Education System Strengthening

DEVCO B4 Education discussion paper

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DISCUSSION PAPER ON EDUCATION SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

This discussion paper is intended for those who want to understand more about education system strengthening and the things to consider when developing programmes of support. The primary audience is therefore staff at EU Delegations involved in programme design, implementation and monitoring, as well as those at HQ in Brussels involved in the programme cycle. System strengthening is an enormous subject, particularly when you consider that education systems are part of much bigger systems of public service. Education is an inherently political activity, and education systems are particularly susceptible to influence from the political system, as well as from systems of power and patronage. Education systems are also shaped and affected by other, less formal systems including cultural and social conventions and practices.

This primer is only intended to provide a brief introduction to the meaning, issues, challenges, and approaches to system strengthening. The primary purpose is to help those involved in designing, developing and delivering EU educational aid to think about system strengthening, to understand the basic "nuts and bolts", to think about main issues and to know where to go for further ideas and support, through links to other resources. Through a few select case studies, it offers some practical considerations for programme design. It is intended that the primer will be followed by more in-depth technical papers that explore some of the issues in greater detail.

INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by system and system strengthening?

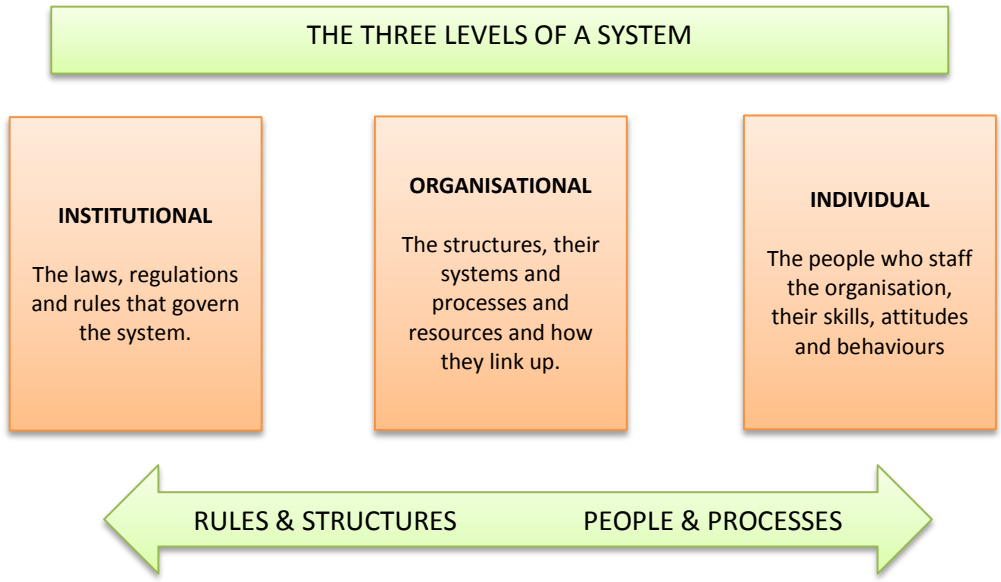
The education *system* is what turns education policy and strategy into education outcomes. An education system is complex and diverse, and all education systems are different. **No one type of system is inherently better than another, though some systems work better than others**. Similar education systems may produce very different results; equally similar results may be produced by very different systems. Changing a system may not necessarily change the results, but strengthening a system – making it work better – is a necessary step to producing better results.

An education system encompasses "*all those who participate in the provision, financing, regulation and use of learning services*"[1]. **The education system therefore includes the state, non-state providers (including civil society and private individuals and organisations) as well as the users of education services, parents, their children and employers**. Education systems have certain functional characteristics and to function effectively require mechanisms for the parts to work together. Often it is a failure to effectively connect the various parts, or different and perverse incentives that lead to reduced function. Education system analysis often uses the following three

[1] World Bank (2011) *Learning for All: Education Strategy 2020.* http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/ESSU/Education_Strategy_4_12_2011.pdf

groupings or levels - **institutional, organisational** and **individual** – to examine and understand the capacity of the system to deliver effective services.

- At the **institutional** level, examining the legal framework of operations and the formal and informal rules and practices that govern functions and relationships within the Ministry of Education and its departments, units and associated bodies, as well as between Ministry of Education and other entities and actors.
- At the **organisational** level, refers to the structures, internal systems and processes, as well as the human, physical and financial resources available within the Ministry of Education and its subordinated bodies. It governs the way in which objectives are set and strategies are formulated, how resources are allocated and how different units, directorates or education institutions communicate and cooperate together. It includes aspects like organisational culture, and processes to manage performance. To be fully functional, mandates, resources and tasks have to align with objectives, and be effectively carried out.
- At the **individual** level, these are skills and capabilities of staff available to undertake the tasks designated to them. In addition to skills, this level also encompasses other factors that impact on effectiveness including ownership, motivation, morale and attitude.



Education Systems: the infinite variety

In very broad terms, education systems range across a number of basic types:

"A variety of organisational forms can deliver similar institutional performance levels, just as identical organisational forms can give rise to diverse performance levels." [2]

In highly **centralised** systems, power and control over resources is at the centre and very little decision-making or autonomy over resources exists at lower levels. This control may extend to all aspects of policy infrastructure, procurement of materials, maintenance of facilities and appointments.

[2] Lant Pritchett: Capability Traps: The Mechanisms of Persistent Implementation Failure CGD Working Paper # 234, Dec 2010.

In fully **decentralised** systems, local authorities (regions, districts, councils etc.) have full or considerable autonomy over resources including planning, budgeting, staff appointments and transfers.

De-concentrated systems combine elements of central authority, typically over policy, overall strategy, curriculum and standards, regulation, quality assurance and teacher training but local authorities have some degree of discretionary powers over service delivery, including planning, resource allocation and budgets, appointments and monitoring.

Large countries with **federal systems**, such as Nigeria, India and Pakistan, often divide responsibility for education between central (federal) and state or provincial governments. Where education is a *concurrent* responsibility, the centre often retains control over policy and curriculum, with states/provinces controlling budget, planning and delivery.

Within the above, many systems are **collegiate** in that certain functions are carried out by autonomous or semi-autonomous bodies, financed through the state. Most typically these include quality assurance or school inspection services, teacher training, accreditation and examination and assessment services.

Finally, there are education systems that involve substantial elements of **independent management**, relying on private, community, religious or charitable bodies to run schools. Roles and responsibilities vary according to context, but providers generally have a high degree of autonomy, with financing often a blend of state and non-state. Here, the state's role is largely regulatory, while actual delivery is performed by others.

Education systems are part of bigger systems

It is important to see an education system in its broader national context: it is part of much wider systems – political, economic, bureaucratic, cultural and social. Education systems do not operate in isolation; they are as much influenced by what happens on the *outside* as what happens on the *inside*.

> *" To strengthen an education system means to align its governance, management, financing and performance incentive mechanisms to produce learning for all"*
> World Bank 2011

System strengthening therefore needs to consider both the internal environment of the policies, rules, structures, processes, players and relationships within the sector as well as the wider forces that exert influence on how the system works. **Ignoring the bigger picture and focussing exclusively within the education system, or even worse on specific parts of the system, can conceal major risks and assumptions, with consequent disappointment and failure.** Education system strengthening therefore needs to consider the interplay of the three levels (institutional, organizational, individual); it is about the alignment of policy with rules, structures and behaviours, including the relationships between key actors, linked to the required resources – human and financial – to achieve results.

Education systems in fragile states.
Fragile states are defined by their weak institutions, inability to provide basic services to their citizens, poor governance, widespread corruption and other symptoms of weak government. While there are many causes for fragility (e.g., natural disasters, conflict, political turmoil), education can contribute to the development and well-being of people, but under certain situation-specific conditions. Fragility is a moving concept: in conflict-affected fragile countries, for example, education has the potential to be a bridge for peace-building ("a peace dividend"), but can also be used to reinforce divisions and prejudices which led to conflict when capacity is too weak .

The challenge of strengthening basic institutions – including education – is the focus of state-building and peace-keeping missions in these countries. In particular, for education systems, there is a need to change the dynamics of fragility, which can be caused by ethnic strife, natural disasters or political and social events. By providing quality mass education in a fragile state, the government will benefit from the perceived value of its legitimacy and be able to engage in other reforms. Improving standards for international cooperation in education in fragile states and setting out collaborative work with other sectors (e.g., humanitarian, security, disaster risk reduction, development) are some of the processes through which the importance of education in fragile contexts has been raised.

Adapted from: *Capacity development in education planning and management in fragile contexts* (IIEP, 2009)
http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Cap_Dev_Rethinking/pdf/Fragile_States.pdf
and *A new agenda for education in fragile states*, Working Paper 10 (Brookings Institutions, Center for Universal education, Rebecca Winthrop and Elena Matsui, August 2013)
http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2013/08/education%20agenda%20fragile%20states%20winthrop/08%20education%20agenda%20fragile%20states%20winthrop.pdf.

System strengthening for what?

The overall purpose of system strengthening is to enable the realisation of policy: to turn the aspirations of policy into reality. **Most countries – developed and developing - have little problem in articulating education policy.** The last two decades have seen considerable support for countries to develop education policies consistent with international declarations - Education for All, and the Millennium Development Goals, Convention on the Rights of the Child, etc. Equally, there has been no shortage of education plans and strategies that set out how those policies will be delivered. A significant part of this international agenda has been achieved, particularly in terms of basic access to education. Much progress has been made on the easier part of expanding the physical capacity to deliver. However, there has been less success in using these resources effectively to deliver improved learning outcomes. The fact that so many education systems are failing to turn gains in participation into gains in learning is now the major **concern and the new international imperative.** The quality of education and ***Learning*** *for All* is now the central agenda, and **system strengthening needs to focus on enabling governments to deliver better services for better learning outcomes. This is proving far more difficult than expanding access.**

When considering system strengthening, it is important to think of the system as a whole and not just a part of it. **Focussing on only one part of the system in isolation may trigger two possible risks: we ignore other parts that may also influence the expected success and we are not aware of possible (negative) consequences in other parts of the system**. Strengthening the system for

teacher training, for example, may address the issues of teacher skills, but will in itself not necessarily on its own bring about the desired result of better learning outcomes. Other parts of the system need to be taken into account. Consideration needs to also be given to how teachers are hired, deployed, compensated, and motivated. How they are held accountable is equally important, as is whether they have the appropriate resources and incentives; these will determine whether strengthening their training will have any impact or not.

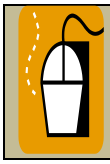
A 'Systems approach'

This section looks at some of the current thinking and approaches to education system strengthening. What is clear is the need to work with the **whole system**, in its three levels, with a focus on the system's ability to **deliver results**. The crucial question for education policy is not simply about more resources, but of creating an institutional system where all involved people are provided with incentives to use resources efficiently and to improve student performance." (DFID: Political Economy Rigorous Literature Review 2014).

The failure to improve learning outcomes requires us to think about education systems in a different way that looks beyond inputs and much more at results. The World Bank in its new Education Strategy, *Learning For All,* places the strengthening of education systems as the number one priority. A new *systems approach* focuses on accountability and results, ensuring inputs are used more effectively. It builds on the influential *World Development Report* of 2004 with its emphasis on service delivery and accountability. It points to the need to reform relationships of accountability – both contractual and non-contractual - within the education system, ensuring they are clear, aligned with functions, and are measured and monitored. The Bank favours an approach that focusses action on those parts of the system that are identified as potentially yielding the best payoffs in terms of schooling and learning outcomes. Central to this is improving accountability and the capacity to measure and monitor learning outcomes systematically at all levels.

UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) and GIZ *Strengthening of Education Systems* Discussion Paper (2012) stresses the need to consider education systems holistically and as part of wider systems. Education systems are first and foremost social systems: they are open in that they adapt and respond to the wider environment; they set goals and objectives and organise themselves around these (to greater or lesser degrees); and they integrate values and norms that are embraced by society. The paper cautions against the tendency to be selective in focussing on specific areas at the expense of the whole system. The paper identifies three areas for priority action:

- Policy and Plan preparation, with a focus on appropriate tools and processes that include good diagnostics, and allocation and management of human and financial resources.
- Systemic quality management that defines quality, and builds systems to measure and monitor learning achievement.
- Increasing knowledge generation and information management and the wider dissemination and use of information.



Two useful World Bank resources on education system strengthening are the *Learning for All* document http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/ESSU/Education_Strategy_4_12_2011.pdf and the Systems Approach for Better Education Results website http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm. The IIEP/GIZ document is at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002168/216856E.pdf

More recently, the "science of delivery" articulated by Barber, Moffit and Kihn[3] offers an approach to delivering better results in public services. "Delivery chains" identify the key actors in each stage of turning policy into results. The approach emphasises the importance of political will to underpin the drive for change, identify the drivers of, as well as constraints to performance, the importance of a limited number of key priorities with targets and trajectories, plans for delivery and a system of rigorous monitoring and checking progress. Though *Deliverology* has been adopted in a number of OECD countries, its basic tenets are now being applied in lesser developed economies, including Pakistan.

The Importance of Political Economy

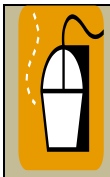
There is a need to better understand the political economy issues that influence the motivations and behaviour of service providers, regulators and users, and which can undermine better delivery of goods and services.
ODI: Making Sense of the politics of delivery (April 2013)

There has been increasing recognition in recent years of the importance of the political economy and its impact on delivery of public services, including education**. Institutional and organisational analysis** examines the formal rules, structures and relationships within the system; **political economy analysis** examines the underlying interests, incentives, motives and relationships between actors. It is often described in terms of the difference between 'formal' governance and 'informal' governance, between what is supposed to happen and what actually *does* happen. Looking at the political economy issues that operate across education systems is important in understanding how things really work and reveals the forces that frequently prevent policy being implemented as planned.

The focus on system inputs – in particular school infrastructure, teacher recruitment and training, textbooks and learning materials –has frequently found support and aligned with the political economy forces in education. Politicians, the interests of business (especially construction and printing) and teacher unions generally welcomed the additional resources and have frequently been able to use them to extend their own power and interests. **Failure to effectively influence and control these interests has often resulted in misuse or inequitable distribution of resources**. With the need to shift the focus away from inputs towards outcomes, the forces and influences within the political economy often resist the types of reform required, as they undermine positions of power and patronage. The causes of failure to increase performance and accountability (e.g. teacher presence and performance) are often found in the imperfections of political systems, and the capacity of key players (e.g. teachers) to deliver votes. The prevalence and strength of systems of patronage and clientelism outweigh the importance of delivering effective services. Low levels of

[3] Barber M, Moffit A, Kihn P (2011) *Deliverology 101: A field Guide for Education Leaders*. Corwin, USA.

accountability, weak levels of citizens *voice,* poor transparency, lack of accountability, poor information and failure to apply legal controls, all allow abuses to persist and education systems to fail to deliver an equitable and good quality service.



The Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GDSRC) *Topic Guide on Political Economy Analysis* (updated 2011) provides a very useful overview and tools for PEA, including numerous links and references to country examples. http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/PEA.pdf. DFID's *Rigorous review of the political economy f education systems in developing countries* (2013) is a further useful resource. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/305753/Political-economy-education-systems1.pdf

In order to understand these informal forces that affect education service delivery a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is required. The key issues to be addressed in a PEA are summarised in the table below, which is derived from the DFID *Rigorous Review* reference in the box above.

Roles and Responsibilities	*Who are the key stakeholders in the education system?* *What are their interests and incentives?* *Have these changed over time?*
Rent seeking & patronage	*How significant is the extent of rent-seeking and patronage?* *Where is it most prevalent (teacher postings, construction, textbooks etc)?* *What impact does this have on education reform and school outcomes?*
Decision-making & influence	*Which groups are involved in education policy decisions?* *Who exerts pressure on the decision-making process?* *What mechanisms are available for different groups to exercise their power?* *What are the implications on educational outcomes?*
Implementation	*To what extent are policy reforms implemented as designed and intended?* *Is a failure of implementation a failure of design, or capacity or political economy issues?*
Driving forces	*What political and economic conditions drive or restrict education reform, both in formulation and implementation of reform?*

Finally, PEA is contentious and may be resisted. The irony is that nothing contained in a PEA is unknown; it reflects the informal, often unspoken, ways in which the really system works which are known by everyone involved in the system. The contention comes in open acknowledgement of these factors, and identifying and negotiating strategies to bring about change. Three conventional strategies often have limited impact:

- Reducing the power of vested interest groups
- Working with vested interest groups to change behaviours
- Mobilising citizens to voice concern and oppose malpractice.

A more promising strategy is to identify "windows of opportunity" to lever change; a change in government or leadership, or negotiations around a new external loan or grant for example.

Understanding system failure

Before looking at what actions best help strengthen education systems, it is important to understand why they fail. Ever increasing evidence shows why developing country education systems are failing: gains in access and participation - in schooling - have not resulted in gains in learning. The sad reality

is that the vast majority of children in lower and middle income countries lag massively behind those in developed countries. Nine out of ten children in lower-middle income countries fail to reach the basic numeracy and literacy benchmarks set by PISA, compared to two in every ten in OECD countries. The difference is not explained by spending: many developing countries match the OECD average spend on education of 4.5% GDP[4]. So why do developing country education systems fail? A number of common issues recur in the research and literature.

Two very useful resources on the challenges to get children learning are Barbara Bruns (World Bank) http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1298568319076/makingschoolswork.pdf and from Fenton Wheelan (Acasus) http://www.acasus.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Acasus-The-Learning-Challenge-Report.pdf.

Weak political commitment for difficult service delivery challenges

Political commitment very often centres around populist policies that have immediate and visible outputs, as well as tangible political benefits. Political preference often favours investments in infrastructure, technology and recruitment, each in itself a necessary but not a sufficient condition to ensure effective learning. There is much less appetite for the contentious and difficult decisions around performance, which often risk upsetting influential voters and interests. Take the example of Ghana, where high levels of teacher absenteeism are tolerated and where effective instruction time is estimated at less than 40% of that available[5].

Weak oversight systems

Systems that hold people to account for the resources they manage and that set and assess performance against norms and standards are very often weak, existing perhaps on paper but not in practice. Inadequate, insufficient and inappropriate human resources are made available for oversight functions. Top-down performance management discipline is often weak: rules are not developed or enforced, functions are not carried out. School inspection and supervision routines, for example, are often under-funded, happen too infrequently to be of benefit, and are often sub-standard and perfunctory. The information gained is rarely used to drive improvement. Bottom-up accountability, is often ineffectual and weakened by lack of understanding or voice and by the counter-weight of local power relationships. There is some evidence however, that training for community members has improved school-based management and accountability.

Lack of performance information

Many education systems fail to collect performance data and information, beyond the typical Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) statistical reporting. Key performance information on teacher and pupil absence, learning achievement, and time on task are rarely routinely collected and even more rarely used to drive improvement. Many systems fail to articulate clear standards and are simply unable to say what *good* looks like.

[4] Bruns et al (2011) *Making Schools Work*. World Bank (link in box above)

[5] Abadzi, H. (2007) *Absenteeism and Beyond: Instructional Time Loss and Consequences.* World Bank IEG Policy Research Working Paper 4376

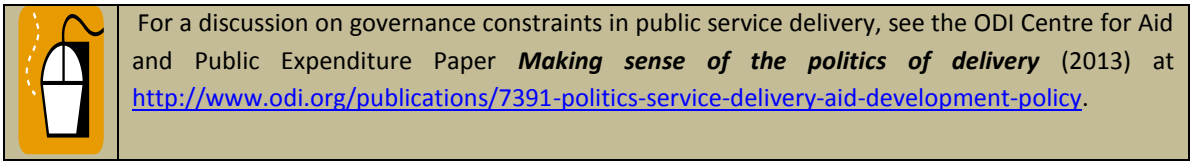
The implementation gap

Many developing countries have well-defined policies on education, and often elaborate, or even over –elaborate, strategies setting out how they will be delivered. These frequently pay in sufficient attention to the ground realities – the actual capacity for delivery. Failure to secure effective learning for all has not been due to a lack of plans or strategies, but more a failure of implementation. This failure is frequently a combination of other failures: poor prioritisation, inadequate or misplaced resources, unclear and confusing mandates and responsibilities, misalignment of finances to policy, lack of technical expertise, and inadequate or perverse incentives that allow providers to ignore policy directives. Policies that exceed the system's capacity to implement them will fail.

"Implementation remains conspicuously under-appreciated, under-theorised and under-researched … the intellectual heavy-lifting in development is thought to center on defining objectives, promoting goals, designing policies and formulating strategies."[6] Part of this failure has been a neglect of attention to local problem-solving and collective action. Frequently local stakeholders fail to cooperate to resolve basic problems (e.g. basic school repairs and maintenance), because the rules may not allow it, or do not promote it; they are often excluded from decision-making with resources controlled from afar (at HQ, or Regional offices for example) and there is often "capture" or diversion of resources to other, sometimes political, priorities; or an unfulfilled belief that someone else higher up the chain will deal with it. Systems may actively discourage self-determination in order to preserve hierarchies.

Rent seeking, patronage, clientelism and corruption

System failure often results when those with influence and control over public resources seek ways to divert public goods, processes and resources away from what was intended to further their vested interest. This occurs at all levels of the system, from senior political and civil service leaders, to district level politicians and bureaucrats, to the capture of meagre resources by elites at the local level of school and community. Most commonly this involves interference in appointments, capture of spending choices and favouritism in award of contracts. The complicity of teacher unions in tolerating teacher absenteeism and misconduct, is a widely recognised and often unchallenged problem.



For a discussion on governance constraints in public service delivery, see the ODI Centre for Aid and Public Expenditure Paper ***Making sense of the politics of delivery*** (2013) at http://www.odi.org/publications/7391-politics-service-delivery-aid-development-policy.

[6] Lant Pritchett et al, Centre for Global Development, 2010

Some guiding principles for policy dialogue

When considering how best to support education system strengthening, the following principles can help to focus and inform policy dialogue.

The importance of political engagement

Education is essentially a political activity. It is important to understand the political context better: the politics of education reform are very often contentious[7].

- Seize opportunities when and where they exist for driving change (around elections or identifying and working with reform champions at a local level for example).
- Provide information that encourages and enables politicians to recognise the potential benefits from improving education service delivery: this can be an important strategy to create deeper "political will" beyond often unrealistic pledges.
- Identify tangible political pay-offs: why would politicians want to engage in reform? Why would politicians wish to support something that would lose votes? (Challenging teacher unions, or reducing university grants for example).
- Act as a broker to bring together often divergent stakeholders: how often do donors work with teacher unions for example?
- Incentivise participation, innovation and challenge at the local level.

Increase knowledge and use evidence

Greater knowledge and understanding about system effectiveness in education is an essential basis for good policy and strategy. Yet evidence rarely drives policy decisions. Programmes should invest more in building and sharing a stronger knowledge base.

- Develop sound routines of data collection that go beyond delivery of inputs and look at effect: ask the "so what" question.
- Commission action-research that investigates what works, or does not, and why.
- Link this to wide dissemination strategies that promote a more informed public debate and demand for change.
- Invest in building local capacity for educational research.

Chile's experience of education reform.

Chile was one of only three OECD countries to improve pupil reading performance by more than 20 points between 2000 and 2009. "*Progress in educational quality has not been driven by a single factor but is a combination of a number of things under a systems approach.*" (Chilean Education Specialist)

What were the key drivers of Chile's reform? In addition to substantial increases in education budgets, and a strong focus on improving the terms, conditions and professional development of teachers, two aspects of the reform process were:

- The building of political consensus for reform, resulting in gradual and incremental change rather than a transformative approach. Education rose up the political agenda, shifting from "laissez-faire" to a more interventionist approach. Widespread and open consultation helped

[7] For an excellent overview of education reforms in Latin America see Merilee Grindle (2004): *Despite the Odds: The Contentious Politics of Education Reform*. Princetown University Press, New Jersey.

build irreversible political momentum.
- The establishment of a strong culture of monitoring and evaluation created an information-rich environment. Coupled with the growing political consensus this gave policy makers evidence on what was working and what was not, and drove a culture of constant refinement and improvement.

Adapted from: *Improvements in the Quality of Basic Education: Chile's experience* (ODI 2014) http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9067.pdf

Make what exists work better, avoid "mimicry"

The elusive quest for "global best practice" through which lesser developed systems are encouraged to mimic the forms, structures and processes of developed ones, often results in failure as they fail to account for context. This mimicry often camouflages dysfunction: things look as though they work in theory but not in practice. Whilst there is always value in identifying good global practice, adapting such lessons to different contexts is necessary. Heed the advice "Think globally, act locally".[8]

- Develop strategies that work to make what is in place work better; this is a safer route to success.
- Avoid implanting alien forms that fail to account for the large numbers of discretionary variables rooted in the national and local context of political, social and cultural norms[9].
- Find answers to problems within existing systems. Within all countries there are examples of ingenuity, innovation and resolve to solve problems, often despite the odds. The key is to recognise, reward and replicate what is already working.

Be realistic

Systems rarely transform suddenly, they often show remarkable resilience. Progress and improvement generally happens slowly and incrementally, though aspects of the system may change quickly.

- Set realistic expectations and build the necessary foundations for change.
- Be careful not to place early and excessive "stress" on the system; new structures and processes take time to stick.
- Start simple and increase complexity over time. Focus on a limited number of relatively easy gains that are likely to succeed and stimulate increased interest in continued reform.

Facilitate local action

The importance of encouraging local action to resolve problems of service delivery is widely recognised. Many of the reforms of the last decade have focussed on increasing the involvement and influence of local stakeholders, including most significantly communities and parents, giving them increased autonomy over resources.

- Identify ways to mobilise actors at the local level, often through civil society organisations bearing the relatively small costs that enable collective action.

[8] World Bank (2011) op cit
[9] Lant Pritchett (2010) op cit: provides a strong evidence base why development based on a theory of "modernisation" fails.

- Support effective decentralisation of responsibilities and resources, and consider ways to support and work at the sub-national level. (DFID Ghana, for example, earmarked the majority of its Sector Budget Support for the district level, to facilitate local offices better plan, support, supervise and monitor service delivery.

Indonesia's successful reform included decentralisation
Decentralising power to local governments, school administrators and parents through school-based management reforms has the potential to build local involvement and support for improving education outcomes. Indonesia's experience shows decentralised management of schooling can be an important part of improving education quality, particularly where local institutions have adequate capacity and when combined with resource increases through block grants.
"Decentralisation is good because we don't need to wait for a decision from central government or Ministry ….. Furthermore, those who know best are those who are closer". District Education Official.
From "Towards Better Education Quality: Indonesia's Promising Path" ODI July 2014.
http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9065.pdf

What's the answer? Five top tips to strengthen the education systems ability to deliver results.

Having sound policies and coherent strategies, particularly if they are overly ambitious, will not in themselves produce results. The "system" needs to be able to work effectively to turn policy into reality. Plans tell you *what*, strategies tell you *how* and the system, with all its parts and processes, will determine *whether* policies and plans will work or not. "Getting the strategy right is difficult, but only 10% of the task; the remaining 90% is getting it done".[10]

PRIORITY 1: Help governments prioritise, develop action plans and targets

The fact that so many children in developing countries fail to learn, points to systemic weakness. There is frequently a high degree of incoherence between what is supposed to happen (policy and strategy) and what actually does happen (implementation). Many strategies present long "wish lists" which, ironically, lack strategic focus! **Business as usual will not work.** Shifting the central focus to support the "how to" must be a priority. **Getting to grips with the underlying political economy and putting it on the policy dialogue agenda is essential if strategies, plans and targets are to stand any chance of being effective**. This would mean helping partner governments:

- Define a limited number of clear priorities that offer the best opportunities for rapid progress; set targets and develop clear action plans that spell out how they will be achieved, specifying by who and when; build in clear measuring and monitoring processes.
- Identify the key bottlenecks in implementation, looking at structure, process and both human and financial resources. Use some of the conventional analytical tools such as Functional Reviews, Political Economy Analysis, Capacity Needs Analysis.

[10] Barber, M (2010) This time it's going to be different"
.http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2010/11/04%20education%20pakistan/barberpakistan_education%20paper.pdf

- Enable those at the front line, particular districts or similar units, to turn national policy and strategy into realistic, actionable implementation plans, with agreed targets, and appropriate resources as well as effective monitoring and oversight arrangements.

The Good News from Pakistan

Pakistan has a poor record service delivery and failure in turning successive policies and strategies into reality. The *Road Map* approach adopted by the Chief Minister in Punjab Province follows the core tenets of *Deliverology*. This takes a systems approach, focuses on a few core priorities including attendance, getting lesson plans used in schools, repairing infrastructure. At its heart is a vigorous routine of monthly monitoring of every school against a small set of core indicators and bi-monthly stocktakes of progress chaired by the Chief Minister where district performance maps are revealed. Incentives and sanctions are applied to good and poor performing districts. Results have been impressive.[11]

PRIORITY 2: Set standards and benchmarks

Define what a 'good' looks like and ensure that all stakeholders – providers as well as users – understand this. Strengthen both policy and regulations related to quality assurance. Go beneath the standard proxy quantitative indicators (e.g. Pupil Teacher Ratios, Pupil Textbooks Ratios, Number of Classrooms etc.) and set standards related to the process and learning achievement. Set standards for what schools should *do.* This should include:

- Hours of effective instruction (e.g., time on task, which measures actual time used on academic activities): there is frequently a major difference between the official hours schools are required to be open and the actual amount of instructional time pupils receive.
- Teacher and pupil absenteeism: understanding how much school is missed and addressing the main causes.
- Developing and promoting better measures of effective teaching and learning; going beyond the provision of teacher training to define and measure what good classroom practice really is.
- Prescribing clearly what pupils should be able to do at given stages of their education and making this information available to parents.
- Measuring what pupils are learning through national assessment surveys, reliable tests and examinations, especially in the early grades to catch failure early before it is too late.

PRIORITY 3: Measure, monitor and make results public

There is a need to go beyond the standard EMIS driven annual statistical exercise and **capture a greater degree of performance information and make this widely available** to providers and users. National information is of little use to districts, and even less use to parents who are concerned about what happens to their child in their school. There are a number of ways in which this can be done:

[11] http://www.reform.co.uk/content/20419/research/education/the_good_news_from_pakistan

- Use school inspection/supervision reports (and support this process to be effective: see Priority 4 below) to generate reports and agendas for improvement.
- Use school report cards to inform and engage parents and communities.
- Measure what pupils are learning through national assessment surveys, reliable tests and examinations.
- Publish, as widely and frequently as possible, the results of the system at all levels and focussing particularly on all vulnerable groups: putting performance information in front of stakeholders has a powerful effect in raising expectation.

PRIORITY 4: Incentivise good performance

An education system that fails to discriminate between good and poor performance, particularly of teachers and educational leaders, is doomed. So many education systems fail to do this: and progression and promotion is more frequently determined by length of service or political and personal connection: rarely is it based on merit.

- Encourage the use of both rewards and sanctions to incentivise improved performance, using clear and transparent criteria. Ensure staff have clear objectives, understand standards and how they will be measured.

> *"Without well-defined responsibilities and performance goals, there is no way to generate the information needed to manage and assess a service delivery system"*
> World Bank 2011

- Don't just reward the best – reward improvement. Top performing schools, districts, even teachers tend to remain the same – and persistently rewarding can have the opposite effect on the rest of the system. The journey from bad to fair is often the hardest – recognise and reward it.
- Incentives do not have to be cash. Recognition by communities, or national or local government, career advancement, access to further training are all ways of saying "well done".
- Incentives can help even out inequities in the system, by attracting good people to difficult places. Incentives can include access to land, additional pension, enhanced promotion – all these can help get good people to work in difficult places.

PRIORITY 5: Strengthen oversight mechanisms

Build a system that expects and manages compliance with regulations and standards. This starts with clearly defining roles and responsibilities throughout the system. Two main types of system oversight exist, and arguably they are most effective when pursued together.

- Improve the mechanisms through which the performance of those responsible for the effective use of resources are managed and held to account. The Road Map *stocktake* approach in Punjab, Pakistan is a recent innovative example of effective top-down oversight (for more details see chapter Case Studies).
- Strengthen school support and supervision routines by working with providers (e.g. local authorities (often District officers) and school inspectors, as well as communities

themselves) to build skills and processes that focus on effective teaching and measure learning. School Report Cards are an effective way of doing this[12].

In a decentralised system: Paraná State School Report Card.
Between 1999 and 2002, the state of Paraná (Brazil) used report cards to monitor the state of basic education. Its primary audience was communities and parents and the report cards aimed to increase transparency and accountability at all levels (i.e., school, community, region, nation).

The design of the report cards explicitly took into account its audience and reported on several education features, taking data form multiple sources:

- Parents' opinions on the schools
- Test scores from 4th and 8th grades
- Student flow data
- School characteristics
- Background student information
- Principals' statements about school management

When possible, report cards compared specific schools with municipal and state averages. Schools' performance was reported by controlling for student socioeconomic backgrounds. Although the inclusion of parental opinions was not statistically representative, it enabled parents and communities to engage in the process (by attending meetings to collect the data), develop a voice in education policy debates and become akin to quality controllers.

The Report Cards were discontinued due to a change in government in 2002, but have been reproduced in other Brazilian states, countries and also in other sectors (Uganda, health).

Adapted from: *Increasing accountability in decentralised education in Paraná State, Brazil* (Donald Winkler, 2005)
http://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Increasing%20Accountability%20in%20Parana%20State%20Brazil.pdf.

- Build bottom-up processes of oversight through empowering local communities to monitor what happens in schools. Most systems have some form of school-community engagement, (e.g. Parent Councils, Village Education Committees (India).
- Rekindle the lost dimension of school leadership: there is truth in the old adage "Good head, good school". Help re-shape systems that link promotion to performance, so that the right teachers become heads, and that they are trained, supported, managed and rewarded is essential to improving schools.

References and further reading

The Governance and Social Development Website contains an extensive resource on Institutional Development, Public Service Reform, Decentralisation and Political Economy Analysis. It is funded by UKAID, AUSAID and the EU.
http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=5649

[12] USAID provides a useful summary of School Report Cards: http://www.equip123.net/docs/e2-ReportCards_WP.pdf , and
http://gec.fhi360.org/publications/EQUIP2/Lessons_Learned/EQUIP2%20SOAK%20-%20SRC.pdf

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) http://www.odi.org/ has a wealth of resources on governance and service delivery in various sectors, including education. Links to two interesting debates are

Public services for all: the politics of delivery
http://www.odi.org/events/3388-public-services-all-politics-delivery#audiovideo
Unblocking results: can aid get public services flowing?
http://www.odi.org/events/3207-aid-governance-collective-action#audiovideo

DFID: Geeta Kingdon et al (April 2014): A Rigorous Review of the Political Economy of Education Systems in Developing Countries
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/305753/Political-economy-education-systems1.pdf