have in place the necessary incentives, capacity and resources? Does the political priorities, agenda and leadership align to be the catalyst to that system? If we are to hope to see any progress on the policy practice, we need to align these three dimensions at the local and national levels.

Professor Yoshida said that it is impossible to conclude what will work for such a complex agenda, but we all know that policy fails when it is not translated into implementation and that, if it is, it does not produce the results that the policymakers intended. That is what is meant by a system error. He put forward the totally different point that we know that somewhere everything works, and we should build on that, so that the local, middle and national systems

are all geared to achieve results on the ground. The implementation system and the monitoring system should all be focused on results.

Professor Kusakabe noted that he had learned much from this small seminar. He noted that there are some contradictions between the top and the bottom levels and suggested that it was necessary to show the top policymakers their local results and to inform the local people of the SDGs. Local universities could possibly perform this between the local and the national policy levels.

Concluding the seminar, Professor Williams said he was particularly appreciative of the new approaches to what works, starting where things are “cooking”. Even as we continue to work at our high national levels to try to have a supportive national context, we should concentrate on what is needed in specific local areas. Overall, maybe what is needed is more attention to the local level.

Professor Williams closed the seminar, thanking the Japanese professors and also Professor Edwards for coming so far from Japan and from Hawaii.







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