

Working towards developing the thematic monitoring framework on education

First meeting of the Technical Coordination Group on SDG 4 thematic indicators

12-13 May 2016, World Bank, Washington D.C., USA

By *Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director, CEO, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh*



The Thematic Coordination Group has been constituted to improve coordination of the efforts to efficiently implement SDG 4 and, particularly, the thematic monitoring framework on education.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNESCO Education Sector's Division of Education 2030 Support and Coordination (UNESCO ED/ESC), with the support of the World Bank, brought together relevant stakeholders in the field of education indicators, including representatives from countries, to initiate the activities of the *Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) on the Indicators for SDG4-Education 2030* in Washington D.C.

Addressing its mandate of working with partners to develop internationally comparable statistics to better assess progress across the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) targets, the UIS and UNESCO ED/ESC convened the Thematic Coordination Group to improve coordination of the efforts to efficiently implement SDG 4 and, particularly, the thematic monitoring framework on education (which includes 11 global education indicators). This new global initiative is expected to promote production of credible data at the country level necessary to report on the cross-nationally comparable measures at different levels.

The specific objectives of the meeting, among others, were to –

1. Provide a technical platform to support the implementation of the thematic indicator framework on SDG 4-Education 2030, ensuring the use of agreed-upon indicator definitions
2. Coordinate the development of guidelines and strategies to support countries in analysing and reporting on SDG 4-Education 2030.



Participants discussed the global processes and next steps for SDG 4 and suggested to keep track of developments across the globe - a major challenge and a big step forward considering the comprehensive, holistic, ambitious, aspirational, universal, and transformative nature of the SDGs.

In this first meeting, after bringing the participants up to date on the processes that defined the SDG global indicators and the status of the SDG4-Education 2030 thematic indicators, discussions were held on the initial steps of a strategy to implement the monitoring framework for education.

The meeting was attended by representatives of 17 member countries of the UN and two civil society representatives (from Education International and the Collective Consultation of NGOs)

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- CCNGO). Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director of CAMPE and Vice-President of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), represented the CCNGO Coordination Group in the meeting. Eight Countries (from all 5 regions of the UN) attended as observers.

The meeting was divided in to an opening session and 10 specific Business Sessions, discussing 3 major dimensions of the SDGs - technical, political, and strategic. Participants also discussed the global processes and next steps for SDG 4 and suggested to keep a track of developments across the globe - a

It was pointed out that the global indicators of the SDGs (including SDG 4) are obligatory, but not the thematic indicators. They are technical and are expected to help national governments to work on global indicators. The spirit is of integration and facilitation while the understanding is that indicators should be measurable, simple, and understandable. The UN Statistical Commission already accepted the global indicators in March 2016. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will discuss those in July 2016 and the UN will endorse the final output in September 2016.

The Technical Coordination Group meeting identified the following challenges of monitoring the implementation of SDG 4 and reporting on cross-nationally comparable indicators at national, regional, and global levels - Lack of enough credible data; harmonisation of data bases; use of survey data with better definitions; implementation of new data collection mechanism in many countries; capacity of stakeholders and clarity of what we are aiming at across the board; how to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data which will be needed for monitoring; governance of the targets and indicators; underutilisation of potential data sources (e.g. civil society, academia, etc.); difficulty in attaining disaggregation; diversity of population groups (e.g. sexual and reproductive health and rights is considered a socio-cultural issue and needs a strong indicator).

Considering all the challenges, particularly keeping in view the priorities, the context, needs, and situation have to be analysed in a scientific way. It is essential to compare each country data in a fair, objective manner. The challenges, as identified, are related not only to data availability, but also to a clear understanding of the concept of parity because “interpretation” of the indicators on parity often poses problems to use data in a scientific, coherent manner.

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In view of the above, the following 3 tiers were suggested by UIS to identify country level capacity for monitoring SDG 4 –

Tier 1 Indicator is conceptually clear, an established methodology and standards are available and data are produced regularly by countries

Tier 2 Indicator is conceptually clear, an established methodology and standards are available but data are not produced regularly by countries

Tier 3 Indicator for which there are no established methodology and standards or the methodology and/or standards are being developed or tested



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It was highlighted that as data collection/generation is costly, it is essential to have sustainable funding/investment. It is also necessary to have alignment of national and international agendas to monitor the SDGs.

A lot of discussion was held on Indicator 4.1.1 which suggested “Administration of a nationally representative learning assessment (i) during primary (ii) at the end of primary and (iii) at the end of lower secondary education”. This will pave the way for ‘Early Grade Reading Assessment’ (EGRA).

Delegates from France and Brazil took a strong position against the introduction of EGRA as an indicator as it may give rise to the practice of ‘testing small children’. EI and CCNGO/GCE expressed solidarity with France and provided feedback from GCE members working at the ground level. There is widespread concern within GCE that introduction of EGRA will subject primary school children to undue testing and deprive them of their childhood which should not be centered around obtaining grades in publicly conducted tests/exams. It will benefit the “testing industry” and may promote commercial coaching business, particularly in the developing world. In conclusion, after a long debate, it was decided that the Education 2030 Steering Committee will consider the concerns raised by some state parties and civil society representatives about EGRA for suggesting measures to resolve the issue.

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