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Shalini Singh¹

1) Julius Maximilians University of Würzburg, Germany

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From Global North-South Divide to Sustainability: Shifting Policy Frameworks for International Development and Education¹

Shalini Singh

Julius Maximilians University of Würzburg

Abstract

Education policies are becoming increasingly oriented towards employability (economic returns) and subjected to measurements especially post-2015. Despite resistance from different stakeholders, employability has become a global norm and funds for programmes with non-economic objectives, especially in low and middle-income countries have been cut tremendously (Singh & Ehlers, 2020). Is this a short term crisis, a faulty and confused policy decision, or a part of a long term policy agenda aimed at bigger changes with deeper policy linkages? Who is promoting it with what intentions? How should the actors in the education sector deal with it? This paper answers these questions by mapping and analysing the shift in policy framework for International Development from Global North-South Divide (1970s-2015) to Sustainability (2015 onwards) and its impact on the policy of education for development. It shows how International Organisations (IOs) used knowledge, information and policy linkages to gain control over states and UN created a narrative about sustainability rooted in environment to facilitate an obscure OECD agenda for sustainable economic growth, backed by World Bank and the IMF's measurement and control tactics. It further explains how and why the development policies (reflected in education) of low, middle and high income countries converged post-2015.

Keywords: sustainable development, policy framework, international organisations, global North-South divide, education for development



De la División Global Norte-Sur a la Sostenibilidad: Marcos Políticos Cambiantes para el Desarrollo Internacional y la Educación¹

Shalini Singh

Julius Maximilians University of Würzburg

Resumen

Las políticas educativas se orientan cada vez más hacia la empleabilidad (rentabilidad económica) y son evaluadas, especialmente después de 2015. La empleabilidad se ha convertido en una norma global. Los fondos para programas con objetivos no económicos, especialmente en países de bajos y medianos ingresos, se han reducido enormemente (Singh y Ehlers, 2020). ¿Se trata de una crisis a corto plazo, una decisión política defectuosa y confusa, o parte de una agenda política a largo plazo dirigida a cambios más grandes con vínculos políticos más profundos? ¿Quién lo promueve con qué intenciones? ¿Cómo deberían tratarlo los actores del sector educativo? El artículo responde a estas preguntas analizando el cambio en el marco de políticas para el Desarrollo Internacional de la División Global Norte-Sur (1970- 2015) a la Sostenibilidad y su impacto en la política de educación para el desarrollo. Muestra cómo las Organizaciones Internacionales usaron los vínculos de conocimiento, información y políticas para obtener el control sobre los estados y la ONU creó una narrativa sobre la sostenibilidad enraizada en el medio ambiente para facilitar una oscura agenda de la OCDE para el crecimiento económico sostenible, respaldada por el Banco Mundial y las medidas y control del FMI. Explica además cómo y por qué las políticas de desarrollo (reflejadas en la educación) de los países de bajos, medianos y altos ingresos convergieron después de 2015.

Palabras clave: desarrollo sostenible, marco político, organizaciones internacionales, división global norte-sur, educación para el desarrollo



In 2015, seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as objectives for International Development. Education for Development was included as Goal 4 in the SDGs. However, the mentioned change was not merely a change in the policy on International Development but rather a shift in the entire framework within which the policy was embedded. The earlier policy was embedded in the Global North-South Divide Framework while the post-2015 policy is embedded in the Sustainability Framework. This implied that transnational, national and sub-national stakeholders were now supposed to operate in a context shaped by the sustainability agenda and follow the corresponding guidelines. This paper analyses the shift from the Global North-South Divide Framework to the Sustainability Framework in 2015 and discusses its relevance for different stakeholders (in general) in relation to Education for Development policy as a consequence of its linkages to the policy on International Development.

Since 1989, the policy frameworks for International Development (including Education for Development) have been shaped primarily by the OECD, the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund (WB/IMF), the UN and its supporting agencies, and the ILO. ILO recommendations have formed the basis of major work-related, vocational, and employability policies and strategies like Recognition of Prior Learning in countries such as India (OECD, World Bank & ILO, 2016; Singh & Ehlers, 2019). The ILO has accepted allegiance to the international agenda for education aiming at development (ILO, n.d.). While the OECD has strong influence in high-income countries, the WB/IMF, and the UN along with its agencies have strong influence in low and middle-income countries outside Europe². Therefore, this paper analyses documents from the OECD, the WB/IMF, and the UN and its supporting agencies as the primary sources using document analysis. Since ILO's policies focus on labour and work rather than education (ILO, n.d.), ILO policy documents have not been found relevant, and thus not included in this paper.

The policies on different areas of international development were embedded in the Global North-South Divide since the 1970s (Ehrlich, 1980). In 1989, they started *converging* as a single policy on International Development (including Education for Development), later manifested as

the MDGs in 2001, and continued to be so till 2015 (Singh, 2018). In 2015, a shift in policy framework was marked by the adoption of SDGs. This paper thus maps global policy changes between 1989 and 2015 relevant in relation to education policies and mentions pertinent facts from the period before and after wherever required.

The research questions include: how has a shift in policy framework for policies on International Development been reflected in Education for Development policies? How is this change relevant for transnational, national and sub-national stakeholders in the context of International Development in general and Education for Development in particular?

The paper is divided into seven sections. The first section (introduction) explains the relevance of discussing the shift in policy framework to understand its relevance for different types of transnational (like transnational education networks), national (like ministries) and sub-national (like universities and researchers) stakeholders in relation to Education for Development policy, mentions the research questions and gives an overview about the methodology. In the second section, an operational definition of policy framework is formulated by comparing it with related concepts of policy norm and policy regime. In the next three sections, the content (for instance terms used, arguments, changes, references etc.) as well as contextual considerations (which IO has published what, when, where, for whom, why and how) of all published policy documents from the mentioned IO between 1945 to 2019 have been analysed and mapped both chronologically as well as thematically using the technique of document analysis to show how the UN and its supporting agencies have been legitimising the OECD agenda for sustainable economic growth in international development and the WB agenda in education policies by constructing illusions of public discussions, summits, committees and negotiations amid low and middle-income countries. However, in order to maintain precision, only those documents are mentioned in the text which were found relevant to answer the research questions directly. In the sixth section the relevance of the shift in policy framework for transnational, national and sub-national stakeholders is discussed followed by the conclusion in the last section.

Structuring Policies: Norms, Regimes and Frameworks

A *framework* is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) as “a supporting structure around which something can be built” or “a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something”. A *policy framework* can thus be defined as *a basic structure (could be assumptive) around which policies are built*. It comprises of rules, ideas, and/or beliefs that underlie policies dealing with a certain policy concern (Sabatier, 2007). Policy goals often indicate the framework within which a particular policy is formulated but the framework is not necessarily limited to goals. A policy framework should not be confused with a policy norm or a policy regime. A policy norm is a standard, usually measurable (for instance through an indicator) (Björkdahl, 2002). For instance, the indicator of access to education measures certain aspects of the policy norm considering education as a human right. A regime is a strong structure with rules and regulations, sometimes laws, that might have consequences, if violated (Wilson, 2000). For instance, violation of trade laws negotiated through the World Trade Organisation regarding teaching as a service might attract consequences if violated as they are a part of the global trade regime, consolidated using international laws. Policy framework is a rather loose structure. Unlike a regime, it is based on loose guidelines and therefore, has space for free negotiations (with or without the exercise of influence). Formulating policies outside it may not lead to violation of laws. A framework usually prioritises the concerns of stakeholders and aligns them, clarifies the key terminology at a particular point of time and provides space and directions for negotiations, usually according to the preferences of the most influential actors. Thus, it fixes a point of departure and sets the rules of the game where the game refers to the act of exerting influence by stakeholders during policy negotiations.

The Global North-South Divide Framework and International Development Policies

The term Global North-South Divide is a geo-political representation of the unequal economic development across the globe. It is rooted in the post

WW-II era and remained a predominant policy framework in relation to policies on International Development between 1970s and 2015 (Singh, 2018). The imagery of the global North and the global South was strengthened by post-colonial politics, Cold War, Non-Alignment Movement, demands for economic restructuring by low and middle income countries following the oil crisis in the 1970s and the like (Ehrlich, 1980). The countries located in the Northern hemisphere were usually rich, technologically advanced, powerful and industrialised, and former imperialists whereas the countries located in the Southern hemisphere (except for some like Australia and Japan) were former colonies, poor, relied on primary and traditional economy, and had limited international political influence (Ehrlich, 1980; Singh, 2018). The dividing line between the North and the South was sometimes called the “poverty curtain” (Haq, 1976; Escobar, 1995 in Thérien 1999). In 1980, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (Brandt Commission), appointed at the WB’s initiative, made an imaginary line (the *Brandt Line*) representing the North and the South to acknowledge poverty and unequal development between the two parts of the globe with some exceptions (Independent Commission on International Development Issues, 1980).

States were the primary actors in devising international policies using *international* platforms to ease their interaction and ensure consolidated intervention wherever needed. Most resources for development came from states. IOs had thus, a limited role to play, shaped by the funding provided primarily by the states. These organisations even competed with each other for influence and the resources that followed it. For instance, in late 1960s, the NATO and the OECD competed for promoting the idea of addressing environmental concerns in relation to economic growth (Schmelzer, 2016).

The oil crisis and the oil glut in the 1970s forced many countries from the South to seek loans from the WB (Heyneman, 2012). With US backing (Baker Plan, 1985), the WB offered *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAPs) to these countries (Heyneman, 2012). These SAPs were *integrated* policy packages covering almost all policy areas, negotiated between the WB and the finance ministries (irrespective of the protests by other ministries) of the loan-seeking countries (Heyneman, 2012). This made the WB a major policy actor in the global South influencing not only development, but all policies

including education. The end of the Cold War, rise of the US as a global hegemon and the EU's internal market, all contributed to an atmosphere where peaceful economic competition (rather than war) could be managed through regulations (Singh, 2018).

The WB-led *policy integration* was followed by *policy convergence* between 1989 and 2001. All policies related to development were included in a single policy on International Development. Even though the UN claimed to facilitate this convergence through various conferences (See Figure 1), sources reveal that it presented a distorted picture of reality. Convergence was not planned till 1995 and the OECD planned the convergence since 1995 for economic reasons⁴. Following the Copenhagen Declaration, 1995 which brought together economic, social and environmental issues, the OECD proposed *International Development Goals, 1996* to make *policy convergence* a reality (Hulme, 2009). Later these goals were adopted as MDGs in 2001 with cosmetic changes as targets for development to be achieved till 2015 (Hulme, 2009; Singh, 2018). When policies converged, IOs started cooperating and aligning their roles with each other (Singh, 2018).

Most policy negotiations remained hierarchical as states negotiated on *inter-national* policy platforms. The engagement of the South (*aid recipients*) was limited since apart from other reasons, funding came from the North (*aid-donors*). Outcomes were measured in terms of *aid effectiveness* or the amount of aid resources spent on a particular initiative (OECD, 2013). In most cases it meant ensuring the achievement of goals laid in the beginning of each initiative (OECD, 2013). The OECD also led the development of an implementation machinery for *policy consolidation* by 2008 through development financing and measurement (OECD, 2008; UN 2009).

As the financial crisis aggravated in 2008, huge influx of immigrants, demographic challenges, restructuring of economic patterns and the like, lead to pockets of poverty in the North (OECD, 2012). In contrast, rising living standards, demographic dividends, booming economies and the like lead to pockets of affluence in the South (OECD, 2012). The OECD thus argued for dropping the North-South Framework in 2012, claiming that the divide between the North and the South was no more a reality since

development challenges needed to be addressed all over the globe (OECD, 2012). However, a mapping of documents reveals that the financial crisis and other reasons only served as *windows of opportunity*5 while a new policy framework was already taking shape as an undercurrent since long6.

Figure 1.

Global Conferences and Summits at the UN Platform leading to Policy Convergence in International Development

Global Conferences and Summits	
Event	Year
Children	1990, 2002
Education for All	1990, 2000
Least Developed Countries	1990, 2001
Drug problem	1990, 1998
Food Security	1992, 1996
Sustainable Development	1992, 2002
Human Rights	1993, 2001
Population and Development	1994
Small Island Developing States	1994, 2005
Natural Disaster Reduction	1994, 2005
Women	1995, 2005
Social Development	1995, 2005
Human Settlements	1996, 2001
Youth	1998
Millennium Summit	2000, 2005
HIV/AIDS	2001
Financing and Development	2002
Ageing	2002
Landlocked and Transit	2003
Developing Countries	
Information Society	2003, 2005

Source: From UN (2007). Copyright 2007 by UN

Till 2015, the entire policy aimed at promoting development in the South in a unilinear fashion and the North was supposed to facilitate the process by providing resources wherever needed. The arguments like the responsibility of the North to facilitate the development in the South arose from

colonisation, economic exploitation in the past, the need for world peace through global prosperity etc. were popular in academic discourse (Amuzegar, 1976). However, research highlighted the economic benefits of providing development aid as well (Independent Commission on International Development Issues, 1980).

Towards the Sustainability Framework

The Sustainability Framework for International Development favours policies with a balance among economy, society and environment. It implies that economic growth should not only sustain itself cost-effectively in the long run, but should also be socially and environmentally viable (World Bank Group & IMF, 2008; OECD, 2012). The benefits of development should be fairly distributed across the society and environmental challenges should be addressed while striving for profits (World Bank Group & IMF, 2008; OECD, 2012).

Different aspects of this framework came gradually on the global agenda. However, the discussion regarding the same was rooted in the OECD since its inception. Promoting *sustainable economic growth* is the first objective of the OECD Convention, 1960 (OECD, 1960). The official policy of the OECD led by economic experts was to promote economic growth without limits but within the OECD, a faction soon came up with arguments against the model by the late 1960s (Schmelzer, 2016). This faction emphasised the absurdity of unlimited quantitative growth and its unintended consequences in relation to environment and society (Schmelzer, 2016). The faction established the Club of Rome in 1968 and its report, *Limits to Growth* (1972) stirred up the debate that was already going on in the civil society and various national and international policy circles (Meadows et al., 1972; Schmelzer, 2016). Even though the OECD resources were used to build up and promote the debate, the OECD officially announced its preference for unlimited economic growth, capable of addressing environmental and social problems, in 1973 due to strong opposition by OECD economists, member countries, changing international milieu and the need for growth of the OECD as an institution (Schmelzer, 2016). In 1979, the approach in favour of limited growth was completely rejected by the OECD on paper

(Schmelzer, 2016; OECD, 1979). Despite this, the Brundtland Commission Report was released in 1987. As the OECD (in policy recommendations) and the WB (in SAPs) adopted a cautious approach favouring *harmless economic growth* in the 1980s and 90s (Park, 2007; OECD, 2008), the mainstream policy on international development started to change gradually.

Sustainable Growth and International Development

Through the Club of Rome and the Brundtland Commission reports, the notion of sustainable economic growth strengthened on the global policy agenda. While the North argued for balanced development, the South demanded resources from the North to do so (Thérian, 1999). Development assistance for balanced growth came as a solution (Thérian, 1999). In 1992, the Earth Summit raised Sustainability on the global policy agenda followed by the Copenhagen Declaration (1995) which stated that economic, social and environmental issues for development are equally important and one *cannot* be addressed at the cost of others (UNESCO, 2014d). The IDGs (1996) proposed by the OECD included economic, social and environmental aspects of development (OECD, 1996). The WB declared them as the monitoring Framework for International Development in 1997 (Bradford, 2002; Hulme, 2009). Despite resistance from the UN, the OECD took control of the policy convergence process, and decided what to include and exclude from the various negotiations going on at the UN platform (Hulme, 2009). While the UN policy favoured a more rights-based idealistic approach, the OECD focussed upon “the politics of what works,” thus increasing and using foreign aid in the most effective way (Hulme, 2009). The UN tried to promote all-inclusive idealistic goals but affirmed the IDGs in 2001 amid much resentment from funders, lobbyists and beneficiaries (Hulme, 2009). States thus adopted a reformulated version of the OECD policy as MDGs at the UN platform in 2001, backed by the WB/IMF (Hulme, 2009).

In 2008, the WB/IMF used the financial crisis as an opportunity to introduce Sustainability as the core value for the policy on International Development (World Bank Group & IMF, 2008). The OECD agenda was now communicated to the South (where development policies were

implemented) through the WB/IMF. The OECD had limited engagement outside member countries and the WB/IMF were the perfect actors to set the tone for policy change. Two years later, the UN announced to start negotiations about the new development policy in 2010 (UN, 2010).

The year 2011 became the year of big changes. The aftermaths of the financial crisis were now understood by the common taxpayer and voter while refugee crisis was visible enough to influence the public opinion. This provided another window of opportunity to introduce major policy changes. While the UN *prepared* for policy ‘formulation’ through public discussions, meetings, summits, opinion polls, etc.; detailed OECD and EU (major aid-donor) policies on development were announced (European Commission, 2011; OECD, 2011b). The OECD further used this opportunity to make the policy formulation *transnational* by including stakeholders from market and civil society in direct decision-making (OECD, 2011a).

In 2012, along with other reasons like demographic challenges, redistribution of poverty and affluence, immigration etc., the OECD used the aftermaths of the financial crisis to replace the North-South Framework with the Sustainability Framework (OECD, 2012). UN followed and took the opportunity to announce its development policy. (Not) surprisingly, the UN policy which was claimed to be a result of the so called global negotiations, consultations, voting, bargaining, expert analysis and the like, engaging as many stakeholders as possible (UN, 2012), was not different from the OECD policy. Between 2013 and 2014, the UN tried to facilitate consensus for the policy; in 2015 it was adopted and backed by funding; and finally, in 2016, the WB/IMF came up with indicators to measure and control the outcomes of policy implementation (UN, 2013; 2015a; World Bank Group & IMF, 2016).

Thus, the idea of sustainable growth was pushed forward by the OECD officially and unofficially gradually while other IOs chose to bandwagon. The entire world became *developing* once *development* was redefined in terms of Sustainability (World Bank Group & IMF, 2016). The division between the North and the South was dropped and the only relevant categorisation for countries remained their income (World Bank Group & IMF, 2016). The idea of sustainable economic growth thus became the core value for the policy on International Development. However, Sustainability

Framework is not limited to sustainable economic growth. Mobilizing resources and evaluating the impact of development are two other crucial and intertwined components of this Framework.

Resource Mobilization and Impact Evaluation

The OECD is working with measurement of aid effectiveness since its inception, showing special interest in increasing the amount of aid for development provided by member countries (Hynes & Scott, 2013; OECD, 1962, 2013). In 1969, OECD introduced the term Official Development Assistance (ODA) to measure aid which later became the consolidated channel for *development financing* (Hynes & Scott, 2013). Questions regarding efficacy of aid and evaluation of aid initiatives were discussed by a special group for evaluation of aid initiatives in several OECD seminars backed by the Nordic Countries, Netherlands and Germany in the 1970s (Hynes & Scott, 2013; OECD, 2013). Since 1983, WB/IMF, UN Development Program and regional development banks cooperated with the group (Hynes & Scott, 2013; OECD, 2013). However, the risk of reduction in aid as an unintended consequence of measurement kept the provision out of the International Development policy for decades (Hynes & Scott, 2013; OECD, 2013).

As the fear of donors regarding loss of allies faded away with the end of the Cold War, they started providing conditional aid (Dunning, 2004). In 1996, the OECD proposed twelve indicators followed by the facilitation of negotiations for aid effectiveness and for developing guidelines regarding the same (OECD, 1996). After the MDGs were adopted, the OECD developed further guidelines for systematic financing of development and impact measurement. MDG 8 aimed to develop a *Global Partnership for Development*. At Monterrey (2002), the existing hierarchical and unequal donor (North) – recipient (South) relationship changed formally to an equal partnership, implying that the South should take responsibility for its own development, mobilise its own funds before asking for aid, and show accountability for spending the development assistance it received (UN, 2003). The North promised to provide resources to bridge the gap between

the funding required and available in the South for achieving the MDGs (UN, 2003).

The *Paris Declaration* (2005) established a monitoring system to assess progress in achieving MDGs and listed implementation measures for ensuring aid effectiveness (OECD, 2008; UN 2009). In 2008, an implementation plan (Accra Agenda for Action) and a conference on development financing followed at Doha (OECD, 2008). The economic crisis was used as a window of opportunity once again since the policy on aid effectiveness developed over decades. In 2010, the OECD proposed norms for evaluation of aid effectiveness which were followed by most DAC member countries thereafter⁹ (OECD, 2013).

Based on the norms, a Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was established in 2011 to implement the change from *aid effectiveness* to *development effectiveness* (OECD, 2011a). The partner countries (not aid-recipients) agreed to evaluate their own initiatives in terms of the contribution of each initiative to achieve the MDGs (and not for a certain amount of aid) (OECD, 2011a; OECD, 2013). The third conference on development financing in 2015 laid down guidelines for implementation (UN, 2015b). Notably, it took about half a century to formulate the policy on aid effectiveness and integrate it with the policy on International Development due to the risks involved (OECD, 2013). Measurement of aid/development effectiveness was therefore, *not* a new policy which emerged due to the economic crisis or changes that preceded its launch. The change in policy framework was therefore an outcome of a collaborated effort of IOs in 2016.

The Role of IOs

The funding by members and the potential to influence policies through its policy expertise makes the OECD the most powerful organisation and leader in policy change through policy formulation, at least in the context of International Development.

The WB/IMF focused on monitoring and evaluation of development against MDGs in the South. They invest in policy research and expertise and provide *conditional* development loans, training and policy

recommendations to low and middle-income countries (outside Europe). The WB/IMF therefore secure strong intervention in the policies of these countries (Zapp, 2017; Singh, 2018).

The UN claimed the origins of sustainability policy in the Earth Summit (1992) and its development through various UN conferences and events that included all countries and relevant stakeholders across the globe (UNESCO, 2014d). However, sources reveal that the UN claim was distorted, and the change was pushed forward by the OECD followed by the WB/IMF. The UN and its supporting agencies are highly dependent on funding which hinders their ability to push for independent policy changes, but they offer the biggest platform for bargain and negotiations to low and middle-income countries (outside Europe). Equal voting rights of each state in the UN General Assembly despite inequality among them in international political arena, popular consultations, idealistic propaganda for social change, outreach activities to reach all kinds of stakeholders and the like, make the UN and its agencies perfect platforms for gaining legitimacy, marketing, acceptance and implementation of policies with least resistance (and thus less costs). The claims regarding sustainability policy by the UN therefore, obscure the OECD agenda for sustainable economic growth.

Policies on Education for Development

The current Education for Development policy is embedded in the policy on International Development and therefore reflects the above-mentioned changes (Singh, 2018). Manifested as SDG 4, it aims to: *“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”* (UN, 2015a).

Even though the UN and its supporting agencies were active in the field since the 1940s, Education for Development came in focus primarily after the Sputnik Shock¹⁰ (Baten, 2016). During the cold war, the US and the former USSR used education to increase and maintain their spheres of influence in former colonies (Singh, 2018).

The WB has been one of the most influential international actors in the area through funding¹¹, production, management and transmission of knowledge (Zapp, 2017; Singh, 2018). Thus, the aid-dependent policy in the

South has primarily been led by the WB and not the UN (as depicted in the MDGs). In the North, *Development Education* has been used to convince the taxpayers about the need for development in the South and to motivate them for financial and non-financial contribution (Singh, 2018).

Between the 1960s and the early-1980s, the WB's policy focussed on funding infrastructural projects for secondary and post-secondary vocational education to promote industrialisation that complemented economic growth and nurtured cold war inspirations in the West (Psacharopoulos, 2006; World Bank Group, 2011; Heyneman, 2012; Mundy & Verger, 2015). During the 1970s and early 1980s, research and reorganisation of the WB staff changed its approach in favour of public spending on primary education and gender parity, leaving other sectors of education to the market (Psacharopoulos, 2006; Heyneman, 2012; Mundy & Verger, 2015). According to the WB, spending on primary education and gender parity yielded maximum *rate of return* (Heyneman, 2012). When crisis-ridden countries from the South approached the WB for loans in mid-1980s, its SAPs led to a remarkable decline in access to education among rural populations of these countries (UNICEF, 1987 in Heyneman, 2012). In answer to the consequent growing resentment, the WB pushed forward its *sector-specific* policy in education based on rate of return (Psacharopoulos, 2006). In early 1990s, more research and staff reorganisation in the WB strengthened its claims but by the end of the decade, a counter-trend started (Heyneman, 2012). As fast-growing industrial countries took loans from the WB and implemented SAPs, outcomes for education proved disastrous because of contextual differences (Heyneman, 2012). The WB was forced to reconsider its stand, drop its sector-specific (basic education) policy and move to post-basic (integrated education) policy (Heyneman, 2012).

WB was not the only IO to change its approach towards Education for Development. The UN and its supporting agencies also changed their policy, but for different reasons. Since the late 1940s, the UN and its supporting agencies like the UNESCO and the UNICEF organised several initiatives for promoting different aspects of education, introduced policy variables like Lifelong Education and promoted an integrated approach towards education (rather than sector-specific approach) (Faure et al., 1972; Jones & Coleman, 2005; Elfert, 2016; Ehlers, 2019; UNESCO, n.d.). The UNESCO, which

specifically dealt with Education for Development, was facing competition from the OECD in the global North in the 1980s (Ehlers, 2019). The US, Singapore and the UK chose to engage with the OECD in 1984-85 and withdrew their financial support from the UNESCO (Ehlers, 2019). Consequently, the UNESCO was forced to cut down its activities (Jones & Coleman, 2005).

Since 1989, the UN platform was used for a series of conferences in different policy areas (UN, 2007). The WB, which was facing much criticism because of the SAPs, co-organised the EFA Conference (1990) with four UN agencies as a counter-measure (Joint Declaration, 1990). In 2000, six EFA goals with an integrated approach towards education in all sectors were adopted. Despite this, the WB's sector-specific policy found place in the MDGs and most EFA goals were left for private action (Faul, 2014; Singh, 2018). While Education for Development policy for the South became limited to sector-specific policy, education in the North prepared for knowledge economy through lifelong learning reforms and integrated qualification frameworks.

To streamline the agenda further, the WB initiated a *Fast Track Initiative on EFA* (2002) (Global Partnership for Education, n.d.). Despite EFA in its name, the initiative promoted the sector-specific policy of the WB (Global Partnership for Education, 2013, n.d.; UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, n.d.). In 2005, educational aid started being channelled through it (Global Partnership for Education, n.d.) corresponding to the WB's policy.

While poverty led the MDG agenda due to pressure from civil society (Hulme, 2009), the policy on sustainable development developed as an undercurrent. In 2002, the decade 2005-14 was declared as the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development to create awareness about Sustainability (UN, 2015a). When the economic crisis came in 2008, resentment against the existing education policy grew. Countries in the South argued that policy implementation was difficult since other educational needs were addressed inadequately (Singh, 2018). Their situation in relation to primary education and gender parity had improved, their dependence on the WB had declined, and they could perceive the challenges of knowledge economy (Rosling, 2018; Singh, 2018).

Since education policy was embedded in International Development policy, a clear education policy was announced by the WB in 2011 ([World Bank Group, 2011](#)), only after the International Development policy took shape. The economic crisis (2008) and the refugee crisis (2011) were thus used as windows of opportunity because the announced education policy was built upon the WB strategy of 2005 ([World Bank Group, 2005](#)) prepared before the crisis.

The *UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* (DESD) was divided into two phases: 2005-08 and 2009-14 ([UNESCO, 2014d](#)). During the first phase, the idea of Sustainability was promoted through education whereas during the second phase, policy formulation regarding Sustainability began ([UNESCO, 2014d](#)). This coincides with the interpretation of development in terms of Sustainability by the WB/IMF (mentioned earlier).

The WB policy to “*Invest early. Invest Smartly. Invest for All*” portrayed education as an *investment* rather than a *cost* ([World Bank Group, 2011](#)). The target group of the policy expanded from children and females for primary education in the global South to all individuals across the globe ([World Bank Group, 2011](#)). The approach changed from *teaching* (education) to *learning* ([World Bank Group, 2011](#)). Reflecting the change in the policy on International Development, the EFA-Fast Track initiative was renamed as the *Global Partnership for Education*, included more stakeholders, and made the South responsible as partner (taking initiatives) rather than aid-recipient (following directions from donors) ([World Bank Group, 2011](#)). Focus on learning, measurement, Sustainability and employability; treating education as an investment rather than a cost; mobilisation of non-public resources; integrated rather than sector-wide approach towards education, were all characteristics of education policies in the North. The aid recipient countries were now free to follow the same, despite the aid they received. Education for Development policy in the North and the South *converged* after decades.

The UNESCO strategy on education, the results of Education for All Steering Committee, and the Muscat Agreement which claimed to be independent reiterated the goals put forth by the OECD, the WB/IMF and the EU, just like in case of International Development ([UNESCO, 2014a](#);

UNESCO, 2014b; UNESCO 2014c; UNESCO, 2014d; Singh, 2018). The UNESCO indicated the need to adapt its policies in line with the international agenda for development and also released a timeline to show how it pushed sustainability on the global agenda (UNESCO, 2014c). Interestingly, no references to outside influences or linkages with the OECD, or the WB/IMF were made, creating the *illusion* that the UNESCO steered the policy on Education for Development.

In 2015, the UNESCO criticised MDGs, advocated policy change in favour of an integrated approach for all learners, and facilitated the Incheon Declaration to formulate SDG 4, a fabricated version of the WB policy (World Bank Group, 2011; UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO et al., 2015). Later in 2015, this policy was adopted once again as Education for Development policy but this time, without any resistance or parallel claims from the UN or any of its specialised agencies. The change in policy was marketed and legitimised at the UN platform by 2015 since all documents and declarations by the UNESCO reiterated the agenda already put forth in the documents by the OECD and the WB/IMF but obscured their involvement.

Discussion

Change in Policy Framework from Global North-South Divide to Sustainability was led by the OECD, supported and implemented in low and middle-income (non-OECD) countries by the WB/IMF (and the ILO (Singh & Ehlers, 2020)), and marketed and legitimised by the UN and its supporting agencies. It was marked by the move from competition (before 1990s) to collaboration (since 1990s) among IOs. These IOs have risen beyond state control (reducing the role of state) through formulation (using expertise, funding, data, research, etc.), regulation (using guidelines, research etc.), and control (using comparison, evaluation etc. through for instance, indicators) of transnational policies. Such consolidated policies based on comparative advantage of these IOs with reduced resource wastage (due to alternative and conflicting policies), better expertise and procedures, long-term considerations, and data-based informed policy choices are beyond the capability of individual states.

Further, these organisations have resorted to transparency and fairness (according to certain rules they have laid down and agreed upon by themselves) to gain legitimacy and have pooled the resources like funding and expertise to ensure efficiency and optimum utilisation of resources. States on the contrary, are marred by national, sub-national political constraints (sometimes resulting in quite inefficient solutions) and thereby, bank upon authority which could be undermined due to transparency.

However, increasingly converged, integrated, aligned and harmonised policies consolidated into a *policy mammoth* with many complicated interconnections and linkages make policy diversion difficult due to *path dependency*, leading to TINA (There is No Alternative) situations, even if policies result in undesired outcomes. There is no specific checklist to ensure that all externalities are considered while projecting outcomes, and that the policy choices will not lead to undesired outcomes.

Since 2011, the OECD-led move from *international* (state-predominated, hierarchical) to *transnational* (non-hierarchical, partner-led negotiations among states, market and civil society actors depending upon their influence and relevance of issues) policy formulation has resulted in inclusive, adaptable and flexible policies representing stakeholder interests that remained (un)represented by the state. Such stakeholders are more likely to cooperate in policy implementation (as compared to those who are not engaged at all) maintain local pressure, keep a check on policy implementation by the state, and collaborate transnationally if the state refrains from supporting them. This has however led to the weakening of state control (not necessarily good or bad) making diversion from agreed policies difficult for the state in the name of non-cooperating stakeholders, even though the policies are not contextually suitable for certain stakeholders in the state.

The shift from cost-based to investment-based approach leading to further streamlining of policies, especially in terms of measurable outcomes along certain indicators based on political (rather than scientific) considerations has changed the way policies are conceived, designed and evaluated. Stakeholders unable to define their outcomes as *sustainable* will be excluded from the mainstream process of development.

In relation to education policies, outcomes are prioritised against the method and process of education. This has led to the widening of educational focus from enrolments and gender parity in primary education to outcome-oriented education. This does not mean that education policies will be funded only if they lead to employability but they should rather be clever arguments in favour of promoting sustainability in any form (for instance, building of social capital to support peace and therefore economic growth). However, aspects of education focussing on long-term humanistic changes which are difficult to quantify or could not be visibly aligned with sustainability might even be ignored despite their relevance.

The change from policy based on *exclusion* (of sectors that give less returns on investment) to *inclusion* (for everyone, everywhere) allows low and middle-income countries to spend on areas in education relevant for their contexts. With the freedom to prioritise aspects of education according to contextual needs, low and middle-income countries are free to compete in the knowledge-economy competition. This might increase the global competition in knowledge but at the same time, can provide opportunities to new competitors (low and middle income states and non-state actors) for participation.

Redefining Development in terms of Sustainability led to the irrelevance of the North-South Divide and developed-developing conceptual constructs. In the Sustainability Framework, no state can claim to be completely sustainable in all aspects and therefore, all states are *developing*, irrespective of their location, income or power. The developed-developing categorisation among states was replaced by income-based categorisation by the WB/IMF. This seems promising as it is subject to changes corresponding with the rise and fall in the income of states, less stereotypical (as compared to the location in a certain part of the globe) and more competitive (for development assistance as well as market investments). Unequal donor (developed North) and recipient (developing South) relationship is replaced by equal relationship among *development partners* striving for sustainable development. Further, assistance to a certain part of the world would no more be justified in favour of development since it is now an objective that every country strives for.

Conclusion

The increasing economic-orientation in policies is a result of the OECD-led shift in policy framework for development in favour of sustainable economic growth (not sustainable development). This has been reflected in different policy areas including education. Streamlining policies in favour of economic-orientation and evaluation in terms of optimum utilisation of available resources has been systematically done by the OECD, the WB/IMF and the UN along with its supporting agencies between 1990 and 2015. During the process, these organisations have changed from competitors to collaborators working coherently, beyond state control and capabilities. Policies have become increasingly converged, integrated, aligned, and harmonised into a huge *policy mammoth* by these organisations. Miscalculations or undesired outcomes in one policy area therefore are bound to have far-reaching consequences for other policy areas irrespective of direct policy linkages among them. Thus, consequences of continuity and changes need to be calculated through maximum possible objective research and informed policy choices (unlike environmental challenges to economic growth that took almost half a century to be addressed). The changes however offer possibilities for clever stakeholders who could manage to highlight the relationship between their stakes and the OECD-led sustainable economic growth agenda.

Notes

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² Due to the influence of the EU in Europe

³ See Section 5: Policies on Education for Development.

⁴ See Section 4: Towards the Sustainability Framework.

⁵ A contextually defined policy term which might have different meanings in different contexts. ⁶ See Section 4: Towards the Sustainability Framework.

⁷ The definition of fairness could be contextual.

⁸ The faction was led by the OECD's first head Thorkil Kristensen (an economist) and Alexander King (Science Director) and was primarily rooted in Science and Technology.

⁹ The norms were developed by Denmark and Australia in initial phases.

¹⁰ A major event during the Cold War where former USSR got technological advantage over the West due to investments in education.

¹¹ The World Bank is the largest funding international organization in education for development (Zapp, 2017).

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Shalini Singh is a Guest Researcher and Lecturer at the Julius Maximilians University of Würzburg, Germany.

Email: contactingshalinisingh@gmail.com