

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

MAKING COSTS COUNT: A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR BETTER COST EVIDENCE
GENERATION AND USE IN GLOBAL EDUCATION AND ECCE

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GUSTAFSSON-WRIGHT: Good morning, good afternoon, good evening to everyone joining us in the second webinar in our webinar series of the Global Costing Taskforce for Education and ECCE. I'm Emily Gustafsson Wright, a senior fellow at the Center for Universal Education here at Brookings. Today, we are so proud to launch this first big output of the task force action plan, a guidance note on harmonized standards for generation and use of cost evidence in global education and ECCE.

This guidance note has been a collective effort led by Brookings, but with the input of numerous stakeholders from around the globe, providing insightful feedback through a series of consultation sessions. We are so grateful to all the individuals who provided their input. You can find them acknowledged at the beginning of the guidance note.

Before we share more about the note, I'll provide a little bit of background about our work on costing, cost evidence generation at Brookings, and the Global Costing Taskforce, for those of you who are joining us for the first time. In 2014, at the Center for Universal Education, we began the Childhood Cost Data Initiative, which included creating a free user-friendly costing tool, then developing an even better one, and at the same time working with global actors on this important topic, which eventually led to the launch of the Global Costing Task Force in 2025. This was a response to not only the dismal child indicators that we were observing across the globe, such as 80% of children in low-income countries not having access to early childhood education, or 70% of 10-year-olds being unable to read and comprehend a simple text, but also the insufficient, ineffective, and inequitable funding we were seeing in many countries.

One critical piece needed to address those challenges is cost evidence. What do we mean by cost evidence? Cost evidence in this context is systematic information about what it costs to design, implement, or scale an education or ECCE intervention. It is necessary for advocacy, for priority setting, for budgeting and planning, and for managing program activities. It can help answer questions like how much does an education intervention or program or policy cost per child to deliver?

How much would it cost to scale it up? Which parts of a program are driving the expense? Can delivery be made more efficient? Can the same results be achieved at a lower cost through a different approach? In our research over the years, we found that in fact, quality cost evidence is quite sparse, and where it does exist, it is often incomparable and inconsistent.

In a recent systematic literature review that we conducted of impact evaluations of three types of early childhood interventions, only one in four had any cost data. While this is an improvement from a 2019 review of a, of the broader development sector, which found that that less than one in five studies had any cost data, this was far from enough.

So what's holding us back? We've identified these barriers to more and better cost data. Limited demand for cost data driven by lack of incentives or prioritization. Also, limited availability of underlying cost data or the lack of capacity to collect and analyze the data. And the data that do exist may be of limited utility if they're collected too late in the process, or they may lack the detail and relevance to the context and needs.

And then finally, we've observed limited coordination across the sector when it comes to the generation of cost evidence. The mission of the Global Costing Task Force is really to mobilize the sector to increase the demand for and volume and quality, of quality publication and use of cost data in the global education and ECE sectors. The task force is supported by a high-level steering group, as well as a consultative group of individuals represented by key stakeholders in the education and early childhood sectors globally. In the first year of the task

force through this consultative process, we identified what is needed to achieve the mission of the task force.

Garnering commitment, harmonizing standards, agreeing on best principles and practices, sharing knowledge, resources and tools, and strengthening capacity. This resulted in three pillars of action for us to undertake. To harmonize standards and garner commitment from key institutions, to create an online repository of resources and tools for cost data capture and analysis, and to strengthen capacity through training modules and webinars.

The key output of pillar one is this guidance document that my co-author, Elena Walls, will share some snapshots from today. Elena's presentation will be followed by a conversation with an outstanding panel who will provide perspectives of government, funders, researchers, and will have an opportunity to respond to questions from the audience.

So if you have any questions, please submit them to events@brookings.edu. And with that, I will turn it over to Elena, who is an education research expert who spent nearly a decade at USAID, advance-advancing evidence on cost and impact of education programs, including as a research policy team lead. She previously led monitoring evaluation and research work at Education Development Center and now works as an independent consultant

WALLS: Thank you so much, Emily.

I will start my presentation with a very brief overview of the desk research that we did as part of this initiative. We found that in the last few years, there has been a proliferation of new publications on cost data collection, analysis, and to less extent, use. We conducted a thorough review of these resources and discovered some interesting patterns.

We found that resources targeting production and use of cost evidence for Global South aim to address needs of different stakeholders. While resources for Global North, particularly the US, are focused on the research community. These latter resources provide explicit detailed guidance on the best practices for conducting cost data analysis and to less extent, data collection and publication of findings. What we also found in the reviewed resources that they frequently disagree on fundamental definitions, use conflicting analytical frameworks, and diverge on how the process of generation and use of cost evidence should occur.

We think that this lack of harmonization across literature not only impedes the cost evidence production but can undermine trust in the findings among decision-makers. These differences are particularly pronounced in the category of resources designed for the generation and use of cost evidence in Global South.

While cost analysis resources are very valuable for generation of cost evidence in the US they are not as useful for the costing of education programs implemented in Global South since they rely on data infrastructure not available in Global South. So over the past few months, we engaged with the Global Costing Task Force to produce a document that would harmonize the standards for cost evidence production and use, including the main terminology, processes for the key steps in cost data collection and analysis, and use cases for the main categories of stakeholders in the global education and ECCE.

These stakeholders include, first and foremost, decision-makers, national governments and governmental subunits, bilateral and multilateral donors such as philanthropy, as well as philanthropies that routinely make policy and investment decisions in this sector. The second stakeholder group that we focused on is education and ECC implementers and service providers who develop and implement interventions and programs.

The third group of stakeholders is researchers and evaluators who generate cost evidence and can support their effective use. In drafting this note we attempted to balance the diverse needs of these audiences and provide information that would be relevant and useful for them throughout the life cycle of cost evidence.

So this was the background. Now let's turn to the results of many months of drafting work and multiple rounds of review by the Global Costing Task Force representing these three main stakeholder groups. This slide shows you the table of contents of the guidance notes. The note opens up with the list of harmonized key concepts to ensure we're all on the same page from the beginning.

The substantive content is guided by the cost measurement framework, which is anchored in the decisions that cost evidence can help inform. Looking at this table of contents, you might think that we attempt to reproduce guidance already available elsewhere. That is not at all the case.

Instead, we provide citations and links to particularly helpful resources that already exist that might help the reader gain practical insights into the details of this particular-- of any particular step in the process. So next, I wanna give you some examples of what you will find in this note. On the left of the slide, you can see in a very tiny print the decision tree for which analytical method to use based on a particular situation of data availability.

On the right, you can see the list of cited resources that analysts can use for more information on each method. Now, here is another example from the chapter on standards on cost data analysis. For each step, in this case, currency conversion and inflation adjustment, we provide a summary present in standards for this step based on the existing literature and consensus achieved, and consultations with the global costing task force, and cite useful resources that analysts can use when implementing it.

And here's the final example from the chapter on reporting and publication standards. The guidance presents six areas of reporting standards, and you can see the first two on this slide, details of the costed intervention and the cost study design decisions. The other four cover cost data collection standards, cost anal-- data analysis standards, appropriate use of findings, and details of calculations.

We hope that it will become a useful checklist for analysts as well as commissioners and users of cost evidence. So now these were the examples from the note, but now let's shift to the most important aspect, using it. In the next few slides, I will summarize how we envision different stakeholders can benefit from this note.

Let's start with decision makers. Government, donors, funders. Cost evidence can be helpful for decision makers in a variety of ways, including sector planning, budget decisions, and program prioritization, scale-up, replication, redesign, and discontinuation. It can also be super helpful for mo-mobilizational funding since it can provide data-supported clarity about specific funding amounts needed to achieve concrete educational objectives.

And so now how to use this note. Decision makers this note can be helpful for decision makers with asking the right questions, answers to which will help advance their specific goals, including resource allocation decisions. It can also help them assess affordability, scalability, fiscal sustainability, efficiency, cost effectiveness, equity and trade-offs, and among competing investments.

Another aspect of this note is that it gives decision makers clarity about expectations they can set when engaging with cost evidence in terms of both its generation and use. The note gives decision makers specific language to use when procuring cost data collection or analysis. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it gives decision-makers a clear sense of how to interpret information on cost alongside data on effectiveness, quality, equity, feasibility, and context, rather than treating cost estimates as a universally transferable price tag.

So the next stakeholder group that can benefit from this note is implementers of education and ECE programs. Implementers can use cost evidence to improve operational planning and resource management. They can also use cost evidence to advocate for needed levels of funding for achievement of specific objectives and educational outcomes. This note can help implementers modify the internal systems to enable routine data collection and analysis.

This information is valuable for understanding the structure of expenditures behind implementation to shed light on both cost drivers and cost mitigators in a specific context where they work. This can be very useful for optimization of resource and improved planning. Cost evidence can also help forecast future resource needs and understand how costs may change when programs grow, move to new context, or transition to government or another provider for implementation.

Such information is helpful, in particular, when planning for sustainability or scale, and with adaptation of interventions and programs to different contexts or populations. Requests for funding are always better received when they are substantiated by data, and implementers can use this note to help them design systems to obtain such data.

Now, the last key stakeholder group is researchers and evaluators, without whom we would not have the cost evidence in the first place. A really important category. As they generate cost evidence, it is particularly important that this evidence is both relevant and used by other stakeholders. Research and-- researchers and evaluators can benefit from this note the most since it provides useful practical advice on all aspects of designing and implementing cost studies.

In particular, we hope that researchers will adhere to the cost measurement framework and the harmonized definition, concepts and standards presented in this note in their work, as well as in their interactions with funders and implementers. The guidance note provides useful checklists, links to helpful resources, and annexes with additional relevant information.

Researchers can use the guidance when selecting methodology, collecting and analyzing data, reporting and disseminating results. This will help contribute to cost evidence comparability, accessibility and transparency. And now over to Emily on the next steps for the initiative

GUSTAFSSON-WRIGHT: Thanks so much, Elena. I'm so excited for everyone to get their hands on this guidance note. So, you can access the note on the events page and also in the following slide we have a QR code if you want to use that. So we really hope that you use this in your, we really hope that you use this in your organizations as you collect and analyze and publish cost evidence so we can begin to harmonize standards across the sector. Also take a look at our call to action sheets which I love. These are sheets that are dedicated to specific types of stakeholders.

They're on the same landing page as the report. So what's next for us? So, in pillar one, we'll continue to socialize this guidance note, and please feel free to do so as well within your organizations and networks. And in-- under pillar two, we'll be creating a costing tools and re-repository-- a repository of cost tools and resources.

And then under pillar three, we'll begin to develop training modules that are linked to this guidance note and we'll be continuing with our regular webinars. So if you are interested in being on our mailing list, please email us at gct@brookings.edu if you'd like to be part of the mailing list for our continued webinars.

So here is the QR code of the guidance note, and please feel free to download that, and we'd love to hear your feedback. So with that we will be transitioning to our panel discussion. Our moderator for today's panel is Barbara Hanisch-Cerda, who serves as the lead knowledge curator at the International Education Funders Group, IEFG which is the largest global network of philanthropic actors funding education.

She brings over fifteen years of experience leading educational projects across national and international organizations with expertise in the design and impact of evaluation impact evaluation of education policies and programs. She is passionate about bridging research and practice to advance evidence-based solutions in education, which is why she is the perfect person to moderate this conversation.

With that, I'll hand it over to you, Barbara.

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you so much, Emily, for that introduction, and thank you so much, Elena, for presenting this guidance document and harmonized standards for cost evidence generation and use in education and early childhood care and education. This is so important and it's so nice to see it out there with so many practical guidelines, so I'm very excited about it.

This comes at a critical moment in the education sector where governments, funders, researchers, and implementers increasingly recognize that good cost data drives better decisions. But we've been working in silos with different terminologies, methodologies, different standards, and this guidance document really brings together years of work and consultation across the globe to create harmonized standards that can be adapted across different contexts and for different stakeholders.

So to discuss the importance of this work and how it will advance our field, I am delighted to have an exceptional panel joining us today. Joining Elena Walls in the panel today, we have a, a wide array of voices to help us understand the different perspectives on the importance and usefulness of this work.

Well, we were going to have a government representative, Janeli Kotzé, who's the deputy director of research, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation directorate at South Africa's Department of Basic Education, to share what evidence they need and what informs the decisions they make. Unfortunately, she's just been called to a ministry meeting at the very last minute, so she sends her apologies for not being able to stay for this panel conversation.

We have a researcher to share where is cost evidence missing and what that implies on her work, and we have a funder who will help us explore how has the lack of consistent cost data limited in any way the funding decision that she makes. So I hope through each one of these different voices you get a sense of what this harmonized standards guidance document comes to help us with.

The way we will proceed is that I will introduce our panelists, then we'll have two or three questions for each one of them, and depending on how succinct and brief our panelists are, we will open up the conversation for questions from the audience may have. So please feel free to share, post your questions in the chat, and they'll come to me, so, so with us is Elizabeth, Liz Brown. She's a staff scientist at UC Berkeley's Center for Effective Global Action, CEGA, and a senior research fellow at 3IE, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, where she leads CEGA's Cost Transparency Initiative and research on the cost of aid programs and cash transfers. She holds a PhD in policy analysis from Pardee RAND Graduate School.

And also with me here today is Maniza Ntekim. She's the senior program officer for Global Early Childhood Development in East and Southern Africa at the Hilton Foundation, overseeing grant-making in Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania. She previously served as a regional advisor for UNICEF and as a senior program officer at the Open Society Foundations.

So, to open up this conversation, I would like to start asking you all to reflect on where in your work have you observed the scarcity of cost data and need to harmonize standards and what has been the impact of that? So I'll start with you, Maniza. From your funder's perspective, could you share with us how has fragmented cost data constrained or, in any way, your funding decisions?

NTEKIM: Thank you so much, Barbara. And first of all, I want to say congratulations to the team that's put together this really seminal guidance for us. I cannot emphasize how critical it is to have this at this time, because if we're serious about scaling anything, sustaining anything, reaching as many people as we can in a sustainable way, we just can't do it unless we know a basic question of how much is this gonna cost?

And so I can answer your question in two ways really. I know you've asked me as a funder, but I'm gonna answer as a sort of funder stroke advocate and a funder, if I may. So I will start with an example. A few years back I think it might have been maybe eight or nine years, before I joined the foundation, our president was at UNGA and was meeting with one of the ministers of finance from one of the countries we support.

I'm not gonna say which one, but those of you who know our strategy can try and guess. Anyway, at this meeting he was accompanied by our team, our president, and a great case was made, the importance of investing in the early years, the evidence from science, the rate of return, really emphasizing the rate of return because it was tailored to a minister of finance.

That minister of finance said, "Oh gosh, you know, I hadn't actually heard about that stuff before. This sounds great. Like, we could budget for this. Where, how much is it, and where do I budget?" No answer. And for me, that was a really missed opportunity, because this was a rare occasion, a senior government official, a minister of finance, we're always trying to get those guys to see what we're thinking about, sort of buys into the argument, opens up the door for a discussion on how to implement, and we kind of have no answer.

And the reason why we don't have no answer is not because of a lack of wanting it. There are so many reasons. So for example, in the early childhood field, we've been doing a lot of experimenting of what works. We've kind of been trying to work that out first before then really getting behind something and doing the costing to see for scale.

So there's lots of reasons why the answer wasn't there 10 years ago. But I would say fast-forward now, I'm going to UNGA next week, and if a minister of finance accosts me

somewhere and says, "How much and where do I put the money?" I'm in the same position our president was 10 years ago, really. So, so for me, even, like, as an advocate, not having that data really has limited our chance to kind of get the results we want.

Now, as a funder, I'll come to the other side, which is that we're always, you know, we're a private foundation. We will never be able to fund services at the scale that they are needed in a sustainable way. I will also speak for funders. We're not always that reliable in the same place at the same time for decades on end, but governments and other partners are.

And I think one of the things we've been keen to do as the Hilton Foundation is support the development and the proof of concept for programs. But we've also wanted to do that in a way that when you get something that works, you can then go to a government or another donor or a community and say, "Look, this is what to put your resources and your time behind."

So for us as funders, we need that data in order to kind of, just prove and show that what we're doing lasts beyond our time in a place, but actually can be sustained for the long term. So having that data, which is so critical for decision-making of whether you put your dollar here or there, is just ... I can't overestimate how important it is.

And I think we have a role as funders both to support and work with our grantees on that, but also to expect that data and also to advocate for others to see the importance of that data. So a very long-winded answer to you, Barbara, but I hope that shares our perspective. Thank you.

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you so much Maniza, and especially thank you for bringing up that government voice that I think we would have gotten from Janeli.

So I think it's great that you put that example. And I hope that when you go to UNGA next week, you're not faced with that question about how do you budget for this? And if you are faced with that question, you have a very concrete answer, at least the first steps. I hope so. So thank you, thank you, Maniza for sharing.

So, Liz, may I come to you now? And c- could you share with us from your research perspective, where have perhaps incompatible cost data affected the way you do research, and you share your findings, and how you advocate for those?

BROWN: Thanks. Thank you so much. First, thank you so much for inviting me here, to be here.

I'm very excited about this work and the potential that it has to really impact global education and especially early childcare and and education. So I've got a couple of examples, and I hope that's okay. So the scarcity of cost data directly impacted my own career. In 2019, I co-authored a paper at the World Bank that one of the major findings was really just finding that one in five published impact evaluations actually had any kind of cost analysis.

And this was, you know, everyone knew, like there was, you know, like no cost evidence, but we didn't have numbers. So I was really interested in putting a number on it because the number can move people to action. And just to put this into perspective, there's something like twenty thousand RCTs that have been published since the late 1990s or the early 1990s, excuse me. That's about twenty thousand point estimates of various program impacts across different kinds of sectors. But there's only four thousand corresponding cost data points. So you wonder about the scarcity of evidence. It's real.

What it means is that when we're looking backwards trying to figure out, "Well, what did this program cost?" We just simply do not have the evidence over twenty years of producing research. And so to me, this gap was so huge and my focus so intent on policy and moving public policy, and in particular, that is the movement of resources towards policies and programs that are effective and that, you know, do good in the world.

I thought this gap was worth addressing, and I let this insight really guide my work as a researcher. So let me give two examples. I mean, because In, in, in the academic world, this did not carry much weight or freight or water. There's no PhD training. So you start for development economists in a practical applied cost and cost effectiveness analysis training.

Everybody understands what cost benefit is, but that's more from a theoretical point of view and not really built around this whole notion of the need to harmonize standards across, you know, multiple kinds of organizations or across programs or what have you, to make costs comparable and commensurable. And that's really important for us to be able to do in order to judge the comparative value and cost of different types of policies and programs.

So my harmonization and scarcity story can be oriented around two, two big examples that were pretty influential for me. The first was at Development Innovation Ventures. And starting early, like we couldn't quite do what Brookings has done now, which is trying to harmonize across all of the definitions in the sector and sort of recognizing that there is a-- there's cost evidence methodology out there in the world. Before we really could get to that point, we're more in the world of kind of harmonizing across like different levels.

So first, at DIV it was really harmonizing across the portfolio of interventions that Development Intervention-- Innovation Ventures was undertaking. So close to the inception of DIV, we started really thinking about templates and tools to collect data from the grantees directly so that DIV eventually could go on to estimate the social rate of return to an investment in a portfolio of interventions.

So ultimately, DIV had a lot of data, but in the very beginning, I developed templates and tools that were really intended to kind of help the grantees estimate their own costs in a standardized way. So what's the impact of that harmonization or that, that standard? So ultimately, Michael Kremer and his co- colleagues went on to really estimate this social return, and they ended up using a very simplified measure of cost, which was just DIV's own funding contribution to the in- innovation.

But the impact of this and the attention to cost was super important. And what they were able to do was calculate a social benefit and found that ratio to be over seventeen. So what does that mean? This is net positive and therefore good evidence that an intervention that is developing... You know, investing public dollars in development innovation is actually worth it.

And so that can motivate a lot more investment in innovation, in research and development, just by showing the value to society of taking those scarce resources and putting them into a whole portfolio of grants that are focused on development innovation. Let me stop there. I was gonna go on to do cash benchmarking, but I think I think I would love to hear back.

HANISCH-CERDA: Lovely. Thank you so much, Liz for sharing that, that scarcity of the 20,000 RCT publications versus the 4,000 that actually had any little tiny piece of cost data is just overwhelming. But I hope that's a that's a good starting point for sharing how urgent this is.

Elena, can I come to you now? And speaking perhaps from your donor and implementer perspective, what concrete examples show how poor cost evidence led to perhaps suboptimal decisions?

WALLS: So, I actually would like to speak from my perspective of former USAID lead on cost measurement. So at USAID, we funded a lot of programs with the intention for the government to pick it up and scale it up and continue the implementation.

And what we discovered, which I think I'm sure not a surprise to anybody, is that when you attempt to do that, the government representatives will ask you two questions. First of all, how much does it cost? And second, how exactly do we implement it, right? So and what I've discovered in my career, long career at USAID, that the vast majority of implementers could not answer this question.

They could tell you what the overall price tag for the program was like, "Yes, this program maybe cost us fifty million dollars over the course of five years." But what we always like joke about at USAID that a lot of our programs were like Christmas trees, where everybody puts like little ornaments on because we have so many different things wrapped into this one program.

To try to isolate specific interventions and their effects was challenging, but that's like impact evaluation program, right? But then try to assign costs to those specific effects was even more challenging. Now you have to track very concrete, you know, expenditures for this particular portion of the program that contributes to those specific measured effects, right?

And that becomes really challenging unless you have systems in place. So I'm not gonna talk about the second part of this problem, which is exactly how we implement the programs. That was a whole other problem and deserves a whole other webinar, right? What is implementation? What does implementation look like- looks like?

What are those details that we need to be aware of? But from the point of view of costing, that became a real issue because we were trying to understand something that structurally was very difficult, right? So eventually, we found some solutions to this, how to overcome this particular issue by harnessing existing systems and try to incentivize our implementing partners to use their own accounting systems to track the expenditures in the way that would allow us to get to the answers to those questions.

But broadly speaking, I think that this brings me back to the question for the need for this document is that how do we make sure we all speak with the same language? Like, a lot of times when we talk with government representatives about costing or even with implementers about costing, everybody would throw in different words.

And sometimes you just have to like, you know, get through this vocabulary confusion because people would say, "Is this program cost effective?" Without running an impact evaluation, right? Or they would just... While in fact what they would mean is like, "Is this, you know, is this something we can afford?"

Right? And then you have to understand what it is that they mean and try to translate it, you know, again, to people who can help with those answers. Frequently, attention to cost would be equated with, by cheap, which is really unfortunate, and it's prevalent in a lot of discussions around costing.

Or the other confusion that I frequently encountered is that every time you raise question about cost, people talk about finance. Like how do we find money as opposed to how much does it cost. So anyway, all of this is to say that we have, I hope that this guidance will help address some of the core issues in this conversation, such as clarity.

What exactly do we mean when we say, you know, the program costs something, or what exactly what we mean when we talk about cost effectiveness versus efficiency, you know, estimates for instance. And also emphasizing that there is no like one answer that is globally applicable, right? It's not like, you know, this program costs X and it will always produce that effect.

Because honestly, both answers will vary depending on the context, depending on, you know, what beneficiaries you're working with, depending on whose perspective you're looking from, right? Because the costs will differ if you measure it from the perspective of the funder versus from the perspective of the implementer versus the the government that might wanna scale that up.

So anyway I hope I began answering your question, Barbara. Back over to you.

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you, Elena. Yes, I think you did. So with all these sort of needs in our heads I would like to ask Liz and Elena a, a little bit about the- W-what-- H-how have we moved forward in the last decade? So perhaps, Liz, could you tell us a little bit about what you've seen in the past decade?

Either there are tools, initiatives, or any other positive shift that has improved the quantity, the quality, and the use of cost data in education and early childhood development.

BROWN: Yeah. Absolutely. So I think, like, we often look to the health sector. The-- It go-- It seems to go sector by sector. We often look to health.

I think the Gates Foundation reference case, the Global Health Cost Consortium, helped to set standards, you know, early on, earlier that were very helpful and similar to this initiative in, in that they try to kind of converge around a common vocabulary for analyzing costs. But not everything in the health center-- health sector relates to what's happening in education.

And so that's why, like, there is a little bit of a sector difference, you know, going between to be able to arrive at harmonization standards that are relevant to the kinds of interventions that we're thinking about. So I think that's why this, you know, this initiative is particularly important in, in sort of defining that for education.

I think there's a couple other things. There's NGOs. So NGOs have really led the way in doing cost analysis, generating evidence in ways that's very helpful and demonstrates what can be done. The most one-- the most important one that I can think of is the International Rescue Committee. They have their best use of resources team that analyzes IRC's own internal projects and program costs, and then uses that information to drive efficiency through the delivery of, you know, programs.

I mean, this can be latrines, this can be you know, s-staff-intensive home visits. Whatever you-- Whatever it is, you name it, they're analyzing it. And the use of data kind of internally by NGOs is like a very good example of how cost evidence can be used very fruitfully. I think there's a couple other things, FCDO and the Center for Global Development, the World Bank, and now the Smart Buys Alliance have used smart buys lists, best buys lists, and other ways of ranking cost-effectiveness of different alternative interventions.

These can move a lot of money in the sense they can build a lot of awareness about sort of the relative cost-effectiveness of different sorts of interventions. One example, the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel raises a lot of awareness about comparative cost-effectiveness of alternative programs.

And then I think there's two more. There's the world of effective altruism and that is the Givewells of the world. And, you know, that's really thinking very transparently and really hard about cost-effectiveness, methodologically intensive. You know, really looking at charities to see are they using their resources very well.

Can they deliver in a way that's better than a cash benchmark? And then last, I think there are, you know, research organizations working on tools like J-PAL and IPA, which we've talked about. So there's a lot of movement. It's taken time. It's sector by sector in a lot of respects. But I think there are more tools available than have been in the past.

And I think at this stage now, I'm gonna say that cost-effectiveness is kind of a thing, and this is good. This is good. This brings a lot of attention to kind of, you know, what we can do in, in our field to keep moving things forward.

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you very much, Liz, and thank you for that parallel with health sector.

'Cause I totally agree, when there's so much being done there that we try to extrapolate, but that, it doesn't necessarily match exactly with what we do. And what comes to my head especially is the multiple outcome interventions that we tend to have in education, whereas that, well, might, it might be that I'm ignorant in health perhaps, but it seems like the outcome it's more clear in, in, in health interventions.

It's just been one or a couple, whereas in education we see multiple outcomes that challenge us to think about, well, how do we cost for all those outcomes, for some of those outcomes et cetera. Thank you so much for bringing that, that analogy in, Liz.

Elena, can I come to you with the same question? What have you seen done to improve cost evidence in the last 10 years and what do you think are we, are some of the lessons that we are gaining from those efforts?

WALLS: Thank you, Barbara. Yes, and I completely agree with Liz, what she said. I think I'm very encouraged, honestly, to see how much more conversations include attention to cost, how much more attention the funders are paying to cost data, at least in terms of the demand.

I mean, I know that the availability is still lagging, lagging behind the interest, let's put it that way, right? So, but at the same time, like somebody just sent me the most recent review of RCTs, and it was definitely in an increase in the proportion of our pub- recently published RCTs that had some process.

So to me, this is a little bit of also-- on one hand, I'm very excited. On the other hand, I'm also a little concerned because in the lack of when we don't have standardization, when we don't have clarity about what cost estimate actually does and when we don't have actually talked about or includes, and when we don't have sufficient capacity among decision-makers to interpret this data in the context of their context in the situation of their particular context, they then this can be also very misleading.

So for example if the published cost estimate does not specify what it includes, what it doesn't include, what perspective it takes, then the donor or the funder or the government can take this number and apply it in you know, equation that it's not designed for, and basically produce the overall funding envelope for this program to scale up, for example incorrectly, which can actually damage the implementation.

So I'm kind of always worried about such misapplication, particularly in-- when people want to take the cost estimate and apply to a different country, for example, when we have very different pricing, right? And it can really... Sometimes I feel like bad data can be worse than no data, because if there is no data, a person at least is aware that, well, I don't know.

I need to collect the data and understand how much it actually costs. Versus a person saying, "Oh, well, we have this estimate from country X and I'm sitting in country B, and surely it's gonna be the same." And they just go ahead and multiply the per child estimate by number of their children, give it to Ministry of Finance and say, "This is how much I need to scale up this program."

While in reality could take-- maybe they need twice as much, right? Because of the pricing is very different in this particular context. So this issue of misapplication of estimates, I think is a very serious one. And while it took us maybe a decade to build up the capacity of the government and decision makers in general to understand effectiveness estimates, and even that is still not like quite there, right? The thing with costing, it's also gonna take us some time. And if we have any decision makers in, in the audience, I just would like to really emphasize the importance of training staff and make sure that people understand how to interpret, how to read and understand those estimates in the context of how they are, how these estimates are produced, and how the, how they can be interpreted for very specific decisions that need to be made.

So that is not to say that, oh, we cannot learn anything from other contexts. Of course we can. We can learn, you know, what doesn't work, for example. It's pointless to try to cost out one laptop per child because we have overwhelming evidence that it doesn't work anywhere, okay, in terms of effectiveness.

So it doesn't matter how much it costs, it's not effective, right? Anywhere. But at the same time, say if you think about the very popular interventions right now, the TARL, you know, or structured pedagogy, the the cost of implementing these programs were very dramatic from context to context.

And most important as well, I think sometimes when we put that cost estimate on a program and interpret it without references to the context, we may miss very important kind of, clues about the system in which it operates. So the a cost, for example, for delivering a program where we have a particular teacher ratio in a classroom may be quite different from the one which has a different cost ratio, right?

Because you have different details about the implementation. So all of this is to say is that I feel like where we made a lot of progress is that there's a lot more attention paid. People really want to understand how much things cost, and they want to use this information, which is all great and wonderful.

Where we're still lacking behind the need, I feel, is solid skills both for people who produce cost evidence to explain to decision makers how to use it appropriately, and on the part of decision makers to be able to interpret cost evidence within their context alongside data that is also very important, such as evidence on effectiveness, evidence on equity, which

particular contextual conditions that you have that may or may not, you know, work alongside the, you know, those cost estimates that you have, that you're using.

So that's why I feel like we need we still have a lot of work to do building up that capacity among in, within the sector to both generate and use cost evidence. Over.

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you, Elena. And I think that's specifically what the pillar three of this Global Costing Taskforce aims to do, is to increase that capacity, at least providing some, some some training for different stakeholders to better use this, this evidence.

So thank you so much for s- so far the conversation, I feel like it has allowed me to explore what are some of the needs of cost evidence, its scarcity, it's how do we translate that cost-- the evidence of impact into also cost evidence that can inform budgets into, in the governments and in decision-making of funders.

And also what are some of the efforts that we have seen happening in the last decade, as you've just said. There has been more attention paid to it by NGOs, by multilaterals. There is been more demand, but we still need to be able to support more better offer of cost evidence.

So I would love us to together reflect on what else is still needed and on what does this harmonizing guidance is helping us with in our different roles. So Mainissa, I would like to come to you in your role as funder. Like, where do you see are the, the, the biggest obstacles for better cost data collection analysis and use?

And how do you think this guidance document will support will support the effort in overcoming those, those challenges?

NTEKIM: I think, I mean, I think Emily alluded to it at the beginning, or maybe it was Elena, about the actual demand for this data. And I think just even an acknowledgement that it's very critical to the work we're trying to do.

So, I mean, I feel very strongly about this, that if it is sort of, irresponsible to be promoting a program or an intervention, especially in low- and middle-income countries, but to be honest, any country, where you're not really sure about the impact and the cost. And so for me, I think one of the first things is just an acceptance that before you're going to promote or advocate a certain approach or program, that you really have a full entirety of the data.

It isn't just about cost. Like Elena said, there's all these questions about implementation. But to go forward without that full package, to advise a government to go a certain course of action without that information, I do... I really think that's irresponsible. So I think for all of us, we should have a demand for that cost.

I can understand some concerns around that, and I was drawn to, I know, a question we got from one of our colleagues, who I hope is online today Dumisani. I think she's from Malawi. Her question alluded to that. And her concern is a really legitimate one, which I think we have to face head-on.

And if I can paraphrase it, it's essentially, are we gonna go now for programs that are cheaper, cost less, less because they're reaching easier people or easier-to-reach communities? And I think for me, before that, there has to be some fundamental agreement with the approach you're taking in the first place.

So for example, for us at the Hilton Foundation, our strategy across the board in early childhood, whether it's the program I run or the program run by my colleagues with refugees or my colleagues in the US, we all have an underlying focus. It's on the com- the focus is communities most likely to be left behind.

Different contexts. In my context, we think a lot about adolescent mothers who are, who have young children. Of course, there's refugees in host communities. In the United States, we think about particular populations. So I think if that's your sort of guiding principle, then the question isn't I go for the cheapest thing 'cause it's easier to do.

It's more still a question of what is still the most cost-effective way to deliver meaningful impact for these populations. So you don't, you still don't get away from the question of cost. And so I think being very clear about what our commitments are to equity, to efficiency, and being very sort of like scientific in our approach to understand how much it costs to deliver on those impacts and outcomes we want- I think is really critical.

So the first point for me is just a demand and an acceptance from all of us in the field that we're at... whatever level we're working at, whether we're researchers or government or funders or implementers, cost is really relevant to all of us. And I think from a funder's perspective, to give real sort of assurances to those we grant-make and partner with that we're not looking for the cheapest way to do something.

We're looking for the most effective way to do something, the most efficient way to do something, which is about operationalization, including costs. So it's not the only parameter to use to decide whether you fund something or not. And the last thing to say is I just think it will be so effective for proper decision-making.

So if you sit in my position, you get many proposals, many ideas to deliver certain results. How do you choose between them? I use lots of criteria. One of them should be cost. So I guess I'm just saying if we appreciate it's one of the key parameters, not the only parameter, we weigh it against other parameters, but it's definitely something we should all be looking at across the board

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you so much, Manissa.

And I see several questions coming in the chat. I really appreciate them. Dunissani, Siveti, Cruz, Jerry, Rajendar. And I just wanna kind of synthesize them a lot because they all touch on the same point of equity that you've just touched on, Manissa. How do we ensure that we are not leaving behind marginalized rural communities kids with special needs, and those communities that tend to be left behind because they are under the...

You know, we're treating impacting the average umbrella. We're treating costs in the average in the same, in the average cost per student. How do we ensure we don't left behind all these marginalized communities? So I would love if Liz and Elena, and maybe even Emily, if you'd like to touch any point about how do we deal with equity in this with this standards and we- whenever we do cost analysis data collection and use, how do we use this e-equity criteria overall?

Who... Liz, maybe you wanna go first.

BROWN: Yeah. I mean, I think kind of relevant to these standards of harmonization, you know, cost is always relevant. A-and there's a lot of questions here about equity. How do we

think about equity in the context of cost? And I think the main way to think about it is in terms of, from a research point of view, what population or group are we talking about?

What is the specific program or intervention that we're considering? And then specific geographies. There's like three really important contextual features that can influence the cost of something. So we know that targeting or going after trying to reach really remote groups is more expensive. Just think about the transportation cost.

I think a lot of people kind of understand this intuitively. But when we're reporting costs out, you know, when do a study, et cetera, these contextual features matter a great deal, and always the question is, you know, cost-effective for whom? So the sort of unpacking and understanding the cost number that you're looking at, sort of the top line, what does this cost per participant, whatever, you know, requires a deep understanding of who was the target of the objective of the intervention, who-- what, what population or group are we trying to reach, where, and with what sort of program.

So I think that's a really important feature that can be sort of directly related to these harmonization standards and to reporting out information in a way that conveys that context in addition to the number.

HANISCH-CERDA: Thank you. Thank you very much, Liz. Well, and thank you all for this great conversation.

I think it has highlighted not only why this work is important, but how much more work we still need to do in terms of building capacity, building demand, acknowledging the equity criterias that are behind this, and also acknowledging all of the different perspectives of the individuals who need to use this data for decision-making.

So thank you f- so much for all our panelists, for all the participants who have shared questions, very relevant questions indeed. Thank you, Elena and Emily, for this opportunity, and I'll pass it over to Emily. Thank you.

GUSTAFSSON-WRIGHT: Thank you, Barbara, and thanks to the fantastic panel. I think you really brought some insightful perspectives from the different hats that you've worn in your work and hopefully we'll get to have Yanli join us for a future webinar.

Important work to be done at the ministry, which we totally understand. So, so what have we heard today? You know, I think really strengthening the generation and use of cost evidence in global education and ECCE is going to require more than harmonized technical standards, of course. It's going to require sustained organizational commitment, leadership support and coordinated action across governments, funders, implementing organizations, researchers, and ad- advocacy communities.

So I'm speaking to all of you and hope that you are able to make a commitment to more and better cost data. Advancing this agenda is really going to require collective action across all stakeholders to bring a stronger culture of transparency, learning, and evidence-informed resource use throughout the global education and ECCE sectors.

So this guidance and other resources developed by the task force really aim to support this action through harmonizing of standards, through garnering commitment, ensuring access to tools and resources, and strengthening capacity across the sector. Please continue to follow us this work. If you would like to be part of the Global Costing Task Force consultative group, we'd love to have you.

Again, this is really a collective effort, and it's going to take definitely more than a village to achieve this. So thank you all today, and wishing you a wonderful day. Thank you.