

# **EFA FTI Global and Regional Activities (GRA) Program**

## **Thematic Area : Learning Outcomes**

### **Comments by UNESCO (ED/BHL, UIS and IIEP) (First Consultation)**

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We appreciate EFA-FTI for clearly articulating the support it intends to offer countries in the field of learning outcomes; and build on previous similar EFA-FTI activities.

In 2009, the EFA-FTI asserted that literacy and numeracy skills are a key priority in primary education. As such, it adopted two indicators (actually, the need for countries to set specific indicators on two topics): levels of reading acquisition in early grades; and levels of competency achieved by the end of primary.

Thus, it is of crucial importance to have learning outcomes as one of the main topics in the set of papers of this consultation. This initiative is very timely, as it is intended to address the “gaps” in knowledge and practice at the country and regional level, as well as identify eligible activities to fill those “gaps”.

While UNESCO acknowledges the contribution of the FTI in this thematic area, it considers that this is only one parameter in addressing and measuring quality and is thus limited in scope. UNESCO takes a much broader and systemic approach to quality and is therefore in the process of developing a General Education Quality Diagnosis/Analysis and Monitoring Framework. More details on the Framework and how UNESCO envisages developing this work in joint collaboration with the FTI are provided in the last section of the document.

#### **General comments:**

In the following section, following comments include questions on issues that would need to be clarified, as well as suggestions for areas that require improvement.

1. The rationale and the main assumptions of this paper seem to rely mainly on findings of the research produced by a single author. Even if the draft is not an academic paper, due attention should be paid to quoting. The draft should either quote a significant body of evidence, or not at all. What does not seem to be a good solution is to quote only one author (except when reproducing a graph in page 4). If the text ends up explicitly using an extensive body of literature, proper references should be provided at the end.
2. Moreover, this is particularly important given that it is stated that “the matters to be addressed on learning outcomes are sufficiently urgent and that enough knowledge exists, that it is possible to start with Activity 3, namely specific experiences in countries that can be take to scale quickly” (page 5). Even though it is foreseen to improve the knowledge base used while this work continues, it seems crucial to revise this draft and justify proposed actions with significant evidence.
3. This initiative seeks to demonstrate “quick and tangible results” (page 4) from educational investments for justifying continued financing from donors. However, it would be advisable to take into account that developing appropriate solutions might not adjust to this expectation, since they involve deeply rooted factors and are hampered by structural obstacles.
4. This paper adopts a prescriptive approach which can not be endorsed by UNESCO (and we find this is not suitable for the FTI-S which would have to be aligned with the principles of the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) giving emphasis on national ownership, either). Some examples of this approach will be mentioned below. We would like to emphasize that sustainability and proper attention to countries’

sovereignty requires countries' ownership and autonomy. For issues which are particularly sensitive from a political point of view, such as the definition of purposes of education, curricula, syllabuses, textbooks and instructional practices, UNESCO advocates for countries' autonomy, even though we are willing to provide guidelines and support on their demand. The promotion of localized solutions for these issues is a way of encouraging relevance in specific local, cultural and socio-economic contexts. For UNESCO, the quality of education implies necessarily a strong focus on pertinence. Rather than being prescriptive, it is highly recommended for this kind of global initiative to function as a platform to address knowledge and practice gaps through which Partner countries can benefit and adopt methods and approaches that fit most to their specific needs.

5. The paper needs to be deeply revised to ensure coherence and clear wording of ideas. Critical issues that need to be revised can be summarised in the following way:

- a. It is not clear why the paper is focused **exclusively** in early grades. It has to be said that the FTI framework mentions both early grades and end of cycle as crucial moments.

These two elements are different in nature: while the first one (early grades) is mostly focused in the need to identify a sort of "early alert" as to react accordingly; the second one (end of primary) is more related to monitor the degree of success achieved at the end of the cycle.

The paper also mentions (i.e. item 3.3.8.) secondary education grades to be part of this initiative: this would need to be clarified.

- b. One of the main assumptions of this initiative is that "...reading is fundamental to all other skills". It would be good to support this assumption with evidence.

In the same way, for UNESCO, learning outcomes embrace the effective acquisition of a wide range of competencies that include, for example, knowledge in different subject areas, inter and intra-personal skills, values, attitudes and dispositions, which are all fundamental. We totally understand that the priority is given to cognitive fundamental objectives of primary education which are the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, but in this case, we would like to suggest changing the title of the paper/initiative. This title should reflect the focus on a certain aspect of Learning Outcomes, to avoid any confusion about what we mean by Learning Objectives. Alternatively, we would recommend that the scope of proposed activities on learning outcomes to be broaden to incorporate other concerns raised by this note (e.g. to go beyond early grade, the universal model to measure learning outcomes, the eight selected key technical topics, etc.).

- c. There is a need to give credit to and properly prioritise local ownership of assessments, including the development of benchmarks and capacities at local level. Several countries already measure learning at early grades and at the end of the primary cycle and other moments and these experiences should be supported and expanded. The proposal should build upon existing good practices rather than promoting a particular approach.<sup>1</sup>

- d. This paper's approach is particularly questionable when promoting a universal recipe to measure learning outcomes (a number of words per minute decoded in early grades). This proposition is flawed by several reasons:

- (i) Decoding and decoding at a given speed are necessary for reading, but are not identical to reading. Reading is mainly about grasping meaning, understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, on page 6, last paragraph: "The benchmarks would be applied **to** Partner countries." Shouldn't this be "The benchmarks would be applied **by** Partner countries..."? The fact that the overall tone is prescriptive suggests this particular text is just an example of a peculiar approach.

- (ii) Languages and scripts vary; therefore a universal recipe cannot be promoted.<sup>2</sup>

Trying to “correct” the way languages work<sup>3</sup> is questionable: we cannot ask realities to be modified for a given method to work. This approach makes manifest the proposal inadequacy in this regard.

- (iii) It does not take into account that the moment in which a student should decode in an automated way depends on the relationship between his/her mother tongue and the language of instruction. It is problematic to set the same bar for those studying and being assessed in their mother tongue that happens to be the official language and for those in bilingual education programmes (that usually start with a mother tongue and then move gradually to the command of an official language).

In some mother-tongue-based bilingual education programmes analyzed in Mali, Papua New Guinea, Peru and the United States<sup>4</sup>, it has been demonstrated that overall academic achievement of students (including in mathematics) taking part in this programmes is superior to that of students in the monolingual second-language system.

- (iv) It confuses the stability of decoding measures across languages, with assuming that a universal benchmark can be set. Certainly, the differences in languages and scripts do not mean that decoding is important in one context and not in another, but they entail that decoding operations are not identical across languages and scripts making a universal common benchmark deeply problematic.
- (v) Overstressing decoding might lead to forget other elements that matter for becoming a competent reader and make the school experience too centred in the mechanics of reading and not in reading as a communicative action.

For at least all these reasons, the FTI-S should reconsider endorsing approaches that are prescriptive and unclear. The current wording of the indicators in the framework is good enough since they stress that countries should set their own goals and measure themselves against them.

- e. Issues related to international comparability of data are not addressed; therefore the discussion about what has to be done in this realm is non-existent. If there is interest in global monitoring of learning outcomes, there has to be a specific activity on this topic since this cannot be addressed just by the aggregation of national information.
- f. The eight topic areas suggested do not include issues related to what kind of competencies and skills are meant to be acquired against which learning outcomes are measured and monitored. To capture on-going debates and initiatives about how to measure learning outcomes on a wider range of issues, it might be good to add this element as another topic area.
- g. The topical areas suggested could be improved:
  - (i) What is suggested under “refining of indicators” departs from what the FTI-S should be doing. There is no point in endorsing and

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, decoding in Kiswahili (language where words become particularly lengthy) and in Vietnamese (where there are many monosyllabic words) cannot be measured using a common benchmark. Another example is related to the different degrees of orthographic transparency that impact on decoding (and reading) tasks; for instance in Spanish letters tend to sound in the same way most of the time, while in Arabic some letters can be omitted in the written language.

<sup>3</sup> In page 13 the paper states that “A method is needed to specify how words would be counted in various languages and language (sic) in order to compare reading performance in various languages (e. g. how to segment agglutinative languages)...”

<sup>4</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001611/161121e.pdf>

advocating a unique recipe that is problematic. Instead of that, the FTI-S should promote, as the framework suggests, that countries effectively set their own targets for literacy and numeracy skills at both stages (early grades and end of cycle) and measure them using the mechanisms they find more useful for their own national purposes (their own assessment, participating in international studies, etc.)

- (ii) Indicators repository. This is a very specific and well defined area that is already being addressed by the UIS.
  - (iii) Literature reviews, studies, etc. The rationale for the selection of the eight topical areas is not explicit. There might be other areas that are equally important for other points of view (for instance, promoting enrolment at the official ages –minimising repetition and overage; promoting more flexible delivery mechanisms, just to mention two).
  - (iv) Scalable experiences. There is an assumption behind this topic: experiences can be mechanically or easily replicated across different contexts and that is not necessarily the case. Approaches that are prescriptive in nature are usually not very effective. The role of the international community is to support countries' own processes by keeping the focus on what matters (in this case, children's learning) while not insisting too much on the how-to. This must be a concrete and local answer.
6. The paper should take into account that, according to its mandates, the UIS is currently implementing an Observatory of Learning Outcomes that comprises:
- a. The creation of a catalogue of existing information being produced by national and international (regional or global) assessments and examinations. This activity is closely related to what the paper mentions in page 7 (item 3.2) but it is not restricted to information on early grade reading since it also encompasses information concerning reading and maths in ISCED levels 1 and 2.
  - b. Promoting convergence among existing initiatives in order to build a body of cross-nationally comparable data. The UIS is currently discussing options with PASEC, SACMEQ and the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE). The intention is to generate the necessary consensus to make this endeavour owned by the relevant partners and, therefore, sustainable.

### **Specific comments:**

1. Page 3. Introduction. Second paragraph. It would be better to say that "...almost all low-income countries showed very low speed in basic decoding which underlies the capacity to understand a simple text." This suggestion is intended to prevent two problems: decoding is not identical to reading; and the way the text is phrased sounds as if there would be an average decoding speed that applies to any language, which is not correct.  
  
Moreover, the figure does not provide a clear indication of what "fluency" means. If it is number of words per minute, the underlying assumption of the graph (that you can express fluency using a common metric regardless of the language characteristics) is really problematic.
2. Page 4. First paragraph. It would be better to say "...over 90% of the students could not decode a single word..." since decoding is a precondition for reading but it is not identical to it.
3. Page 4. First paragraph. The problem is that teachers are "poorly paid" or that they cannot perform their tasks? Better salaries are not necessarily the unique requirement for them to be able to do what they have to. The problem is poor performance that is the

result of issues that belong to three different and concurrent domains: (i) motivation; (ii) professional competence; and (iii) availability of resources (including pedagogical support -which is not necessarily supervision).

4. Page 4. First paragraph. These two sentences are extremely problematic: "In these information-deprived circumstances, teachers may interact only with the few students who keep up. Thus, only the smartest or those with parental help may benefit from schooling. The rest may drop out or even graduate illiterate." First, deprivation is not only about information scarcity, it is much more complex than that; secondly, the only ways out are said to be being smart or relying on parental support. Probably, these two actually mean that those who succeed are relatively wealthier (not smarter); that is: they eat properly, their parents can and actually support them, a long list of other factors associated with a better off socio-economic situation (like not having to work, etc). In fact, a wide range of associated factors that have an impact on poor learning outcomes should be taken into account. These might include socio-economic factors; cultural issues; gender; ethnicity; home to school distance; child labour; etc.
5. Page 4. Second paragraph. Last sentence. "...quick and tangible results must be obtained..." not to satisfy donors but because people (students, parents, taxpayers) are entitled to.
6. Page 4. Second paragraph. "With time it was found that donors and governments had overestimated the competencies of poor students": it would be useful to demonstrate the evidence of this statement.
7. Page 4. Third paragraph. Item b): "... in this particular area there are enough pilot and even scaled-up experiences available, by now, that one can generalize from—thus there is no need to wait": this can be a very problematic assumption, since the evidence is still in the first stages and only in a small number of countries.
8. Page 4. Third paragraph. The meaning of this paragraph should be properly spelt out. What does the "knowledge gap" entail? What are the factors that are not known? By whom?
9. Page 4-5. Item c) It would be good to provide more evidence on the *exclusive* focus on early reading. There are many other areas of interest and while reading is a core element, it is not clear from the text why focusing exclusively on early grades and, probably, pre-reading skills. It would be also important to take into account, for instance, the actual achievement of the educational goals in this regard.

"Key donors": it would be useful to explicitly mention some examples.

What does it mean to "generalize experiences" in this regard? There are many other experiences regarding reading at different stages of the primary cycle: many countries conduct their own assessments, many of them have examinations at the end of the cycle; there are international efforts like the regional initiatives (two in Africa, one in Latin America) or global ones (like PIRLS). Stating the world lack interesting experiences in relation to other areas, is not enough to argue for focusing exclusively on early reading.

Early reading is essential because measuring at the end of the cycle might be too late for corrective action. That is why both moments (early grades and end of cycle) are important: one for monitoring, the other for having a timely reaction; and that is why, these two moments might require different emphasis: monitoring for the public debate at national and international levels; the information for reacting quickly for those more directly involved in the direct delivery of educational services.

10. Page 5. Second paragraph. It is not clear what is meant by "...there is enough of an empirical basis on how to get going with improved learning outcomes...": again, what is the evidence of this? In any case, standardized solutions on how to make people learn should be avoided, since learning is always a concrete experience where a set of diverse and manifold factors interact.
11. Page 5. Proposed activities. First paragraph. It is not clear what the "important gaps" the text refers to are. What exactly is the nature of the 'gaps'? Is it the lack of studies about how to improve learning outcomes in low income countries? Studies of how to implement

findings from previous research? Lack of political will or financing to implement these programs? Something else?

12. Page 5. Last paragraph. If “enough knowledge exists”, why is number 1 activity “research, literature review and knowledge packaging”? Starting with Activity 3 actually undermines the value of the first two activities. Is there any example of experiences which are “already taking place, under countries’ own initiatives”? Which are the “knowledge products” that will be produced?
13. Page 6. Key technical topics:
  - a. There are many additional areas and topics that could be listed here beyond these eight. FTI should provide a broader perspective of some other potentially useful/relevant/important areas of what is needed to improve performance.
  - b. A definition of “performance” could be very useful.
14. Page 6. Item 3.1. Second Paragraph. School curricula include topics beyond reading and mathematics, which are not discussed above...
15. Page 6. Item 3.1. Third Paragraph. Again, decoding speed and reading achievement are not the same thing.
16. Pages 6-7. Bullet points.
  - a. It is not clear why international comparisons and information that might be country or language specific are listed together. They serve different purposes which are not acknowledged by the text.
  - b. Public examinations and existing national assessments should be extensively used and acknowledged. Resources should be devoted to improve them where applicable and requested by countries.
  - c. Instructional time is not an indicator of learning outcomes. As the text says, it is *related to* outcomes. If we are going to take elements that are related to outcomes as outcomes, we can have a long list and we will lose focus.
  - d. “Child illiteracy”: if literacy skills exist over a continuum it is not pertinent to talk about illiteracy (and going back to dichotomous phrasing). Furthermore, this notion is not rooted in literature.
  - e. “Levels of comprehension”: There are different types of comprehension, including the simplest type: literal comprehension.
  - f. Decoding speed: again, this varies from one language to the other.
17. Page 7. Item 3.1. Last paragraph. Again, there is a need to have a broader set of scientific references to substantiate some of these assertions.
18. Page 7. Item 3.2. Proposed activity. No need to restrict it to “early grades” actually if this were the case, eddataglobal.org is already doing it. In any case, it should be noted that eddataglobal.org’s scope is restricted to the studies conducted under the initiative this site belongs to; thus, it does not include important information coming from other national assessments. Limiting the initiative to reading and mathematics would also need to be further justified. Additionally, “basic indicators” cannot be limited to reading and numeracy.
19. Page 8. Item 3.3. First and second paragraphs. Who would decide whether a threshold of accumulated research with clear implications has been reached? How quickly, and under what conditions, does one transition from a literature review to a pilot study and field based research? How are the field based studies going to be designed?
20. Page 8. Item 3.3.1. First paragraph.

It would be useful to have some of the references for the evidence mentioned.

Again the dichotomy “literate/illiterate” could be avoided. Since skills exist over a continuum, the important point here is to be able to guarantee that children develop, in

early grades, the skills needed in order to consolidate, by the end of the level, their abilities as competent readers and, therefore, being able to read for further learning.

It would be important to ensure that the elements listed here are included in the teacher training programmes. If teachers know how to teach reading, they would be able to do it.

It would be important to introduce a mention to the fact that all of these elements should pay proper attention to the specific characteristics of the different languages and scripts.

21. Page 8. Item 3.3.1. First bullet. It would be helpful to know more about teachers' profile in early grades in low income countries: What is their background? What kind of pedagogical training, if any, have they had? To what extent do they speak official languages, as well as any local languages?

Teachers' role goes beyond carrying out particular teaching methods: teachers are active agents of the process and we have to value their role as such.

It is suggested to avoid the confusion between support and supervision.

22. Page 8. Item 3.3.1. Second bullet. This depends on methodologies and contexts.
23. Pages 9. Item 3.3.1. Second and third bullet. Systematization in this sense is not suitable from UNESCO's point of view. In addition, it is not clear what would be the purpose of systematization and what would be the efficiencies maximized there.
24. Page 9. Item 3.3.2. Title: As stated before, "basic skills" are broader than literacy and mathematics.

First paragraph. "The large number of languages in many countries create problems in children's literacy": this issue varies a lot from one country to the other. It would be probably worth mapping countries to understand better the extent of this issue. In any case, for UNESCO, this should not be presented as a "problem". In Papua Guinea which is the most linguistically diverse country in the world, with 820 living languages, this was not an insurmountable obstacle even in a context of limited financial resources. This country managed to introduce initial formal education in more than 430 languages thanks to political determination and community support. Furthermore, it is not realistic to suggest that the real world should adapt to our working methods. Linguistic diversity is an asset, not something we have to "fix."

25. Page 9. Item 3.3.2. First paragraph, last sentence. We should avoid an instrumental view of languages and culture. The point is not to "enhance the utility of local languages" but to respect them, to favour their development and prevent them from dying.
26. Page 9. Item 3.3.2. First bullet: It is also important to know in which contexts are languages used: at home, with neighbors, in the markets, when interacting with officials representing the state?
27. Page 9. Item 3.3.2. Second to fourth bullet: As mentioned above, education in a second language for early grades has proved to be less effective than education in mother tongue. Therefore, these questions should be re-examined, as they are not necessarily relevant and do not take into account languages' diversity.
28. Page 9. Item 3.3.3. While ECCE is extremely important, it is not clear how this topic can be included under this initiative. The answer to this might be straightforward but simplistic and misleading: ECCE is important because of its effects on learning outcomes at a later stage. This is misleading because of two reasons: (i) it undermines the value of ECCE by looking at it only as a means to an ulterior end; and (ii) the same reasoning can be applied to any other element that impacts on learning outcomes. In any case, any proposal on learning outcomes should stress different factors, one of which is related to develop linguistic competencies. One of the important elements under this topic would be to address the importance of transition from ECCE to early grades.
29. Page 10. Item 3.3.3. First bullet. This should be broader: in ECCE the approach of learning also focuses on psycho-social, emotional and cognitive aspects. These can encompass the development of positive attitudes and dispositions towards learning through appropriate pedagogies. In this regard, child-teacher interaction is the most important quality element in ECCE.

30. Page 10. Item 3.3.3. Third and sixth bullets. Given that ECCE has some particularities, it could be better to focus on pedagogy rather than on aspects such as instructional time or materials. Classroom-centred activities reflecting practices of primary education can be inappropriate for ECCE (i.e. activities using games as pedagogic tools or undertaking outdoor activities have proven their effectiveness in child development).
31. Page 10. Item 3.3.3. Fifth bullet. Does this refer to individual assessment? If that's the case, it should be noted that this is very controversial and is not necessarily encouraged for ECCE because of the negative influence it can play on teachers and children.
32. Page 10. Item 3.3.4. There is no mention of studies on factors associated to learning in maths provided by existing studies like PASEC, SACMEQ and the LLECE.

Introducing new textbooks might not be cost-effective.

33. Page 10. Item 3.3.5. First paragraph. The fact that actual teacher training experiences do not show any statistical relationship with learning outcomes improvements might be explained by: (i) the scope of the teacher training experiences (not related to the issues that are measured by student's tests); (ii) the quality of the teacher training; (iii) the connection (or lack thereof) between teacher training activities and the actual challenges teachers have to face; (iv) the connection (or lack thereof) between teacher training activities and the prior knowledge of teachers; (v) the fact that teacher training is not accompanied by other elements that are equally required (motivation, and resources) for the teaching practice to be effective, etc. Given this situation, stating that teacher training has no effect on students' achievement is not precise.

In regards to the value of supervision of teachers, it would be useful to have the evidence supporting this assumption. Again, support should not be limited to supervision.

34. Pages 11-12. Item 3.3.7. Bullet points. These issues seem too specific. Would not it be much more effective and appropriate to promote the enabling mechanisms for countries to be able to do this sort of prescriptions on their own? Again, UNESCO's views are not prescriptive but aimed at supporting Member States to develop their own textbooks and learning materials. It is recommended that the FTI-S also endorse a "supportive" view instead of a prescriptive one.
35. Pages 12-13. Item 3.3.8. First paragraph. The scope of this is not clear: "Achievement tests are needed that are valid and reliable for the **lower grades**. They should show progress **through at least the primary and the lower secondary grades** in important subjects". While the text so far has focused on early grades, here there is a mention to think about the first two levels (ISCED 1 and 2). While this latter interest seems completely right, there is no clear connection between it and the rest of the paper.

The added-value of "a regular program for measuring reading and math achievement" would need further justification. It is not clear enough to what extent existing tests already in place "fail to fulfil" the intended requirements.

The sentence "... they should not overly tax the limited psychometric capabilities of low-income countries" is questionable. It suggests that psychometric capabilities are the exclusive possession of some countries and therefore denotes an ethnocentric perspective.

36. Pages 13-14. Bullet points.
- a. The discussion on international comparability is almost nonexistent in the text: the paper would need to be explicit on this issue.
  - b. The text suggests that international comparable data have been used only for monitoring purposes, but not for policy design. This might be correct, but then there is another set of questions that need to be posed in order to understand why. This might have to do with the purpose of some of these tests which focus mainly on rankings. Ranking countries as the primary goal does not contribute to have scores that are "intuitively comprehensible" as properly suggested before.

- c. It is not clear why a 3Rs measurement endeavour should be called “PISA”. Actually, there is no need for such identification since PISA does not measure the 3Rs in general, and does not use the approach suggested in this paragraph.
- d. Why are we interested in counting words across languages? Why is this important for policy? This seems to be the result of asserting benchmarks as words per minute, rather than something that is inspired by evidence.
- e. The paragraph that starts with “The early-grade set of tests ought to be institutionalized...” is not clear. Does it mean that there should be an organisation that should coordinate from above existing regional initiatives? We believe that it would be important to foster collaboration among existing initiatives (and the UIS is currently working on that), build agreements and collaboratively explore venues for mutually benefiting from each other’s experiences and making the info comparable.

This whole section is very prescriptive and seems to forget that partner countries and organisations are autonomous and that autonomy needs to be respected. The different elements that are identified as topics for measurement should be mentioned as potential examples, not as the core tasks.

37. Pages 14-15. Item 4. It is not clear why the “technical content of all the training and workshops would be around the key 8 topics identified above”. This looks as claiming a role of controller that is not necessarily an attribute of the FTI-S. In addition to this, some modules already exist.

“Proposed approach”: “A form of certification could be sought and offered. It should have as much labour market value as possible.” It is not clear why training activities should be limited in this way.

“Expected deliverables”: Even though the timeline is not defined, the expected deliverables might be insufficient to meet the intended goals.

38. Page 15. Item 5. Last paragraph. It would be useful to have more details on the selection of “ideas” to be tested and the methodology to determine this.

### **IIEP Comments:**

IIEP welcomes the major policy shift which occurred in 2009 regarding the FTI’s approval procedures in order to ensure “that learning outcomes are placed at the core of the FTI agenda”. This resulted in FTI’s adoption of the following two reading skills indicators (<http://www.educationfasttrack.org/FTI-at-Work/learning-outcomes/>):

- Proportion of students who, after two years of schooling, demonstrate sufficient reading fluency and comprehension to “read to learn”.
- Proportion of students who are able to read with comprehension, according to their countries’ curricular goals, by the end of primary school.

The current FTI proposal on EFA FTI Global and Regional Activities (GRA) seems to focus more on the first indicator regarding the early grade reading fluency, rather than the second one about the reading comprehension at the upper primary level.

As rightly pointed out in the proposal, a “diagnostic” testing to identify early problems in individual pupils could be very valuable. However, we feel that this approach should be more school-based and placed in the hands of teachers, rather than system-based where the purpose would be developing national norms and cross-national comparisons.

Possible drawbacks for relying too much on the early-grade reading fluency for national benchmarking and international comparisons are as follows:

- It has been felt that testing at lower grade levels would tend to provide an assessment of the reading readiness skills acquired by pupils from their home environments, rather than an assessment of what school had added to their learning.

- Across developing countries, where the spread of the socio-economic measures is very large, cross-national comparisons of any reading performance measures at lower grade levels, which are mainly linked to home influences, may not be much meaningful.
- In many developing countries the first two to three years of schooling are conducted in the local language - and Grade 4 is the changeover year to the national language. We feel that testing at the early primary levels would be misleading due to the “turbulence” associated with the changeover from local to national languages.

On the other hand, IIEP’s experience through collaboration with SACMEQ confirms the value on the second reading skills indicator because: (i) skills in official national language of instruction are usually required for a successful transition to secondary schooling; and (ii) skills for “reading for meaning” of pupils have been identified as important competency when confronted with the kinds of passages of text that they would be challenged with at higher grade levels.

### **Proposed Activities for Potential Collaboration with UNESCO**

As stated above, the UNESCO Division for Basic to Higher Education and Learning (ED/BHL) is developing a comprehensive Quality Framework for systemic analysis, diagnosis, and monitoring of educational quality that goes beyond learning outcomes. The Framework takes into account all the factors that contribute effectively to the attainment of quality education and to learning effectiveness. The work that the FTI is embarking upon can be subsumed into this Framework. ED/BHL proposes that the UNESCO Framework be used to integrate the Learning Outcomes activity.

In view of UNESCO’s mandate as a convening and lead EFA agency and its functions as a clearing house and as a catalyst of international partnerships, ED/BHL proposes FTIs funding support and collaboration in the following areas:

#### **1. General Education Quality Diagnostic/Analysis and Monitoring Framework**

- a) **Convening of technical consultative forums:** ED/BHL will further convene a series of technical meetings with the pilot countries, to develop and pilot test the framework. The consultative process, which has already begun with a limited number of countries, is intended to be country-led and will assure responsiveness to diverse country contexts. This will be done in close collaboration with key partners and national experts.
- b) **Piloting:** Once the Framework is in an advanced draft stage, it will be piloted in participating countries on a volunteer basis. Key cost drivers at the pilot stage will be the reproduction of the draft framework and the actual piloting. The framework will be refined and finalized at this phase.
- c) **Production for the final output including a web-based final output:** At the end of the pilot-phase and the quality reviews, ED/BHL will produce the final output, which will be presented in a set of toolkits backed by resource materials. This will be translated in the UN official languages. A website dedicated to the framework will be developed to ensure accessibility. Key cost drivers will entail production in the 6 languages and dissemination.

## **2. Standard setting for higher education “community service” and strengthening the role of higher education institutions as national and regional hubs for providing technical support services.**

Higher Education institutions are usually not well integrated in the policy and technical dialogue of countries’ educational reforms, or in the decision-making process. More often than not, Higher Education institutions are represented or involved in such dialogue through individual experts. As key actors uniquely positioned for informing this dialogue, higher education institutions require having an established and sustained role in this process. Without their involvement in decision-making and in policy implementation, the outcomes of educational reforms could be limited. For these reasons, ED/BHL is proposing an analysis and identification of good practices that demonstrate how the institutionalized role of universities can ensuring perennial responsiveness of education policies to rapidly changing social contexts and how this can contribute to quality attainment in education. The good practices will be used as a platform for setting standards for higher education institutions, so as to eventually enable them to contribute to sustainable capacity at country level to support education reforms and manage change.

## **3. Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality**

ED/BHL will facilitate setting up a Consortium of regional networks specialized in learning assessment and monitoring of learning outcomes, for example PASEC, SACMEQ and LLECE. The purpose of this Consortium would be to bring together a core group of specialists in learning assessment to draw on their collective experiences in this field to identify and analyze constraints and propose the way forward to tackle the challenges of education quality today. The consortium would provide an interactive platform for exchange of practices, emerging research evidence, and lessons learnt in order to refine methodologies, to better inform the policy dialogue on these issues across regions and at global level, possibly by consolidating the different approaches to learning assessment. As such, the consortium would help strengthen joint technical cooperation at country and regional level. ED/BHL would work closely with IIEP, UIS, UNESCO/OREALC and other core partners. The proposed activity, will add tremendous value to the UNESCO Quality Framework, which recognizes the imminent role of assessment in diagnosing quality education and learning effectiveness.