

three sets of countries, at different stages of educational development, and was able to judge that one category would not reach UPE until **after** 1980, a second category **around** 1980, and a third **before** 1980 (Fredriksen, 1981: 3).¹² But the African regional report did not work with a common goal and differentiated expectations of reaching it. Furthermore, national educational plans (and targets) had become more relevant than what had been anticipated in the early 1960s; hence, unlike the very widespread debate and advocacy in the years before 2015, it has been argued that 'this [1980] deadline passed with little political or policy attention' (King and McGrath 2012: 5). It would nevertheless be intriguing to research to what extent national plans or commissions for education coming after 1960 were aware of the Addis Ababa report, its projects and targets. At least in the case of one country, Kenya, which was not even independent at the time of Addis Ababa, its Education Commission Report of 1964 did actually discuss the Addis recommendation, and explain why it did not believe it possible that Kenyan primary education could be 'universal, compulsory and free' (Government of Kenya, 1964: 66-67, 139).¹³

It may well be that it has been mainly academics (Abernethy [1969]; Bray [1981]; Brock [1981]; Watson [1981]; Bown, 2009) and statisticians in UNESCO headquarters such as Fredriksen (op. cit.) who have seized the opportunity to reflect on the timings of UPE, whether before Addis, twenty, or fifty years later. But it is Abernethy who powerfully reminds us of the essential politics of long-term targets, in his analysis of UPE in Nigeria's Eastern and Western Regions, before 1961:

Moreover, policy makers cannot be expected to act on the basis of long-range forecasts, however optimistic these may be; the far-sighted statesman who thinks he can ignore short-run considerations is likely to find himself thrown out of office (Abernethy, 1969: 282).

However, a further crucial element was missing from these 1960s' targets; that was the absence of the kind of systematic, regular global monitoring that has been associated with the MDGs from the early 2000s, and with the six EFADakar Goals since 2002 (Fredriksen to KK, 8th September 2015). Despite its absence for the UNESCO regional goals of the 1960s, Coombs was able to assert

that 'These regional targets have unquestionably been able to spur the education efforts of many countries' (Coombs, 1968: 61), but the UNESCO assumptions about growth rates of 5% in Asia and Latin America, and 4.39% in Africa were confounded, and the chance of reaching the goals depended on such an array of unlikely conditions as to become 'only a distant dream' (ibid. 63).

Rethinking education and training in the 1970s and 1980s

Long before the UNESCO deadlines for UPE targets and for the other levels of education had arrived, a whole series of critiques of the mere expansion of formal education had taken centre stage. Many of these derived from multi-lateral and bilateral agencies, foundations and think tanks in the North, but there were a number arising directly in the South. Their titles captured some of the malaise or change of direction from business as usual – *The world educational crisis* (Coombs 1968); 'Costs and confusions in African education' (in Jolly, 1969); *Education and development reconsidered* (Ward, 1974); *New paths to learning for rural children and youth* (Coombs et al. 1973); *The diploma disease* (Dore, 1976); *Deschooling society* (Illich, 1971); *Non-formal education in African development* (Sheffield and Diejomaoh, 1972); *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for adjustment, revitalization, and expansion* (World Bank 1988). In the South, the so-called Cultural Revolution had started in China in 1966 and had lasted till 1976; and Nyerere's *Education for self-reliance* was a year later (1967). Both, in their very different ways, had dramatic implications for secondary and higher education expansion.

McNamara, president of the World Bank, captured some of the widespread malaise about the mere expansion of existing systems of education in the following foreword to the Bank's *Education Sector Working Paper* of 1974:

Developing countries have greatly expanded their educational systems over the past quarter of a century. But much of the expansion has been misdirected. The results are seen in one of the most disturbing paradoxes of our time: while

millions of people from among the educated are unemployed, millions of jobs are waiting to be done because people with the right education, training and skills cannot be found. (McNamara, in World Bank, 1974: 1)

The critical ferment around traditional schooling produced non-formal education, and its parallel in the world of work and of jobs was the 'discovery' in 1971 of the informal sector.¹⁴ The sheer size of the informal sector of the economy, both then and now, and of non-formal education, beyond regular schools and classrooms, combined to change for a time the discourse about education and jobs. The challenge to traditional schooling arising from the belief that 'education systems have been irrelevant to the needs of developing countries for the last two decades' (World Bank, 1974: 3) dealt a body blow to the short-lived excitement about high level manpower, and encouraged the adoption of pro-poor growth. 'Target-planning' of the 1960s was alleged to have encouraged the growth of inequalities, and behind the unparalleled achievements in educational expansion, the Faure Report, revisiting the regional UPE data since the UNESCO regional conferences, uncovered 'a much darker picture by showing just how many children in the regions are not receiving the prescribed schooling' (UNESCO, 1972: 54).

The educational decline for many countries in the 1970s was affected directly by the economic decline, and later, especially in Africa during the so-called lost decade of the 1980s, the situation was made worse by the new message of structural adjustment. This was no time for aspirational goals. Instead, particularly in Africa, the World Bank's 1988 *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* had the sub-title: *Policies for adjustment, revitalization and expansion*, reminding the reader that this was an education parallel to economic adjustment (King and McGrath, 2012: 6).

The rediscovery of primary education on the road to Jomtien

Throughout the lost decade of the 1980s, the World Bank had been accumulating 'a cascade of evidence' on the impact of primary education on many facets of development including on fertility, farmer and informal sector productivity (Jones, 1992: 261).¹⁵ *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* contributed to

this momentum by documenting the stagnation of progress towards UPE but also pointing to the minute amounts of all external aid going to primary education along with 'a disproportionate fraction' being allocated to higher education (World Bank, 1988: 108). Arguably, one of the seeds of Jomtien's 1990 *World Conference on Education for All* lay in the Bank's assessment that many low-to-middle income countries had been underinvesting in basic education. With Haddad's leadership of the Bank's education and employment from 1987, and with UNICEF's readiness to apply to education the global target-setting it had successfully applied in health, the preparations for Jomtien go back to 1988 (Shaeffer, 2015: 21).

UNESCO for its part had decided at the 25th session of its General Conference in 1989 to authorize the periodic publication of a *World Education Report* (WER). The timing of this decision meant that UNESCO was already involved in the preparations for Jomtien that would take place a few months later in March 1990. Indeed a whole series of regional meetings were taking place in late 1989 on the draft declaration and framework for action for Jomtien, along with a 160-page background document (UNESCO, 1990c). The WER did not actually appear till 1991, but there may well have been an element of competition as the Director-General, Mayor, claimed in the introduction that 'some twenty years after the last edition of the *World Survey of Education*, it is appropriate that UNESCO should begin once more to take stock periodically of progress towards the objective of education for all' (UNESCO, 1991a). It is noteworthy that the WER does have a very short section on 'Goals and targets' (ibid. 45-6) but this is essentially about the extent of adult literacy, not about any goals associated with Jomtien.

Goals and targets in the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) Jomtien

It might sometimes appear that the first set of global targets in education since the UNESCO regional targets some 30 years earlier were actually set at Jomtien. They are often referred to as such, e.g. in Jansen's 'The six dimensions of EFA targets' (Jansen, 2005: 2). The reality is that so-called EFA targets from Jomtien were actually

intended to be **national**. In the *Background document*, the main discussion of targets comes under a section called 'Priority action at a national level'. In the section termed 'Goals and Targets' in the *Framework for Action* agreed at Jomtien, the 'ultimate goal affirmed by the World Declaration on Education for All is to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults' (UNESCO, 1990b: 2). But it is clearly stated that intermediate goals set at national and subnational levels will be the way to make progress towards that ultimate outcome.

The *Background Document* could not put it more strongly: 'Success or failure in meeting the basic learning needs of all people will depend ultimately on the actions taken within individual countries.... A national plan of action should set clear objectives and measurable targets in a realistic timeframe' (UNESCO, 1990c: 80). Jomtien's *Framework for Action* does encourage 'time-bound targets' as they convey a sense of urgency and can be used as a benchmark for later implementation. But in introducing the six areas where targets could be developed, the national focus is absolutely clear: 'Countries may wish to set their own targets for the 1990s in terms of the following proposed dimensions' (UNESCO, 1990b: 3). There then follow the six well-known target themes on early childhood, universal primary, learning achievement, adult literacy, essential skills, and skills and knowledge via media.

It seems entirely possible that UNICEF and the World Bank had different approaches to goals. Thus, UNICEF, in one of the earliest versions of the eventual Declaration and Framework, in September 1988 argued for 'global goals, benchmarks and targets', based on its 'dramatisation of Health for All, and its campaigns for child survival and immunization ... in the earlier 1980s' (King, 1990: 3-4).¹⁶ In the final drafting at Jomtien therefore, UNICEF was determined to secure the time-line of 'universal access to, and completion of primary education, by the year 2000'. Haddad has since said 'the notion of the individual nation and its decisions was changed into a single global target (to be achieved by 2000). This was a global mistake, as was 2015' (Haddad to King, 15 June 2004, in King, 2006: 34).

This tension between global goals and targets on the one hand and national targets on the other would resurface in later attempts at goal-setting

in education, including in the Incheon World Education Forum. This aside, Jomtien was hugely effective in beginning to put primary education back on the map. It was helped in this by the sheer volume of relevant material created deliberately for Jomtien. The World Bank's policy paper, *Primary education*, circulated in draft in Jomtien (World Bank, 1991), as did an early draft of Colclough with Lewin's *Educating all the children* (1993). There was a great deal more (see *NORRAG News 8*) along with three World Conference monographs from UNESCO on the purpose and context; the expanded vision; and the requirements (UNESCO, 1991b,c,d).

Given the uncertainty in some quarters about the global or national status of six 'suggested' target dimensions in Jomtien, it should not be surprising that the follow-up to Jomtien was tentative. Furthermore, there was no agreed monitoring mechanism set up. In the event there was a belated 'mid-term' meeting in Amman in June 1996 with a slim statistical document, and a *Working document* which admitted that the picture was 'based largely on a few main quantitative indicators that focus on primary schooling' over the less visible and measurable dimensions of Jomtien (UNESCO, 1996: 17).¹⁷

By contrast with Amman's mid-term event, there was a hugely more influential meeting held by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) one month earlier than Amman in May 1996 which selected out of the seven UN World Conferences, held between 1990 and 1995, a set of six targets that covered economic well-being, social development, and environmental sustainability. They were selected by DAC donors but they were directly derived from genuinely global events. In *Shaping the 21st century: The contribution of development co-operation*, no less than two of the targets related to education. 'Universal primary education in all countries by 2015' drew on Jomtien but dropped the learning achievement; and 'eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005' came from the Cairo and Beijing conferences, including the same deadline (OECD-DAC, 1996: 10).

These international development targets, with the exception of the one on reversing the loss of environmental resources, were essentially

aimed at the South, a fact that was affirmed by their being whole-heartedly accepted by the UK's new Department for International Development (DFID) as the core of their new *White Paper on International Development* (UK, 1997). They were also targets that were carefully reviewed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. In due course, after the Millennium Summit of 2000, these targets would also become the core of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Dakar EFA goals and Framework for Action

Before the Millennium Summit took place in September 2000, the international education community had met in Dakar in April, ten years after Jomtien; and in the World Education Forum, they had agreed a Dakar Framework for Action which included six EFA goals. Only the main Dakar Framework was actually agreed in the Forum. An expanded commentary was added later, and the final report included the six regional Frameworks for Action, all of which had been agreed prior to Dakar.

The three pages of the *Framework for Action* with its six EFA goals took over the gender disparity target directly from the OECD-DAC. The other goals paralleled the six dimensions of Jomtien, though the one about knowledge and skills through all forms of media was dropped. Intriguingly, time-lines were only allocated to UPE, adult literacy, and gender disparities; there were no deadlines for early childhood care and education, for the learning needs of young people and adults, or for the achievement of quality.

On the critical issue of the relation between Dakar's six global goals and national action, the national dimension is emphasized again and again in the *Framework for Action*. Like the text of Jomtien, Dakar also underlines that 'The heart of EFA activity lies at the country level. National EFA Forums will be strengthened or established to support the achievement of EFA' (UNESCO, 2000: 10). Equally, systematic national evaluations of EFA preceded the Dakar Forum in what is claimed to be the most extensive evaluation of education ever undertaken (ibid. 3). These then fed into the regional EFA Frameworks for Action, already mentioned.

On the vital question of monitoring, we have just noted that the monitoring of the *Jomtien Framework for Action* really only took place nationally just before the Dakar *World Education Forum*. But what might be the lessons learnt in the previous ten years for the monitoring of the Dakar Goals? UNESCO claimed that there would be a monitoring report to 'hold the global community to account for commitments at Dakar'; it would be the responsibility of no less than five of the major UNESCO institutes, such as the IIEP and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (ibid. 10).

It is not widely known that UNESCO did indeed seek to carry out the monitoring of Dakar within its own resources, and the result was available in October 2001. It had just 43 pages of text and a few pages of appendices, including six pages of statistical tables (UNESCO, 2001). It only covered three of the Dakar goals, and just 13 of the indicators developed after the problematic Amman conference. It was not even clear that this would be the first of an annual series of monitoring reports (King, 2011: 24).

It is not at all clear what would have happened to the crucial EFA monitoring process but at the first High Level Group meeting on EFA in 2001, the donors, and particularly DFID, made clear that they wanted a much more substantive report. Under very considerable time constraints, the first of the well-known *EFA Global Monitoring Reports* (GMRs) was produced in 2002. The series rapidly established itself as highly authoritative. Though it was produced in UNESCO with valuable contributions from the organization, it has retained an editorial position independent of UNESCO and has been largely dependent on external funding.¹⁸

With the two Education MDGs being monitored by the *Millennium Development Goals Report* produced by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and all the EFA goals through the EFA GMR, there was serious attention given to the assessment of progress on the EFA Dakar goals. The 'Vision Statement' for the GMR states that the report 'holds the global community to account for commitments made at the World Education Forum';¹⁹ it will be appreciated that this is very different from compliance.

The sudden awareness of education in the post-2015 development agenda

It was at the Rio+20 conference in Brazil from 20-22 June 2012 that the *Future we want - Outcome document* became available, and with it the notion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that would encapsulate a new development agenda with the end of the MDGs in 2015. For many people, including the writer, the term 'post-2015' only came into currency in mid-2012.²⁰ However, once the notion of a new development agenda had surfaced, many different constituencies began to recognize that it could be crucial to the future status and even funding of their particular thematic area for it to be represented in the world's next set of development priorities. In the case of education, it became progressively clearer that Education needed to be strongly represented in the new set of development goals, but there also needed to be some continuation of the wider coverage of the EFA Goals.

The Muscat Agreement – a global goal and targets

Education visibility had certainly benefited from there being two Education MDGs, but at the same time the relative narrowness of these two goals, and their lack of concern with education quality or learning outcomes, meant that a new set of education goals were urgently needed. The first attempt to elaborate these was taken through a Global Education for All Meeting set in Muscat 12-14 May 2014. The so-called *Muscat Agreement* contained 'an overarching goal' and seven 'global targets' (UNESCO, 2014). What are the features of this first attempt to construct a new post-2015 global agenda for education?

First, there is no longer the same concern with the national or country-level dimension of goals as there was in Jomtien and Dakar. Only a single mention is made of the need for country-specific targets and indicators to be developed in order to reflect local contexts.

Second, and connected to this first point, is the fact that some of the targets are universal, in the sense that they deliberately encompass 'all boys and girls', 'all youth', 'all learners', and

'all governments'(ibid). These targets relate to primary education, youth literacy, qualified teachers, education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED), and the proportion of GDP allocated to education. Other targets, which are for early childhood care and education, adult literacy, and skills for work and life, have a percentage attached to them. Surprisingly, this percentage is not explained in the text of the *Muscat Agreement*, but it can only mean that the percentage to be covered for that target should be set at different levels, nationally. If this is the case, the *Muscat Agreement* is following the practice of the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) of May 2013 which distinguished global goals and country-set targets:

The Panel recommends that all these goals should be universal, in that they present a common aspiration for all countries. Almost all targets should be set at the national level or even local level, to account for different starting points and contexts (e.g. 8a increase the number of good and decent jobs and livelihoods by x). [HLP, 2013: 29]

A third issue is also linked to the global reach and relevance of the goal and its targets. The EFA Dakar goals and the MDGs had very much been interpreted as being for the developing countries in the South, and not for the developed economies. The text of Muscat deliberately underlines its pertinence to the world and not just the South: 'It should be of universal relevance and mobilize all stakeholders in all countries' (UNESCO, 2014: 2).

An intriguing final issue in the global targets of Muscat is that they represent in one respect the particular concerns of member states. This would certainly be the case with target 5 which includes a role for global citizenship education and education for sustainable development.

Education and skills in the Open Working Group (OWG)

As a result of the decision in the Rio+20 conference to develop a new global agenda, an Open Working Group was established in January 2013, with most of its 30 seats shared amongst a number

of member states. The OWG held 13 sessions between March 2013 and July 2014, the first eight of which were thematic. At these sessions, observers were welcome from specialized agencies and related organisations, as well as from NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC. The OWG could also draw on its technical support team and expert panels. In the case of Education, it was discussed over a period of 1.5 days during the OWG's fourth session in June 2013. The agenda was larger than just education; it covered 'Employment and decent work for all, social protection, youth, education and culture'.²¹

The OWG duly delivered its Outcome Document, termed *The Open Working Group proposal for*

Sustainable Development Goals in July 2014 (UN, 2014). This has more than twice as many goals as there were MDGs, and no less than 169 targets. It covers, therefore, a whole series of goals for sectors that were not covered at all in the MDGs. As far as the Education Goal and Targets are concerned, it might be expected that there will a good deal of common ground between the *Muscat Agreement* and the OWG, not least because it was claimed just a year later that 'Muscat successfully informed the proposed targets of the Open Working Group' (UNESCO, 2015: 6).²²

The comparison of the Muscat and OWG versions of the Education Goal and its Targets is revealing, taking the same order as Muscat:

On the overarching goal, Muscat had used the powerful word 'ensure' as part of its goal statement: "Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030". The OWG weakened the second half of this goal by using 'promote' rather than 'ensure'.

On early childhood care and education, Muscat argues for one year of free and compulsory pre-primary, but despite this proposes just x% ready for primary. By contrast, the OWG argues for universal access to early childhood development, care and preprimary – so that all are ready for primary education.

On basic education, Muscat proposes nine years of good quality, free and compulsory education, while OWG covers both primary and secondary – with no mention of junior secondary. So effectively for the OWG, it could be 12 years.

On literacy and numeracy, Muscat offers these to all youth, but with just x% of adults getting access to these. The OWG has the same distinction between all youth and just a proportion of adults.

On knowledge and skills for decent work and life, Muscat has a double percentage with x% of youth and y% of adults getting access. Perhaps surprisingly, the means to these are via '**technical and vocational, upper secondary and tertiary education and training**'. The OWG divides the Muscat target into two separate and almost contradictory proposals: One, a little like Muscat, offers only a percentage to have access via skills to decent jobs and entrepreneurship. But a second proposes universal access for men and women to 'technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university'.

On knowledge and skills through ESD and GCED, Muscat sees all learners accessing these in support of sustainable and peaceful societies. The OWG goes a great deal further and adds a large array of additional items including human rights, gender equality, culture of peace and cultural diversity. A very much larger commitment.

On qualified teachers, Muscat insists that all learners should have 'qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers'. The OWG merely proposes to 'increase by x% the supply of qualified teachers'.

On financing for education, Muscat proposes 4-6% of GDP or at least 15-20% of their public expenditure for the education sector. The OWG drops this sector-specific proposal for financing education.

Beyond these seven Muscat targets, the OWG adds three 'means of implementation' – school buildings, scholarships for developing countries, and qualified teachers – the last of which we have already commented upon. (UNESCO, 2014; UN, 2014)

What can be derived from this comparison? First, and possibly most important, the OWG text is generally more ambitious or more universal than Muscat. This is true of early childhood, basic education, and on access to technical, vocational and tertiary education. Surprisingly, the OWG does not follow Muscat in arguing for qualified teachers for all learners. Equally surprising, neither Muscat nor the OWG argues for universal adult literacy and numeracy. Both versions support ESD and GCED but the OWG makes the proposal a whole lot more demanding.

What of the global versus national dimension which we have been following in this paper? Again, paralleling the line of the HLP, the OWG argues that 'These goals constitute an integrated, indivisible set of global priorities for sustainable development.' But then claims that:

Targets are defined as aspirational global targets, with each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances.

What is less clear, in the light of this contrast, is why national x percentages are present in no less than four of the education targets and means of implementation, but more than 160 of the 169 other OWG targets have no x percentages at all.²³ In part this can be explained by the OWG following Muscat. We shall return to the vexed issue of national percentages in the Incheon World Education Forum.

Before leaving the OWG contrast with Muscat, we should note that technical and vocational education training and skills are taken rather seriously by the OWG, appearing in three separate targets, but there appears to be a contradiction between universal access to technical in one target and percentage access in another.

Global goal and target challenges in the Incheon World Education Forum (WEF)

Some of the apparent anomalies in WEF have been discussed at length elsewhere,²⁴ but the issue of global versus national targets seems to be at the heart of these. Unlike the earlier Forum in Dakar in 2000, Incheon in May 2015 produced a *Declaration* that contained no goal or targets, and its draft *Framework for Action*, which did contain

the targets, will only be finally agreed in the next UNESCO General Conference in November 2015.

The main reason for the absence of agreement on the goal and targets seems to be that all the SDGs were being discussed at the very time of Incheon by the UN's Intergovernmental Negotiations on the sustainable development agenda, including a proposal to drop all the national percentages. Incheon presumably did not want to agree a set of targets that might within a few weeks be out of date. So despite pressure from the large NGO constituency in Incheon, the Forum did not formally affirm the *Framework for Action* and its targets.²⁵ Thus, Incheon, like Jomtien 25 years earlier, was a world conference where one of the key tensions was around the global or local status of its proposed or 'suggested' education targets.

From Financing for Development (Addis Ababa) to the final draft for UNGA

Within less than two months from Incheon, the Financing for Development Conference had been held in Ethiopia, and the *Outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development* had been finalized. It frequently discussed the SDGs to be confirmed in UNGA, but there is no listing of goals or targets. Indeed 'targets' are mostly used in relation to domestic financing rather than anything else. While there is, therefore, no mention of education targets, there is some challenging language about the vital importance of science, technology, engineering and maths education in innovation strategies as well as capacity development being 'integral to achieving the post-2015 agenda' (King, 2015a: 48).

By the 2nd August 2015, the finishing line for the SDGs was in sight. Member States of the UN agreed the outcome document: *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. It only needed to be affirmed in the UN General Assembly on the 25th September 2015. What changes had been made to the global Education Goal (SDG 4) and its seven targets and three means of implementation in this final text? The answer is very little, but they are worth noting.

The overarching goal is virtually identical, but the UNGA version followed the OWG by merely

promoting rather than **ensuring** lifelong learning opportunities for all. No less than five of the UNGA targets are identical to the OWG ones. These are early childhood; basic primary and secondary education; TVET, upper secondary and higher education; gender disparities and the vulnerable; GCED, ESD and other knowledge and skills.

The main difference in the remaining targets and means of implementation is that the x% percentages have all disappeared. But the percentages have not been replaced by 'all' as suggested by the NGO Forum at Incheon. Thus, instead of literacy for all adults like all youth, the final version, as we have already mentioned, lamely talks of 'a substantial proportion of adults' (UN, 2015b: 14). Equally, instead of proposing that all learners should have qualified teachers, the UNGA text merely proposes to 'substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers' (ibid. 15). Similarly, in the domain of skills, the percentage is removed and replaced by 'substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills' (ibid. 14.).

Conclusions on the Education Goal (SDG 4) and its Targets at the finishing line

After this 25 year safari from Jomtien in 1990 to UNGA in September 2015, a number of issues inevitably arise.

The first and sharpest contrast is between the starkness of the overarching goal and its seven targets, on the one hand, and the wider inescapable complexity of schooling, learning and skills development, on the other. The word 'quality' may be used many times in the goal and targets, but what it might mean in the many different levels of learning can only be guessed at. Other words such as 'curriculum' are not used at all. The sheer selectivity of the global targeting process is remarkable, and is 'much more selective than any national plan for education and training could be' (King and Rose, 2005: 2)

What are missing are both the text and the context from which these targets have arisen. In some of the earlier *World surveys and International yearbooks of education*, we have noted the vast amount of country-level detail that backed up the few general chapters at the beginning of each volume. This eventually proved to be indigestible.

But what has been absent in these last 3-4 years of target development is the kind of *Background document* that was available and which circulated widely before Jomtien (UNESCO, 1990c). This document (164 pages) provided the essential context, rationale and even research evidence for the main Articles in the Jomtien Declaration. The nearest we come to such a document is *Making education a priority in the post-2015 development agenda* (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2013). This is in fact the Report of the global thematic consultation on education in the post-2015 development agenda. It valuably analysed the different target proposals that were circulating, and it did make the case for an overarching goal: 'Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All' (ibid. 38). But it preceded the main target development process; so it could only comment on the kind of goal and target framework that would be useful.

By the time that there was an agreed goal and different sets of targets, in Muscat, OWG, and Incheon, there was no available parallel to the Jomtien *Background document*. Of course, there had been prepared for Incheon a large number of national evaluations of EFA, as there were in Dakar 2000. But there was only the draft *Framework for Action* which in its 24 pages just elaborated a little on each of the targets and discussed implementation modalities.

The real challenge of the focus on **targets without text** is that the different constituencies associated with particular levels of education and training have found themselves seeking to ensure that 'their area' is secure within the seven targets, and that it is seen as universally relevant rather than relevant just to 'a substantial proportion'.

In terms of global impact, it is worth considering whether the phrasing of a single line in a global target can actually influence for good or ill the image and visibility – even the funding – of a particular thematic area. Those areas such as early childhood or technical or vocational training that have universalist framing of their targets, will that really make a difference?

In the case of technical and vocational training, for example, it is possible to consider either that the UNGA glass is full or just half full. One target proposes that all should have access to 'quality

technical, vocational'. But the very next target only proposes to 'substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational...'(United Nations, 2015b: 14).

Now that the educational targets for UNGA are virtually cast in stone, it will be intriguing to see what happens in the way that they are interpreted both by the leaders who may refer to them in the United Nations' special session in September, and by the different educational constituencies linked to early childhood, teacher status, adult education and skills development.

But we turn now in a last section to some of the wider issues raised by this analysis of the construction of global goals and targets.

The history, culture, politics and governance of global goals and targets

We shall raise these more general issues in a series of questions, and we shall treat them very briefly, as we suspect many of them will have been discussed in the different sub-themes of the 13th UKFIET conference.

Who owns the global goals and targets?

The very intense advocacy and debates around the setting of the SDGs have been a great deal more participatory than the setting of the MDGs (King and Rose, 2005). Nevertheless, a great deal of the post-2015 discourse has been associated with agencies, foundations, think-tanks and academic centres, based in the North. Even when post-2015 debates on education and skills have been located in the South, they have often been funded or co-organised with Northern agencies, as in the case of China (King, 2014).

How global are the global goals and targets?

Running through the post-2015 discourse is the claim that this time, unlike last time with the MDGs, the goals and targets are truly universal, for richer and for poorer countries. We mentioned at the very beginning of this paper that *Transforming our*

world had claimed: 'These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike' (United Nations, 2015b: 1). But a closer examination of the text of *Transforming* would suggest that the principal focus of the SDGs is still on 'developing countries' and 'least developed countries'. Every SDG with the exception of SDG 5 has one or more of its targets or means of implementation couched specifically in terms of 'developing countries' or 'least developed countries', or both.²⁶ The very fact that we are talking about the world's new **development** agenda being set on 25th September 2015 might suggest that this is not for OECD-DAC countries, but for the developing world.²⁷

Can we globally monitor the unmeasurable?

Doubtless those institutions who were successful in getting some phrase or specific focus into the education targets were thinking primarily about their agency or organization's interests and priorities – as well as global concerns – and not about how easily the target could be monitored. But perhaps there is something really vital about a target that points to crucially important internationalist attitudes and values which we hope that schools can encourage in their students, regardless of whether their performance can be readily monitored in these. The best illustration of this near impossibility of measurement in the targets of SDG 4 is target 4.7:

4.7. By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (ibid. 15).²⁸

But as Jansen has forcefully pointed out in this same conference in Oxford 12 years ago, 'not everything worth doing in schools can be measured in a set of discrete outcomes' (Jansen, 2003: 16). The concerns, for instance, about the meanings of global citizenship, human rights, and cultural diversity have suddenly been at the very centre of

world attention in these last weeks and months. Arguably, the very demanding challenges of target 4.7 are more relevant in today's critical times than the measured (and measurable) tone of SDG 10.7:

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies (ibid. 18).

Development goals: From construction and critique to compliance

We have examined historically a tiny segment of the development agenda over a period of a hundred years. Hopefully, we have offered some insights into global goal setting and goal constructing in education, and what have been the pressures behind the final wording of the goals and targets. Even though we may appear to have reached a stage in the international debate where, in Maggie Black's words, 'Goals reign supreme,' (Black, 2015) it is crucial to recognize what they stand for, whose interests they represent, and how far their text is from the context of developments at the country level. The SDGs are much more complex than the MDGs, and are therefore politically more inaccessible. In addition to being complex and 'poorly formulated,' they don't capture the complexity of education and skills development (McGrath, 2015: 414).

The 'elephant in the room' is implementation or compliance (King and Palmer, 2015). There will be monitoring, at least of what proves to be measurable. But very little thinking has been done on compliance: 'What body is to hold governments and aid donors accountable? None exists at present' (King, 2015b: 386).

As glasses were raised in New York on Friday 25th September 2015 to confirm and celebrate the birth of so many UN goals and targets, it would have been wise to recall Jansen's last words in his paper to the UKFIET Oxford International Conference on Education in 2003:

But for targets and target setting to have any educational meaning in the day-to-day lives of teachers and learners, these transnational activities will require much more humility about their measurement, much more honesty about their motivation,

and much less hype about their meanings. (Jansen, 2003: 16).

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Endnotes

¹ See King and Palmer, NORRAG working papers 1, 4, 6, 7 for an analysis of this process over three years; also *NORRAG News* 49, 51 and 52. www.norrag.org

² The title suggested who was framing for whom: OECD-DAC *Shaping the 21st century: The contribution of development co-operation*.

³ Many different dimensions of the 'full' and 'effective' implementation of the SDG agenda are mentioned no less than 48 times in the 29 pages of *Transforming our world*.

⁴ Surprisingly, half of the 169 targets have a time-line; and half don't.

⁵ For the history of IBE, see <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/about-the-ibe/who-we-are/history.html>. And Rossello (1961;2002) *Historical note on the IBE (1934-1977)*.

⁶ In the drafting committee for Article 26, there was much debate about 'fundamental', but it was retained because of its coverage of adult education.

⁷ The renowned Indian policy-maker and thinker, J.P. Naik, argued that 'The first long term plan we ever had was in 1944, covering a period of 40 years, known as "Post-war educational development in India" mnIt had many weaknesses.... The objective was to create in India by 1984 an educational system which existed in England in 1939' (Naik, 1982:12).

⁸ See for example UNESCO, *Regional conference on free and compulsory education in Latin America*, Lima, 1956; also *Regional conference on free and compulsory education in South Asia and the Pacific*, Bombay 1952.

⁹ Arguably there were 4 regional conferences if the conference in Tripoli for the Arab states is considered (UNESCO, 1966).

¹⁰ See also Jolly et al. (2004. pp.247-275) for a valuable review of the influence of these 50 UN goals, despite the fact that the Bretton Woods institutions for the most part have not supported them.

¹¹ See King (1991) for an account of 'a brief worry

- about primary school leavers' before the 'discovery' of the informal sector in Ghana and Kenya laid this worry to rest (ch.4).
- ¹² The categorization is reminiscent of the first *EFA Global monitoring report* (GMR) which had one group 'in serious risk of not achieving any of the goals', another group likely to miss at least one goal, and a third with the goals already achieved or 'with a good chance of doing so by 2015' (UNESCO, 2002: 15). These three categories were for the world, not just for Asia.
- ¹³ A possible reason for the reference to Addis Ababa may have been that Professor Arthur Lewis was advisor to the Kenya Education Commission.
- ¹⁴ For a discussion of the parallels between the rise of non-formal education and the discovery of the informal sector, see King (1977, chapter 1).
- ¹⁵ For the detail, see Colclough, 1983; and King (1991) chapter 6 'The golden fleece: The search for low-cost quality in primary education for all'.
- ¹⁶ A detailed history of how the Declaration and Framework for Action evolved under different influences and through different drafts from February 1988 to March 1990 was covered in *NORRAG News* 7, pp. 3-44.
- ¹⁷ For a critical analysis of the mid-term review, see *NORRAG News* 19.
- ¹⁸ The list of some 12 bilateral donors, two multilaterals, plus two foundations is available on the GMR website at: <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/about>. The length of the GMR has normally been over 400 pages.
- ¹⁹ For the 'Vision statement for the EFA Global Monitoring Report', see <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/about>
- ²⁰ NORRAG held a joint meeting (17th May 2012) with UNESCO on 'Beyond 2015: Perspectives on the role of TVET and skills development in the international development agenda', on the side of the Shanghai World TVET Congress, and a joint meeting with UNDP on 1st June 2012 in Geneva on 'Post-2015 politics and foresight: What room for education?'
- ²¹ For the OWG's methods of work, structure and thematic sessions, see 'Organisational documents' under: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1549>
- ²² McGrath (2015: 409-411) has a valuable target-by-target critique of the zero draft of the OWG targets.
- ²³ For instance, there are no such percentages for any of the 9 health targets or for the 10 economic growth, employment and decent work targets
- ²⁴ *NORRAG News* 52 contains detailed 'Reflections on the World Education Forum'.
- ²⁵ See the *NGO Forum Declaration* proposal: 'We support the recommendation of the co-facilitators in the New York Intergovernmental Negotiations that where x% is used in the adult literacy, skills and teacher targets, these should be replaced by "all" (NGO, p.2).
- ²⁶ See further King and Palmer (2015) on the developing country focus of the SDGs.
- ²⁷ Several colleagues from Germany, USA, UK and Japan have seen the SDGs as being more relevant to their development agencies than to their home ministries.
- ²⁸ Ernesto Schiefelbein has commented to KK (8.8.15) 'I believe that the wording is too ambiguous for operational implementation and monitoring advances'.

About NORRAG:

NORRAG is an independent network whose Secretariat is located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva, Switzerland.

Since its launch in 1985, NORRAG has established itself as a multi-stakeholder network of researchers, policy-makers, members of NGOs, foundations and the private sector seeking to inform, challenge and influence international education and training policies and cooperation. Through networking and other forms of cooperation and institutional partnerships, it aims in particular to stimulate and disseminate timely, innovative and critical analysis and to serve as a knowledge broker at the interface between research, policy and practice. As of November 2015 NORRAG has more than 4,500 registered members in about 170 countries, with 47% from the global South.

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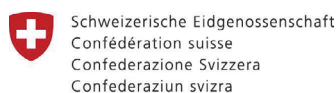
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