



Fourth external evaluation of the Global Education Monitoring Report Management response

January 2019

Introduction

Approximately every three years, the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) commissions an external evaluation to review the quality of its Report and related products, the success of its outreach and communication activities, and the cost effectiveness of its operations. Following a competitive bidding process, Ipsos MORI was invited in December 2017 to conduct the fourth external evaluation of the Report since its inception – and the first since its new mandate and the adoption of its new brand in 2015 and its transition from the EFA Global Monitoring Report to the GEM Report series. Ipsos MORI's preliminary findings were presented and discussed at the GEM Report Advisory Board meeting held in Paris on 31 May 2018, while the final evaluation report from Ipsos Mori was delivered on 26 October 2018.

The GEM Report team welcomes the positive conclusions of this fourth evaluation, which affirm that the quality of its outputs has remained high and that the Report has fulfilled its mandate to monitor progress on education in the SDGs. These conclusions will further deepen the trust of its multiple audiences and supporters, as the Report approaches its first 20 years. The conclusions will hopefully also encourage more countries to support the production of this independent education report, helping fulfil the commitment they made in Incheon at the World Education Forum in 2015. Ensuring support from countries in the global South, in particular, would be a strong signal of engagement with this Report that has served a universal agenda, not least through its themes over the period 2016-2021.

The evaluation also points out that expectations on what the Report team can deliver are rising. While the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) set a clear mandate ('the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG 4 and on education in the other SDGs' and 'on the implementation of national and international strategies to help hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments'), its funders increasingly call on the Report to demonstrate that it also leads to policy change. For those familiar with the process of policy change in any country, these expectations may appear too ambitious. We therefore appreciate the evaluation's careful questioning of the links behind a global/sector-wide report and national/issue-specific policy change, and of the level of resources that would be needed to achieve, and monitor, such results.

At the same time, we accept that the evaluation calls on the Report team to propose clearer answers on how it allocates its existing resources to meet these rising expectations. Contributing more effectively to the ultimate objective of policy impact at national level is after all a question of maintaining and increasing its relevance, a challenge to which the Report team is very keen to respond. From that point of view, the evaluation recommendations, most of which are directed at this question, will be helpful in the development of the Report team's strategy in the coming 3-5 years.

The external evaluation report has four overarching recommendations. This document presents each recommendation in detail, followed by the GEM Report Team management response.

Overall, the GEM Report team would like to thank the evaluation for identifying successes and challenges relative to the aim of providing an indispensable monitoring and reporting service to SDG 4 stakeholders around the world in the past four years. The GEM Report team appreciates its recommendations, which will help further fine-tune priorities, implementation strategies, and future resource mobilisation.

Summary

| Recommendation | Management response |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Develop a multi-year strategy to better align resource allocation with the Report’s mandate and other objectives, and to better measure achievements</p> | <p>Accepted. Following the expansion of the Report’s expected results beyond its traditional mandate, the project strategy must be updated to increase the chances of policy impact at the national level. Budget options will be made transparent for donors. However, care should be taken to keep the cost of measuring achievements low.</p> |
| <p>2. Make the Report even more relevant for readers in the Global South</p> | <p>Accepted. The GEM Report is committed to strengthen its relevance by bridging the global and national level through outputs targeted at the regional level. Targeted fundraising will be pursued for this purpose. However, it cannot renege on its universal mandate and cannot appear to be more relevant for some countries than others.</p> |
| <p>3. Revise the composition and the role played by the Advisory Board to get better value from their expertise</p> | <p>Partially accepted. Improvements can be made to composition and operations of the Advisory Board within its existing rules and terms of reference. However, substantive changes to Board operations to support the implementation of the strategy will require a wider consultation, which the team will carry out at the next Advisory Board meeting.</p> |
| <p>4. Engage the Report’s potential readership at the early stages of the Report production to further improve its relevance</p> | <p>Partially accepted. The GEM Report team notes that the issues raised in this recommendation have not been major constraints to its visibility, relevance and development but will look at using its website and social media to encourage greater public engagement and participation in the future.</p> |

Recommendation 1

Develop a multi-year strategy to better align resource allocation with the Report's mandate and other objectives, and to better measure achievements

- 1.1 Adopt a revised Theory of Change along the lines of the one proposed in this report. While the expected impact can go beyond the mandate, the assumptions and risks that underlie the intervention logic need to be acknowledged. The proposed revised intervention logic could be adopted by the GEM Report Team and adjusted once a comprehensive communications strategy is developed. By setting out in more detail the logical flow of activity through to impact, the GEM Report Team will be able to allocate resources more appropriately, and be clearer with stakeholders about strategic decision-making. The suggested Theory of Change presented in this evaluation should, of course, be reviewed and improved by the GEM Report Team, and updated should the expected outcomes and impacts of the Report be revised.
- 1.2 Update the results framework. In line with the suggested changes to the Theory of Change, the GEM Report results framework could be improved by acknowledging that the current results framework is too ambitious and adopting a series of levels of impact that better represent the Report's intended impacts and the means of achieving these, and by setting measurable indicators at these levels.
- 1.3 Develop a multi-year communications and dissemination strategy aligned to the revised Theory of Change and results framework. This strategy should identify and define the GEM Report's intended audiences, the products that are tailored to each audience, the channels by which they will be reached (including any partners involved in dissemination such as UNESCO field offices and other UN bodies), and the expected outcomes of reaching each target audience. In particular, the strategy for reaching policymakers should be formalised, and target policymakers including ministers and civil servants should be identified. While generating and maintaining a database of target policymakers would be a resource-intensive task, the GEM Report Team could explore the possibility of accessing the databases of other UN bodies. Having a single strategy covering multiple years would improve efficiency and, importantly, could be analysed and evaluated in the long term. Because every edition covers a different theme, it will need to be adapted annually.
- 1.4 Developing a multi-year financial strategy. The development of a longer-term strategy for the GEM Report, together with the recommended changes in the Team's financial monitoring, could help the Team make a case for multi-year investment to donors. Securing multi-year agreements would improve certainty for the Report's future and also reduce fundraising requirements. In this regard, a recommendation in the previous evaluation to extend the Report's strategic plan to four years appears not to have been adopted. This strategy should be closely linked to the revised Theory of Change.
- 1.5 Collect more granular cost data. Staff time should be allocated to outputs through timesheets or a similar tool.

Management response

Donor expectations about the Report's results have been gradually expanding beyond the Report's mandate. These have been reflected in the project logframe and its key performance indicators for some time. However, the evaluation correctly points out that the Report team is yet to provide clear answers as to how these more ambitious results will be achieved, given available resources, on top of its existing mandate.

As there are hundreds of education policies in hundreds of countries and sub-national units, there is a choice to be made. The Report could directly target specific policies in specific countries; however, this would contradict its global mandate. A preferred alternative is to continue improving the Report content, communication and distribution and achieve policy change indirectly.

The Report team fully concurs with the evaluation's timely and forward-looking recommendation to:

- Introduce a project *theory of change*, complete with its assumptions and risks ([recommendation 1.1](#)): This key element has been missing, and it is necessary to instil the right level of ambition and communicate it internally and externally.
- Update the project *strategy*: The current strategy recognizes the impact expectations beyond the Report's official mandate but is not consistent with a theory of change geared towards policy influence, and resources are not allocated to increase the probability of policy change at the national level. Much has changed since 2015 and the GEM Report strategy needs to adjust.

These two key public documents will be supported and aligned with three new strategies on:

- Communication/distribution ([recommendation 1.3](#)): The Report has achieved a lot of success in its communication and outreach activities, which the evaluation could have highlighted and recognized more strongly. However, the evaluation is correct in pointing out that the emphasis on communicating the key messages of each individual Report cycle comes at the expense of a more strategic perspective for achieving policy impact. Inevitably, there are trade-offs: for instance, a longer term policy impact orientation may not be compatible with a constantly increasing number of media articles, and monitoring policy impact takes up communications resources. But overall, there is scope to revisit target audiences and align communications and distribution with policy impact, notably with a view to effective and cost efficient ways to enhance policy dialogue at national and regional levels.
- Fundraising/financing ([recommendation 1.4](#)): The Report team has pursued a consistent fundraising strategy over the years but is faced with several risks that affect its financial situation. First, donors tend to perceive mistakenly that the Report enjoys robust financial foundations because of its strong reputation. Second, most donors tend to increasingly concentrate their funding into fewer and larger projects, which makes support to the Report less attractive from a management point of view. Third, potential new donors may be less committed to the pooled account mechanism to which all donors have subscribed since 2001. The thrust of the new fundraising strategy will be to propose solutions to these and other dilemmas of a diversifying donor group and to communicate the new strategic orientation. With respect to the latter, the budget will be aligned more explicitly to the overall strategic objectives to increase the attractiveness of the Report to potential donors and it will generate increasingly granular information on unit costs per output; a process is already under way in that direction ([recommendation 1.5](#)).
- Partnerships: The evaluation does not include this strategy in its recommendations; however partnerships are an increasingly important lever to achieve the project's mandate. The Report has enjoyed successful partnerships over the years but the call for policy impact at the national level also requires a more systematic approach to identifying long-term partners that can deliver change.

Updating the project's strategic documents may also call for amendments to its results framework. As the latter was only recently updated and is an element of existing funding agreements with donors, it may not be advisable to bring any changes to it before 2020. However, once the review of the project's strategic documents is complete, input from donors shall be solicited as to whether the results framework can be amended ([recommendation 1.2](#)).

Recommendation 2

Make the Report even more relevant for readers in the Global South.

2.1 Produce outputs with a regional focus, subject to funding. Stakeholders across all groups are interested in local and regional findings. They use the Report to compare their country to others in their region and to consider how to apply findings and recommendations in the local context. However, because the Report is global, there is little room to incorporate many local findings, examples and recommendations. The Team should consider the publication of regional reports. These would be popular and relevant, and would lead to a wider readership among key groups. However, this would certainly involve substantial cost increases, potentially requiring development of new research strands and partnerships for data collection and output dissemination. We therefore recommend that specific additional funding be committed to this.

Management response

The GEM Report team is committed to increase the relevance of its outputs for its global and diverse audience. Using its mandate to inform the international community on progress towards the commonly agreed education targets in the SDGs as a basis, it aims to refine its content to mobilize actors towards actions that will help achieve the targets. As the agenda is universal, its messages should be relevant everywhere in the world.

Until 2015, the Report had a tradition of producing regional summaries on demand to support launch activities in different regions. However, these were not contributing to the ultimate objective of policy change: the Report is written for a global audience and extracting its regional content is not sufficiently relevant and representative of education issues for any single region. To increase regional relevance, the Report needs to develop specific outputs that are planned from the outset to serve regional audiences as a bridge for policy dialogue at the national level.

An approach the GEM Report team had begun developing prior to the evaluation entails a range of activities focused on two outputs:

- A new series of regional reports will develop the theme of the global report in a particular region. Beginning in 2020 and working with two partners in each region, every global report will be accompanied by at least one report focusing on one region that will be developed in parallel. As the evaluation notes, the cost implications of such an expansion could be considerable. However, it is also anticipated that the new series, once introduced, will also help attract new funding streams.
- A more systematic approach to collect information on national education policies, starting at least with those related to the theme of the Report, will help generate peer learning using existing policy dialogue mechanisms at the regional level. The process of developing these comparative resources will strengthen links with policy makers at the national level and generate a virtuous cycle that can achieve the recommendation of increasing the relevance of the Report.

Recommendation 3

Revise the composition and the role played by the Advisory Board to get better value from their expertise

- 3.1 Involve the Board members in dissemination, launch events, and fundraising. Participation in dissemination would not pose a risk to the Report's independence, but Board members should take care to highlight this independence and differentiate the findings of the Report from commentary provided by others. Meetings with donors could be used as an opportunity to gather feedback on fundraising strategies and possible additional sources of funding. The Advisory Board's mandate and TORs could be expanded to formalise these new responsibilities.
- 3.2 Increase the representation of the Global South on the Advisory Board. The composition of the Board should be reviewed to enhance representation from the Global South without increasing the overall size of the Board. For example, the number of donors on the Board could be reduced by requiring a minimum funding commitment or by reinstating a rotation system for donors.
- 3.3 Refine the format of Advisory Board meetings to enhance efficiency. Small groups should be formed during the course of the Advisory Board meeting to facilitate discussion and/or advisory on specific issues in participants' areas of expertise.

Management response

According to its terms of reference (ToR), the GEM Report Advisory Board plays a 'consultative role', providing 'oversight, guidance and suggestions' on, among others:

- the vision, purpose and objectives of GEM Reports and their consistency with SDG 4 and the FFA;
- the evolving national, regional and international context for implementation of the FFA;
- future GEM Report themes, priorities and approaches
- the long-term development of the GEM Report
- sources of expertise, knowledge, information and mobilising funding
- communications and outreach for the Report, including advocacy, publications and partnerships.

With respect to the last point, 'Members of the Advisory Board are further called upon to contribute to advocacy, outreach and distribution of the GEM Report among their own constituencies.'

The Report team will work with the Board members on the basis of these responsibilities:

- Board members are already expected to, and many do, take active part in dissemination and launch activities. Members are less supportive of fundraising activities and related initiatives. There is no strong need to amend the ToRs as they currently stand ([recommendation 3.1](#)).
- With the Board ToR as a basis, the GEM Report team will look into:
 - ensuring members from the constituency 'Developing country representatives (3-4 members): Representatives from regional institutions and networks', which is in line with the overall strategy;
 - considering options for ensuring all voices are equally heard, while taking into account that Board membership is an incentive for donors;
 - ensuring support of donors from countries in the global South;
 - engaging constituencies in advance of the Board meeting to ensure a well-informed debate during the Advisory Board sessions ([recommendation 3.2](#)).
- The GEM Report team will explore all options to re-configure the congested agenda of the Board meeting to make space for discussion on the implementation of the new strategy and key long-term issues facing the GEM Report that may have received less attention ([recommendation 3.3](#)).

Recommendation 4

Engage the Report's potential readership at the early stages of the Report production to further improve its relevance

- 4.1 Strengthen the visibility of and participation in the shortlisting of the three themes prior to selection by the Advisory Board. The GEM Report Team is already engaged in informal discussions around Report themes, but as further steps, the GEM Report Team could engage better the Advisory Board and/or its audience at an earlier stage. For example, the GEM Report Team could carry out a public consultation through its existing blog, social media and newsletter to engage the education community on the selection of the new themes, or they could request formally the Advisory Board members to provide suggestions. Especially in the context of having such a consultative process, having clearly elaborated criteria for theme selection aligned to the Education 2030 Agenda would ensure the selected theme reflects global priorities.
- 4.2 Strengthen public consultation on the selected theme: The theme is selected two years ahead of the Report's publication, and therefore, it could be published earlier to make sure all stakeholders – especially those in the Global South – have sufficient opportunity to participate in think-pieces, public consultation, and background papers. In addition to publishing the theme, these opportunities for participation could be announced at the same time. It should be noted that enhancing participation is expected to increase demands on staff time, and that this recommendation could only be actioned if the GEM Report Team has enough resources. The evaluation team notes that the theme and public consultation for the 2020 edition have already been published.
- 4.3 Disseminating background papers more visibly and make them more easily accessible. The GEM Report Team has improved the research tool on the website to locate background papers. However, their dissemination could be enhanced through social media and the newsletter, which are some of the main tools by which readers become aware of new publications.
- 4.4 Sharing details of the production and editorial processes. The GEM Report Team should enhance its own visibility by publishing details of the Team's composition, the Report production processes, as well as details of its independence on the website and in the Report, in addition to the website where some of this information is already available.

Management response

The GEM Report team welcomes the attention that the evaluation has paid to the issues in this recommendation.

- The first five themes in the GEM Report series are based on the FFA and are highly relevant for the SDG 4 agenda. The evaluation supports this conclusion in finding that ‘survey respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the themes covered in the last three editions of the GEM Report are very relevant to education priorities.’ To that end, the selection process and criteria used were effective. The editorial independence of the GEM Report requires it to have a strong voice in advocating for certain themes; however, in response to the recommendation, the GEM Report team will make two calls for future theme suggestions: one for Advisory Board members, advertised well in advance of the next meeting, and one to its broader audience ([recommendation 4.1](#)).
- The GEM Report team runs an extensive consultation on the selected theme. The 2020 Report theme consultation, which was the most successful to date, went on for eight weeks and resulted in a 100-page recommendations document. More in-person consultation events on the future Report could have been organized on the back of launch events of the current Report but this could confuse the communication of messages and is therefore not advisable. Project resources, as the recommendation notes, do not allow for further changes to current arrangements. However, increased use of teleconferencing has expanded the scope of consultation activities in recent years and the Report team will look into tapping into the use of this tool ([recommendation 4.2](#)).
- Access to report outputs is not entirely determined by the GEM Report team but follows the UNESCO documentation management process. The Report team has improved the background papers webpage in the 2019 Report and will do so retrospectively for previous editions in coming months. Highlighting a selection of relevant background papers each year would be another approach to attract attention ([recommendation 4.3](#)).
- As the recommendation notes, all information that is critical to the Report’s audience is already available on the website but there is considerable scope in further improving the website content on several pages and will engage in those changes throughout 2019 ([recommendation 4.4](#)).