

Comments on the thematic papers for the EFA FTI Global and Regional Activities (GRA)

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General Comments (for the three thematic papers):

The GRA Program is a part of EFA-FTI and intends to contribute to the enhancement of capacity of partner countries for achieving their education goals in coordination with the other activities under EFA-FTI Partnership. In reviewing the papers in this context, rationalization on why the proposed activities in the papers are needed and how they will contribute to the achievement of education goals of partner countries seems weak or missing partly due to the fact that there is no analysis / review provided in the paper on the past experiences accumulated under the EFA-FTI partnership in each of the thematic areas (good practices and lessons learned in the development, implementation and monitoring of ESPs.)

In this regard, analysis on the past experiences in ESP development among partner countries, its implementation and its progress focusing on the issues and challenges related to each of the thematic areas needs be conducted and appropriately reflected in the background included in each paper. In addition, the objective and targeted countries by each activity should be clearly defined and stated in order to assess the validity of the activities to be supported by GRA, and later to facilitate monitoring and evaluation. With the current contents, formats and presentation, justification of each activity to be considered as EFA-FTI prioritized activities is generally weak and uncertain.

Given the limited financial resources available for GRA (as well as whole EFA-FTI support), it is strongly recommended that activities to be proposed under the Program should be highly selective, targeted and cost effective (against the expected impact) based on a thorough analysis on the previous and on-going experiences of partner countries. This work should be facilitated in coordination with the Country Support Team of FTI Secretariat. And furthermore, it should be avoided that the Program be utilized for merely producing another set of tools and modules in the top-down and research oriented manner, which are to be applied only for the piloting without ensuring that the activities or their outputs shall be fully integrated into the existing systems of the partner countries. The Program should ensure, when finalizing each of the thematic papers, that the proposed activities fully support the quality implementation of ESP on the ground, and that equity as well as quality

issues shall be appropriately addressed in not only the preparation but also the implementation of ESPs, taking into the account the previous experiences among the partner countries. In this regard, the three thematic areas are deeply interrelated thus should not be treated in a parallel manner. In this respect, it is recommended that the three thematic papers should be consolidated and better tuned so that the reader can easily follow the logic, the urgency of the issues, and the relevancy of the activities to be supported under GRA as EFA-FTI task.

The following are some specific comments on thematic papers for “learning outcomes” and “out of school children”:

1. Learning outcomes

First of all, implementation or capacity gaps found at the school level need to be well captured in the paper in order to reach the slow learners and support them to be better benefit from schooling. Even if well-developed tools including methods or materials are provided to local stakeholders including teachers, headmasters and inspectors for improving the class room teaching learning practices, in often cases they do not make the most out of the tools because such tools were just distributed without proper orientation, on-site facilitation, or continued follow-ups to ensure their effective use in achieving the intended purposes. It is pointed out in the page 14 that “.every one of the technical issues listed above, need to be disseminated in appropriate venue”, however, the issue is usually beyond the “appropriate venue” for dissemination. The constant follow-ups on the ground for developing capacity as well as fostering ownership of key stakeholders are most critical, thus appropriate integration of the tools into existing mechanisms and systems is a key for the effective implementation and its sustainability. In this regard, how to ensure the engagement of the key stakeholders on the ground needs to be addressed when developing or introducing new tools or materials to be applied at the local level.

In the paper there are too many elements included as technical topics relating to “reading in the early grades”, starting from indicators, research based instruction in early grades, use of local languages in the instruction of basic skills, effective early- childhood education methodology, teacher training and supervision. It gives a reader an impression that the focus and priority become unclear as one reads through the document, and the concrete results expected out of this whole process are not well specified. What EFA-FTI partnership expects from this series of activities needs to be presented in a more clarified

manner, and the tangible changes to be brought by the activities should be well defined. As additional information for making possible refinements to the document, some effective and sustainable interventions were shared for improving quality of education in achieving MDGs in the MDG F/U meeting took place in Tokyo on 2 June (last week). Education Policy and Strategy Simulation model developed by UNICEF/UNDP, General Education Quality Analysis/Diagnosis and Monitoring Framework (UNESCO), Literacy Boost by Save the Children, Learner-centered Teaching Packages in Math and Science (Bangladesh/JICA), Lesson Study as an approach for continuous professional development (Indonesia and others /JICA), Training of Trainers on Evaluation using the Competency Based Approach (Mali/UNESCO) are some examples of good practices shared in the meeting. It might be worth undertaking further analysis on selected experiences from these examples for knowledge sharing among partner countries with similar issues for their possible adaptation, taking into account the economic, socio-cultural and political environment of respective country. (A list of good practices is being prepared by MOFA, and will be shared shortly.)

2. Out of school children

As stated in the introduction, “the EFA FTI partnership’s goal is to ensure barriers for out of school children are lifted so that every child has an opportunity to enroll and succeed in school”. The concept paper identifies three gaps (data, policy, and management) to be tackled for achieving the said goal and proposes activities to fill those gaps.

Firstly, the proposed activity for data gap, which is “development and use of the new measurement instruments to collect comprehensive data on out-of-school children” does not seem priority for GRA considering that the overall EFA fund is scarce thus activities to be conducted in GRA need to be highly selective and prioritized in relation to achieving the said goals. There are partners who are strong in this field and already the related initiative has been launched. Although it is mentioned that the activities shall be “partnering or supporting existing partnership”, the role to be played by GRA in this context is not very clear and convincing.

The issues of out of school children are diverse and complex, and thus they need to be identified and treated at local level with different stakeholders. In this respect, it is indispensable that the school/ school managers develop the capacity to collect and control the data, and mobilize different stakeholders and resources to reach the unreached and to attract the children to school for learning. Therefore, the appropriate data collection and control is required to be integrated into the school planning process so that “problem analysis” and “solution finding” can be appropriately conducted in the participatory manner

based on the collected data. In this respect, strengthening the mechanism of bottom-up school data collection, confirmation and analysis needs to be emphasized to fill the data/information gap for reaching the out of school children rather than the top-down research oriented approach. It should be noted that there are many cases that even the sound policies are not producing the intended results on the ground if the local stakeholders are not well sensitized and engaged in the process due to the top-down input-driven implementation. The bottom-up approach should be appropriately emphasized in such cases starting from the data collection and analysis.

In terms of the proposed activity for "Policy", the work seems to belong to the local education group rather than GRA. It might be possible that GRA support to identify few good examples of countries with sound ESP in terms of identification and addressing policy gaps with respect to out of school children, and its progress in reducing them. Such experiences and tips for success can be shared in a workshop with the selected FTI countries with relatively large number of out of school children.

As for the proposed activity in Management for addressing the key out of school issues, there are different types of good practices in such areas including school management with community participation, effective multi-sectoral school activities, etc. which were also shared in the recent MDG F/U meeting. In principal, it is meaningful to analyze the already functioning good practices in different countries and tips behind the success, and widely share such cases among partner countries. However, it is recommended that pilot activities should be financed under the ESP implementation, not under the GRA as proposed in the paper. In this way, alignment of GRA activities (analysis on good practices and their dissemination) and improvement of ESP development and implementation (support for ESP implementation- former CF) shall be facilitated, and sustainability after the GRA activities shall be ensured by the ESP implementation.