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SDG4

Challenges, Successes and the Future of the World's Education Target

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SRI Executive would like to thank the organisations and individuals who contributed to this report, including:

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Foreword

As we enter the crucial Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we all acknowledge that efforts must urgently accelerate if we are to achieve their ambitious targets. This is particularly true for SDG4 on inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The reality is that we face a daunting learning crisis in which: *"262 million children were still out of school in 2017, and more than half of children and adolescents are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics."* Among them are 75 million children and youth, of whom 39 million girls, enduring conflicts, natural disasters and forced displacement.

Future prospects are worrying: *"…based on current trends, one in every six children will still be out of primary and secondary school in 2030, and only six in every ten young people will complete secondary education."* This, all before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing, exacerbating challenges it has presented.

As the global education community takes stock of the challenges that lie ahead to reach SDG4 and its seven targets, the question should be: Are we – leaders, donors, investors, policymakers, UN agencies, civil society organisations and governments – doing our utmost; and are we ready to conquer the obstacles to reach the targets that we have set ourselves?

While some may be deterred by the immense task at hand, we must be clear about what rolling back our efforts now would mean: simply put, we will not reach the targets by 2030 and, once more, we would fail in our commitments. Instead, we would inadvertently contribute to a world even further entrenched in inequalities, disparities and despair for millions of children. Do we want to count ourselves among those who forsake our global commitments and collective responsibility towards entire generations to create a world that is better, more fair and provides a tangible sense of hope for those left furthest behind?

Drastic change needs to happen today. Changes of attitude and changes for action. Extraordinary solutions are required to resolve abnormal problems. If we are to address the learning challenge, we need to strengthen our resolve beyond the echo chamber where it feels it is now trapped. Education is the foundation for achieving all other SDGs. Ensuring that education is a central priority for global financing and global investment is the only sustainable way forward.

As this enlightening report accurately spells out, the global education community has already come a long way in understanding the complex barriers to quality learning outcomes for children and youth in a variety of contexts – whether they be systemic, financial, policy-related, socio-economic or cultural. This is true for some of the most abhorrent, abnormal and challenging of contexts – such as situations of armed conflicts, forced displacement, climate-change-induced disasters and protracted crises – and for some of the most marginalised groups – such as children and youth with disabilities, girls and women, LGBT youth, as well as refugees and internally displaced communities.

The findings of this report also demonstrate that we are learning how to effectively lift these barriers to education in emergencies and protracted crises with a growing body of global knowledge, lessons learnt and global goods. Importantly, evidence shows how context-specific challenges require holistic approaches that bring together a wide range of stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels. No one can do it alone. It is a collective effort.

This all coincides with the United Nations Secretary General's Reform: to end silos and competition in favour of coordination and collaboration in a *New Way of Working*. Together with our partners – governments, public and private donors, United Nations agencies, civil society organisations, communities, educators and children themselves - Education Cannot Wait is implementing this innovative approach in some 30 crisis-affected contexts. In just over three years, we have already successfully reached more than 4 million vulnerable children and youth - caught in the midst of armed conflicts, forced displacement, natural disasters and protracted crises - with quality, inclusive education. Education Cannot Wait is not an organisation. It is a platform for all of us and our unapologetic sense of impatience.

Together, we have shown that by working with urgency, strategically, thoughtfully and differently we can achieve more effective results for the most vulnerable, even in some of the most challenging contexts on the globe. Together, we are bringing those left furthest behind to the front and centre. It is possible. Provided that it is a collective effort backed by global financing.

Clearly, now is not the time for the global education community to divert from the SDGs targets. On the contrary. *Now is the time* to accelerate our efforts to mobilise resources, engage more stakeholders, inspire political commitment and deepen our knowledge on 'what works' so we can work more collaboratively to bring these solutions to scale globally.

The World Bank's *Global Platform for Education Finance* initiative to support its new target to reduce learning poverty aims to do precisely that. It represents an important milestone in our collective efforts to end the learning crisis. Financing remains one of the most essential drivers to advance SDG4, along with mainstreaming equity in the allocation of funds and programming.

Now that we know what must be done, the Decade of Action is the opportunity for the global education community to unleash its collective capacity, step up and deliver on our commitments. As Goethe said: *"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."* Now, we must translate the *New Way of Working* into the *New Way of Learning* through action and action, alone.

Yasmine Sherif

Director
Education Cannot Wait

1 Context

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed and agreed with global buy-in from governments and non-governmental stakeholders to address issues of extreme poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice worldwide. Adopted by all United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015, the SDGs aim to achieve a more equitable, sustainable global society by 2030.

The Quality Education Goal, SDG 4, includes seven targets on inclusive, accessible, high quality, vocationally relevant, sustainable education from pre-primary through university level, with focus on primary and secondary literacy and numeracy education. According to the 2019 report on SDG Progress, 750 million adults– two-thirds of them women– were illiterate in 2016.[1] The report also highlighted that 262 million children from ages six to 17 were still out of school in 2017, and that more than half of children and adolescents are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics.

Most worryingly, "based on current trends, one in every six children will still be out of primary and secondary school in 2030, and only six in every ten young people will complete secondary education according to projections produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report".[2]

The year 2020 marks the Decade of Action on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and SDGs, and while progress has been made across many areas, for SDG 4 it has not been to the scale required to achieve the Quality Education targets by 2030. Looking ahead to the next decade, actors in the global development space will need to reassess their strategies to achieve the education targets.

It is in this context that the World Bank announced a new, single learning target in October 2019, which gave focus to "halving learning poverty" by 2030. The Bank defines learning poverty as the percentage of 10-year-old children who cannot read and understand a simple story, which the UIS estimates is 53 per cent of children in low-and middle-income countries (LMCs).[3] The Bank's objective of halving learning poverty has been introduced in an effort to galvanize action toward a more attainable goal and attempt to skyrocket global reading proficiency levels.

Within the development, multilateral and nongovernmental organisation (NGO) community focused on education, this objective has sparked a live debate on the initiative's merits, shortfalls and operational feasibility. Will this objective re-engage governments and education ministries to accelerate action on education, or are we giving up on a fifteen-year global plan only five years in? Will this objective truly leave no one behind? Will it improve or detract from the way education programmes are introduced, and the way learning targets are addressed at a policy level?

2 Methodology

The purpose of this report is to inform the debate on the introduction of the World Bank's learning poverty objective, since the objective affects actors in the global development community whose work aims to address one or more of the SDG 4 targets.

We interviewed 17 individuals representing 13 organisations in the global development community focused on education, including NGOs, multilateral agencies and impact investors. Contributing organisations worked on a variety of functional areas across education, including international advocacy and policy, national government policy, provision of education materials and services, teacher development, and implementation of education practices. These functional areas ranged from the global, regional, and national policy level to the community, classroom and individual implementation level.

Our respondents were geographically diverse, speaking to operations of programmes specifically in North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, the UK, East and South Asia, and to a lesser degree provided examples of work in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The individuals themselves represented a spread of operational competencies including CEOs, Global Programme Directors, Regional Directors and Senior Thematic Advisors.

We asked respondents to comment on successes and challenges their organisations were experiencing in achieving SDG 4, what challenges remain for governments to implement appropriate education policies, and whether the World Bank objective to change the global education target is an effective way to achieve meaningful progress on access to quality education for all.

Commonalities from all respondents have been drawn into this report, but individual responses have been anonymised. Responses have been grouped into common trends observed across all interviews. Direct quotes have been included where expert opinions provide needed insights. These are supplemented by quantitative data from secondary sources (including organisation-specific annual reports, high-level white papers and global reports by multilaterals) in support of programmes that have been referred to by our interviewees.

Regarding the country programmes that were discussed in interviews, there was a majority of data provided on education programmes within low-and middle-income countries, with a notable minority of data provided on programmes in high-income countries. Since the data on education in the latter group of countries was too sparse to comment on how it fits into wider education trends, it has not been included in this report.

3 Findings: Challenges in Global Education

The consensus from many in the international development community is that we are falling short of SDG 4 targets. In fact, many respondents in this report made a point when discussing their successes of adding the caveat that "progress" is a difficult term to use when it comes to SDG 4.

The common challenges the International community and development partners experience when it comes to achieving progress on SDG 4 include:

Funding Dedicated to Education

Provision of Funding

Adequate financing for initiatives and programmes on SDG 4 emerged as a challenge from the global policy to the field implementation level. Global aid for education has remained stagnant over the past ten years.[4] There were consistent responses across interviews speaking of the shortage of funding for SDG 4.

Several of our contributors observed "funding fatigue", or waning interest from donors when they do not see immediate progress and outcomes from a programme.

Likewise, public interest in certain regions and issues diminishing over time has led to a need for continued advocacy for education, rather than a focus on delivering programmes. For instance, in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, initial global advocacy and donor generosity has lessened as issues in other regions take the global stage.

One respondent called for a more coherent financing approach that joins the major funding sources together, so funding at the global level is more comprehensively allocated at the national level. The current process for implementing education programmes at the national level is that education-focused agencies design and agree programmes with governments. At the global level, financing for SDG 4 has been promised by multilateral and bilateral donors, however, the funding for SDG 4 programmes is not allocated to programmes before design, leaving NGOs and implementing multilateral agencies to go searching for funding after governments have agreed to have a project implemented in their country. This often results in multiple agencies, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs)— even ones operating within the same country— competing for funds and detracting from programme delivery.

At the country level, there is a question of government funding priorities. For instance, one interviewee expressed concerns about where governments are focusing the budgets they do have:

"The defence expenditures are so enormous…that every time I hear of an arms sale or transfer, or new army capacities being built, I think 'we could put one million kids back in school'…[Where] governments have…money, they don't prioritise SDGs. Most governments aren't spending the money on education."

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[4] *Roser, M., Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2020) Financing Education, Available at: https://ourworldindata.org/financing-education*

The average cost of an active duty soldier per year in the U.S. military stood at $99,000 USD a year in 2014, and is estimated to increase up to $215,000 by 2030,[5] while the average cost per primary and secondary school pupil across the country as of 2017 came to $12,201 per annum.[6] For some countries, a shift in government spending priorities could tilt the balance of funding needed to meet education targets.

Particularly in fragile contexts, allotting funds to adequately support the education targets is challenging. Relief donations go towards blankets, water, or medicine, but amid the global refugee crisis, people are beginning to see the need to provide education in refugee communities. Only 2% of traditional humanitarian funding is allotted to education.[7] If crisis response teams do not invest in the people to whom they are providing aid, especially through education, crisis regions cannot build resilience.

Allocation of Funding

While funding is a challenge at all levels, many mentioned that even when funds are secured, they do not always reach the field and areas where they are most needed.

Since regional and country contexts are so different regarding the greatest needs for educational investment across each of the SDG 4 targets, there is a lack of coherent allocation of funds and implementation of funded programmes cascading from the global to the national to the community level. For some implementers, the challenge lies in determining whether to invest in early childhood, pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary education. For others the challenge is investing in innovative technologies that could accelerate access to education in countries where the infrastructure does not exist to support the introduction of such technology. The priority for others is to fund advocacy programmes to increase the value placed on education at the community and national level, especially for marginalised communities. These are only a few examples of priority areas where financial support is needed to catalyse progress on the education targets.

> *If you only have one dollar and you don't get another for education, you will have fewer blankets, WASH, medicine. Growing the pie is something we are consistently trying to do.*

Increased recognition of the need to provide quality education to people who may become future doctors, electricians, or engineers within the refugee community is changing how refugee aid is solicited.[8] However, it is still a zero-sum game.

"Growing the pie" to allocate more relief funding to education is especially difficult in sustained fragile contexts. In regions such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, where global focus has diminished, programming must be adjusted as a result of reduced allocation of education funding. If there is a reduction in funding at the global level, it needs to be re-allocated at the programme level.
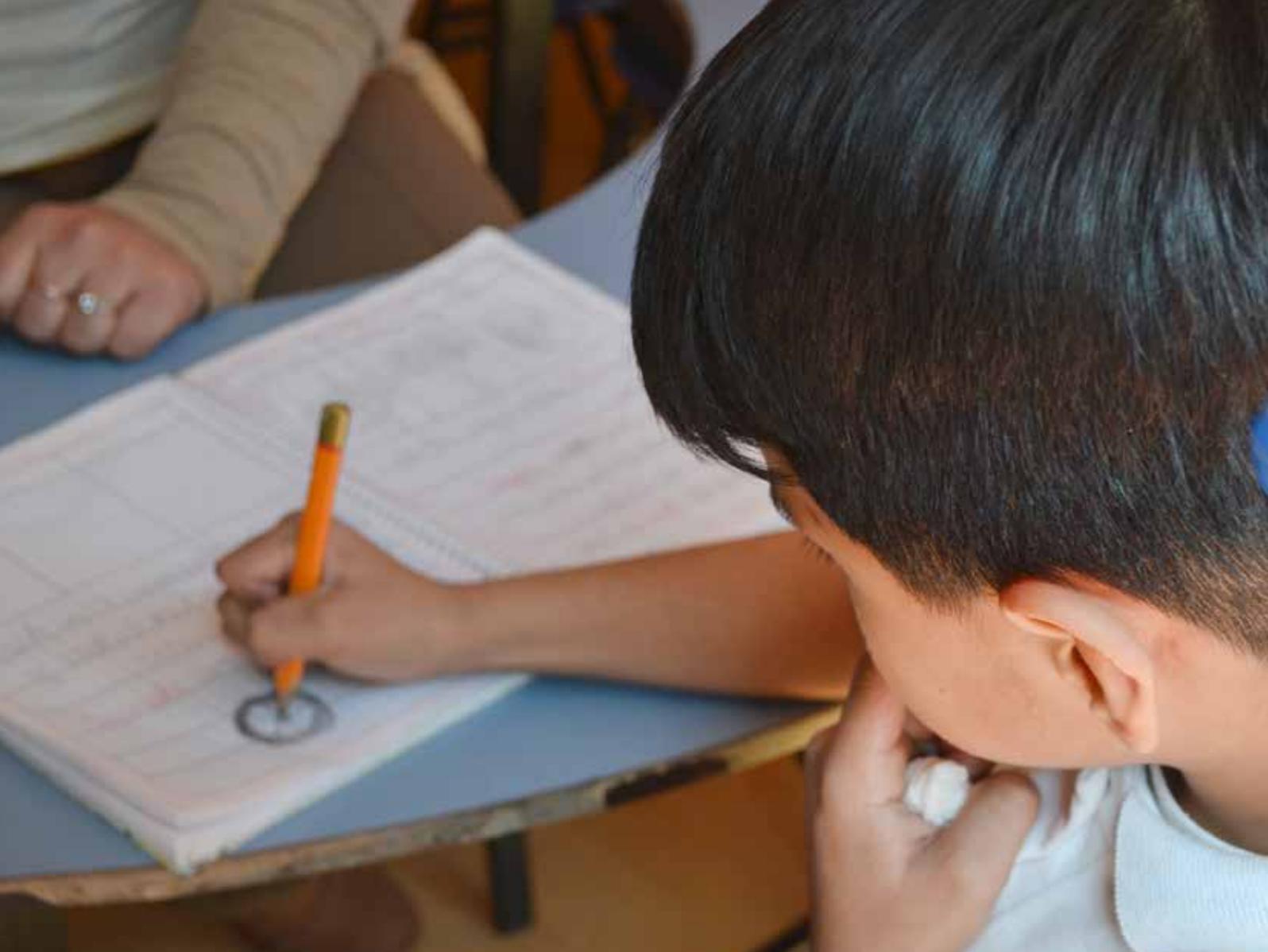
Funding for Innovation

At the classroom level, funding innovative ways of learning to prepare students for the 21st century is a challenge. Shifts in technology and global connectivity provide both the opportunity to improve education access for marginalised groups, and the challenge of ensuring students are being taught 21st

5 Ousley, J. (2015) New Report Shows Military Personnel Costs Spiraling Out of Control, Available at: https://www.veteransunited.com/money/cbo-report-shows-military-personnel-costs-spiraling-out-of-control/

6 U.S. Census Bureau (2019) U.S. School Spending Per Pupil Increased for Fifth Consecutive Year, U.S. Census Bureau Reports, Available at: https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/school-spending.html

7 Education Cannot Wait (2016) A Neglected priority, Available at: https://www.educationcannotwait.org/the-situation/

8 Gordon Brown (2017) Gordon Brown: we're failing to give refugee children an education, Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/gordon-brown-were-failing-to-give-refugee-children-an-education

> **If you look at SDG 4, it's pretty ambitious. It's all levels, it's all-encompassing, it's the kitchen sink and so the overarching challenge is how do you prioritise when you have all that?**

century skills. The funding challenge is in attracting money for innovations in classroom pedagogies.

Most governments fund what they already see as the most efficient way of learning: classroom-based, teacher-led instruction. With that focus, there is little room for investment in educational programmes devoted to soft skills and modern vocational skills.

Traditional views on education policies also create a lag in modern curricula being introduced that would prepare students for the future of work. Many teachers do not have the training to teach or assess soft skills. Most

governments, particularly those in LMCs, have not translated topics like programming, machine learning or AI into their education curricula. The speed at which the world is developing is not always recognised by decision makers in the education system. Running costs of an education system are difficult enough without developing new objectives, which would require a budget shift of educational resources.

However, if less developed countries continue to focus on quality, teacher-led instruction while more developed countries such as the Nordics, shift their educational focus towards vocational skills and education for the 21st century, the education gap between rich and

poor countries will carry into the next century.[9]

Disconnected Approaches to Global Education

Translation of Global Targets to the National Level

Many interviewees described SDG4 as comprehensive, especially when compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on education. The targets were praised for correctly framing the complexity of issues in achieving quality education for all, in varying developmental contexts and economies. But this complexity is also a downfall.

At the global policy level, we see that the SDGs are coherent and should be implemented easily at the government level. In practice, we see that policy alignment on the SDGs is limited by the resources of governments implementing these policies. There are so many things to be aware of in achieving the education targets in the country context, and the funding to achieve all these goals is limited.

The answer to the question of where to start depended very much on the regional and national contexts in which our respondents were operating. This creates difficulty in coherently funding, implementing, monitoring and adjusting education programmes in an efficient, impactful way.

Differences are usually tied to relative economic development. Even within similar regions, different elements feeding into the education targets require different levels of priority. For instance, an interviewee commented on national emphasis on teacher quality in Colombia and Guatemala, as compared to in Zambia:

"We see a much higher emphasis on teacher quality in Colombia than in Guatemala, for example. We invest in direct support in Guatemala rather than teacher and tutor training. But, if you compare Guatemala, then, to Zambia, Zambia in particular has huge infrastructure challenges, and early childhood education is quite a new thing to invest in."

For governments where access to education is still a major problem, a global framework calling for primary through tertiary education that is high quality and vocationally relevant is too much to take on board.

In contrast, in middle-income countries—particularly those in Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia— commitments to education targets are internalised and access is not a main issue anymore; focus has shifted to other issues like inclusive education and monitoring and evaluation (MEL) systems in education.

According to data from the Asia-Pacific region, *"equitable learning and lifelong learning for all in the Asia region were affirmed [by] the governments to work on all of this. What we have seen in the last 18 years, for example with out-of-school children, these levels have decreased by half.[10] This is much faster than the global average."[11]*

In this context, we see governments competing and comparing best practices, appointing national SDG coordinators, and there is regional and national discourse around focusing on the vulnerable and leaving no one behind.

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[9] Rebecca Winthrop and Lauren Ziegler (2019) 'Leapfrogging to Ensure No Child Is Left Without Access to a Twenty-First Century Education', in Kharas, H., McArthur, J.W., Ohno, I. (ed.) Leave No One Behind: Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals. Brookings Institution Press, p. 108

[10] UNICEF (2019) Learning Against the Odds: Evidence and Policies to Support All Out-of-School Children and Adolescents in East Asia and Pacific, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office: UNICEF, Available at: https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/3816/file/out%20of%20school.pdf

[11] UNESCO (2017) Reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education, (Policy Paper 32 / Fact Sheet 44) Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/reducing-global-poverty-through-universal-primary-secondary-education.pdf

In the Southeast Asia context, specifically India, there is also strong buy-in to achieve quality, inclusive education at the government level.

"The Indian government is very committed to achieving the SDG4 goals… the government is talking about what it would mean for the country to achieve SDG4, changing government policy, changing the non-profit sector, changing the way funding tools are used. They are looking at accountability systems, messaging around buy-in, parent buy-in for the outcomes."

While it comes as no surprise that the operational contexts differ between countries in achieving the education targets, it needs to be addressed that the international community and development actors working towards these targets are not addressing them in a coordinated way that agrees on prioritisation methods, implementation strategies, or impact measurements. The significant differences in regional and national contexts have made it difficult to translate the global targets into a coordinated approach that can be applied uniformly across national levels.

Inconsistent Programme Implementation at the Ministry/Field Level

Another oft-cited challenge is the tendency of some development agencies to tackle SDG4 target-by-target, programme-by-programme when working within countries. When international organisations introduce programmes to education ministries that work on one issue at a time (targeting inclusion, infrastructure, and global citizenship separately, for example), ministries are overloaded with requests to develop new policies, change and reform what is already in place, or contribute new funding. This becomes too time-consuming, costly, and unrealistic for education ministries, who *"can do a curriculum reform, say every seven to eight years, and a major policy reform maybe once every 15 years".*

According to one respondent, many governments have a strong education policy but a weak strategy. They lack a step-by-step plan to introduce quality and relevant content into curricula, or to retain and build teacher capacity. Working more concretely on strategy

so that policy can be implemented all the way down to the school level is key.

Another issue is existing lines between ministries whose work influences education quality and inclusive access, but who don't work directly on education. Education sits with one ministry, transport with another, and child protection somewhere else altogether. The difficulty is in introducing and implementing education policies that connect these different issues. For example, instead of addressing how a child protection ministry can work with children at risk of violence in the education system, that ministry and an education ministry could work together to design and implement a coordinated, multisectoral response to be more effective.

What will be important for development organisations is to work within the right government structures, understanding the pace of change and introducing programmes with the right tools to address issues in education holistically, in a way that can translate into an issues-based approach on the ground.

Inconsistent Monitoring and Evaluation of Programmes

Interviewees were challenged by a lack of buy-in from many governments and donors, who do not incorporate SDG4 as a requirement for their programme indicators. SDG4 targets aren't consistently used to inform goal-setting or measurement across governments and ministries, either because ministries and donors at the implementation level are not interested in the types of data that reflect the SDG4 targets around quality education, or because any alignment in indicators exists without explicit reference to SDG4.

In practice, this results in donor money being ploughed into education metrics that do not allow for continuous education improvement and strategic resource allocation decisions. For example, many less-developed countries in which our interviewees have implementing programmes track data that is heavily skewed towards technical metrics, such as the number of teachers and textbooks available at a given

school. This is partly due to capacity and training of ministers, and partly due to socio-political challenges around the collection and proper use of these types of data. At district-level education offices, many leaders prefer the freedom to allocate data as they see fit, or leaders do not have proper training in effective data use to make informed decisions.

On the other hand, because metrics of education progress are not used uniformly across multilateral donors, implementing NGOs, governments and education ministries, it is difficult to gain buy-in for any single metric or set of metrics by which to track progress and best practices.

In the Indian context, for example, *"the government doesn't buy into the fact that learning poverty is being addressed or that goals are being met, because everyone has a different standard".*

There is some voice for ground-up development of indicators, but there's a real disconnect in the type of data being collected from the local all the way to the global level, and a lack of coherent, systems-based approaches to monitoring education progress and making data-informed decisions to improve that progress.

Education in Fragile Contexts

With the increase in conflict and climate disasters, the number of displaced people and refugees has increased exponentially. Those that fall within UNHCR's mandate have more than doubled from 8.7 million in 2005 to 19.9 million in 2017.[12] This has significant ramifications for SDG4, as refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than others.[13]

Schools and education systems are

disproportionately at-risk in fragile contexts and conflicts. In at least 26 armed conflicts between 2005 and 2015, both government and non-state armed forces used schools for military purposes.[14] In 2016, 952,000 school-aged children fled violence in Nigeria, while Syria lost more than one-quarter of its schools, with 6,000 damaged, closed or re-appropriated by military groups or displaced families.[15]

For certain organisations whose mandate is to bring education to refugees, the work to be done is only increasing.

One of the greatest challenges at field-level is reaching learners in conflict-affected areas. Fragile state contexts influence whether students can physically get to school, how long they remain in school, whether they progress to secondary education, the quality of their learning, and whether there are any opportunities for them if they complete their education. Conflict further affects teachers' opportunities for training and professional development.

In some cases, security and safety when accessing certain regions makes it nearly impossible for organisations to reach communities and implement education programmes. Security was highlighted by respondents implementing programmes in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq for example. Day-to-day access to key locations is not guaranteed, making implementation of projects intermittent.

Additionally, the emotional trauma for teachers and students completely diverts attention away from education system strengthening, because there is an immediate need for social and emotional support for students and teachers. The broader statistic is that half of all out-of-school primary kids are in conflict affected areas, a staggeringly complex problem to address.[16]

[12] UNHCR Statistics Team, FICSS, Scott, P. (2018) Are refugee numbers the highest ever?, Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/statistics-refugee-numbers-highest-ever/

[13] UNESCO (2016) Global Education Monitoring Report, Available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245752/PDF/245752eng.pdf.multi.page=126

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] UNESCO and UNICEF (2015) Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Available at: https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_78718.html

Further to the issue of primary education in fragile contexts is the perception of refugee scholars and students: *"when you talk to funders and implementers [about refugees], they immediately conjure an image of a women carrying a baby. They don't see displaced scholars or students forced to drop out of medical school."*

The support and education of refugee children is a daunting challenge for implementors, as is the support and training of refugee teachers, and higher-level scholars.

Addressing these barriers to education in fragile contexts can be more difficult due to the siloed approach between humanitarian response and education development. Since many education programmes are implemented as part of global development programmes rather than as humanitarian response programmes, they are crisis-sensitive. As one respondent described:

"A model in Tanzania will not work in Syria or Democratic Republic of Congo. In Tanzania we let the government lead because they have a structure, procurement systems, administration, control over territory. In crisis countries, the government does not control the territory. [For example], the Central African Republic has different armed groups controlling different territories, and you cannot use that system. In Afghanistan, they have wonderful education ministers, but they do not control the territories. They've been at war for forty years, if you use that system, education will wait."

Addressing education targets with a crisis-sensitive lens is critical to achieve equitable, quality education in fragile contexts.

Women and Girls' Education

Many respondents working on the programme implementation level discussed the role cultural attitudes toward education play in their efforts. In communities where education is not valued, it is more difficult to get children into school. This particularly applies to young girls,

> *The intersections between gender violence against girls and education is absolutely key, and we are not going to achieve SDG 4 unless we take action on child marriage.*

because in some contexts, girls' education is not valued. Women may not have economic opportunity after they finish school, because they will face resistance when joining the workforce.

Issues of girls' and women's rights are closely linked with the SDG4 targets. Girls who marry young are more likely to drop out of school, and girls already out of school and who are at low levels of education are more likely to marry young.[17]

Girls can also be barred from entering the classroom altogether in some areas because they are pregnant or are young mothers. In countries such as Tanzania, for example, there are specific laws, policies or practices that require girls who are pregnant to leave school or that don't allow young mothers back into school.

Keeping girls in school from primary through secondary education is a huge challenge for many organisations. Child marriage plays a huge part in this. Girls may be under pressure to support their families sooner or be married at a young age because families want to ensure their daughters can be supported financially. In many contexts, when girls are married at a young age they have children of their own very soon afterward, as cultural norms dictate. The result is that girls are not

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17 World Bank (2017) Educating Girls, Ending Child Marriage, Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2017/08/22/educating-girls-ending-child-marriage

> ❝ *We must acknowledge right now that we have a learning crisis. Right now, we are focusing on the quality of learning. Learning poverty is linked to general poverty, so in a way we must make sure we address the equity issues around the learning crisis. This includes early childhood education, nonviolence in schools, gender and disabilities.* ❞

able to access or return to education, making them vulnerable for the rest of their lives and reinforcing the cycle of poverty and low education rates.

Additionally, the transition to secondary school becomes a challenge for girls when their local schools do not have safe bathroom facilities for menstrual hygiene. There is not always education in place that can empower girls to understand their bodies and how to navigate sexuality. Making sure schools have safe and private toilets with sanitation to allow them to manage their menstrual hygiene influences whether they will remain in secondary school.

In addition to social expectations, girls may not go to school because of the risk of violence

from teachers and peers. Some parents stop sending girls to school because they are not safe either at or on the way to school. One of our respondents mentioned that in Niger, which has the highest child marriage rate in the world (76%), a key cause of marrying girls off instead of sending them to secondary school was that school was not safe.[18] Some of our interviewees are engaging local communities to raise awareness of violence—which may not even be perceived as an issue locally— and educate communities on how to report and respond to acts of violence against women and girls.

Gender discrimination is a problem for both students and teachers in some contexts, where young professional women face resistance from communities. This becomes a problem

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[18] *Girls Not Brides, Niger- Child Marriage Around The World, Available at: https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/niger/*

at field implementation level where women looking to provide education access in remote areas are not allowed to travel or work alone, or where women must travel with a chaperone, but male chaperones are not allowed in classrooms for girls and women. This issue becomes cyclical, since biases are overcome through education and the provision of education access.

Access/Marginalised Communities

Barriers to Access

Both physical and financial access to schools continues to be an issue in less-developed countries and to a lesser extent in more developed countries. There are barriers to enrolment at all stages of education, even at the primary level in some contexts. In many countries, or in fragile settings, children don't have the basic documentation required to enrol in schools. Given the increase in displacement within and between countries, it's challenging to build a truly inclusive education system when people are forced to miss school for different reasons.

Schools may also be too far from home for students, or they may not have safe transportation to get there. Similarly, secondary schools may have fees and costs which bar families who can't afford them from sending their children to school. Building more schools in remote areas is key for achieving universal education because there are major barriers to access when secondary schools only operate far away from the remote communities.

Additionally, in the primary to secondary school transition, when students haven't built foundational knowledge from primary education, achieving learning outcomes in secondary becomes more of a challenge, and dropout rates are higher. Foundational skills are a significant issue in the adolescent context, because if they don't have basic literacy and numeracy capacity, then trying to build on that

and help them develop transferrable skills, life skills and job skills is challenging. There has been a shift in focus in recent years towards adolescent education because bridging primary education to adolescent education and preparing students for vocations and sustainable livelihoods links all the education targets together in an effective, relevant way.

Another issue that has grown in focus is disability inclusion. Schools and classrooms in many contexts don't support all learners. Students with disabilities may not be supported in their school environments, and therefore they risk being left behind.

While general targets of access and quality education are formidable, *"getting that last 10%, 20% into school and learning so we can meet the targets for the SDGs for everyone is a real challenge."* Getting children and young people who have disabilities, or are from poor families, or other marginalised groups into school and learning is always going to be challenging. That's true in both developed and developing countries. Education organisations need to allocate a lot of resources in advocacy, training and materials to get marginalised communities into school.

Teacher Quality and Capacity

Valuation of Teachers

Teachers are the heart of the education system. Getting the supply of teachers right, making sure they're trained appropriately and deployed well is difficult.

In many countries, the most talented members of the workforce are not going into education. Teacher quality is a problem because of a lack of existing talent. Part of the problem is the perception of the teaching profession, which is viewed as a second-class job in many contexts. For instance, the Varkey Foundation has produced a Global Teacher Status Index (latest 2018), speaking to the need to elevate

> *What are we doing for the most marginalised? And that's not just the most marginalised in developing or low-income countries, we're seeing more and more marginalised communities in Western economies.*

the teaching profession. The 2018 index showed classroom teachers place close to last on a global ranking of the social status of occupations. In 28 / 35 countries examined for this Index, teachers are being paid less than what is considered a fair wage.[19] High teacher pay and high status are needed to achieve high academic outcomes for students, but in many countries, those who are going into teaching are going in because they didn't get into other, well-regarded professions. School systems struggle to recruit the best and brightest.

Teacher Capacity

For both boys and girls, families may not be motivated to send children to school when they aren't learning. Interviewees recalled conversations they had with parents, in which they said *"it doesn't matter if [children are] in school because the schools aren't good quality. There's no incentive to send children to school because they're not learning anything anyway."* Part of the reason why students aren't learning is because of their teachers.

Across the organisations interviewed, teacher deployment was a common issue. It is common for the best teachers to be placed in urban areas, or for talented teachers to seek better paid opportunities in wealthier areas. This often leaves rural areas with very few teachers and very large class sizes.

Many of the organisations we spoke to were conducting programmes from the policy to implementation level to examine teacher management and professional development, train the teachers and make sure they have the right skills, and then look at what the challenges are with deployment, and what incentives you can give to deploy teachers to less popular areas.

Curriculum Language

A major issue for teacher capacity building and

deployment is the language of instruction in teaching. In lower-income areas, the dominant language which schools use may not be the language children speak at home. Therefore, achieving proficiency in their mother language plays a huge role in literacy outcomes in a dominant language of instruction.

One respondent gave the example of Ethiopia, which is a federated country with many regions and languages. The education community must consider how to recruit trainee teachers from areas where there are very few teachers and where people speak the local language, how to draw those people into the teaching profession and incentivise them to go back to those areas and teach.

"If [students] don't have proficiency in their mother tongue and proper support to transition from their mother tongue to the dominant language they can end up being left behind."

Future-ready, Vocationally Relevant Education

For many implementing organisations, if quality education is provided in an economically stagnant area where there are no jobs, then there's a question of *"what's the point of education?"* Implementers not only need to ensure that teaching is high quality, but also that students have economic opportunities when they graduate. Some of the organisations we spoke to were focused on programme models that paired education programmes to specific economic opportunities in their region in order to address this problem.

Within all the focus on achieving access, quality, relevant education for all comes the question of where learning is headed. What are the new skills and competencies that future generations are going to need? How are we preparing students for jobs that don't exist yet? Some mentioned the need to ensure students are learning soft skills, and that there is a need to invest in student-led learning.

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[19] Dolton, P., Marcenaro, O., De Vries, R., She, P.W. (2018) Global Teacher Status Index 2018, The Varkey Foundation, Available at: https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/media/4790/gts-index-9-11-2018.pdf

4 Findings: Successes in Global Education

The development community recognised that while we may be far off track in achieving the SDG4 targets, we have seen success in some areas..

It is key for the education community to recognise where forward progress is being made, understand what is working and why, and scale up those successes. In specific improvement areas, our interviewees saw success in the following areas and with the following programmes.

Documenting and Sharing of Initiatives

In order to gain more government and ministry level buy-in for education policies and gain more financial support from donors, many organisations are improving their Monitoring and Evaluation (MEL) practices to demonstrate what programmes and strategies are improving student outcomes.

One respondent reported on the creation of a global evidence base around what works for supporting adolescents in education and skills development and ensuring equity and measuring these results systematically. This evidence base has led to the development of multisector partnerships that marry education, life skills, employment, entrepreneurial skills, and civic engagement for young people so they can be better equipped to make the transition from education to employment and so they can be active citizens.

Another organisation has improved data collection methods to more accurately identify the disaggregation of children with disabilities, and another to map where there is insufficient teacher training and schools. The PISA (UNESCO) framework to map accelerated learning plans at schools has shown good progress.[20]

Education programmes have launched in Asia-Pacific using a primary learning matrix, which provides actionable intelligence on where the gaps are in enrolment and student achievement. Prior to the use of this matrix, most of these countries were not sharing learning outcomes with others and many did not know the exact outcome of learning. A UNICEF-led household survey and creation of a comprehensive database in the region has allowed for the creation of a multiple indicator cluster that addresses multiple barriers to educational achievement.

Another of our respondents who is seeing programme successes in India has been adhering to several World Bank indicators on literacy and numeracy. Over four years the children are measured on their incremental learning (LAYRS, learning adjusted years of return), rather than on absolute learning, which better demonstrates where progress is being made and how that progress can be scaled effectively:

"I think what we need to do in the next three to four years is to create a common standard to measure learning poverty, and hopefully, the work that has been done using LAYRS can be

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[20] OCED (2019), PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/b25efab8-en

part of that work. We are doing quite a bit of advocacy in India to adopt these mechanisms, into a simple mechanism as a national achievement survey".

The creation of common, actionable tracking mechanisms to measure the success of the work being done right now on education has great potential to bring these programmes to scale.

Innovative Funding Models

Given the gap in funding required to meet the education targets, as outlined above, several models to diversify funding sources are being piloted, with modest success.

Globally, governments account for 79% of education spending. This is supplemented by a mere 0.3% of donor funding globally, or 12% in less-developed countries and 2% in more-developed countries.[21] This has led to the mapping of additional sources of domestic funding, especially in LMCs where tax income does not provide enough money to adequately support the education system. For many countries, pension funds have been identified as a potential source of untapped funding, representing $1trillion globally in developing countries.[22]

In order to supplement government funding, our interviewees have also seen successes with co-funding models, either between government donors and foundations, or between collaboratives of foundations and multilateral agencies. One respondent referred to the 'Educate a Child' movement under the Education Above All Foundation in Qatar. The foundation's funding model is to supplement funding for education programmes, but not to contribute more than 50% of a national effort to put out-of-school children back in

school. In their latest report, Education Above All Foundation has this data: The average Qatar foundation contribution runs about 30%, while host institutions, NGOs or governments contribute to about 70%.[23] Having a co-funded model as opposed to just ploughing funding into a programme seems to have really worked, and it has worked in 62 different countries for the foundation.

"They've made real progress and proved that this co-funding model could work. The foundation has just announced a new goal to put every out-of-school child back in school. Examples like that, commitments like that are to me the absolute way to go".

Successes are also being observed in collaborative philanthropic partnerships, like the Luminos Fund. In this funding model, foundations, high net-worth individuals and private companies pool their resources to create higher impacts at a systems-level. The increase in targeted, private resources allows the Fund to set up schools that are better resourced than government schools, reducing class sizes, increasing school hours and introducing innovative learning models. The successes achieved in this type of model are evident in Luminos Fund's evaluation of long term impacts, which shows that, compared to students in government schools in their countries of operations, 44% of Luminos students are highest achievers on standardised tests, and consistently outperform peers by an average of 10% in English and Mathematics. In the poorest households, Luminos children also complete primary school at more than twice the rate of government schooled children.[24]

In addition to collaborative funding models, the development community are also experiencing successes with results-based financing (RBF) or payment by results (PbR) models. The World Bank funds 23 countries via this model using its REACH (Results in Education for All

[21] *Gustafsson-Wright, E., Boggild-Jones, I. (2019) Paying for Education Outcomes at Scale in India, Washington, D.C.: Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/research/paying-for-education-outcomes-at-scale-in-india/*

[22] *Filipp, R., Lerer, L., Filmus, D., Owens, T.L. (2014) 'Innovative Financing for Global Education', ESP Working Paper Series, (No. 58), p. 3, Open Society Education Support Program. Available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/innovative-financing-global-education*

[23] *Education Above All Foundation (2018) Annual Report 2018, Doha-Qatar, Available at: https://educationaboveall.org/#!/librarylist/publication*

[24] *The Luminos Fund (2018) Long-Term Impact, Available at: https://luminosfund.org/long-term-impact/*

Children) programme. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) allots 30% of its country financing using RBF, and 15 of 37 education projects under DFID's Girls Education Challenge tied financing to education outcomes.[25] While a limited number of these programmes have been evaluated to show their lasting impacts, tying education funding to programmes that achieve meaningful impacts is a promising way to increase both educational outcomes and donor interest.[26]

A financing model similar to RBF, which has also seen success, is impact investing, where private investors or donors put up capital that is repaid based on the achievement of set outcomes. This model has demonstrated multiple gains in India. One such project, the Educate Girls Development Impact Bond (DIB), was implemented over four years and achieved student learning outcome gains equal to 160% of the target and saw a 15% return on investment. The success of this project encouraged the development of a second bond, called the QEI DIB, which is also targeted over four years, and has seen a 40% achievement of learning targets in the first year alone.[27]

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[25] *Gustafsson-Wright, E., Boggild-Jones, I. (2019) Paying for Education Outcomes at Scale in India, Washington, D.C.: Center for Universal Education at Brookings*

[26] *Ibid*

[27] *Ibid*

Systems-Based Approaches

Translating high-level policies at field level is difficult, but interviewees said they saw the greatest success when they took an issues-based approach, making their programmes relevant to individual contexts.

Systems Approaches in Education Ministries

One respondent spoke about a programme they had been piloting for several years in southern Africa, to provide ICT access to schools and communities. Due to the huge opportunity ICT presents to increase access to education, it is important to provide ICT capacity to marginalised communities. Throughout the implementation of the programme, they found that while building eSchools was effective in urban areas that were comparatively well-off, many schools in the region where the programme was implemented did not have electricity.

This triggered a new programme to bring renewable energy facilities, mostly solar, to schools, and from there to the community. Once communities have energy, ICT processes are introduced to education, but also more widely via community learning centres. Once the new technologies are introduced, community-based technical and vocational training is undertaken. Since the energy being provided in most areas is solar, a curriculum for sustainable development is introduced in these communities that incorporates hands-on examples and programmes on how to manage climate change, interventions on energy, water management, school gardening, food security, etc.

The success factors of this programme, which can be scaled in other regions, are in the issues-based or whole-system approach. This pilot represents a programme of education for sustainable development, citizenship education, peace education, climate change education, etc. which relates to target 4.7. But

Education impact investors to date have focused on select regions that have been identified as 'high potential' due to their large, vulnerable populations, education systems that are insufficient in scope and quality, large low and middle class bases who value education as a means for social mobility, and active entrepreneurial base.[28] While these regions, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are limited in the geographic scope of where education funding is needed, this model has great potential to scale over the next decade.

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[28] D. Capital Partners (2014) 'Impact Investing in Education: An Overview of the Current Landscape', ESP Working Paper Series (No. 59), Open Society Education Support Program, pp. 17. Available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/impact-investing-education-overview-current-landscape

it also incorporates work on global education access, introduction of innovative learning tools, etc.

Introducing programmes on these issues separately would be far less effective, which our respondent described as *"basically molesting a Minister of Education with now you need items on this, now you need a policy on that, now you need to enrich your curriculum on this".* This approach is time-consuming and heavy for Ministries to absorb, so the issues-based or systems approach shows greater promise for achieving the education targets.

Similar successes were seen with systems approaches in Kenya from a different respondent, targeting out-of-school girls.

"We've realised it needs to happen at a number of different levels. The school is important, but the community and household are equally important, so you need to engage with the community and household to advocate for the importance of schooling and take an integrated, holistic approach to the whole girl rather than just their education."

Engaging with the community and targeting all the causes of school dropout for girls in one programme was found to be an effective approach. This programme in Kenya took place between 2013 and 2017, targeting 6,000 out-of-school girls. This target was greatly exceeded, reaching 9,596 girls, 320 of whom were previously out-of-school, pregnant mothers.[29]

Other respondents reported success in similar types of 'holistic' or 'whole child' approaches. Programmes focusing on pre-primary education, informal education and play-based or peer-to-peer learning were seeing successful outcomes, as these approaches address social, community, and neurological factors that are barriers to educational achievement.

"Sometimes we underestimate how children's social lives out of school affect learning in school. UNESCO shows there is more dropout in older children, we need to make sure that vocational and soft skills are part of the curriculum"[30]

One respondent pointed to successes they were finding in investing in early education, and in working with communities, specifically mothers, to emphasise the role informal education, play groups, physical education and age-appropriate socialisation play in learning. In locations where this kind of learning was heavily invested in, there were improvements across high-level indicators. For example, 92% of kids in tutoring programmes in 2018 improved their math and reading comprehension, and 95% of computer course participants increased their digital literacy.[31]

Globally Coordinated Crisis Response

To streamline planning and response to education in crisis contexts, improve accountability and increase global commitment to education targets, one of the organisations interviewed has achieved great success with a global platform model.

This model works through established coordination systems for humanitarian crises. It uses the existing multilateral system, primarily the UN, to address education development within a crisis context.

Working through existing humanitarian response systems allows the development of educational interventions which are crisis-sensitive, while the collaborative structure places more emphasis on fieldwork and less on headquarters. This lean model allows funding to go directly to programmes on the ground, which in-country staff and partner agencies implement. Partners get visibility, funding, research, and support from the platform.

[29] *Education Development Trust (2018) Let All Girls Learn: A Case Study in Successful Educational Reform at Scale in Kenya, Available at: https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/case-studies/wasichana-wetu-wafaulu-gec-kenya*

[30] *UNESCO (2015) Adolescents twice as likely to be out of school as children of primary school age, say UNESCO and UNICEF, Available at: https://en.unesco.org/news/adolescents-twice-likely-be-out-school-children-primary-school-age-say-unesco-and-unicef*

[31] *Children International (2018) Annual Report 2018, Available at: http://online.anyflip.com/ugfv/acwq/mobile/index.html*

Multiple agencies in-country are mobilised to work together on interventions. Rather than having agencies operating in silos in the same country, there is a single, unified approach.

One example of this model in action is the education response in Uganda to address the influx of South Sudanese refugees. The Ugandan government, UN, NGOs, and communities collaborated on the assessment and implementation of the programme, with great success. By bringing together multiple actors in the country, and identifying pathways to certify and recruit South Sudanese refugee teachers, this model accelerated the provision of education services.[32] As of early 2018, one-quarter of the way through this project timeline, 17,450 children had been reached with formal and non-formal education.[33]

On a global scale, this platform model has reached 2.3 million children from 2017 to April 2020.[34] They have mobilised $615 million USD and invested in 30 countries, bringing together both humanitarian and development actors through coordinated approaches to reach those left furthest behind from SDG4.[35] Coordinated, system-wide responses to education development can lead to both accelerated positive outcomes and increased global funding commitments for education.

Basic Literacy to Workforce Approaches

Several organisations interviewed were piloting programmes to ensure that students are workforce bound or will be workforce bound when they graduate into a labour force at a time when we can't anticipate the skillsets they'll need.

One respondent reported on successes they were having with UNICEF on a multisectoral partnership called 'Generation Unlimited' (GenU) which joins up education, life skills, employment, entrepreneurial skills, and civic engagement for young people so they can be better equipped to make the transition from education to employment. This programme is producing global guidance on five topics: secondary education and skills, the transition from school to work, job opportunities for youth, entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset, and civic engagement and participation. The programme provides high-level guidance around best practices for adolescent education, trying to predict what kind of jobs are going to be there in the future and how adolescents need to be prepared for those. Though it was only launched in 2018, GenU projects will help 130 million young people receive improved education, 70 million young people find decent work, and 20 million young entrepreneurs start or grow their businesses, if funding goals are met.[36] To date, no impact report has been released.

The same respondent referred to this systems approach with workforce-ready teaching being incorporated into school retention and basic literacy and numeracy support. They have programmes in Rwanda and Kenya to build foundational skills, educational skills, but also transferrable skills, life skills and entrepreneurship skills to provide future livelihoods. Based on their successes in delivering large-scale education reform in Kenya, the organisation has received funding to follow-up with a programme in the same region to support a further 72,000 girls to not only complete primary education, but move on to secondary and technical and vocational schools. The impact of this programme is expected in 2023 after the programme's completion.[37]

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[32] ducation Cannot Wait (2018) Results Report April 2017 – March 2018, Available at https://www.educationcannotwait.org/download/ecw-results-report-april-2017-march-2018/?wpdmdl=1792&ind=RVdSMTAwMV9Bbm51YWwgUmVzdWx0cyBSZXBvcnRfd2ViLnBkZg

[33] Ibid.

[34] Education Cannot Wait (2020) Results Dashboard, Available at https://s30755.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ECW_Dashboard-Map-7-April-2020.pdf

[35] Ibid.

[36] Generation Unlimited (2020) A Case for Investment, Available at: https://www.generationunlimited.org/our-work/strategy/investment-case

[37] Education Development Trust (2018) Let All Girls Learn: A Case Study in Successful Educational Reform at Scale in Kenya, Available at: https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/case-studies/wasichana-wetu-wafaulu-gec-kenya

A third organisation was focused on incorporating the development of global competencies into their work on improved educational access. A 'Virtual Exchange Programme' targeted students in the US and globally without access to traditional educational supports. Outcomes out of these programmes included not only increased access, but also increased marketable skills; 82% of students engaged in the programme felt more globally competent as a result,[38] with 97% of Jordanian and 92% of U.S. students indicating increased confidence in socialising with people from other countries.[39] These global communications skills link back into work-force preparedness, as these are skills employers want to see.

Innovative Teaching/Learning Approaches

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for most governments is in reframing education systems for the 21st Century. Doing so requires collaboration across sectors, inclusion of young people in decision-making, a stronger focus on community and family engagement, and innovation in learning pathways. The tendency is still for rote learning and memorisation, when the emphasis from employers is on soft skills such as problem-solving or collaboration. Similar to the approach outlined above in incorporating vocational skills, social and soft skills across all levels of childhood development and education, organisations are beginning to focus more on incorporating 21st Century skills into education, including AI and machine learning.

Incorporating AI and Machine Learning into education is a complicated endeavour, necessitating not only the infrastructure through which AI can be accessed and developed, but training to improve the digital literacy of students and teachers. The addition

> *Everything around changing the construct of education sectors should come down to: what is really the process of learning and teaching in the classroom?*

of AI technologies into the education sphere offers several positive possible outcomes, particularly in providing access for marginalised people and communities, people with disabilities, refugees, those out of school, and those living in rural, isolated communities. For example, the use of telepresence robotics to allow students with special needs to attend schools remotely.[40]

Furthermore, AI can help to personalise learning, through the creation of AI assistance for teachers, which handle the more routine tasks performed by educators, freeing them up for more direct interaction with their students.[41] Additionally, it can map student performance, and create personalised learning opportunities. However, as this technology grows, it is important to ensure equity in AI education, as the lack of foundational infrastructure for this technology within developing countries could create a digital divide.[42]

Other innovative approaches to education being piloted entail re-thinking the way learning happens, and focusing on new pedagogies such as student-led learning.

One organisation we spoke to experienced

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[38] IREX (2020) Global Solutions, Available at: https://www.irex.org/project/global-solutions

[39] Grimes, A., Lake, S. (2019) Creating meaningful learning for Jordanian and American students through virtual exchange, Available at: https://www.irex.org/insight/creating-meaningful-learning-jordanian-and-american-students-through-virtual-exchange

[40] Francesc, P., Rivas, A., Valverde, P. (2019) Artificial intelligence in education: challenges and opportunities for sustainable development, Paris: UNESCO

[41] Ibid

[42] Ibid

unique successes through the programmes they have been piloting in play-based learning. The logic for this model is that in aiming to achieve higher learning outcomes, play-based learning is attractive, both because it encourages children to come to school, and because the methodology contributes to learning achievements in literacy and numeracy and core subject areas. This model encourages children to participate and engage in the learning process. Research and studies show that play is helping to have a long-term positive influence on the learning process. Repeated play and repeated actions linked to emotions connect brain and behaviour. This is backed by neuroscience. For example, within the Middle East, children participating in play-based programmes are three times more likely to express the ability to avoid conflict than children outside such programmes, while in Pakistan peer violence against girls decreased by 59% in schools with play-based programmes.[43]

Teachers who are trained to implement the student-led process are at the core of making changes in the classroom. While children-led or engaged learning is seen as too slow a process in some contexts, the interviewee stated that the learning outcomes have been found to last, based on the way this type of learning affects neural pathways. They have seen successes using this method, with children they've engaged in their programme in Pakistan scoring 10% higher on standardized tests than children with not taught by their trained teachers.[44] Furthermore, the process leverages the advantages of empowering youth and including them in decision making processes. In some contexts, youths are better able to identify where new learning priorities should be; for example, they know better how important technology will be for the future.

[43] Right to Play (2018) Annual Report 2018, Available at: https://www.righttoplay.com/en/national-offices/national-office-global/resources/

[44] Right to Play (2020) Our Impact, Available at: https://www.righttoplay.com/en/impact/

Government Buy-in, Community Buy-in

Interviewees shared multiple examples of improving their programme outcomes where there was strong government engagement and community buy-in to the process.

An advocacy organisation we spoke to related the successes they achieved in building government commitment to girls' education. Zambia for example, *"is a very open country to work in and they have put strong national strategies in place to address and champion the issue of ending child marriage. The Zambian president is head of the African Campaign to End Child Marriage."*

Ghana is another country where the advocacy group saw success in working with the government. They developed a costed national action plan to address child marriage. In that context strong political support and great collaborative relationships have been seen to be successful.

Another organisation saw results in Rwanda to help develop and cost up their six-year national education plan which was about putting their policies into action and having monitorable deliverables. In the large-scale education programme they are implementing which supports the objectives outlined in the national education plan, they orientated and provided self- and peer-learning toolkits to 32,069 teachers, as well as to 4,027 local coaches, and deployed ten Special Needs Education Coordinators to 83 target schools. This programme saw a 5% improvement in English comprehension and an 8% improvement in Maths within its first year of implementation.[45]

A specific government engagement tactic that worked well for achieving progress on girls' education was budget line advocacy:

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[45] *Education Development Trust, Annual Impact Review 2018/19, Available at: https://www. educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/impact-reports/annual-impact-review-2018-19*

"Governments don't budget for human rights; they budget for programmes...there's a budget line that says registration and birth certificate validation, there's a line that says transport to school, there's a line that says gender sensitive HIV programming. It's about understanding what those programmes are that will be implemented on the ground that will have the impact of realising human rights."

This approach has been successful in improving girls' access to education. What budget advocacy highlights the top initiatives that need funding in order to address an issue. That takes that conversation into line ministry budgets. So, in the context of girls' education, ending child marriage translates to a budget line within the ministry of education, requiring safer schools, teacher training, or funds for girls in secondary schools, for example.

This kind of approach has worked well to reduce the secondary education gap in India, where, for example, the gender gap decreased by 40% within the state of Bihar when the government introduced a cycle programme and worked with the transportation sector to provide safe transport to secondary schools.[46] This programme was successful enough that a similar programme has been scaled in Nepal, with good results.

Community

When communities and parents valued and wanted their children educated, that commitment made a difference for access and school enrolment. In some cases, getting this buy-in meant changing minds, for example around the value of educating women and girls.

One organisation achieved a reduction in

bullying (59% in girls, 33% in boys), corporal punishment (66% for girls, 45% for boys) and reported depression (10% for girls, 7% for boys) within a programme run in Afghanistan that aimed to address gender-based violence and social exclusion through play-based activities.[47] This success demonstrated a need to address gender bias through communal activities, outside of academic lessons.

One interviewee cited successes from a programme about violence against girls in school, which ran between 2008-2013 in three countries. The programme raised awareness of reporting mechanisms and engaged with teachers and community members so they understood that violence against girls was an issue and that there would be a response to that violence. The programme also strengthened cooperation between schools and police to ensure that reports of violence would be acted upon. Programmes like this which ensure girls' safety in school address parents' reservations about sending them to secondary school.

Our interviewee also referred us to work being done by the International Centre for Research on Women's Gender Equality movement in schools. They run workshops in schools to challenge gender roles and sexual behaviour and reduce violence against girls. That was piloted in Indian schools over a three-year period. The findings showed a strong reduction in reports of violent behaviours actions, threats of violence, and reduction in approval of child marriage. The programme was successful enough to be scaled up to 25k schools in India,[48] and is now being piloted in Vietnam and Bangladesh.[49]

The root of it is raising awareness and understanding that violence is an issue and putting into place community support that will recognise and address the violence so

[46] Muralidharan, K., Prakash, N. (2013) *Cycling to School: Increasing Secondary School Enrollment for Girls in India, Discussion Paper No. 7585*, The Institute for the Study of Labor, pp. 3, Available at: http://ftp.iza.org/dp7585.pdf

[47] Right to Play UK (2018) *REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT RIGHT TO PLAY UK*, Available at: https://righttoplaydiag107.blob.core.windows.net/rtp-media/documents/LR_RTP_RA_18_FINAL_uwrRLgJ.pdf

[48] International Center for Research on Women (2014) *Gender Equality Movement in Schools (GEMS)*, Available at: https://www.icrw.org/research-programs/gender-equity-movement-in-schools-gems/

[49] International Center for Research on Women (2015) *Expanding the Evidence Base for Primary Prevention of Gender-Based Violence: Multi-Country Evaluations of School-Based Interventions in Asia*, Available at: https://www.icrw.org/research-programs/expanding-the-evidence-base-for-primary-prevention-of-gender-based-violence-multi-country-evaluations-of-school-based-interventions-in-asia/

that schools are perceived as safe spaces as opposed to dangerous spaces.

Teacher Training and Support

Respondents have demonstrated successes in resolving issues of teacher support in education. One such respondent referred to pilot programmes to ensure that teachers have portable qualifications so they can teach in fragile contexts, even if they are displaced. There's a huge untapped resource in refugee teachers who are not able to fully work but could be an asset in supporting their communities.

Other organisations are seeing success through partnerships with governments and NGOs to strengthen sectoral expertise and collaboration with government and providing more training to teachers through a learning-centric pedagogy. Just training and send them back to the classrooms is not working. A focus on learning outcomes for the kids and how teachers should perform in those settings is getting results.[50]

One organisation interviewed has multiple well-documented successes related to teacher training and development, especially when done in a holistic way. In Georgia they supported 18,000 teachers and 2,000 principals to improve student-centred teaching and learning approaches in STEM subjects.[51] One effective component was a scaffolded professional development programme over two years, with lots of opportunity for practice, application and reflection using professional learning communities.

In assessing outcomes for programmes like the above, the implementing organisation surveyed international teachers who went through the programme and linked learning and exchange between the United States and developing countries. At the end of the programme, 85% of teachers had incorporated differentiated instruction into their teaching after completion of the programme; in the research piece, interventions tied teaching to learning levels including differentiated instruction, which are then positively linked to positive student learning outcomes.[52] You can draw a line from that professional development experience to impact on students and classrooms worldwide. The survey also found 75% or those teachers were using project-based learning approaches following the programme. Research shows this leads to positive student learning outcomes and is effective in building problem-solving skills, linked to global competencies and market competitiveness. So, the programme not only linked back to positive learning outcomes, but also vocationally relevant learning outcomes. Every employer wants employees who can solve problems.

The same organisation had also done teacher and administrative support work in the West Bank, improving the Ministry of Education teacher licencing system, overhauling the quality assurance agency to reassessing accredited teacher training, and working with universities to improve quality of pre-services teacher training curriculums. According to our interviewee:

"The SDGs have driven those approaches with education and administration indicators, because they have both educational and administrative indicators, and that has proven an effective approach"

[50] UNICEF (2019) 'Every Child Learns' UNICEF Education Strategy 2019–2030, New York

[51] IREX, Training Educators for Excellence, Available at: https://www.irex.org/project/training-educators-excellence

[52] Beaudoin, E. (2018) How Georgian teachers are facilitating student-centered learning in STEM, IREX, Available at: https://www.irex.org/success-story/how-georgian-teachers-are-facilitating-student-centered-learning-stem

5 Findings: Opinions on the Learning Poverty Objective

When interviewees were asked for their thoughts on the World Bank objective to halve learning poverty by 2030, responses were mixed. One chose not to respond. Some saw significant benefits in focusing on a simpler, more measurable, and in some cases more attainable learning target. Others raised concerns, largely to do with equity in education, which they said SDG4 is uniquely ambitious in addressing. They viewed a new target as relinquishing that ambition.

The World Bank objective will improve government engagement in LMCs and create a clearer, more actionable monitoring and evaluation process.

Two of the individuals interviewed agreed that having a less complicated target—halving learning poverty— could be more effective in re-engaging governments and creating achievable education strategies. A further two acknowledged that the World Bank target could be beneficial in certain contexts, for example:

Two interviewees felt that a simpler target would renew interest in advancing education

targets, and galvanise collective action, because halving learning poverty is a more easily measurable goal, and that it would translate into impact. Two interviewees also pointed out that a simpler goal was more understandable, and therefore created something that we can collectively work towards.

"I think when you simplify targets you always get better impact…instead of creating a complicated multiplicity of targets, sometimes you need to say 'this is a problem and we all need to solve it.' The problem with the SDGs is that some of it is so complicated, and there are so many, that they can't measure success. What the World Bank is trying to do here is pull together a clear measurement of these successes, to clearly monitor and solve the problem."

> *Halving learning poverty in Zambia, for example, is a tremendous but still attainable goal, maybe the only attainable goal by 2030. But it's not appropriate for Ecuador, Colombia, the Philippines. I think it's a good initiative to ask the question: are the goals unattainable in certain contexts? We don't want some countries to check out because the goals are too high.*

One respondent raised that the new objective would also support a model the World Bank is moving toward which ties financing to results. The interviewee noted how *"the financing teams don't know very well what they want, and what goes on in the education space, which isn't helpful to us in the sectoral space."* In order for innovative approaches to financing such as results-based financing to be successful, implementers in the education space need to be working from clear, measurable and scalable indicators. Another respondent echoed the view that the

objective would be effective in the context of support for the World Bank's Global Platform for Education Finance initiative, since current financing models are not sufficient to provide quality education for all. "I fully support this because financing is the key issue… we've seen some actors spread so thin it is impossible to get quality or continued education. Countries get $10 billion USD to solve all these problems and that is not enough."

The World Bank objective will reduce focus on marginalised groups, oversimplify the issues around quality education and confuse global coordination on implementation

Even in contexts where our respondents felt that the World Bank's initiative would be positive, they still raised concerns about how it would influence ongoing donor and government buy-in, and the implementation of some of the existing targets.

One respondent feared that focusing on halving learning poverty would enhance competition for funding; some donors will remain dedicated to SDG4 targets, while others would refocus on halving learning poverty.

Four respondents raised the issue of equity and feared that the target of halving learning poverty would not only undermine the *"moral imperative"* of SDG4 to *"leave no one behind,"* but could also potentially worsen inequality. *"The temptation will be to just go for low-hanging fruit,"* and focus our efforts on the most easily reachable groups, worsening inequity in both LMCs and Western economies.

Tied to this was the concern from five respondents that the World Bank objective is only focusing on literacy, which ignores the quality of education entirely. Of these, two described the objective as a "stepping stone" on the way to achieving quality education for all, but not an end target. Furthermore, one of these respondents pointed out that addressing learning poverty ignores future-ready education.

Another major point, which two respondents spoke to, was how the SDGs were developed in *"one of the most comprehensive process in the world,"* which ensured international buy-in. Governments around the world agreed to pursue the targets SDG4 set-out, and while as one interviewee acknowledges *"the world does not appear to be getting behind them as much as we hoped,"* there was a question of whether countries would buy-in to the World Bank objective when they did not have a say in creating it.

Finally, one sentiment which emerged from four interviewees was the sense that the education community should not lose its ambition. All of these four described SDG4 as ambitious and felt that it needs to be. As one asked:
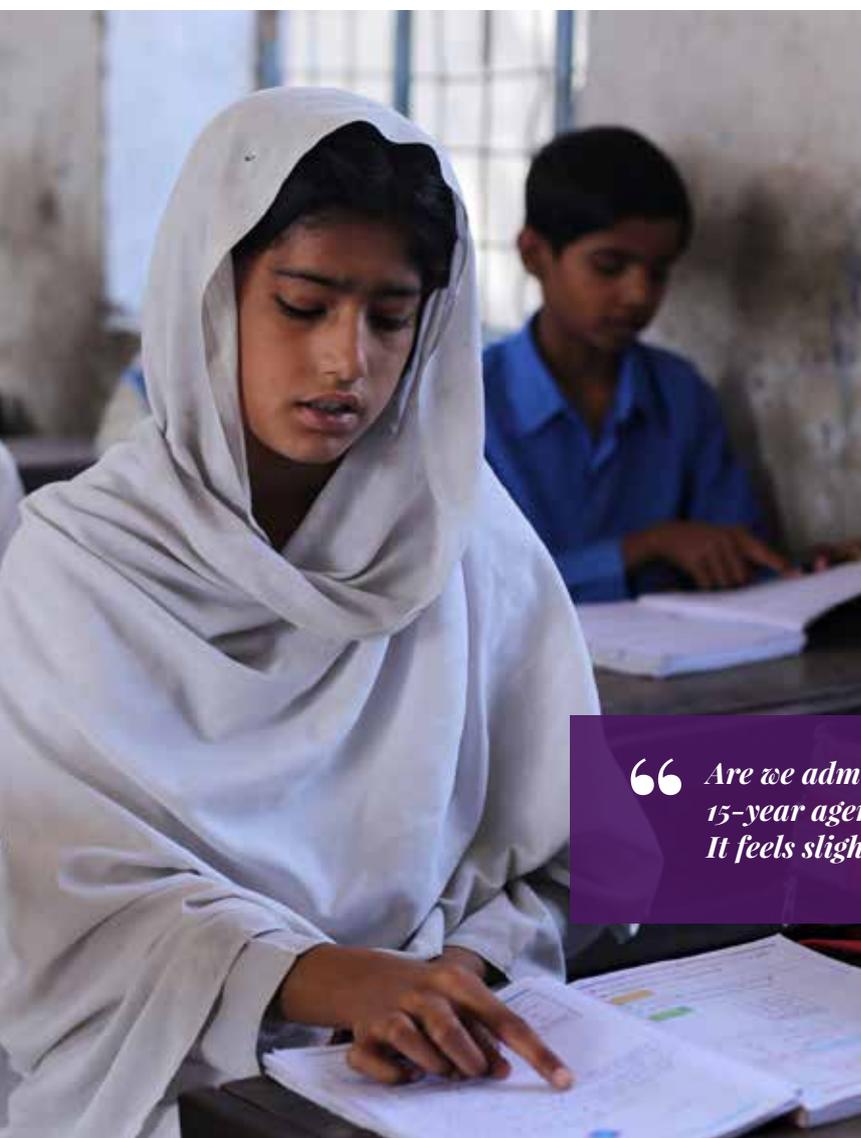
> 66 *Are we admitting defeat already only four years [into a 15-year agenda]? Does that make us less ambitious…? It feels slightly like we've accepted defeat.* 99

6 Concluding Remarks

It is clear that the World Bank's objective to halve learning poverty by 2030 is responding to a plethora of global challenges and complexities associated with achieving the SDG4 targets by 2030. There is no doubt that re-engagement and catalysing action is needed to accelerate progress on achieving SDG4. The work the World Bank is doing to create better monitoring and evaluation systems and has potential to address the urgent need for measurable, scalable indicators that can be taken on by all governments, donors and implementers.

As adoption of this objective is considered by the global development community, they have called for assurances that it be implemented in the spirit of the goals, 'Sustainability for All.' Questions also remain on how best to engage with governments who may be hesitant to buy-in to new goals or targets after having agreed to implement the original goals, and how best to continue vital education programmes not specific to basic literacy skills at the primary level.

It is still unclear whether this objective has buy-in from governments and nongovernmental actors, and to what degree it will influence funding decisions, implementation of programmes and the monitoring of progress going forward.

For contexts where government engagement, infrastructure, and access to schools are still overarching issues, the World Bank objective could be the best way forward, if it is carried out in the spirit of SDG4, where efforts to halve learning poverty are inclusive, considered from a whole-system approach, and considerate of cross-cutting issues in global education. With this approach, progress towards halving learning poverty would be less likely to entrench development gaps between LMCs and high-income countries.

In contexts where halving learning poverty is more than achievable by 2030, the development community is best positioned to accelerate progress on higher-level goals through focus on strategies that have shown greatest potential to scale. There is clear need for strengthened monitoring and evaluation of education impacts, particularly monitoring of marginalised groups, whole-system or issues-based approaches to education programming, use of innovative funding models, and introduction of new learning pedagogies, particularly those that empower youth.

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