

# Monitoring EFA from a Capabilities' perspective: A life skills approach to quality education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Dakar Framework for Action gave new impetus to the promotion of quality in education, recognizing that Education For All can only be achieved if education provided is improved in ways that ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes and that everyone is given the means to acquire recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

According to the capabilities approach, human capability is the “substantive freedom of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and enhance the real choices they have” . Education per se is in this respect facilities or arrangements that enable freedom, as well as a “hard” set of outcomes, ie capabilities as particular skills acquired. In other words, for education to fully enhance freedom and development it is required that the learning needs of all are met through equitable access to an education of such quality that it leads to learning outcomes that ultimately enhance individual freedom. Also, according to A.K. Sen *“it is best to see human rights as a set of ethical claims which must not be identified with legislated legal rights”*<sup>1</sup>. In order to claim their rights, individuals and communities need to be equipped to know these rights, the ways to demand that their rights be respected and the means to enforce their claims, requiring psychosocial proficiencies such as critical thinking and responsibility as central elements along with agency and empowerment. This is related to quality education contents, processes, and contexts that leads to building capability of the individual. The capabilities approach as concerns education is thus larger in scope than the human capital approach which narrows down the contribution of education to a limited range of indirect livelihood skills mainly related to production and income generation.

To further concretize this aspiration, an Inter-Agency Working Group on Life Skills in EFA (IWGLSE) was organized by UNESCO. This group considered some of the central issues within a life skills approach to education and proposed a synthesis of underlying principles and guidelines for planning life skills based education, as well as, implementation and assessment: the various panels outlined the theoretical and practical foundations for the concept of life skills education within the larger context of EFA and sustainable human development. Participants discussed the underlying principles of life skills-based education, particularly in relation to the needs of the learner

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<sup>1</sup> Development as Freedom

and implications for the provision of life skills-based education illustrated with national and regional experiences. They also concentrated on operationalizing a **life skills approach to education** and follow-up activities by participating agencies in order to further life skills based education and discussed assessment and monitoring of the outcomes of a life skills approach to education as it applies to various specific domains, and quality indicators.

The present paper underlines some of the main conclusions that were reached regarding the concept of life skills approach to education. It then goes on to look at the complex issue of monitoring the EFA goals through a capabilities perspective.

## I. The Defining process

### **I.1. Confusion in terms used : A variety of definitions**

The text of goal 3 is as follows:

***“Promote the acquisition of life skills by adults and youth. Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs”.***

The text of goal 6 reads as follows:

***“ Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.”***

A first reading of the text raises the following three points.

? As the following section of this paper will illustrate, there is a diversity of definitions of ‘life skills’ in the world. The Dakar Declaration applies the term ‘life skills’ without indicating which of these definitions it uses. This problem is one of the themes of this paper.

? There is a certain hybris in the formulation, in that the former of the two sentences of the text emphasizes certain learning outcomes, namely life skills, and the latter sentence speaks of learning opportunities namely ‘learning and life skills programs’. This slightly suggests that life skills are typically acquired in learning programs for youth and adults, and not or less in school education. This paper will try to clarify this point and reconcile the two sentences.

? The term ‘learning and life skills programs’ suggests that learning programs and life skills programs are different things. Since the acquisition of life skills is a matter of learning, it would be more logical to regard the latter as a subset of the former.

In the absence of an indication, in the Dakar Declaration, of what is understood by life skills, one could examine existing definitions - produced or used by more or less authoritative sources - in search of common tendencies.

In this section, a limited review of existing definitions is presented. It is emphasized that it does not claim to be complete and definite. It serves merely to provide an indication of the diversity of these definitions, and of the feasibility of arriving at a broadly shared definition to underpin further indicator development We will look at concrete examples of definitions of life skills, and at two normative approaches of learning needs. Finally, we will discuss implications and draw conclusions.

#### ? **Philippines**

Several definitions of life skills are ‘deductive’ in that they depart from a preliminary and normative notion – usually a certain purpose that is stated without further argumentation - and then elaborate the implications in terms of the more concrete

competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes) or abilities that are needed to achieve that purpose.

A Philippine source ([www.teenfad.ph/library/fadsources/psychmp.htm](http://www.teenfad.ph/library/fadsources/psychmp.htm)) states that: 'Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.' In this case, the phrase 'to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life' can be regarded as the axiom. The source goes on to admit that this definition would cover a rather broad range of competencies, but that there appear to be (empirically) a 'core set of skills' that are most crucial for provoking this normative behavior of dealing with everyday life. Ten of these skills are then listed; they include decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, etc. All of the skills listed are of a rather general nature; they are not context specific. They are basic skills – partly psycho-social skills - that underpin behavior, rather than that they fully determine behavior in concrete circumstances.

### ? **Zimbabwe**

A Zimbabwean source ([www.femshuleni.org/studies/zimbab/zimlfs2.htm](http://www.femshuleni.org/studies/zimbab/zimlfs2.htm)) resembles the former Philippine example: " .. in addition to reading, writing and numeracy, parents and communities expect schooling to include skills, attitudes and values (such as responsibility, confidence, decision making, and reasoning) that entail the development of the whole person in preparation for the learners' full participation in the family and the community. These learning competencies are summarized under the phrase life skills". In this example, too, there is a preliminary and normative notion: the development of the whole person. There is also reference to 'participation' (in family and community), pointing not just at the person but also at his/her relation to the environment, which is a theme that occurs more frequently as we shall see. The deducted competencies are slightly different from the Philippine source, in that there is a somewhat stronger accent on norms and values (responsibility, confidence) as opposed to neutral skills (problem solving). But like the Philippine example, the life skills according to this definition are general, not context-specific. In its reference to schooling, the Zimbabwean example underlines clearly that 'life skills' is as much a matter of education as of learning programs for youth and adults. In fact, a certain critique on regular education rings through; the definition urges school to do more than to teach just the traditional literacy subjects, and to address more transcending competencies. This, too, is a recurrent theme.

### ? **UNICEF**

UNICEF states: 'The definition of life skills is evolving to encompass psychosocial skills of cooperation, decision making, and critical and creative thinking in preparation for the challenges of modern life. It is an education in values and behavior. Life skills are those that children need in order to cope with issues and problems related to the entire spectrum of survival and well-being, including knowledge about health, nutrition and hygiene.' ([www.unicef.org/programme/education/advbasic.htm](http://www.unicef.org/programme/education/advbasic.htm))

Another UNICEF source adds that 'life skills are psycho-social and interpersonal skills used in every day interactions...not specific to getting a job or earning an income. A wide range of examples exist under the UNICEF working definition of life skills, such as assertion and refusal skills, goal setting, decision making, and coping skills ... Life skills

curriculum focuses on attitudes, values and behavioral change, rather than seeking to provide young people with a body of knowledge about a set of topics' ('Defining Quality', paper presented by UNICEF at the International Working Group on Education, Florence, 2000).

Compared to examples 1 and 2, the UNICEF definition is less strictly derived from a preliminary and normative notion. Although there is the objective of preparing the learner for 'the challenges of modern life' and being able to function in 'every day interactions', the list of competencies labeled as life skills lacks a common denominator. The skills range from psychosocial skills to practical skills such as those related to health, nutrition and hygiene, and address the entire spectrum of survival and well-being. In other words, UNICEF's definition is inductive rather than deductive, or, in its own words: '...the definition ... is evolving to encompass ...'. It is not clear why this gradually expanding collection of skills does include health skills but excludes other practical skills of more or less the same order, such as skills regarding livelihood, environment, gender and family life. An advantage of UNICEF's definition is that it demarcates life skills from (competencies acquired in) vocational education, where some other definitions fail to do so.

### ? **Some North American sources**

We will now examine three North American sources. Neither of the three is very authoritative, but together they sketch a picture of how people in a part of the industrialized world use the term life skills.

a) : *"Life skills are the problem-solving skills individuals use to manage their lives successfully in five areas: self, family, community, career and leisure. Examples of life skills topics are: creative problem solving; communication; goal setting; self-esteem; conflict resolution; managing change; handling stress.* (Website named 'Life skills, training and publications' of YWCA, [www.ywca.org](http://www.ywca.org), Toronto, Canada)

b) (Life skills are the skills that) *"help persons live more successfully and function better in their multiple roles as members of a family, community, and workforce". After admitting that all education programs contribute to these broad goals in life, the source stresses that life skills are complementary to regular educational content, and elaborates life skills as follows:*

- *the world of work: filling in applications, writing resumes, interviewing, work ethic, and job keeping skills;*
  - *practical living skills: money management, housing, transportation, parenting and health;*
  - *personal growth and management: goal setting, responsibility, moral reasoning and anger control;*
  - *social skills: getting along with people, conflict resolution, and mediation.*
- ([www.ed.gov/OVAE/AdultEd/OCE/LifeSkills/intro.html](http://www.ed.gov/OVAE/AdultEd/OCE/LifeSkills/intro.html))

c) *"Life skills traditionally refers to cooking, washing dishes, personal grooming, grocery shopping, street crossing, counting money, etc." The source – a person working in secondary education – then mentions communicating, making friends and ICT-skills as crucial life skills. Further it states that: 'literacy is another vital life skill'.* ([www.ume.maine.edu](http://www.ume.maine.edu)).

Examples a and b clearly depart from a preliminary and normative notion, namely the adage of 'successful living'. This notion is, as we shall see, also the point of departure of the Deseco project (see sub-section 3.8), and in some degree the Zimbabwean example (the development of the whole person). This intrapersonal notion of a successful life is in all four cases (a), b), Deseco and Zimbabwe) extended to an extra-personal notion of a well-functioning environment, be it the family, the community, the workplace or society at large. The notion of a successful life further reminds us of Sen's notion of the good life, highlighted in the 2002 GMR. In other words, the notion of a good or successful life in conjunction with one's environment seems robust; various sources use it as a point of departure. However, examples a) and b) also illustrate that such a common point of departure is not a guarantee for a common destination. Whilst example a) arrives at a list of life skills that resembles the Philippine and Zimbabwean definitions, example b) arrives at a list with little coherence. The life skills according to b) range from psychosocial and pseudo-psychological (personal growth) to rather practical skills, and it fails to demarcate life skills from vocational skills. Example c), finally, presents a list of 'life skills' of which some are extremely practical, if not trivial. Interestingly, however, it is the only source discussed so far, that draws the possibly correct conclusion that literacy skills are in fact a subset of life skills. Indeed, any definition that tries to capture the skills that are essential – be it for a good or successful life, be it for 'everyday life' - will cover literacy.

A reason why literacy is usually excluded from definitions of life skills, is possibly that literacy has its own longstanding history as a policy issue. It would be a bit odd to place this 'heavy' issue under the relatively new umbrella of life skills; but theoretically it could be consistent to do so. Practically, however, it is important to clearly distinguish literacy skills from all other skills in the process of monitoring, the more so considering the separate attention given by the Dakar Declaration to literacy, in goal 4.

## **1.2. Coming to an operational consensus**

### **? The report 'Learning the treasure within' by the Delors Commission**

This report – further titled 'Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century' Paris: UNESCO, 1996' – did not intend to provide a definition of life skills; rather, the Commission was asked to develop an authoritative vision on the future of education.

Interestingly, the Commission formulated this vision not so much in terms of education but in terms of learning and of learning outcomes (in this case: abilities and attitudes). The Commission identified four essential pillars of learning and their outcomes:

- ? learning to know : understanding the world
- ? learning to do : turning knowledge and understanding into useful action
- ? learning to live together : participation of the learner in the wider environment
- ? learning to be : autonomy and judgment; personal responsibility for our collective destiny.

(In the Delors Report, the abilities and attitudes are of course elaborated much further than above). We will further discuss these four pillars of learning and their outcomes in conjunction with the Deseco project in the next and last sub-section. Here, we will pay

some attention to the shift in the Commission's focus from education to learning and learning outcomes.

Historically, there has been a fairly sharp distinction between what people were thought to be learning in various learning environments. Certain things were thought to be learned in primary education exclusively, other things in secondary exclusively; some skills were thought to be acquired in vocational education, and other skills in adult education and company-based training. In other words, there were, more or less, one-to-one relations between learning environments (or learning opportunities) and learning outcomes.

At present, these boundaries seem to be blurring. Some individuals learn certain things at school, others may acquire the same competencies in learning programs, or at work, or in the local community. Informal learning – activities where learning is a side-effect – is gaining importance, too. All this is relevant both for knowledge societies seeking to develop flexible lifelong learning policies, and for poor countries where many adults have not attended good initial schooling.

More importantly, there is growing awareness of the fact that learning outcomes are independent of place, time, age and learning mode. It is recognized increasingly that people have different learning styles, and that alternative learning modes should no longer be underestimated. Accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning has become an important element of lifelong learning policies.

In other words, there is a tendency to graft education policies increasingly on learning outcomes, and less on the supply side of learning opportunities. The subsequent titles of the five year mandates of the OECD Education Division reflect this shift of paradigm: Quality Education for All (1991); Lifelong Learning for All (1996); Investing in Competencies for All (2001). In fact, the shifting emphasis towards 'outcomes' can be seen as part of a broad development in society at large; public sectors are increasingly steered on the basis of their performance rather than their inputs.

It is difficult – yet necessary, given the two different sentences in the text of goal 3 - to assess the implications of this paradigm shift for the monitoring of EFA. Should this shift be followed and should the reference – in the first sentence - to acquiring 'life skills' (whatever their meaning) be the guiding light in monitoring goal 3? Should it not be followed and should the supply side - access to learning programs, emphasized in the second sentence – be leading? Or can we strike a balance? On the one hand it is tempting to appreciate the underlying humanitarian and egalitarian notion of the emphasis on learning outcomes. The statement by the Delors Commission presents an authoritative normative definition of learning needs, and, in time, it could even result in a redefinition of the Human Right to education: not access to a school building, but the acquisition of a minimum set of crucial competencies could become a right of every person. On the other hand: an outcomes-based monitoring technique requires a strongly enhanced level of transparency regarding these outcomes. It requires: frequent assessment of learning outcomes at school-, national and international level; well-developed qualification systems at national levels; and preferably a certain tradition in skills assessments outside the education context (e.g. in the public employment service

and in companies) to ensure that the educational assessment are aligned with the world outside school.

In many developing countries, these conditions are not yet fulfilled, whilst in the poorest countries the problems regarding the provision of learning opportunities may be such that the transparency of outcomes does not have a high priority. It could be concluded that the work of the Delors Commission is precisely what it was intended to be: a very important statement to guide the long term development of education and a normative definition of learning needs. As such, and more practically, it could serve as a conceptual framework for the development of outcome indicators (see also the next sub-section). But it is not immediately suitable as a tool to monitor goal 3.

### ? **The Definition and Selection of Competencies (Deseco) project.**

For the Deseco project, the development of a conceptual framework for outcome indicators was the primary objective. More in particular, the project was intended to identify key-competencies, 'i.e. competencies that are important across multiple areas of life and that contribute to an overall successful life and a well-functioning society'. The ambition was to identify what people all over the world minimally need to learn, regardless of their specific circumstances. Human rights, democratic values and sustainable development were accepted as axioms. The project was initiated in response to the proliferation of achievement surveys for the school-population and for adults in the 1990s. The need was felt for a theoretical underpinning of the choice of competencies to be assessed, and of their specification.

The project identified the following key-competencies:

- ? acting autonomously:
  - o ability to defend and assert one's own rights, interests, responsibilities, limits and needs
  - o ability to form and conduct life plans and personal projects
  - o ability to act within the big picture / the larger context
- ? using tools interactively
  - o ability to use language, symbols and text interactively
  - o ability to use knowledge and information interactively
  - o ability to use (new) technology interactively
- ? functioning in socially heterogeneous groups
  - o ability to relate well to others
  - o ability to cooperate
  - o ability to manage and resolve conflict

A transcending competence is, according to DeSeCo: critical thinking and holistic / integrated approach.

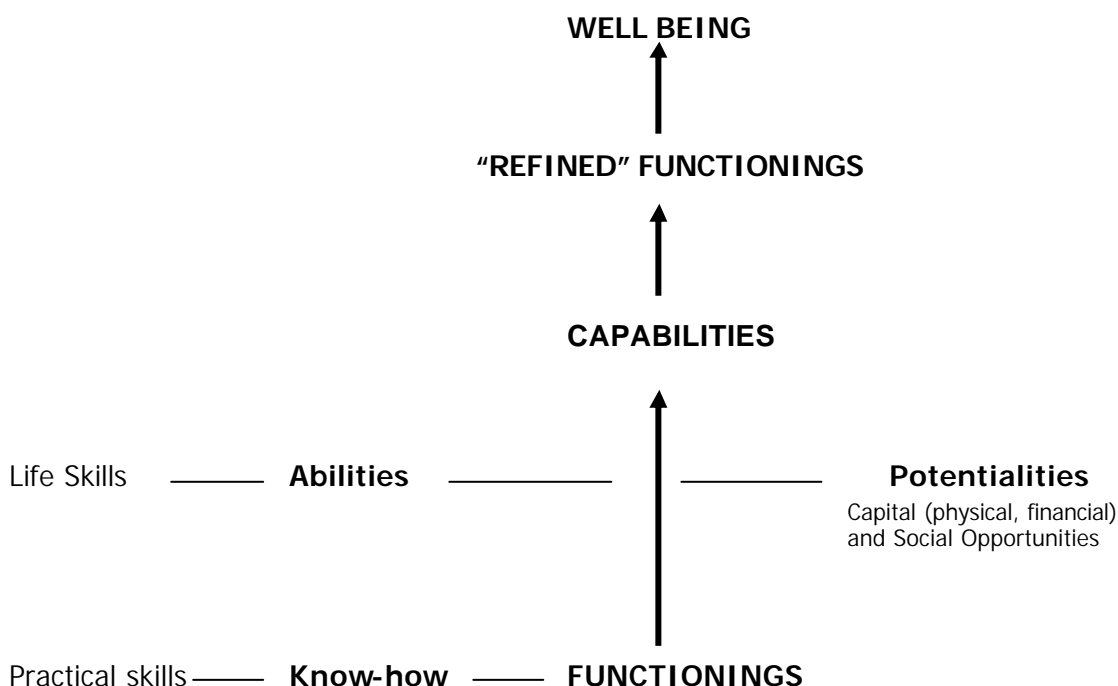
(Ref: Deseco Strategy Paper, code deelsa/ed/ceci/cd(2002)9, page 12. In the Deseco documentation, these outcomes are of course elaborated much further). Since both the Deseco project and the Delors Commission attempted to arrive at an overarching view on the competencies needed in life, it is interesting to compare the outcomes.

## ? Coming to an agreement...

It seems that the four pillars of the Delors Commission and the three types of key-competences plus the transcending competence of Deseco, both broadly correspond with four 'dimensions': the dimension of the autonomous individual, the social dimension, the cognitive and reflective dimension, and the instrumental dimension; the capabilities approach serves a theoretical framework to structure these documents. Table 1 illustrates this.

| Capabilities approach                     | Four dimensions        | Delors Commission         | Deseco project                               |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Enhancing agency                          | Individual             | Learning to be            | Acting autonomously                          |
| Building potential through social capital | Social                 | Learning to live together | Functioning in socially heterogeneous groups |
| Developing reasoning                      | Cognitive / reflective | Learning to know          | Critical thinking and holistic approach      |
| Actual functionings                       | Instrumental           | Learning to do            | Using tools interactively                    |

Although a more in-depth comparison is needed for the actual development of outcome indicators, it is clear at forehand that the correspondence between the two strands of work is strong, which is a positive indication of the robustness of each of them. As the outcomes of the Delors Commission were endorsed by the UNESCO membership, and those of the Deseco project by the OECD membership (a subset of the former), these outcomes can be regarded as being supported by the world community.



This conception reflects a shift in education objectives from programmes that work on survival and income generation skills only, limiting their results to monetary poverty and not reducing vulnerability in the long run. Whilst addressing life skills would be meaningless if the practical skills for basic survival and livelihood were not taken into

account, stopping at the level of basic needs would be insufficient to achieve long-term results and to break the poverty cycle. A new impetus to education for all is therefore the need for a new family of skills, the psychosocial abilities or life skills, to bridge the gap between the practical knowhow and the ability to do things regularly and over time through the development of reasoning, the enhancement of agency and building potential through social capital, in order to understand the consequences of behaviour, feel responsible and have the ability to solve problems and take decisions that don't compromise the choices of future generations.

To reach a functional agreement, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Life Skills in EFA (IWGLSE) was organized by UNESCO in March 2004. Divided into six panels, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Life Skills in EFA considered some of the central issues within a life skills approach to education and proposed a synthesis of underlying principles and guidelines for planning life skills based education, as well as, implementation and assessment. Instead of trying to come to an agreement on a exhaustive and consensual list of specific skills which would fail to take into account cross cultural differences, a "life Skills education" can be seen as an **approach** (process) to education, with the aim of helping people achieve something that they consider important, whether we use the term competencies, capabilities or life-skills-based education becomes merely a matter of terminology; although it is necessary to ensure that this terminology is understood in the same way. In this respect, it was agreed that a life skills approach to education is a process, a new culture of learning, and that there is a strong need for on-going training that is cyclic and sustained. Given that the areas of education are generally accepted as content, methodology, psychological environment, context and output/product it was generally agreed that the concept of Life Skills based education is a part of all of these areas, in fact part of quality education.

A growing number of countries clearly recognize the importance of skills building, both concerning manual skills as well as psychosocial abilities to be able to cope with new challenges in life. The key issue is how to assist in the operationalization of a quality education that prepares the learner to face daily life in a constantly changing world. It was suggested that there is a need to define the life skills learning outcomes **with regards to specific areas and issues** eg gender, human rights, HIV, repro health, nutrition, peace ed/conflict, entrepreneurship etc.... **This could be achieved through the four pillars framework for each of the various domains addressed.**

*It was thus agreed that:*

? There is some clarification of life skills-based education as a process, ie involving development of knowledge, attitudes (and values etc) and skills to be able to cope with new challenges throughout life, - as such life skills-based ed is a process to be applied to various learning areas, not a domain or subject in itself

? Life skills education is closely linked to sustainable human development through its objective of fostering human capabilities in present and future generations.

? A life skills-based approach to education should cover four dimensions: 1) the individual dimension; 2) the social dimension; 3) the cognitive / reflective dimension; and 4) the instrumental dimension.

? The four pillars of learning was seen as a possible platform for a life skills approach to quality education.

? **The conceptual framework for a 'Life Skills approach' to quality education should focus on operationalizing and monitoring the approach.**

## II. How do we look at monitoring?

The 2002 EFA Global Monitoring Report has indicated that the third of the Dakar goals needs to be developed conceptually before it is possible to monitor it. The challenge is to come to an understanding of goal 3 that is equally meaningful for wealthy knowledge societies as it is for the poorest of countries.

### ***II.1. Understanding the text of the goal***

To further analyze the text of the goal and its implications, we will apply the input-throughput-output-impact framework, which is commonly used to describe production and service processes.

In the case of education, the input can be seen as the combination of (1) the learner (and his/her characteristics), (2) his/her learning needs and (3) the learning environment or learning opportunities. Throughput is usually referred to as (4) learning process, and output as (5) learning outcomes. The impact of the learning outcomes is often understood as the (6) benefits to the learner and to society, or as private and public benefits.

This framework has been criticized for insufficiently capturing the complexity of what happens at micro-level in schools and in learning programs. The indicators that are (potentially) available to perform this task, tend to relate to the concepts used in the framework. In contrast, indicators that could capture the micro-level complexity of learning processes are scarce, even at school-level.

The framework is shown in figure 1, which is followed by a preliminary discussion of each of the six elements of the framework.

*Figure 1: Framework*

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>1. Learner</b><br>'youth and adults' | <b>2. Learning needs</b><br>(of youth and adults)  | <b>3. Learning opportunities</b><br>'learning and life skills programs' |
|   | <b>4. Learning process</b>   |   |
|   | <b>5. Learning outcomes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- competencies: in the case of goal 3: 'life skills'</li><li>- formal qualifications: degrees, diploma's, certificates</li></ul> |   |
|   | <b>6. Benefits to learner and society</b>  |   |

### ? **The Learner**

In goal 3, the Dakar declaration links the acquisition of life skills to a specific target group, namely youth and adults. In goal 6, by contrast, it links life skills to the objective of enhancing the quality of school education. It follows that not all life skills are seen as

'adult skills' by nature; they can (at least partly) be acquired during the school age as well. Indeed, a survey conducted in 1999 in two South African districts indicated that 22% of all schools teach life skills if a narrow definition is applied, and 95% of all schools do so under a broader definition ([www.edc.org/GLG/hiv-impact/hypermail/0160.html](http://www.edc.org/GLG/hiv-impact/hypermail/0160.html)). Another source (The State of the World's Children, UNICEF, 1999) sees also ECCE as an environment where certain life skills can be acquired. The emphasis on youth and adults in goal 3 can thus be understood as a special concern, of the participants of the Dakar Forum, for those who did not attend school, and for those who did attend but acquired insufficient skills.

### ? **Learning needs**

It is significant that the text of the goal makes explicit reference to the learning needs of youth and adults. In other words: the Dakar conference did not simply call for expansion of learning programs, but it demanded this expansion in the light of what youth and adults need to learn. Reference to learning needs is absent for goals 1, 2 and 4 - ECCE, UPE and literacy - probably because it is regarded obvious what the learning needs are in these cases.

Indeed, at somewhat higher ages, the daily circumstances and activities of people tend to diverge, and so do learning needs. This is especially relevant if life skills are seen as skills needed in specific contexts such as livelihood, family life and environmental care. It is less relevant if life skills are primarily seen as skills such as problem solving, teamworking and communication, since the need for these skills changes less strongly throughout life and differs less strongly among people.

In either case, however, it seems not feasible to measure or monitor learning needs in a strictly empirical sense. An important preceding question is: who is the actor who determines what the learning needs actually are?

The best answer is probably: the learner. As the 2002 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) underlined, being conscious of learning needs is crucial for participation in programs and for successful learning. To monitor the learner's self-perceived needs, one could, theoretically, include items in household surveys asking people directly what they need to learn. But, paradoxically, articulating one's own learning needs is a skill in itself that not every respondent masters yet. And for many, the daily struggle for life is so severe that, right or wrong, they may not be accustomed to thinking about learning as a priority.

Alternatively, one could envisage that authorities or employers are asked about their perception of the learning needs of the population or the workforce. But in this case, too, attempts to empirically chart learning needs ex ante have proven to be problematic. Even in the case of well-researched areas such as vocational and further education that cater for various branches of industry, employers have often difficulty predicting what skills are needed over a certain period of time.

Another approach is to regard observed learning activities as a proxy of learning needs. One could monitor participation in learning programs (see next paragraph) and assume ex post that learning needs are met through the participation of people in these

programs. But the problem with this approach is of course that unmet learning needs remain out of scope.

As an alternative to an empirical approach to learning needs, one could pursue a normative approach. Section 3 will briefly describe two strands of work that have identified the competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) or abilities that people should acquire throughout life. One is the Delors Report on Education for the 21st Century, the other is the Deseco project. As we shall see, there is an important congruence between the outcomes of these two strands of work, underlining their robustness. These outcomes could indirectly support the monitoring of EFA in two ways: (i) as a normative notion of what people should learn, and perhaps eventually what people have a right to learn, and (ii) as a conceptual framework for surveys for the assessment of learning achievement.

But the outcomes of the two projects were not intended – and are indeed not suitable – to serve as a tool for monitoring learning needs empirically.

We must thus assume that it will not soon be possible to monitor learning needs empirically at international level. Whether the provision of learning opportunities is sufficient in concrete cases will have to be assessed on the basis of national and international comparison and on the basis of judgment, not in light of a preceding and independent measurement of learning needs.

### ? **Learning opportunities**

This is likely to be the first area of figure 1 where indicators can be developed for goal 3. The experience in indicator development for formal education tells us that provision of learning opportunities has been charted earlier and better than other elements of the framework, such as needs, process, outcomes and benefits.

For charting the provision of – or access to - learning programs, the NFE-MIS project, based on national initiatives, is an important development. It builds on the experience in a small number of pilot countries and seeks to widen the circle of participation step by step.

However, the NFE-MIS project cannot be expected to provide outcomes in the very near future that allow generalization at regional or global level. Thus, in addition to the ongoing NFE-MIS project, desk research could take stock of available data, regardless the source, concerning participation in learning programs for youth and adults. To make this a meaningful and manageable endeavor, more clarity is needed about the scope of this scan, and also about the usefulness of the concept of life skills as a common denominator of the learning programs in question.

This last point will be addressed in section 3. The issue of monitoring provision and access will be elaborated somewhat more extensively in section 4, in conjunction with the NFE-MIS project

### ? **Learning process**

The text of the goal does not ask to monitor (the quality of) the learning process. Indeed, in this area it is unlikely to avail of sufficient indicators within the coming years. As the 2002 GMR indicates, life skills programs are extremely diverse, both in their learning objectives and in the nature of the programs, especially compared to school education where there is, despite diversity, always a relatively strong common model of a teacher, a class, a classroom, a curriculum and a timeframe. It should be noted that even in the case of school education, process indicators are scarce.

### ? **Learning outcomes**

The pedagogical and structural differences between life skills programs for youth and adults on the one hand, and school education on the other hand, will also have consequences for monitoring learning outcomes. Given the diversity of programs, it will not be practical to conduct a program-based achievement survey, by analogy with school-based surveys such as Sacmeq, Pasec, Laboratorio, MLA, TIMSS and PISA. Instead, an achievement survey for the assessment of adult skills would have to address the individual directly, as is the case in the International Adult Literacy Study (IALS) and the forthcoming Adult Literacy and Life Skills Study (ALL).

In the latter study, five to six developing countries participate. As we shall see in section 3, the definition of life skills used in ALL is shared by many but certainly not all actors who have developed a view on life skills. So, a wider coverage of such surveys in the South would require either a more broadly agreed definition of life skills, or would need to avoid the use of the term life skills as a label for the non-literacy competencies to be assessed. Furthermore, surveys such as ALL are costly (between 1.5 and 2 mln Euro) and require thorough preparation to ensure unbiased measurement. The development of surveys to assess the skills of youth and adults at national and international level is likely to become a major issue in the monitoring of goal 3, and also goal 4 (adult literacy).

Formal qualifications (degrees, diplomas, certificates) are often used as proxies for learning outcomes, especially in formal education, and especially in industrialized countries. But non-formal programs are not always formally completed, whilst if they are, it is not always clear how the qualification relates to the various levels of the ISCED classification system. This issue is being addressed in the NFE-MIS project. Time will pass before formal qualifications can be used to help monitor goal 3 at global level.

### ? **Benefits**

The text of the goal does not ask to monitor the benefits of having completed learning programs for youth and adults. Again it is the diversity of these programs and the absence of a broadly agreed definition of life skills that makes it difficult to monitor benefits in the coming years, other than at country level. A lack of data on participation is another obstacle. However, the body of knowledge regarding the measurement of benefits of formal education (see 2002 GMR) may be seen as an encouragement.

**Insert figure 2.14 from the 2002 GMR**

## **II.2. The 2002 EFA Global Monitoring Report.**

*" It is often asked whether certain political or social freedoms, such as the liberty of political participation and dissent, or opportunities to receive basic education, are or are not 'conductive to development'. In the light of the more foundational view of development as freedom, this way of posing the question tends to miss the important understanding that these substantive freedoms (...) are among the constituent components of development. Their relevance for development does not have to be freshly established through their direct contribution to the growth of GNP or the promotion of industrialization".<sup>2</sup>*

As a result, having recognized the role that quality education has to play in achieving individual and social well-being and building peaceful societies, we have to ask the question: what do we assess? How do we assess?

The Global Monitoring Report has deliberately avoided the use of the term life skills because of the existing confusion concerning this concept. It has, instead, concentrated on sketching a picture of the variety of learning programs for youth and adults that are aimed at the acquisition of skills and that are at times referred to as life skills programs.

This approach could be regarded as inductive and empirical. It was inductive in the sense that it did not depart from a preliminary and normative notion. But it differed from the inductive approach by UNICEF in that it was empirical. It restricted itself to existing learning programs. This inductive-empirical approach merely intended to provide a general impression of the area that goal 3 addresses, as long as true monitoring was not yet possible due to a lack of consensus about 'life skills' and a lack of indicators.

In practice, the approach chosen in the 2002 GMR resulted in a rough and preliminary categorization of learning programs, regarding: livelihood; health; environment; gender; family life. It is important to note that these five headings are in fact 'domains of application' of the skills that are acquired in these learning programs.

The approach chosen in the 2002 GMR takes us in a different general direction than do some of the other examples. The skills that came forward in the examples of Zimbabwe, Philippines and ALL – whatever their label is: life skills, psychosocial skills, generic skills, cross-curricular competencies – are not the leading concepts in the empirical categorization in the 2002 GMR. These skills are certainly addressed in the programs described in the 2002 GMR, but there are no such things in the world as 'problem-solving programs' or 'teamworking programs'. The concrete domain of application – livelihood, environment, et cetera – is always central in the programs, and this is probably a condition for their success. As the 2002 GMR underlines, it is the prospect of improving one's concrete daily living circumstances by learning that motivates people to enroll and learn successfully. The cases presented in the 2002 GMR reveal that the type of skills highlighted in the examples of Zimbabwe, Philippines and ALL represent a very important set of learning outcomes, but so do the very practical and contextual skills that enable people to, for instance, sustain a livelihood, enhance the health of their family or maintain a water pump. And it is the latter type of skills that attracts the learner, rather than the former.

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The critique on traditional education is – in the terminology of table 1 - that it has focused too much on the instrumental and on the cognitive and reflective dimension, with an emphasis on cognition rather than on reflection. These are the dimensions where for instance the literacies can be located primarily, as well as the skills learned in vocational education. The same bias towards instrumental and cognitive competencies can be said to have been present in the practice of the assessment of education outcomes.

As suggested earlier, the interest in life skills can at last partly be understood as a desire for education to broaden its scope and to better address the more individual and social dimensions of learning, as well as critical thinking. However, it is questionable if existing approaches to the use of the concept of life skills meet this end.

We have distinguished deductive and inductive approaches. The former depart from a preliminary and normative notion such as a good or successful life, lived in a sound relation to the individual's environment.

Indeed, deductions from this notion clearly tend to address the individual, social and reflective dimension, given the listings of skills such as team-working, communication, self-directed learning, problem solving.

But, logically, these deductions do not exclude the other dimensions. Literacy, for instance, is obviously essential for a good and successful life, whilst it has strong instrumental and cognitive aspects. The same can be said about vocational skills and skills acquired in agricultural extension programs; these skills are crucial for a good life and even survival and have instrumental and cognitive aspects. And if development of the whole person is the goal, then even the (partly cognitive) competencies acquired in Higher Education can be indispensable in certain cases.

Should the concept of life skills then embrace all of these skills? And if the concept is so broad, then what is its added value?

It seems there is a trade off between consistency and demarcation in the deductive approaches. Either one wants to confine the concept life skills to a relatively small set of competencies – like in the cases of Zimbabwe, Philippines and ALL – but that would be inconsistent with the premise that life skills are (all) the skills needed for a good or successful life. Or one is true to this premise and accepts literacy, vocational skills and even higher education competencies to be part of life skills, in which case the concept has little practical value.

One could avoid this trade off by choosing an inductive approach as in the example of UNICEF. This approach is not burdened by a strict deduction of skills from a normative notion, and indeed, the UNICEF definition has a relatively explicit demarcation from vocational skills. But all this is at the cost of coherence; any skill, of any order, that is deemed important could be added to the melting pot called life skills.

In other words, inconsistencies and demarcation problems seem unavoidable.

Another source of confusion may lie in different interpretations of the word 'life' in the term life skills. Is this to be understood as 'daily life' or 'throughout life'?

Let us consider for instance the ability to operate a forklift. Some will argue that this is a life skill, since it can be essential – in a specific, ‘daily’ context - to get a job and hence to have a good or successful life. Other approaches would say that it is typically not a life skill, because if you change job, or if the firm where you work is robotized, you will no longer need it. Much rather you need the ability to flexibly adapt to new work settings, which is an ability built on various skills that last throughout life such as learning skills, social and communication skills, ICT-skills, et cetera.

The latter discourse is usually linked with the debate on lifelong learning, and more in particular with the question of the objectives of education, especially vocational and further education: should they focus on short term employment, or on long term employability? Behind this lies the notion of the increased dynamics of (working) life, driven by rapid technological and economic change.

Although some competencies are crucial both in ‘daily life’ and ‘throughout life’ (e.g. literacy), it does make a difference which of the two is chosen as a point of departure. Theoretically, the case for the latter option seems strong. The world seems overwhelmingly dynamic and people need a certain set of skills to help them through the ever-changing circumstances that life confronts them with.

But in reality, many people in the world are likely to spend their lives in the same environment and with the same limited choice of ways to make a living. And in countries where few have a chance to attend some years of good quality basic education, the discussion about short term employment versus long term employability has little meaning. These people are better addressed in their learning needs by the more down to earth provision of learning programs that directly address their living conditions and that they can recognize by the domains of application.

This discussion reaches the following conclusions:

1. Inconsistencies and demarcation problems are unavoidable in the use of the term life skills.
2. Even if we would take these problems for granted, there would remain the problem of the divergence between on the one hand most existing definitions of life skills – including skills as problem-solving, teamworking, communication - and on the other hand the more concrete ‘domains of application’ according to which the concrete learning programs are categorized. In other words, there would not be a good link between the monitoring of outcomes implied by the first sentence of the text of the goal, and the monitoring of learning opportunities implied by the second sentence.
3. Priorities differ. The GMR needs to monitor goal 3 over the whole continuum of countries: from the wealthiest knowledge economies to the poorest nations. In this broad range, the concrete policy priorities and hence the monitoring instruments vary strongly. Therefore it is necessary to first go back to a higher level of abstraction, in search of common issues for all countries.
4. In all countries, in North and South, there are, empirically, learning programs for youth and adults, even if the content differs. Partly, these programs provide a second chance to learn the things that should have been learned in school, partly they address skills that, by nature, are better learned after the school-age.  
It will be necessary to monitor the provision of and access to these programs. This is best done by categorizing them by domain of application. It is not problematic if

these domains of application appear to vary according to development status. Livelihood programs may typically be important in developing countries, whilst programs for the integration of immigrants may typically be important in industrialized countries. The categorization will have to provide a place for all of these, although criteria are needed to demarcate these programs from, for instance, vocational education and advanced courses in engineering or business management.

5. In all countries, in North and South, there is a consensus at a higher level of abstraction regarding the things people need to learn in life. This consensus is embedded in the work of the Delors Commission and the Deseco project. An important implication of this consensus is that learning should not predominantly be restricted to the instrumental and cognitive dimensions (e.g. literacy and vocational skills), but be extended strongly to the individual, social and reflective dimensions.
6. In the latter dimensions, a new 'family of skills' appears to have emerged, valued by actors in the North and the South alike. This new family of skills includes for instance problem solving, teamworking and communication. Like the literacies, these skills are important 'throughout life' and not strongly context-specific. They are addressed in the learning programs mentioned under conclusion 4, but not exclusively, and they are usually not the leading concepts in these programs.

There is a case to further define, demarcate and denominate this new family of skills in order to monitor them in achievement surveys. Given the relatively general nature of these skills, they could in principle be assessed at international level, although there is a risk of a cultural bias, as in the case of applied literacy. In the further conceptual development of this new family of skills, the EFA monitoring process will link up with activities that already take place in this area.

It seems not wise to use the label 'life skills' for this new family of skills, because in practice, this label is being used in very different senses. Labels that are being used for (a number of) the skills in question are 'generic skills', 'psycho-social skills' and 'cross-curricular competences'. To avoid confusion, and to avoid premature choices, this paper will further hold on to the very provisional term 'new family of skills'.

### **11.3. Learning opportunities: monitoring provision and access**

An important activity in this regard is the project 'Non-Formal Education – Management Information System' (NFE-MIS). It runs in three pilot countries, Cambodia, India and Tanzania, to be joined by Jordan and possibly a fifth country, and is operated by UNESCO Institute of Statistics and UNESCO's Section for Literacy and Non-Formal Education. The goal is to develop a methodological package for monitoring NFE including software, in close conjunction with the countries and an International Expert group, and to gradually widen the circle of participating countries and scale up the methodology. Capacity building is an important element of the project.

On the one hand, the approach is such that there is space for country-specific – perhaps sub-national – elements. On the other hand, a minimum common core should ensure international comparability, which is particularly relevant for monitoring EFA goals 3 and 4.

Obviously, monitoring activities regarding learning programs are already taking place, not just in the pilot countries, but elsewhere too. Approaches may differ among countries, as do the stages of development of national systems. The NFE-MIS could be the factor to enhance the harmonization of the various information systems, and to create the transparency needed to seduce more countries to develop information systems. Such a gradual and bottom up development process would resemble the historical development of the ISCED classification system for formal types of education programs: a classification resulting from decentralized work, not preceding it.

Considering that this is likely to be a long term process, it is considered, for the short term, to consult existing national monitoring systems and to try to arrive at a first rough overview of the types of learning programs that exist, and their attendance.

Existing information systems are likely to contain indications/indicators regarding some of the following five entities:

- ? Participation. The absolute numbers of people participating. If possible, it would be good to have some indication of relative participation, e.g. as a proportion of the number of young people and adults living in the area in question.
- ? Content or learning outcomes. A rough categorization, formulated in terms of 'domains of application', could be sufficient for a first overview. Examples are:
  - the domains used in the 2002 GMR: livelihood, health, family, empowerment, gender;
  - agricultural programs as an important addition to the former domains;
  - programs for the integration of immigrants and for enhancing employability of marginalized groups, especially in industrialized countries.(these examples serve just to give an indication of the level of abstraction).
- ? Duration. It is important to have some rough indication of the length of programs, in order to be able to at least distinguish programs of just a few days from programs of several months.
- ? Longevity. For how long has the program been provided and is it planned to be provided? Short-lived programs should be distinguished from longer lasting ones.
- ? Nature of provision and funding. Is it a public or a private program, or a mix of both? By whom is it funded and are there fees?

These five categories could be the basis for a first stock take. Existing information systems may go beyond these basic indicators, but: the more detail, the more divergence. Limiting the exercise to these indicators could keep comparability at a satisfactory level.

The stock take will have to be aligned with ongoing work in the NFE-MIS project, and with the information gathering process in the follow up of CONFINTEA V.

The exercise itself will have to reveal (i) if and to what extent estimations about participation are presently possible at national, regional and global level, and (ii) in which direction future work should develop.

An important issue that will require a decision in the future, is the demarcation of the area called 'learning programs for youth and adults'. Would this area simply include all learning programs for these age groups outside the regular education system?

Intuitively, one is inclined to exclude advanced programs, such as those for the further training of business managers and engineers. It is felt that these are not the groups most urgently in need of support from the EFA movement, even though they are strictly not excluded by the second sentence in the text of the goal.

One could exclude these higher level programs by agreeing that goal 3 should only monitor those learning programs for youth and adults for which an equivalent exists in regular education, up to a certain level. This level could be primary, lower secondary or upper secondary education, depending on a judgment of the coverage that results from these three options. A problem could be that it might be difficult to compare the level of some learning programs to levels of regular education.

It may be the case that the criteria for including and excluding learning programs in and from the coverage of goal 3 can only be established after the first stock take.

A final point to be addressed, is the demarcation from literacy programs.

As the 2002 GMR underlined, learning programs for youth and adults often teach (applied forms of) literacy simultaneously with other skills, and there seems to be great synergy in doing so. And even the programs that address literacy more in isolation of other skills, could be taken stock of in basically the same way as indicated in the five bullet points above; the series of 'domains of application' (second bullet point) would have to be extended with the domain of literacy, and perhaps sub-domains regarding various forms of literacy.

So, whilst it remains important to distinguish literacy from other skills in the monitoring process, the provision of literacy programs and that of other learning programs can be addressed in one and the same activity. In so far as monitoring provision of learning programs is concerned, literacy can be addressed through a life skills approach.

#### **II.4. Learning outcomes**

There is now a broad consensus, that in monitoring and evaluating learning activities it is not sufficient to look at participation in these activities. If the quality of the learning is low, outcomes can be unsatisfactory. Indeed, there is a growing number of surveys in which learning outcomes are directly assessed, both at national and international level, both school-based and by addressing adults directly.

Some questions come forward: does the monitoring of goal 3 imply the use of outcomes of surveys of adult learning; if so, which competences should be assessed in these surveys; and should these surveys combine the monitoring of goals 3 and 4, as in the case of the ALL survey, or should that be separate activities.

It is clear that the first sentence of the text of goal 3 implies direct assessment of 'life skills', whatever the meaning of this term. There is no other way to assess internationally if 'the acquisition of life skills by youth and adults' takes place sufficiently.

In principle, two sets of skills are candidates for direct assessment under goal 3:

- ? The first is the rich variety of practical and contextual skills that are the outcomes of the learning programs described in the 2002 GMR, and that are categorized by domain of application. However, it is precisely the rich variety and the contextual

nature of these skills that will make it impossible to directly assess these skills in an international survey. The comparability will be highly problematic and the bias will be unacceptable.

- 7 The second is the set of skills referred to in this paper as the 'new family of skills', and (partly) referred to by other sources as generic skills, psycho-social skills, life skills or cross-curricular competences. The global consensus regarding the importance of these skills seems strong enough to indeed directly assess them through surveys, as part of monitoring EFA.

Regarding the question of linking the assessment of the new family of skills with that of literacy skills, it seems indeed meaningful and cost-effective to combine these assessments. It is meaningful because both sets of skills are deemed crucial for youth and adults to survive and to function in society, and it is cost-effective because the operational costs of both assessments – which imply the testing of large numbers of people and analyzing the outcomes - are high and can be reduced, relatively speaking, if the two measurement efforts are combined.

The GMR does not have the means to initiate such surveys by itself; it shall limit itself to encouraging others to undertake these surveys.

It must be emphasized that it will take a considerable amount of time before combined surveys of literacy and 'the new family of skills' (such as ALL) will actually take place on a large scale. Today, even the assessment of literacy is largely based on self-declaration, whereby the learner is not tested but is simply asked whether he or she can read, write or calculate. The transition from self-declared literacy to tested literacy is likely to have the higher priority, and is the aim of the Literacy Assessment Programme by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

### **Conclusions : understanding the Dakar goals and their interrelations**

Table 2 summarizes some of the conclusions in the previous sections of this paper. It is based on the idea that the EFA goals address three broad age groups: early childhood (goal 1), school age (goal 2) and (out-of-school) youth and adults (goals 3 and 4 combined). Gender (goal 5) and quality (goal 6) cut across all three of these age groups.

It is important to note that outcomes (literacy, the 'new family of skills' and other outcomes) also cut across the age groups and are not restricted to youth and adults, although in practice the measurement of outcomes seems not feasible and meaningful in the case of early childhood.

Provision – with capacity, funding, fees and support schemes as important aspects – also cuts across all age groups, and is combined for goals 3 and 4, although the provision of literacy programs should be distinguished from the provision of other programs.

In some cells of the matrix, indications are given of sources of data and information.

Table 2: the six Dakar goals and their interrelations

|  | 1. Early childhood  | 2. School-age   | 3+4. Youth, adults  |
|--|---|---|---|
| 5. Gender  |   |   |   |
| 6. Quality   |   |   |   |
| A. Provision & access<br>- capacity<br>- funding and fees<br>- support schemes | Regular statistical reporting, household surveys and case studies | Regular statistical reporting, household surveys and case studies | Regular statistical reporting, household surveys and case studies |
| B. Outcomes<br>- literacy<br>- 'new family of skills'<br>- other               | (Measurement of outcomes not meaningful and feasible)             | School-based achievement surveys                                  | Adult skills surveys  |
| C. Other aspects<br>- teachers?<br>- governance and management?                | Various   | Various   | Various   |

(It could be argued that gender and quality not only cut across the three age groups, but also across the categories provision, outcomes and other).