Education targets, indicators and a post-2015 development agenda:
Education for All, the MDGs, and human development

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The Power of Numbers: A Critical Review of MDG Targets for Human Development and Human Rights

Preface

This paper is one of a series of papers in a research project, *The Power of Numbers: A Critical Review of MDG Targets for Human Development and Human Rights (the "Project")*[1]. Motivated by a concern with the consequences of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) beyond the achievement of the 2015 targets, the Project seeks to explore their broader policy and programmatic implications. It focuses particularly on the reductionism inherent in the way in which these global goals were set and came to be used, as well as the potential for distorting priorities and marginalizing, or even displacing, important human development and human rights concerns inherent in such global goal-setting exercises. A total of 11 studies are included, each analyzing the normative and empirical consequences of a particular MDG goal/target, and considering what other targets and indicators might have been more appropriate. The Project aims to identify criteria for selecting indicators for setting targets that would be more consistent with Human Development and Human Rights priorities, amenable to monitoring impacts on inequality, accountability and consistency with human rights standards.

Although this paper is currently accessible as a free standing working paper, it should be read in conjunction with the synthesis and background papers of the Power of Numbers Project. These papers provide necessary information about the scope of the Power of Numbers Project, the historical framing of international agreements leading up to the MDGs, and the human rights and human development frameworks referenced in the paper. These working papers are expected to be compiled as a special issue of the *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*.

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Education has a prominent position in the MDG framework. Targets on schooling appear in two of the MDGs. But, from a human development perspective, the framing of the targets and indicators, provide a very partial view of education and what can be measured by whom. The MDG targets and indicators, in practice, have caused a number of perverse incentives, both with regard to the education component of the MDG framework and the capacity of education to contribute to delivery on other MDGs. The approach to measurement associated with the education targets and indicators has been associated with the omission of salient aspects of quality, context and equity. In thinking about possible indicators for the post-2015 framework this paper considers, firstly, the history of how and why the education indicators for MDG 2 and MDG 3 were selected, and secondly, puts forward some critical reflections on two alternative indicators that may be appropriate for a post-2015 framework. In conclusion, a number of approaches to thinking about measuring education drawing on human development and human rights concerns are discussed highlighting some emerging positions on the post-2015 framework.

The MDG education targets and the 1990's back-story

In 2001, education was given a prominent place in the framing of the MDG targets and indicators. The second Millennium Development Goal ("MDG 2") commits to achieving universal primary education with the following target: 'Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling' (UN, 2002). The three indicators associated with this target are:

i)   Net enrolment ratio in primary education
ii)   Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary school
iii)   Literacy rate of 15-24 year-old women and men

MDG 3 to promote gender equality and empower women, has the target 'Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015'. The indicators for this are

i)   Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education

ii)   Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector

iii)   Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

The centrality of education to the whole MDG project was signalled in MDG 3, where the belief was expressed that securing gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005, would drive forward achievement of many of the other MDGs by 2015.

 The origins of the MDG education targets and indicators can be seen in discussions which took place in the 1990s and before. But, in formulating the MDG education framework, particular omissions and emphases were evident, which were to have considerable impact on policy, planning and funding. The MDGs thus came to be associated with a number of perverse incentives. These expanded provision at the primary level, but often at the expense of quality. In addition, the development of many other education sectors – most notably secondary schooling, technical and vocational education, higher and adult education – were all given much less attention because of the focus on universalizing primary schooling.

A number of conferences of the 1990s set a broad agenda for education, building on an architecture of UN conventions and declarations in previous decades. The importance of measurement and monitoring became a recurring refrain through the 1990s as delivery became the primary emphasis. Frameworks linking *basic* education and human capital theory were seen to have particular significance, notably by analysts in the World Bank (World Bank, 1995). In this context, a restricted agenda for the donor community and governments started to emerge. This had its fullest expression in the MDG targets and indicators, which drastically narrowed the broader visions that had been articulated in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

The Jomtien Education for All Conference

In March 1990, four UN bodies collaborated with 155 governments and 150 NGOs, to sponsor the Jomtien conference on Education for All (EfA). This was one of the first of the major convening conferences of the post-Cold War era. The Jomtien conference affirmed the World Declaration on Education for All (WDEfA, 1990). Chabbott's (1997; 2004) interpretation of this gathering was that it was primarily about securing some consensus between the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO, and UNICEF, and other UN bodies. In the

1980s UNICEF & the World Bank had been publicly in opposition with regard to structural adjustment and policy recommendations, including the question of whether states should expand spending on primary schooling (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart 1987). Collaboration at this conference, according to Chabbott, was an attempt to try to build bridges. The prominence all four organisations gave to aspects of girls and women's education acted as a kind of connection. However, as discussed below, the issue had somewhat different emphases in the different organisations, and all, in their concern with gender parity and the importance of mother's education for children's wellbeing, were somewhat out of step with a wider women's rights agenda that had deep historical roots and came to be articulated later in the decade in conferences at Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing (Unterhalter, 2007).

The UN human rights architecture on education

The substance of the World Declaration on EfA was not new, and reprised affirmations of universal rights to schooling, set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). ICESCR explicitly recognised that free and compulsory education should not be confined just to the primary level. It states that secondary education should be made "generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education" (ICESR, 1976, Article 13 (2)b). It also sets out the prospect of higher education being made widely available at no cost and "on the basis of capacity" (Ibid; article 13 (2)c). This wide scope of what education rights entailed was to be framed more and more narrowly in subsequent decades. In 1990, both in the World Declaration on EfA and in a number of UNICEF policy documents attention was focussed primarily on *basic* education.

Even stronger legal commitments to expanded education provision than those contained in ICESR were articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). CEDAW was adopted by the UN in 1979 and by 1990 had been ratified and/or acceded to by a large number of member states, albeit often with provisos and reservations regarding certain obligations. CEDAW does not explicitly address the question of how much education women have a right to, but it does give more detail on features of gender equitable education. It stipulates that states "shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education" (CEDAW, 1979, Art. 10). It also calls for equality in a range of different educational sites including (i)

adult education, (ii) career and vocational guidance, (iii) access to the same curricula, (iv) examinations and teaching staff, (v) the elimination of gender stereotypes in textbooks, (vi) access to scholarships, (vii) sport, and (viii) the establishment of special programmes for young women who have left school prematurely (Ibid). There is also a particular provision which deals with the importance of access to educational information (CEDAW, 1979, art 10 (h)). Although this is phrased in terms of information with regard to family planning, it has some important implications, as outlined further below. However, there was little guidance in CEDAW on approaches to measuring either the extent or nature of gender inequalities in education and formations of equality.

A clear feature of the pre-MDG era on education seems to be that the more detailed the documentation on children's rights or gender equality, the less the focus is on issues of measurement. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by the General Assembly in 1989, is the fullest statement of the nature of rights in education regardless of gender or any other differences. Some of the most notable provisions protect the rights of children to (i) preserve their own identities, (CRC, 1989, Art 8) (ii) participate in discussions and affirm views, (Ibid, art 12) (iii) access through the media to information of "social and cultural benefit", (ibid, art 17 (a)) (iv) protection from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse" (ibid, art 19). With regard to schooling, the CRC affirms that primary and secondary education should be made available and accessible and that measures should be taken to make secondary education free and to support school attendance (Ibid, art 28 (1)). Ignorance and illiteracy are also to be eliminated by "modern teaching methods"(ibid art 28 (3)). With regard to the content of education, CRC envisages education which develops (i) "the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" and (ii) respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (ibid, art 29), but it does not address in any detail contesting ideas about gender inequality.

ICESCR, CEDAW and CRC - the three UN human rights instruments with the strongest purchase on implementation by member states - while containing full statements on access to education, are much less explicit on the content of that education, the teaching process, and the treatment of children at school, although CRC does have a clear statement on children's protection from violence and support for identity formation. However, the limited attention given in all three documents to monitoring, evaluation and numbers, and how these could be

linked with ideas about rights, a discussion still very much only beginning in the 1980s, meant that there was little framing available for the work of the 1990s which came to focus more explicitly on the selection of indicators, albeit in the context of an agenda narrowing from the broad remit of ICESR, CEDAW and CRC to a very narrow concern with basic education.

Attempting to realise EfA

Early in the 1990s, however, precision with regard to indicators was not the major focus in discussions of EfA. The background paper for the Jomtien conference noted that, despite the statements of support for education rights in international and national policy documents, the reality was that large numbers of children were out of school, schools were unable to meet 'basic learning needs' and education was thus not able to play the role that would make it relevant for economic growth, halting environmental degradation, and expanding human development (Inter Agency Commission, 1990). A wider context to these education challenges was provided at the World Summit on Children in September 1990, organised by UNICEF in New York. The programme of action from this meeting linked education with child survival, notably nutrition and health, family health and relationships, addressing poverty, protection of children from violence, concerns with child labour, and support for children with disabilities (UNICEF, 1990). An even more expansive context was set out at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, which adopted the Beijing Platform of Action. This identified education and training of women and the schooling needs of girls, as key objectives, while also noting the education dimensions of many other areas for action with regard to women's rights and gender equality (Beijing Platform of Action, 1995). Similarly, at the World Food Summit (1996), detailed actions were set out to enhance the general education as well as particular skills for food producers, with a distinct emphasis placed on the engagement and education of marginalised groups (World Food Summit, 1996).

However, this wide range of concerns with a joined-up approach to inter-connected rights, equalities and social development, was hard to maintain in practice. Many education departments came to focus, not on this broad agenda, but on a very narrow concern with improving access to primary schooling. Heynemann (2009) writes that this limited vision was powerfully driven by the World Bank, which, in the 1990s concluded that the rate of return was significantly higher for basic education compared to other levels, and should thus be the

major beneficiary of donor assistance. As a consequence, virtually no development assistance was directed to secondary or tertiary education for a decade, and there was much less investment in gathering data on education participation at these levels. Although the World Bank changed its mind on the importance of higher education and, after 2003, came to place secondary and higher education at the heart of its anti-poverty activities, encouraging other donors to do the same, their approach to this came less from a concern with inter-connected rights, and more from advocacy for knowledge development, acknowledged as a central tool in poverty reduction in the *World Development Report* (1998/1999) and *Constructing Knowledge Societies* (2002). These documents point out that social and economic progress is primarily achieved through the advancement and application of knowledge, and that tertiary education is critical for the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge and for building technical and professional capacity (Lebeau and Sall, 2011: 135).

Tracking multilateral and bilateral commitments to education show an enormous growth since 1995. However, the largest component of development assistance has been to primary education, either for specific projects on teacher development or district planning or direct to governments through budget support. This peaked in 2009/10 at US $5,789 million, when it comprised 43 percent of the total aid to education (US $13, 468 million) (UNESCO, 2012, 147). This represented a 97 percent increase since 2002, and a 92 percent increase in aid to low and middle income countries. By contrast, aid to secondary education grew from only US $117 million in 2002 to $426 million in 2010, while aid to post-secondary education was even more limited, expanding from US $161 to $389 million in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012, p. 396-7)

In 1990 the primary education statistics available to government planning offices and the international community were: (i) expenditure on education as a proportion of government spending and (ii) gross enrolment ratios, that is the total numbers of children enrolled in a particular phase of schools. Gross enrolment ratios were acknowledged to be misleading, because they included in the school population children who were too old or too young for a particular school phase, thus hiding the problem of how many children in any age cohort were not attending school. The background document for Jomtien acknowledged that net enrolment ratios were not widely available (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, p. 24). While completion rates and girls' participation rates were being logged, there was no measure of what children were learning (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, pp. 25-6). Data on adult

learning was also limited, and tended to reflect levels of enrolment in adult literacy classes, with very limited information on literacy rates (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990 pp. 27-8).

The purpose of the Jomtien conference, however, was not to improve the collection of statistics, but to mobilise a policy community that agreed that the resources for realising EfA could not be met by national governments or community or family investments. The scale of resources needed required outside support (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, pp. 39-40). However, while the EfA movement, in this early phase, was very much about mobilizing development assistance, there was a strong emphasis on countries setting their own targets for increasing access throughout the 1990s (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, pp. 83-84), but the limited informational base for planning in most countries, was noted:

> An essential step to improve capacity in this area is to establish, or reinforce, technical services and mechanisms to collect and analyze data on basic learning needs, basic education, and their socio-cultural context. This requires an operational definition of the learning needs considered "basic" and agreed indicators for monitoring progress in meeting them, for evaluating the effectiveness of specific programmes and activities, as well as for assessing individual learning achievement. Most developing countries will need to develop their statistical services and management information systems to provide relevant information to a wide range of professionals working at national and sub-national levels. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for research to clarify policy and pedagogical issues, and applied research to translate relevant findings into actual practice (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990 84-5).

The report for the EfA conference commented on the extensive network on planners in government Ministries, research institutes and in UNESCO bodies that could be networked to take this forward, and a plan was sketched for regional discussions and networks to effect this (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, p.91). However, the tone of the background document was most emphatic that it was local initiatives supported by international assistance that would expand EfA. The statistical data, the authors appeared to be arguing, would be collected to support this process, rather than in their own right. The image that emerges from the document was that education numbers were to be gathered in support of national planning processes. In 1990 it appears a global process of assembling numbers was not initially conceived as the train that would drive forward the process of national policy on EfA.

That numbers assembled globally came to be accorded a very directive role with regard to EfA, maybe linked to some of the politics of the 1990s and the difficulties of realising the vision of either Jomtien, the UNICEF World Summit, the Beijing Platform for Action, or the plans of the World Food Summit. According to various commentators, although Jomtien was a significant moment of normative, analytic, and policy convergence around an Education for All agenda, the World Conference and its declaration failed to realise their potential because of the stresses between different multilateral organisations (Jones, 2007; Unterhalter, 2007; Mundy et al, 2011), tensions within organisations between a social democratic orientation and an accommodation with 'small state' globalization (Lee and Friedrich, 2011), general imprecision about the programme envisaged (Buchert, 1995), a lack of opportunities to engage regional thinking, particularly in Africa (Samoff, 2009) and failures to realise that expansion of provision of basic education could not be achieved at the expense of growing participation in secondary and tertiary education (Henynemann, 2009; Lewin, 2008). Nonetheless, the expansion of provision of primary schooling in countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Ghana (eg. Bhatta, 2011; Chowdhury, Nath and Choudhury, 2002; Akeampong, 2009) show how aid and government strategies linked together explicitly invoked the Jomtien agenda.

A full assessment of the aftermath of the Jomtien conference and the connections and disconnections with the World Summit on Children, the Beijing Platform and the World Food Summit is beyond the scope of this paper, but by the late 1990s a number of planners were writing that the reason the Jomtien conference had failed to realise its potential lay in the inadequacy of the informational base, statistical capacity in governments and internationally and the weakness of the available Education Monitoring Information Systems (EMIS) to provide a clear picture of what levels of education governments were and were not providing, and how such information could be used for planning (Heyneman, 1999; Buchert ,1995; Lewin, 2008). This concern with better data, was not, in and of itself responsible for the narrowing of the wide EfA ambition, but it coincided with political processes that were working to limit the scope of EfA. A provocative paper by Rosa Torres, published by IIEP in Buenos Aires, and much discussed at the end of the decade, asserted that over the decade the discourse of EfA had shrunk:

1. From education for *all* to the education of *children (the poorest among the poor)*.
2. From *basic* education to *schooling* (and *primary* education).

3. From universalizing *basic* education to universalizing *access* to *primary* education.

4. From *basic* learning needs to *minimum* learning needs.

5. From focusing on *learning* to improving and assessing the *school achievement*.

6. From *expanding the vision* of basic education to *increasing the duration* (number of years) of compulsory schooling.

7. From basic education as the *foundation for lifelong learning* to basic education as an *end in itself*.

8. From enhancing the learning environment to enhancing the school environment.

9. From all countries to developing countries.

10. From the responsibility of countries and the international community to the responsibility of countries (Torres, 1998)

What Torres' analysis indicates was that there was a considerable struggle over ideas concerning EfA. On the one hand the World Bank was pressing for the overriding importance of all children completing primary school, what came to be known as UPE (universal primary education). This was linked to their belief that this offered the best rate of return for investments in human capital (Heyneman, 2009). On the other hand, other education analysts and activists were arguing for an expanded vision of education and learning. This position was strongly associated with the UNESCO Commission on Learning and human development led by Jacques Delors (Delors, 1996). The precision with which UPE could be measured, while many facets of learning as a 'treasure within' were not amenable to quantitative evaluation, was one feature of how an attenuated version of EfA came to be incorporated into the MDGs.

The review of EfA took place at a conference in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, 5 months before the Millennium Summit at the UN General assembly, which agreed the Millennium Declaration and trailed the MDGs. This conference agreed the Dakar Programme of Action on Education for All. The Dakar conference mobilized wider support from governments, IGOs and NGOs than those who had attended Jomtien in 1990. Crucially, it saw a pledge by donor governments that money would be available to fund well-developed national education plans. The Dakar Framework identified six goals, not all of which had indicators attached to them and which went considerably beyond UPE. This was a significantly wider agenda than that to be agreed in New York the following year when the MDG targets and indicators were

outlined, and the relationship between the Dakar Framework and the MDGs has been a matter of some debate and controversy within the EfA community for many years. (Tomasevski, 2003; Colclough, 2005; Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Verger, et al., 2012)

The Dakar Framework comprised six goals:

- The expansion and improvement of early childhood education
- Access to free, compulsory education of good quality for all children
- All learning to be appropriate for children, and life skills included in learning
- Improvement in levels of adult literacy
- Gender disparities in primary and secondary education to be removed
- All aspects of quality of education, including measurable learning outcomes, to be improved (Dakar Framework, 2000, pp. 15-17)

This Programme was to be monitored by an annual Global Monitoring Report (first published in 2002) and was supported by the reviews of national statistics undertaken by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, which had been set up in Montreal since 1999.

While there was resonance between the Dakar programme and the MDG education targets in some areas, in others there was dissonance. The MDG framework, set out in 2001, considerably narrowed the Dakar goals. While at Dakar there was concern with early childhood education, adult literacy, the quality of learning, forms of learning outcomes and life skills, none of this was present in the MDG goals and targets, which transmuted 'free compulsory education of good quality for all children' as expressed in the Dakar documents into 'universal primary education'. The concern with regard to women's rights and gender implicit in provision for early childhood education, life skills, and adult literacy were all not incorporated either into targets for MDG 2 or MDG 3. A number of other concerns of the EfA movement, for example with lifelong learning and the development of higher education, were present in neither the Dakar Framework nor the MDGs, although clearly it would be difficult to develop adequate teacher training, economic expansion or deliver on the health components of the MDGs without this.

A number of commentators (Hulme and Scott, 2010; Black & White, 20043 point to the links between the targets and indicators incorporated in the MDG framework and International Development Goals (IDGs), set out by the OECD DAC in 1996. This is

certainly the case for some of the education targets. Thus in the 1996 IDGs, the education targets are, firstly, universal primary education by 2015 and, secondly, gender parity in primary and secondary education by that date (DAC, 1996, p. 9-11). Both of these goals considerably narrowed the education vision of EfA and the gender equality and education vision articulated at Beijing, but nevertheless, came to find their place in MDG 2 and MDG 3.

As of yet, there is no historical account of the diplomatic and organisational moves that resulted in this narrowing agenda between Dakar and the MDG framework in education. Verger et al. (2012, p. 6-7) argue that what became evident at Dakar and in the MDGs was the effects of globalisation in establishing a particular framework of global education policy limiting the remit of welfare states to act outside a global framework, legitimating the role and priorities of UN organisations, de-territorialising local solutions, legitimating the efficiency of education markets, and, to a more limited extent, supporting the emergence of global civil society. It is evident that the significance given to national planning at Jomtien had receded by the time of Dakar, and the global EfA movement was framed as a means for citizens to hold states accountable. Mundy and Murphy (2001) noted the emergence at Dakar of coordinated action by transnational networks of NGOs, notably the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) as a significant trend that articulated demands linking education access with debt relief, equity and internationalism. However, they were uncertain as to whether the density and coherence of this coalition would continue and made no comment on education indicators. Writing a decade later, however, Colclough (2012) argued that indicators and approaches to measurement were powerful means of deploying information for accountability, and, as discussed below, global civil society has since 2000 engaged with the movement for better indicators, rather than dismissed the project.

The target set in MDG 2 can thus be seen to have emerged from a number of concerns, associated with the goal of expanded and improved education provision as articulated in earlier UN declarations and conventions. But the precise wording of the target selected for MDG 2 entailed a narrowing of the focus, and hence, the ambition, of the global EfA community. It could be argued that primary education was of universal relevance, while the level of secondary education states could afford was still debatable, and access to tertiary level tended to be limited to elites. A case could also be made that the stress in the MDG target was on what was considered the key education reform to make, which at that time was

seen to be improve access to primary schooling. It was this, rather than what was learned, how this was transacted and how this might connect to other dimensions of social development that seemed the key result to aim for. A number of analysts point to the politics of ignoring adult literacy, which had no target or indicator, and had experienced waning concern by global organizations even before the MDG targets were set (Bhola, 1998). The view of a number of commentators (Roberts, 2005; Hulme, 2010; Heyneman, 2009) was that it was a technocratic politics of a top-down approach to planning, linked to the priorities of donors, pre-eminently the World Bank, rather than governments, civil society or the EfA movement that drove the selection of this target.

Selecting indicators

With regard to indicator selection, this appears closely linked with the capacity of UIS and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), initiated in 1995, in response to the World Summit on Children (UNICEF, 2012). Institutional capacity to measure net enrolment ratios (based on school administrative data relative to population size), school completion (based on administrative data), and literacy levels (based on household surveys) meant that net enrolment ratios, school completion and literacy rates appeared appropriate indicators for measuring progress on the target for MDG 2. Gender parity in school enrolments, which became a target for MDG3, rested on presumptions of the robustness of school administrative data, and what gender ratios on their own could show. Criteria regarding data availability and reliability for school enrolments, comparability across national contexts, and the possibility that data quality could be assured by UIS, contributed to these indicators being selected (Kitamura, 2009). It is noticeable, that in 2000, in contrast to 1990, the stress was on national planning teams developing analyses of information linked to securing donor assistance and providing information for international assessments, rather than developing local planning capacity to improve local delivery.

In 2000, very little work on additional metrics or indicators to review equity, aspects of gender or education outcome had been done. Although UNICEF, through MICs, collected school attendance data for use in the *State of the World's Children,* attendance was not an indicator for the MDGs. Similarly, DHS collected data on adult literacy, although only youth literacy (15-24) was an indicator for the MDGs. DHS also collected data on participation in secondary and tertiary education, neither of which were measured for the MDGs. Since 1995 the UNDP had developed approaches to assessing gender inequalities (the GDI) and gender

empowerment (GEM), both of which held out possibilities for thinking about gender and education in ways that went beyond gender parity in enrolments, but these issues had not yet been taken up by the education research or policy community.

There were a number of weakness acknowledged by commentators at the time regarding the indicators to be used in the MDG framework. Firstly, administrative data regarding enrolments (that is numbers on the school register) provided no information on the numbers who actually attended (Lewin, 2005). In 1999, UNICEF documents were drawing on indicators of school quality, how children learned, and access to water and sanitation (UNICEF, 1999) although not across a full range of countries. None of these measures made it into the MDG indicator framework.

The MDG indicators gave no indication on what was learned, and by whom (Perlman-Robinson, 2011). Although comparative learning assessments of children by age cohort, such as SACMEQ (Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Measuring Education Quality), which had been in existence since 1995, and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), set up in 1997, were in existence, the robustness of the data from these may have been considered too untried to be incorporated into an international framework.

In addition, as the decade progressed, the lack of acknowledgement of the salience of a number of other features of education provision came to be stressed. These included the complexities of context, the size of pupil-to-teacher ratios, a number of problems associated with inequities, the challenges of multilingualism, different levels of provision according to socio-economic status, and location, and the complexities of gender, which went considerably beyond gender parity (Jansen, 2005; Rose, 2005; Unterhalter & North, 2011; UNESCO, 2010). The Right to Education (RtE) project, drawing on the work of UN Special Rapporteur, Katarina Tomasevski, established the importance of 4 As in education – availability, affordability, accessibility and adaptability – and set about assembling indicators to measure these (Right to Education, 2012).

From 2003, in order to monitor the implementation of the Dakar Framework, UNESCO published annually a *Global Monitoring Report* (GMR), which was in some respects modelled on the UN Development Reports. The UNESCO GMR team worked with UIS and UNICEF to expand the range of data on education collected and analyzed. The GMR was a key publication for the EfA movement, and while a number of NGOs and academics, and

writers for the GMR criticised the narrowness of some of the measures (eg. Carr Hill, 2012; Maddox and Esposito, 2010; Miske et al, 2010; Street, 2011; Unterhalter et al., 2005), a lively policy community grew up, with the GMRs every year expanding how they worked with the data and giving richer pictures of education, access and aspects of quality, and inequalities. Although the links with outcomes were still difficult to establish in numbers, the GMRs provided a much richer counterpoint of measurement to the narrowness of the story provided by the MDGs.

Some consequences of the MDG education goal, target and indicators

Education is often portrayed as one of the successes of the MDG approach, with the number of children out of primary school falling dramatically. From 1999 to 2011 the number of children of the requisite age band out of primary school fell from 108 million to 61 million (UNESCO, 2012, 3). In 1999, 71 percent of children enrolled in primary school in low-income countries remained enrolled by the last grade of the primary cycle, and this had increased to 78 perfent in 2009 (The comparable figures for middle income countries were 90 and 95 percent) (UNESCO, 2012, p. 363). Of the 167 countries with data on the gender parity index in primary education in 1999 and 2010, 33 had a gender parity index (GPI) of below 0.90 in 1999. By 2010, this group had reduced to 17. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where 21 countries in 1999 had had a primary GPI below 0.90, only 12 remained at this level in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012, p. 6). This is an achievement of policy, planning and provision that needs to be celebrated.

However, a number of critical commentaries (eg. Verger et al., 2012; UNESCO, 2012; Lewin, 2009; Mundy et al, 2010; Beyond 2015, 2013), point out that the aggregate increases in enrolment and progression, partly driven by the MDG target and indicator approach, must be read side by side with other developments, which are more sobering, and indicate much work still to be done. There are particular concerns about equity.

The aggregate improvements shown in the number of children enrolled and progressing through school at the national level need to be qualified by regional and socio-economic disparities. When looking at disaggregated data, it becomes clear that often there is virtually no progression for children who are from the lowest socio-economic groups, the most subordinated ethnicities, generally living in rural areas or particular regions that have not benefitted from enhanced social development. In all these areas of inequity there are

generally additional dimensions of gender inequity. For example, Ghana is a country that has made spectacular improvements in the proportion of children in primary school. The primary net enrolment rate in 1999 was 67 percent and in 2010, this was 84 percent. The GPI of 0.97 in 1999, was 1.01 in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012, 353). But the UNESCO EfA GMR inequalities database, available online since 2013, gives an indication that these overall improvements have not been equitable. Amongst young adults of the MDG generation, who were between 17 and 22 in 2008 (that is of primary school going age when the Dakar Programme and the MDGs were agreed) have a national mean of 7.9 years of schooling. However, the poorest quintile has had only 4.2 years of schooling and 42 percent of this quintile has had only 2 years in school (UNESCO EfA WIDE, Ghana, 2013a). In the northern region, the mean years of schooling for this age group is 4.7 years, compared with 9.9 years in Accra; and 45 percent of the age group in the northern region have less than 2 years of school (UNESCO EfA WIDE, Ghana, 2013b). 16 percent of girls aged 17-22 in 2008 have less than 2 years of schooling and 20 percent have less than 4 years, compared to 9 percent of boys with less than 2 years at school and 12 percent of boys with less than 4 years (UNESCO EfA WIDE, Ghana, 2013c). The UNESCO EfA WIDE (World Inequality Database on Education) brings together data from DHS and MICS to replicate this pattern in virtually every country for which there is data. Unequal access to education is confirmed with other education statistics, where the EfA GMR, for example, shows how late entry into school, often associated with early exit, is most prevalent amongst the poorest (UNESCO, 2012, p. 65), how large proportions of the poorest children do not progress between education levels (UNESCO, 2012, p. 66-7) and how girls from the lowest quintile fail to complete secondary school (UNESCO, 2012, p. 185). In addition, much of the data on attainment confirms how this is linked with income, location and gender. Assessment of the proportion of children reaching level 2 in mathematics by wealth quintile based on PISA data for 2009 in high and middle income countries, showed attainment was lowest amongst the poor, and mostly amongst poor girls (UNESCO, 2012, p.127). Citizen assessments show low rates of formal literacy and numeracy among children, despite regular attendance to school. Where data is collected, these highlight how the lowest levels of attainment are amongst the poorest. Thus, the Jangandoo project in Senegal, which undertook an independent evaluation of the learning of children in 526 households in 2012, established that 87.8 percent of children in households assessed as having poor living conditions failed the test, compared to 76.2 percent of children in households assessed as having 'high living conditions' (LARTES, 2013, p. 6).

It can thus be seen that the targets selected for the MDGs of gender parity in enrolment and net enrolment rates, mask major problems about what is learned, and the nature of the school experience of children from the poorest and most marginalized groups.

Concerns for different indicators

Some of the consequences of the MDGs education goals, targets and indicators, need to be taken into account when thinking about a post-2015 framework and what might work better.

In assessing and considering these critical commentaries with a view to working towards a better framework of measurement, I want to draw on Langford's (2012) discussion of criteria for selecting approaches to measurement to engage with the problem of what he calls 'the art of the impossible' suggested by the problems associated with measurement and the MDGs. Langford notes that any indicators selected for measurement should be appropriate to the theme selected, their salience should be easily communicable to a wide audience, good quality and appropriately comparable data should be available, which is robust, and subject to external verification. In addition, the indicators selected should be action oriented, clearly signalling what should be done nationally and locally. They should be universally applicable, but sensitive to inequalities, and avoid setting up perverse incentives. I will review some of the possibly unforeseen consequences of the MDG education goal, target and indicator selection in relation to all these criteria. From this perspective, there are six major areas of concern that need to be borne in mind in developing an appropriate indicator or set of indicators for education post 2015.

Firstly, the aggregate expansion of primary schooling, with falls in the numbers of children out of school, or never having attended, masks a severe problem of distribution linked with what is often referred to as the problem of quality (Lewin, 2009; Perlman-Robinson, 2011; Aikman and Unterhalter, 2013). As has been shown, the poorest, notably girls in rural areas, but also boys and girls from the lowest quintiles, have dramatically fewer years in school than those from middle or upper income levels, and people who live in towns (UNESCO, 2012). This is true both in low- and middle-income countries. The current education indicators are not sufficiently sensitive to inequality. Because children who drop in and out of school, may be classed as enrolled, the MDG indicators currently do not pick up either the inequities of who is and is not enrolled or completing, or the perverse incentives associated with large numbers of children being enrolled in school but learning little. This is most acute for the

poorest, who might experience exclusions associated with language, discrimination, and unmet learning needs. It has acute gender dimensions, but also talks to features of subordinated ethnicities, and problems of location. Because schools often receive capitation grants on the basis of the numbers enrolled, or noted as attending, schools have incentives to include children on their register, but not to ensure they learn. The MDGs incentivise enrolment and progression, but have no indicator linked to what is learned and how this is taught. In their current form, they also fail to acknowledge that learning takes place in multiple sites, not only school, and the importance of action that can link together these disparate settings. Currently, the information revolution is largely driven by the private sector, while the education revolution is primarily state led. An action-oriented indicator that has salience for both groups is particularly important. A number of commentators highlight how the caps on teachers pay, often imposed by IMF strictures from 2000, contributed to the perverse incentives associated with enrolling large numbers of children, with inadequately trained and supported teachers in place to enable learning to take place (Nordstrom, 2012; UNICEF, 2010). The intersection of inequalities is a huge challenge for teachers working with the poorest, who often have minimal time or financial resources, inadequate training and support, to address this. The MDG indicator thus masks, and does not reveal the problem of intersecting inequalities, limiting, rather than clearly steering appropriate actions to be taken.

Secondly, the focus on achieving UPE in MDG 2, where indicators on illiteracy only address the 15 to 24 age group, has parked the unfinished business of adult illiteracy and the multiple exclusions suffered by this group. Thus, the indicator selected had perverse incentives, meaning that governments can achieve national and international accolades for expanding primary education for children, but ignore the injustices associated with adult illiteracy. There are particular gender dynamics here, as globally the population without literacy and numeracy are two-thirds women and one-third men. The omission of an indicator in this area is thus associated with deepening inequalities for a substantial population. This issue suggests that education targets should not just be limited to schooling for children and youth. Possibly two or three education targets with associated indicators are needed.

Thirdly, a number of commentators on the education MDGs remark how they set the bar too low, giving governments few incentives for expanding good quality secondary provision or technical education, one reason families might take on some of the expenses and difficulties of maintaining children through primary schooling (Lewin and Sabates, 2011; Beyond 2015,

2013). Again, what is evident are the perverse incentives associated with selecting UPE from the broader framework of six education goals developed in Dakar.

This links with a fourth area of concern. Since the 1990s, despite the lack of attention in either the EfA or the MDG framework, there has been a considerable expansion of participation in higher education around the world (Leathwood and Read, 2009; King, Marginson and Naidoo, 2011; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010). However, participation in higher education too is marked by many inequalities. Particularly in low- and middle-income countries, participation rates are very low, despite the fact that many areas of social development require skills and understanding only developed in higher education. For the education sector, the limited nature of teacher education and the low levels of training provided to education administrators and managers have had severe consequences. A number of studies of teacher education (Moon, 2012; Griffin, 2012), children's attainment (UNESCO, 2012), and professional engagement with poverty and inequality (Unterhalter et al, 2012; Unterhalter, 2013) suggest a need to connect to some in-depth reflection, which is often associated with discussion and engagement in university. In addition, the incentives in the higher education sector to develop systems of ranking linked to particular markers of esteem, largely associated with research output, rather than contributions to social development, have also set up an additional layer of perverse incentives. There remains limited knowledge and understanding about how to teach professionals to work across sectors, engage with the poorest, and the challenge of how or whether a measurement indicator could facilitate inter-sectoral action remains on the table.

Fifthly, limiting gender concerns in education largely to improving gender parity in enrolments has meant that the actions taken by governments and NGOs have been limited on important human rights and human development concerns about violence against women and girls in or around school. Addressing problems with formations of masculinities and femininities, and looking at what girls study has lagged behind concerns with enrolment and retention. Here too, the ways in which the inter-sectoral problem as to whether enrolment in school helps expand gender equalities in the wider society, has not been sufficiently addressed.

Sixthly, implementing the MDGs with a results-based approach resulted in blaming the poor which only exacerbated inequalities. When teachers or provincial officials are publicly held to account for children not succeeding in school, they displace the blame to poorer

communities, who cannot answer back (Unterhalter et al., 2012). This appears to emerge from the process of setting indicators with limited participation and solidarity in developing the choice of indicators or the process of evaluation.

In reviewing these six areas of concern we need to pose questions regarding what is gained by having technically adequate data and robust systems of validation, and what is lost in not having wide public understanding of measurement, the choice of indicators, and the locus of responsibility. The lack of a means for dialogue, not just by technical experts at the top, and excluded groups at the bottom, but between different layers of decision-making and professional engagement, is also a problem of inequality in participation and review of the MDG targets and indicators (Unterhalter and Dorward, 2013).

Thus there are gains and losses with regard to the MDG targets and indicators in education. The focus on UPE, and the very precise and robust indicators selected to measure this, ensured that governments could legislate for universal primary education, monitor progress and expenditures. Donors could clearly direct funds. Very clear levers for implementation could be pulled, particularly with regard to building schools, training teachers, incentivising attendance (eg. through conditional cash transfers) and focusing on excluded groups. This project has been easily communicable and action oriented. However, despite effective actions regarding increasing enrolment, the focus on UPE has not generated equivalent actions linked to enhancing learning, addressing equity, deepening participation in decision-making or expanding an education vision beyond the primary level to take in secondary and tertiary levels and lifelong learning. The education indicators associated with MDGs 2 and 3 are particularly open to critique on their limited equality focus, their association with perverse incentives, limits on participation and solidarities which become evident in discourses linked with blaming the poor. Can we do better in post 2015?

Here are two suggestions for alternative indicators: The first concerns an MDG target on realising the right to a basic education. The first indicator I am suggesting relates to completion rates, as measured by the proportion of a cohort of pupils that enrolled in year 1 successfully complete an examination at the end of a primary or lower secondary phase of schooling, approximately nine years later depending on the organisation of the education system.[2] The second touches an MDG target on lifelong learning. Here the indicator still

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[2] My thanks to Roy Carr Hill for discussion on this issue.

needs to be developed, but it could draw on data already collected through the DHS on levels of education and literacy, and the attitudes and understandings people express relating to equity and sustainability, for example views on violence against women. In looking critically at both possible indicators I will turn to Langford's comments on criteria for any candidate indicator.

Criteria	Suggested indicator: Cohort successfully completing primary school
1. Relevance of Indicator to Theme	This would talk to the right to education; not just enrolment in school, but learning achievement. Helping to address aspects of identity, and freedom from poverty
2. Salience/ Communicability	Simple to communicate. Highly salient
3. Data availability and comparability	Relatively well-established data sets collected at school level. While historical administrative data varies, infrastructure to collect and review this in place. Some variation in nature of examination at the end of the primary phase, but possibility of comparability.
4. Robustness	Robust. Some problems of external verifiability in some countries.
5. Action-oriented; motivates national policy and practice	Action-oriented for improving enrolment, retention, attendance, teacher quality, teacher support, learning needs of diverse children.
6. Universally Applicable	Yes; while some school systems do not have public examinations at the end of primary or lower secondary school, assessments are made at school level
7. Equality-Sensitivity	While assessments at the level of the child cannot be made, patterns with regard to schools serving particular income quintiles, rural communities, ethnic groups can be made. An inequality modifier could be applied to distinguish countries doing well by all children to those which do not. Able to identify patterns of girls' and boys' attainment.
8. Absence of Perverse incentives	Could mean teachers 'teach to the test', limits the more expansive aspects of how children use knowledge and corruption in examination system. Subjects like global citizenship and sustainability may not be tested. Could mean children are held in last year of schooling until able to pass final test, but limited incentives to do this as this would show up as low proportions of cohort enrolling.

The first indicator measuring primary school completion rates is relatively robust with regard to issues of data availability and comparability, goes beyond the perverse incentives associated with measuring enrolment and progression, but not measuring attainment in the

current framework. It does not necessitate implementing a large and expensive additional testing regime. However, the indicator may not be amenable enough to monitoring learning for sustainability, equality, citizenship and participation. These qualities are more emphasised in the second suggested indicator.

The second suggested indicator does not draw on such clear data sources as the first, but shows promising potential to operate as a measurement for lifelong learning. DHS data could be used to gauge a number of features about the population of adults (beyond 18) and their engagement with lifelong learning, including years of schooling and higher education completed, knowledge about HIV and sustainable development, and attitudes to violence against women. The indicator could be both a measure of lifelong learning and empowerment. It is much less robust and well established than first indicator of primary school completion rates, but it would be complementary and perhaps more advantageous because it could be developed over time by a more participatory process. Woking this through Langford's criteria reveals the following:

Criteria	Suggested indicator: Lifelong learning & empowerment
1. Relevance of Indicator to Theme	This would talk to the right to education at all levels; not just schooling
2. Salience/ Communicability	As a composite indicator, not that simple to communicate. Salience of inclusion & exclusion of fields would need justifying
3. Data availability and comparability	Limited to countries where DHS collected. Comparability with countries without DHS an issue
4. Robustness	Not robust.
5. Action-oriented; motivates national policy and practice	Action-oriented for improving participation in secondary, tertiary and adult education, and supporting education in relation to health, gender equality and sustainability, providing these components of the general indicator visible enough
6. Universally Applicable	Yes;
7. Equality-Sensitivity	Could show up patterns within particular groups and locations. But may have perverse effects of blaming the poor
8. Absence of Perverse incentives	Could be used to enforce a particular set of dispositions in public declarations, driving articulation of alternative views into private spaces. Perverse effects of blaming the poor

It can be seen that the two suggested indicators each have strengths and weaknesses. The first because it is based on existing data sets, is robust, easily communicable, and appears to address some of the problems associated with UPE because it engages with the question of quality and learning. However, it does not address the problem of lifelong learning or expanded concern with gender equality, an important divergence of the MDG targets from the Dakar and Beijing Programmes of Action. The second suggested indicator attempts to take on these issues, but because it is not based on already developed indicators is much less robust. Datasets for this second indicator are uneven and its salience would need arguing for. While it might be an important indicator of inequalities and guide to action, it too has perverse incentives. The indicator might measure particular publicly accepted positions and would delegitimate dissenting views. There would thus be a possibility that if the poor and the vulnerable express adaptive preferences and hostility, say, to sustainability or equity, this would not merit careful consideration. One strength, however, of the putative indicator on lifelong learning and empowerment could be that it is developed through a participatory process and avoids some of the top-down technical directives associated with the more established indicators. While both the candidate indicators had merits, using these criteria, neither is without drawbacks.

However, other criteria for judging targets and indicators are also currently circulating in a number of discussion papers. Firstly, the UN Secretary General's Education First initiative stresses the importance of access, quality and global citizenship (United Nations, 2012). Secondly, the team working on the NGO network, Beyond 2015's position paper on education highlights the importance of seeing access, quality in learning and teaching, and equity as inextricable (Beyond, 2015, 2013). They point to the need to clearly address crises of affordability, accessibility, availability and adaptability. In their analysis there is a need to develop learner-centred assessments, and ensure that the targets selected drive action for substantial government investments in education, and learning, not just in literacy and numeracy, but also in critical skills, non-discrimination, and global citizenship (Beyond 2015, 2013). Thirdly, the group co-ordinated through the Brookings Institute's Global Compact on Learning is considering minimum and maximum indicators of learning achievement at a global and national level in early years, primary and post-primary provision (Learning Metrics task Force, 2013). Fourthly, work co-ordinated by the NGO PLAN has highlighted the importance of local score cards on school quality and metrics for addressing gender based violence at school (PLAN, 2012). For some of these initiatives what is important is using the

process of measurement to drive a policy agenda, while for others, what is important is developing a more comprehensive policy agenda to complement the MDGs, and backfilling with the most appropriate indicator

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to map some of the history of how the education targets and indictors in the MDG framework were selected and comment on some of the consequences of the way the agenda narrowed from Education for All to universal primary education, from gender equality and concerns with participation and sustainability to a limited notion of gender parity. It has also considered some of the constraints associated with the lack of targets or indicators concerned with adult education, secondary or tertiary levels. Two possible candidate indicators have been suggested and subjected to scrutiny using Langford's criteria.

In putting forward for discussion the two education indicators outlined above, I have hedged, suggesting both an indicator-led form of policy, and a policy-led form of indicator. I am attempting to think both with what is possible and what might be impossible, but still take us further along a road that recalls the significant achievements of the rights frameworks so comprehensively developed in previous decades.

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