



NETWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICIES AND  
COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

December 2013

**Working Paper #6**

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**EDUCATION AND SKILLS POST-2015:  
WHAT EVIDENCE, WHOSE PERSPECTIVES?**

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By Kenneth King and Robert Palmer

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## Foreword

Those of you that have been following the post-2015 education process will know that there are a lot of pieces to the jig-saw and that a lot has happened, especially since 2012! Below we quickly outline some of the main developments and new reports that relate to the formal process of establishing a new post-2015 education agenda September 2012 – December 2013.

**88 UN-facilitated country and thematic consultations on post-2015 have taken place and concluded.** The outcomes of all 11 thematic consultations, can be found at [www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org). Note that there was one consultation specifically on education (which included a major meeting in Dakar in March 2013), and culminated in a September 2013 report, and consultation another on employment and growth (which contained discussion on education and skills). See: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002230/223024E.pdf>

**‘MY World’ was launched and the “world” (or 1.3 billion inhabitants of it) has been voting for their top 6 development priorities. ‘A good education’ remains the #1 priority identified to date.** See: [www.myworld2015.org](http://www.myworld2015.org)

**The Sustainable Development Solutions Network has been set up and delivered a report in June 2013.** 10 global expert thematic groups have been established, including one on ‘Early Childhood Development, Education, and Transition to Work’ which delivered its own report in September 2013. Country SDSN hubs are being established in different parts of the world. See: [www.unsdsn.org](http://www.unsdsn.org)

**The UN Secretary General’s Education First Initiative was launched in September 2012.** This is an effort to focus minds on achieving as much as possible in the field of education before the end of 2015, and to maintain education as a focus post-2015. See: [www.globaleducationfirst.org](http://www.globaleducationfirst.org)

**The UN Global Compact** has produced a report on post-2015 giving business’ perspectives on a future agenda, including in education. See: [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)

**The High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has been and gone.** There were meetings in New York (September, 2012), London (November 2012), Monrovia (January 2013), Bali (March 2013) and New York (May 2013), leading to a report delivered to the UN Secretary General at the end of May 2013. See: [www.post2015hlp.org](http://www.post2015hlp.org)

**The UN Secretary General’s report**, came out in July 2013 and was presented at the **Special Event on the MDGs during the UNGA week** in New York, September 25<sup>th</sup> 2013. See: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf>

**The Inter-governmental Open Working Group (OWG) on the SDGs is in full swing**, and has completed six meetings between March and December 2013, with the June 2013 meeting most directly addressing the issue of education. See: [www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org](http://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org)

**UNICEF and UNESCO have each produced various post-2015 position papers / key asks.** See: [http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Post\\_2015\\_Key\\_Ask\\_V01.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Post_2015_Key_Ask_V01.pdf) (UNICEF) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002243/224367e.pdf> (UNESCO)

**UNESCO’s National Education for All (EFA) Reviews** are underway to evaluate progress made towards achieving EFA, and to lay out implications for education in the post-2015 era. National reviews will continue until June 2014 and be followed by EFA Regional conferences between June and September 2014. See: <https://en.unesco.org/national-efa-reviews>

# EDUCATION AND SKILLS POST-2015: WHAT EVIDENCE, WHOSE PERSPECTIVES?

By Kenneth King and Robert Palmer

## 1. Introduction

As we approach the end of 2013, we can look back on the tremendous flurry of post-2015 activity that has taken place over the last 12 months (and more). We have seen various formal post-2015 engines turn on and come up to full power; some have already reached their destinations, others still have more distance to travel. We have seen civil society and lobby groups edging around these formal processes and trying to influence the direction they have been heading in.

Reflecting on our September 2012 paper (King and Palmer, 2012), we noted that at that time 'there were more ideas and "must-haves" than there were concrete evidence-based suggestions for future education and skills goals' (King and Palmer, 2013: 5), and we added that by April 2013 there was 'still a paucity of this reflective work around the priorities for goals and targets' (ibid.). Now in December 2013, is that still true? Given that there has been a tremendous amount of proposals and priorities put forward by various groups that relate in whole or in part to education and skills post-2015 (NORRAG, 2013), we would hope not. Is the 'data revolution' that the report of the UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda (HLP) (HLP, 2013) called for already becoming evident in the recent post-2015 proposals?

This current working paper is concerned with the evidence-base and justification for the post-2015 education and skills objectives, goals and targets that are being recommended. It will review the major research-based material making the case for education and skills goals.

### 1.1. Evidence, data and development post-2015

The case for the post-2015 development agenda to be an evidence-based agenda has been made repeatedly by some of the key UN reports of 2013; the role that data and evidence *should* play in the design, measurement and monitoring of the future agenda is often mentioned.

At the end of May 2013, the HLP report called for a data revolution (HLP, 2013) and three months later in August the HLP Secretariat came out with a clarifying note on what this actually meant (HLP Secretariat, 2013). The HLP call for a data revolution implies more than just having better disaggregated data. This is only part of it. It argued that a data revolution should really be a revolution: a very different approach to what data we collect and how we use it. For example, thanks to advances in technology, we can get more and better data, faster; but one challenge of course is to better link this real time feedback and learning with real time development decisions and accountability. The data revolution that the HLP calls for implies that there should be more evidence-based development policy-making. This, of course, is a refrain echoed among many of the traditional development partners (especially DFID, USAID and the World Bank).

In the first week of June 2013, a week after the HLP report was issued, the report of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was delivered (SDSN, 2013a). It argued that 'data, monitoring, and accountability will be key' (p.27) in the framing and implementation of the future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As we shall note in this working paper, the SDSN post-2015 proposals are quite thick with evidence to justify a particular proposition. This is perhaps not surprising given the SDSN's function as a network that 'engages scientists,

engineers, business and civil society leaders, and development practitioners for **evidence-based problem solving**' (p.51, bold added).

In July 2013, the UN Global Compact issued its own post-2015 report (UN Global Compact, 2013), but with no mention of the impending data revolution about to sweep through the hallways of post-2015; in fact the words 'data' and 'evidence' do not appear once in the 25-page report. This said, the UN Global Compact report was clear about the need for a 'global measurement framework to help business determine measurable targets and identify performance indicators' (p. 17). This was more, however, connected to encouraging engagement of the private sector than to encouraging evidence-based policy making.

Also in July 2013, the UN Secretary General's report to the September UN General Assembly, *A Life of Dignity for All* (UN, 2013), was made public. The Secretary General (SG), referring to 'My High-level Panel' (p. 3), reiterated the call for a data revolution. The SG's report tended to focus more on the need to improve data and evidence with regard to monitoring and accountability during *implementation* of the post-2015 agenda. Elsewhere, however, it is abundantly clear that the SG is keen that the post-2015 agenda itself is evidence-based (for example the 'evidence' collected during the 11 thematic consultations, the 88 country consultations ([www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org)), as well as the setting up of the UN SDSN itself, noted above).

Homi Kharas, the lead author of the UN HLP report notes that at the UN General Assembly debates on the post-2015 agenda in September 2013, there was 'repeated reference to making sure that the post-2015 agenda is based on evidence' (Kharas, 2013). Kharas continued: 'This focus on evidence, and the growing pressures to link funding to proven impact, could be hugely significant' (Kharas, 2013).

#### *Education and data post-2015*

While the above UN reports concern the overall post-2015 agenda, this obviously includes within it the education and skills agenda; hence what they say about evidence and data above also applies to education and skills post-2015.

In addition to the formal UN post-2015 process with regard to the overall post-2015 agenda, UNESCO has been getting itself busy with exploring the post-EFA (Education for All) agenda.<sup>1</sup> However, UNESCO only recently appears to have taken up an emerging position on education post-2015 (UNESCO, 2013), and there is clearly a long way to go. 'UNESCO believes that... education should be an explicit stand-alone goal as well as a cross-cutting theme across the broader development agenda' (Tang, 2013: 82), and have stated that: 'there is a clear consensus on the need for a clearly defined, balanced and holistic education agenda **regardless** of the structure the future post-2015 development framework may take' (UNESCO, 2013, bold added). It appears that UNESCO is saying that there is consensus (presumably from UN member states) that there will be a post-EFA agenda in addition to whatever happens with education in the post-2015 agenda overall. It is expected that this issue, as well as focal areas will be better defined during the current national EFA assessment process.

It will be recalled that, in the lead up to the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, UNESCO organised an EFA assessment exercise (starting in mid-1998) to take stock of EFA progress since Jomtien (1990).<sup>2</sup> In the lead up to 2015, starting from mid-2013 UNESCO is again running a process of EFA national reviews, this time looking back to 2000. It will start with a detailed EFA national assessment process (UNESCO, 2013) which runs to June 2014. This will be

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the following text on the EFA assessment exercise draws heavily on Palmer (2013).

<sup>2</sup> It will also be recalled that this exercise in the run up to Dakar was regarded as being very edu-centric and was unable to synthesize much data beyond ministries of education.

followed by EFA Regional conferences between June and September 2014 to review the EFA national reports and draw on an EFA regional agenda. The EFA review is intended both to assess EFA progress since 2000, but also to provide (experiential) evidence to suggest the best way forward post-EFA, post-2015. The Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO insists that 'this exercise will be aligned with the on-going process of the global debate and development on the post 2015 development agenda' (Tang, 2013). In May 2015, the Global Education Conference will be organised, hosted by the Government of Republic of Korea (Chung, 2013).

The next short section of this introduction will explore the history of education goal setting at Jomtien and then at Dakar, and the extent to which these were evidence-based policies.

## **1.2. Bridging research and policy in education goal setting: Lessons from Jomtien for goal-setting in 2013-2015**

Those engaged in goal-setting on education and skills over the next 20 months before September 2015 should be encouraged to re-read the text of the *Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All* (WCEFA) and its *Framework for Action* (WCEFA, 1990b). This should of course include those preparing for the Global Education Conference in Incheon in South Korea in May 2015, just mentioned. Those who believe that the importance of learning as opposed to access is one of the crucial lessons just learned in the last few years should note that Jomtien Article IV is 'Focusing on Learning', emphasising that the 'focus of basic education must... be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment'. Equally, Article VI is on 'Enhancing the Environment for Learning'. And for those who believe that it is only now that the international community has become interested in evidence-based policies, Article VIII should be re-read. It not only underlines the crucial role of 'political commitment and political will backed by appropriate fiscal measures' but it points up the vital role of knowledge in support of basic education: 'Societies should also insure a strong intellectual and scientific environment for basic education. This implies improving higher education and developing scientific research' (WCEFA, 1990b, Articles, IV, VI, VIII).

Should target-setting be national or global? It should be recalled that unlike the Dakar World Education Forum of 2000, Jomtien did not set global goals. Instead, the WCEFA argued that 'countries may wish to set **their own targets** for the 1990s' along the lines of 'the following proposed dimensions' (WCEFA, 1990b, *Framework for Action*, p.3). There then followed the six dimensions, not targets. Again, re-emphasising the crucial roles of access and learning, it declared that the focus of basic education should be 'both on universalization of access and of learning acquisition, **as joint and inseparable concerns**' (ibid. 3-4, bold added). Indeed, there is one whole dimension of these suggested country targets dedicated to learning: 'Improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort.... attains or surpasses a defined level of necessary learning achievement' (ibid).

The lesson to be learned again from a study of Jomtien's WCEFA is that if the international community is being told today by the GMR 2012 that 250 million young people have either not reached grade four, or scarcely learned anything if they were in school, that is not necessarily because of a failure to emphasise learning, but a failure of political commitment.

There was certainly a good deal of research underpinning the *World Declaration* and the *Framework for Action* but most of it was not made explicit in the documents themselves. There was however an official background volume, *Meeting Basic Learning Needs* (WCEFA, 1990a; 170 pages) which was available at Jomtien and supported all the main arguments and the priorities of the World Conference, as well as a *Final Report* which was available two months later with all the detail of who said what at Jomtien (WCEFA, 1990c). There were other key research-based

documents available at Jomtien like the first draft of what would become the World Bank's primary education policy paper (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1990), and also a first draft of Colclough with Lewin's *Educating All the Children* (Colclough with Lewin, 1990). These latter two focused on the research and the evidence for investing in primary education rather than on the wider notions of basic education being discussed at Jomtien. Indeed, it was already clear at Jomtien that some of the key funders would be supporting primary schooling more than the wider vision (see NORRAG, 1990).

But the key evidence-based document supporting the actual text of Jomtien and the expression of the six dimensions, as well as the powerful emphasis on learning, was the background document, *Meeting Basic Learning Needs*. It covered all the key research resources available in the late 1990s, and was full of evidence about 'Educating girls: an investment in development' (Box 3.01, p. 34) or 'Improving primary school performance: nutrition and health' (Box 3.03, p. 37). But there was a whole chapter on 'The context and effects of basic learning in the world' (WCEFA, 1990a: 15-32) which argued the research case for investing for example in early childhood, primary education etc.

We have illustrated Jomtien and WCEFA in some detail in order to show that there was very considerable determination to base the case for the Jomtien vision for the 1990s upon the very latest research evidence. In 2013, 23 years later, there is not that tight relationship that was there prior to Jomtien between the drafters of the Declaration and the Framework and those reviewing and arguing the research case.<sup>3</sup>

The World Forum on Education for All at Dakar in April 2000 drew on a different research basis than Jomtien. Principally this was a whole series of national assessments of EFA which were done in preparation for the Forum. But the relationship between the richness of some of this assessment material, and the six Dakar EFA goals is not at all clear. There was no parallel to the background document which had supported the *Declaration* and the *Framework for Action* in Jomtien.

It was only after the establishment of the independent Global Monitoring Report team in 2002 that there was an opportunity for research to be rigorously applied to the six EFA Goals. With the benefit of hindsight it is a pity that more research did not underpin the drafting of six Dakar Goals themselves.

Now, in the build-up to finalizing any new set of goals in 2015, we shall show in the sections that follow that the research evidence that might support a tightly argued case is widely dispersed, and appears here and there in the different bilateral and multilateral agencies, think tanks and civil society organizations.<sup>4</sup> Thus Brookings' Centre for Universal Education (CUE) set up a Research Task Force for Learning in 2011 after the publication of its *Global Compact on Learning* (Brookings, 2011), but this did not so much review the evidence as make the case for new research on learning, in many different domains (Wagner et al. 2012).

Different organizations and different streams of work through the HLP, the OWG, the SDSN and other UN-linked initiatives have been working on the case for the goals, along with a multitude of other bodies, but not only have these been a wide and – to some degree - uncoordinated (or un-synchronised) series of initiatives, but there has been no single body ensuring that the best

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<sup>3</sup> Wadi Haddad, the executive secretary of the Inter-agency commission at WCEFA, had been director of the education department of the World Bank before Jomtien and was also the lead author of the background document, *Meeting Basic Learning Needs*.

<sup>4</sup> The GMR team has recently provided a valuable piece of evidence-based policy: <http://www.education-transforms.org/en/>

evidence was drawn upon and focused upon the case for education and skills in the post-2015 development agenda.

### **1.3. Outline of this working paper**

The first part of this paper will review the use of evidence in the key institutional proposals made by the UN High Level Panel Report in May 2013 (HLP, 2013), the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Report in June 2013 (SDSN, 2013a), the UN Global Compact Report in July 2013 (UN Global Compact, 2013) and the UN Secretary-General's Report of September 2013 (UNSG, 2013).

The second part of the paper explores the way that evidence is used by the bilateral development agencies as well as by civil society in their debates and positions about education and skills post-2015. There is also a brief focus on the views from the Global South.

## 2. The Use of Evidence by the UN-Related Education Post-2015 Processes

There have been a wide number of post-2015 goal and target suggestions that relate to education and skills (King and Palmer, 2013; 2012),<sup>5</sup> and there has been a strong consensus on the importance of having an overall education goal (Bergh and Couturier, 2013).

But what evidence, if any, is presented to justify the inclusion of education as a main goal, or a focus on a particular educational issue, level or type? Where evidence is used, how is it used? Is it stated as a proposition or 'fact'? (e.g. "primary education increases agricultural productivity"), or is any evidence actually alluded to or cited? What was the stock of knowledge drawn on, and what is not? What kind of evidence is referred to; e.g. experiential evidence (based on MDG implementation or other prior experience), evidence from studies, experiments?

This section reviews the use of evidence in the key institutional proposals made by the UN High Level Panel Report in May 2013 (HLP, 2013), the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Report in June 2013 (SDSN, 2013a), the UN Global Compact Report in July 2013 (UN Global Compact, 2013) and the UN Secretary-General's Report of September 2013 (UNSG, 2013). It will also note the use of evidence related to education by the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will then look at the education-specific institutional proposals including the education thematic group report of the SDSN in September 2013 (SDSN, 2013b), the UNESCO-UNICEF September 2013 report of the global education thematic consultation (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013), the September 2013 UNICEF Key Messages on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (UNICEF, 2013), and the November 2013 UNESCO Director-General concept note on the post-2015 education agenda (UNESCO, 2013).

Below we look at three dimensions of how evidence is used to justify education and skills proposals with regard to:

- the overall justification (and evidence referred to) for the inclusion of education and skills in the post-2015 framework.
- the use of evidence with regard to the main levels and types of education and training including: Early childhood; Primary; Secondary; Tertiary education; Lifelong learning, including skills for work, for life and adult education and training.
- the use of evidence with regard to the following cross cutting themes: equality; learning; and quality.

### 2.1. Education goal proposals and the use of evidence

First, we explore the justification and evidence base referred to in the key institutional reports regarding the inclusion of education as a stand-alone post-2015 goal (Fig.1). The most common evidence-base referred to was the association between education, skills and employment/work. This is perhaps not surprising given the current global economic climate and high rates of un- and under-employment globally. Other commonalities were the reference to education being a human right, and the role of education in economic growth. Less commonly referred to were the purported links between education and citizenship, inequality, sustainable development, poverty reduction, private income and health.

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<sup>5</sup> Readers may also wish to use ODI's 'Goal Tracker' to check the latest: <http://tracker.post2015.org/>

**Fig.1. Headline education goal proposals**

Goal	Proponent	Evidence base cited / Justification
'Provide quality education and lifelong learning.' <sup>6</sup>	UNSG (2013)	Education is a human right. It forms the foundation for a decent life and promotes economic growth and employment.
'Ensure effective learning for all children and youth for life and livelihood.'	SDSN (2013a)	Education is a human right. Improves job prospects, increases economic growth, improves health, peace and reduces inequalities.
'Provide quality education and lifelong learning.'	HLP (2013)	Education is a human right. Private and social benefits of education. Post-conflict reconstruction.
'Quality education for all.'	UN Global Compact (2013)	Education link to employment. Where business leaders feel they can make a difference
No proposed wording yet, but strong indications education will be included in the OWG goals.	OWG SDG (2013a, b)	Education is a human right. Education is an essential investment, has links to employment and productivity and is an important basis for human enrichment through lifelong learning. Gender equality in education has multiple social, economic and environmental benefits.
'Ensure equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.'	UNESCO (2013)	Education is a human right, a public good. It is the foundation of human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, gender equality and responsible global citizenship. It contributes to reducing inequalities and poverty.
'Equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all.'	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	Education is a human right. Education is associated with many development outcomes
No goal noted (but see UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013 above).	UNICEF (2013)	Education is a human right. Education increases income and growth. Education contributes to sustainable development.

**Education and employment.** The purported association between education, skills and employment/work was referred to by all institutional proposals above. The UNSG report, for example, noted that 'relevant education and skills training' can 'promote... decent employment' (UNSG, 2013: 14). The SDSN report that education 'can improve job prospects for individuals' (SDSN, 2013a: 12). The HLP noted that 'workers with the right skills is one of the key determinants of success for any business' (HLP, 2013: 36). For the UN Global Compact report, this association between education and work ('it is a pathway to better-paying and more productive jobs' (UN Global Compact, 2013: 7)) was perhaps the most significant justification in their inclusion of an education goal and 'also an area where business leaders feel they can make

<sup>6</sup> Not described as a goal in the SG report, but as priority action areas.

a difference' (UN Global Compact, 2013: 8). The UNESCO proposals noted the link between (especially vocational) skills and the work agenda (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013; UNESCO, 2013). While all proposals asserted there to be a strong relationship between education, skills and employment, none made reference to a specific evidence base, experiential or from research studies.

**Education as a human right.** Across all but one of the institutional proposals made, there is agreement that an education goal is justified on the grounds that education is a human right (HLP, 2013: 36; OWG SDG, 2013a: 1; SDSN, 2013a: 12; SDSN, 2013b: 5; UNESCO, 2013; UNICEF, 2013: 9; UNSG, 2013: 3). Only the High Level Panel report and the Education Thematic report of the SDSN specifically cited human rights declarations/conventions.<sup>7</sup> The UN Global Compact (2013) report was the only one not to justify the need for an education goal on the grounds that education is a human right. Of course, the extent to which education as a human right is itself research based is less clear; but it is of course a very widely accepted principle and not one we would disagree with or one that we believe needs to be justified by evidence.<sup>8</sup>

**Education and economic growth.** The connection between education and economic growth was noted by the UN SG report (UNSG, 2013: 7), both the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) reports (SDSN, 2013a, b), and by UNICEF (2013). While the UNSG report and main SDSN reports just contained statements like education can 'raise economic growth' (SDSN, 2013a: 12), no actual evidence for this was cited. The education thematic working group report of the SDSN cited actual evidence of a link between education and economic growth; they noted that 'investments in large scale public education have nurtured and sustained economic growth' (SDSN, 2013b: 8) and then go on to mention that evidence of this can be seen in East Asia and is 'widely discussed in the development literature' (ibid.). Similarly, UNICEF (2013) cited a 2002 rate of return study (Sianesi and Van Reenen, 2002) which claimed that 'a one-year increase in the mean years of schooling has been shown to be associated with a... higher growth rate of 1 percentage point' (UNICEF, 2013: 6). The other institutional proposals from the HLP, the UN Global Compact or UNESCO did not make explicit reference to a link between education and growth.

**Education and citizenship:** The link between education and responsible global citizenship was expressed by the SDSN, HLP and UNESCO reports. The SDSN and UNESCO propositions noted that education can help children learn values and skills related to creating peaceful and socially inclusive societies (SDSN, 2013a: 12; SDSN, 2013b: 7; UNESCO, 2013: 5). Meanwhile, the HLP report noted more vaguely that education increases 'how much a person can engage with and contribute to society' (HLP, 2013: 36). In all cases, these are propositions or claims but do not refer to an evidence-base.

**Education and inequality:** Two of the institutional proposals noted here (SDSN and UNESCO) cited the role that education (specifically, good quality education) has in reducing inequalities (SDSN, 2013a: 12; SDSN, 2013b: 7; UNESCO, 2013: 5). In terms of backing up this assertion with reference to evidence, the SDSN (2013b) report talked specifically about the evidence for an association between early childhood education and reductions in inequality (citing Arnold,

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<sup>7</sup> The HLP report referred to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (HLP, 2013: 37). The SDSN thematic report referred to article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, as well as noting the existence of 'several other international conventions related to the right to education' (SDSN, 2013b: 5).

<sup>8</sup> Note the United States' Declaration of Independence 'We hold these truths to be self-evident...'

2004; Magnuson et al., 2004; UNESCO-GMR, 2007; Yoshikawa et al., 2013), and not about evidence of a relationship between education in general and inequality.

**Education and sustainable development:** The Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs, the SDSN thematic report on education (SDSN, 2013b: 6), UNESCO (UNESCO, 2013: 5) and UNICEF (2013) all noted the association between education and sustainable development (and its economic, social and environmental dimensions).<sup>9</sup> While the OWG has not yet proposed any goal wording, its *Interim Report* notes that ‘Education is absolutely central to any sustainable development agenda’ (OWG SDG, 2013b: 10). It is interesting that these claims regarding education and sustainable development are not backed up by reference to a specific evidence base; elsewhere in these same reports it might be argued that evidence is sometimes referred to of the link between education and economic or social issues (though not between education and environmental issues).

**Education and poverty reduction:** This link was perhaps one of the least made by the institutional propositions examined here. Only the SDSN education thematic report and UNESCO cited this. The SDSN noted that ‘a good quality education is the basic weapon to end extreme poverty and its inter-generational transmission’ (SDSN, 2013b: 6); and while there are no direct links to evidence about the poverty reducing effects of education, the SDSN report (2013b) contains reference to a range of evidence about education’s impact on developmental outcomes (see this section) which of course have poverty reducing effects. Meanwhile, UNESCO noted that ‘education is a key contributor to reducing poverty’ (UNESCO, 2013: 5), though it makes no reference to a specific evidence base.

**Education and private income.** The association between education and private income was only referred to by two of the institutional proposals examined here: the HLP report and UNICEF (2013). The HLP proclaims that education ‘lifts lifetime earnings’ (HLP, 2013: 36), and ‘each additional year of education results in, on average, a 10 per cent increase in lifetime earnings’ (ibid.). Unfortunately, the evidence base that was directly referred to was the old rate of return to education evidence of the 1960s-1990s from Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004).<sup>10</sup> McGrath (2013) comments that the reference to Psacharopoulos and Patrinos’ old work does:  
not really have much salience to the argument of the [HLP] goals, which are not seeking to distinguish between the developmental effects of different levels of education, nor to make the narrow case that education’s developmental effects consist of impact upon earnings. Nor does it make much sense as the core of an argument that learning matters rather than notional years of schooling. (p.6)

McGrath (2013) argues that the HLP ‘reliance on very old rates of return data is an unsustainable basis for planning a forward-looking approach to “quality education and lifelong learning”’ (McGrath, 2013: 6).

In fact, most quantitative studies now point to the fact that income returns increase with increasing levels of education (see Palmer et al. 2007 for an early review of this; or the RECOUP findings – Colclough et al., 2009) and learning (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2008) which is opposite to the Psacharopoulos rate of return studies which showed the highest income returns being at primary level. It might have been wiser for the HLP to refer instead to these other

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<sup>9</sup> For the SDSN, sustainable development has a fourth dimension: good governance including peace and security.

<sup>10</sup> The country rate of return data on which this average of 10% was calculated date from between 1973 and 1998; so the data are between 15-40 years older than the HLP report of 2013.

studies; but it is possible that the attractive sound-bite of one year of schooling = 10% increase in earnings was too strong to ignore.

Meanwhile, UNICEF (2013) cite a 2002 rate of return to education report by Sianesi and Van Reenen (2002) and report the finding from it that 'a one-year increase in the mean years of schooling has been shown to be associated with a rise in per-capita income of 3-6%' (UNICEF, 2013: 6). This is cited by UNICEF stripped of the caveats in the original evidence base as acknowledged by Sianesi and Van Reenen (2002); thus the finding says nothing about the type and quality of education that are essential for this rise in income to be secured for example.

**Education and health:** The evidence of a link between education and health outcomes was only referred to by the SDSN (SDSN, 2013a; 2013b: 6) and the HLP reports (HLP, 2013: 36). The HLP noted that 'Quality education positively effects health, and lowers family size and fertility rates' (HLP, 2013: 36). Meanwhile the education thematic report of the SDSN noted there is 'substantial evidence to show that countries with better educational outcomes have improved... health indicators... A higher level of education, especially among women, has been shown to... increase[ ] the age of marriage and child survival', reduce fertility rates, reduce mortality rates, and risks of chronic non communicable diseases (SDSN, 2013b: 6).<sup>11</sup> The SDSN education thematic report also noted that 'in most studies, the effect of improved education on health is the greatest in the low and middle income countries' and that there is a 'strong inter-generational effect of education' (SDSN, 2013b: 6-7).

Having noted some of the key justifications given by the above institutional proposals, it is worth examining briefly what evidence is drawn upon in the main UN member-state process – the Intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals - to justify the inclusion of education. At the 4<sup>th</sup> OWG meeting in June 2013, the intervention from Jorge Sequeira, Director of OREALC/UNESCO, Santiago, on behalf of UNESCO and UNICEF, cited several pieces of evidence to justify to the members of the OWG why education should be included in the post-2015 agenda both as a cross-cutting issue, across all development goals, and as an explicit education goal (Sequeira, 2013). He noted that education is a fundamental human right, and that it contributes to all three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental), but also that it underpins governance and security. He then went on to cite the findings of some studies that show the power of education:

We know that people of voting age with primary education in some countries are more likely to support democracy than those who have received no education. This is to demonstrate the power that education has to contribute to the cause of peace...

Investments in quality education, especially for girls, generate immediate and intergenerational paybacks across all dimensions of sustainable development. For instance, when 10% more girls go to school a country's GDP increases by on average 3%; moreover every extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5-10%...

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<sup>11</sup> The SDSN education thematic report cited several sources of evidence of the education-health association directly.

Studies show that if all students in low income countries go to school and receive some basic reading skills, it is likely that 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty resulting in a global 12% cut of global poverty. (Sequeira, 2013)

Some of the above claims, cited by Jorge Sequeira are from the *Technical Support Team Issues Brief: Education and Culture* that was prepared for the 4<sup>th</sup> OWG meeting (see DESA-UNDP, 2013). So where did these claims originate? Taking several examples:

- The claim about those with primary education being more likely to support democracy can be traced back via the UNESCO-GMR (2009) to research into relationships between education and democratic attitudes in eighteen countries of sub-Saharan Africa by Evans and Rose (2007).
- The claim about an extra year of a mother’s schooling reducing the probability of infant mortality by 5-10% can be traced via the UNESCO-GMR (2011) to a 1986 study by Caldwell.
- The claim about 171 million people being lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, seems to be traced back to UNESCO’s Global Monitoring Report (GMR) team (e.g. UNESCO-GMR, 2010).

The UNESCO GMR team have clearly been interested in collecting, generating and disseminating evidence to support the case for greater attention to the EFA Goals. On a last, related issue, it is worth noting that in mid-September 2013, the UNESCO GMR came out with an evidence-packed booklet, *Education Transforms Lives* (UNESCO-GMR, 2013a),<sup>12</sup> just ahead of the UN General Assembly, claiming that ‘Our new evidence underlines education’s unique transformative power’ (UNESCO-GMR, 2013b). It came out too late of course to be of use to any of the key institutional proposals of 2013 reviewed above, but it might be expected that we shall see reference to this in key proposals of 2014, including from the OWG on SDGs.

We now turn below to the evidence used to justify the inclusion of specific education targets in the key institutional proposals noted here.

## 2.2. Early childhood education and development targets and evidence

The justification used by these institutional proposals for the inclusion of ECD in the post-2015 education agenda are related to claims about links between ECD and school readiness, future learning, inequality and several other areas (Fig. 2). Most of these claims appear to have been substantiated with reference to evidence.

**Fig. 2. Early childhood education and development target proposals**

Target suggestion <sup>13</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
No explicit target, but clear statement that: ‘Young people should be able to receive high-quality education and learning, from <b>early childhood development...</b> ’	UNSG (2013: 14)	None
‘All girls and boys have equal access to quality <b>early</b>	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, target a)	• ECD improves school

<sup>12</sup> See their website <http://www.education-transforms.org/en/>

<sup>13</sup> Bold added below.

<b>childhood development (ECD) programs'</b>		readiness.
'All children under the age of 5 reach their developmental potential through access to quality <b>early childhood development</b> programs and policies.'	SDSN (2013b: Goal 3, target a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECD improves later school success and completion.</li> <li>• Quality ECD can reduce inequalities.</li> <li>• ECD can help teach about environmental issues.</li> <li>• ECD can transform societies.</li> <li>• ECD can improve a country's potential for sustainable development.</li> </ul>
'Increase by x% the proportion of children able to access and complete <b>pre-primary education'</b>	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target a.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECD improves school readiness.</li> </ul>
No target on ECD	UN Global Compact (2013)	n/a
'The right to equitable access and completion of a full cycle of free <b>basic education (*)</b> of good quality with recognized and measurable learning outcomes based on national standards is ensured for all children and youth, girls and boys alike'.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 1) * includes one year pre-primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECD is the foundation of learning.</li> </ul>
'All girls and boys are able to access and complete quality <b>pre-primary education</b> of an agreed period (at least one year)'	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	None
No specific target.	UNICEF (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECD is the foundation for learning throughout life and labor market success.</li> </ul>

**ECD and school-readiness:** The association between ECD and children being school-ready was referred to by both the SDSN (2013a), HLP (2013) and UNESCO (2013: 6). The SDSN report noted that

evidence accumulated in recent years shows that programs for early childhood development (ECD) play an important role in supporting individual development from birth to ensure a healthy entry to school and preparation for later life. (SDSN, 2013a: 12)

The HLP report did not talk about the wider notion of ECD, but did refer to the role of pre-primary education in 'getting children ready to learn' (HLP, 2013: 36), citing a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010) study as evidence.

**ECD and later school success, completion, future learning and labour market success:** Just as a target on ECD was justified because of evidence of its impact on later learning, the SDSN report (2013b) noted that 'children's health, learning and behaviour during the early years are the foundation for later school success and completion' (SDSN, 2013b: 38). Similarly, UNICEF cited a World Bank study (Naudeau et al., 2011), which itself referred to a specific evidence base, that 'skills and capabilities developed in [early]<sup>14</sup> childhood form the basis for future learning... labor market success... [and] the basis for a productive adult workforce and for skilled, capable entrepreneurs' (UNICEF, 2013: 6).

<sup>14</sup> It was specifically early childhood that Naudeau et al. (2011) were referring to.

**ECD and reductions in inequality:** Both the SDSN (2013b: 7) and UNICEF (2013: 6) justified the inclusion of an ECD target on the basis of the association between ECD and inequality. As usual among these institutional reports, the SDSN education thematic report made the case most clearly:

...quality ECD services can reduce inequality. Across many studies, the positive impacts of ECD on child outcomes are strongest for the most disadvantaged; this suggests that ECD can be an effective approach to reducing social and educational inequality. (SDSN, 2013b: 7)

The evidence base upon which this assertion was made was noted above (section 2.1.).

**ECD and sustainable development:** Perhaps unsurprisingly, the only institutional proposal to link ECD directly to sustainable development was the SDSN (2013b). Here they simply stated that ‘there is a direct link between developmental potential in early childhood and a nation’s potential for sustainable development’ (SDSN, 2013b: 39), though no evidence was offered to back this up.

**ECD and poverty reduction:** Only the SDSN made the connection between ECD and poverty reduction (SDSN, 2013b: 25), again with no direct reference to any evidence base.

**ECD and private and social returns:** Both UNICEF (2013) and the SDSN (2013b) reports made specific reference to the high private and social returns to ECD, with UNICEF (2013: 6) citing Naudeau et al. (2011), and the SDSN (2013b : 6) citing the rate of return studies of Heckman et al. (2010).

### 2.3. Primary education targets and evidence

The evidence-base presented to justify a target on primary education was almost non-existent. Most referred simply to the evidence that there were still millions of children out of school and that this fact itself justified more attention to primary schooling (Fig. 3). However, there was no evidence presented on the benefits of primary schooling. This is surprising. Readers may recall the 2002 GMR (UNESCO-GMR, 2002) where the first chapter, *‘Education for All’ is Development*, was entirely on the claims and evidence about the benefits and impact of primary education.

**Fig. 3. Primary education target proposals**

Target suggestion <sup>15</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
No explicit target, but clear statement that: ‘Young people should be able to receive high-quality education and learning, <b>from early childhood development to post-primary schooling...</b> ’	UNSG (2013: 14)	Primary education is a human right.
‘All girls and boys receive quality <b>primary... education</b> that focuses on learning outcomes and on reducing the dropout rate to zero’	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, target b; 2013b)	No evidence cited. Just refers to there being some 60 million out of school children.
‘Ensure every child, regardless of	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target b.)	No evidence cited. Just refers to

<sup>15</sup> Bold added below.

circumstance, completes <b>primary education</b> able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards.’		there being some 60 million out of school children. Noted that the evidence shows that conflict affected countries furthest behind.
‘Every child completes <b>primary education</b> with basic literacy and numeracy, in schools with grade divisions, books, light, meals and sanitation’.	UN Global Compact (2013)	None
‘...a 50 per cent availability of digital facilities among <b>primary schools</b> without them’.	UN Global Compact (2013)	None
‘The right to equitable access and completion of a full cycle of free <b>basic education (*)</b> of good quality with recognized and measurable learning outcomes based on national standards is ensured for all children and youth, girls and boys alike’.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 1) * Includes primary education	None
No explicit target, but stated priority: ‘Equal access to and completion of a full course of quality <b>primary schooling</b> , with recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy’.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	No evidence cited. Just refers to there being some 60 million out of school children.

**Primary education and the UPE target:** The SDSN education thematic report (SDSN, 2013b), the HLP report (HLP, 2013) and the UNESCO-UNICEF (2013) report all referred to there being some 60 million children still out of primary school; and used this evidence of unmet universal primary education (UPE) to implicitly argue for a primary education target.

**Primary education as a human right:** The UNSG report was the only one to deviate from this justification, referring to the ‘right to primary education’ (UNSG, 2013: 5) as justification it should be included as a target. As noted above, the extent to which evidence played a role in education being regard as a human right is not clear.

#### 2.4. Secondary education targets and evidence

The evidence referred to by the key institutional proposals and reports related to secondary education was linked to the evidence of there being an unmet demand for secondary education, and the need for secondary education to better enable economic and political outcomes of individuals (Fig. 4).

**Fig.4. Secondary education target proposals**

<b>Target suggestion<sup>16</sup></b>	<b>Proponent</b>	<b>Evidence-base cited</b>
No explicit target, but clear statement that: ‘Young people should be able to receive high-quality education and learning,	UNSG (2013: 14)	None

<sup>16</sup> Bold added below.

from early childhood development to <b>post-primary schooling...</b>		
'All girls and boys receive quality... <b>secondary education</b> that focuses on learning outcomes and on reducing the dropout rate to zero'	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, target b; SDSN, 2013b)	Secondary education has higher income returns than primary education.
'Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to lower <b>secondary education</b> and increase the proportion of adolescents who achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes to x%'	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target c)	No evidence presented, but reference to there being millions of out of school adolescents.
No target on enrolment or access. Only: 'All <b>secondary schools</b> to facilitate computing skills'.	UN Global Compact (2013)	None.
'The right to equitable access and completion of a full cycle of free <b>basic education (*)</b> of good quality with recognized and measurable learning outcomes based on national standards is ensured for all children and youth, girls and boys alike'.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 1) * includes lower-secondary education	Evidence that UPE has led to a growing demand for secondary education.
'Equitable access to quality <b>upper secondary</b> as well as tertiary education is ensured'.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 2)	Evidence that UPE has led to a growing demand for secondary education.
No explicit target, but stated priority: 'All adolescent girls and boys are able to access and complete quality <b>lower secondary/secondary education</b> with recognized and measurable learning outcomes'.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	Secondary (and vocational and higher) education are linked to innovation and growth.

**Secondary education and unmet demand:** Commonly cited 'evidence' of the need to include a secondary education target, noted by the HLP (2013) report, UNESCO (2013) and the SDSN (2013b), was that there is still a large unmet demand for secondary education; both the SDSN and HLP referred to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics' evidence of there still being over 70 million adolescents not attending school.

**Secondary education and economic and political life:** The SDSN (2013a) report noted that young people need to complete up to secondary education (and for it to be of good quality) if they are to have '...effective participation in economic and political life' (p.12). Something similar was echoed in the Open Working Group's Interim report, though focussed on economic participation: 'to ensure productive employment in increasingly knowledge-based economies, greater emphasis is needed on secondary school... attainment' (OWG SDG, 2013b: 10). UNESCO-UNICEF (2013) also made reference to the Africa MDG Report (African Union Commission, 2012) which 'identifies investment in secondary, tertiary and vocational education as a priority, with a strong emphasis on building human capital, innovation and growth' (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013: 8).

**Secondary education and returns to education.** Only the education thematic report of the SDSN made reference to evidence that the private income returns to secondary education are higher than at the primary level, but without making any comment on whether the quality of the education should be taken into account:

Evidence suggests that the returns to schooling increase at the secondary level as compared to primary levels. At the secondary level, the return for every additional year of schooling can be 10 per cent... This means that the difference in incomes between a primary and secondary school graduate is 77 per cent. (SDSN, 2013b: 59)

## 2.5. Higher education targets and evidence

Evidence of the need to include a higher education target in the post-2015 education agenda revolved around three issues: the links between higher education and technology use and development; the links between higher education and employment in knowledge economies; and, the links to higher income returns (Fig. 5). While several of the key reports noted the importance of higher education in their respective report texts, UNESCO (2013) and UNESCO-UNICEF (2013) were the only two reports that included higher education in their illustrative education targets.

**Fig. 5. Higher education target proposals**

Target suggestion <sup>17</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
No direct mention.	UNSG (2013)	None.
No explicit mention in targets, but could fall under the 'skills... needed for work' HLP proposed target.	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target d)	Higher skills needed to make and take advantage of technological breakthroughs
No direct mention.	SDSN (2013b)	Higher education needed to develop technologies, do research
No direct mention.	UN Global Compact (2013)	None.
'Equitable access to quality upper secondary as well as <b>tertiary education</b> is ensured'.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 2)	Higher education's link to employment in the knowledge economy.
No explicit target, but stated priority: 'All youth and adults, particularly girls and women, have access to post-primary and <b>post-secondary</b> learning opportunities'.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	None.

**Higher education and technology:** Both the HLP (2013) and SDSN education thematic report (SDSN, 2013b) clearly signalled the important role of higher education in the post-2015 education agenda in the text of their reports. The HLP noted that:

Scientists and academics can make scientific and technological breakthroughs that will be essential to the post-2015 agenda... What matters is not just having technology, but understanding how to use it well and locally. This requires universities, technical colleges, public administration schools and well trained, skilled workers in all countries. (HLP, 2013: 11)

The HLP also noted the benefits to both businesses and individuals when research programmes can adapt technologies to local contexts and help to create a culture of entrepreneurship (HLP,

<sup>17</sup> Bold added below.

2013: 47). The text of the education thematic report of the SDSN made a similar point about the role of higher education and technology:

Preparing scientists who can undertake... research [into new technologies, renewable energy, ways of reducing greenhouse emissions etc] and push the frontiers of sustainable scientific inquiry will depend on investments in higher education. (SDSN, 2013b: 7)

However, both the HLP and SDSN fell short of including any specific target related to this in their illustrative goal and target frameworks.

**Higher education and employment in knowledge economies:** For two key institutional actors, the justification for addressing higher education as part of the post-2015 education agenda was the importance of higher education to employment in global knowledge economies. UNESCO (2013) mentioned that there was a global 'knowledge divide' (p.4) because of lack of 'opportunities to access higher levels of learning... resulting in... serious consequences on the chances of employment in today's technology-driven world' (p.4). In a similar vein, the Open Working Group's *Interim Report* argued that 'to ensure productive employment in increasingly knowledge-based economies, greater emphasis is needed on... tertiary attainment' (OWG SDG, 2013b: 10).

**Higher education and income returns:** Only the education thematic report of the SDSN made reference to the quantitative evidence that shows that returns to education are now highest at higher levels of education:

Evidence suggests that the returns to schooling increase' [at higher levels of education]. At the tertiary level, the return for every additional year of schooling can be... as high as 18 per cent... This means that the difference in incomes between... a primary and college graduate can be up to 240 per cent'. (SDSN, 2013b: 59)

## **2.6. Lifelong learning targets and evidence: skills for work and adult education and training**

There are three sub-sets of targets addressed here: targets related to skills for work, targets related to skills for life, and targets related to other types of adult education and training (including adult literacy).

### **2.6.1. Skills for work targets and evidence**

All of the key institutional proposals related to education post-2015 have included some kind of skills to work target or else identified this as a priority concern to be addressed (Fig. 6). In terms of evidence, however, the majority of proposals cite high unemployment rates and the need to develop and invest in improved vocational skills systems as a means to help combat unemployment. There is no evidence presented, however, of the extent to which vocational skills can help to reduce unemployment. Indeed, it has been argued elsewhere that there is no semi-automatic connection between vocational skills and reductions in unemployment rates (King and Palmer, 2010).

**Fig. 6. Skills for work target proposals**

Target suggestion <sup>18</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
No explicit target, but clear statement that: 'Young people should be able to receive high-quality education and learning... including not only formal schooling but also life skills and <b>vocational education and training</b> '.	UNSG (2013: 14)	None.
'All youth and adults have access to continuous lifelong learning to acquire functional literacy, numeracy, and <b>skills to earn a living through decent employment or self-employment</b> '.	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, narrative)	A focus on skills for work is needed because of the changing skill requirements in labour markets. Also the evidence of high dropout rates in lower secondary suggest a need for schools to be more closely linked to work.
'Increase the number of young and adult women and men with the <b>skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work...</b> '	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target d)	Evidence of growing youth unemployment rates.
'Decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or <b>training...</b> '	HLP (2013: Goal 8, target b)	
'Increase new start-ups by x and value added from new products by y through creating an enabling business environment and <b>boosting entrepreneurship</b> '.	HLP (2013: Goal 8, target d)	
'Increase the percentage of young adults with the <b>skills needed for work</b> '.	UN Global Compact (2013)	None.
No explicit target, but stated priority: 'All youth and adults, particularly girls and women, have access to post-primary and post-secondary learning opportunities to develop knowledge and <b>skills, including technical and vocational, that are relevant to work and life</b> '.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	None.
'All young people and adults have equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities to develop skills and competencies for life and <b>work</b> and towards fostering of personal and professional development'.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 5)	Evidence of growing youth unemployment rates.

**Skills for work and unemployment:** The most common justification for there needing to be a post-2015 target on skills for work was that better work skills are needed as one part of countries' approach to tackle rising (youth) unemployment rates. The SDSN report cited the

<sup>18</sup> Bold added below.

success of the German and Swiss models of vocational training and apprenticeships as evidence that it would be worthwhile having comparable institutions in other countries as a means to tackle unemployment:

As demonstrated by a small number of countries, most notably Germany and Switzerland, targeted institutions of vocational training and apprenticeships can train a large number of skilled workers, support the school-to-work transition, and help keep youth unemployment low. Equivalent institutions are missing in most countries. (SDSN, 2013a: 13)

Meanwhile, the SDSN report does not note that many education and TVET experts have highlighted evidence of the difficulty of transferring the Swiss or German models to other countries (Gonon, 2014). The education thematic report of the SDSN further noted that large numbers, they cited 40%, of lower-secondary students drop out by the last grade and end up working in the informal economy; and hence there is justification for providing them ‘skills that allow them to earn a decent livelihood or be self-employed’ (SDSN, 2013b: 28). The HLP report also argued that work skills should be ‘learned in school’ (HLP, 2013: 37). Lastly, UNESCO (2013) specifically cited the ‘growing youth unemployment in many countries’ (p.3) as a justification given by many countries for a more focus on vocational skills for work.

**Skills for work and changing labour market demand:** In addition to the concerns related to unemployment rates, skills for work targets were justified further by the SDSN on the grounds that changing labour market demand requires there to be an on-going focus on skills for work so that workers don’t ‘find themselves without marketable skills and as a result face unemployment or wages at or near poverty levels’ (SDSN, 2013a: 13).

The importance of skills for work for the post-2015 agenda was also picked up by the report of the post-2015 growth and employment consultation (UNDG, 2013).

#### 2.6.2. Skills for life targets and evidence

While the experience of Dakar EFA Goal 3 (King, 2011; Palmer, 2013b) would suggest that ‘life skills’ as a concept is far too vague to be of any use as a target, it appears that it is resurfacing in some areas of the post-2015 education debate. UNESCO (2013) included it in the wording of its objectives, and UNESCO-UNICEF (2013) included it among its priorities. It even got specific mention in the four lines on education post-2015 in the September 2013 UN Secretary General’s report (Fig. 7). However, none of these three drew on any evidence to support its inclusion.

**Fig. 7. Skills for life target proposals**

<b>Target suggestion<sup>19</sup></b>	<b>Proponent</b>	<b>Evidence-base cited</b>
No explicit target, but ‘life skills’ specifically mentioned.	UNSG (2013: 14)	None
‘All young people and adults have equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities to develop skills and competencies for <b>life</b> and work and towards fostering of personal and professional development’.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 5)	None

<sup>19</sup> Bold added below.

No explicit target, but stated priority: 'All youth and adults, particularly girls and women, have access to post-primary and post-secondary learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, including technical and vocational, <b>that are relevant to work and life.</b> '	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	None
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### 2.6.3. Other adult education and training targets and evidence

While lifelong learning was specifically mentioned in the illustrative education goals or targets, or else in the key texts of several of the institutions examined here (Fig. 8), with the exception of one comment from the Open Working Group's report, only the SDSN actually cited any justification for its inclusion.

**Fig. 8. Other adult education and training targets**

Target suggestion <sup>20</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
'Provide quality education and <b>lifelong learning.</b> '	UNSG (2013: priority area)	None.
'All youth and <b>adults</b> have access to continuous <b>lifelong learning</b> to acquire functional literacy...'	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, narrative)	Adult learning empowers individuals and positive multiplier effects. Changing demands of the labour market and sustainable development necessitate lifelong learning.
'Provide Quality Education and <b>Lifelong Learning</b> '	HLP (2013: stand-alone education goal)	None.
Explicit mention in targets that adults should also be trained in the 'skills... needed for work'	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target d)	
'Ensure equitable quality education and <b>lifelong learning</b> for all by 2030.'	UNESCO (2013)	None.
'Functional levels of literacy, numeracy and other basic competencies are acquired by all young people and <b>adults</b> as foundational skills for further learning and the realization of their human potential'.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 4)	None.
'Equitable, quality education and <b>lifelong learning</b> for all.'	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	
No explicit target, but stated priority: 'All youth and <b>adults</b> , particularly girls and women, have access to post-primary and post-secondary learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills... that are... necessary for further learning'.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	None.

<sup>20</sup> Bold added below.

**Adult literacy empowers individuals and improves their children’s learning outcomes:**

The SDSN reports (SDSN, 2013a, 2013b) noted the importance of adult learning, including adult literacy, to individual empowerment and its links to improvements in the learning outcomes of children of literate and educated parents (SDSN, 2013a: 13; 2013b: 25, 27).

**Lifelong learning and the changing demands of the labour market and sustainable development:**

The Interim Report of the Open Working Group (OWG SDG, 2013b) noted that lifelong learning should be a key post-2015 component so that individuals are better able to adjust to changing labour market environments (p.10). The education thematic report of the SDSN added that ‘the challenges of sustainable development... [also] requires a society... [to] regularly upgrade[] and reinvest[] in its own people at all ages to build new competencies’ (SDSN, 2013b: 15-16).

**Today’s low rates of secondary and tertiary enrolment will require a greater focus on lifelong learning opportunities in future:**

The education thematic report of the SDSN argued that the data indicating low enrolment rates at the secondary and tertiary levels at the global level implied that lifelong learning opportunities will be critical if those that missed out on formal schooling to this level are able to effectively participate socially and economically (SDSN, 2013b: 25).

## 2.7. Equality targets and evidence

Ensuring that the post-2015 education agenda contains a strong equality element has been a common theme in the global consultation (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013) and is reflected in the majority of key institutional proposals examined here.

**Fig. 9. Equality targets**

Target suggestion <sup>21</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
‘All girls and boys have <b>equal</b> access to quality... ECD programs’	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, target a)	To reach universal enrolment, and to achieve the full benefits of education and learning, an equity focus is needed.
‘Ensure <b>every child, regardless of circumstance</b> ’ (reference to primary and lower-secondary levels only)	HLP (2013: Goal 3, targets a and b)	Focuses on evidence for gender equality – e.g. benefits of education to girls and women.
‘Achieve <b>parity</b> in enrolment and educational opportunities at primary, secondary and tertiary levels for girls and women’.	UN Global Compact (2013)	None.
‘... <b>equitable access</b> and completion of a full cycle of free basic education... [and] <b>equitable access</b> to quality upper secondary as well as tertiary education’.	UNESCO (2013: Objectives 1 and 2)	Equitable access to education is a human right.
No explicit target, but stated	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	Focuses on evidence for gender

<sup>21</sup> Bold added below.

priority: <b>'Equal</b> access to and completion of a full course of quality primary schooling, with recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy'.		equality – e.g. benefits of education to girls and women.
No explicit target, but stated priority: <b>'All adolescent girls and boys</b> are able to access and complete quality lower secondary/secondary education with recognized and measurable learning outcomes'.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	
No explicit target, but stated priority: <b>'All youth and adults, particularly girls and women,</b> have access to post-primary and post-secondary learning opportunities'.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	

**Gender equality in education as an important focus:** Much of the focus on equality in education is on gender equality. The HLP report for example cites evidence from *The Lancet* (Gakidou et al., 2010) of the health benefits to children of more educated mothers – as a justification for ensuring more girls and women get schooling (HLP, 2013: 34). The education thematic report of the SDSN (2013b) notes that ‘evidence shows that despite recent progress [in getting more girls into school] , gender matters immensely’ (p.20), and then goes on to remind the reader about some of the specific factors affecting girls and women participation in school, including domestic responsibilities and issues once girls reach puberty (ibid.). The Open Working Group on SDGs’ Interim Report also noted that ‘gender equality in education is an important objective in its own right, with multiple social, economic and environmental benefits’ (OWG SDG, 2013b: 10); though did not reference any evidence to back this up.

**To reach universal enrolment and to obtain the full benefits of education, a focus on equity is needed:** The SDSN reports (SDSN, 2013a, 2013b) made the point that experiential evidence from MDG implementation shows that ‘to reach universal enrolment, countries... need to focus on equity’ (SDSN, 2013a: 12). ‘To reap the full benefits of education’ they noted, ‘societies need to extend education to all boys and girls’, regardless of circumstance (ibid.). They highlighted not just the equity issue within countries (children living in rural areas, those from ‘poor and socially discriminated backgrounds’ (SDSN, 2013b: 21) and those with disabilities), but noted the inter-country equity dimension; drawing attention to the need for more focus on children in post-conflict and fragile states, and citing evidence of significantly lower enrolment rates in these countries (p.20).

**Inequality in education is important to address from a learning perspective:** The SDSN education thematic report further noted the learning benefits that accrue if inequalities are addressed (SDSN, 2013b: 19), though without citing specific evidence.

**Equitable access to education is a human right:** UNESCO (2013) was the only institutional proposal to draw on human rights conventions as “evidence” that there needs to be a focus on equitable access to education in the post-2015 agenda; they noted the 1960 UNESCO Convention against discrimination in education.

Looking at the proposed targets and priority areas related to equality, it is interesting to note the range of educational levels that are said to be the focus area, as well as the fact that some proposals specifically talk about equitable access only, while others also talk of equitable learning opportunities.

## 2.8. Learning targets and evidence

The argument that there needs to be a learning focus to education post-2015 has been one of the loudest and most common refrains in the education post-2015 literature (cf. King and Palmer, 2013; 2012). Unsurprisingly, all of the main formal institutional proposals make reference to the need to include in a future education agenda. The two main pieces of evidence that are referred to justify the inclusion of learning are firstly the evidence of there being large numbers of children and adolescents with low levels of learning, and secondly a recognition that the benefits of education come from what is learned, not from how many years an individual spends in school. The Brookings-facilitated Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) has been at the forefront of efforts to argue for the inclusion of learning in the post-2015 education agenda; and their efforts have certainly been referred to in some of the key institutional proposals noted here.

**Fig. 10. Learning targets**

Target suggestion <sup>22</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
'Young people should be able to receive high-quality education and <b>learning...</b> '	UNSG (2013: 14)	None.
'All girls and boys receive quality primary and secondary education <b>that focuses on learning outcomes</b> and on reducing the dropout rate to zero'.	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, target b) and SDSN (2013b)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics. Evidence that the benefits of education come from what is learned, not from years spent in school.
'Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, completes primary education <b>able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards</b> '.	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target b)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics. Evidence that the benefits of education come from what is learned, not from years spent in school.
'Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to lower secondary education and <b>increase the proportion of adolescents who achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes to x%</b> '	HLP (2013: Goal 3, target c)	
Only at primary level: 'Every child completes primary education <b>with basic literacy and numeracy...</b> '	UN Global Compact (2013)	None.
'The right to equitable access and completion of a full cycle of free basic education of good quality	UNESCO (2013: Objective 1)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics.

<sup>22</sup> Bold added below.

<b>with recognized and measurable learning outcomes based on national standards</b> is ensured for all children and youth, girls and boys alike’.		
‘Quality and relevant teaching and learning in terms of teaching and learning processes, content, learning environments and <b>recognized and measurable learning outcomes</b> are ensured for all children, youth and adults’.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 3)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics.
<b>‘Functional levels of literacy, numeracy and other basic competencies are acquired</b> by all young people and adults as foundational skills for further learning and the realization of their human potential’.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 4)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics.
No explicit target, but stated priority: ‘Equal access to and completion of a full course of quality primary schooling, <b>with recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy</b> ’.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics.
No explicit target, but stated priority: ‘All adolescent girls and boys are able to access and complete quality lower secondary/secondary education <b>with recognized and measurable learning outcomes</b> ’.	UNESCO-UNICEF (2013)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics.

**Evidence that millions are not learning the basics:** The majority of institutional proposals for a target that includes learning (or that highlighted learning as a post-2015 education priority) noted that millions of children leave school without basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills (mentioned by HLP, 2013: 36; SDSN, 2013b: 26; UNESCO, 2013: 3; UNESCO-UNICEF, 2013). The evidence base cited by the above included data from the UNESCO *Global Monitoring Report 2012* (UNESCO-GMR, 2012), the Brookings *Africa Learning Barometer*<sup>23</sup> and the Brookings-facilitated Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF, 2013a). UNICEF (2013) was the only one of the institutional proposals to spell out directly that that there is evidence of poor learning outcomes among groups ‘in virtually all countries - least developed, middle income and developed nations alike (UNICEF, 2013: 5-6).

**The benefits of education come from what is learned:** Only the HLP report (HLP, 2013) and SDSN education thematic report (SDSN, 2013b) made specific reference to evidence that the years in school do not necessarily equate to learning, and that learning is what is important for all the beneficial outcomes to education, not years of schooling per se. For example, the HLP report noted that to realize the social, environment and economic benefits of education, ‘children and adolescents must have access to education and learn from it’ (HLP, 2013: 36); the

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/01/16-africa-learning-watkins>

HLP report then makes reference to Brookings (2013).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the SDSN education thematic report notes that ‘a series of studies over the past several years have shown that there is at best a tenuous link between classroom presence and learning [and that this]... has already provoked a shift in global emphasis to learning outcomes’ (SDSN, 2013b: 61). They then cite a specific evidence base, including Hanushek and Woessman (2008) and Brookings (2013), among others.

The proposed inclusion of learning in the post-2015 agenda is in line with most, or perhaps all, of the post-2015 positions and think pieces from bilaterals and civil society (see section 3, this paper). As Burnett and Felsmand (2012) noted: ‘That there is a learning crisis in the developing countries is beyond dispute’ (p.8); the same might be said about there being a global learning crisis.

## 2.9. Quality targets and evidence

Specific mention of quality was made by most of the key institutional proposals examined here. The evidence base to justify its inclusion in the post-2015 agenda seemingly focussed on the experience of the MDG and EFA implementation – that a focus on access was not enough. However, since quality and learning are so interlinked (though not identical), much of the evidence the same institutions drew on to justify a learning focus (above) would also apply here.

**Fig. 11. Quality targets**

Target suggestion <sup>25</sup>	Proponent	Evidence-base cited
‘Young people should be able to receive <b>high-quality</b> education and learning...’	UNSG (2013: 14)	None.
‘All girls and boys have equal access to <b>quality</b> ... ECD programs’	SDSN (2013a: Goal 3, target a)	Experiential evidence from MDGs that an access focus is insufficient.
No direct mention in targets, but in headline goal suggestion: ‘Provide <b>Quality</b> Education and Lifelong Learning’	HLP (2013)	Trained and motivated teachers are key to ensuring quality education.
Only at primary level: ‘Every child completes primary education... in <b>schools with grade divisions, books, light, meals and sanitation.</b> ’	UN Global Compact (2013)	None.
‘ <b>Quality and relevant teaching and learning</b> in terms of teaching and learning processes, content, learning environments and recognized and measurable learning outcomes are ensured for all children, youth and adults’.	UNESCO (2013: Objective 3)	Evidence of there being millions of children not learning the basics, and evidence of there being poor outcomes of education at all levels.

**Evidence that an access focus is insufficient:** Several of the main institutional target (and goal) proposals specifically mentioned ‘quality’ within them (Fig.11). To justify this, they largely

<sup>24</sup> The evidence base in Brookings (2013) on the importance of learning refers to Hanushek and Woessman (2008).

<sup>25</sup> Bold added below.

drew on experiential evidence from MDG and EFA implementation that has shown that a focus on access is insufficient; as the SDSN report noted ‘the quality and relevance of education are becoming more important’ (SDSN, 2013a: 12). Though it does not yet have goal or target proposals, this experiential learning was echoed by the OWG Co-Chairs’ Summary of the June 2013 meeting: ‘Access is not enough – quality must also be addressed’ (OWG SDG, 2013a: 1). The education thematic report of the SDSN was the only one to make the direct connection between the experiential learning from MDG and EFA implementation with regard to a focus on access at primary level. It noted that in relation to universalizing secondary schooling ‘quality improvement has to take place simultaneously for access to be truly meaningful’ (SDSN, 2013b: 60).

**The links between teacher quality and quality education:** The word ‘teachers’ did not appear in the wording of any of the institutional target proposals examined here, though teachers are certainly mentioned in the reports. Indeed, two of the key reports noted their centrality for improving the quality of education. The education thematic report of the SDSN noted, for example, that:

Successful education systems revolve around the teacher as critical for learning. Countries that are unable to deploy a cadre of highly skilled, motivated teachers struggle to achieve high quality. (SDSN, 2013b: 30)

In a similar vein, the HLP report noted that ‘the quality of education in all countries depends on having a sufficient number of motived [sic] teachers, well trained and possessing strong subject-area knowledge’ (HLP, 2013: 37).

## **2.10. Will the goal setters be convinced?**

We have seen that the main institutional proposals made by UN entities and agencies have made it clear that they recommend the inclusion of a stand-alone education goal as part of the overall post-2015 framework. There have been quite a lot of propositions of ‘fact’ made about the power of education, and these have to varying degrees been substantiated with reference to an evidence base. It will be interesting to see the extent to which the current on-going UN-member state process – the Open Working Group (OWG) – adopts education as a stand-alone proposition, and what education and skills targets it might propose. It will be even more interesting to see what parts of the evidence base the OWG picks up on.

Of course the OWG do not have the final word. They are due to submit their recommendations to the UN Secretary General by September 2014. There will then be another round of intergovernmental discussions until any text, goal or target wording is agreed.

### **3. Bilateral and Civil Society Visions on Education Post-2015**

Having looked at the key institutional proposals in the different streams associated with the UN, we shall look briefly at two other sources which have been concerned with post-2015 development process – the bilateral agencies, and civil society. We shall also seek to give a flavour of the extent to which proposals emerging from the Global South on post-2015 have been supported by particular concerns with research evidence.

#### **3.1. Research approaches by bilateral agencies, think-tanks and civil society**

It may be worth mentioning at the outset that our interest in the evidence base for proposals comes at an appropriate time for a number of agencies. A wave of concern with value for money, results, and impact has been sweeping through many DAC development agencies (See NORRAG, 2012); so there is now a lively interest in being sure that lessons have been learned from the past decade and more since the EFA goals were set in 2000 and the MDGs in 2001.

Arguably, the very widespread conviction that access to education is insufficient but that learning is critical is itself derived from research. The iconic figure of 250 million young people who either fail to reach grade 4 or fail to attain minimal learning despite being in school, is drawn from research (UNESCO, 2012: 122ff). What Brookings' Centre for Universal Education termed 'an emerging body of evidence on the scope and scale of the learning crisis' (Brookings, 2011:10-11) was documented by 'civil society organizations, cross-national research studies, and ministries of education'.

The fact that several bilateral aid agencies such as DFID and USAID, as well as the World Bank, put the term 'Learning' into the title of one of their recent education strategy papers, underlines the fact that from at least 2010, analysis of learning outcomes at the country level had moved this element onto agency agendas.<sup>26</sup> Some of these findings drew on Early Grade Reading Assessments, used widely by USAID, in no less than 20 programme countries.

But these concerns about learning outcomes were also evident from the surveys carried out by SACMEQ and PASEC in Sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>27</sup> as well as by Uwezo, a Southern NGO, in Eastern Africa. And as early as 2006, the proposal that there should be a 'Millennium learning goal' had surfaced in the Centre for Global Development in Washington (Filmer et al. 2006), as a result of research reported from India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Peru, Ghana and South Africa. The research was not concerned with the poorest developing countries, but claimed, by contrast, that the average scores in a number of relatively better off poor countries were equivalent to the lowest 2-7% of those in countries such as USA, Denmark and France.

As far as this research on learning outcomes is concerned, it was essentially reviewing reading with comprehension, and maths in certain grades in primary schools, and participation in the tests made by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) at age 15, as well as the SACMEQ and PASEC evaluations. The majority of the assessments of learning have been of this type; far less common have been qualitative assessments of students learning in primary or secondary school classrooms. The latter have tended to be doctoral studies such as those by Wedgwood (now Naylor) in Tanzania (2007) or Caddell in Nepal (2002).

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<sup>26</sup> See DFID's *Learning For All* (DFID, 2010) and *Education Position Paper: Improving Learning, Expanding Opportunities* (DFID, 2013); USAID's *Opportunity Through Learning* (USAID, 2011); and the World Bank's *Learning For All* (World Bank, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (1995) and Connfenmen Programme on the Analysis of Education Systems (1990s).

The appearance of the term 'quality' in most of post-2015 education and skills proposals is the direct result of the widespread use of quantitative analysis of learning outcomes. For some analysts, this 'quantification of performance' ends up being a rather narrow view of educational quality (Languille, 2013). For organizations such as Education International with their wider concerns for teaching and learning, and the development of cognitive capabilities, including critical thinking, this approach may well encourage teaching to the test (Education International, 2013: 4).

A good deal of the research which will be illustrated in more detail below comes out of the traditions of economics of education, and ends up sounding like terse generalizations about 'what works' or 'what makes a difference' (McGrath, 2012).

### **3.2. Bilateral agencies and research evidence around 2015**

DFID's 2013 *Education Position Paper* is a near to ideal example of an education policy paper which is research- and evidence-based. In just 33 pages, the term 'Research' appears 46 times and 'evidence' 43; 'impact' 23 times and 'value for money' 15. It even has a whole section called '2015 and Beyond'. Paradoxically, however, the term 'post-2015' does not occur at all. Yet by the end of 2013, it will have carried out what it calls a series of 6 'rigorous literature reviews'.<sup>28</sup>

Even though DFID does not use the specific language of goals, targets and post-2015 in its key section on '2015 and abroad' it does claim to be 'working with new partners ...in early childhood, upper secondary, skills and higher education'; importantly, 'The aim is to build evidence about what works and the types of investments that deliver the best results for poor children' (DFID, 2013: 17).

But the aim is not just to build evidence; DFID's investments that 'contribute to ECD [early childhood development] in health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene' are quite explicitly derived through 'Data from multiple countries' (ibid.).

DFID's new interest in supporting skills development is also said to derive from research that 'suggests that skills systems in low income countries are not demand led and do not meet labour market demands' (ibid). This research-led strategy is resulting in partnerships between the government and the private sector in skills development for poor people; and to 'innovative models and approaches to non-state skills' provision for the poor' (ibid.). This example, of course, raises the more general question, to which we shall return, about whether it is research that is driving policy, or policy selecting research that confirms policy.

When it comes to DFID's support to higher education, that too is research-led, but now as compared to some years back when research was said to confirm the investment priority of primary education it is now said that 'Evidence suggests that higher education interventions offering the greatest developmental return are those that build capacity at individual, departmental and institutional levels' (ibid. 18).

Looking to the future, it will be interesting to see how DFID's recognition that a focus on primary education and lower secondary is not always enough, and that there should now be support to early childhood, upper secondary, skills and higher education translates into support for the specific goals and targets which we have seen the UN- led processes are emphasizing.

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<sup>28</sup> Readers may also wish to refer to the refer to the collection of 'evidence' by the UK Government for the House of Commons Enquiry of Post-2015 (House of Commons, 2012).

The Netherlands is another country where there has been serious research and evaluation of the case for supporting the education programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This careful review, including case studies, was carried out by the office of evaluation (IOB) and it presented very convincing evidence that ‘Dutch support for basic education had been, in general, highly relevant, well-aligned with other donors and particularly supportive of the priorities of its partner countries’ (Mercer, 2013: 5). Somewhat surprisingly, shortly before this very positive report on *Education Matters* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011) was presented to the ministry, the new government had decided that education should not be considered one of its four ‘spearheads’. These were determined by considerations about economic growth as well as of their potential mutual benefit to Southern partners and to The Netherlands. The country thus changed dramatically from being one of the four largest donor contributors to basic education to no longer prioritizing education in its development portfolio. It can be seen that the careful evaluation research played apparently no role in this political decision. It can be anticipated that this decision about development priorities is bound to impact on The Netherlands’ support for any proposed post-2015 education development goals.

USAID too, like DFID, has taken a very strong position on the importance of research; its latest *Education Strategy* (2011) claims to be ‘grounded in the most current evidence-based analysis of educational effectiveness’ (ibid. 1). Like DFID also, the *Strategy* does not contain any explicit commitment to post-2015 goals; indeed the term ‘post-2015’ does not even appear. But from the extremely robust emphasis on ‘years of research and experience’ there have been a series of important lessons learned. Here is a flavour of them:

**‘Education raises individual incomes... every additional year of schooling has been estimated to increase income per workers by 8.3 per cent on average’** (USAID, 2011: 2).

Having made this very strong generalization about the relationship between years of schooling and income, the *Strategy* then, in effect, qualifies it by a second claim:

**‘In an enabling environment, education can contribute significantly to economic growth’** (ibid). The addition of this crucial phrase, ‘in an enabling environment’ underlines the point that education does not automatically have these powerful impacts on income or on growth.<sup>29</sup>

A similar qualification about years of education making a difference is evident in a third strong claim:

**‘Access to education is a crucial precondition, but what matters most thereafter is the quality of education’** (ibid). USAID admits that research shows that if students acquire few skills because of low quality education, then there is no automatic translation of school enrolments into gains in economic growth.

The strategy goes on to underline a number of other well-known claims about the relationship of education to health outcomes, especially for girls, and to the relationship of education with catalysing transitions to democracy. But it does not in all cases underline the crucial qualification about it being the quality of education that is crucial to its impact.

Although USAID does not present its position on post-2015 goals, it does see its current *Strategy* as supporting the achievement of the MDGs by 2015. But its own Goal 1, **Improved reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades by 2015** is really a critical commentary on the access-only dimension of MDG2 on universal primary education by 2015. Its own Goal 1

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<sup>29</sup> Readers will recollect one of the most quoted pieces of World Bank research: ‘Four years of education makes a difference to farmer productivity’. In fact, the research did not claim this to be true except in an enabling environment (King and Palmer, 2006).

derives from research studies which show that for many students in low-income countries ‘very little learning is occurring in the classroom’ (ibid. 9). This research has led to USAID’s decision to focus on early grade reading as it offers the most strategic impact within its resources.

It will be interesting to see how the three USAID goals of its strategy (reading skills; tertiary and workforce development skills; educational access in conflict environments) affect USAID’s approach to the different post-2015 proposals.

DFID, USAID, and the Netherlands are not alone in having no education strategies explicitly around the post-2015 goals, including education. Canadian CIDA (now part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Germany’s Development Ministry (BMZ) seem similarly not to have adopted clear positions. In their cases, this may seem surprising as the two agencies had supported the important thematic consultation around education post-2015 in Dakar in March 2013.

This does not mean that there have not been expressions of commitment to education being ‘central to the global development agenda’ in ‘future basic education programming’ in the case of Canada, and in particular to equity, quality, learning, and school to work transition (Fantino, 2012).<sup>30</sup> Even, it is clear that these claims are based on evidence.

But this is not so different with BMZ which launched its first ever *Education Strategy* back in 2010: *Ten Objectives for More Education*. This, too, does not explicitly comment on future goals for the world’s development agenda, but like DFID and USAID sees its own programming as based on a set of common understandings or assumptions about the important leverage of educational investments. There is therefore a series of powerful claims about the role of education in development, including on poverty reduction, economic growth, democracy, and conflict prevention (BMZ, 2012: 5). These claims underlie BMZ’s education programming, explicitly organized around 10 priority themes. This a wide agenda, based on much that may be seen as Germany’s comparative advantage, e.g. ‘tried and tested instruments of vocational training’, but covering a great deal more (ibid. 11).

What seems plain from these few examples of bilateral education programming is that these are perceived to reflect national priorities, traditions, and comparative advantage. By contrast, support to the current MDGs, EFA goals or, by implication, any future development agendas is seen to be different, part of ‘shaping multilateral processes through dialogue and consultations with like-minded partners’ (ibid. 10).

Similarly, Denmark’s new development policy very forcefully focuses on human rights as ‘a means and an end in our development cooperation’ (DANIDA, 2012: 2). Here, again, it might be argued that its engagement with post-2015, like Germany’s, would be similar to Denmark’s involvement with other multilateral forums, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) – a chance to put issues of human rights higher on the agenda in such settings.

By contrast, one of the few countries to have published a comprehensive statement on post-2015 is Switzerland. This has been issued by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs through an interdepartmental taskforce on post-2015. It effectively connects Switzerland’s *Dispatch on International Cooperation 2013-2016* with this *Swiss Position on a Framework for Sustainable Development Post-2015* (FDFA, 2013: 10). Apart from ‘sustainable development’ and ‘rights’ which occur throughout the document on the *Swiss Position*, Education, along with Health, qualifies as one of a series of key issues and topics under the banner: ‘**Realization of the Right for All to Quality and Relevant Education and Learning**’ (ibid).

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<sup>30</sup> Fantino was Minister of International Development till July 2013.

In terms of our interest in this paper in the evidence or knowledge base of whatever goals are being proposed in education, Switzerland does not follow DFID and USAID in asserting a robust evidence base for supporting the case for education; rather it argues for education from a rights perspective. Not only is education ‘a fundamental human right’, but it is also an ‘empowerment right’ for the poor or marginalized. Finally it is an ‘enabling right’, critical to securing other human rights (ibid).

Switzerland’s proposal of a future stand-alone goal on education is not about reproducing the narrow focus of the MDGs. Instead, it covers the four Delors’ pillars of learning to know, do, live together and be. It should be seen as a public good, and hence at basic level, be free and compulsory. Importantly, it goes beyond primary school and beyond narrow measures of reading and writing, to cover all the actors in the educational constituency, and be seen as a life-long process with a diversity of provision, covering both education and skills.

France is only the second country<sup>31</sup> to have developed a full formal position on the development agenda beyond 2015. The *French Position* on development post-2015 was developed along with over 60 French NGOS (France, 2013)<sup>32</sup> but it learnt from the experience of the MDGs to propose a ‘more comprehensive view of development’ that went beyond the focus on basic but minimal social needs for developing countries. The emphasis should be rather on the whole range of freedoms discussed by Amartya Sen: ‘political and civil freedoms, social, cultural and economic potential, transparent governance and economic life, and protective freedoms’ (ibid. 8). It would thus be rights-based, but truly universalist, applying to all countries, yet differentiated.

In terms of selecting future goals, the *French Position* emphasises seven criteria: universality; relevance over a 20 year period; suitability to combat inequality and the needs of the poorest; leverage for transition to sustainable development; multidimensionality; measurability; and communicative clarity (ibid. 10).

‘Quality lifelong education for all’ is selected as one of ten goals by the paper (ibid. 13). It is seen as a right in itself but also as a lever to achieve the other development goals. As far as education itself is concerned, it should reflect the right of universal access, but also equity, quality and diversity. The implication of this is a vision that recognises educational pathways from young children up to higher education, but also the expressions of education that are both ‘formal and informal, academic and vocational’. The result is a vision of education that has to balance the economic dimension of human capital, education’s role in sustainable development, and its role in the delivery of social, cultural and humanist goals.

Like the recommendations of the High Level Panel, the *French Position* argues the case for ‘decent work for all’, and in that connection there are a whole series of emphases on the importance of training for work, in the spirit of the 2013 European Youth Guarantee, with its pledge on either the offer of a job, training, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship’ (ibid. 16).

While there is not an explicit concern with the evidence base in making the case for education and training, it is clear that there has been a very careful analysis of what has been learnt from the education-related MDGs and the EFA goals.

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<sup>31</sup> Other countries, such as Norway, Sweden and Germany, are actively concerned with the challenge of developing such a position.

<sup>32</sup> France has also developed, like a number of the other bilaterals, a specific education and training policy for its development work: AFD (Agence Francaise de Developpement (2013) *Cadre d’intervention sectoriel, 2013-2016. Education – Formation – Emploi. La Jeunesse au Coeur du Developpement*. AFD, Paris.

### 3.3. Civil society's advocacy for post-2015 education goals

We have noted that a selection of bilateral donors have taken rather different positions on future education goals, with several of them providing strong evidence but for their own national programmes of education support (rather than on post-2015), others taking a rights-based rather than a research-based approach. But only Switzerland and France, among those reviewed, have elaborated a full formal position on post-2015, including on education.

By contrast, it might be expected that civil society organizations would approach post-2015 goals with more of an advocacy lens rather than through detailed research evidence, but we shall see below that this is not the case. Several of the civil society organizations and think tanks pay a great deal of attention to the research evidence underpinning their proposed goals.

#### **Basic Education Coalition (BEC) USA**

BEC is a grouping of some 18 global development organizations that takes evidence very seriously. In their ambitious position paper *Every Child Learning, Every Student a Graduate: A Bold Vision for Lifelong Learning Beyond 2015* they first lay out what they call a 'Recommendation for a Post-MDG goal' which stresses the completion of primary and lower secondary by all children and youth by 2030 (BEC, 2013: 1). But they then also make a recommendation for four 'Post-EFA goals'.

These cover much more than the bald post-MDG goal appears to do.<sup>33</sup> They target 50% reductions in those not attending early childhood care and education programmes; and similarly a 50% reduction in adult literacy. They also look to have all countries with strong education systems in place which support learning (ibid. 2).

What is the evidence base for their proposals for these two kinds of goal? They view their proposals as 'an indispensable solution' to improving human security and well-being. This is based on three areas where education has a profound influence: economic growth, security, and social equality.

On economic growth, they could not argue more forcefully for the evidence: 'We know with certainty that the quality of education has powerful effects on individual earnings, distribution of income, and economic growth' (ibid. 3). They quote the axiom 'that for every dollar invested in education, there is an estimated fifteen fold increase in economic growth' which is derived from the GMR 2012; and they also quote from the GMR the dramatic transformation of Korea in 30 years from being poor to wealthy, partly through skills development and universal primary and secondary schooling.

There is then a strong quantitative assertion around security with the claim that each year of education for males 'reduces the risk of conflict by about 20 per cent' (ibid. 4).

Finally, there is a very powerful statement on the evidence around education and social equality: 'The positive impact of education is irrefutable as a means of empowering women and girls and other marginalized and vulnerable groups' (ibid.). There then follows the usual list of all the claims made about the relation of education to maternal and infant mortality, income, disease prevention, and the strengthening of democracy.

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<sup>33</sup> Though the Post-MDG Goal mentions only primary and lower secondary education, the indicators proposed for tracking this goal, somewhat confusingly, talk of early childhood as well as adult literacy, as well as effective national education systems.

Beyond the research base of these claims, they also simply assert that ‘education is a human right and must be extended to all’, and as advocacy and a call to action they propose: **‘Every child learning, Every student a graduate’** (ibid. 4).

If BEC sees their proposed Post-MDG and Post-EFA goals as based on ‘abundant evidence’, they are not alone.

**Education International**, representing some 400 unions and associations worldwide, has drawn up ten *Principles for a Post-2015 Education and Development Framework*. They are essentially rights-based from the very first sentence: ‘All states will guarantee the right and access to quality education for all’ (Education International, 2013. 1). And they see education as a global public good. Nevertheless, they are aware of the evidence base for their claim about the impact of early years education on the successful completion of basic primary and secondary education. Intriguingly, they also claim that there is an evidence base of the value of teaching a broad curriculum, not focused on ‘teaching to the test’ (ibid. 4).

But they take a broad view about evidence and research, not drawing merely on quantitative correlational findings between education and other outcomes. Indeed, it is worth underlining that the last of their ten principles draws on history for evidence: ‘Understanding history is the key to future educational improvements’ (ibid. 5).

**Global Campaign for Education (GCE)**, a broad-based civil society coalition operating in almost 100 countries, draws very forcefully on its own estimates, as well as those of others such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in presenting the ‘overwhelming evidence that education has a transformative impact on individuals, communities and nations’ (GCE, 2013: 4). It uses what may be called a series of quantitative sound-bites to present the answer to the question: ‘Why invest in education?’ Here are some of them:

**HIV and AIDS:** 7 million cases could be prevented in ten years if there was education for all.

**Poverty reduction:** 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, if all children leaving school had basic reading skills.

**Livelihoods:** One additional school year can increase a woman’s earnings by 10% to 20%.

**Agricultural output:** If all women attended primary school, agricultural yields in sub-Saharan Africa could increase by 25%. (ibid)

It can be seen that there is a real danger in the presentation of these sound-bites that they risk undermining the central message about post-2015 education goals – that they won’t deliver all these claimed benefits by offering access to ‘any old education’, but only to education of some real quality. Without emphasis on what USAID’s strategy called the enabling environment, some of these claims are in danger of being misleading.<sup>34</sup>

For instance, in a GCE report by its US Chapter, there is again a repetition of some of the same quantitative ‘findings’, including from Psacharopoulos’s now widely disregarded claims about the rate of return for girls of one additional year of primary school being as high as 15 per cent (GCE US Chapter, 2013: 2). We referred to these ‘findings’ at some length earlier in the paper.

### **Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CGECCD)**

One of the bodies that takes the research base for investment in their chosen field of action very seriously is the international early childhood care and education community. The CGECCD has

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<sup>34</sup> An example would be the following: **‘Peace:** increasing secondary school enrolment by 10% reduces the risk of war by 3%’ (GCE, 2013: 4).

been extremely active in getting their messages about early childhood care and development (ECD) out to the public, and particularly have sought to ensure that documentation was specifically prepared for a key meeting such as the Dakar thematic consultation on post-2015, or for the High Level Panel. As early childhood is not narrowly conceived of as a sub-sector of education, it is important to distinguish the several faces of ECD. These would include care, development and learning from birth in the first critical 1000 days, as much as the formal entry to early childhood centres, and then into formal pre-schools, or pre-primary. It can be seen that ECD covers some 5-6 years of care and education, and arguably extends back before birth.

This is why the ECD community through the Consultative Group have paid considerable attention to the impact of child health and its impact on learning. There have been a series of articles published in the influential medical journal, *The Lancet*, through the International Child Development Steering Group, covering on the one hand the effects of stunting and the prevalence of families living in absolute poverty. These are shown to be associated with poor cognitive and educational development of children (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). This concern with the crucial health dimensions of early childhood are confirmed by the identification of four risk factors: inadequate cognitive stimulation, iodine deficiency, iodine deficiency anaemia, as well as stunting (Walker et al., 2007). On the other hand, it has been shown that early childhood interventions such as parenting support and pre-school enrolment (especially programmes of higher quality) can have a major impact on developmental outcomes particularly for some of the most vulnerable children (Engle et al., 2011).

The ECD community have also profited from the influence of Nobel prize-winning economist, James Heckman, arguing the economic case for investing in the early care and education of disadvantaged young children (Heckman, 2006).

The result of the multi-dimensional aspects of ECD has meant that the Consultative Group have necessarily produced not just learning and education targets, but also a nutrition target, health targets and social protection targets (CGECCD, 2013a). As they are concerned with a comprehensive early childhood development agenda, they have not relied on single sound-bites as we have noted earlier; but for pre-school enrolment alone, they have produced the following figure: 'The 2011 *Lancet* Series on ECD calculated the economic effect of preschool enrolment ...on reducing the schooling gap showing a benefit of USD\$10.6 billion by increasing preschool enrolment to 25% in all low-income and middle- income countries' (CGECCD, 2013b.2).

CGECCD's proposed goal for ECD is therefore very broad, but has a series of targets and respective indicators underlying it: 'To ensure that all children under the age of 5 reach their developmental potential through access to quality ECD programs and policies'.<sup>35</sup>

### **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)**

The GPE is a multilateral organization whose board is composed of developing country and donor partners, civil society and private sector organizations, as well as multilateral agencies. Like a number of the bilateral agencies discussed earlier, it has so far not decided to elaborate a post-2015 education position. Indeed its latest *Results for Learning 2013* only has one passing reference to 'post-2015' in its 144 pages. However, *Results for Learning* is itself, like the EFA GMR, a major contribution to the evidence or research base for any attempt to propose post-2015 goals, targets or indicators.

Its data base covers its 59 developing country partners, and in its latest *Results* it is concerned with just three sub-sectors: pre-primary, primary and lower secondary. Interestingly, in

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<sup>35</sup> This was from the CGECCD's response to the report of the High-Level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.

discussing results for these sectors, the Report does draw on some of the same evidence, e.g. for early childhood education, that we have just referred to (GPE, 2013: 17). But they are also alert to the equity issues in pre-primary, as no less than 34% of children in GPE countries are in private pre-schools.

The GPE also has substantial amounts of evidence about the situation of primary and lower secondary in its partner countries. But a theme running particularly through the 2013 report is the need for much better data.<sup>36</sup>

The focus of the GPE does remain very much the formal school system, covering, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary. Thus far there has been little or no coverage of adult literacy or technical and vocational skills development.

### **Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF)**

Convened by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Centre for Universal Education (CUE) of Brookings, the LMTF has had a forceful concern that its reports planned for 2013 should be based on the best evidence, principally from Western Europe and North America, about learning in different disciplinary domains. Earlier in 2011, the priorities of the *Global Compact on Learning*, which are outlined in its report (Brookings, 2011), were identified as the three education sub-sectors, early childhood development (ECD), literacy and numeracy in lower primary, and relevant post-primary education opportunities.

Then in 2013, in the report, *Toward Universal Learning: What Every Child Should Learn*, for each of the seven domains of learning that the LMTF had elaborated through its consultative process of 2012, there was care to consider both the policy rationale and the research rationale (LMTF, 2013a). Hence, for physical well-being, social and emotional, culture and arts, literacy and communication, learning approaches and cognition, numeracy and mathematics, and science and technology, some of the key research findings on learning are provided, and they are disaggregated by the three levels of ECD, lower primary, and post-primary.

This makes the seven domains well secured in research, and it is by no means ‘sound-bite research’ on how, for example, one year of schooling makes such and such a difference to income; rather it contrasts this kind of research with some of the findings it has reviewed in *Toward Universal Learning*: ‘Research into the effects of education shows that assessment of measured cognitive skills is a far better predictor of economic outcomes (in terms of returns to education) than length of school attendance’ (ibid. 37).

The LMTF had seen its own whole carefully planned process as being post-2015 related: it was about the ‘feasibility of identifying common learning goals to inform the post-2015 global development policy discourse and improve overall learning’ (ibid. 94). But the LMTF has not sought itself to develop or promote a particular set of post-2015 education goals. Rather, it would consider the consultative process it has gone through, in identifying domains and learning characteristics, to be potentially valuable to those organisations tasked with post-2015 goal development.

Indeed, in respect of the Education for All (EFA) Steering Committee based in UNESCO which set up a Task-Force in September 2013, with a mandate to set up sub-task-forces to look the targets and indicators for each of a series of education objectives, it could well be that the work of the LMTF could facilitate and feed into this process.

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<sup>36</sup> The CEO of GPE, Alice Albright, echoes the HLP in arguing that ‘a data revolution is needed’ (foreword to GPE, 2013: iv).

### **The evidence of MyWorld<sup>37</sup>**

This global citizens' survey asks individuals across the world to vote for 6 out of 16 possible development priorities which are 'most important for you and your family'. Each of the 16 is explained almost like a goal or as an objective: In the case of Education, it is stated that 'This means that all children should have a high quality primary and secondary education that equips them for employment and an enjoyable life. Governments and the private sector should work together to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development for adults'.

These are not presented as objectives for the developing countries but for all countries. Even if there is no evidence provided for the goals or objectives, the results of the survey can be analysed by gender, age, as well as by low, medium, high and very high HDI. There are now country tailored reports where it is possible to see voting patterns at the country level broken down in valuable ways as parts of the current total of the more than 1.2 million individuals who have voted so far. It is nevertheless important to the case for post-2015 goals that Education has continued to be in the top place for every category of voter, regardless of gender and income levels, apart from those who are 55+ in age.

### **The Participate initiative**

This endeavour, convened by the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University and the Beyond 2015 campaign, brings together the results of the Participatory Research Group of 18 partners, who have sought to bring 'high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level' into the post-2015 arena. The insights on the key role of education (and the lack of it) in the lives of the poorest are very evident in their reporting (Participate, 2013). These data do not translate into nice clear goal statements. Indeed, the project would argue that the very clarity of the usual goal declarations does not take sufficient account of what actually happens to such statements in the highly unequal disabling environments of many countries: 'Dominant forms of international assistance often ignore how social forces interact with institutional structures, with grave consequences for those in the margins. The target-based approach of the Millennium Development Goals aggravated this by incentivising development practitioners to prioritise those easiest to reach' (Participate, 2013: 8).

### **Save the Children (SCF)**

It is entirely appropriate to follow the *Participate* initiative with Save the Children's account of *Learning and Equity in Education Post-2015* (SCF, 2013). Their report, with the main title, *Ending the Hidden Exclusion*, is a powerful account of what happens to goal statements when they are approached through the lens of equity. It means that the indicative targets and potential indicators must routinely include phrases such as 'gaps between the richest and poorest quintiles significantly reduced'. The issue is not the over-arching goal which with the SCF is not very different from the goal agreed in Dakar in March 2013: 'Goal: by 2030 we will ensure all children receive a good quality education and have good learning outcomes' (ibid: 34).

The formulations chosen derive from a good deal of evidence (112 references for 38 pages), but this is not only the evidence which we have already encountered in several sources of a learning crisis, nor of the 'compelling evidence of the *importance of a child's early years*' which we have also met (SCF, 2013: 31). Rather it is the emphasis upon 'even the most disadvantaged children' starting school early and being ready to learn. In other words, the new focus is not simply moving from access to quality, but ending the exclusion of the poorest and most marginalized from the new deal on quality and successful learning outcomes.

We have covered just some of the expanding literature on the case for education and skills goals, and we have seen that research is certainly widely used to substantiate the case for particular priorities. Before turning to the concluding section of this review, it might be useful to look very

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<sup>37</sup> See for the results of MyWorld: [www.myworld2015.org/index.html?page=results](http://www.myworld2015.org/index.html?page=results)

briefly at how research is being used in any of the southern countries in their concern for promoting particular education goals.

### **Some Southern positions on goals and research post-2015**

We have argued in earlier papers that, until recently, many southern countries do not appear to have got much involved in the very widespread preoccupation with post-2015 in Western Europe and North America (King and Palmer, 2012; 2013).

China did produce a *Position Paper* on development post-2015, just before the United Nations General Assembly in 2013. This is a short document of just eight pages, with no mention of research or evidence. It contains just a couple of references to education, and like many of its other proposals for development priorities, this is rights-based rather than research-based: 'Countries should guarantee people's right to education, promote equity and improve quality of education' (China, 2013: 3).

By contrast, Bangladesh has had a very lively People's Forum for MDGs which has taken up different approaches towards the government's claims about progress towards the existing MDGs. There have also been long-standing NGOs such as CAMPE, the Campaign for Popular Education which have engaged with the post-EFA and post-MDG agendas in education. In this connection, it is relevant to see that in constructing a set of key education elements for the post-2015 development agenda, CAMPE has drawn on both rights-based and research-based priorities. Thus, action on early years care, education and development are promoted 'because of their proven strong influence on later learning, juvenile behaviour and adult life' (Ahmed, 2013: 40).

South Africa, as a third example, had not been much involved in the discussions around post-2015 in education until as late as October 2013. This is beginning to change, with a recent high-level 'Workshop on the post-2015 development agenda on post-school education & training' in South Africa on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013 (DHET, 2013).

It should also be noted that the education ministers of the BRICS<sup>38</sup> countries met on the margins of the UNESCO General Conference on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013, and 'agreed to establish a mechanism at the "highest political and technical level" to coordinate and implement collaboration, especially in higher education' (Lee, 2013). The ministers did also emphasise the importance of collaborating with UNESCO to 'hasten progress towards achieving Education for All – EFA – goals, and also to shape discussions on the post-2015 agenda' (ibid), but there is no further detail at the moment on how this was being taken forward.

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<sup>38</sup> BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

## 4. Data, Evidence, Education and Development Post-2015

### 4.1. Evidence-based policymaking / policy-based evidence-making

One of the implicit concerns running through this paper has been that the process of determining goals and targets may be more driven by politics and sound-bites rather than real evidence.

Some are certainly of the view that 'development goals, the focus of the post-2015 debates, are political, consensus-based and non-specialist derived. They are based in implicit theories-in-use... and are only very loosely evidence-based' (McGrath, 2013: 1).

Writing in the Guardian blog, Glennie (2013) notes that:

The manipulation of data is so common in politics... when facts don't suit politicians' prejudices, they frequently prefer simply to commission another study. Rather than evidence-based policymaking, we so often have policy-based evidence-making.

As Jerven (2013) notes, this kind of 'policy driven evidence [is] the opposite of what we need'.

The extent to which the final agreed post-2015 agenda and goal framework is driven by evidence remains to be seen; what we do know now is that all parties are certainly making bold statements of the power of education even if these statements are not actually qualified in situ with reference to evidence.

### 4.2. Post-2015 education and development, from Jomtien, to Dakar, to 2015

In these previous sections on the UN-related streams of post-2015 thinking and those associated with bilateral agencies, civil societies and the South, we must emphasise that our approach has been selective. There is much else that we could have referred to. Here we shall say just a word about the changing relationship between education and development over these 23 years since Jomtien.

In March 1990, WCEFA was the first of a whole series of UN conferences on different dimensions of development that would cover also environment, women, and social development, to mention just three others. They would be drawn together by OECD DAC in 1996 (OECD-DAC, 1996), in a formulation of global development targets that would result eventually in the Millennium Development Goals. Jomtien itself was much affected by a sense of new possibilities of cooperation and also of a peace dividend, as the Berlin Wall had just fallen the year before. But Jomtien was able to proceed without a sense that it must become part of a wider global agenda for development.

By the time of the Dakar World Forum in April 2000, the so-called International Development Targets (IDTs) had already emerged from the OECD DAC several years earlier, and preparations for the Millennium Summit of September 2000 were underway. But Dakar's drafters of the six EFA Goals were not competing to make the case for education in the face of multiple other development agendas. Arguably they should have anticipated that the two targets from the IDTs would be what would emerge with the MDGs in 2001. But the international education community was not much involved in the final decisions around the MDGs (cf. Manning, 2009).

By contrast, now, in the hurricane of activity around post-2015, those planning the final versions of education and skills goals have a double challenge. Unlike Jomtien, there is no single, forceful background document to guide the formulation of education goals, nor is there a single figure with the authority of Wadi Haddad with executive authority for this task. **Even within**

**education**, there are a multiplicity of voices, from UNESCO and UNICEF, from development agencies, think tanks, and from civil society. Jomtien was the first time that civil society had been invited to participate as part of national delegations in a world conference. 23 years later, many international and national NGOs have developed their own versions of the goals or of a particular focus such as early childhood, disability, or education for sustainable development. So now there is no single authoritative education pathway towards post-2015, but a multitude of competing paths. Even UNESCO and UNICEF, the lead agencies in the education sphere, do not yet have their own, final agreed versions of the Goals, Targets and Indicators, though we referred to their post-2015 positions and key asks in the foreword and in section 2 of this paper.

The second part of the challenge, again very different from Jomtien and Dakar, is that there is a wider development constituency charged to determine the shape of the post-2015 agenda. Just one critical element in that is the Open Working Group (OWG) whose deliberations may prove crucial to the positioning of education in any final development agenda. But as of December 2013, there is not yet a possibility that a fully agreed set of education priorities can be fed into the OWG process. UNESCO may have its own time-table for organising national EFA reviews, with a Global Education Meeting in Oman in May 2014, ministerial meetings around education post-2015 to be set later in 2014, and a final global conference already set for Incheon in South Korea for May 2015. But this process cannot just run autonomously and separately from the wider decision-making on global development priorities. The education timings must be synchronised with the wider development timetable if they are to be influential.

If education beyond 2015 is to figure prominently and authoritatively in the world's development agenda, then it is high time that a coherent, evidence-based statement on education and skills was available to all those taking decisions in other fora such as the OWG in the next few weeks and months. It is particularly unfortunate, in addition, that the position of the education constituency on skills for work and for life has not been confirmed either. UNESCO's World TVET Report has not yet been released, almost two years after the Shanghai 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress on TVET where it was previewed.

There is, therefore, right at the end of 2013, a very great deal still to do if the case for education is to be presented with authority and conviction in the early months of 2014 to the key development decision-makers who are not themselves education specialists.

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