
What are the implications for UNESCO of the proposed post-2015 EFA goals?

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Executive summary

UNESCO has been tasked with spear-heading the global education agenda – as part of the post-2015 development debate. The organisation is well placed to take on this role – with unique experience and expertise in the field.

This report looks at the implications for UNESCO of the proposed post-2015 education goals. It asks a series of challenge questions – seeking to prompt debate and action within UNESCO. It focuses on the implications of the goals for UNESCO's policies and practices, processes and structures.

The brief concludes that there are some important issues for UNESCO to address.

Summary of challenge questions:

What are the challenges in finalising the overarching post-2015 education goal?

1. How can UNESCO develop the overarching goal into a more persuasive and powerful statement that is ambitious, realistic and comprehensible to a general audience?
2. How can UNESCO balance the holistic approach to education in this goal with the need for specific, measurable targets and indicators to shape the post-2015 education agenda?
3. How can UNESCO specifically ensure that equity is built into the goal, its targets and indicators without making them excessively complex?

What are the implications of these goals for UNESCO policies?

4. How will UNESCO make better use of its convening power and influencing potential to ensure that education features strongly in the post-2015 development agenda?
5. How will UNESCO lead the global education community to take cognizance of the shifts in social, economic, technological and demographic realities and their impact on education systems over the next fifteen years?
6. How will UNESCO prioritize future attention to policies relevant to the new education goal compared to those relevant to both the overall development goals and those relevant to other areas of education?

What are the implications of these goals for UNESCO processes and structures?

7. How will UNESCO strengthen and adjust the EFA structures to ensure that they are fit for the purpose of supporting the post-2015 development goals?
8. How will UNESCO balance technical capacity and activities across headquarters, institutes, regional and country offices in the context of the new goal?
9. How will UNESCO structure its partnerships with other major development agencies active in education in the context of the new goal?
10. How will UNESCO build on existing partnerships with emerging economies to ensure sufficient financial and technical support to achieve these goals?
11. What will UNESCO stop doing in order to allow space for the new challenges in the post-2015 goals?

Is UNESCO equipped to track the progress towards meeting the new goals? What evidence would we need to gather to monitor progress?

12. How will UNESCO help the education sector to bring about a data revolution in the post-2015 development agenda?
13. How will UNESCO ensure that the measurement of learning outcomes reflects a wide range of skills, knowledge and values?
14. How will the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (GMR) adapt to include the wider range of topics and also to the combination of global and national target specificity that seem likely with the new goal? How will its monitoring be linked to that for the new development goals in general?

Are there key gaps that need addressing?

15. How will UNESCO facilitate holding countries accountable for their commitments under the new goal?
16. What measures would be needed to institute a periodic review of progress towards the education goals?
17. How can UNESCO help to strengthen national mechanisms to allow citizens to hold their own governments to account for commitments to deliver better quality education?

The brief recommends that UNESCO prioritises and addresses these issues and that they form part of an internal debate on how best to equip and structure the organisation ahead of this important stage in its history.

1 / Introduction

The post-2015 development agenda

It is essential that UNESCO provides effective leadership to bring together policy makers, researchers and practitioners in order to ensure that education plays a strong part in the post-2015 development agenda and to shape the education debate for the next generation. It is equally important that UNESCO prepares itself for its role with regard to this agenda in order that the new goals take on practical meaning. It can be argued that one shortfall in devising the current Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (EFA) goals, was that in setting targets for 2015, insufficient attention was paid to how progress towards them would be monitored.

This paper outlines some of the implications, challenges and opportunities for UNESCO of the likely education goals in the post-2015 development agenda. The paper does so in five sections by discussing the proposed education goals, their implications for UNESCO policies, for UNESCO processes and structures, for UNESCO's ability to track progress and resulting gaps. Each section raises some key questions for UNESCO to consider as it prepares for the period after 2015. The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) plans to develop further papers advising on some of the key issues raised here.

The paper does not discuss in any detail either the content or the likely broad structure of the overall development goals and the process for setting them. We note, however, that the broad framework is likely to be that of sustainable development.

2 / What are the challenges in finalising the overarching post-2015 education goal?

The current UNESCO position paper proposes a single, comprehensive and overarching goal to replace the six EFA goals in the post-2015 development agenda. The paper's initial formulation of this goal is to:

*Ensure equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.*¹

The paper argues that in addition to this standalone goal, education's contribution to the achievement of the other components of the development agenda should be clearly stated. UNESCO cites the statement in the Open Working Group summary that "Education is absolutely central to any sustainable development agenda. It is not only an essential investment but an important basis for human enrichment through life-long learning."

The overarching goal is very broadly phrased to respond to a range of demands from different constituencies to strengthen the focus on learning and the quality of education²; to continue to emphasise the importance of equitable access to education³; and to retain a component of lifelong learning.

The position paper proposes ten specific targets under six priority areas: basic education; post basic and tertiary education; youth and adult literacy; skills for work and life; quality and relevant teaching and learning; financing for education (including both domestic and donor financing)⁴. The paper lists both outcome and input targets.

1 UNESCO. Position Paper on Education Post-2015. February 2014.

2 e.g. Institute for Statistics/ Brookings. Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force. September 2013.

3 e.g. Save the Children. Ending the Hidden Exclusion: Learning & Equity in Education. 2013.

4 UNESCO. Position Paper on Education Post-2015. February 2014. Annex.

UNESCO faces three major challenges as it finalises the education goal and targets:

- a) **Ensuring that the overarching goal is specific enough to be politically compelling and meaningful.** In its current form the goal runs the risk of being seen as too general and not comprehensible to a general audience. If this happens, there is a risk that the general goal will be replaced by a narrower learning goal as several agencies have advocated.
- b) **Setting specific targets.** Current thinking on the new targets in general, including the education ones, involves a combination of global minimums and also country-specified national targets. This has the great advantage that all countries can potentially set targets meaningful to them but also runs the risk that there are too many targets and again the overarching goal will be seen as too general and too complicated to be communicated to a general audience.
- c) **Incorporating equity.** At one level, any targets that are for all children and adults by definition incorporate equity; at another, this is again too broad to be easily understood and it may be important to think about defining targets also for the poorest people, though this again runs the risk of further complication.

Challenge Questions:

- How can UNESCO develop the overarching goal into a more persuasive and powerful statement that is ambitious, realistic and comprehensible to a general audience?
- How can UNESCO balance the holistic approach to education in this goal with the need for specific, measurable targets and indicators to shape the post-2015 education agenda?
- How can UNESCO specifically ensure that equity is built into the goal, its targets and indicators without making them excessively complex?

3 / What are the implications of these goals for UNESCO policies?

UNESCO should be extremely well placed to lead the effort to place education at the heart of the post-2015 development agenda. It has been given the mandate as the leading UN agency. It has substantial technical capacity in the UNESCO education directorate, the GMR team and UNESCO specialised institutes such as IIEP, IBE, UIS and UNEVOC. Beyond education, UNESCO also has a leading role in other components of the post-2015 development agenda which are being given greater prominence including culture, peace, science and sustainable development. UNESCO has more than two decades of experience in developing policy and supporting national and global policy development from Jomtien to Dakar and up to the present day. Lastly, UNESCO is able to convene education ministers from developed as well as developing countries to discuss policy and assess progress towards the current and future goals.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report has made a major contribution to the global education debate over the past decade and continues to receive donor support, as has the UIS and IIEP.

The proposed overarching goals and targets for education post-2015 are largely in line with the current priorities for UNESCO's education section. They do not require any major adjustments to UNESCO's policies and strategic development activities. This in itself begs the question whether UNESCO's vision for the future takes adequate account of the changing global environment which will affect education over the next fifteen years. There are a number of major trends which will have a major impact on the demand, financing and provision of education in almost every country. These include the rapid decline in population growth and ageing populations in most regions of the world; the increasing access to affordable technology; the growth of the middle class; the expanding

non-state education sector, especially in urban areas; the shift to middle income status for many developing countries; and reductions in international aid for education.

While no major changes in UNESCO policies seem necessary, there are crucial questions about the priority UNESCO gives to various policies. There are a number of significant education policies potentially competing for time and resources. UNESCO may need to consider how much priority it gives to Education for All alongside other policies which may be relevant to the broader development goals such as education for sustainable development. There are also education-related policies which are important but not directly relevant to either the broad development or the education goal such as cross-border recognition of qualifications.

Challenge Questions:

- How will UNESCO make better use of its convening power and influencing potential to ensure that education features strongly in the post-2015 development agenda?
- How will UNESCO lead the global education community to take cognizance of the shifts in social, economic, technological and demographic realities and their impact on education systems over the next fifteen years?
- How will UNESCO prioritize future attention to policies relevant to the new education goal compared to those relevant to both the overall development goals and those relevant to other areas of education?

4 / What are the implications of these goals for UNESCO processes and structures?

The proposed education targets are clustered around the priority areas of basic education; post basic education and tertiary; youth and adult literacy; skills for work and life; quality and relevant teaching and learning; and financing of education (both domestic and donor financing).

These priority areas map approximately onto the current structures and arrangements for the education section. However, some of the current structures involve duplicated and ambiguous responsibilities for example, literacy is handled both by the Paris headquarters, the regional bureaus and the Institute for Lifelong Learning, financing is largely handled by IIEP, skills for work are handled by both headquarters and UNEVOC.

While the broad mapping may only need minor changes at the headquarters/institute level, there are major questions about the implications for UNESCO field offices, both regional and national. These are now able, with varying degrees of success, to focus their activities mainly on the current six EFA goals; they are unlikely to be able to have the resources to focus sufficiently on the much wider range of topics implicit in the new goal. This raises important questions to do with the balance of activities between regional and country offices and also the question of the purpose of the country offices: will they in future be mainly to support country efforts towards the new goal, in which case should they be concentrated where most support is needed?

UNESCO's website currently lists important priority areas which are not included in these targets including education for sustainable development,

health education and ICT. These are cross cutting areas which are prominent elsewhere in the post-2015 development agenda and it will be important for UNESCO to make a substantial contribution to the definition of goals in these areas to ensure that education is given due attention.

The decision to phase out the EFA High Level Forum in 2012 has left a gap in the global education structures for a platform for top level policy and strategic discussions. This gap has been filled to a certain extent by *ad hoc* events organised by one or more stakeholders in collaboration with UNESCO⁵. This has provided opportunities for new donors and private sector organisations to play a greater role and the meetings have often been more dynamic. However, UNESCO inevitably has a less dominant role in such events and could be seen as diminishing its leadership in the global education debate.

A linked issue is UNESCO's relationships with regard to other major development agencies, such as the World Bank and UNICEF. Such relationships have been weakened in the past by UNESCO's resource constraints and weakened technical capacity. It will be important for UNESCO to build effective partnerships around the new goal with other relevant agencies and to agree on some division of labour with regard to its various targets.

UNESCO's convening power of education ministers remains one of the unique strengths of the organisation. There is scope to make better use of these meetings to support the achievement of the post-2015 education goals and targets which are likely to be universally applied across developed as well as developing countries. This will require the development of agendas that are more tightly focused on the goals and more systematic linkages to monitoring mechanisms such as the GMR.

UNESCO is in the process of trying to develop strategic partnerships in response to the External Evaluation of 2010. These are likely to be a key focus of the new medium-term strategy and could provide an opportunity to take a leadership role in key education partnerships.

5 e.g. The recent Global Education and Skills Forum sponsored by GEMS and other private education organisations and the WISE event sponsored by the Qatar Foundation.

UNESCO also has a unique advantage in building partnerships with emerging and new growth economies in support of global education. Examples of this include the E9 group meetings; the partnerships with Qatar and other gulf states; and specific trust fund supported activities such as the UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust Project on “Enhancing Teacher Education for Bridging the Education Quality Gap in Africa.” It is likely that new economies will increasingly take on leadership roles in the next fifteen years and UNESCO is well placed to secure their support for the post-2015 education goals.

Challenge Questions:

- How will UNESCO strengthen and adjust the EFA structures to ensure that they are fit for the purpose of supporting the post-2015 development goals?
- How will UNESCO balance technical capacity and activities across headquarters, institutes, regional and country offices in the context of the new goal?
- How will UNESCO structure its partnerships with other major development agencies active in education in the context of the new goal?
- How will UNESCO build on existing partnerships with emerging economies to ensure sufficient financial and technical support to achieve these goals?
- What will UNESCO stop doing in order to allow space for the new challenges in the post-2015 goals?

5 / Is UNESCO equipped to track the progress towards meeting the new goals? What evidence would we need to gather to monitor progress?

The High Level Panel report⁶ calls for a 'data revolution' to make better use of new technologies and big data sources to enable governments to track their progress towards the post-2015 development goals more effectively and to allow citizens to hold their governments to account for achieving this progress.

The education sector and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics are still reliant on conventional management and information systems in some countries which are slow, unreliable and biased towards administrative rather than household-based data. The result is that the release of data to track progress is at least two years out of date and, in a number of countries with large out of school populations, data is not available at all.

There are a number of innovative initiatives to make better use of survey data and mobile phone based applications to collect data more efficiently and provide more timely feedback to schools, communities and ministries on key target areas such as enrolment, attendance and learning achievements. UNESCO could make a significant contribution to a data revolution in education by investing resources in collecting these innovations and making them more widely available to countries.

6 The High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. May 2013.

There has been extensive debate among the global education community about the best approach to measuring learning outcomes⁷. The debate has recognised that it is necessary but not sufficient to measure basic literacy and numeracy skills. In particular, employers and policy makers alike have argued that they need tools to measure non-cognitive and “21st Century Skills” in order to assess young peoples’ readiness to enter the workforce. There have been a number of national initiatives to measure these skills in developed countries. UNESCO could play an important role in reviewing the experience of these initiatives and making recommendations to countries on assessment mechanisms that are practical and applicable in a developing country.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report is the definitive vehicle for monitoring progress towards the current education goals and should continue to have this function with regard to the new goal. It will be necessary, however, to link education monitoring more to the broader monitoring of the new development goals than has been the case in the past. In addition, the potentially complicated nature of having both global and national targets will mean some rethinking of how the GMR reports. Currently, for instance, it tends to report broad trends across countries and regions and does not go in depth into individual country performance in a systematic comparative way, except through its extensive data tables. This is already a weakness but may become more of one in future.

Challenge Questions:

- How will UNESCO help the education sector to bring about a data revolution in the post-2015 development agenda?
- How will UNESCO ensure that the measurement of learning outcomes reflects a wide range of skills, knowledge and values?
- How will the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report adapt to include the wider range of topics and also to the combination of global and national target specificity that seem likely with the new goal? How will its monitoring be linked to that for the new development goals in general?

7 e.g. Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force.

6 / Are there key gaps that need addressing?

The previous section has addressed the gaps that exist in terms of the provision of timely, population-based data.

More generally, goals and targets are unlikely to be met unless they are set well and monitored effectively and are also accompanied by mechanisms to hold countries accountable. UNESCO is playing an important role in setting the new education goal and, so long as the GMR continues and is adapted, can also play the key role in monitoring.

However, the principal gap, today and in the future, is accountability, holding countries to that to which they commit. This will likely be more important in future if there are nationally set goals as well as global minimums. The now-abolished High Level Forum was designed to provide one accountability mechanism. New mechanisms are now needed for this. As the share of domestic financing for education increases, accountability mechanisms should be strengthened at the country level so that citizens have the information they require to hold governments to account for the effective use of taxpayers' money to support education and other basic services. International or regional monitoring mechanisms should be designed to support this. One possibility might be an extensive system of peer review by countries of each other. The Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights could provide a good model, and there are also lessons from OECD practices. UNESCO with its strong convening power has the potential to organize such a mechanism, which would need substantial additional technical support from regional bodies or other institutions such as the GMR.

Challenge Questions:

- How will UNESCO facilitate holding countries accountable for their commitments under the new goal?
- What measures would be needed to institute a periodic review of progress towards the education targets?
- How can UNESCO help to strengthen national mechanisms to allow citizens to hold their own governments to account for commitments to deliver better quality education?

7 / Recommendations

This policy brief raises some key questions for UNESCO as it prepares to spearhead the new global education agenda. The UK National Commission for UNESCO is planning to provide further advice on some of the issues introduced in this brief.

We recommend that the following questions be given due consideration by UNESCO as part of the process of preparing for this next important phase in the organisation's history.

Summary of challenge questions:

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The views contained in this policy brief are those of the UK National Commission for UNESCO and do not necessarily reflect those of the UK Government or the individuals or organisations who have contributed to this report.

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