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POLICY NOTES

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In this Issue

Throughout the world, education is essential to social mobility, bettering the lives of individuals and helping whole nations to rise out of poverty. Yet educational opportunity and the upward mobility it can bring are not equally available to everyone. In rich and poor nations alike, the disadvantaged — defined by gender and geography, race and religion, class and caste — fall behind, losing the

(continued on page 11)

A Salzburg Global Seminar

"Optimizing Talent: Closing Education and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide"

Basic Education Up To Age 18

The Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS) convenes experts from different professions and cultures to share innovative ideas and create strategies for change on a variety of political, social and environmental issues. In December 2011, 63 established and emerging leaders in the field of education gathered at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria, to take a closer look at what needs to be done to ensure that quality education is available for all. Participants came from 25 countries throughout the globe and brought with them a variety of professional experience as educators, researchers, policymakers and advocates.

The conference, "Optimizing Talent: Closing Education and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide," focused on bettering the educational and life prospects of students up to age 18. Presented in partnership with Educational Testing Service (ETS) and with the support of the DeVry Foundation, the program was the second in a series designed to eliminate educational and mobility gaps. The partnership with SGS is a global extension of ETS's eight-year series of "Addressing Achievement Gaps" symposia — with 15 conferences to date — that have examined educational gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

During the conference, participants discussed ways to create equitable and effective educational systems worldwide, particularly those that serve socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. Conference speakers addressed a range of issues including global trends in education access and quality; local and international education finance reform; the role of assessment in promoting quality and equity; the central importance of teacher quality; and political strategies for achieving success. Participants sought to identify where interventions are most needed and which have the most potential for success in helping disadvantaged populations to not only gain access to quality education, but also to complete their education and lead more satisfying and productive lives. The goal of this series of conferences is to outline the policy framework needed to address educational attainment and social mobility, while also establishing a global advocacy group and forum called "Optimizing Talent Worldwide." As **Michael Nettles**, Senior Vice President of the ETS Policy Evaluation & Research Center, said in his opening remarks, "If you were planning to improve the lives of millions of people around the world through education, then you are in the right place."

The Promise of Education

Education can improve the quality of life of individuals, strengthen communities, increase the wealth of nations and promote peace, whereas the absence of education is associated with numerous social ills. Research has shown links between a lack of education and increased AIDS and HIV rates, infant mortality, shortened life expectancy, poor economic opportunities and political instability. For reasons such as these, Nettles argued that education should have higher priority on the current global policy agenda that includes other crucial issues such as climate change and health care. In a sense, education is a more fundamental issue than even these other pressing needs. For example, educated individuals are better situated to avoid disease and maintain their health, and any movement toward environmental conservation and the greening of our society is dependent on the education of individuals on these issues. Addressing our society's education needs will facilitate progress on other pressing human and environmental needs.

The continuing evolution of economies toward ever more technologically advanced production makes education more important now than ever before. Conference speaker **Jozef Ritzen**, Professorial Fellow at UNU-MERIT and Maastricht University School of Governance and Director of the International Policy Network of the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), noted that "knowledge investment [i.e., more and better education] is the driver of economic growth." He cited evidence that the supply of skills in the workforce has induced the development of new technologies and economic growth. And this technological growth continues at such a rate that the supply of skilled labor has become even scarcer relative to the demand. The complexities of our society have increased faster

Seminar Participants Represented 25 Countries

Australia	Hungary	Mozambique	South Africa
Austria	India	Netherlands	Turkey
Chile	Japan	Norway	United Kingdom
China	Kenya	Pakistan	United States
Egypt	Malaysia	Philippines	
France	Malta	Romania	
Ghana	Mexico	Singapore	

than our education systems can accommodate them, and we must invest in our education systems so that they provide the skilled labor needed.

Conference speaker **Dylan Wiliam**, Emeritus Professor of Educational Assessment at the Institute of Education, University of London, demonstrated the growing importance of education with several different kinds of evidence. One fact is that the proportion of jobs relying on complex communication and problem solving has increased by 14 percent and 8 percent, respectively, while jobs characterized as routine manual, non-routine manual and routine cognitive have all decreased as a proportion of the job pool. Wiliam cited research that estimates that a 25-point increase on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) during the next 80 years would produce economic gains with a net present value of $40.6 trillion in United States, $4 trillion in Mexico and $3.5 trillion in Turkey. Moreover, education is associated with benefits in the lives of individuals. Students with more education are better off on a host of indicators including length of life, health indices, incarceration rates, rate of teen parenting and rate of suicide.

While the provision of quality education results in numerous benefits to individuals and society, its absence often leads to tragic consequences. This was a point made by **Marian Edelman**, founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund, who emphasized the importance of education's preventative role in a number of social ills. Focusing on the situation in the United States, Edelman highlighted the fact that 80 percent of Black and Latino children cannot read. As she put it, "These children are being sentenced to social and economic death in our globalizing economy." They become part of the "cradle-to-prison pipeline." The fact is that a Black boy in the United States today who is 10 years old has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino boy, a one-in-eight chance. The United States invests three times more per inmate than per public school student. Nations would be wise to prevent these counterproductive expenditures by investing more in the education of their young people, especially the most disadvantaged.

Non-economic Benefits of Education

Better educated students:

- Live longer
- Are healthier
- Have less disability toward the end of their lives
- Are less likely to be teenage parents
- Are less likely to be incarcerated
- Are less likely to commit suicide

Source: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Education.

Given the great social benefits that stem from education, Nettles emphasized the responsibilities that leaders in education have. "As education professionals," he said, "we have the means and opportunity to improve lives. We can unlock the cells of ignorance and despair with the key of education."

Inequity: Persistence and Progress

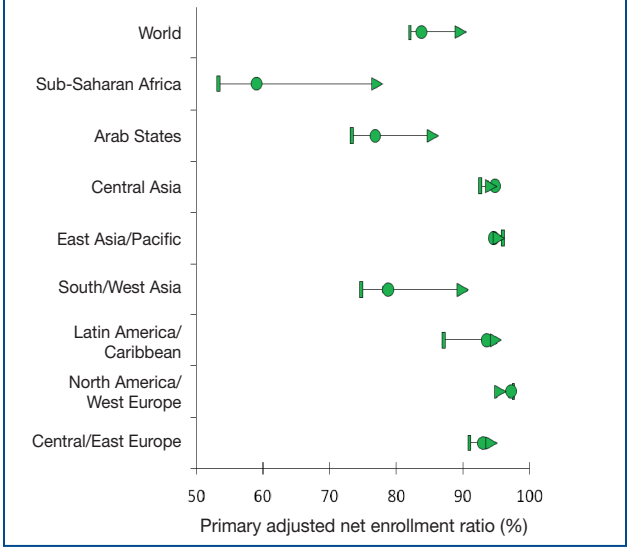
Although the promise of education is great, the ground that must be covered is vast. Conference speakers showed that educational inequities exist throughout the world, based on socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, sex and geographic region — namely, urban versus rural areas. Vast educational gaps exist not only between countries, but within them. On the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA), the average reading score in Kyrgyzstan is only 314, compared to an average of 493 among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Scores in Korea and Finland are above 530. The richest quintile in India attains roughly 11 years of education, compared to just over four years for the lowest quintile. While some countries are focused on having more students pursue higher education,

others are struggling just to get all of their children to complete primary school. Throughout the world, 67 million children of primary school age and 72 million children of lower secondary school age are not attending school. These numbers represent 10 and 17 percent of their respective age groups. In many countries, women are disproportionately denied access to basic education. More than 25 percent of girls in the lowest quintile in South and West Asia and nearly 40 percent in sub-Saharan Africa have never been to school. Nearly 800 million people — one-sixth of the world's adults, almost two-thirds of them women — are illiterate. The fact is that enormous obstacles still exist throughout the world in educational access, achievement and attainment and these factors negatively affect social mobility.

Conference speakers looking at global trends agreed that while significant progress has been achieved in expanding educational access over recent decades, particularly in developing countries, there has not been a corresponding increase in education quality or student achievement. For example, data from PISA 2006 showed that half the population of 15-year-olds in Latin America's six most educationally advanced countries do not reach minimum skill levels necessary for employment and citizenship. Disadvantages in socioeconomic and family environment are at the basis of the significant gaps in learning in the region, as is true throughout the world. Global socioeconomic trends also are discouraging. Worldwide, income inequality is increasing and social mobility is decreasing or stagnant as increasing technological complexity in our societies outstrips the advancement of our education systems.

There are many obstacles to be overcome and many signs that great progress can be made. As was already noted, access to education increased dramatically over recent decades. For example, 70 percent of Chilean students in higher education are the first generation of their families to achieve this level. In 1990, 16 percent of Chilean students entered higher education. In 2010, that number had risen to 42 percent. On the other side of the world, in Mongolia's western region, enrollment in early childhood education rose from 49 percent of children in 2006 to 81 percent in 2009. In Ghana, the number of "schools under trees" — i.e., schools conducted outdoors — was reduced from 5,500 in 2009 to 1,266 in 2011 by investment in school buildings. Although a general worldwide trend in achievement has not been documented, some countries have seen impressive improvement in recent decades and can serve as models for others. In less than a decade, Korea almost doubled the proportion of students demonstrating excellence in reading. Major education reforms in Poland helped to dramatically close achievement gaps between schools while at the same time raising overall performance by the equivalent of more than half a school year. Countries such as Germany, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia and Peru have produced substantial gains in performance as well.

Progress in Primary School Participation, 1999–2008



Source: UNESCO, Global Monitoring Report 2011

In some instances, while achievement gains have yet to be documented, dramatic improvements in school quality have occurred in severely disadvantaged

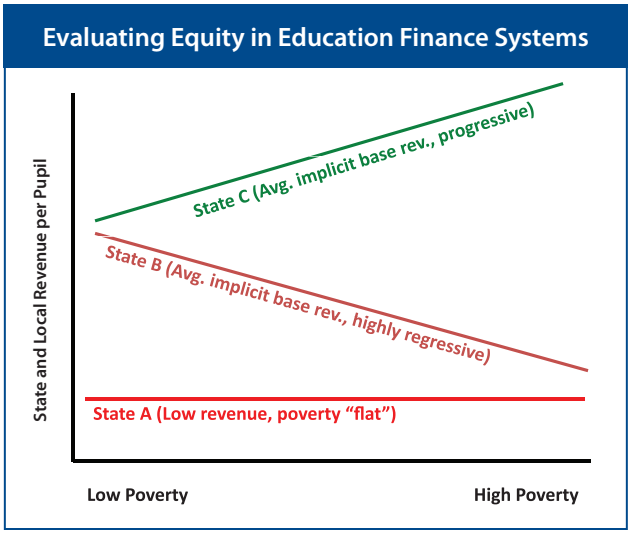
regions of the world. Conference speaker **Yuting Chen**, presenting on behalf of **Zhiyong Zhang**, Deputy Director of the Department of Education, Shandong Province, China, showed how large disparities between urban and rural education in Shandong Province were mitigated by aggressive reforms. Large increases in public expenditures per student and of teachers' salaries in rural areas brought these to parity with urban areas. These new funds were invested in new school buildings, libraries, desks, chairs, computers and playgrounds. Pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development and support services are being designed and institutionalized. Shandong recently succeeded in providing a pre-service training course to all teachers for the first time. Given recent and dramatic improvements in education quality in Shandong, one would expect achievement gains to follow. The dramatic improvements achieved in educational quality in rural Shandong should serve as a source of optimism for developing countries.

> *"It is not fate that consigns a child or a nation to ignorance, stasis or regression, but the absence of human intervention."*
>
> *Michael Nettles*

As **Teresa Bracho**, Profesora Investigadora at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), pointed out, there are many fallacies about educational inequality. Bracho rejected ideas that educational inequality is a "natural" part of society, that inequalities are based on innate differences in IQ and individual ability, that patient inaction is an acceptable solution, that funding is not part of the solution, that increases in equality necessitate a decrease in quality, and that the free market will produce quality and equitable education. Rather, as Nettles put it, "It is not fate that consigns a child or a nation to ignorance, stasis or regression, but the absence of human intervention."

Financing Education

A prerequisite to closing gaps in education and increasing social mobility is supplying adequate resources to initiate and support the education programs that will accomplish these goals. When thinking about education finance, one of the first questions to answer is: What are the characteristics we want in an education finance system? Conference speaker **Molly Hunter**, Director of Education Justice at the Education Law Center, framed the issue nicely by outlining a few different measures of equitable funding systems. As a first principle, adequate funds should be provided to make possible a quality education for all. Beyond a basic level of sufficiency, funds should be distributed to account for poverty, compensating the most disadvantaged students with additional resources. Hunter categorizes education systems as *progressive*, *regressive* or *flat*, based on how funds are allocated among different schools with varying proportions of student poverty. Hunter argued that funding all students equally is not equitable; rather, the progressive solution is that schools with more poverty receive more funding.



Source: Molly Hunter

It is one thing to articulate the criteria of an equitable education finance system and another to have the

political means to implement that system. Hunter argued that the federal funding of education in the United States is minimal and will not have much effect in achieving more equitable education finance arrangements. Rather, the issue is largely a matter of state policy, and the discrepancies between how well states support their disadvantaged students are vast. In many states "resistance is deep," Hunter said. The political obstacles involved in implementing equitable education finance systems are not unique to the United States. **Rong Wang**, Director of the China Institute for Educational Finance Research, said that historically China has had several problems with finance. First, local governments have had low fiscal capacity because of poverty. Second, the government funnels too much money toward production and construction sectors at the expense of education. Third, the presence of large income gaps among social groups and among regions leads to inequitable distribution. Although the Chinese government has set a number of goals in recent decades to increase education funding, progress is hindered by the absence of mechanisms to link finance targets with public budgetary institutions. Political hurdles to implement education finance reform should not be underestimated.

A few speakers focused on education aid in an international context. Conference speakers **Nicholas Burnett** and **Shubha Jayaram** of the Results for Development Institute asked the question: How do we get more resources to the poor? They recommended a number of innovative financing strategies, including educational aid derived from a tax on financial transactions in the European Union, investment of the pension funds of developing countries into their own education systems, voluntary consumer contributions, "social investment" (i.e., investment seeking little or no return) and debt swaps for education investment between creditor and debtor countries.

"The allocation of aid must become more firmly based on evidence regarding how aid can most effectively help countries build sustainable systems capable of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the type of policies and programs needed to successfully address these challenges."

Birger Fredriksen

Beyond suggestions on how to raise more money to fund increased equity in education, Burnett and Jayaram emphasized the importance of targeting funds toward policies that are most effective. For example, reallocating funds toward the early years of education is a cost-effective use of resources, because education has a greater effect on younger children. Conditional cash transfers, vouchers, bursaries and scholarships are effective ways of improving the educational access of students in need. Remedial programs are an important way of reintegrating out-of-school children and adults back into the school system. Programs offering flexible hours also have proved valuable in providing access to families with a variety of scheduling needs, and school-based deworming initiatives have proved to be effective.

The theme of effective use of aid also was discussed by conference speaker **Birger Fredriksen**, former Director for Human Development for Africa at the World Bank. While Fredriksen commended efforts to increase the volume of aid and the efficiency of delivery of that aid to countries in need, his key argument was that aid should be allocated more efficiently to fulfill need. In his words, "the allocation of aid must become more firmly based on evidence regarding how aid can most effectively help countries build sustainable systems capable of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the type of policies and programs needed to successfully address these challenges."

Although adequate funds to support education are necessary, they are not sufficient to achieve high-quality education. In the words of conference speaker **Betty Mould-Iddrisu**, Minister of Education for the Republic of Ghana, we must "find the right ingredients that make up quality education for all our children."

Improving the Quality of Education

Any discussion about the benefits of education assumes a standard of educational quality. That is, positive effects are not the result of just any education, but of a *quality* education. Determining what is meant by "quality" and how to deliver quality education are two of the central questions with which those who think seriously about education have to grapple. This point was made by conference speaker **Yusuf Sayed**, Reader in International Education at the University of Sussex and co-author with **Anil Kanjee** of Tshwane University of Technology (not present at conference). Sayed noted that quality was at the heart of education; it impacts enrollment, attendance, retention, completion and progression. And crucially, he added, quality education entails the principle of equity — that is, quality education must devote time, energy and resources to the needs of the most disadvantaged. Two main themes were present among speakers who focused on how to improve education quality: assessment and, perhaps most important, teacher quality.

Assessment Systems

Several speakers addressed the important role that assessment plays in promoting and maintaining high-quality education. Conference speaker **Maureen McLaughlin**, Director of the International Affairs Office at the U.S. Department of Education, said that one condition for educational success is "having high standards for what you expect students to be able to learn and what you expect teachers to teach." And in order to have accountability to these standards, assessment data is necessary. "You need to know where you are. You need to know where you're going. And you need to know the progress [achieved]. Data is really important to be able see: Do you need to make changes? Are you moving in the right direction?"

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Maureen McLaughlin

Similarly, Sayed argued that a well-designed assessment system is an important tool to achieve the goals of educational quality and equity. But, he said, this relationship is not so simple, because the systematic use of assessments also runs the risk of exacerbating inequities. Looking at several different types of assessment that compose assessment systems, Sayed identified three key issues in assessment design and administration that must be considered to help maximize educational equity. First, care should be taken that assessments are free from any form of bias or discrimination. Assessments should be developed while taking into account specific characteristics and needs of the population they serve, and should provide reliable and valid information. Second, the administration of assessments should not privilege some groups over others. Administration processes must be transparent and fair for all students, and financial barriers to test preparation and test taking should be minimized. Third, data from assessments can be used to evaluate pro-equity policies and implementation. Trends in achievement by different demographics can be highlighted and targeted by policies so that additional resources are channeled to those in need. Assessment

data also allows the public to hold education institutions and staff accountable to the needs of children.

One of Sayed's concluding recommendations was that countries should invest more in developing teachers' assessment skills. In particular, teachers should learn to utilize "assessment for learning," in which teachers and students seek and interpret evidence to decide the current state of the students' learning, the learning goals and how best to achieve those goals. This approach has been shown to produce significant learning gains and has great potential for addressing the needs of poor and marginalized children. The difficulty of this type of assessment is the high level of skill needed by teachers to effectively implement these teaching techniques. However, several conference speakers agreed that the primary policy lever to increase educational quality is improving teacher quality through investment in professional development and other supports.

Teacher Quality

Referring to a study by the OECD on the conditions that improve students' performance and social mobility, Ritzen gave a concise summary of the findings: "The keyword is teachers who are well qualified, well endowed and well empowered." Providing teachers with adequate training and ongoing support is the most important policy. This will require increased wages and other measures to attract the best and the brightest to the profession, as well as massive investment in the preparation and continuous education of teachers.

> *"The keyword is teachers who are well qualified, well endowed and well empowered."*
>
> *Jozef Ritzen*

Ritzen gave several examples of countries that have substantially benefitted from reforms focusing on the organizational characteristics of schools, particularly those focusing on teachers. Korea has achieved dramatic improvements in reading, and Poland has significantly closed achievement gaps while at the same time raising average performance. Germany, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia and Peru all have achieved impressive gains in performance as well. The common element in the reforms that improved these education systems is the empowerment of teachers.

Dylan Wiliam sees teacher quality as the primary lever that can improve educational quality. Wiliam even went so far as to say that teacher quality is "pretty close to a magic bullet." In the classrooms of the best teachers, students learn at twice the rate of those in the classrooms of average teachers. And in classrooms of the least effective teachers, students learn at only half the rate of those taught by average teachers. Moreover, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with behavioral difficulties learn as much from the most effective teachers as students not facing such obstacles. For all students, teacher quality is what matters.

Nations that draw their teachers from the brightest and most talented people in the country will have great education systems. For countries who are not fortunate to already have a highly selective teaching workforce, the question is how to get one. Wiliam dismisses strategies for improving quality that rely on raising the bar for entry, de-selecting (i.e., firing) low-performing teachers or providing incentives for teachers based on student performance. Rather, the only practical way of improving teacher quality is by helping the teachers we have become better. Helping teachers improve means helping teachers change their habits, not just acquire new knowledge. And the best way to support teachers in improving their instruction is for schools to establish teacher learning communities that meet monthly for 75 minutes. In these meetings "teachers report back to their colleagues about what they have done in their classrooms to improve their practice, get the support of their colleagues for persisting with these difficult changes, hear about new ideas for improving practice,

and commit themselves to specific improvements in their practice for the coming month." Providing quality support and professional development for teachers is crucial for improving teacher quality and, in turn, educational outcomes and social mobility.

Beyond Achievement: Quality as Relevancy

In his talk, Jozef Ritzen argued that "the contribution of education to equality of opportunity is decreasing, because education adapts slower to the increasing complexities of our societies than the home and social environments of the upper class and the upper part of the middle class." This need for education to keep pace with the economic, social and political developments of our ever-changing modern society was the subject of a talk by conference speaker **Veronica Boix Mansilla**, Principal Investigator at Project Zero, Harvard University. As she said, "To nurture human talent and equity in the 21st century, educators must go beyond narrowing the 'achievement gap.' We must bridge the 'relevance gap.'" Boix Mansilla casts the definition of education quality in a new light.

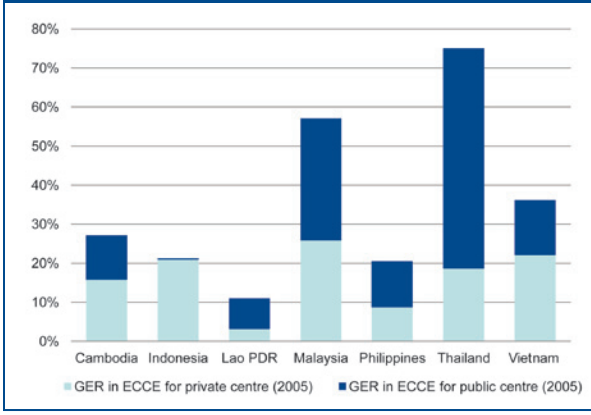
> *"To nurture human talent and equity in the 21st century, educators must go beyond narrowing the 'achievement gap.' We must bridge the 'relevance gap.'"*
>
> *Veronica Boix Mansilla*

"Quality," she says, "is not limited to the *effectiveness* with which systems yield student achievement, but includes the *relevance* of what students learn *vis-à-vis* contemporary societies as well." The goal of education is to educate students for *global competence* — i.e., the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance. In order for students to reach global competence, we must provide relevant education. And to bridge the relevance gap, we must ensure that all youth — especially those with fewer resources — can develop the capacity to understand and transform the world in which they live so they are able to contribute to their own and societal well-being.

Expanding Early Childhood Education

Numerous conference speakers acknowledged the importance of early intervention programs. These programs can facilitate cognitive, social, emotional and physical development — particularly for the least-advantaged children — and are one of the most cost-effective types of social intervention. Conference speaker **Mariana Aylwin**, Executive Director of the Corporación Educacional Aprender, emphasized early childhood education's place in the dramatic educational improvements Chile has experienced over the last few decades. Based on evidence from two successful school models in Chile, Aylwin highlighted the importance of socio-emotional development and language development as being particularly beneficial for disadvantaged students. As she sees it, "The absence of 'cultural capital' or 'literacy capital' is the principal obstacle to enhancing learning capacities and opportunities of poor students." In low socioeconomic contexts, an early beginning in literacy has a large impact on students' development by compensating for the cultural capital they lack — cultural capital that other children received in their families.

Gross Enrollment Ratio in Early Childhood Development Programs in Public and Private Centers, 2005



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics.

The need for early childhood education programs throughout the world was demonstrated by conference speaker **Junko Miyahara**, Coordinator at the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood. In East Asia and the Pacific, 22 percent of children under the age of five suffer from stunted growth resulting from undernourishment and disease. In South Asia, 48 percent suffer from stunted growth. Although progress has occurred in some countries in the Asia-Pacific region, challenges persist in access and equity for early childhood development services. In most countries, less than 40 percent of children receive early childhood development services. But quick and dramatic progress can be made. In Mongolia's rural western region, enrollment rose from 49 percent in 2006 to 81 percent in 2009.

> *"The absence of 'cultural capital' or 'literacy capital' is the principal obstacle to enhancing learning capacities and opportunities of poor students."*
>
> *Mariana Aylwin*

Miyahara made several recommendations for early childhood education policy. Increased attention should be paid to marginalized and disadvantaged groups. It is essential that programs rely on local experts and community networks and that the community identifies potential caregivers to receive training to work with the children. To attract and maintain caregivers in rural areas, they should be paid the same as urban caregivers. Early education programs should be holistic and include parents and family in the education process. Programs should be monitored and evaluated to provide information to improve further actions. These programs must take place within a policy framework and budget provision that is lasting and can sustain progress.

Policy Change

Knowing the policies and programs that will best address educational and social mobility gaps is not enough. It is also necessary to have the political will to implement them. Unfortunately, this is never easy, but several conference speakers had advice on how to work politically to achieve policy change.

Conference speaker **Cristián Cox**, Professor of Curriculum Policies in the Faculty of Education at the Catholic University of Chile, identified two growing demands that should be the primary focus of the education policy agenda in Latin America: first, policies targeting education quality which have at their core teachers' capacities; and second, policies that strive for equity and have at their core educational institutions and their ability to counter rather than reproduce social segregation.

Cox suggested three foci — *time*, *inclusiveness* and *identity* — that are at the heart of any political process that seeks to serve a particular policy agenda. His first point was that quality and equity agendas require long periods of time for implementation and even longer for assessing results. Moderately complex changes take from three to five years, while major restructuring efforts can take five to 10 years. Second, Cox stressed the importance of political inclusiveness and dialogue in order to achieve productive and lasting policy change. Dialogues should include four actors in the policy-making arena, each one with a perspective and interests that should be valued: politicians, experts (professionals, researchers), civil servants and teachers. Last, since every country unavoidably faces both global pressures and local needs, national policy-making arenas must have close links to international networks and forums while simultaneously being receptive to their economic, political and cultural needs. In this way, nations will be able to form the "criteria and capacities for re-contextualizing and adjusting external pressures, for linking external influences to national requirements, and for maintaining their own identity at the same time that this very identity becomes more open to the world."

Conference speaker **Costel Bercus** leads the Roma Education Fund in its quest for inclusion of Roma in

European education systems and society. Similar to many ethnic minorities throughout the world, Roma face the barriers of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion from the larger societies in which they live. Bercus offered several insights into how policy change towards inclusion can be facilitated. He emphasized that policy change should take place in a context where national policies and local policies and institutions are in alignment toward the same goals. Also, projects must be informed by research and evaluated to avoid bottlenecks in program implementation. Regarding the framing of the issue, Roma inclusion should *not* be seen as beneficial only for Roma; rather, Bercus said, "National inclusion reforms should also be seen as beneficial to the majority as they are for various minorities." Inclusion should be framed not only as a human rights issue but as an issue of economic development of society as a whole. "The argument for linking economic and human rights concerns centers around the contribution of human rights to creating more cohesive and equitable societies … stable societies will in turn generate stronger growth and economic development …" Using only the human rights argument can be counterproductive. Finally, as a last point about successful program implementation, Bercus highlighted the importance of having Roma community members participate in the project. This empowers communities, dispels stereotypes and helps build trust between groups of stakeholders.

> *"The argument for linking economic and human rights concerns centers around the contribution of human rights to creating more cohesive and equitable societies … stable societies will in turn generate stronger growth and economic development …"*
>
> *Costel Bercus*

"Changing the culture of an institution is like moving a cemetery. You do not get help from the inside. You get resistance. No one wants to change." This was how conference speaker **Mee Foong Lee**, Executive Secretary of the European Access Network, expressed the frustrations and difficulties of causing political and institutional reform. But Lee remained optimistic. "Be a flea," she said. Continually hold policymakers accountable and ask, "Where is equity? Where is diversity? Where is inclusion?" Although you may be tiny in the grand scheme of things, persistent pestering of those in positions of power can make the beast move.

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chance to improve their lives and depriving society of the contributions they might have made. Even in countries where access to education is expanding rapidly, these gaps persist, as social stratification perpetuates itself across generations and schooling too often fails to make up for family disadvantage.

Eliminating educational and social mobility gaps is a complicated endeavor that demands concerted effort from politicians and bureaucrats, teachers and university administrators, employers and policy advocates. Although much progress has occurred in different aspects of education throughout the world, improvement in educational quality and social mobility has been lacking. It takes an effort of will and political skill to enact and implement the policies that can make a difference — training and supporting effective teachers, extending schooling to the youngest children, adequately funding the education of the most disadvantaged, and designing assessment systems to identify needs and provide accountability. With a host of compelling issues crowding the international agenda, advocates must deploy new kinds of arguments as they strive to convince funders and policymakers of the urgency of this work.

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This article was written
by Robert Schwartz with Beth Brody.

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Increasing educational opportunity and social mobility through reforms targeting students up to the age of 18 was the topic of "Optimizing Talent: Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide," a conference co-sponsored by ETS and the Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS) and supported by the DeVry Foundation. The conference, held December 6–11, 2011, in Salzburg, Austria, brought together 63 researchers, policy advocates and policymakers from around the world, and was the second in a series of three conferences focused on global educational and social mobility gaps.

Twenty-three of the seminar participants gave formal presentations, and introductory remarks were offered by ETS Senior Vice President **Michael Nettles**, SGS Senior Vice President **Edward Mortimer,** and SGS Vice President of Program Operations **John Lotherington**. **Gerben van Lent**, Executive Director of Knowledge Management and Governance for ETS Global, served as the rapporteur. Conference interviews were conducted by **Georg Winckler**, former Rector of the University of Vienna, and John Lotherington.

More information about the conference, including PowerPoint presentations, is available at **http://www.salzburgglobal.org/current/sessions-b.cfm?nav=lectures&IDSPECIAL_EVENT=3099**.