

# Learning for All

Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills  
to Promote Development



World Bank Group  
Education Strategy 2020  
Executive Summary

The Executive Summary accompanies the complete World Bank Group Education Strategy 2020, Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development that can be accessed at [www.worldbank.org/educationstrategy2020](http://www.worldbank.org/educationstrategy2020).

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# FOREWORD

We are living through a period of extraordinary change. The stunning rise of the middle-income countries, led by China, India, and Brazil, has intensified the desire of many nations to increase their competitiveness by building more highly skilled workforces. Technological advances are changing job profiles and skills, while offering possibilities for accelerated learning. Persistently high levels of unemployment, especially among youth, have highlighted the failure of education systems to prepare young people with the right skills for the job market, and have fueled calls for greater opportunity and accountability.

Expanding and improving education are key to adapting to change and confronting these challenges. Simply put, investments in quality education lead to more rapid and sustainable economic growth and development. Educated individuals are more employable, able to earn higher wages, cope better with economic shocks, and produce healthier children. But although developing countries have made great strides over the past decade toward the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and gender equity, an abundance of evidence shows that many children and youth in developing countries leave school without having learned much at all.

**This is why our Education Strategy 2020 sets the goal of achieving Learning for All.** Learning for All means ensuring that all children and youth – not just the most privileged or the smartest - not only can go to school but also acquire the knowledge and skills they need to lead healthy, productive lives and secure meaningful employment. The three pillars of our strategy are: **Invest early. Invest smartly. Invest for all.** To learn more, read on.

This strategy reflects the best insights and knowledge of what works in education, gleaned from our worldwide consultations with governments, teachers, students, parents, civil society, and development partners in over 100 countries. We are grateful to all of the participants who came together to shape this strategy with their energy, ideas, and experiences. In a real sense, this is their strategy. We look forward to working with them to achieve Learning for All.

Tamar Manuelyan Atinc  
Vice President, Human Development Network  
The World Bank

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Education is fundamental to development and growth.** Access to education, which is a basic human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is also a strategic development investment. The human mind makes possible all other development achievements, from health advances and agricultural innovation to infrastructure construction and private sector growth. For developing countries to reap these benefits fully—both by learning from the stock of global ideas and through innovation—they need to unleash the potential of the human mind. And there is no better tool for doing so than education.

**The Education Sector Strategy 2020 lays out the World Bank Group’s agenda for achieving “Learning for All” in the developing world over the next decade.** The overarching goal is not just schooling, but learning. Getting millions more children into school has been a great achievement. The World Bank Group is committed to building on this progress and stepping up its support to help all countries achieve Education for All (EFA) and the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The driver of development will, however, ultimately be what individuals *learn*, both in and out of school, from preschool through the labor market. The Bank’s new 10-year strategy seeks to achieve this broader “Learning for All” objective by promoting country-level reforms of education systems and building a global knowledge base powerful enough to guide those reforms.

## Why A New Strategy?

**The Bank Group has made substantial contributions to educational development around the world over the past 49 years.** Since launching a project to build secondary schools in Tunisia in 1962, the Bank has invested \$69 billion globally in education via more than 1,500 projects. The Bank’s financial support for education has risen over the decade since the MDGs were established, surging to more than \$5 billion in 2010. Since 2001, when the International Finance Corporation (IFC) started to focus on the education sector, it has invested \$500 million in 46 private education projects.

The number of out-of-school children of primary school age fell from 106 million in 1999 to 68 million in 2008.

**This period has seen great educational advances, particularly in enrolling children in school and keeping them there, and in improving gender equality.**

Compared to a decade ago, far fewer children in developing countries are now out of school, thanks to more effective education and development policies and sustained national investments. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age fell from 106 million in 1999 to 68 million in 2008. Even in the poorest countries, average enrollment rates at the primary level have surged above 80 percent and completion rates, above 60 percent. And between 1991 and 2007, the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education in the developing world improved from 84 to 96 percent, with even larger gains in the Middle East and North Africa and in South Asia. Governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), communities, and private enterprises have contributed to this progress by building more schools and classrooms and recruiting teachers at unprecedented levels. The World Bank Group has supported these efforts—not only with financing and technical assistance, but also with ideas.

Gains in access to education have turned attention to the challenge of improving education quality and accelerating learning.

**But that success has bred new challenges at a time when conditions in the world have changed.** With tens of millions of children still out of school and substantial gender gaps remaining, efforts to achieve the education MDGs must continue. Gains in access have also turned attention to the challenge of improving the quality of education and accelerating learning. In addition, the global environment for education is changing. One set of changes is demographic: lower fertility rates are shifting population profiles from the very young populations typical of many low-income countries to “youth bulges” more typical of middle-income countries, increasingly concentrated in urban areas. At the same time, the stunning rise of new middle-income countries has intensified the desire of many nations to increase their competitiveness by building more skilled and agile workforces. Another set of changes is technological: incredible advances in information and communications technology (ICT) and other technologies are changing job profiles and skills demanded by labor markets, while also offering possibilities for accelerated learning and improved management of education systems.

**These developments call for a new World Bank Group education strategy for the next decade.** To be sure, the Bank Group has not stood still since it adopted its last strategy in 2000. It has moved closer to client countries by decentralizing its operations, with 40 percent of staff now in country offices. It has improved its results measurement and orientation, and also invested in better evaluation

of program impacts, with the education sector helping to lead the way. It has also innovated financially through greater use of sectorwide financing, pooled funding, performance-based instruments, and other approaches. And it recognized the growing role of the private sector in education by creating a health and education department at IFC. This new education strategy aims to build on these changes by setting out a new objective, together with strategic directions and instruments for implementing them. This education strategy supports and implements key Bank Group priorities—targeting the poor and vulnerable, creating opportunities for growth, promoting global collective action, and strengthening governance—laid out in its recent post-crisis directions strategy.

## **Objective: Learning For All, Beyond Schooling**

**The new strategy focuses on learning for a simple reason: growth, development, and poverty reduction depend on the knowledge and skills that people acquire, not the number of years that they sit in a classroom.** At the individual level, while a diploma may open doors to employment, it is a worker's skills that determine his or her productivity and ability to adapt to new technologies and opportunities. Knowledge and skills also contribute to an individual's ability to have a healthy and educated family and engage in civic life. At the societal level, recent research shows that the level of skills in a workforce—as measured by performance on international student assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)—predicts economic growth rates far better than do average schooling levels. For example, an increase of one standard deviation in student reading and math scores (roughly equivalent to improving a country's performance ranking from the median to the top 15 percent) is associated with a very large increase of 2 percentage points in annual GDP per capita growth.

**Learning levels that have been measured in many developing countries are alarmingly low, especially among disadvantaged populations.** Of course, even in poor learning environments, most students acquire some skills from school. But too often these skills are rudimentary at best. In some countries, recent studies show that a quarter to a half of youth who have graduated from primary school cannot read a single sentence. International student assessments also reveal wide knowledge gaps between most developing countries and members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Despite the impressive performance of Shanghai-China in the recently released PISA 2009 results, the scores of almost every other low- and middle-income country or region were in the bottom half of results, with many lagging far behind the OECD average.

**Learning needs to be encouraged early and continuously, both within and outside of the formal schooling system.** The emerging science of brain development shows that to develop properly, a child's growing brain needs nurturing long before formal schooling starts at age 6 or 7. Investments in prenatal health and early childhood development programs that include education and health are essential to realize this potential. In the primary years, quality teaching is critical for giving students the foundational literacy and numeracy on which lifelong learning depends. Adolescence is another fertile period for learning, but also a time when many students leave school to marry (especially in the case of girls) or to work full-time. Second-chance and nonformal learning opportunities are thus essential to ensure that all youth can acquire skills for the labor market.

**The Learning for All strategy promotes the equity goals that underlie the education MDGs.** In adopting the objective of learning for all, the new strategy elevates the education MDGs by linking them to the universally shared objective of accelerating learning. Major challenges of access remain for disadvantaged populations (especially girls and women) at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, with demand for the latter two levels of education having grown sharply as primary completion has increased. Without confronting these challenges, it will be impossible to achieve the objective of learning for all. Children and youth cannot develop the skills and values that they need without the foundational education provided by schools. Indeed, the latest (2009) PISA results reinforce the lesson that the countries that are most successful overall in promoting learning are those with the narrowest gaps in learning achievement among students.

**The bottom line of the Bank Group's education strategy is: Invest early. Invest smartly. Invest for all.** First, foundational skills acquired early in childhood make possible a lifetime of learning; hence the traditional view of education as starting in primary school takes up the challenge too late. Second, getting value for the education dollar requires smart investments—that is, investments that have proven to contribute to learning. Quality needs to be the focus of education investments, with learning gains as a key metric of quality. Third, learning for all means ensuring that *all* students, not just the most privileged or gifted, acquire

Learning for All means ensuring that all students, not just the most privileged, acquire the knowledge and skills they need to live happy, productive lives.



the knowledge and skills that they need. This goal will require lowering the barriers that keep girls, people with disabilities, and ethnolinguistic minorities from attaining as much education as other population groups.

**To achieve learning for all, the World Bank Group will channel its efforts in education in two strategic directions: reforming education systems at the country level and building a high-quality knowledge base for education reforms at the global level.**

## System Reform, Beyond Inputs

**At the country level, the Bank Group will focus on supporting reforms of education systems.** The term “education system” typically refers to the public schools, universities, and training programs that provide education services. In this strategy, “education system” includes the full range of learning opportunities available in a country, whether they are provided or financed by the public or private sector (including religious, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations). It includes formal and nonformal programs, plus the full range of beneficiaries and stakeholders in these programs—teachers, trainers, administrators, employees, students and their families, and employers. It also includes the rules, policies, and accountability mechanisms that bind an education system together, as well as the resources and financing mechanisms that sustain it. This more inclusive concept of the education system allows the Bank Group and its partner countries to seize opportunities and address barriers that lie outside the bounds of the system as it is traditionally defined.

### **Improving education systems means moving beyond simply providing inputs.**

There is no question that providing adequate levels of schooling inputs—whether these are school buildings, trained teachers, or textbooks—is crucial to a nation’s educational progress. Indeed, the increase in inputs in recent years has made it possible to enroll millions more children in school; this effort must continue wherever levels of inputs remain inadequate. But improving systems also requires ensuring that inputs are used more effectively to accelerate learning. While past strategies have recognized this goal, the new strategy gives it more emphasis, setting it in a context of education system assessment and reform.

**The education system approach of the new strategy focuses on increasing accountability and results as a complement to providing inputs.** Strengthening

Recent research shows that the level of skills in a workforce predicts economic growth rates far better than do average schooling levels.

education systems means aligning their governance, management of schools and teachers, financing rules, and incentive mechanisms with the goal of learning for all. This entails reforming relationships of accountability among the various actors and participants in an education system so that these relationships are clear, consistent with functions, measured, monitored, and supported. It also means establishing a clear feedback cycle between financing (including international aid) and results. Because failures of governance and accountability typically have their severest effects on schools serving disadvantaged groups, this system approach promotes educational equity as well as efficiency.

**Operationally, the Bank will increasingly focus its financial and technical aid on system reforms that promote learning outcomes.** To achieve this, the Bank will focus on helping partner countries build the national capacity to govern and manage education systems, implement quality and equity standards, measure system performance against national education goals, and support evidence-based policy making and innovations. While this agenda sounds challenging, the system approach does not require reforming all policy domains at once. Detailed system analysis and investment in knowledge and data will allow the Bank and policymakers to “analyze globally and act locally”—that is, to assess the quality and effectiveness of multiple policy domains, but focus action on the areas where improvements can have the highest payoff in terms of schooling and learning outcomes. Internally, the Bank Group will work to improve project outcomes by strengthening the results framework for projects, improving portfolio monitoring, and selecting the right operational instruments.

## Building The Knowledge Base

**At the regional and global level, the Bank will help develop a high-quality knowledge base on education reform.** Analytical work, practical evidence, and know-how related to education programs and policies are critical to improving the performance of education systems around the world. By investing in system assessments, impact evaluations, and assessments of learning and skills, the Bank will help its partner countries answer the key questions that shape educational reform: Where are the strengths of our system? Where are the weaknesses? What interventions have proven most effective in addressing them? Are learning opportunities reaching the most disadvantaged groups? What are the key roles of public and private sector in service delivery? Are children and youth acquiring the knowledge and skills that they need?

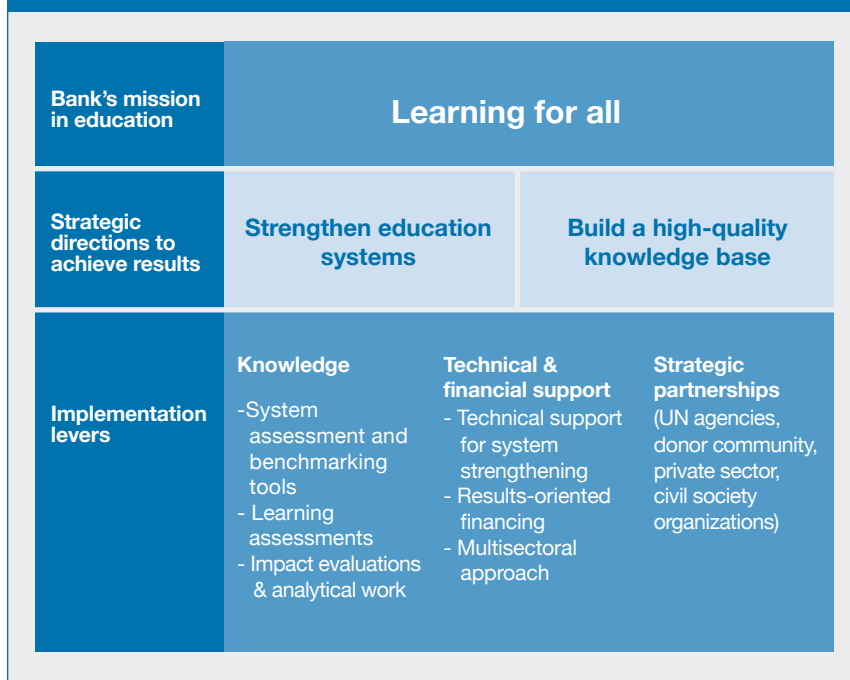
The education system approach focuses on promoting accountability and improving results.

**The Bank is developing new knowledge approaches to help guide education reform.** New tools for system assessment and benchmarking (“system tools”) will provide detailed analysis of country capacities in a wide array of education policy domains, from early childhood development (ECD), student assessment, and teacher policy to equity and inclusion, tertiary education, and skills development, among others. In each policy domain, the system tools will analyze the “missing middle” of intermediate outcomes, illuminating the part of the results chain that lies between inputs and learning outcomes. This vital information will allow policymakers and civil society organizations to make better-informed decisions about education reforms and interventions by determining where the results chain is breaking down. And by benchmarking progress against international best practices, the tool will highlight areas of strength and weakness as well as identify successful reformers whose experience can inform education policy and practices in other countries.

**Better knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of particular education systems will enable the Bank Group to respond more effectively to the needs of its partner countries.** Countries at different levels of educational development face different challenges, and priorities for assistance and knowledge sharing should vary accordingly. The new strategy therefore supplements the Bank Group’s usual regional groupings with developmental groupings based on whether a country is middle-income, low-income, or fragile, and sets out distinct priorities for each of these groups. For example, in middle-income countries, where a higher proportion of available jobs is likely to require higher-level skills, one priority is to improve quality assurance and financing for tertiary education and for workforce development. In many low-income countries and fragile states, striving to reach the MDGs remains a key priority.

**Careful analysis of each country’s level of educational development, in addition to its overall development, allows for sharper and more operationally useful differentiation.** Some countries achieve much higher levels of educational performance, in terms of system operation as well as outcomes, than would be expected based on their incomes. Detailed and internationally comparable information about education systems helps identify these strong performers in specific areas—such as teacher professional development, student assessment, or university accreditation—while also flagging weaknesses in other areas. In addition to helping the Bank Group prioritize its assistance, this system information will facilitate more effective South-South learning, by enabling countries facing specific educational challenges to learn from the stronger performers.

**Figure 1 | World Bank Strategic Priorities in Education 2020**



## From Strategy To Action

To implement the new strategy, the World Bank Group will focus on three areas: **knowledge generation and exchange, technical and financial support, and strategic partnerships** (see figure 1). To generate knowledge about education reforms and interventions, the Bank will provide: *system assessment and benchmarking tools, along with data*, to assess the capacity of an education system to improve learning outcomes; *assessments of student learning and achievement* that cover the basic competencies of reading and numeracy, as well as other skills, including critical thinking, problem solving, and team skills; and *impact evaluations and other analytical work* that can inform policies and interventions, together with *knowledge exchange* and debate that facilitate learning across partner countries and organizations.

**Knowledge generation and exchange is an essential tool for increasing the effectiveness of all spending in a country's education sector, not just financing from the Bank Group.** The Bank will use this knowledge to guide technical and financial support for countries, including: *technical and operational support for system strengthening*, prioritized according to its expected contribution

to strengthening a country's education system and advancing learning goals; *results-oriented financing*; and a *multisectoral approach* to educational development that provides the right incentives, tools, and skills for staff to work across all sectors that influence education outcomes. Improving education outcomes depends heavily on links with the health and social protection sectors: these sectors influence whether students are healthy enough to learn well, whether the system offers families a strong enough safety net to protect education in times of crisis, and whether schooling reflects adequately the demand for skills in the labor market. Within the Bank Group, the World Bank and IFC will work together to improve knowledge about the private sector's role in education and to help countries create policy environments and regulatory structures that align the private sector's efforts with national education goals. Finally, the Bank will implement this strategy through *strategic partnerships* at both the international and country levels to improve education systems. It remains committed to supporting and strengthening the global partnership EFA Fast Track Initiative, which aims to help low-income countries achieve the education MDGs.

**To measure the success of the strategy, the Bank Group will use a number of performance, outcome, and impact indicators.** Given that accountability is a major emphasis of the system approach to education, the Bank is committed to tracking the effectiveness of its own strategy. The indicators (see table 1) that it will use include: *performance indicators* for areas over which the Bank has direct control; *outcome indicators* for areas in which progress requires the efforts of both partner countries and the Bank; and *impact indicators*, which will monitor progress toward the ultimate goals of the education strategy.

**Achieving Learning for All will be challenging, but it is the right agenda for the next decade.** While countries can achieve rapid changes in enrollment rates from one school year to the next, it is much harder to make significant gains in learning outcomes. Learning gains typically require structural and behavioral shifts made possible by institutional changes, which the new strategy will support. It is not enough to get the technical details right; reforms also require navigating the twin challenges of constraints on a nation's implementation capacity and its political economy. Reforms require buy-in from a large group of stakeholders, with teachers playing a special role. Progress on the outcome and impact indicators listed in table 1 will therefore hinge on countries instituting real reforms and having the political will to follow through. The Bank Group's assistance will need to take these constraints into account, with support tailored to country circumstances and realistic targets set for learning outcomes. Yet all this effort will be worth it: when children and young people learn, lives improve and nations prosper.

The bottom line  
of the Bank Group's  
new education  
strategy: Invest  
early. Invest smartly.  
Invest for all.

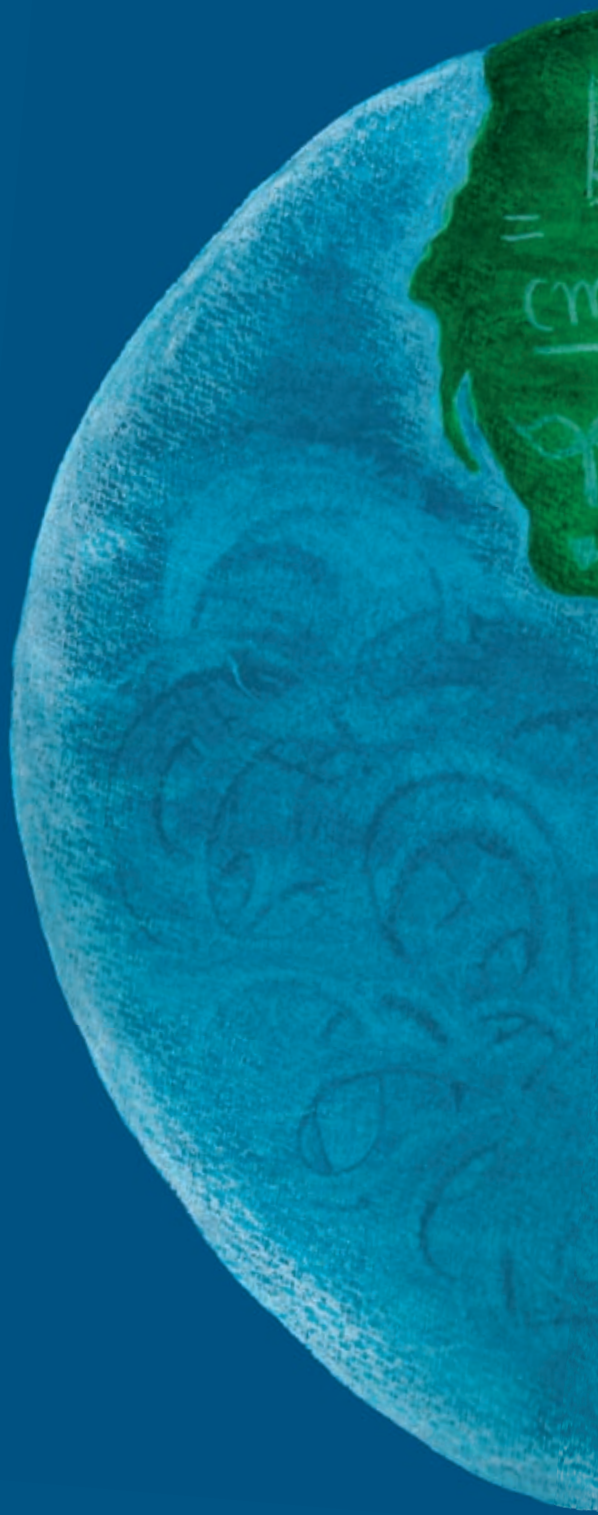
**Table 1 | Performance, Outcome, and Impact Indicators for the 2020 Education Strategy**

Performance Indicators	Outcome Indicators	Impact Indicators
<p><i>Changes in Bank Group actions to support countries</i></p> <p><b>1. Knowledge development to strengthen country education systems</b></p> <p>a) Number of education system tools developed and launched <sup>a</sup></p> <p>b) % of Bank knowledge products that use system tools in the analysis</p> <p>c) % of knowledge products that use learning outcomes in analyses of basic education</p> <p><b>2. Organizational development to strengthen country education systems</b></p> <p>a) % of Education Sector staff who have completed a competency program on the education system approach and tools and on Monitoring &amp; Evaluation (M&amp;E) methods</p> <p><b>3. Technical and financial support to strengthen country education systems</b></p> <p>a) % of education projects or programs that have learning- or skills-related key performance indicators (KPI)</p> <p>b) % of education projects or programs that use education system tools in their design and/or their M&amp;E approach</p> <p>c) % of education projects or programs that have a satisfactory M&amp;E in their design and implementation</p> <p>d) % of countries furthest from reaching the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have received increased support (lending and non-lending) from the Bank Group</p> <p>e) % of education projects or programs that finance outputs/outcomes</p>	<p><i>Changes in policy and programs of countries receiving Bank Group support</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. % of (i) middle-income countries, (ii) low-income countries, (iii) fragile or conflict-affected states, (iv) Fast Track Initiative (FTI)-endorsed countries that have applied system tools and have collected and used system data</li> <li>2. % of countries that have applied learning or skills (national or international) assessments <sup>b</sup></li> <li>3. % of countries whose systems have improved in at least one policy domain as measured by the system assessment tools</li> <li>4. % of countries furthest from reaching the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have taken new steps since 2010 to addressing the obstacles to attaining those goals</li> </ol>	<p><i>Ultimate goals monitored in countries receiving Bank Group support</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. % of countries (or beneficiaries in countries) with increases in measured learning or skills since 2010 (or since the earliest available baseline)</li> <li>2. % of countries that have reduced schooling or learning gaps for disadvantaged populations (e.g., income groups, gender, ethnolinguistic groups, disability) since 2010 <sup>c</sup></li> <li>3. % of countries furthest from reaching the education MDG in 2010 that progressed towards their attainment since 2010</li> <li>4. % of countries with gains in the skills level of their labor forces since 2010</li> </ol>

Note: a. The World Bank is developing education system tools under the System Assessment and benchmarking for Education Results (SABER) Program. One system tool, "Teacher Policies," has been launched as a prototype, together with the publication of the strategy. Other system tools to be launched during the first year of the strategy include "Student Assessment," "Early Childhood Development," and "Workforce Development." The online SABER database will be maintained by the World Bank on its externally accessible Education Web site.

b. Assessment application conducted on a regular basis and in a sustainable manner.

c. Beginning in 2010, the World Bank Group will commit US\$750 million to those countries furthest from the education MDGs, with an emphasis on countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Bank Group will work closely with development partners, in particular through the Fast Track Initiative, to scale up results-based financing and to support innovative interventions in these countries. Lessons from some countries indicate that demand-side interventions such as girls' scholarships and conditional cash transfer programs, as well as school grants, can lower obstacles to school enrollment and increase attendance for disadvantaged populations, as well as in lagging areas. The Bank also commits to making the lessons from these innovations more widely accessible so they can inform future policies and investments.





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