



## THE EDUCATION LINK

WHY LEARNING IS CENTRAL TO THE POST-2015  
GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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### INTRODUCTION

**W**ith fewer than three years until the planned end-date of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), attention is rapidly turning to what will follow. The elaboration of the next global development agenda is a complex, multi-pronged process that is academic, political and practical, involving experts from a myriad of social and economic sectors and representing a cross-section of constituencies. While the formal U.N. process is still in the early stages, the ongoing discourse (predominantly occurring in the global north, but not exclusively) has introduced several potential frameworks for this agenda. This paper describes the leading frameworks proposed for the post-2015 global development agenda and discusses how education and learning fit within each of those frameworks. While many within the education community are working to develop a cohesive movement to advance an “access plus learning” agenda, it remains equally important to engage proactively with the broader development community to ensure that education fits within the agreed upon overarching organizing framework.

The frameworks described below represent a snapshot of current thinking in 2012. On the road to 2015, the education community will need to refine and sharpen its thinking with respect to how learning is incorporated into the prevailing framework. The seven frameworks that will be addressed in this paper are:

1. Ending Absolute Poverty
2. Equity and Inclusion
3. Economic Growth and Jobs
4. Getting to Zero
5. Global Minimum Entitlements
6. Sustainable Development
7. Well-Being and Quality of Life

**Table 1: Summary of Development Frameworks**

Development Framework	Description	How Education and Learning Fit
<b>Ending Absolute Poverty</b>	Ending absolute poverty extends beyond lifting everyone above \$1.25 per day to also addressing deprivations of capabilities, choices, security and power.	Education, particularly learning achievement, can break intergenerational poverty cycles through higher wages and increased ability to address economic shocks and income fluctuations better than households with less education.
<b>Equity and Inclusion</b>	Global development goals and targets seek to reduce disparities both between nations and within nations.	Early and sustained learning opportunities can reduce inequalities that begin before birth and extend through adulthood.
<b>Economic Growth and Jobs</b>	Ensuring decent and productive work for all citizens helps reduce poverty and improve well-being of individuals, families and societies.	Quality schooling boosts individual wages and GDP, and higher levels of educational attainment are associated with lower levels of unemployment.
<b>Getting to Zero</b>	The sustainable end to extreme poverty is sought through achieving absolute targets for basic services.	Universal access to education alone does not ensure universal educational attainment, so more attention needs to be paid to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all.
<b>Global Minimum Entitlements</b>	Establishing a minimum standard of human well-being includes ensuring a minimum income, essential health services, access to energy and a standard of knowledge and skills.	Quality education equips citizens with the basic skills they need to transition into adult life with core competencies that contribute to the political, social and economic aspects of society.
<b>Sustainable Development</b>	Sustainable development balances environmental sustainability, economic growth and human development.	Quality education can reduce poverty, improve reproductive health and regulate population growth, all of which affect global sustainability.
<b>Well-Being and Quality of Life</b>	A focus on well-being balances material, planetary and relational factors to achieve improved human and global development.	Education leads to improved living conditions, better health status, greater civic awareness and political participation, and better integration into society that can lead to higher productivity and economic growth, political stability, lower criminality, stronger social cohesion and greater income equality.

## U.N. Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, in which the eight MDGs are included, begins with the responsibility to “uphold principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level” with attention to “the most vulnerable, and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.”<sup>1</sup> The eight goals, endorsed by 189 world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly in September 2000, provided a framework for international development cooperation with a focus on tackling poverty in its many aspects. The MDGs fit within a human development paradigm that defines progress in terms of social indicators such as health and education. This approach can be recognized as a pendulum shift from the focus on economic growth as the main progress indicator that characterized the 1980s and 1990s, where structural adjustment policies emphasized “cost-cutting, user fees, and private sector provision.”<sup>2</sup> In the 21st century, global development policy has focused on meeting basic needs, with social protection and free access to health and education as main pillars. Since the MDGs were established, the U.N. secretary-general’s office has produced annual reports and convened periodic high-level summits to review progress. Each of these meetings of leaders included recognition of unsatisfactory progress and insufficient aid resources, followed by a recommitment to do more. A similar U.N. General Assembly event on the MDGs is planned for September 2013 to track efforts made toward achieving the goals, and most likely will include a clearer indication of what the post-2015 development era will look like.

Despite the shortcomings of the MDGs that have been recorded over the last decade<sup>1</sup>, the goals should be recognized as an important building block toward bet-

ter global development by demonstrating the possibility of global cooperation. The MDGs have influenced policies in a number of spheres, including domestic policies in low-income countries, and development and financing policies in donor countries. Additionally, local, national and international civil society actors have often set their own advocacy priorities based on the goals. Thus, beyond a simple measure of whether the goals are being achieved or not, their existence has had marked influence on decisions made at national and international levels.

While it is important not to prematurely abandon the current efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015, the next three years are also needed to strategically develop the post-2015 agenda. This new framework will likely contain some level of continuum while demonstrating the lessons learned since 2000 and a more complex understanding of how development works.

## Education Progress under the MDGs

For the international community, education has long been understood as the birthright of every child, irrespective of social and economic status. In 1948, the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly. Article 26 declared that everyone has a right to an education that seeks to ensure “the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”<sup>3</sup> The goal of achieving free basic education for all was recommitted to in 1990 at the World Education Forum in Jomtien, Thailand and again in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal. This Education for All (EFA) framework included six education goals that spanned from early childhood through adulthood, including attention to the quality of education and broader skills development. In

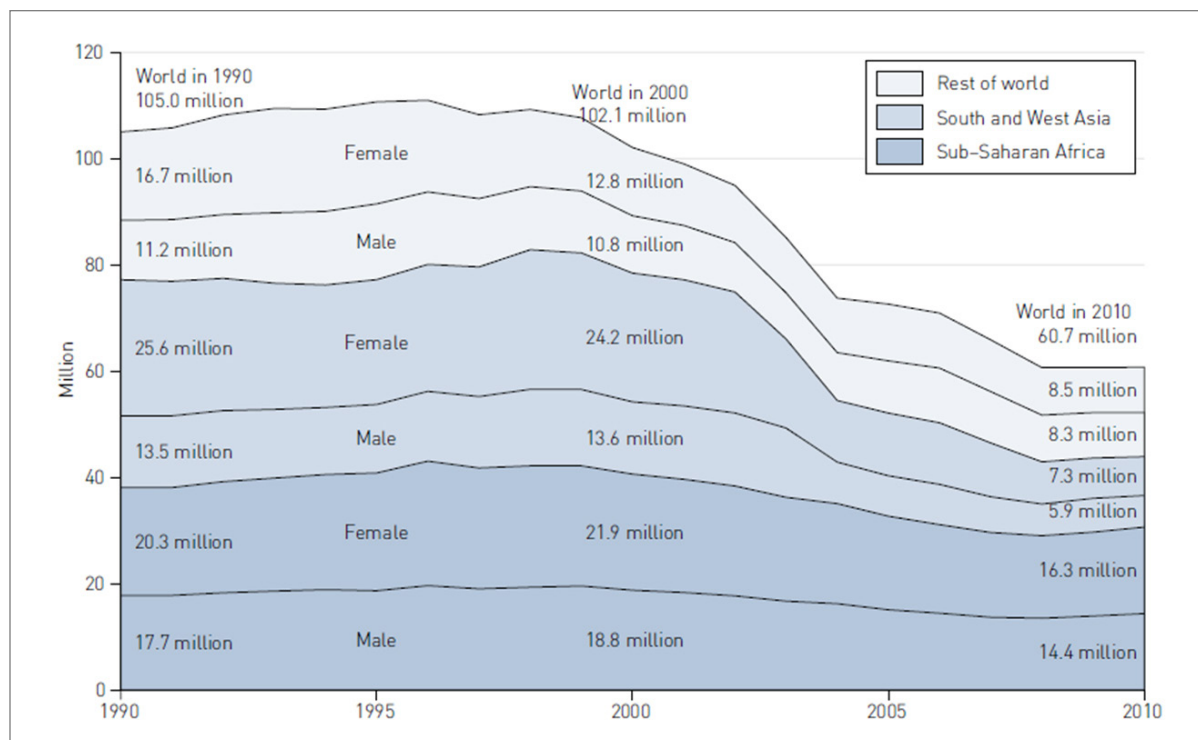
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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Clemens and Todd Moss’ “What’s Wrong with the Millennium Development Goals?” and William Easterly’s “How the Millennium Development Goals are Unfair to Africa” for two examples.

the Millennium Development Goals framework that was adopted afterward, two of the eight goals are focused on education: universal primary education and gender equality. Due in part to these two global commitments, the number of primary school-age children who are out of school has decreased from 101 million in 1990 to 61 million in 2010.<sup>4</sup> The World Bank's 2011 Global Monitoring Report on the MDGs calculated that primary completion and gender parity at the primary and secondary levels were the development goals nearest attainment by 2015, with between 90 and 96 percent of the goals being reached by developing countries.<sup>5</sup> However, current statistics show that in developing regions, only 87 out of every 100 children complete their primary education.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1 illustrates the overall downward trend of out-of-school children, as well as the particularly sharp gains in enrollment made between 2000 and 2005, across all regions for both boys and girls. Yet this overall progress should not draw attention away from the unfinished global agenda of ensuring that all children and youth have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to lead safe, healthy and productive lives. It is also clear from the more modest gains made since 2005 that the pace is slowing: over 10 percent of primary school-age children worldwide remain out of school today. In addition to those still bereft of schooling opportunities, an estimated 250 million children who are in school are learning so little that they are largely unable to read basic text.<sup>7</sup> And al-

**Figure 1: Out-of-School Children, by Gender and Region (1990-2010)**



Source: UIS database, 2012.



though the gender gap has narrowed, many countries in Africa and Asia have failed to provide equal access to education for girls, even at the primary level. It is clear that by focusing solely on universal primary education and gender parity, the MDGs narrowed the education landscape too severely. While the MDGs can be credited with helping to catalyze improved access to education, the framework falls short in four key areas.

First, it fails to sufficiently address what is at the core of the education experience: learning, or the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable children and youth to live safe, healthy and productive lives. By employing indicators related to enrollment and completion rates, the MDGs created an incentive for governments and donors – as well as civil society advocates – to concentrate on getting children into school, rather than ensuring that all children, whether in or out of formal school, acquire knowledge and develop skills. The tension created by setting easy-to-understand global goals is not reserved for the education sector alone. Those working on poverty reduction, child mortality and environmental sustainability can all cite shortcomings with their sector goals. Across all sectors, experts and campaigners are unlikely to find large swathes of common ground between conveying the technical details of a problem and putting forth a simple encapsulation of that problem.

Second, the eight development goals have often been treated as eight individual projects, with little attention to the interactions between the goals and how efforts to achieve one (such as universal education) will influence others (such as halving poverty and hunger). With respect to education, the links are numerous: early childhood health and nutrition have an impact on school readiness and learning achievement. More than 200 million children under age 5 are failing to reach their developmental potential due to an

array of factors including malnutrition, malaria and HIV/AIDS infection, and exposure to violence.<sup>8</sup> In turn, learning achievement has an impact on accessing decent work and combating disease, participating in society and raising healthy families.

Third, by setting global goals toward which individual nations are working, issues related to equity are not sufficiently addressed. Global targets – and the regional statistics used in the U.N.'s annual Millennium Development Goals Report – fail to bring attention to the development reality of individual countries within a region and of individuals and populations within countries. According to the 2012 Africa Progress Report, the wealth disparities in Africa are among the largest in the world. While the growing ranks of wealthier individuals signal that some of the fastest-growing economies in the world are now in Africa, the benefits of growth are not reaching everyone and about half of the continent's population still lives on less than \$1.25 a day.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, in a globalized world where the knowledge economy increasingly drives economic growth, the objectives of education have become more complex. A certificate signaling the completion of a basic education no longer guarantees the same level of employment and income as it did 50, or even 25, years ago. As the Lancet-London International Development Center Commission on the Millennium Development Goals stated in 2010, “if future education goals are to serve the interests of the poor, they must be formulated in relation to changing economic rewards of different levels of education and to the learning levels expected of those different levels.”<sup>10</sup> This sentiment has been furthered echoed this year with the emergence of a “skills for development” focus among a number of stakeholders, including donor development agencies, multilateral organizations, private founda-

tions and corporations. This angle on education seeks to better link education and learning with employability, work skills and economic growth.<sup>11</sup>

## **Global Development Frameworks**

This paper discusses the links between the education sector's core messages and remaining challenges, and the broader post-2015 development agenda. The ongoing discussions and deliberations – within the formal U.N. consultation process as well as informal debates within independent institutions – provide an opportunity to think broadly about the intermediate and ultimate goals of development, and make the case for how education and learning contribute to these

goals. Among the seven frameworks described in this paper (ending absolute poverty; equity and inclusion; economic growth and jobs; getting to zero; global minimum entitlements; sustainable development; and well-being and quality of life), there are overlapping ideas and intersecting principles and the final development framework will likely be some combination of these approaches. For example, if ensuring economic growth and decent work is the organizing objective, then the challenges related to absolute poverty and the growing population of working poor, as well as the bidirectional relationship between low levels of educational attainment and low-productivity employment will all need to be addressed.

## ENDING ABSOLUTE POVERTY

In sharp contrast to the trend of expanding the scope of the next global development framework, one idea is to focus intently on one goal - ending absolute poverty.<sup>11</sup> Although poverty reduction sits at the center of the global development agenda currently, it is notoriously difficult to measure, particularly in a timely manner. A great deal of the reduction in the number of people living on less than \$1.25 per day can be attributed to economic growth in China and India. While this is important progress, using the global figures obscures situations where real poverty remains. Even within countries that are making progress, there are areas of severe deprivation where extreme poverty remains, often related to marginalized populations. According to one set of future projections by the Brookings Institution, sub-Saharan Africa and fragile states are two areas where increased attention to poverty should be placed over the medium term.<sup>12</sup> While some estimates show that the goal of halving poverty by 2015 has already been achieved (and poverty rates may be halved again by 2015), poverty will remain a central challenge beyond 2015 and a new framework focused on eradicating absolute poverty will need to understand the changing poverty landscape,<sup>13</sup> including four more recent developments.

First, it is now widely recognized that poverty is much more than the simple measure of living on less than a dollar a day. Poverty is characterized by suffering deprivations of resources, capabilities, choices, security and/or power. While the multiple facets of poverty may seem to complicate the picture, this enhanced understanding also opens up additional policy options for alleviating that poverty. If ending absolute poverty is the ultimate goal, then instrumental goals should include raising incomes above \$1.25 a day; ensuring access to basic healthcare; acquiring fundamental

knowledge and skills; and increasing availability of transportation and communications.

Second, new facets of poverty have emerged over the past 15 years, including issues related to climate change, urbanization and migration, decreased agricultural productivity and slower economic growth. All of these trends have put millions of people at risk of falling back into poverty following a prolonged lack of rainfall, infection by HIV/AIDS or other livelihood shocks.

Third, there are clear costs of prosperity that may not increase levels of absolute poverty, but certainly lead to diminished life opportunities and outcomes for some populations. Increased industrialization depends on individuals working in sweatshop factories. Natural resource extraction and industrial farming displaces families who have worked the land for generations. While global affluence increased during the 20th century, so did armed conflict; instead of greater wealth diminishing hunger, desperation and violence, it appears that wealth and power are closely linked to higher levels of oppression.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the majority of poor people are not living in the poorest countries. Over 70 percent of people living in poverty (approximately 1.2 billion) live in middle-income countries, while about 460 million are living in low-income countries.<sup>15</sup> If global development goals are intended to achieve human progress, then a strong case can be made for more attention toward individuals regardless of where they live. Given the wealth disparities that exist in every nation, a global development agenda that only addresses ending poverty in only the lowest-income countries would fail to improve the life standards for over a billion individuals.

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<sup>11</sup> Absolute poverty is defined as the absence of sufficient resources to secure basic life necessities to meet basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. The international poverty line, which was \$1.00/day at the adoption of the MDGs, was revised by the World Bank in 2005 to \$1.25 at 2005 purchasing-power parity.

## Education and Ending Absolute Poverty

The relationship between education and poverty is bi-directional, with poverty being both a cause and an effect of poor educational opportunities and outcomes. Children from poor households are less likely to enroll

and complete their schooling, due to the costs – direct, indirect and opportunity – of education. Absolute poverty negatively impacts learning achievement through malnutrition and poor health, the lack of a supportive home environment with books or lighting, and lower levels of parental education.<sup>16</sup> Thus, children who enroll in school but do not learn basic skills are at a higher risk of dropping out and therefore far less able to break the intergenerational poverty cycle. Quality education can reduce poverty since an educated individual has a higher income earning potential, is more likely to utilize social services to improve the quality of life, and is more likely to be a more active civic participant. Conversely, those without access to learning are more likely to have lower earning potential and are less likely to move out of poverty.

Learning, particularly by girls, brings social benefits that can improve the situation of those living in poverty. Educated young women have smaller families and healthier children. They also have higher rates of labor force participation. Quality education is an empowerment tool that enables individuals to be more proactive in their lives and communities and

helps them to fight against marginalization. Increased earning potential, political and social empowerment, and enhanced capacity to participate in community governance together help to break the poverty cycle.<sup>17</sup> Amartya Sen has defined three forms of poverty (capability, participatory and consequential); the first two of these are intrinsically linked to education: capability poverty, which is the lack of knowledge and skills to be able to participate in economic life and participatory poverty, which is the lack of participation in social life and decision-making processes.<sup>18</sup> A development framework centered on ending absolute poverty should focus on ensuring opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in income-generating activities and in social and political activities.

### Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Ending Absolute Poverty

- Education, particularly learning achievement, can break the intergenerational poverty cycle. For each additional year of education, a person's wages increase an average of ten percent. For girls, the rate of return for one additional year of primary education is as high as 15 percent.<sup>19</sup>
- Farmers with higher levels of schooling in India's green revolution earned profits that were notably higher than farmers with less schooling.<sup>20</sup>
- More highly educated households can address economic shocks and income fluctuations better than households with less education.<sup>21</sup>

## EQUITY AND INCLUSION

If the goal of global development is to ensure human progress for all, then one could argue for a framework focused on equity and inclusion, or inclusive economic and social growth. One of the core criticisms of the MDGs is that the focus on progress toward global targets and the reliance on regional and national averages have masked systemic inequities that continue – and in some cases grow – within countries. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) articulates the centrality of an inclusive development agenda in both its own approach to poverty reduction and in the MDGs, stating that “economic growth will not reduce poverty, improve equality and produce jobs unless it is inclusive.”<sup>22</sup> An equity and inclusion framework proposes to ensure that the targets established seek to reduce disparities both between and within nations.

Although average incomes may be converging globally due to stronger growth in emerging markets and slower growth in more developed countries, evidence shows that within all countries incomes are diverging and inequality is rising.<sup>23</sup> Many see a new development agenda as a chance to target those who have not benefitted from recent progress. Typically, this includes families living in the lowest quintiles of socio-economic status, or the world’s “bottom billion” and, more specifically, includes those who are from discriminated ethnic minorities or religious groups, those who live in remote rural regions, and those who have disabilities. Furthermore, while great progress has been made in gender equality in the aggregate, data show that women and girls who are members of one or more of the marginalized groups fare worse than their male counterparts in the same groups.<sup>24</sup> Inequalities between men and women have deep historical roots in many regions of the world and are evident in control over natural resources, in employ-

ment and earnings, in land and property rights and in social and political participation. Within an equity and inclusion framework, countries would be measured by how well they take care of their least well-off citizens.

The discussion of equity and inclusion also extends beyond individuals in low- and middle-income countries since it is a challenge faced by countries regardless of development level. This can lead to a universal approach to goal-setting such that the responsibility for addressing global challenges is shared, beyond development aid transfers, by both developed and developing countries. In this argument, every nation has a role – albeit a differentiated role – to play in addressing global challenges. Broad development goals that are applicable to all countries are gaining some traction in the development community, although this concept faces strong resistance from several fronts, including those who believe that having to negotiate with industrialized countries would detract from the real goal of improving lives and livelihoods in the lowest-income countries.

## Education and Equity and Inclusion

Persistent inequalities based upon ethnicity, gender, language, location and wealth hinder equal opportunity in education and lead to continued disparities in life opportunities. Globally, income levels are a strong determinant of educational opportunity and achievement. Children from the poorest households are less likely to enroll in school and more likely to drop out of school when they do enroll. Particularly in developing countries, other factors – such as being a girl, living in a rural area or an area affected by conflict, being a member of an ethnic or linguistic minority group, or having a disability – limit a child’s educational outcomes. The deprivation and marginalization in education (DME) indicator, developed by the EFA Global



Monitoring Report, seeks to draw attention to the relationship between “education poverty” – those with fewer than four years in school (the minimum needed to gain basic skills) and these social characteristics.<sup>25</sup> Reaching the last 25 percent of the population with quality education is far more challenging than the other three-quarters.

While increasing educational opportunities for children throughout the education lifespan is important for improving equity, there is particularly strong evidence of the impact of early childhood development interventions in leveling the playing field. High-quality early childhood development activities have long been shown to have a lasting impact on learning and life. These early activities—which include health, nutrition and stimulation—can also lead to cost-saving efficiencies in primary school by increasing overall retention, reducing attrition and raising primary school completion rates. The returns are often greatest for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Moreover, disparities in opportunity for education are a source of far wider inequalities and exclusion. The inability to develop one’s potential through quality education leads to more limited opportunities

throughout one’s life, including constrained health, nutrition, employment, and political and social participation.<sup>26</sup> Learning achievement helps to mitigate disparities and level broader opportunity. Education development goals focused on equity could start by seeking to halve the disparities in school attendance and learning achievement that are associated with wealth, geographic location and ethnicity.

### **Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Equity and Inclusion**

- Inequality begins before birth. Therefore, investing in early learning opportunities, especially for disadvantaged children, can help close achievement gaps that persist later in education and life.<sup>27</sup>
- Disparities in education are closely linked to wider disparities, including income inequalities within and between countries. In some countries, children from the poorest 20 percent of households are more than twice as likely to drop out of school as children from the wealthiest 20 percent.<sup>28</sup>
- Girls’ secondary education results in increased civic and political participation, thereby including more citizens into society.<sup>29</sup>

## ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOBS

Although economic growth was central to development work at the end of the 20th century, there was little explicit mention of it in the Millennium Declaration (save a resolution to give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work), and virtually no mention in the MDGs.<sup>iii</sup> In the current global economy, it is clear that this is a priority issue for national leaders, as well as for the more than 1.1 billion people unemployed or underemployed around the world.<sup>30</sup> Globally, youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are three times as likely to be unemployed as their adult counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Unemployment rates do not give the complete picture; 1.5 billion people globally are in vulnerable or insecure jobs and in sub-Saharan Africa, more than three-quarters of the population (and 85 percent of women) are working in vulnerable employment.<sup>32</sup>

Productivity growth in developing countries is not on track to converge with more developed economies, hindering efforts to reduce poverty and improve job opportunities. According to a 2012 International Labor Organization (ILO) report on global employment trends, increases in productivity are heavily reliant upon gains in education and skills in order to achieve broad-based development that includes “fair and just distribution of economic gains.”<sup>33</sup> Creating employment opportunities will not pull struggling economies out of recession if there are no citizens with the skills needed to carry out the new jobs.

If the broader development framework is focused on promoting economic growth and employment, then the ILO’s “Decent Work Agenda” could be incorporated to help link human well-being and jobs. This agenda concentrates on creating jobs, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protections, and promoting dialogue among workers and employers

to increase productivity and build a cohesive society. The ILO contends that work is central to people’s well-being as it not only provides income, but also contributes to personal dignity, family stability, peaceful communities, and participatory democracies that lead to social and economic advancement. With the buy-in of governments, employers, workers and civil society, the Decent Work Agenda demonstrates that these standards are essential for “achieving a fair globalization, reducing poverty, and achieving equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development.”<sup>34</sup>

## Education and Economic Growth and Jobs

Economic research has consistently demonstrated that a population’s aggregate skills and talents are critical inputs into economic production. Human capital is created by investing in quality education and training (in addition to family and community inputs). Thus, economic growth depends on an educated and skilled workforce. Data from developing countries have shown that one additional year of schooling increases a person’s earnings by approximately 10 percent.<sup>35</sup> And while higher levels of educational attainment do not guarantee higher productivity, it is clear that youth who lack a basic education are far less likely to break into and advance through the labor market. Moreover, there is additional evidence that an increase of one standard deviation in student scores on international assessments is associated with a 2 percent increase in annual GDP per capita growth.<sup>36</sup> The quality, not simply the quantity, of education is essential to translating educational participation into economic growth. The evidence on the link between skills and productivity identify a positive relationship where skills and training benefit the economy as a whole, as well as the individual companies that conduct training.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>iii</sup> Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women does include a target to increase the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector.

There is a global talent gap where employers in developed and developing countries alike are unable to find people with the skills - including communication, teamwork and problem solving - needed for the jobs that are available.<sup>38</sup> In many Arab states, highly educated young people are unable to secure suitable employment and, at best, are employed as low-wage unskilled laborers. In sub-Saharan Africa, most youth have not attended secondary school and many have not even completed primary school. While there are vast regional differences, all countries are experiencing some type of skills deficit and must seek to address the challenge within the formal education system. Closing the gap cannot be left only to technical and vocational opportunities offered in the informal sector and through workplace training programs.

Youth unemployment and “working poverty” are global problems that are symptoms of a massive learning deficit, even though the variety of contributing factors may differ by region and country. Youth in South Asia are not acquiring the education and skills needed to match a rapidly changing business ecological structure due to the shrinking size of the public sector. In Latin America and the Caribbean, productivity gains are increasing but will not converge with more developed regions until education and skills are improved. In the Middle East, educational attainment levels are relatively high but employers report a massive mismatch between education and the skills needed to fill job openings. North Africa is fraught with inequality and exclusion, especially of girls and women, which slows economic growth. In sub-Saharan Africa, the working poverty rate is the highest of all regions and low levels of educational attainment feed the cycle of working poverty.<sup>39</sup>

The role of education in driving economic growth extends beyond the formal school system. Youth who have never had formal schooling, dropped out before completing a basic education, or were otherwise pushed out of the education system due to conflict or crisis, are more likely to be outside the formal employment sector as they transition to adulthood. Second-chance and remedial education programs, technical and vocational education training, and other alternative pathways to skills development are needed to provide youth with the knowledge and skills they need to access the jobs that are available.

Strong evidence from countries that made high quality education a national priority through targeted policies and investments in the latter half of the 20th century, like China, South Korea, Singapore, and Chile, demonstrates the role that education plays in spurring a country’s economic growth and development success. This helps make the case for education and learning within a global agenda that prioritizes economic growth and jobs. Finally, in an era where more and more workers are migrating to regions to access greater job opportunities and sending their earnings back to their families, skills are again linked to economic growth through the billions of dollars in remittances being transferred to low- and middle-income countries.

Linking education and skills development to employability and jobs broadens the learning agenda beyond the necessary, but not sufficient, attention given to literacy and numeracy to include both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Life and livelihoods require a broader conception of educational outcomes. Without adequate knowledge and relevant skills, youth will not be able to fill the jobs created under a decent work agenda or an economic growth and jobs framework.

## **Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Economic Growth and Jobs**

- Young people who have not completed secondary school are more likely to be unemployed than those who have acquired a secondary school qualification.<sup>40</sup>
- According to a study of 50 countries, an additional average year of schooling boosts GDP by 0.37 percent annually.<sup>41</sup>
- When learning outcomes are also substantially improved, the impact on annual GDP growth is up to 2 percentage points.<sup>42</sup>

## GETTING TO ZERO

Most current MDG targets call for achieving improvements – halving, reducing by two-thirds, or a significant reduction – against the current rates of poverty, hunger, child mortality, biodiversity loss and slum dwelling, among others. Only a small handful of the more than 20 targets – productive employment, primary education, gender parity, and access to reproductive health and HIV/AIDS treatment – sought to achieve universal coverage. A “MDG 2.0” approach would extend the deadline for the current goals to 2020 or 2025, possibly allowing for some minor updates to the goals and indicators to reflect current realities and the new timeline. While this option is often cited as a starting point for discussions around the post-2015 development agenda,<sup>43</sup> given all of the attention the post-2015 development is receiving already and the activity within sectors and subsectors that were not explicitly included within the 2000 goals (e.g. early childhood development, climate change, noncommunicable diseases,) it seems unlikely that simply extending the deadlines will be satisfactory.

One step beyond MDGs 2.0 is the “getting to zero” framework, which builds upon the existing goals and targets while also tackling equity issues. This framework, as proposed by the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Benchmarking Progress, focuses on achieving the sustainable end to extreme poverty within a generation. “Getting to zero” sets absolute targets for the existing goals (eliminating extreme poverty), as well as for “next generation” development goals, such as ending illiteracy, stopping child stunting and creating access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The framework may be particularly attractive to high-level policymakers because it builds upon existing goals, thereby avoiding the sense

of completely changing courses midstream. It also utilizes lessons learned and altered circumstances to set new and additional targets within the same broad sectors, thereby making strategic course corrections. Campaigners may be attracted to its clear goal-oriented title.

One criticism of this approach is that it continues to exclude some of the important issues not addressed by the original MDGs, including governance, energy, transportation and climate change. Another criticism – which the authors address by cautioning against a too literal interpretation of “zero” – is that not all development goals have a zero target, or even a universal target. Some, such as child mortality and carbon emissions, will always have a nonzero number. While a more nuanced interpretation of the framework can be employed, it may detract from conveying a straightforward set of goals in headline messaging.

## Education and Getting to Zero

Universal access to a basic education is a fundamental human right that has been enshrined in international commitments for decades. However, ensuring universal access alone does not guarantee the much-promised returns on education, so efforts must be simultaneously focused on preventing drop-outs, ensuring learning achievement, and managing transitions to further education and work. In terms of education and learning, the “getting to zero” framework would seek to achieve important development milestones: zero children without access to early childhood development services, zero out-of-school children, zero children dropping out of school, zero children unable to read and do math, zero children failing to transition and complete a relevant post-primary education, and zero adults illiterate.



While global attention often focuses on the children who are out of school, the 775 million adults who are illiterate cannot be ignored in the development discussion. Furthermore, these disadvantaged adults are not all residing in low-income countries. A recent study by the World Literacy Foundation found that more than 20 percent in the UK and U.S. and 47 percent of adults in Italy are “functionally illiterate,” meaning that they struggle in their daily lives due to their poor reading and writing skills.<sup>44</sup> A goal of zero illiteracy would be applicable to all countries.

While some measures of education can be framed as absolute goals, more holistic concepts of education and learning, such as acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to live a safe, healthy, productive and happy life, are harder to frame as such. Education in the 21st century needs to be anchored in ambitious positive targets whereby children and their communities are constantly gaining through education. Setting an absolute goal for learning should focus on establishing broad basic competencies that transcend differences between countries. One such list, put forth by the European Parliament, includes eight key competencies: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical, science and technology competence; digital competence; metacognition or “learning to learn”;

social and civic competence; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression. All of these competencies are envisioned as interdependent and require critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving and risk assessment to be successful.<sup>45</sup> While this competency-based proposal might represent an idealized view of what education can accomplish and beyond the scope of global development goals, maintaining a vision of the ultimate objective of education is a critical feature of any serious goal-setting.

### **Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Getting to Zero**

- The right to a basic education is a fundamental human right that is protected in international commitments.
- Literacy is an essential skill in the 21st century, yet globally one in every five adults lacks minimum literacy skills. Parents who are literate are better able to support their children’s education.
- “Getting to zero” in education requires more than full enrollment in primary school; it means working toward equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all to achieve no illiteracy, no drop-outs, and no child finishing school without the knowledge and skills needed to lead a safe, healthy, happy and productive life.

## GLOBAL MINIMUM ENTITLEMENTS

Building more concretely on an equity and inclusion framework and expanding on the absolute targets of the “getting to zero” approach, some, including the Overseas Development Institute, have outlined a framework that establishes a global set of entitlements for every person that would ensure a minimum standard for human well-being. Global entitlements are more than just minimum inputs or even minimum outputs. Potentially framed within the context of universal basic human rights and recommitting to the broader principles enumerated within the Millennium Declaration, a set of entitlements could include a global minimum income<sup>iv</sup>, a package of essential health interventions, access to energy and sanitation services, personal security, and a standard of knowledge and skills needed to live and work in the 21st century.<sup>46</sup>

One concrete example of a global minimum entitlements framework was developed at a conference in Bellagio, Italy in 2011<sup>47</sup> and expanded upon in Paris in April 2012.<sup>48</sup> As a set of revised development objectives for the post-2015 period, the “Bellagio Goals” are organized into three groupings: 1) essential endowments necessary for individuals to achieve their full potential; 2) protection and promotion of collective human capital; and 3) effective provision of global public good. The “essential endowments” section is comprised of goals that address the need for livelihoods; food and water; education and skills; and health. It relates each of these needs as instrumental to achieving a higher-order outcome: dignified human existence, active living, productive participation in society, and physical and mental well-being. These

goals would apply to both developing and developed countries by setting global minimums that interact with national targets that address each country’s own context.

Oxfam International has put forth a similar approach, based on human rights, outlining the social foundation that is necessary for all people to “lead lives of dignity and opportunity.”<sup>49</sup> Using the social priorities raised by governments in preparation for Rio+20 (the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development), Oxfam includes 11 social dimensions – food security, income, water and sanitation, health care, education, energy, gender equality, social equity, voice, jobs and resilience – that together would enable people to be well, productive and empowered.<sup>50</sup>

## Education and Global Minimum Entitlements

In order to productively participate economically, politically and socially in society, one needs to possess a set of core competencies to transition into adulthood. These competencies are developed, in part, through the acquisition of knowledge and skills in both formal schooling environments and general life experiences. Minimum entitlements for every global citizen must include opportunities for learning throughout one’s lifespan, beginning in early childhood and extending into adulthood. The purpose of education is to equip learners with the knowledge and skills they need to transition into adult life with the competencies to contribute to the economic, political and social aspects of society. Thus, the Bellagio goal of appropriate education and skills for productive participation in society mirrors those listed earlier, including a set

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<sup>iv</sup> According to Chandry and Gertz’ analysis of global poverty, providing every person in the world with a minimum income of \$1.25 per day, which would lift everyone out of absolute poverty, is, from a financial standpoint, feasible. Based on 2010 numbers, the cost of ensuring a global minimum income in 2010 was \$68 billion, approximately half of all official aid. It is no small amount of resources, but if poverty is a barrier to broader development gains, one can make a convincing argument to allocate sufficient resources to eliminate it.

of basic cognitive and non-cognitive competencies that are needed for productive participation in society. A global minimum entitlements framework for education would address both inputs (e.g. what basic educational services are being provided to citizens) and outcomes (e.g. what fundamental knowledge and skills are citizens acquiring).

Furthermore, education is an integral part of social protection, which is defined as the policies and program aimed at reducing vulnerability to risk and chronic poverty. As stated above, education is an important means of ending the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Moreover, social protection measures – such as scholarships and cash transfers – can help address the barriers that prevent better educational and social outcomes for all.

### **Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Global Minimum Entitlements**

- The purpose of education is to equip citizens with the basic skills they need to transition into adult life with the core competencies to contribute to the political, social and economic aspects of their society.
- A set of minimum entitlements must include opportunities for learning beginning in early childhood and extending into adulthood.
- Education links to social protection by helping to reduce vulnerability to risk and chronic poverty, and by benefitting from efforts to reduce risk vulnerability and poverty.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Defined by the Brundtland Commission as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs,”<sup>51</sup> sustainable development calls for the responsible use of resources to create and share wealth fairly now and in the future toward intergenerational equity. Sustainable development includes three pillars – economic growth, environmental protection and social equality – and is seen as one way to unite those primarily concerned with environmental sustainability, those focused on economic growth and those advancing human development.

To date, sustainable development has largely been within the purview of agencies and organizations focused on the environment and climate change.<sup>v</sup> The U.N. Secretary-General recently called for forging a consensus on a new generation of sustainable development goals (SDGs) after 2015 that build upon the Millennium Development Goals by providing “equitable economic and social progress that respects [the] planet’s environmental boundaries.”<sup>52</sup> In theory, sustainable development offers a balanced approach for uniting the objectives of environmental protection and poverty reduction. In practice (and illustrated by the drafts of the Rio+20 outcome document), this balance is not guaranteed.

One major difference between the current MDGs and a new framework focused on sustainable development is the likelihood that the latter would be universal in its coverage, applying to all nations in some way. Such a uniting framework can help to mitigate the tension between developing countries seeking to grow economically while facing increasingly strict regulations, often imposed by already-industrialized donors, to protect the environment. Country-specific sustainable

development targets would share the burden more equally across all nations.

The current push for sustainable development goals was focused on the Rio+20 process, which convened in June 2012. Tying together the importance of economic and environmental sustainability, the Rio+20 agenda centered on creating a greener economy that prioritizes “poverty eradication, food security, sound water management, universal access to modern energy services, sustainable cities, management of oceans and improving resilience and disaster preparedness, public health, human resource development and sustain, inclusive, and equitable growth that generates employment, including for youth.”<sup>53</sup> While the official outcome document has been panned for lacking any real teeth, the conference itself was acknowledged by others for providing a platform for announcing hundreds of new initiatives, which, even in the absence of a unifying global agreement, could change lives for the better.

## Education and Sustainable Development

Under a sustainable development framework, education is categorized as “something to be developed,” as opposed something “to be sustained,” such as clean air, fresh water and biodiversity. The seminal Delors report (1996) recognized the close relationship between quality education and sustainable development, stating that “it is essential that all the people with a sense of responsibility turn their attention to both the aims and the means of education ... [to develop] ways in which education policies can help to create a better world, by contributing to sustainable human development, mutual understanding among peoples and a renewal of practical democracy.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> Recent history includes Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), which were a comprehensive plan of action for global, national and local actors in every area where humans impact the environment.

Issues that are hindering sustainability, including poverty, reproductive health and population growth, can be impacted by improved learning opportunities and outcomes. In addition to the relationship between education and poverty, education is a key determinant of population growth: higher levels of education are associated with lower levels of both under-five mortality and women's fertility. More (and better) education leads to fewer and, on average, healthier children. Population growth projections that take education into account produce vastly different trends, depending on the quantity and quality of education projected. For example, if Kenya expands and improves its education system at the rate at which the best performing countries have in the past (i.e. Singapore and South Korea), its population is projected to increase from 31 million to 85 million over the first half of this century. However, if school enrollment rates remain stagnant, then the country's population is projected to increase almost three times as fast, to 114 million by 2050.<sup>55</sup>

For the past decade, UNESCO has promoted Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which tasks education with seeking to “balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the Earth's natural resources”<sup>56</sup> and draws attention to learning content, including citizenship, peace and health education, among others.<sup>57</sup> ESD has become a catchall for all causes rather than a catalyst for coordinated action<sup>vi</sup> and has taken a backseat to the more-focused Education for All goals and MDGs.

Education is seen by some as an untapped opportunity to combat climate change and its associated risks. Evidence shows that investments in climate change education, including disaster risk reduction, can change both perceptions and behavior. Quality educa-

tion that emphasizes critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as relevant education content such as climate literacy and green technology, can help provide the knowledge and skills needed for making informed decisions about how to adapt to a changing environment.<sup>58</sup> Evidence shows that higher levels of scientific knowledge are associated with greater environmental awareness and stronger sense of responsibility for sustainable development.<sup>59</sup>

While universal primary education and gender equality goals primarily target the needs in low-income countries, education for sustainable development broadens the goal to include everyone. The need for resilient education systems and disaster risk reduction activities are not limited to low-income countries, as natural disasters can affect all countries. Moreover, education for sustainable development carves out a specific role for more privileged societies, where consumerism has a greater impact on global sustainability, to provide knowledge and skills to ensure sustainable consumerism.

The Rio+20's zero draft, *The Future We Want*, was criticized for falling short of illustrating the vital role that education plays in achieving sustainable development, not only through gaining relevant knowledge and skills to ensure environmental protection, but also through the knock-on effects that education has on achieving economic growth and social equity. However, civil society organizations from around the world submitted their own proposal for SDGs, setting forth 17 aspirational goals that both build upon existing commitments made by governments (i.e. the MDGs) and new thinking by civil society organizations. “Sustainable livelihoods, youth, and education” proposes prioritizing investments in education of young

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<sup>vi</sup> In 2008, UNESCO facilitated a dialogue about EFA and ESD that considered merging the two frameworks into Education for Sustainable Development for All. The framework was rejected by participants as being premature; there may be greater appetite for it in 2012 as a way for the education sector to unite the discussions around SDGs and MDGs.



people, who make up a large proportion of the population and disproportionate number of those in poverty, unemployed, discriminated against and in ill health. Furthermore, governments should enact policies that empower youth to “fully and freely exercise their human rights, fulfill their aspirations and be productive citizens.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Sustainable Development**

- Quality education impacts factors that affect sustainability, including poverty, reproductive health and population growth.
- Evidence shows that a better understanding of scientific knowledge is associated with greater environmental awareness.
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills help learners to make informed decisions about how to adapt to changing environment.

## WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Over the last few years, there has been increased interest in well-being and quality of life as an organizing framework for how to conceptualize and measure improved development. Well-being is often limited by unemployment, inequality and a lack of political and social freedoms, among others.

The government of Bhutan's measurement of Gross National Happiness (GNH) might be the most well known large-scale attempt to achieve a balance between material well-being and other societal needs (emotional, cultural and spiritual). Forty years ago, the government cited happiness as the ultimate objective of every citizen and established the four pillars of ensuring sustainable development, cultural values, natural environment and good governance to create the conditions that achieve that widespread happiness. These pillars were later expanded out into eight general contributors to happiness: physical, mental and spiritual health; time-balance; social and community vitality; cultural vitality; education; living standards; good governance; and ecological vitality.<sup>61</sup>

More recently, former French President Nicholas Sarkozy convened the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (the Stiglitz Commission) to study the measurement of economic performance and social progress. The commission concluded "the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being. And measures of well-being should be put in a context of sustainability."<sup>62</sup> Similar to the three pillars of sustainable development, a well-being framework could be comprised of indicators that reflect material well-being, planetary well-being and relational well-being.<sup>63</sup> Despite the high-level panel

on well-being, this framework has received the least amount of attention in these preliminary discussions and is unlikely to be the core organizing principle for the global development agenda. However, some of its principles could be integrated into previously discussed frameworks.

### Education and Well-Being

Being educated is a core component of well-being. By providing individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in the economy and community, education has benefits for the individual and as well as society. Educated people generally contribute positively to the quality of life of their community and thus both families and governments find that investing in education can help reach economic and social goals simultaneously.

The 2011 OCED report "How's Life: Measuring Well-Being" cites education's individual benefits (improved material living conditions, better health status, greater civic awareness and political participation, and better integration into society) and its societal benefits (higher productivity and economic growth, political stability, lower criminality, stronger social cohesion and greater income equality). It also enumerates the importance of lifelong educational opportunities both in and out of school, and the need to start early to mitigate compounded inequalities in society.<sup>64</sup> OECD's selected indicators for education and skills include education attainment, education expectancy, lifelong learning (education acquired in addition to or in lieu of formal education), cognitive skills and civil skills.

While the link between education and economic growth has been a feature of economic research, far less attention has been paid to the relationship between learning and quality of life. The Stiglitz

Commission cites the importance of education and learning “in their own right, as better cognitive functioning expands individuals’ freedoms and opportunities, independently of any effect that it may have on people’s earning or on countries economic activity.”<sup>65</sup>

It should be noted that some research has been conducted on the relative assessments of happiness depending on one’s circumstances, briefly summarized as the happy peasant and frustrated achiever problem. Evidence from surveys of well-being often demonstrated that poor, non-educated farmers in low-income countries reveal that they are more satisfied with their quality of life than wealthy executives in high-income countries. This may mean that expectations and ability to adapt play as an important a role in determining well-being as income distribution, educational attainment and other more typical measures of quality of life. Leading happiness researcher Carol Graham suggests “some conceptions of happiness – such as the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life – are

worth pursuing as policy objectives, while others – such as contentment alone – are not.”<sup>66</sup> Education is a leading means of opening up opportunities for individuals, their families and their communities.

### **Key Points for Linking Education and Learning to Well-Being and Quality of Life**

- Education’s individual and familial benefits include improved material living conditions, better health status, greater civic awareness and political participation, and better integration into society.
- Societal benefits from education include higher productivity and economic growth, political stability, lower criminality, stronger social cohesion and greater income equality.
- Opportunities for lifelong learning, from early childhood through adulthood, impact quality of life measures.

## CONCLUSION

Education is an essential ingredient for development, impacting human lives, economic growth and environmental protections. Regardless of which global development framework is adopted for the post-2015 era, quality education and opportunities for learning will have a significant role to play in achieving global development goals. How people in different contexts around the world can be better governed and can live

more prosperous, peaceful and fulfilling lives depends upon ensuring widespread opportunities for quality education and learning. As the world continues to debate the goals and means of global development over the next three years, the requisite knowledge and skills that individuals need in order to improve their own lives and the communities around them should be a central consideration to define the global development agenda for the next generation.

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