



Oxfam Feedback on the Concept Note for the World Development Report on Education (WDR 18)

April 2017

Oxfam welcomes the focus on education in the upcoming 2018 World Development Report (WDR). Supporting countries to achieve universal, equitable high-quality public education must be a core priority for the World Bank Group if it is to achieve its twin goals of ending poverty and promoting shared prosperity. It is also foundational to the achievement of the Sustainable Development agenda.

Oxfam also welcomes the concept note's nuanced discussion of a number of difficult issues in the education sector, including the treatment of high-stakes standardized testing, the training of teachers and the role of technology in the classroom. We appreciate in particular the acknowledgement that education is a human right and has intrinsic value beyond economic returns, and the discussion of the role that interventions outside the education sector, such as early childhood health and nutrition, play in education outcomes.

However, we have a number of fundamental concerns related to the framing and direction of the report. Overall, we are concerned that the concept note does not closely align the WDR with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education and its Framework for Action (FFA), which represents the global consensus of governments, civil society and other key stakeholders on priorities in the education sector. In particular we would like to see significant changes to the treatment of the following concerns.

1. Unacceptable silence on the importance of increased financing for education

- **The WDR should highlight sustainable financing as a key prerequisite for quality education and learning, and unequivocally call for increased investment in education.** The concept note considers the 'learning crisis' in isolation and ignores the role of inadequate financing in creating the real quality challenges facing many education systems. Evidence from recent PISA results underlines what should already be obvious: below a certain expenditure threshold, learning outcomes in science and math are strongly correlated with national per-student expenditure on education.¹ The vast majority of low- and middle-income countries fall below this spending threshold.

Many low- and middle-income countries have historically failed to make adequate investments in education and many are currently spending well below the Framework for Action's recommendation of at least 4-6% of

¹ OECD (2016) PISA 2015 Results (Volume II) "Policies and Practices for Successful Schools." The report finds: "Among the countries and economies whose cumulative expenditure per student is under USD 50 000 (the level of spending in 18 [PISA] countries), higher expenditure on education is significantly associated with higher PISA science scores." pp. 185-186. The vast majority of low and lower-middle income countries fall below this threshold. For math results, see also PISA 2012 "What Makes Schools Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices" (Volume IV), OECD. pp. 40-41.

GDP and at least 15-20% of public expenditure. The FFA noted that countries “need to *reach or exceed the upper end* of these benchmarks if they are to achieve the targets.” While equity and quality of education spending is also crucial, it is impossible to achieve quality education and strong learning outcomes without enough funds to ensure appropriate numbers of trained and qualified teachers, adequate facilities and basic materials – at a bare minimum. Without these basics, no amount of policy alignment or efficiency will lead to better outcomes.

Finally, public investment in education is important because of its role in fighting economic inequality: recent research on fiscal policy has found that public spending on education is equalizing in all twenty-eight low and middle-income countries studied.²

- Because of its special relationship with ministries of finance, **the World Bank through the WDR has a unique responsibility to relay this message clearly to governments**, both South and North. By omission, the Bank is sending a loud message that education should not be a financing priority for governments and aid donors. Indeed, World Bank policy advice and IMF loan conditions during the structural adjustment era, which pushed for reduced public expenditure and greater private provision and financing of education,³ should be acknowledged for their contribution to low investment in education historically across the developing world. While in the early 2000s, the Bank played a positive role in championing financing for education and user fee abolition, this larger historical context should be a special reason for the WDR to be explicit about the importance of financing.
- **The WDR should consider the tools available to governments and donors to increase funding allocations to education** – in particular progressive tax reform and eliminating or radically reducing corporate tax incentives, as well as coordinated global tax reform. It should look at successful country examples of scaled up financing for education, such as Brazil and Ecuador. Since 2000, **Brazil** increased its investment in education from 10 to 18 percent of its budget, which -- combined with efforts to transfer federal funding to poorer states, and its conditional cash transfer program Bolsa Família -- has helped to tackle inequality in the education system and led to one of the fastest increases in learning achievements on record.⁴ **Ecuador** tripled its education spending from 2003 to 2010 through effective tax mobilization policies and prioritizing education in its budget.⁵

Even in low-income countries there is great potential to mobilize new tax revenue, for example by ending corporate tax incentives: in 2012, **Sierra Leone**’s tax incentives for just six foreign mining companies were

² Lustig, Nora (2017) “Fiscal policy, income redistribution and poverty reduction in low and middle-income countries.” CEQ Working Paper 54. http://www.commitmentoequity.org/publications_files/Comparative/CEQ_WP54_Lustig_Jan12_2017.pdf

³ Mundy, Karen and Francine Menashy (2012) “The World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, and Private Sector Participation in Basic Education: Examining the Education Sector Strategy 2020.”

⁴ Unfortunately these successes are now under threat due to new spending restrictions. See Brazil text box in Watkins, K. and Alemayehu, W. (2012). Financing for a Fairer, More Prosperous Kenya: A review of the public spending challenges and options for selected Arid and Semi- Arid counties.” Washington DC: Brookings Institute. See also OECD PISA 2012 data on Brazil.

⁵ UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2014) “Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality education for all” p.18, p.120. This edition of the GMR has a useful discussion of country efforts to improve tax mobilization and increase expenditure on education.

equal to seven times its education budget.⁶ The WDR should also examine how WB expertise outside the education sector can be deployed to help countries mobilize these resources, and how the Bank can work with the IMF to ensure tax advice in IMF programs is consistent with this goal.

2. Insufficient focus on equity

- **The WDR should devote far greater attention to policies and financing to address equity.** While the concept note acknowledges that inequitable or discriminatory education can yield “social bads” and provides a useful discussion of learning deficits among the poor, it does not adequately address how to tackle challenges of equity in access and learning. More attention is needed to strategies to improve equity in education policies and spending, such as targeting extra resources to lower-income geographic areas, and to marginalized populations such as the disabled and ethnic/linguistic minorities. Approaches such as offering higher pay or incentives for teachers to work in schools serving marginalized communities or students should also be explored.

Recent evidence from the OECD’s PISA shows that equity and excellence can go hand in hand. For example, it found that in countries where more resources are allocated to disadvantaged schools than advantaged schools, overall student performance in science is somewhat higher; in other words, equity can drive up performance across the system.⁷ The Finnish education system also illustrates that investing in equity can lead to high quality.⁸

- **The WDR should take a clear position that school fees and other household payments are harmful to equity, including gender equity,** and are a barrier to access for poor and marginalized children. There is robust evidence of the exclusionary impact of fees, including on gender equity.⁹ When families cannot afford to send all children to school, often girls are disproportionately excluded; the remarkable progress on gender parity at primary level following school fee abolition in the 2000s is especially illustrative.¹⁰ The Bank has acknowledged this in the past, calling fees a “roadblock to Education for All” and citing the dramatic surge in enrollments that followed school fee abolition.¹¹ Furthermore, the new evidence emerging on brain development referenced in the concept note underscores why fees can be so damaging: when poor and vulnerable families do find the money to pay fees, they often make tradeoffs with other household expenditures, such as nutritious food and basic health care for their young children – this can impact

⁶ Tax Justice Network et al (2014) “Losing out: Sierra Leone’s massive revenue losses from tax incentives.”

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/Sierra-Leone-Report-tax-incentives-080414.pdf>

⁷ OECD (2016) PISA 2015 Results (Volume II) “Policies and Practices for Successful Schools.”

⁸ Pasi Sahlberg, (2012) “Quality and equity in Finnish schools” *School Administrator*. https://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Qualit_and_Equity_SA_2012.pdf

⁹ UNESCO (2010) EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalised, Paris: UNESCO, p. 140, p. 165, p. 186, p. 189 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001866/186606E.pdf>;

¹⁰ The removal of school fees in particular has been cited as the single most effective policy in achieving this progress on gender parity. For example, see R. Greenhill, et al. (2016). Financing the Future: How international public finance should fund a global social compact to eradicate poverty. Overseas Development Institute. <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9594.pdf>

¹¹ World Bank (2004) School Fees: A Roadblock to Education For All.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/Education-Notes/EdNotes_Userfee_3.pdf

children's neurological health and future capacity to learn in school.

- **In line with the expanded SDG agenda, the WDR should champion school fee abolition, including for secondary education**, learning lessons from the challenges of previous country experience with fee removal, and showing how countries can responsibly plan for, implement and finance this. At the beginning of the 2000's, together with Oxfam, UNICEF and others, the World Bank was a major champion of eliminating school fees. In recent years, the World Bank has notably ceased playing this role. Yet these fees continue to exist in many countries meaning many children, especially girls, fail to get an education. The WDR should emphasize the importance of helping governments take action to abolish fees where they remain at primary level, as well as progressively at secondary level. They should address the practice of charging informal fees, improve staffing and finance systems to ensure adequate resources are reaching schools, and reduce other financial barriers to accessing school.
- **The WDR should tread cautiously in promoting Results-Based Financing (RBF) approaches**, and should examine potential tradeoffs with equity. Despite a relatively weak evidence base on the effectiveness of RBF approaches,¹² the World Bank in 2015 committed to channel \$5bn over 5 years through RBF programs in education. Particularly when RBF approaches are used to incentivize or reward performance in student learning outcomes, equity becomes a serious concern. Furthermore, the impact of external factors such as socio-economic class raise questions about attribution. RBF can risk deepening existing inequality and exclusion by rewarding those schools that are performing well, and leaving those in most need with less support and funding. It can lead schools to engage in behaviors that will improve performance on standardized tests, such as cream skimming of the best students, selectivity, cheating, and unnecessary expulsions of low-performing students. RBF approaches that seek to directly address equity for example by rewarding schools for enrolling poor students may be limited by low institutional and data capacity of local governments to verify income status; these resources could perhaps be better used in providing capacity for stronger school management and oversight.

The WDR should take into account the growing evidence base on the pitfalls of results-based financing linked to test results. Research in the U.S. by the National Academies of Sciences looked at 15 incentive programs designed to link rewards or sanctions for schools, students and teachers to students' test results. It found that test-based incentives do not produce meaningful improvements in student achievement.¹³ The WDR should also consider the challenge of sustainability and lack of predictability of this form of financing which makes it difficult for schools and districts to commit to hiring quality teachers and other personnel, which are critical inputs for the task of improving learning.

¹² Global Partnership on Output-Based Aid in Education, Results for Development (2016) "Paying for Performance: An Analysis of Output-Based Aid in Education" pp. 1.

¹³ National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences (2011) "Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education." <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/12521/incentives-and-test-based-accountability-in-education> Also see discussion of findings in the Washington Post, "Report: Test-based incentives don't produce real student achievement," May 28, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/report-test-based-incentives-dont-produce-real-student-achievement/2011/05/28/AG39wXDH_blog.html?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.14992e93d4cb

3. Silence on the crucial role of public education in achieving the education SDGs

- **The WDR should focus explicitly on how to improve the quality and equity of *public* schools.** The concept note is silent on the importance of public schools in universalizing quality education. No country – possibly aside from the city state of Singapore – has ever achieved universal basic education by relying on the private sector. In developing countries, enrollment has risen dramatically in the last 15 years, and today there are 50 million more children in school than in 2000 – this progress has been the result of government commitments and public provision, despite serious constraints. Indeed, financially the World Bank is a major supporter of this public expansion, yet fails to celebrate this investment or highlight the pivotal role played by government provision of education in so many countries around the world. The WDR should build on this progress by placing a very clear emphasis on the key role the public sector plays and the need to rapidly scale up investment in access to and quality of public education.
- **The WDR should reject for-profit, low-fee private schools** as a model that deepens poverty, harms equity, erodes quality education, and increases gender inequality. A new report raises particular concerns about International Finance Corporation (IFC) investments in for-profit K-12 education operators, finding that the ‘low’ fees charged are a barrier to the poor, that commercial operators are prone to put business interests above education, that quality of education is determined by what families can pay, and that these schools do not drive up quality in the public sector.¹⁴ Furthermore, new studies raise concerns about the practices of prominent commercial school chains, which keep costs low by hiring untrained, poorly qualified teachers; using scripted, standardized lessons based on a narrow curriculum oriented to standardized tests; and actively seek to avoid government regulation.¹⁵ A recent review of literature on private schools funded by DFID found evidence that ‘private schooling is not equally accessed by boys and girls.’¹⁶ Since that review, several new studies have also come out that have added to the body of evidence on female disadvantage in private schools.¹⁷ The WDR should distance the World Bank from such approaches, which are highly unlikely to lead to equitable, quality education in developing countries, and which flatly contradict the Bank’s commitment to reducing economic and gender inequality.

¹⁴ RESULTS Educational Fund (2017) “From Free to Fee: Are for-profit, fee-charging private schools the solution for the world’s poor?” http://www.results.org/uploads/files/From_Free_to_Fee.pdf

¹⁵ For a comprehensive discussion of the concerns about low-fee private schools, see Global Campaign for Education (2016) “Private Profit, Public Loss: Why the push for low-fee private schools is throwing quality education off-track.” http://www.campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/PPPL_FINAL%20EDITION_15%20SEPT%202016_A4_WEB.pdf. See also East African Centre for Human Rights, (2017) “Low Cost Private Schools: School Choice for the poor at the expense of Quality?” <http://eachrights.or.ke/images/2017/Homa%20Bay%20Research%20Report.pdf>; and Education International and Kenya National Union of Teachers (2016) “Bridge vs. Reality: A study of Bridge International Academies’ for-profit schooling in Kenya.” http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/Bridge%20vs%20Reality_GR%20Report.pdf

¹⁶ Day Ashley L, Mcloughlin C, Aslam M, Engel J, Wales J, Rawal S, Batley R, Kingdon G, Nicolai S, Rose P (2014) The role and impact of private schools in developing countries: a rigorous review of the evidence, DFID. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439702/private-schools-full-report.pdf

¹⁷ Such as: Sahoo, S (2015) Intra-household gender disparity in school choice: evidence from private schooling in India. University of Goettingen; Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi; Maitra, P, Pal, S and Sharma, A (2016) Absence of Altruism? Female Disadvantage in Private School Enrolment in India. World Development; Alcott, B. and Rose, P. (2015) Schools and learning in rural India and Pakistan: Who goes where, and how much are they learning? Prospects 45.

- **The WDR should use extreme caution in considering the potential of PPPs and school “choice.”** While the concept note does not explicitly promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs, defined here as public financing of private schools), there is good reason to be concerned that PPPs may be promoted as solution to challenges of alignment and efficiency of education systems. For example, the World Bank’s “Systems Approach for Better Education Results” (SABER) private sector framework positions the Bank as an advocate for expanded private provision of education through a rubric that rates education systems according to their ‘maturity’ level, with greater governmental engagement with the private sector considered more mature, despite a lack of evidence base for these assumptions.¹⁸

Academic research has raised concerns about the equity impacts of PPPs in education service delivery. For example, a recent literature review has found that “market-oriented PPPs seem to be especially problematic in terms of education inequalities, inclusion, and school segregation. This is due to the fact that the competitive environment that many PPP contracts generate incentivizes schools to try to select the best students, as well as to discriminate against those students less academically skilled or with special needs or behavioral issues.”¹⁹

For example, **Chile’s** thirty year experiment with a PPP model utilizing vouchers has resulted in severe socio-economic stratification within the education system, with the poorest students generally concentrated in neglected, low-performing government schools,²⁰ and no evidence of improved average educational outcomes at the national level.²¹ The relationship between socio-economic status and performance in the international PISA tests is higher in Chile than any other OECD country’ and Chile ranks last in the OECD for the number of students from their country’s poorest quartile who score in the top quarter of test results internationally.²² Following citizen and student protests, a number of recent reforms to the Chilean education system have been enacted to dismantle aspects of the voucher program and strengthen Chile’s public schools.

4. Narrow focus on learning, defined by narrow metrics

- **The WDR should adopt a broader understanding of learning, based on holistic, quality education.** Learning, as it is discussed in the concept note, is limited to performance in basic reading and math as measured by standardized tests. This narrow definition of quality education neglects valuable aspects of a

¹⁸ Mundy, Karen and Francine Menashy (2012) “The World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, and private sector participation in basic education: Examining the *Education Sector Strategy 2020*” in Christopher S. Collins, Alexander W. Wiseman (ed.) *Education Strategy in the Developing World: Revising the World Bank’s Education Policy* (International Perspectives on Education and Society, Volume 16) Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.113 - 131.

¹⁹ Verger, Antoni and Mauro Moschetti (2016) *Public-Private Partnerships in Education: Exploring Models and Policy Options*. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. [http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/OSF-INEE_PPP-roundtable_Framing-paper_Verger-Moschetti_ePPPs_\(1\).pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/OSF-INEE_PPP-roundtable_Framing-paper_Verger-Moschetti_ePPPs_(1).pdf)

²⁰ Mizala, A and Torche, F (2010). *Bringing the schools back in: the stratification of educational achievement in the Chilean voucher system*. *International Journal of Education Development*. Elsevier; see also González P, Mizala A, Romaguera P (2004) *Vouchers, inequalities, and the Chilean experience*. Santiago, Chile: Center for Applied Economics, University of Chile.

²¹ Hsieh, C.-T. and Urquiola, M. (2003), *When Schools Compete, How Do They Compete? An Assessment of Chile’s Nationwide School Voucher Program*. NBER Working Paper 10008

²² Mizala, A and Torche, F (2010) op. cit.

transformative education which seeks to provide students with higher-order skills such as critical thinking, exposure to a rich curriculum including arts and science, and in particular, empowers students to become active citizens, challenge harmful gender norms, build inclusive communities and promote environmental sustainability -- as described in target 4.7 of the education SDG.²³ These speak to the value of education beyond a purely economic rationale, although they may well have positive economic impacts.

- **The WDR should look more comprehensively at the causes of the learning crisis.** The list of causes described in the concept note are actually symptoms. Furthermore, it is glaringly incomplete: it neglects the most important factor in learning, the presence of an adequate number of well-qualified, professionally trained, well-supported teachers, as well as inputs such as adequate infrastructure and appropriate learning materials. To examine the real causes of the ‘learning crisis,’ the report will need to take a more systematic look at the problems of financing, political will, and democratic accountability which undermine the performance of education systems.
- **The report must put a professional teacher workforce at the center of its approach to learning.** A recent World Bank report on teaching in Latin America rightly emphasized that “once children get to school, no single factor is as critical as the quality of teachers.”²⁴ Yet strangely, in the concept note the recurrent costs of teacher salaries are treated as a barrier to investing in learning (paragraph 43). In reality, insufficient budgets, not expenditure on salaries, create this barrier to investing in learning. A major omission in the “promising approaches to improve learning” is again the consideration of how to build and sustain an adequately staffed professional teacher workforce, as well as how to ensure teachers without certification and adequate training receive the necessary support. The importance of reasonable pupil-teacher ratios – a clear constraint to learning in many developing country contexts – appears to be ignored, as is the challenge of attracting highly-qualified individuals into the teaching workforce.

While the discussion of approaches that build on teachers’ intrinsic motivation and holistic assessments of performance at school-level is valuable and appreciated, the focus on “teacher effort” is myopic. It places responsibility on the individual rather than the system and the environment in which teachers are operating. Good management and oversight systems at the school and district level, adequate salaries, ongoing professional development and support, and community engagement are all strategies that should be explored to ensure quality teaching. The Bank should explicitly reject test-based evaluation or compensation of teachers, which corrupts the classroom environment, the professional collaboration between teachers, and undermines holistic, quality education.

Across the developing world, teachers, many of them women, are the unsung heroes of education, working often for miniscule reward in hugely challenging conditions to deliver the best education they can for their

²³ SDG 4, Target 4.7: by 2030 ensure all learners acquire 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.

²⁴ Bruns, Barbara; Luque, Javier (2015) *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20488> .

country's children. Female teachers in particular are vital role models for young women. In its 'knowledge products,' the World Bank has often portrayed teachers in a negative light,²⁵ focusing on instances of teacher inadequacy out of context, and failing to highlight the incredibly important and useful role the vast majority of teachers play every day educating the next generation. The WDR offers an opportunity to turn this around, and offer teachers the respect they deserve.

- **Data and metrics are critically important, but should focus more on tracking equity of service delivery** – for example, monitoring the inputs, resources and services reaching poor and geographically marginalized communities. Emphasis should be placed on collecting data that is broken down by socio-economic profile, gender, marginalized linguistic/ethnic groups, disability etc, as well as by geographic area. We appreciate that the focus is not being placed explicitly on high-stakes testing, and the acknowledgment that poor use of metrics can have negative consequences. More emphasis on the perverse incentives of testing and test-based accountability for classroom practice is merited, such as the practice of teaching to the test, the narrowing of curriculum, and the problem of funding being directed only to areas that can be easily measured, such as basic reading and math.

²⁵ Fontdevila, Clara and Antoni Verger (2015) "The World Bank's Double-Speak on Teachers: An Analysis of Ten Years of Lending and Advice" Education International. http://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/World_Banks_Doublespeak_on_Teachers_Fontdevila_Verger_EI.pdf