Learning in the Global Education Agenda

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Funding from U.S. Agency for International Development, Contract No. AID-OAA-M-14-00001

2015 Global Education Summit @USAIDEducation #LetGirlsLearn #endpoverty
Background and aims

• Contention some have made that with MDG focus on access, learning has been neglected in global education agenda

• Questions:
  – What is status of learning in the global education agenda?
  – What explains patterns of attention to learning?
  – What are implications for raising its agenda status?

• Focus:
  – Global actors
  – With recognition that national and local actors are critical
Methodology

• Presenting preliminary results and emerging themes
  – Currently conducting analysis of collected information
  – Final report due April 2016

• Triangulation among data sources
  – Semi-structured interviews
  – Theoretical saturation rather than representative sample
  – Published scholarship and organizational reports
### Organizational affiliations of sample of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donors</th>
<th>UN agencies</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
<th>Research institutions</th>
<th>Governments and inter-governmental organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report</td>
<td>Pratham</td>
<td>REAL Centre</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>UNESCO, IIEP</td>
<td>Inter-American Dialogue</td>
<td>Brookings Institution</td>
<td>New Zealand Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>World Bank</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>Education International</td>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>OECD</td>
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<td>Hewlett Foundation</td>
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<td>GPE</td>
<td>University of Pennsylvania</td>
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<td>LMTF</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
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Theoretical background

• Multiple issues, scarce resources
• Agenda-setting as a phase in the global policy process
• Agenda-setting framework* (originally developed for global health):
  – Actor power
  – Ideas
  – Political contexts
  – Issue characteristics

Three preliminary findings

• Disagreement on agenda status of learning
• Emergence of learning as stated organizational focus over past decade
• Unresolved debates shaping agenda status
Finding 1: disagreement on agenda status of learning

- Learning has **never been neglected** in any fundamental sense:
  - “…at the level of international policy, learning has been a fairly integral part of the international education policy discourse probably for 25 years. Mostly it was subsumed under the issue of quality education.”

- Learning has been and **continues to be neglected**:
  - “I’m not convinced the agenda has really shifted to learning as opposed to it shifted to some combination of global rhetorical discourse about learning…in favor of a quality school agenda, which isn’t a learning agenda in my mind.”

- Learning **was neglected, but recently emerged as prominent issue**:
  - “I would find it difficult for anybody to argue at this particular juncture that at least in terms of the post-2015 debate, learning is not central and a core element of the education targets to be adopted in September.”
Finding 1: disagreement on agenda status of learning

• Reflecting differences on:
  – Understanding of history
  – Meaning of ‘learning’
  – How ‘learning’ should be measured

• Divergent perspectives:
  1. Learning **always there**: inherent; quality part of EFA goals
  2. Learning **neglected**: ongoing focus on inputs rather than outcomes; resources allocated
  3. Learning **recently prominent**: stated organizational priorities

• Is objective answer to its agenda status possible?
Finding 2: emergence of learning as stated organizational focus

- **Precursors (1990-2000s)**
  - 1990: World Conference on EFA, Jomtien
  - 2000: World Education Forum, Dakar – Commitment to EFA goals
  - 2000: UN Millennium Summit – MDGs

- **New organizational focus (2006-2012)**
  - Hewlett Foundation (2006; QEDC initiative launched)
  - Pratham (2007; Read India Campaign)
  - DFID (2009; DFID’s education strategy)
  - USAID (2011; USAID’s education strategy)
  - World Bank (2011; WB education sector strategy)
  - LMTF (2012; Convened)
  - GPE (2012; GPE’s strategic plan)
Finding 2: emergence of learning as stated organizational focus

- Recent developments (2015)
  - 2015: World Education Forum, Incheon
  - 2015: UN SDG Summit
Finding 2: emergence of learning as stated organizational focus

• Some hypotheses:
  – Emergence of studies showing lack of learning
  – Accumulation of data from learning assessment tools
  – Access achieved so naturally turn to learning
  – Individual and organizational champions
Finding 3: ongoing debates in the learning agenda

- How they are resolved will shape prospects for the agenda
- Debates:
  - On content
  - On measurement
  - On prioritized groups
  - On decision-making power
**The framework and the agenda status of learning**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Influence of factors in category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor power</strong></td>
<td>• Individual and organizational champions</td>
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<td>• Questions surrounding efficacy of UNESCO</td>
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<td>• Influence of civil society initiatives such as Pratham’s</td>
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<td><strong>Ideas</strong></td>
<td>• Disagreements over whether to focus on foundational skills such as literacy</td>
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<td>• Disagreements over value of global learning assessments</td>
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<td>• Evidence on relationship to economic growth helps spark policy-maker attention</td>
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<td><strong>Political contexts</strong></td>
<td>• Global goal-setting exercises (EFAs, MDGs, SDGs) focal points for learning debates</td>
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<td>• Competition for resources within education sector (such as with access)</td>
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<td>• Competition for resources with other sectors (such as with health)</td>
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<td><strong>Issue characteristics</strong></td>
<td>• Assessments showing global learning crisis spark attention</td>
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<td>• Uncertainty over what works hampers agenda status</td>
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Reiterating preliminary findings

- Emergence of stated priority among global education actors in mid-to-late 2000s
- Possibly driven by:
  - studies showing lack of learning
  - emergence of measurement tools,
  - natural turn to learning given access agenda progress
  - individual/organizational champions
- Trajectory of this agenda will be shaped by how debates unfold (re: content, measurement, prioritized groups, decision-making power)
Next steps

• Consider more carefully how actors’ prior assumptions shape their perceptions of the agenda status of learning
• Examine more carefully evidence for hypotheses around emergence of learning priority
• Consider strategic implications of present global developments for the future of the learning agenda