Working Group 1: Smart Partnerships  
Policy Paper  
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Introduction
- Short description of your theme’s focus, rationale and scope.  
- Brief synthesis of relevant research related to the theme’s topic of study.  

Despite widespread agreement on the need for Smart Partnerships in education to improve equity in access to ICT in schooling, few examples of Smart Partnerships can be identified. For this reason, this EDUsummIT working group (TGW1) has accepted UNESCO Bangkok’s invitation to respond to the request of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Forum on ICT in Education (AMFIE) for a brief on research into Smart Partnerships.

In 2005, the ‘World Summit on the Information Society’ (WSIS) was notable in its adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach as a way of ensuring harmonious, fair and equitable development for all. Highlighting for example, the almost incredible contrasts in cost of access to ICT between different parts of the world; the summit recognised that to ensure more equitable access to ICT, Smart Partnerships’ were required among various stakeholders. Ten years later, a review of the implementation of WSIS Action lines (post WSIS+10) re-emphasised the strategy of Smart Partnerships as essential towards the provision of “technology enhanced quality learning for all” (p.27).

As part of its commitment towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all (e.g. Incheon Declaration Education 2030), UNESCO has similarly asserted the need for Smart Partnerships among education stakeholders to “to create equitable, dynamic, accountable and sustainable learner-centred digital learning ecosystems”. In line with its 2030 education agenda, UNESCO also calls for further consultation and dialogue between governments and the private sector to design scalable innovative funding mechanisms that will secure the financial resources needed to unleash the full potential of ICT for learning in the Qingdao Declaration (see Appendix 1 for relevant summaries).
Smart Partnerships can underlie synergistic relationships for more equitable access to ICT for schooling, providing they cover all essential conditions (see Edusummit TGW4 Policy Brief). Education-industry partnerships have three main variations: the type of partnership structure; the level of impact, and maturing involvement as partners engage more deeply with one another (Grobe 1990). Risks of such Smart Partnerships involving ICT in education include: political and commercial pressure (Othman & Fairuz Omar, 2012), neglect of essential conditions including staff development (Mazuin, Aziz, & Nair, 2015), and the continuing development of trusting respectful communication between all stakeholders (Yussof et al., 2014), including the worldviews of indigenous peoples (UNESCO, 2011). Finally it is important to note that societies tends to be over optimistic about the impact of ICT (e.g. Selwyn, 2014), with little awareness of negative impacts including child safety online (UNICEF, 2011). Despite these risks, there are examples of successful partnerships.

**Innovative practices**

Provide examples of innovative practices. If possible, include Asian-Pacific examples.

One Smart Partnership has been selected to illustrate sustainable and scalable increases to ICT in education that may be useful to AMFIE and other regions. The Integrated ICT education (ITE) initiative in schools and communities in rural and remote regions of India is only possible because of an interconnected set of Smart Partnerships. Additional illustrations are provided in our discussion paper and in the appendix of vignettes in Twining, Davis and Charania (2015).

The ITE Smart Partnerships between the state, the Tata Trust, and the community synergize to take ITE to scale by including children and adolescents in rural and remote regions. Each partner plays a significant role in actualizing digital access for knowledge deepening, authentic learning, and changing the teaching and learning patterns of Indian schooling. The state entering the partnership significantly changed the scale and the promise of sustainability. Additional emerging partnerships are with the companies providing low cost computer solutions, power and connectivity solutions.

The Integrated approach to Technology in Education (ITE) is an initiative of the Tata Trusts in twelve mostly rural locations in Eastern and northern India. This approach is a pedagogical framework to improve teaching and learning processes and foster authentic and project based learning for the older children and adolescents in some of the most underprivileged geographies in India. Students, mostly first time computer users, create learning artifacts to deepen their and peers’ learning of content, such as weather charts, graphics of jute production in India, or compare population density in cities. All the projects assigned are carefully selected by the teachers and match with the curriculum and lessons currently taught in the school.

The Smart Partnership was initiated by the charitable Trust when they approached organizations working with adolescents through learning centres in remote rural regions with the ITE concept, which had been well informed by studies of change with ICT in education (Charania, 2014). After carefully evaluated pilots in several places, to scale the initiative nationwide, the Smart Partnership became tripartite with complementary responsibilities (and benefits):

1. The Trust offered the programmatic inputs, training support with the help of other organizations, and financial support for program personnel and activities.
2. The host organization would implement the intervention, manage the program on the ground in terms of providing logistics support, monitoring and supervision and direct liaison with the teachers and the district authorities.

3. The state/district would provide the infrastructure support for computers, connectivity, electricity, furniture, the physical premise of the school, permission to integrate the program within the school hours, and offer their teachers to attend training and devote time to implement.

More localised innovations are also welcomed. Smaller Smart Partnerships address the needs of communities with challenges that arise in unusual ecologies. For example, one of the ITE locations is in the jungles of Jharkhand state, which is also recognised as a Naxal/conflict zone. Here a Smart Partnership is in partnership with the local community through a local organization (Torpa Rural Development Society for Women) mainly to ensure safety of the infrastructure investment in one of the four ITE centres that is ‘plugged in’ a government school.

Issues and challenges for practitioners and policy makers

Outline issues and/or challenges policy makers should consider.

Further analysis is currently underway to turn the research and illustrations of innovative practice into recommendations for researchers (including programme evaluators), practitioners and policy makers. Early suggestions are:

For researchers and evaluators

- Consider research in this area that may assist in the identification and development of this emerging research topic. Questions requiring research include:
  - What are the factors in partnerships which influence failure of scaling, sustainability of interventions?
  - How should scale be defined in Smart Partnerships? I.e. the traditional approach to scale is to start small and then reach big. However, not all interventions that are successful when small will succeed effectively when scaled. Thus, a caution would be to question boutique type interventions which do not promise scale, but look for intervention which uses scale as an input to demonstrate quality
  - How can digital platforms can offer opportunities to promote and facilitate Smart Partnerships

- Recognize the core role of metrics in innovations and thus the role and impact of the evaluator, while also noting that the most productive strategies appear to be hands on

- What methods and tools are best suited to measure Smart Partnerships?

For practitioners

- Look out for Smart Partnerships and work with them knowing that it might bring more than first appears, in both benefits and challenges.

Policy recommendations

Possible recommendations to help resolve these challenges and move forward.

These will be discussed at the EDUsummit. Our work so far indicates these points may be worked into recommendations,
• Smart Partnerships appear to involve complementary roles and responsibilities, which do involve government agencies to enable scalability
• Be persistent with attention to local ecologies as well as an overarching vision for the Smart Partnership
• Be vigilant to identify ways in which a government agency can change to play a role within a Smart Partnership that emerges from an unusual place or direction
• Be aware that the risks include child safety from online services accessed through smart phones and computers, which Smart Partnerships increasing access to ICT may reduce and/or increase. There are global challenges and strategies “Lack of parental awareness and knowledge, difficult economic conditions, and underdeveloped regulatory frameworks can further exacerbate potential risks and the likelihood of harm … protection for children and young people in the online environment may be greater in low and middle-income countries, where gaps in overall child protection already exist.” (UNICEF, 2011, page 21)

**Recommended readings**

- Up to 10 references.


Please cite this paper as

Appendix 1: TWG1: Smart Partnerships Related UNESCO Bibliography contributed by Ave Mejia, UNESCO.

Incheon Declaration, World Education Forum 2015

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Relevant Content (ICT in Education):

10. We commit to promoting quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education. This includes equitable and increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training and higher education and research, with due attention to quality assurance. In addition, the provision of flexible learning pathways, as well as the recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education, is important. We further commit to ensuring that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, achieve relevant and recognized functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels and acquire life skills, and that they are provided with adult learning, education and training opportunities. We are also committed to strengthening science, technology and innovation. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) must be harnessed to strengthen education systems, knowledge dissemination, information access, quality and effective learning, and more effective service provision.

Relevant Content (Partnerships):

Implementing our common agenda

12. We reaffirm that the fundamental responsibility for successfully implementing this agenda lies with governments. We are determined to establish legal and policy frameworks that promote accountability and transparency as well as participatory governance and coordinated partnerships at all levels and across sectors, and to uphold the right to participation of all stakeholders.

13. We call for strong global and regional collaboration, cooperation, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the education agenda based on data collection, analysis and reporting at the country level, within the framework of regional entities, mechanisms and strategies.

(please refer to full Incheon Declaration for additional item nos. 14-20)

Qingdao Declaration, International Conference on ICT and Post-2015 Education

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Relevant Content:

Accountability and partnership

19. We encourage governments, industry partners and all other education stakeholders to join forces and share resources to create equitable, dynamic, accountable and sustainable learner-centred digital learning ecosystems.

20. We recognize the growing importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for successful ICT in education policies, based on cooperation between governments, industry partners, civil society organizations – including teachers’ organizations – and academia.

21. We call for further consultation and dialogue between governments and the private sector to design scalable innovative funding mechanisms to secure the financial resources needed to unleash the full potential of ICT for learning, in line with the 2030 education agenda.

3. 2015 Global Monitoring Report (GMR)


Relevant Content (Finance):

Chapter 8 – Finance (pages 241 to 279) Finance (p. 241)

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action called for significant increases in financial commitment by national governments and donors to the education sector to accelerate progress towards the Education For All (EFA) goals. It encouraged donors to support government efforts to increase aid for basic education and deliver it as effectively as possible. This marked a strategic shift from the view of finance at the time of the 1990 Jomtien conference, when the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s had led to deep cuts in government spending on education and the role of non-state finance grew. By contrast, the Dakar Framework implicitly recommended governments to take the lead in increasing financial commitments to EFA, with the EFA High Level Steering Committee proposing that 15% to 20% of annual budgets be earmarked for education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set similar goals for other basic service sectors, such as health and water and sanitation, with governments committing a minimum share of their annual budgets to help achieve poverty reduction goals (African Union, 2008; World Health Organization [WHO], 2011).

The Dakar Framework also called for greater accountability, with countries accountable to citizens. With much stronger influence from civil society organizations (CSOs) than at Jomtien, the framework specifically referred to a need to curb corrupt practices and increase the
efficiency of domestic resources. CSOs had strong participation in the drafting of the framework, which pushed for greater commitments to EFA and regarded CSOs as key partners to hold governments accountable for their financial promises.

This chapter assesses the extent to which governments and donors have fulfilled the financial commitments of the Dakar Framework. The first part provides an overview of trends over time of domestic spending on education compared to what was committed at Dakar. It reviews the efficiency and equity of domestic public spending on education and considers the influence of CSOs in this regard. The second part considers trends in the last 15 years in aid disbursements to education and whether donors have fulfilled their pledges to increase funds to basic education and to countries most in need. It reviews the evolution of policies relating to aid effectiveness; explores the role of humanitarian aid, funding by NGOs and non-traditional financing; and mentions the need for improved diagnostic tools to assess education financing.

Conclusion (p. 279)

The pledge made at Dakar that no country should be thwarted in achieving the EFA goals due to lack of resources has been one of the biggest failures of the EFA period. Donors failed to live up to their promises. Resources were increased to meet the goal of universal free primary education, but are still in chronic shortage: more is needed to ensure that the goal of universal primary education is met. The efforts of many low income governments in reprioritizing education budgets towards primary education are commendable, but more is required to prioritize education spending in general.

Financial support from governments and donors for the other EFA goals has been negligible and progress towards them weak. There is still a need to reprioritize resources from non-EFA education areas, such as tertiary education, towards areas which would benefit the disadvantaged. Households have had to bolster spending to make up for a lack of national resources. Aid to education as a share of total aid has stayed stagnant, and within education aid, the share of basic education has changed very little. Moreover, aid to basic education has failed to be reprioritised to the countries most in need.

These mistakes need to be avoided for any set of goals for education after 2015. A firm financial commitment to education is demanded of governments, donors and other education funders, and civil society must hold them to account. Otherwise, those who will pay the price, as has been the case since Dakar, are the children in need of basic education, the marginalized and the hard to reach. More broadly, all of society will miss out on the long-term, wide-ranging, transformative effects of education.

Other chapters:

- Changing national financial commitments to EFA since Dakar (p. 241)
- International development assistance (p. 261)
- Other sources of international financing (p. 277)
- Diagnostic tools needed to assess education financing (p.279)