

# Comments on Second GRA Consultation: Out of School Children

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It is clear that we are instructed to not comment on the background text and rather focus on the activities proposed. However, it seems that the activities proposed need to be in line with the problems previously identified in the background. As in any intervention, there should be, in principle, a clear link between the problem analysis and the activities that aim to provide solutions to the problems described. This is the rationale in which the following comments are based.

The analysis made by the Secretariat identifies three main gaps and some specific problems connected to each are mentioned. Nevertheless, in some cases one can conclude that the activity proposed, especially as far as the deliverables are concerned, do not necessarily tackle the problem described. Of course, some problems are beyond the scope of GRA and cannot be addressed exclusively through FTI. Nevertheless, considering the resources are limited, it seems that a more detailed problem-analysis could help define priorities and help partner countries make significant and sustainable progress. If we are to promote a results-based approach, GRA could set the example for developing partner countries.

## Data gaps

The data gap section of the document identifies the following difficulties or problems:

- difficulty estimating number of children out of school
- Insufficient consensus on definition of dropout
- Inadequacies of the EMIS and household surveys
- Problems/deficiencies of reporting systems
- poor quality of age data provided by administrative sources
- EMIS systems also often do not provide information on children who are being schooled outside the “regular” school system
- Household surveys are insufficient in determining children’s regular school attendance
- lack of birth certificates remains a major problem in many countries
- information collected through both administrative data and household surveys is insufficiently used for policy prioritization
- little is known about how countries use data at the local level to actively manage enrollment and attendance

So, in view of the above, one could summarize the problems roughly into estimation of population out of school, issues related to reporting systems on enrolment and attendance and quality of data available. Against this background, it seems there is a disconnect between the activities proposed and the deliverables, and that the former do not tackle the real causes of the problems analysed and do not provide a sustainable solution. The underlying causes to the problems described above need to be address if significant achievements are to be made.

## Data gaps proposed activities

<b>Proposed activity #1 - Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EFA FTI Partnership should ensure that all EFA FTI developing country partners can access and use improved measurement instruments and approaches to define and count out-of-school children, assess their characteristics, classify the reasons why they are out of school and help manage the situations at the local level, with specific attention to girls and children in fragile states.</li> </ul>
<b>Expected deliverables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model household survey questionnaire(s) and model improvements in EMIS forms.</li> <li>• Workshops to advocate for the use of these improved instruments.</li> <li>• A report on the results of field testing of instruments in 3-5 countries.</li> <li>• A set of instructions and how-to for the process going forward, that survey supervisors, field survey workers, EMIS officials, and others can refer to when administering new forms and approaches.</li> </ul>

Besides developing a new instrument, to be applied every 2 or 3 years, as envisaged, it could be interesting to carry out a series of benchmark studies on FTI countries. Such studies would help us understand better the causes for dropout and desultory attendance and would be the base for evidence-based policies. Also, I note with concern that the activity does not seem to have strengthening the capacity of national governments to collect and process data as one of its objectives. It is not sustainable, nor time and cost-effective, to fund such surveys every 2 or 3 years.

As far as the expected deliverables are concerned:

Is a model household survey to be applied indiscriminately by FTI countries what we are aiming for? Is the idea to apply the same survey everywhere, or will it be suited to the country's reality?

With regards to the idea of running field testing in 3-5 countries, one could wonder how these countries will be selected. Will a decision be made based on country's expression of interest? Will there be a regional balance? Will countries be chosen based on performance? Will fragile countries be part of the testing? What will be the use of the report? Is this model of running country-case studies and elaborating a comparative report useful? If FTI is trying to adopt a new approach on certain issues, maybe we should be more innovative and try to find alternative ways of working. Unless, of course, the decision to run 3-5 field tests and elaborate a report corresponds to a need identified by FTI partners. A debate on this kind of approach would be welcome.

Are workshops to advocate for the use of the, supposedly, better instruments a good investment? If we run thorough benchmark studies, accompanied by a long term strategy for advocacy and policy development, we could have better and more sustainable results. There is ample evidence that a workshop is not enough to change behaviour, and in fact, a workshop is more an activity than a deliverable. So, if rather than have, by the look of it, a team of consultants develop an improved instrument and go to a certain country to advocate for its use we actually helped countries develop the instrument and involve national governments from the beginning with the process, ensuring thus a sense of ownership of the instrument, we would not have to advocate for its use.

With regards to the broader definition of "school" and the attempt to include non-formal education, it seems to be a very delicate issue. It could even turn out to be contradictory, because on the one hand, the activities proposed are trying to reach a more precise estimation of the number of children out of school, while on the other hand trying to consider that non-formal education has the same impact, for statistical purpose, as enrolment in formal school. Should FTI partners really be trying to adopt a more flexible concept of school?

As far as the timeframe is concerned, assuming all goes as planned, by 2013 we would have model household surveys that countries would apply and process, probably, by the end of 2013, so that we are left with 2014 and 2015 to act on the results. This is why a well-planned benchmark survey could be a better investment in the long-run.

All in all, it seems that the activity proposed does not tackle some of the key problems linked to data, such as the school attendance reporting systems. In fact, considering the paper states RFPs will be result-oriented, a proper problem analysis should be carried out. If we consider that the problem is the lack of data, and base the intervention on providing that data, we are merely tackling the symptom. The question we should ask is why is it we do not have that data and the answer to that question will vary from country to country. A sustainable solution requires building capacity at the national level to collect, process and analyse information, ensuring that the school plays an active role in helping gather data that will, in the long run, be used to help improve the reality at the school community.

### Policy Gaps

The paper rightly points out the obstacles out of school children face and their complexity. It also draws attention to the important issue of inadequacy, or inexistence, of policies to tackle such obstacles. Notwithstanding that, it does not mention the crucial issue of monitoring and evaluation of implementation of policies, as well as the dissemination process, as often a national government has elaborated policies but a system to disseminate them and provide schools with the means to implement them is not in place. The paper seems to argue that policies fail because they are not based on reliable data. However, it takes more than having access to correct data for effective policies to be developed, implemented, monitored, evaluated and fine-tuned if required.

The following problems are identified:

- Lack of knowledge and data about the main determinants of out-of-school status, lack of demonstration projects, experience and effective strategies, or failure to apply existing knowledge to address out-of-school children in policy development.
- Lack of linkage between education policy and other policy areas such as health and poverty alleviation
- Not all countries have an evidence base for policy development that clarifies which constraints are most binding on their out-of-school children,
- Many countries do not have well-considered, cost-effective policies for addressing their needs
- Even when there are data and available knowledge, knowledge is not always applied
- Weak national policies on school health and nutrition

Problem	Activity proposed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of knowledge and data about the main determinants of out-of-school status, lack of demonstration projects, experience and effective strategies, or failure to apply existing knowledge to address out-of-school children in policy development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assessing whether countries have clear, well-articulated and cost-effective policies</li> <li>• assess Education Sector Plans' ability to address out-of-school issues from a policy planning point of view in cases where data is available</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of linkage between education policy and other policy areas such as health and poverty alleviation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training/support for government officials and LEGs to develop effective strategies for out-of-school children</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all countries have an evidence base for policy development that clarifies which constraints are most binding on their out-of-school children,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and documenting policies that work as well as policies that have been ineffective</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• many countries do not have well-considered, cost-effective policies for addressing their needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where there is no policy addressing out-of-school children, assessing whether this is due to lack of knowledge, lack of capacity to translate knowledge into policy change, lack of resources, etc.;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge is not always applied</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• weak national policies on school health and nutrition</li> </ul>	

The paper concludes that given the policy gap, work is needed on:

- 1) Characterizing or inventorying FTI countries according to whether they have clear, well-articulated, and cost-effective policies to prioritize the out-of-school problem according to its many causes;

How will we characterize any given governments' policy as being well articulated and cost-effective? Who will be the judges in the policy panel? It could be more "cost-effective" to facilitate a process of policy development based on sound problem analysis and broad and meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, so as to ensure a sense of ownership and accountability. Besides, as stated above, FTI countries need to go beyond merely having a policy. An effective system for monitoring implementation and providing feedback should be in place. Otherwise, sustainability of policies is at risk.

- 2) If there is not a policy, assessing whether it is due to:
  - a) lack of a stock of easy-to-access best practices of approaches from other countries
  - b) lack of accessing existing knowledge,
  - c) lack of political will
    - i) ineffective managerial know-how to implement policies (which would refer to "Management Gaps", below), and
    - ii) lack of budget (total or relative) and lack of budget targeting (e.g., no pro-poor allocations);

Is understanding the reasons why a policy does not exist a "cost-effective" enterprise? A benchmark exercise would determine which policies are in place, which are not and to what extent these are implemented, monitored and evaluated. Unless an adequate set of actions is envisaged to tackle the causes, it does not make much of a difference if a policy to promote access to education of children with disabilities does not exist because of budgetary constraints or because of ineffective managerial

know-how. The real problem is that those children’s needs are not being addressed and this should be the focus of FTI GRAs. We run the risk of running elaborate surveys and accumulating massive data that will be of limited use and relevance. This is matter of clear definition of priorities.

Helping FTI countries develop a culture of evidence-based policymaking is a welcome approach. The challenge for FTI is how to do so by engaging national government and relevant stakeholders in a meaningful way, rather than impose policies and approaches deemed to be those required. GIOSC recognizes that around 10 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa drop out of primary school every year and that half of all OSC in South and West Asia were previously enrolled but dropped out. The 2005 *Children out of School* report draws attention to the fact most children have been in school at some time. In Malawi, for instance, 91% have, but only 31% reach grade 5. National strategies and initiatives to better understand dropout and tackle its causes might yield more results and prove to be more sustainable in the long run than focusing on the out-of-school terminology debate.

The issue to take into account as RFPS are prepared is how to define priorities. The introduction states that “ if we do not act quickly, 56 million boys and girls will remain out of school in 2015”. It is precisely because time and resources are short that we need to plan our strategies and prioritize actions that correspond to the reality and the needs of the school community, and not what one assumes is the right thing to do. GRA need to help shorten the distance between the international theoretical framework that guides the education policy debate and the reality and needs at the national level.

<b>Proposed activity #2: Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EFA FTI Partnership should ensure that all EFA FTI developing country partners are enabled to develop effective policies to bring out-of-school children into school, with specific attention to girls and fragile states.</li> </ul>
<b>Expected Deliverables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sample of Education Sector Plans (ESPs) assessed for their capacity to address and prioritize key out of school issues – Should include country policy statements as part of the FTI endorsed Education Sector Plans;</li> <li>• Identification of issue-country combinations where the policy gap and not the data gap is the main problem;</li> <li>• Successful support to 3-5 countries in ESP development or improvement to improve inclusion within the context of an existing ESP, recognizing that this may require a more detailed action plan than was originally sketched in the ESP;</li> <li>• Gathering of experiences into source-book, a network of expertise and a platform for learning from effective policy responses;</li> <li>• Experience sharing workshops via experts and peer networks.</li> </ul>

As far as the deliverables are concerned, there is no doubt that having a clear snapshot of the education policies, their content and implementation in FTI countries is crucial for the efficiency of future interventions. Nevertheless, as stated above, investing time and resources in understanding why there are no policies on, say, promoting access of children with special needs seems less of a priority. In the absence of a policy, emphasis should be placed on helping develop it, rather than carry out a research or survey to find out why it is not there.

As for the development of policy statements, although a good idea in principle, most national education plans elaborated by FTI countries include and mention explicitly measures to promote education for children currently out of school. We run the risk of investing limited resources on yet another declaration that will not be backed by budgetary allocations and whose implementation will be, consequently, undermined.

With reference to the 3-5 countries, the comments made above on this choice of approach are reiterated. One could also wonder whether those will be the same 3-5 countries chosen above, for instance. In any event, it seems we could end up promoting actions in, say, some 10% of FTI developing country partners. If rather than take such an approach LEGs are invited to bring these issues onboard when applications for funds are made, there could be more impact.

Is the gathering of experience in a source book cost-effective? Is there going to be a strategic plan for its use, beyond its formal presentation in a one-shot workshop for ministry officials? Have partner countries expressed interest in such a material and in a network of expertise? What matters is that deliverables are indeed useful, and not just a good idea in principle.

### **Management and Implementation Gaps**

Some of the management or implementation gaps are not really gaps, or at least, not the kind GRAs can or should address. For instance, problems with school works supervision are not widespread and issues with contractors occur in any sector and are by no means a major obstacle to achieving EFA. One could argue that lack of contractual ability to deal with builders, lack of cement and other problems are way beyond the scope of GRAs and do not seem to be the kind of issue FTI funds should tackle as a priority. Unless there is data to back this statement, which indicates this is a recurring problem in FTI developing country partners. Or do we expect to develop a protocol or set of procedures to ensure a given builder finishes a school within the period agreed in a contract?

The issue of management of “non-attendance and non-enrolment” is a data, policy and management gap. Perhaps the “management gap” could be left aside as, in principle, an effective policy contains in itself mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, by mentioning the attendance of children with special needs and district and school-level staff lack of ability for making simple judgements as to how to address enrolment and attendance of such children, the paper makes a rather controversial and patronizing statement. Unless there is evidence to back up such an opinion, that school staff is unable to make simple judgements, it might be worth reconsidering its inclusion in the text.

To address the management and implementation gaps, activities may be needed which address practical managerial gaps in

- (a) Input-related barriers such as availability of teachers, school construction, input supplies, nutritional supplementation,
- (b) Cost and poverty factors such as conditional cash transfers and poverty-targeted allocations,
- (c) The direct management of enrolment and attendance in cases where other fundamental causes are not operational. This latter issue includes the management of enrolment and attendance of any population with special needs such as nomadic populations, children with disabilities, etc.

It seems that the managerial gaps mentioned have had significant attention from multilateral agencies.

If we look at the seven FTI countries with the highest numbers of children out of school, we will see that the World Bank is financing interventions to tackle these difficulties.

For example, in Ethiopia, a project was recently approved to enhance to public financial management and procurement capacity. It includes a component to support the strengthening of existing national and sectoral M&E systems and M&E assessments to be implemented by lead Government agencies. In Niger, a project is being implemented to strengthen capacity of the Ministry of Education (MoE), and decentralized entities. In Burkina Faso, the Bank is strengthening the education sector’s financial sustainability and enhancing the financial management, budgeting, procurement, monitoring, evaluation and donor coordination of the Basic Education Ministry. In a nutshell, unless GRA takes on an innovative approach, it seems that the management gaps is sufficiently addressed and other priorities could be set.

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Activity proposed</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management gaps can be a barrier to the development of strategies for addressing out-of-school children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification and sharing of best practices to address management issues</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education officials responsible for the implementation of policy lack information and knowledge on the policy itself , and do not have clarity on roles and responsibilities for implementing it.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education ministries sometimes lack the capacity to use available data and knowledge to develop and cost relevant strategies for bringing out-of-school children into the system</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education systems generally lack adequate mechanisms to identify children at risk of dropping out or to identify conditions that affect non-enrollment and non-attendance</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Countries experience capacity gaps in the management of school construction, including the management of planning, costs, bidding processes, works supervision and quality control</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor contracting with and supervision of publishers and printers, inability to deal with non-competitive tendencies, ineffective distribution systems</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaps in teacher management have an adverse effect on time-on-task and education quality.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education officials are not necessarily used to adapting education provision to specific needs, identifying and setting up</li> </ul>	

support strategies, mobilizing community participation, etc	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of practical know-how in the design and management of financial instruments ( refers to cash support for school attendance)</li> </ul>	

The strategy proposed consists, basically, of carrying out research to identify good practices in addressing “key out-of-school limitations” and share the results with government officials and other policy makers. This approach has been tried before and the results are known. One could be concerned that the results of this research are limited and not applicable in other countries. The “follow the best practices approach” is often received with little enthusiasm by government officials, who have been lectured for years on what they should be doing, how and where.

If instead we favour a different approach, one that actively involves countries in reviewing their current policies, assessing their relevance and implementation with a view to fine-tuning where necessary and developing new policies to tackle areas that are currently neglected, we would not only build capacity at the national level but ensure a sense of ownership of the policy review process and engage relevant stakeholders in a meaningful way. It could produce more results in the long run than hiring a team of consultants to carry out research and lecture on the results.

Also, rather than just focus on identifying “best practices”, maybe some efforts could be made to help promote policy dialogue at the national level and develop policies and measures to tackle , for example, the dropout issue, which is mentioned throughout the document as a problem, but one fails to see it properly tackled in the activities proposed. One other concern one could raise is that , despite attempts to obtain detailed information, the composition of LEGs is mostly unknown and the Secretariat has for some time struggled with this lack of information. This is mentioned because, if we are to build capacity of LEGS, than one could make sure LEGS are actually in place and that, ideally, civil society and teaching profession are invited, as there seems to be scarce efforts from governments to promote their active participation in LEGS.

## El interest in the activities

El expresses its interest in being involved in the following activities:

<b>Data gaps</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Debate on definition of out-of-school children and conceptualizing of the meaning of enrolment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of techniques to measure of out of school children</li> </ul>

<b>Policy Gaps</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment of ESPs</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training/support for government officials and LEGs to develop effective strategies for out-of-school children</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification and documentation of policies</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment of causes for lack of policies</li></ul>
<b>Management gaps</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification and sharing of best practices to address management issues</li></ul>