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# POST-2015 EDUCATION MDGS

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Methodology .....	1
3. The Current Goals .....	1
4. The Impact of the Education MDGs and EFA Goals.....	2
4.1. Education Outcomes - MDGs.....	2
4.2. Education Outcomes – EFA goals.....	4
4.3. Financial Resources.....	6
5. Current Education Debates .....	8
5.1. Themes.....	8
5.2. Fora .....	17
6. Moving Towards the Post-2015 Education Agenda .....	20
6.1. Consensus Areas: .....	20
6.2. Areas without Consensus:.....	21
6.3. Conclusions and Recommendations .....	23
Bibliography .....	25
Annex A. Participant List for Interviews, held between March 1 – July 30, 2012 .....	26
Annex B. Comparison of Broad Approaches to Post-2015 Agenda.....	28

## Figures

Figure 1: Progress towards the education mdgs by lower-middle income countries, 2011 .....	3
Figure 2: Status of developing countries in meeting the education mdgs .....	4
Figure 3: ODA commitments to education, 1995 to 2010 .....	7
Figure 4: ODA commitments to education by sector, 1995 to 2010 .....	7
Figure 5: Number of out of school children of lower secondary school age, 2009 .....	9
Figure 6: Percentage of students transitioning from primary to secondary education, 1999 & 2009.....	10
Figure 7: Average years of schooling by per capita income, 1999 & 2009 .....	12
Figure 8: Tertiary education: gross enrolment ratio (ger) 1999 & 2009.....	13
Figure 9: Estimated external financing requirement for education .....	15

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report has been prepared by the Results for Development Institute (R4D) with the purpose of reviewing and contributing to the evidence base concerning progress on the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All Goals (EFA) to 2015 and beyond. For this purpose, the evidence base comprises experience with the MDGs to date, current debates and policy developments, the aim of a post-2015 global agreement similar to the MDGs, how a global agreement might add value to national efforts, and the type of agreement that might be made, including targets and indicators. This paper on the education MDGs and EFA goals is complemented by similar work on the health MDGs. The authors and Results for Development Institute are grateful to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) for subcontracting this research. This research has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Our study undertook a combination of literature reviews, interviews with key stakeholders in international organizations and in selected low income, middle income and donor countries, and attendance at various meetings organized by those interested in MDGs in general, and in getting learning and early childhood further into the MDG education agenda. We drew also on work already carried out for the Hewlett Foundation on the possibility of a learning goal, including particularly confidential interviews with 21 ministers of education (Burnett, 2012).

## **3. THE CURRENT GOALS**

Education has a longer history of international goals than some of the other MDGs. The original set of six Education for All goals was first established at an international education meeting in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, with the key targets to be universal primary education and gender parity by the year 2000. By the late 1990s it had become quite apparent that very little progress was being registered against these targets and as a result the international education community made preparations to renew the EFA goals in 2000. These preparations, involving regional assessments of progress and regional meetings, took place in the late 1990s and very much overlapped with the MDG process. The EFA dialogue culminated in a meeting in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 which adopted a new set of six goals, roughly the same as those put in place a decade before in Jomtien. As a result, there are currently two Education MDGs and six EFA goals, both sets established in 2000 and targeted on 2015. The education-focused MDGs overlap with two of the six EFA goals.

**MDGs:**

2: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

3: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

**EFA Goals:**

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality [*same as MDG2*].

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full access to and achievement in basic education of good quality [*same as MDG3*].

6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

## **4. THE IMPACT OF THE EDUCATION MDGs AND EFA GOALS**

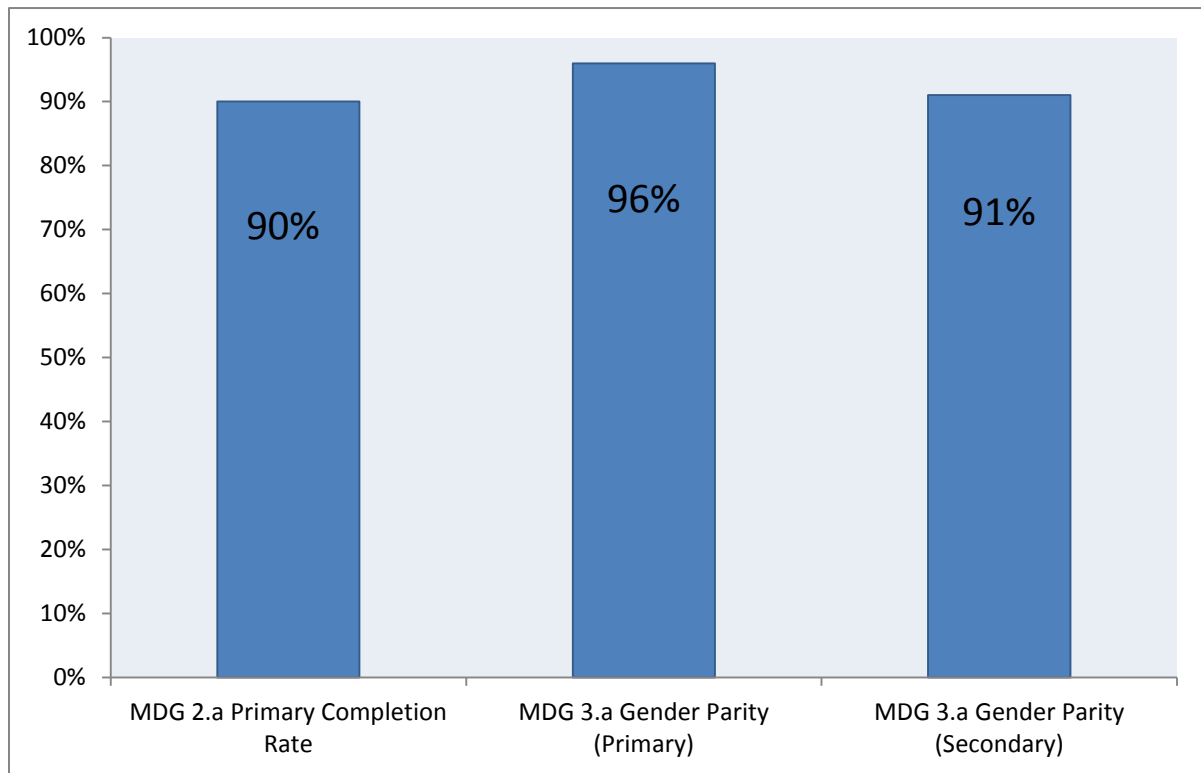
The precise impact of the education goals cannot be ascertained for well known methodological and measurement reasons. Several of the EFA goals are also very imprecisely defined. Broadly speaking, however, there has been considerable progress toward the MDG goals of universal primary enrolment and of gender parity at all levels of education; there has been an impact on international resource transfers and probably also on domestic spending for primary education; but there has been relatively little progress on the EFA goals of early childhood care and education, youth and adult literacy, skills and quality.

### **4.1. EDUCATION OUTCOMES - MDGs**

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the huge progress made towards the two education MDGs, using the official MDG indicators. Even countries currently not on track demonstrate positive progress. Indeed much more progress has been made on the education than on the health goals, and the gender parity

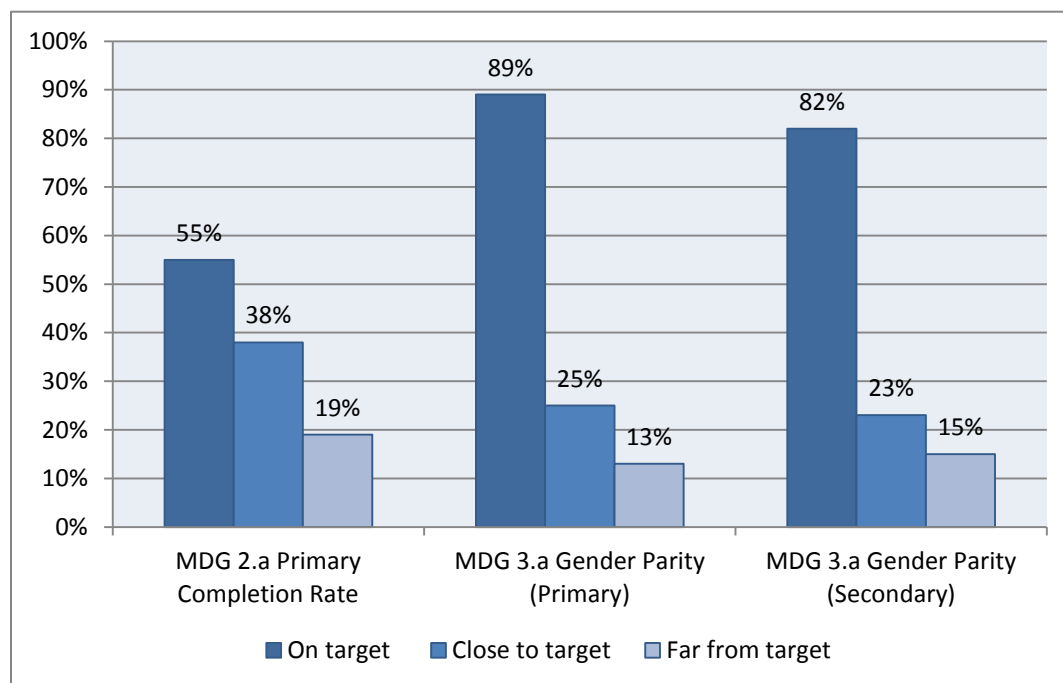
education goal has registered the most progress of all eight MDGs. At the same time, the primary education MDG will not be met by the target date of 2015, though it will on present progress largely be achieved by 2025 (Figure 3 shows likely progress in the 40 countries currently farthest from meeting MDG2). This may be too optimistic, however, as the rate of increase of primary enrolment is now itself falling.

FIGURE 1: PROGRESS TOWARDS THE EDUCATION MDGS BY LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES, 2011



Source: World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2011

FIGURE 2: STATUS OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN MEETING THE EDUCATION MDGS



Source: World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2010

## 4.2. EDUCATION OUTCOMES – EFA GOALS

Overall progress towards the EFA (and MDG) goals is summarized in these highlights excerpted from the latest 2011 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report, which show that the progress on primary enrolment and on gender parity has not been matched in other areas, especially not in quality of education.

### 4.2.a. Positive Developments

The past decade has witnessed extraordinary progress towards the Education for All goals in some of the world's poorest countries.

From 1999 to 2008, an additional 52 million children were enrolled in primary school.

The number of children out of school was halved in South and West Asia.

In sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment rates rose by one-third despite a large increase in the primary school age population.

Gender parity in primary enrolment has improved significantly in the regions that began the decade with the greatest gender gaps.

Government expenditure on education has risen very significantly in recent years in most developing countries.

#### **4.2.b. Continuing Challenges**

The number of children out of school is falling at too slow a pace. In 2010, 61 million children were out of school, more than half (33 million) in sub-Saharan Africa and a further one fifth in South Asia (United Nations, 2012). Notably about half of them live in just 15 countries. There is worry that the final 20-30% in terms of UPE are much harder to reach than those who are already enrolled. Twenty-four percent of children of primary school age in sub-Saharan Africa were not in school, and roughly a quarter of those children that do complete primary education do not continue on to secondary education.

Enrolment rates for secondary school in conflict-affected countries are nearly one third less than in other low-income countries (UNESCO, 2011). In every education indicator nations affected by conflict trail by a growing margin. Internally displaced populations and refugees stand out as the most vulnerable and least visible populations. Reaching them will require a much more concerted global effort both in terms of mobilizing donor funds and more critically in terms of coordinating services at the regional and national level.

Progress towards universal enrolment has slowed. In fact should current trends continue there could be more children out of school by 2015 than there are today. Though this is in part a consequence of the fact that it is increasingly challenging to reach the most marginalized children, it also reflects the persisting conflict discussed above. Moreover, in some countries universal primary enrolment has lost momentum as a political priority, in part precisely as a result of success so far and the perceived need to shift focus and resources to other education levels.

Recent trends illustrate that completion remains as much an issue as initial enrolment. Many children drop out of school before completing a full primary cycle. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 10 million children drop out.

About 17% of the world's adults – 796 million people – still lack basic literacy skills. Nearly two-thirds are women.

Gender disparities continue to hamper progress in education. Had the world achieved gender parity at the primary level in 2008, there would have been an additional 3.6 million girls in primary school. Gender disadvantage is costing lives. If the average child mortality rate for sub-Saharan Africa were to fall to the level associated with women who have some secondary education, there would be 1.8 million fewer deaths.

Wider inequalities within countries are restricting opportunity. In Pakistan, for example, almost half of children aged 7 to 16 from the poorest households are out of school, compared with just 5% from the richest households.

The quality of education remains alarmingly low in many countries. Millions of children are emerging from primary school with reading, writing and numeracy skills far below expected levels.

To achieve universal primary education by 2015, another 1.9 million teachers will be needed, more than half in sub-Saharan Africa. Effectively training these new teachers is as big a hurdle as financing them.

These continuing challenges are important as they highlight many of the areas that are part of the current debates around possible future education goals: especially adult literacy, inequality in enrolment and learning, and the quality of education. To these could also be added skills training (EFA goal 3), but to date this has not been well defined or reported upon<sup>1</sup>.

These challenges do not, however, fully reflect broader developments in education. These are discussed in section 5 below and include particularly the huge expansion of secondary and higher education, both historically unprecedented; the impact of broader debates around equity and employment on education; and the impact of the emerging global middle class.

### **4.3. FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Immediately following the introduction of the MDGs, ODA for all sectors combined increased dramatically. Still, despite the Dakar pledge for additional donor funding for countries struggling to meet the EFA goals, the share of the education sector has stagnated at 10-12% of the total while the share of health has more than doubled (Figure 3). Early figures indicate, however, that aid to education did increase significantly in 2011. Education resource transfers do not, therefore, seem particularly to have benefited from the presence of international education goals. Indeed, current aid levels for basic education fall far, far short of the \$16 billion estimated to be required to meet the EFA goals. An argument has been made by some that in contrast to the health goals, to an extent the unambitious nature of the education MDGs contributed to the inability to attract greater resource flows. Building on this logic, instituting quality goals can help position the education sector more prominently to prospective donors and in turn earn greater respect and resources.

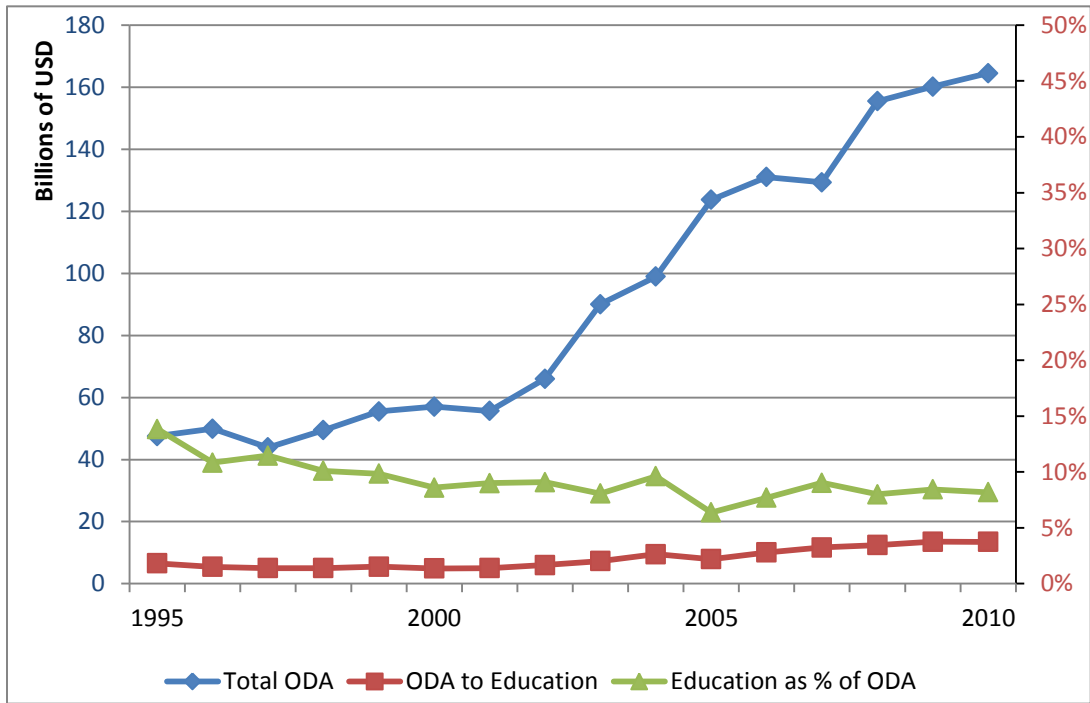
By contrast, the share of government spending on education in developing countries has increased substantially – from 2.9 to 3.8% of GDP in low-income countries since 1999 (UNESCO EFA GMR, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> The 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report is devoted to skills and may throw some light on this question when it is published later this year.

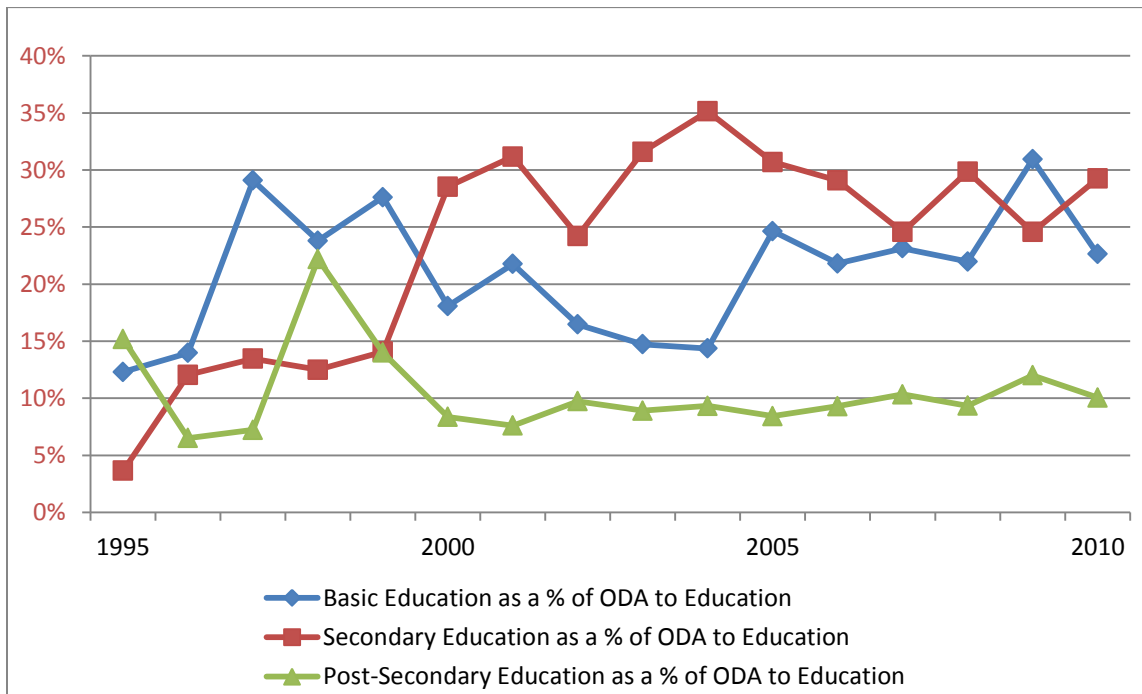


FIGURE 3: ODA COMMITMENTS TO EDUCATION, 1995 TO 2010



Sources: OECD 2011, United Nations Statistics Division 2012, Lu et al. 2010

FIGURE 4: ODA COMMITMENTS TO EDUCATION BY SECTOR, 1995 TO 2010



Sources: OECD 2011, United Nations Statistics Division 2012, Lu et al. 2010

## 5. CURRENT EDUCATION DEBATES

This section discusses eight themes (section 5.1) that are beginning to emerge in discussions of future education goals that are themselves taking place in at least six different fora (section 5.2).

### 5.1. THEMES

Three factors are driving current debate about international education goals. First, there is a sense of what has not been achieved or still needs to be achieved with the current goals. Here there is a heavy emphasis on learning, especially from donors who have supported the rapid expansion of basic education enrolment and are now increasingly concerned with the growing evidence that those in primary school are not mastering their curricula and also that existing statistical measures are insufficient. Second, there are developments within education that are placing enormous pressure on ministers of education – especially rapidly growing secondary and tertiary enrolment rates. Third, there are developments outside education which are having important impacts on education: the growing global middle class is creating a huge demand for secondary and tertiary education, rising inequality within countries is generating concern about equity within education, and pervasive unemployment is forcing attention onto the skills that students acquire and sparking a debate about the need for both more vocational education and for complementing formal curricula with such “life skills” as are important for employment, including communications, entrepreneurialism, punctuality and the like.

As a result, eight areas of debate currently exist and overlap in international discussions about possible future education goals: learning, secondary education, skills and competencies, equity, higher education, education’s place on the agenda, financing and data/statistics.

1. **Learning.** This topic dominates, in large part because of enormous pressure coming now from various donors and organizations, loosely coalescing around the Brookings Institution-led “Global Compact on Learning”. That there is a learning crisis in the developing countries is beyond dispute – and also demonstrates the sheer inadequacy of the enrolment and completion measures used so far to assess primary education. As noted in numerous interviews, the “primary school enrollment goal is seen as a grossly inadequate measure of actual learning, and so while the tremendous rise in enrolment is a notable achievement it does not tell us anything about whether children are actually learning or whether it is relevant.”<sup>2</sup> Consensus is widespread, and most ministers of education interviewed agree that learning is one of their top priorities. (It is significant that the 2013 EFA GMR will be devoted to the topic of Teaching and Learning). This growing momentum around learning has in turn raised concern both about the lack of best practices for learning in the classroom and how best to design metrics to measure learning that have global applicability<sup>3</sup>.

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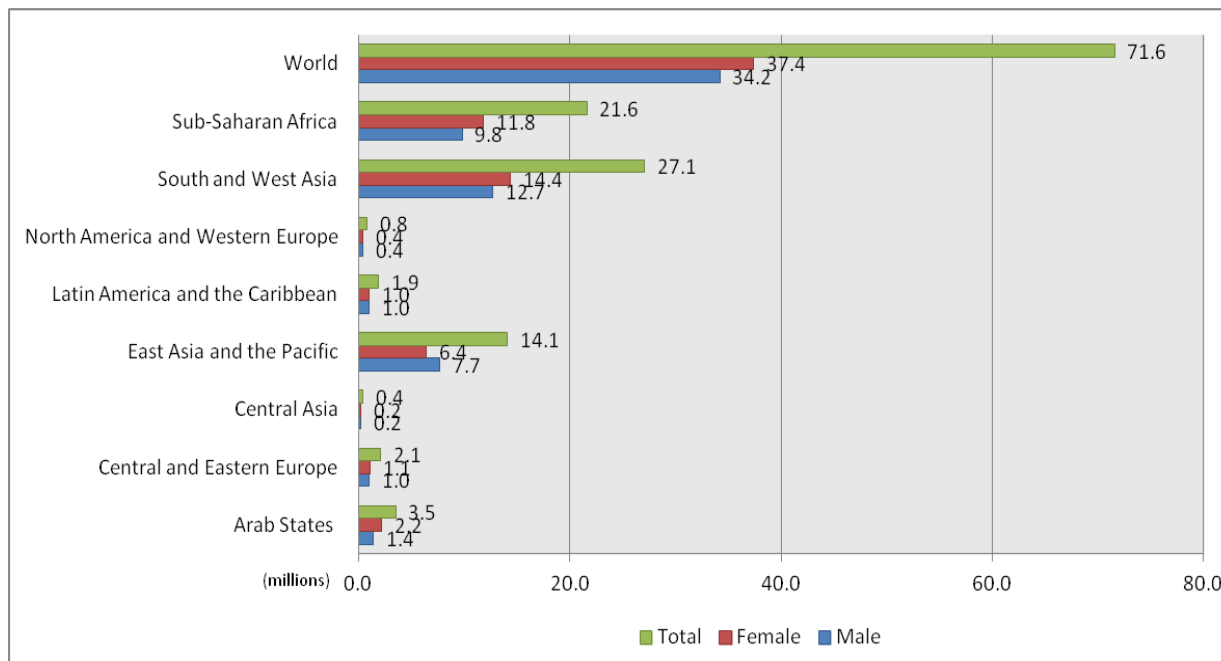
<sup>2</sup> Interview with Richard Morgan, UNICEF Senior Adviser on the post-2015 development agenda

<sup>3</sup> See also the discussion of the Learning Metrics task force set up by the Brookings Institution and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in section 5.2 (3) below.

There is, however, considerable concern that learning is currently being defined too narrowly in this debate, in which it is often equated with basic reading skills in the lower primary grades. Such a narrow definition fails to account for the importance of non-cognitive skills like problem solving, critical reasoning, communication, and teamwork.<sup>4</sup> Currently the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is considering a target of reading fluency by grade two. Defining learning in this way means that countries with substantial linguistic diversity will fall far short of any targets, given the impossibility of teachers being able themselves to master more than a small number of languages and yet with some countries having over 80 languages. The question thus becomes how to set progressive benchmarks for learning while accounting for regional differences.

**2. Secondary Education.** Major success with primary enrolment rates is now leading to increased pressure on secondary education in all developing countries. This is hardest to accommodate in the low income countries which are not yet able, in contrast to the middle income ones, to benefit from a demographic shift and must contend with simultaneously rising demand for primary and secondary education. This problem was the one most often cited in interviews with education ministers, which also reflects the pressure of the rising middle class in their countries. By contrast, many donors seem to consider this an unimportant topic, as reflected both by their participation in international discussions and by their aid priorities within education.

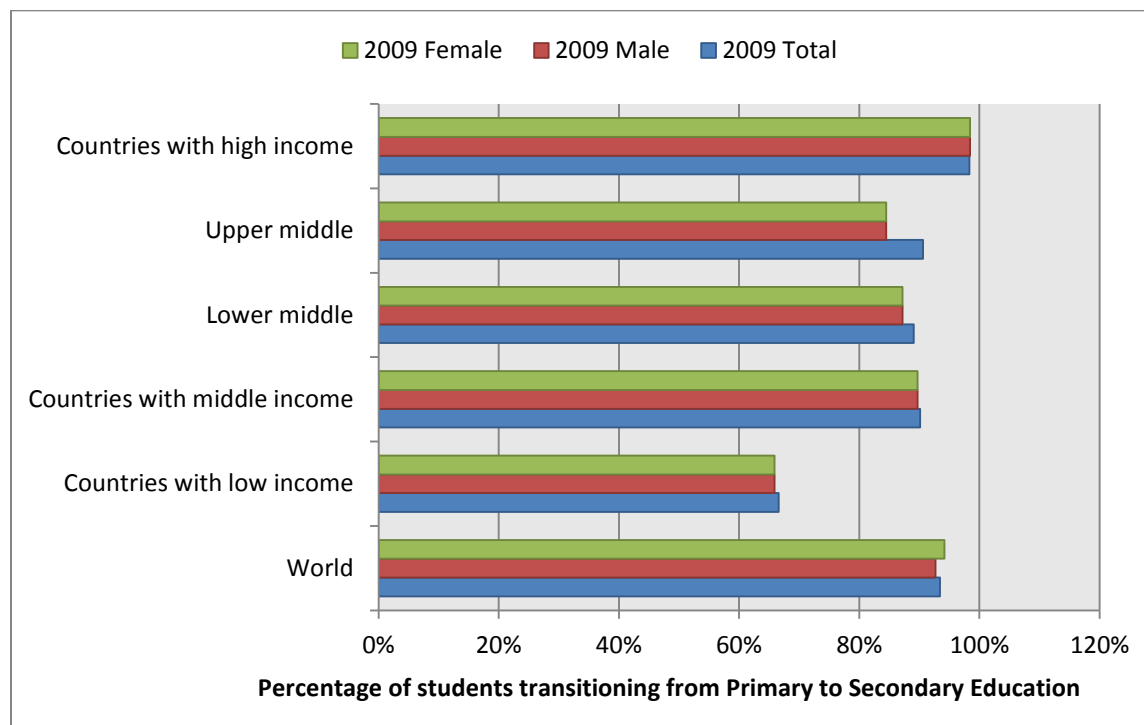
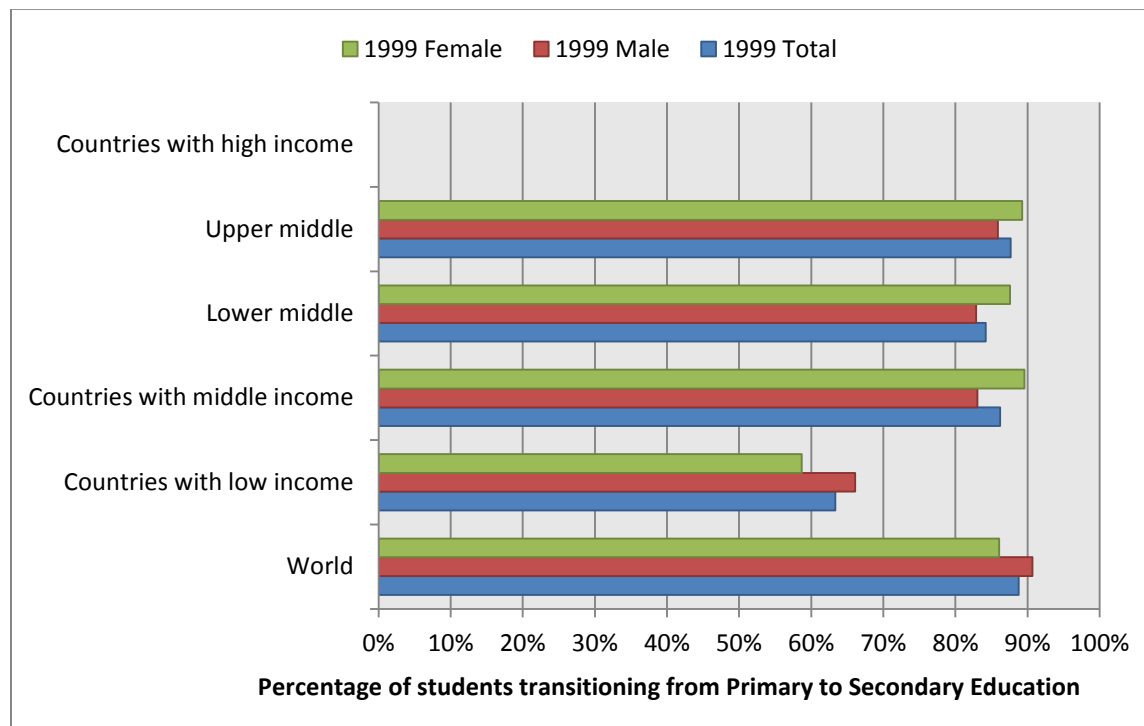
FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN OF LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE, 2009



Source: World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2010

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Elizabeth King, World Bank, Director of Education Human Development Network; Interview with Jordan Naidoo, UNICEF Senior Education Advisor

FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS TRANSITIONING FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY EDUCATION, 1999 & 2009



Source: World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2010

**3. Skills and Competencies.** Very much overlapping with Learning at the primary level and with the question of the required skills for secondary school leavers is the issue of what skills children should acquire at school, in part driven by concern over unemployment and linkages between a skilled workforce and future GDP growth. Indeed “youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are three times as likely to be unemployed as their adult counterparts”(Adams, 2012). Globally, there is considerable dissatisfaction from employers with what school leavers at all levels have to offer; at the same time there is no clear consensus on what is needed. In some cases this discussion is leading to a renewed emphasis on vocational and technical skills, which may have important implications for costs (TVET unit costs are much higher than those for general secondary education). The EFA GMR currently under preparation for 2012 publication is concerned with skills. There seems to be an emerging consensus that certain non-cognitive “life skills” are essential for employment and that these need to be acquired largely in school or through specific youth training schemes. These skills have been variously defined and are often referred to as “21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills” and include communications, entrepreneurialism, ICT familiarity and sometimes also languages (especially English). The International Labor Organisation has produced a “Decent Work Agenda” which promotes dialogue among workers and employers to increase productivity and extend social protection. There is also a push to broaden the concept of education beyond the classroom to recognize the potential of remedial education programs, technical and vocational education training, and other innovative skills training models.

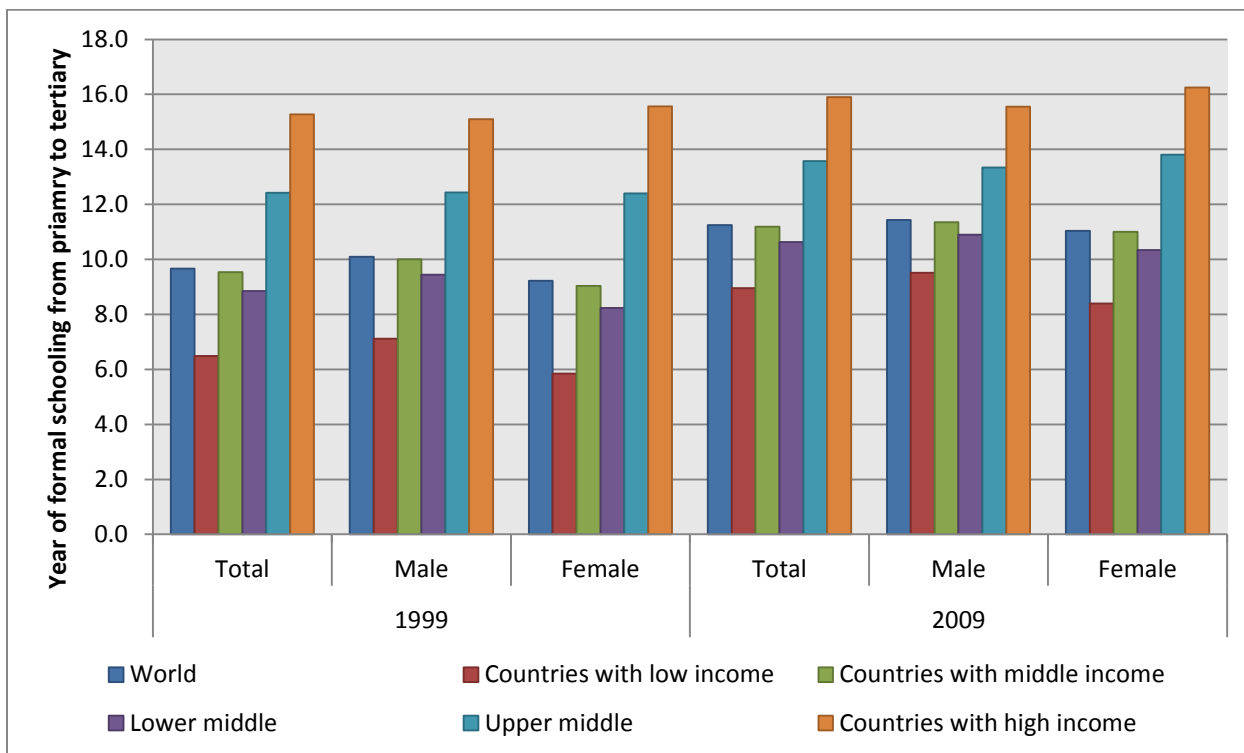
**4. Equity.** There are three dimensions to this debate. The first is the connection with the global debate on widening inequality, for which education would seem to be one key part of any solution. The second, linked though separate, is that it is becoming increasingly evident that, even when enrolment disparities are eliminated, there remain major performance disparities among children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Language, both of instruction and materials, is yet another element of this dimension that has emerged as pivotally important for the post-2015 agenda. Moreover, the tendency to decouple access and learning often masks persistent inequalities present in all countries, from the United States to Malawi. Continuing concern about the lack of progress with adult literacy also falls into this debate, though it is very hard to find either ministers of education or donors with serious interest in this topic. The third, and possibly most important, is that those who remain out of primary school are not forgotten in any move to expand or replace the education goals; they still represent some 10 percent of the global primary school age population, 40 percent of them are disabled, and a third live in low income countries affected by conflict. The challenges are particularly acute in countries affected by violence, which account for 77% of children not in primary school and 59% of children not in secondary school (*World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*). Considering significant enrolment gains, from an access perspective the challenge now hinges on reaching the lowest quintile—those affected by systemic inequities. It is especially crucial to note that the burden is greatest for those who are members of multiple marginalized groups, including females who are also an ethnic minority, displaced urban youth affected by conflict or disaster, and minorities attending schools that teach in what for the students is a second or third language.<sup>5</sup> The EFA GMR has developed a “deprivation and

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Elizabeth King, World Bank, Director of Education Human Development Network

marginalization in education (DME) indicator” which demonstrates the overlap between education poverty (i.e. those with fewer than four years of education) and inequality (UNESCO, 2010).

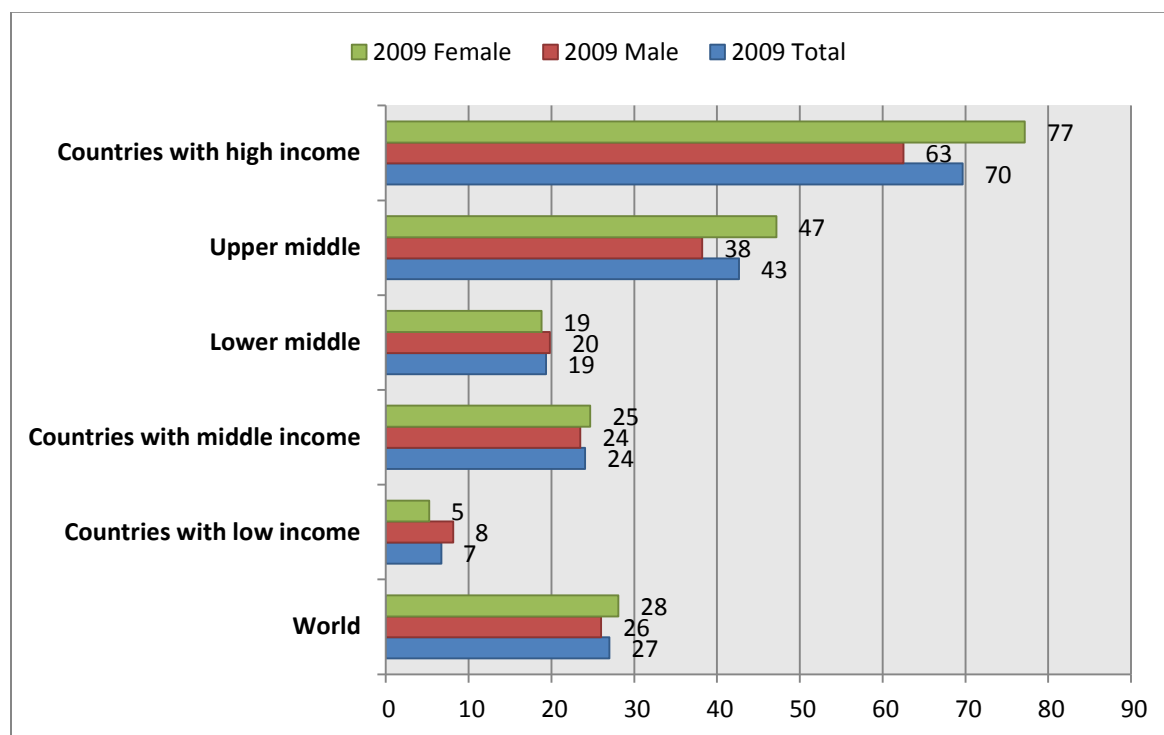
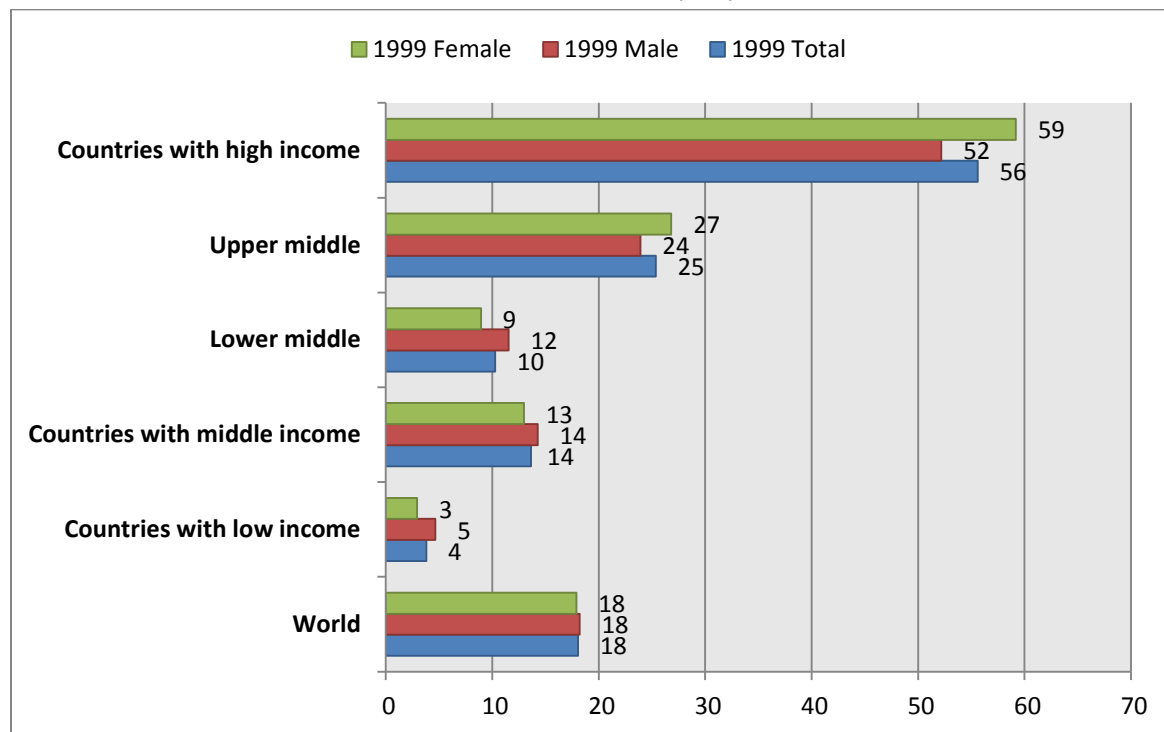
FIGURE 7: AVERAGE YEARS OF SCHOOLING BY PER CAPITA INCOME, 1999 & 2009



Source: World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2011

**5. Higher Education.** Higher education is very commonly handled differently from school level education in many countries, often with separate ministries of Education and Higher Education. As a result, although it would seem to be crucial for educational and national development, higher education is strikingly missing from the international discussions on future goals, including usually also discussions on skills. There are, however, important advocates for higher education though they have not yet penetrated the mainstream global debates.

FIGURE 8: TERTIARY EDUCATION: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) 1999 &amp; 2009



Source: World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2011

**6. Education as a Priority.** There is great concern among the education community that education, which was a central part of the 2000 MDGs, may be losing its priority status, for two reasons:

a) So much progress has been made towards primary enrolment and completion that those outside education, including until recently the UN Secretary-General, spoke of the education MDGs as if they had largely been achieved.

b) Education – and indeed Human Development more generally – no longer seems to enjoy the broad priority it did in the late 1990s. The current development paradigm is much more focused on growth and jobs than on education (and health). Yet no matter what issue one considers to reign at the top of the global agenda (growth, employment, security/peace/terrorism, sustainable development, health, etc.), it cannot be achieved without an emphasis on quality education. Yet that emphasis is, or at least appears to be distinctly absent.

One strategy to return education back to the forefront of the discussion, is to more effectively communicate the growing body of evidence which suggests that greater access to quality education in turn contributes to notable gains in other sectors like health. For instance, studies show that as the education level of mothers rises, under-5 mortality rates decrease drastically. Additionally, education contributes to a rise in income and can lead to positive shifts in behavior that improve nutrition, and improve the success of health interventions. In fact, studies show that on average wages rise by ten percent with every additional year of education, and in the case of girls by as much as 15 percent with every additional year of primary education (Adams, 2012). Leveraging the strong evidence base for these claims will be vital in emphasizing the crucial role of education in the post-2015 agenda (GMR, 2011). Early drafts of the UN Secretary General's Education Initiative<sup>6</sup> indicate an endorsement of this approach, noting that "UN agencies must elevate education's importance in supporting the full spectrum of human development" (UNDP, 2012).

More than simply accepting that sectors are inextricably linked, it is crucial to move beyond sectoral silos and recognize that integrating interventions can lead to major breakthroughs across sectors. Instituting school-feeding programs, or providing de-worming and vaccinations, for example, can reduce malnutrition and improve health while also bolstering student attendance, retention and learning. Utilizing schools as a community hub for access to clean water is yet another means of raising the profile of education at the household level while simultaneously contributing to progress against the separate water MDG.

**7. Financing:** The existing MDGs have been particularly important for increasing financing for health and education, including particularly ODA. Given the change in global circumstances, it seems less likely that any future MDGs or EFA goals will have such a significant influence on finance unless they are restricted (by design or in practice) to the low income countries. So the question of resource flows is intimately linked to the issue of universal or country-specific goals for education.

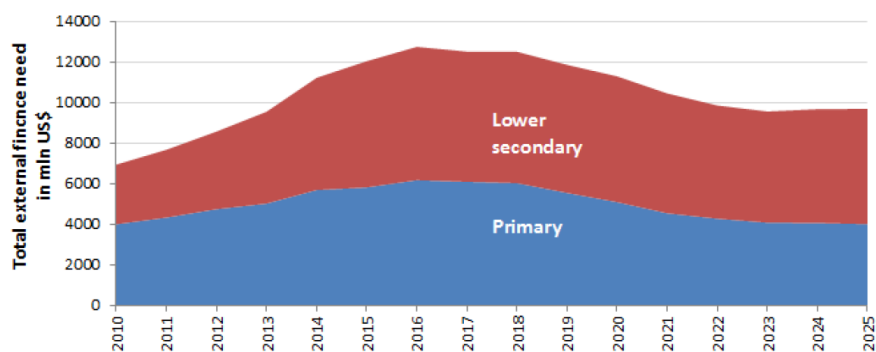
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<sup>6</sup> See section 5.2



FIGURE 9: ESTIMATED EXTERNAL FINANCING REQUIREMENT FOR EDUCATION

THE TOTAL EXTERNAL FINANCE REQUIREMENT RISES FROM A LITTLE OVER US\$7 BILLION IN 2010 TO A PEAK OF US\$13 BILLION IN 2016 AND THEN STARTS A SUSTAINED DECLINE AS DOMESTIC RESOURCES INCREASINGLY COVER MORE OF EDUCATION COSTS.



Source: (Wils & Ingram, 2011)

In interviews, several senior policy figures contended that, while closing the funding gap is important, ODA is by no means the only and indeed not at all the major source of funding for the sector. Thus ensuring education expenditures remain a priority at the country, regional and household levels is at least of equal importance as advocating for expanded ODA.<sup>7</sup> India, for example, instituted an “education cess,” generating additional revenues to support girls’ education (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau, 2012). This type of innovation also has great potential for placing education higher on the agenda of countries striving to meet the current goals. Also important is to tap the increasing interest among civil society organizations (CSOs) to improve accountability in order to ensure that public resources reach their intended destinations. CSO tracking of public spending on education in Uganda and in several Indian states, for example, has both improved understanding of where the funds go and also helped raise the profile of education in local communities.

Finally, since the inception of the MDG and EFA goals in 2000, the nature of international resource mobilization has shifted dramatically. It used to be aid-driven and predominantly North-South. Now North-South flows still include aid but also reflect a now much-expanded role for foundations and private donors. Moreover, a rise in international funding from middle income countries (in particular the BRICS) has occurred, along with a major increase in North-South-South partnerships. In contrast to 2000, a complex funding environment mandates that to mobilize resources the next set of goals must be responsive and relevant to this broader set of stakeholders.

**8. Better use of Data and Statistics.** There were notable weaknesses in the use of data both in formulating and monitoring the last round of goals. Measuring countries’ progress as “on-track” and “off-track” failed to highlight the considerable progress made by countries that began with low levels of

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Elizabeth King, World Bank, Director of Education Human Development Network

human development. Moreover, as more poor people today live in middle income countries than in low income ones, it is evident that national averages in many instances distort realities at the district and local level. There is growing consensus on the importance of improving statistical analysis both to measure progress to date and in framing future goals. Indeed the UN System Task Team, a consortium of 63 UN agencies, recently recommended placing far greater emphasis on the use of disaggregated data. In a report to the Secretary General, the group calls for “defining qualitative indicators and more availability of data disaggregated by sex, age, geography, migrant status, and rural-urban location,” as a means of monitoring “both the degree to which development progress is indeed inclusive and sustainable, and the extent to which the needs of the most deprived and vulnerable groups are being addressed” (UN System Task Team on the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012). Though the original MDGs systematically disaggregated primary enrollement by gender, there is need for far better contextual information with regards to equity. Rather than relying on high-level averages, there is some interest in using the individual as the unit of analysis. With all this in mind, the UN interagency expert group on statistics is poised to play a central role in advising on the open-ended process of goals and the validity indicators.<sup>8</sup> The “feeling within UN Agencies is to not proceed with too much haste but rather to ground indicators in solid existing experience in terms of data collection and analysis, and test possible goals in field conditions.”<sup>9</sup> Yet in order to truly improve both the development of indicators and subsequent accountability mechanisms, there will be further investment required to strengthen capacity at the national level. The call for smarter use of data also incorporates a push to be innovative and look at qualitative measures of progress through the use of methods like perception surveys, and crowd sourcing.

**Overview.** Most lobbying and interest by donors and northern NGOs at present largely surrounds three topics: learning (1), equity (4), the role of education (6) and data (8). By contrast those in the South, who are much less organized (indeed, not really organized) are focused mainly on secondary education (2), skills for employment (3) and, in a few cases, also higher education (5). Interestingly almost no one seems to be focused on international resource flows (7) though this could change if Gordon Brown strongly influences the Secretary-General’s Initiative on Education (see next section).

In addition there is an attempt by one special lobby (early childhood development) to influence the agenda, but it seems likely that their efforts will be largely linked to debates 1 and 4 on learning and equity. Still other discussions are ongoing to formulate a targeted advocacy strategy for girls’ education.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Richard Morgan, UNICEF Senior Adviser on the post-2015 development agenda

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Richard Morgan, UNICEF Senior Adviser on the post-2015 development agenda

## 5.2 FORA

Where are these debates taking place? We can identify six overlapping arenas, none yet fully inclusive of the international education community. In addition, other discussions may turn out to have relevance for future education MDGs, e.g. the Clinton Global Initiative in September will include a focus on education.

### **1. General discussions about MDGs, including the 50 country consultations that UNDP is organizing.**

Responding to widespread criticism that the last round of goals were negotiated without seeking input from those it targeted, there is already strong emphasis on the need for robust consultations with a wide range of developing countries. Coordinated by UNDP and UNICEF, some 50 UN country-level consultations, or “national dialogues,” are being organized based on nine thematic areas, one of which is a broad focus on education at all levels (UNDP, 2012). Other thematic areas of relevance to education are inequality, and growth and employment. Linked to this there will also be thematic consultations at the global level; however UNESCO has yet to clarify how it will or will not integrate EFA and MDG consultations into a global education thematic discussion.

There will also be formal consultations led by the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs on behalf of the UN General Assembly (UNDP, 2012). Indeed at this early stage, UNESCO and UNICEF are undertaking a mapping of key networks and NGOs and Agencies that will need to be engaged. Some decision needs to be made with regard to efficiency and how different levels of consultation will work. With strong priorities already solidifying, at national level there is already concern on how best to provide a platform for multiple voices. Moreover, as the post-2015 discussion continues, there is a greater focus on encouraging participation of youth, and in particular on leveraging web-based and social media tools to harvest youth opinion.<sup>10</sup> Despite the prominent role of consultations, given the compressed timeline (intended to be completed by March 2013) and already emerging priorities, there is some concern the process will still fail to capture the opinions of marginalized groups. As noted in discourse on equity there is fear that those excluded will once again be populations that face the greatest hurdles both in terms of access (past/future goals) and learning (future goals).

### **2. A (slow) process that UNESCO is initiating to review the EFA goals and see what might follow them.**

While, as noted above, this is separate from the MDGs, this is likely ultimately to influence them, as the 2000 EFA goals influenced the 2000 MDGs – if its pace can be accelerated, for it is currently far behind the general MDG discussions. In May 2012, UNESCO completed a High Level Expert Meeting for the Asia-Pacific region entitled, “Towards EFA and Beyond: Shaping a new Vision for Education” (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau, 2012). This meeting was noteworthy in that it reaffirmed the EFA goals, particularly in a context of disparities in the region, but also observed the need to go beyond the goals to include, “learning, equity and quality of education, teachers and skills development” and also affirmed the importance of both an education-specific development agenda beyond 2015 and explicit reference to education in all development agendas. The absence of higher education from the Asia-

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jordan Naidoo, UNICEF Senior Education Advisor

Pacific discussions may largely reflect the non-participation of experts from higher education ministries, as indicated above.

**3. The Global Compact on Learning** – essentially an alliance of northern foundations, NGOs and some donors, assembled by the Brookings Institution which is promoting three priorities: early childhood, learning in primary school, and a less well-defined post-primary agenda, especially for girls. There is beginning to be some Southern involvement in this movement, especially through the creation of Regional Learning Hubs to engage stakeholders. In partnership with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the Brookings Institution is also implementing the Learning Metrics Taskforce over a period of 18 months, with the ultimate goal to “provide a framework for national efforts to measure the status of learning” (Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution, 2012). The taskforce is composed of a secretariat including UIS and CUE; a task force and its co-chairs; and three technical working groups. Additionally, the Center for Universal Education (CUE) has launched a 16 member Research Task Force to develop background papers on topics related to learning. The findings of these various groups will be shared at a Learning Research Symposium hosted by Brookings in late 2012. The final report of the taskforce will include:

- I. Recommendations for a set of competencies across the education lifespan. Depending on feasibility, these competencies may be internationally comparable or provide a framework for country-level measurement.
- II. Recommendations for how the competencies should be measured.
- III. Recommendations for how countries and regional and global organizations should collaborate to implement these measurements.

The group is currently circulating a draft framework, “Proposed Competencies for Learning Outcomes: Early Childhood, Primary, and Post-Primary,” for review, as well as a corresponding toolkit to facilitate broader consultation on the proposed competencies.

**4. The UN Secretary-General’s Global Education Initiative**, to be launched publicly in September, the Secretary General’s Education First Initiative is designed to accelerate progress toward the current EFA goals and MDG2 in selected least developed, post-conflict and post-disaster countries; to advocate for education as key to sustainable development at the global level; and to respond to the current financial shortfall in resources for education, including ODA, national budgets and UNESCO’s core budget. While ostensibly geared towards achieving the 2015 agenda, it is inevitable that this initiative will also focus attention on setting post-2015 priorities (UNESCO, 2011). Though still in the planning phase, the initiative is broken into a political component and a substance component and will include a Steering Committee and a Technical Advisors group, as well as a communications and advocacy group led by UNICEF. Additionally, there will be a Head of State Champions group, intended to raise visibility, resources, evidence that it is working. Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown was recently appointed as the global ambassador, and “will devote himself to working closely with all key partners to

help galvanize support” (United Nations, 2012).<sup>11</sup> His past statements have emphasized the need for a Global Fund for Education so a greater emphasis on international financing for basic education may emerge.

The initiative outlines three overarching priorities, namely:

- I. Unleashing the potential of those excluded: every child in school
- II. Unleashing the potential of every person: learning
- III. Unleashing the potential of humanity: global citizenship

### 5. United Nations Working Groups

A Group of 63 UN Agencies has come to a consensus on general priorities for future goals. The resulting report, “Realizing the future we want,” provides a broad conceptual framework on what form a post-2015 agenda may take as well as reflecting on how the process will differ from the first set of goals (UNDP, 2012). It is significant to note that during the process there was not a single dissenting voice on the importance of ensuring universal relevance of a new agenda. These recommendations were presented to the UN Secretary-General and outline four dimensions for the agenda, with the suggestion that each goal should tie into these points in some way:

- I. Inclusive social development;
- II. Inclusive economic development;
- III. Environmental Sustainability
- IV. Peace and Security

On July 31, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon announced a separate High-level Panel to advise on the post-2015 global development agenda (United Nations News Centre, 2012).<sup>12</sup> The panel will hold its first meeting in September and expected to submit its findings to the Secretary-General in mid-2013. It is intended to coordinate closely with the intergovernmental working group tasked to design Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**6. Regional Education Goals.** Beyond this, there is one region (Latin America), which has already established various sets of new regional education goals. The 20 or so “Metas Educativas,” coordinated by the Organization of Ibero-American States, stand out as a particularly prominent example (OEI, 2009). Yet though they enjoy considerable ownership, the Metas Educativas appear too extensive to serve as global models. Rather, they provide a comprehensive overview of education challenges in the region. What then should be the relationship of these goals to any future MDGs? The reality is that geography does not necessarily provide a good proxy. Even within Latin America, the challenges faced by countries like Chile and Bolivia, or Mauritius and Mozambique, vary substantially. Hence, despite the continued

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<sup>11</sup> [UN Announcement](#) was made on July 13, 2012

<sup>12</sup> This [announcement](#) was made on July 31, 2012

trend of regional integration, there is growing momentum behind the strategy of encouraging countries to group by context with the intent of heightening the relevance of indicators and targets.

## **6. MOVING TOWARDS THE POST-2015 EDUCATION AGENDA**

From these debates and from our interviews, several areas of broad consensus as well as areas of no agreement emerge within the international education community. Annex B summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of proposed approaches for the post-2015 agenda. Even where there is consensus, however, it is relatively limited as the bulk of developing countries have yet to engage with international thinking about the post-2015 agenda, either in general or in education specifically.

### **6.1. CONSENSUS AREAS:**

- a) That education should continue to be included in future MDGs – though this view may not be fully shared by those concerned with the MDGs more generally.
- b) That the current education MDGs should not be forgotten but need somehow to be included in any future goals – this stance has the added advantage that it would ensure education’s inclusion in the future agenda. One possible way of doing this is to adopt the notion of “Getting to Zero”, proposed by the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Benchmarking Progress, by which absolute targets would be set for the existing goals, for example eliminating extreme poverty, and then also for next generation development goals, such as ending illiteracy. As education, unlike poverty and disease, cannot easily be expressed in terms of eliminations, there would have to be a loose interpretation of “zero”.
- c) That future education MDGs, like those for health, should be formulated with low income and middle income countries playing a much more substantial role and should apply to all countries, not solely low income ones. This effectively means that the goals will have to include secondary as well as primary education – and indeed secondary education is now the level from which most individuals exit formal education and enter the labor force in every region except for sub-Saharan Africa.
- d) That the current emphasis on enrolment and completion must be amended to include a focus on learning.
- e) That equity needs to be addressed, with particular focus on rising inequality within countries.
- f) That measurement needs to be addressed upfront at the time that goals are set. There is consensus that the indicators chosen in 2000 were too limited in the case of the MDGs, excluding quality and learning, for example, or indeed initially non-existent, as in the case of the EFA goals.
- g) That monitoring of education goals should continue, principally by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report. However, this implies a new set of EFA goals that also encompass any new MDGs.

## 6.2. AREAS WITHOUT CONSENSUS:

a) Whether the framework should remain the Millennium Development Goals or whether a new framework based on the concept of Sustainable Development Goals should be developed. This debate is unlikely to seriously affect the inclusion or content of education in post-2015 goals so we do not discuss it further.

b) The number of goals: there is no agreement on what should be in the MDGs, on whether there should be a new set of EFA goals, or on how many goals there should be in either category. One possible approach discussed at a July 2012 meeting of the Basic Education Coalition in Washington is to have EFA goals delineate priorities for the sector as a whole while the MDGs can focus on broader aspirational goals.

c) The definition and measurement of a learning goal. There is significant momentum building around the use of early grade reading (and sometimes also mathematics) assessments to define at least a primary education learning goal. This has the advantage of capturing the key early stages at which it is now apparent that learning is failing and so which greatly influence future learning even of those who remain in school. It has the disadvantage that it does not even apply to learning at the end of primary school, much less in secondary school, and yet that is where most children finish education. It also has the disadvantage of applicability in countries with many mother tongues. Progress may be made on this question by the Brookings-led Task Force on Learning Metrics; at the same time there is, at least at present, insufficient involvement of developing countries in these discussions for a global consensus to emerge.

d) The target date for future goals. There is growing interest in developing an extended 20-30 year timeline for any new goals, with defined milestones that correlate to progress against targets. This has abundant appeal for education, where change takes considerable time. By contrast, recent experience with intermediate milestones is not encouraging – the current gender goal had a 2005 milestone that was missed by a sizeable margin with essentially no consequences.

e) Universal or country-determined goals. There is also growing interest, reflecting the desire to have universal country coverage in a world containing countries at very different levels of development, in the idea of globally defined goal areas but country-determined targets. For example, there could be a global goal of improved learning, with countries defining this in ways suited to their own circumstances.

This approach, currently referred to as “common but differentiated”, combines global aspirational goals that could command universal support with targets set by countries in groups that fit their contexts (low income, least developed, middle income etc.). UNICEF has advanced quite far with this approach, currently even advising on the development of standardized targets for groups of countries. An advantage is that this approach can create a mutually supportive learning network around particular challenges, can establish an external accountability mechanism and can ensure relevance.<sup>13</sup> Though

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Richard Morgan, UNICEF Representative for the Post-2015 Agenda.

context-defined country groupings make more technical sense than regional ones, they may also be considered less politically relevant.

At least two variants on this approach are emerging that attempt to combine both a universal minimum and country-determined targets:

(i) ODI's concept of Global Minimum Entitlements which would establish minimum standards for human well-being, like a global minimum income, essential health interventions, and, for education, literacy and a standard of knowledge and skills. Similar to this approach, Oxfam International has called for a framework that includes 11 social dimensions necessary for people to "lead lives of dignity and opportunity."

(ii) The "Bellagio Goals" approach developed at a 2011 conference organized by the Center for International Governance Innovation. Twelve goals are proposed, global in nature but permitting countries to determine targets and indicators. Within this approach, the education goal calls for universal literacy.

These approaches are interesting but their use of literacy seems impractical. Regrettably, there is little interest among either governments or donors in doing anything about the nearly 900 million adults who are not literate; the interest is all on schooling, which of course determines future literacy but has little immediate impact on adult literacy. And at the technical level, the measurement of literacy is exceedingly difficult and relies too heavily on reported rather than tested measures – most countries still determine literacy by asking heads of household about the literacy levels of their household members, leading to frequent under-estimation.

While literacy may not be the appropriate indicator, the broad approach of global goals, including global minima, combined with country target-setting does seem to be gaining momentum.

f) Appropriate accountability mechanisms. The current MDGs have no formal accountability mechanisms beyond the regular MDG summits held approximately every five years since 2000. In education, the Education for All High Level Group meetings were supposed to be the mechanism to hold countries accountable for the goals. These meetings were not particularly effective, however, for two reasons. First, most countries were not invited to attend, invitations being confined to major developing countries, to other "representative" ones (without a representation mechanism), and to major bilateral donors. Second, given that a focus from the beginning was on the failure of donors to supply the necessary external resources for the EFA goals to be reached, the donors have progressively reduced their level of participation down from that of ministers—some now only send only junior officials. New thinking is clearly needed in the area of accountability – including ideas of peer review. Especially if goals may include topics such as learning for which there are not any universal indicators, accountability mechanisms will have to be created that permit the use of multiple indicators. Within the discussion of accountability mechanisms there may be need also to prioritize building capacity rather than getting to the perfect measurement – in that sense building a culture of accountability may be more important



than the particular measures used<sup>14</sup>. The common but differentiated approach could potentially be combined with ideas of peer review.

g) The importance of the goals for future international resource transfers. As we have seen, the international goals have not resulted in any increase in the share of aid going to education, though there does seem to have been an increase in the case of health. There is currently scant discussion – and certainly no consensus – on whether future goals should be formulated with an eye not only to country objectives but also to international financial flows.

### **6.3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Five conclusions and recommendations emerge from this paper. We deliberately do not propose specific new goals for education but rather provide some recommendations that could be helpful to the global process of setting such goals:

- 1) Mechanisms are urgently needed to include developing countries in current discussions about education and to include education more in general discussions about the post-2015 world. UNESCO should take the lead on this. As it seems very slow to do so, however, there may be a case for the Secretary-General's Education Initiative broadening its scope to include also developing international processes to discuss future education goals, accountability mechanisms and monitoring.
- 2) Be careful with some of the current technically attractive proposals, such as adopting a long time horizon, combining universal aspirations and country-determined targets, and setting context-relevant goals. These may result in greater global consensus, desirable in itself, but may also reduce the political intelligibility and appeal of any future goals, rendering them relatively limited in terms of influence. That four of the six current EFA goals have had little impact has been due significantly to the very general way in which they are defined, permitting countries to interpret them as they will, including in some instances doing nothing about them (e.g. early childhood in many countries, adult literacy in most).
- 3) Definitely include Learning but be very careful about simplistic standardized measures. A new set of EFA goals may provide a mechanism to complement in a detailed way a rather general learning MDG.
- 4) Concentrate on equity and the poorest – any new goals should explicitly be measured for each quintile, for example, and could even be set in terms of the performance of the bottom one or two quintiles. For example, a learning goal could be in terms of all children from the bottom two quintiles in grade X reaching defined curricular or externally determined learning targets. One of the major problems of the current goals is that their monitoring has focused more on averages than on the performance of the poorest.
- 5) It may be worth developing some sort of simple educational equivalent of stunting, as used in work in health and malnutrition, to try to capture educational deprivation. Such a measure could combine learning, equity and political intelligibility. Educational goals could then be set and measured in

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Elizabeth King, World Bank.

politically intelligible simple ways around such a new measure or measures (it could be developed for different age groups or levels of education, for example), which could also fit well with the “Getting to Zero” approach.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Burnett advanced this thought at the June 2012 meeting of the International Working Group on Education, held in Washington.

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### Annex A. Participant List for Interviews, held between March 1 – July 30, 2012

Stakeholder Category	Organization	Title	Name	
1	<b>Think Tank</b>	Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution	Director and Senior Fellow	Ms. Rebecca Winthrop
2	<b>Global Financial Institutions</b>	World Bank	Director, Education Human Development Network	Ms. Elizabeth King
3	<b>United Nations</b>	United Nations Development Programme	Policy Advisor	Mr. Shantanu Mukherjee
4		United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF's Senior Adviser on the post-2015 development agenda	Mr. Richard Morgan
5		United Nations Children's Fund	Senior Education Advisor	Mr. Jordan Naidoo
6	<b>Countries: MICs/LICs</b>	Asia, Africa, Latin America	21 Ministers of Education	Names withheld under confidentiality agreements

## Participant List in Roundtable Discussion, held on June 7, 2012

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Amanda Folsom	Results for Development Institute
Anda Adams	Brookings Institution
Andrew Preston	U.K. Department for International Development
Armin Fidler	World Bank
Birger Fredriksen	Results for Development Institute
Claire Melamed	Overseas Development Institute
David de Ferranti	Results for Development Institute
Gina Lagomarsino	Results for Development Institute
Halsey Rogers	World Bank
Jose Dallo	United Nations Development Programme
Julian Schweitzer	Results for Development Institute
Katie Donohoe	U.S. Agency for International Development
Liesbet Steer	Overseas Development Institute
Maeve McKean	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Marilyn Heymann	Results for Development Institute
Marty Makinen	Results for Development Institute
Michelle Engmann	Results for Development Institute
Nick Burnett	Results for Development Institute
Nora O'Connell	Save the Children
Rebecca Fishman	United Nations Foundation
Todd Post	Bread for the World

## Annex B. Comparison of Broad Approaches to Post-2015 Agenda

	Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Universality	Global goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global solidarity</li> <li>• Political intelligibility</li> <li>• Avoids possibility of inaction by countries in setting own goals</li> <li>• Avoids possibility of countries setting easily achievable goals that do not accelerate progress               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Greater potential to influence donor policies and programs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks country ownership and relevance</li> </ul>
	Tiered structure Menu approach	<p>Middle ground</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater country ownership and relevance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Greater potential to influence country policies and programs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks global solidarity</li> <li>• Less politically intelligible</li> <li>• Possibility of inaction by countries in setting own goals</li> <li>• Possibility of countries setting easily achievable goals that do not accelerate progress</li> </ul>
Threshold	Pass/fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politically intelligible</li> <li>• Maintains incentive to achieve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers no support to achieve beyond basic threshold</li> </ul>
	Goal ranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Account for data errors and allow for flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer less incentive to achieve beyond bottom of range</li> <li>• Less politically intelligible</li> </ul>

Source: Results for Development Institute