Education Reform Support Today

Joseph DeStefano and Luis Crouch

SEPTEMBER 2006

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Executive Summary

THE CASE FOR REFORM SUPPORT

Traditional projects in education introduce innovations at the school level, sometimes improving learning in a defined number of schools. The hope is that somehow piloted successes can be replicated or taken to scale. But too often they are not. Dissatisfied with this, donors may choose policy-level interventions that promote resource reallocations, specific policy reforms, and investments in administrative and management capacity to effect system-wide change. But the record of policy reforms having impact on learning at the school level is disappointing. If we fund school-level projects, the challenge lies in how to create policy and institutional reforms that support replicable school-level success. If we support policy-level interventions, the challenge lies in how to ensure that national reforms lead to changes in the day-to-day practice of schools. Both approaches require effective programs of what we call reform support.

EDUCATION REFORM SUPPORT

Why is reform support needed? Ten years ago USAID published the Education Reform Support (ERS) series to answer just this question. ERS recognizes that the existing arrangements in the education sector—urban-rural inequities, management environments skewed by bureaucratic concerns, teaching improvements constrained by union prerogatives—are not accidental. Powerful political forces benefit from, shape, and defend the current situation. Changes within the system cannot realistically be implemented without first dealing with the preexisting institutional environment. Altering that environment means recognizing who stands to win or lose from proposed reforms, and what incentives signal them to either work for change or defend the status quo. The literature supporting such an understanding of education reform is rich. ERS draws on that literature and goes one step further to outline the tools and techniques for supporting and strategically managing the reform process.

> "ERS…goes one step further to outline the tools and techniques for supporting and strategically managing the reform process."

HOW EDUCATION REFORM SUPPORT WORKS

ERS is organized around three notions:

- Clearing space: making room in the existing political economic landscape
- Filling space: introducing the substance of sound educational improvement
- Reform support infrastructure: the network of institutions and actors that clear and fill space

Clearing Space. A major problem in carrying out a reform agenda is the existence of preconceived ideas, mental models, interest groups, and institutional traditions. "Clearing space" refers to the need to reduce the intellectual and political space taken up by existing views and interests. It involves bringing hard evidence and countervailing political power to bear, and it implies isolating narrow interests or traditional beliefs both intellectually and politically and demonstrating the negative effect of these interests on the general good.

Filling Space. If space is cleared in the education landscape, there is no lack of "solutions" waiting to fill it back up—often those solutions proffered by the interests that needed to be cleared out in the first place. Space-filling activities should be judged primarily by whether they are demonstrably effective at improving education outcomes. And filling space requires not just introducing the innovations, but also structuring them so that their impact can be evaluated, the conditions required for successful implementation can be documented, and obstacles that may need to be "cleared" for those innovations to be sustained can be identified.

Reform Support Infrastructure. The original ERS series coined the term, "reform support infrastructure," to describe the network of organizations and individuals that help bring about successful reforms. This infrastructure is needed because donors, by themselves, cannot do reformist work effectively. The work of a reform support infrastructure includes generating demand for specific reforms, creating opportunities for and facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, organizing and mobilizing constituencies, engaging in strategic communication, and presenting data and analysis in compelling formats. No one organization possesses all of these capabilities. Therefore, a viable reform support infrastructure depends on collaboration and coordination among many actors.

THE TOOLS OF EDUCATION REFORM SUPPORT

ERS is implementable as a set of discrete activities provided they are chosen and implemented strategically. The tools of ERS focus on generation and use of data, analysis, dialogue, and communication. ERS also relies on building reform support infrastructure.

Data. Empirical data have to underpin analysis and promotion of reform, so donors should support data efforts. But promoting reform does not require that donors spend much energy on creating and maintaining traditional, supply-driven education management information systems (EMIS) or general-purpose surveys. The data activities recommended for ERS use existing data to support debate or gather original data for a specific policy discussion purpose.

Analysis. Donors can support analysis, but the analysis ideally must be driven by debate about issues that require reform. Analysis of school finance, for example, should be driven by sharp policy concern over funding equity. Also, policy deliberations are often hampered by the lack of rigorous analysis of existing educational innovations. ERS supports systematic experimentation and evaluation that can leverage broader implementation and impact.

Dialogue and Communication. Perhaps the most important element of the ERS approach is fostering communication, debate, and dialogue. Communication and dialogue should be integral to data and analysis activities. In fact, without communication and dialogue, demand for analysis and data is weak. The ERS position is that sustainable, implementable solutions emerge from a dialogue-driven process of competition and searching.

Building Reform Support Infrastructure. All of the activities discussed above can be implemented to support a given package of reforms. Merely funding such activity by itself does not institutionalize ongoing capacity to debate and design reform. The goal of donor assistance should be to help create the infrastructure whereby data-based analysis, policy dialogue, and strategic communication can be ongoing and adaptive. This requires building up the capacity of a variety of institutions and individuals and, in particular, investing in helping them network and collaborate with each other.

The matrix on the following page summarizes how ERS aligns data, analysis, and communication with the challenges of clearing space, filling space, and building reformsupport infrastructure.

WHAT ERS PROJECTS CAN DO

Ideally, we advocate that donors implement all of the above by designing coherent sets of activities (projects) whose size and duration are sufficient to have a profound impact. However, as a practical matter, smaller interventions can be carried out quickly, within the confines of an existing project. For example:

- A project can inject fresh data on schooling quality into policy dialogue sessions that foster awareness of the poor quality of schooling. Dramatic comparisons and illustrations can be useful, for example, in regard to children's reading ability. Such comparisons can be used to focus attention on resource inequality or poor and unequal results.

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Clearing Space</th><th>Filling Space</th><th>Reform Support Infrastructure</th></tr>
<tr><td>Data</td><td>• Using data to redefine issues or to refute conventional wisdom</td><td>• Demonstrating the validity of particular interventions</td><td rowspan="3">• Investing in building capacity of local institutions (inside and outside government) to do data, analysis, dialogue, and communication

• Investing in networking across institutions with different capacities and promoting the emergence of common agendas and an articulated theory of change</td></tr>
<tr><td>Analysis</td><td>• Demonstrating the limitations or inequities of existing arrangements</td><td>• Cost-benefit comparisons
• Comparisons of trade-offs (political and in terms of management difficulty and potential impact)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dialogue & Communication</td><td>• Giving voice to divergent points of view
• Creating opportunities for genuine deliberation and debate</td><td>• Involving stakeholders in dialogue around how innovations can be implemented
• Drawing out broader institutional implications from pilot successes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Networking & Reform Support Infrastructure</td><td colspan="3">• Promoting and supporting strategic alliances
• Informing and mobilizing specific constituencies
• Building strategic management capacity</td></tr>
</table>

- At certain points in the policy process, the debate will peak. Being ready with a proficient analysis and position paper in the middle of a peak moment of policy decision making is a good way to have greater impact than the cost of the activity would indicate, but it requires paying constant attention to the debate and being ready with useful interventions at a moment's notice.
- An existing school-level project can also pursue data, analysis, and communication to address some of the policy issues garnered from its on-the-ground experience. Data can be gathered that show how the conditions for success need to be changed at the school level to maximize the impact of, say, teacher training. Communication and dialogue can help clear space, mobilize supporters, and advocate for establishing those conditions on a broader scale.

ERS activities provide high-leverage possibilities for affecting the direction of national reform efforts, and they potentially can increase the scale at which school-level projects can have impact. Strategically supporting use of data and analysis, targeted communication, and dialogue and networking among reform-minded institutions can advance larger-scale, more sustainable reforms in education system policies and practices.

1. Introduction

With 115 million 6- to 12-year-olds still out of school, the challenge of improving access to basic education remains critical. Furthermore, in sub-Saharan Africa, as many as one in three students fail to complete even four years of primary school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2006). With such high dropout levels, and little if any evidence of learning, improving the effectiveness of schools supersedes the need to expand access if what we are after is truly education for all. What is the point of expending ever increasing resources to get more children into schools that fail to provide adequate education?

Since the early 1960s, the world has witnessed repeated commitments to ensuring education for all children and recurring calls to mobilize the funds needed to make it happen. Each time the target for achieving universal primary education is missed, the date is pushed back another decade or so, and a lack of resources and political will is blamed for the inadequate progress (Clemens, 2004).

Despite this seemingly endless cycle of calls to action, missed targets, and recalculated funding gaps, over the years, many millions have been mobilized to support each push to achieve education for all. By some estimates, low- and middle-income countries spend about US$70 billion a year on education (Abadzi, Crouch, Echegaray, Pasco, & Sampe, 2005). Most recently, the Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was created to mobilize additional multilateral and bilateral resources to support countries' plans for achieving universal access by 2015. For the 20 countries that have qualified thus far for Fast Track support, US$600 million has been pledged on top of regular, ongoing aid transfers for education. But, even this heroic effort to support EFA falls short by US $510 million this year alone, based on the FTI's own estimates. Another 40 countries are slotted to access the FTI by 2008, pushing the estimated additional funding gap to US $3 billion a year for the next decade or so (FTI Progress Report, 2006).

Even under the best of circumstances, it is hard to imagine where this additional funding will come from. As long as we define the problem as mobilizing sufficient amounts of additional resources, we will continue to be disappointed when large increases in foreign assistance fail to add up to what is needed. To talk realistically about improvements that can dramatically increase the effectiveness of schools in most developing countries (and in many developed countries), we must talk about transforming the way education systems are organized and managed, not just what additional resources must be spent. Tangible interventions that can increase educational effectiveness are available and needed (e.g., a focus on methodologies for teaching reading in early primary grades), and resources can and should be directed to promoting them. However, such innovations, if they are to operate at scale and be sustained, necessitate a host of accompanying changes in institutional incentives (Pritchett, 2004). Therefore, reform, whereby the policies, practices, and organization of education are altered, needs to remain on the front burner.

> "…we must talk about transforming the way education systems are organized and managed, not just what additional resources must be spent."

Like the recurring calls for achieving education for all, the drumbeat of reform has been sounded repeatedly. Countless programs and projects, citing reform as an objective, put resources on the table to support policy development, analysis, and institutional capacity building. Projects have supported reorganization of ministries, training of education officials, and massive purchases of computers and information technology. Despite these investments, however, most donor-instigated policy reforms are not formulated well enough to be implementable. Those that are decently formulated too often remain at the level of intention. In the rare cases where policy reforms are implemented reasonably well, it is not clear

what school-level impact they have, at least on quality. If after decades of investing in institutional capacity, a lack of such capacity still constrains improving education, we have to ask whether our methods for investing in capacity development are effective.

Often, the alternative to putting resources into grand plans for sector reform is to invest instead in projects that directly introduce innovation and improvement at the school level. Introduction of new teaching techniques or curriculum improvements, teacher and administrator training, and improved school-community relations and interactions are often the stuff of projects seeking to improve quality and effectiveness. Sometimes real successes are achieved—access is increased, quality is improved, and learning can be demonstrated—and the hope is that somehow these successes can be replicated or taken to scale. But too often they are not. A good case in point is Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI). In spite of successful experiments, and studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of this intervention, scale-up and sustainability of donor-based IRI interventions is quite disappointing. The record is better where such technologies have been developed endogenously.

If we fund school-level projects, then the challenge is how to create the policy and institutional reforms that support, extend, and sustain school-level and child-level success. And, if we support policy-level interventions that target national policy and institutional reforms, the challenge we face is how to ensure that those reforms are implemented in a way that leads to changes in schools' day-to-day practices. In both cases, the challenge is designing effective programs of what we call reform support.

In 1997, USAID published the Education Reform Support (ERS) series. The ERS approach contends that successful reform programs need to direct assistance to overcoming the political and institutional obstacles that too often prevent national-level policy changes from being identified, pursued, and implemented. In revisiting and updating the ERS approach 10 years later, it is clear that those same obstacles must still be overcome, whether we are designing policy-level programs that help shape national reform agendas or school-level efforts that work directly to introduce innovations that can be taken to scale.

This paper takes an updated look at the Education Reform Support series and attempts to consolidate many of its theories, frameworks, and operational guidelines. Annex A summarizes the original body of work. Ten years of experience have reconfirmed the ideas on which ERS was founded and have added a multitude of examples to show how strategically targeted and opportunistic support can move a reform agenda forward—instigating demand for change, promoting dialogue around and new insight into issues, leveraging implementation, or removing political and institutional barriers to success.

This paper starts with the more general and theoretical considerations, and then moves to the more operational and concrete issues. In section 2, we explain why there is a need to help countries sustain their own reforms, rather than simply ameliorate conditions via school-level projects and donations. We note that there is a growing literature in this area. The section provides the "theoretical" or "developmental" justification for why donor agencies need to support education reform. Having established the importance of the issue, in section 3 we lay out some basic concepts that are helpful in understanding how to support reforms. Section 4 provides a concrete categorization of possible reform support activities and offers plenty of examples of such activities. Section 5 explains why not all countries and situations are equally suitable for reform support and suggests how to adapt reform support ideas to difficult circumstances. Section 6 provides operational (as opposed to theoretical) justification for reform support in terms of the imperatives of most donor agencies and the professionals that work in them. Finally, section 7 provides some examples of how donor agency officials can "jump-start" reform support activities, even in projects that may not have been designed with this purpose in mind.

2. Dealing with Scale and Sustainability: Moving Beyond the Technical Challenges of Education Reform

Since publication of the ERS series in 1997, interest in understanding education reform has only increased. The recent literature, on which we draw throughout this document, has been largely consistent with the motivations and principles the ERS approach first laid out a decade ago. However, the literature does not offer many "practical" guides to providing reform support assistance. It seems to imply that the typical reform process is so messy and so political that it is too difficult to offer specific suggestions about tools and techniques that can help in its management. While this may be satisfactory in an academic study, it is of little help if the aim is actually to design projects to support reform. Providing tools and techniques was a hallmark of the ERS approach, and this is taken up again in this update. This section looks at the last 10 years, notes what has changed in the world and what other donors and experts have concluded during that time about reform processes, and explains that the need for a systematic approach to supporting reform is as great today as it was 10 years ago.

SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The central challenges of scale-up and sustainability have not gone away. We wrote 10 years ago in the ERS series that good educational practice can be found anywhere, but that the central challenge of education reform is that good educational practice is not found everywhere. To make good practice the norm rather than the exception, ERS stipulated that reformers recognize that programs or projects often do not go to scale and are not sustained, understand why not, and develop means to address the blockages that prevent scale-up and sustainability.

For one, the last decade of research and experience reconfirms the Education Reform Support explanation of why scale and sustainability, while always pursued, are rarely obtained. Implementing large-scale change is inherently different from introducing minor adjustments or small-scale, pilot initiatives (Elmore, 1996; Samoff & Sebatane, 2001). The existing situation in a given education system is not an accident. Well-entrenched interest groups have worked to ensure that whichever policies, resource decisions, and institutional arrangements are pursued are those that will directly benefit them or, at a minimum, will not threaten the status quo from which they are already benefiting (Moe, 2003; Hess, 2004b). When a proposed school-level reform is seen as only affecting a small part of the system, then important interest groups may not be threatened. When large-scale, policy-level change that entails resource reallocations with tangible winners and losers is proposed, then the interest groups resistant to change see the need to respond and to do so forcefully (Inter-American Development Bank and David Rockefeller Center, 2005). The natural outcome of this dynamic is often partial implementation of many programs, rather than full-scale implementation of any particular reform. People end up settling for what they think they can accomplish given the local political realities, rather than what they should accomplish (McDermott, 2000).

For this same reason, large-scale, policy-level reforms are often difficult to sustain. Interest groups opposed to reform may be overcome on a given issue, but they do not then just go quietly into the night. They use their political and strategic skills and resources to fight back (Moe, 2003). The example of the teachers in San Antonio (see text box) illustrates this perfectly. The superintendent was able to push through the curricular changes she wanted (and the district needed), but ultimately the teachers pushed back, not only eliminating the new math curriculum, but also persuading the board of education that the superintendent had to go. In fact, it is easier for organized resistance to reform to block change, which sometimes only requires that one refuse to take action. It is much harder to successfully carry out a reform that often requires numerous strategies, multiple layers of implementation management, and constant negotiation of a variety of political hurdles (Moe, 2003).

LITERATURE CONFIRMS REQUIREMENTS OF REFORM

Reform needs to be seen as a dynamic, largely political process that unfolds within particular, perhaps changing, institutional contexts. A series of strategic decisions determines whether entrenched political and institutional interests and biases can be altered or overcome to achieve the desired change (Grindle, 2004). Successful reform therefore requires leadership that recognizes the political battles and trade-offs to be fought or negotiated. Grindle's review of education reforms in Latin America in the 1990s highlights how political leaders overcame obstacles to reform by controlling the timing of reform, setting the terms of political debate, and weakening opposition within key institutions by drawing on competing institutional resources and mobilizing broad public support (p. 21).

In addition to leadership that can navigate the politics of reform, successful educational reform requires attention to the institutional frameworks that govern operation of the sector. Within each education system, a complex set of institutional relationships and arrangements will have grown up over time, imparting behavioral norms and

In the late 1990s, the **San Antonio Independent School District** experienced unprecedented gains in student outcomes for a large, urban school system in the United States. For example, mathematics achievement for African American and Latino students more than tripled in just three years. The district had introduced a new math curriculum that teachers and administrators recognized as a sound, high-quality, successful program. However, when the teachers' association requested that staff be allowed to vote on continued use of the program, 70 percent of district teachers voted no. That's right; they voted not to use a program that they admitted worked. Shortly thereafter, the superintendent who had led the impressive gains in San Antonio was fired.

Why did this happen? The teachers' association leadership said they liked the program, but they did not like the way it was being implemented. They saw it as too forceful an obligation imposed on them without (in their eyes) sufficient consultation. The superintendent, who gained recognition around the country for her academic leadership, failed to build the political support she needed in her own district to carry through the reforms she championed.

What's the moral of the story? Technically sound school-level solutions can be implemented and have good effects, but by themselves they cannot address all of the challenges of reforming and improving education.

winners with a potential loss (whether real or merely perceived) of status, authority, or access to resources. At a minimum, reform requires additional capacity beyond what the institutions in the sector are accustomed to doing.

Reforms seeking to improve education (making schools more effective, producing better educational results) are necessarily about changing how resources are used. When the primary concern is expansion of access, reforms are often about how to use the additional resources that would be required—more money in the budget, more schools to be built, more teachers to be hired. When the central challenge is ratcheting up the quality of education, then the use of existing resources needs to be challenged more directly. This raises the stakes for the political and institutional interests in the sector (Inter-American Development Bank and David Rockefeller Center, 2005).

Last, since education is often the largest, most visible public service, there is ample scope for civil society to play a variety of roles in either supporting or opposing education reforms. In democratizing contexts in particular, the roles of public constituencies are magnified, as elected officials will feel pressure to respond to the issues (Grindle, 2004). Organized interests, of course, will have an advantage over diffused sets of actors, so teachers' unions, for example, may exercise even more clout given their well-practiced ability to dominate civic debate. However, there is opportunity for other civic actors to organize and present their points of view and, perhaps, marshal constituencies large enough to exert countervailing political weight.

While all the above is important in considering what issues need to be addressed for reform to succeed, this paper does not try to explain all the complexities and interactions of every conceivable factor that will influence the outcome of an education reform. Education Reform Support by definition is preoccupied with what outside agents can do through programs and projects to increase the probability of reform success. Since most development projects pay attention to the technical aspects of reform, we leave those aside. Conversely, since most projects fail to address the process and politics of reform, it is on those that we focus. In particular, ERS concentrates on the political and institutional dimensions of reform. We touch on leadership, institutional capacity, resources, and civil society issues, but within the context of how one uses them to define, advocate for, advance, and carry through reforms in the face of political and institutional obstacles.

CHANGES IN THE DONOR ENVIRONMENT MAKE REFORM SUPPORT ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT

In the 1990s when the ERS approach was being documented, education reform efforts were shaped in large part by the structural adjustment approach of the World Bank. Reform programs adhered to the notion that getting the policy framework right would allow sector development to take off. Sector policy adjustments were needed as education systems were often plagued by inadequate or inappropriate resource allocations, poor management, and misdirected policy. Both the World Bank's sector adjustment programs and efforts such as USAID's nonproject approach tended to assume that policy change is a technical matter of shifting a "parameter" or two (devote more funding to girls' education, set up a proper EMIS unit, set up a quality assessment unit), or that, if politics was involved, a quid pro quo of financial support in exchange for policy change would be sufficient. At most, formal, one-shot "dialogue" sessions of a few hours, in a large gathering, would be carried out. ERS was formulated to make the case for greater attention to the politics of reform and to highlight the inherent differences between macroeconomic "adjustments" and the implementation-intensive reforms required in the education sector. Changing management and administrative structures in education so that more effective teaching techniques can be used in classrooms across an entire country presents so many opportunities for reforms to be sidetracked, resisted, distorted, or ignored, compared to, say, getting the central bank to

drop a pegged exchange rate. ERS made the case for devoting resources to the strategic management of the politics of reform, because centrally planned sectoral programs that assumed a macro adjustment approach would work, when applied to the education system, were stumbling at both policy formulation and implementation.

Since the late 1990s, the dominant international development philosophy has maintained a sector reform approach, but added to it a more coordinated donor effort to invest in poor countries that can demonstrate good governance. Sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) emerged in the late 1990s to address the challenge of poor local ownership, uncoordinated and competing donor priorities and strategies, and excessive and uncoordinated reporting requirements. The SWAP structure is still being developed, but its core intent is that donors and governments agree on a single program, and donor funds are "pooled" in support of that common program. This, in theory, enables greater donor leverage for policy change, improved donor coordination, and reduced reporting and management burdens for ministries of education. An increased use of general or direct budget support funding mechanisms, as well as basket funding among multilaterals and some bilateral programs, is intended to address the shortcomings of project-based aid, such as high transaction costs, unpredictable funding, donor-driven agendas, and parallel systems that undermine government capacity and accountability.

These recent trends in funding mechanisms have moved hand in hand with the increased coordination of donors and recipient countries at an international level through establishment of international goals: the Education for All initiatives begun in Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000), the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Monterrey Summit (2002), the Rome declaration on harmonization (2003), and the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness (2005). In 2004, the United States established the Millennium Challenge Corporation based on the premise that development assistance is more effective when it is provided to countries with policies in place that promote economic growth, poverty reduction, and good governance. The emphasis is on countries demonstrating their policy commitment in well-defined plans and strategy papers. The emerging paradigm stresses country-led development and, therefore, takes on the fundamental issues of ownership and coherence.

These recent trends are encouraging in that they at least promise to improve the ways in which funding agency intentions and programs interact. What they fail to address are the internal dynamics of any country that actually determine whether the well-defined plans and strategies can effectively translate into implemented system-wide reforms. What we know is that even when policies can be well formulated, centrally planned reform does not automatically translate into sustained policy change, much less into implemented improvements at the school level (Moulton, Mundy, Welmond, & Williams, 2001). Current thinking, epitomized by Easterly's (2006) critique of development assistance, argues strongly for moving away from a central, grand, comprehensive plan and, instead, supporting local capacity to innovate and "seek" solutions, and to unleash entrepreneurial energy in response to development challenges such as providing effective education for all children. Emphasis among education reformists has shifted away from attention to resource allocations and "grand" policy formulation as ends in and of themselves. Policy reforms and resource reallocations are still called for, but attention must be paid to how one sustains and improves on policy change, constantly and at the margin, and must be approached from the perspective of how those changes will lead to more effective schools.

The ERS approach has always emphasized the need to work on political and institutional obstacles to supporting and sustaining school- and community-level changes. Funders are still involved in supporting policy-level reforms, whether in the context of the FTI, a SWAP, or direct bilateral programs. In these policy-level

programs, the key question remains, "How do national reform efforts translate into real changes in the institutional environments that create conditions for success at the school level?"

As funders also invest resources and effort in projects that can demonstrate impact in terms of improved student outcomes, the tendency will be to do more direct piloting of school-level interventions. These kinds of targeted interventions have to develop explicit, strategic theories of change that state how the school- and community-level successes will be used to leverage institutional, policy, and resource changes in the system. ERS specifically addresses the steps needed to "walk up the ladder" from projects to policy reforms. Those steps, by necessity, involve identifying the institutional requirements of the "reformed" system—that is, changes in how teachers interact with students, how schools are organized, how ministerial personnel hold schools accountable, and how the public stays informed about resource use. Considering how to put in place those institutional requirements forces programs and projects to take on the political and institutional interests wedded to the existing rules of the game.

"ERS specifically addresses the steps needed to 'walk up the ladder' from projects to policy reforms."

Whether school-level programs are trying to have an impact and be sustained beyond the immediate scope of a project, or assistance to policy-level reforms is going to lead to impact at the school and community levels, we are forced to deal with the politics of reform and the institutional contexts that govern the education sector. Because ERS is primarily about addressing the politics and institutional context of reform, we elaborate on these two below.

THE TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES DISCUSSED IN ERS ARE STILL VALID

Ten more years of experience and research only reiterate the primacy of politics in education reform. ERS introduces some tools and techniques for identifying, formulating, and implementing strategies to deal with those politics, and stresses data and information as critical to shaping the dialogue and debate around what is needed. In addition to analytical data, ERS promotes communication and marketing approaches to information use—for example, surveying stakeholders to understand their points of view, market-testing different ways of defining or highlighting issues to see how key interest groups react, and promoting public dialogue and deliberation over policy options. ERS also emphasizes the need to network with a variety of actors and stakeholders to form coalitions that could support reforms and work to overcome other interest groups that may oppose them.

What recent research and experience have added to ERS's original set of political tools and techniques are a greater emphasis on collaboration and purposeful constituency building in support of reform. It is not enough merely to identify and seek to include key stakeholders in dialogue. For example, Navarro points to the inherent disadvantage government has when confronting union leadership that has a longer planning horizon. Unless other forces are mobilized, this disadvantage leads to unions getting what they want more often than government getting what it needs (Inter-American Development Bank and David Rockefeller Center, 2005). What adds to the challenge is that the entrenched interests are well organized and have sharp, narrow objectives, while the beneficiaries of reform are loosely organized and often unaware of the their interests and potential gain. For these reasons, successful reform requires dedication of resources and effort to forming purpose-driven networks of organizations that can align and mobilize large constituencies in support of particular reform measures. A Rand Corporation study (Bodilly, Ikemoto, & Stockly, 2004) highlights the importance of technical assistance in supporting the building of just such collaborations.

Experience in Guinea helps illustrate the above point. In the mid-1990s Guinea wanted to redeploy surplus lower secondary school

teachers to primary schools that lacked staff. Those secondary teachers who were working only a few hours a week and living comfortably in small cities around the country were a natural constituency that would oppose just such a reform. The Ministry recognized the need to mobilize another constituency that would lobby in favor of teacher redeployment. Parents and community members in villages that had schools but no teachers were activated as a constituency in each district through a media campaign and local dialogue sessions. Surplus secondary teachers could no longer defend their situation while sitting across the table from the people whose children were denied access to primary school because of it.

NEW FOCUS ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR REFORM

The original ERS approach focused on interest groups and pressures, but tended not to obviate the internal logic of institutions as a source of inertia. Schools and their communities need to operate within an institutional environment that creates expectations, norms, incentives, and disincentives for the different choices they may make. Reform efforts need to pay attention to how the institutional environment does or does not support the intended changes, and, more important, reforms need to define specific strategies for altering the institutional environment so that implementation is actually feasible. The importance of infrastructures external to schools and their communities that can simultaneously challenge schools to do better and nurture them in their efforts to improve are cited both by Fullan (2000) and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (School Communities that Work [SCtW]). Tangible rewards for success and sanctions for failure are important but by themselves will not dramatically change behaviors. Elmore (1996) argues that the normative environment—the set of accepted behaviors and habits that are part of the organizational culture of an education system—determines how people will react to a system of rewards and sanctions better than any tangible benefit or loss promised by the system. Reform strategies need to address how system infrastructure (whether within the ministry of education or arranged through partnerships and affiliations with other organizations) is positioned to reinforce a changed normative environment and provide the ongoing supports that schools and communities need to succeed.

In discussing the challenges to implementing education reforms, Bodilly et al. (2004) point out that changing behaviors within organizations is one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish, and it is especially so when multiple levels of government are involved. For any reform to succeed, numerous individuals and groups in the concerned institutions are expected to behave differently. These groups "respond to and are driven by many varying incentives, rules, and regulations inherent in the infrastructure of schools and schooling" (p. 17). Attempts to implement reforms often lead to adaptations that include some changed behaviors consistent with the reform goal, some that represent coping with the reforms, and some that actively divert or subvert the intentions of the reform. Less than desirable outcomes occur because the supports that proposed changes require are not put in place, and certainly are not institutionalized as supporting infrastructure.

Two examples, one negative and one positive, illustrate this point. In a study of school improvement in four countries in East Africa, Heneveld and his colleagues (Heneveld, Ndidde, Rajonhson, & Swati, 2006) found that textbooks were more available at the school level than they had been in the past, but the books were still not used regularly to enhance instruction. They concluded that this was because neither the supporting infrastructure of training for teachers on how to use books nor regular supervision and support to reinforce the use of textbooks in the classroom was present. In fact, Heneveld et al. found that supervision and support were infrequent, lacked any meaningful follow-up, were unfocused and confused several different purposes, and were not visibly associated with improving school outcomes. In contrast, in a study of nine community-based complementary education programs, DeStefano, Hartwell, Moore, and

Balwanz (2006) found that the effectiveness of the community schools derived in part from networks of well-trained teacher support personnel that visited schools at least once a month. Teachers in these programs are given initial training and additional intensive support during their first year and continuing for several years

IMPLICATIONS FOR DONOR PROJECTS

Whether supporting policy-level reforms or initiating school-level improvements, if funders are going to provide targeted assistance, that assistance has to be strategic in addressing the political and institutional obstacles outlined above if it is going to leverage impact beyond the immediate scope of a project. This section has argued the following: that scale and sustainability are still a problem, that the more recent literature concurs that politics are paramount, that changes in the donor environment make a reform support approach all the more important, and that the basic tools and techniques proposed 10 years ago are still the right ones. This approach is enriched by paying attention to institutional inertia. We now turn to how one takes all these factors into consideration in supporting reforms.

3. Clearing Space, Filling Space, Building Reform Support Infrastructure

Scale-up and sustainability remain elusive for most education reform efforts because of intellectual, political, and institutional resistance. Doing something about those limitations requires, first, recognizing that the existing arrangements in any education system are not accidental. Making room in the existing political economic landscape of the education sector—clearing space—so that the substance of sound educational improvement can be introduced—filling space—constitutes the operational core of the Education Reform Support approach.

CLEARING SPACE

One of the major problems in setting forth and sustaining a reform agenda is the existence of preconceived ideas, mental models, institutional traditions, and economic and social benefits derived from the existing arrangements. A key step in supporting reform is thus to reduce the intellectual and political space taken up by existing views and interests.

Why does the U.S. school year still follow the rhythms of an agrarian society that has not existed for at least 70 years? Why are curriculum documents in almost all cultures written in a common and impenetrable jargon? Why do most classrooms around the world have children sitting in rows copying notes off a blackboard in the front of the room? To propose reforms to these well-entrenched views of when school is in session, what curriculum looks like, or how classrooms should be organized, we have to clear intellectual space. School-level projects that want to introduce and bring to scale innovations in education need to recognize how those innovations depart from prevailing patterns and then devote resources, time, and effort to making the case for why changes in the existing circumstances would be better. If improved quality requires more interactive teaching methodologies, then teachers, administrators, students, and parents need to be disabused of their prevailing mental model that a good classroom has children quietly attentive to the teacher's every word. In the case of a policy-level project focused on more broad-scale reform, the same intellectual space-clearing may be required. For example, to promote funding reform successfully, a project may need to help build the case for why weighted allocations based on need would be more equitable than uniform capitation grants (something that may go against the prevailing mental model of what constitutes fairness).

In other cases, the space that needs to be cleared may be more political than intellectual. Everyone knows that more teachers are needed in rural areas, but the teachers' unions work hard to protect the interests of their members who prefer working in towns and cities. Unless another political force can be mobilized to oppose the interests of unions, space will not be cleared to allow reforms in teacher deployment. Ministry officials who are concerned about unrest in the capital city will make sure that resources are spent on urban schools and university students. Only when the interests of those who are on the losing end of that resource allocation are voiced, organized, and mobilized, will it be realistic to expect that policy will change. Clearing political space involves mobilizing the stakeholders and interests that stand to gain from proposed policy changes, and working strategically to overcome or neutralize the interests that oppose change.

A third kind of space-clearing concerns the institutions involved in managing and implementing education. Directorates within the central ministry, regional and local education offices, and other officials within the system have all figured out how to operate to their own benefit within the existing set of institutional arrangements and prevailing rules of the game. To change what they do, how they do it, and with what degree of effectiveness and accountability, requires clearing space in terms of the prevailing institutional norms, expectations, incentives, and relationships. Before we can expect new managerial relationships and administrative and organizational practices to take root, we first need to understand the dynamics that underlie the existing institutional context. Grindle (2004) points out how almost all the reforms she reviewed in Latin America in the 1990s "imposed at least short-term burdens on politically important groups that readily defined themselves as losers"—for example, teachers' unions that feared losing jobs and benefits (p. 11). Bureaucrats within Latin American ministries also saw themselves as losers, fearing loss of jobs or responsibility or having to deal with genuine job performance standards. Political party leaders who relied on patronage as part of their power base also saw themselves as losers if new standards were to be implemented for how jobs were assigned and carried out. Furthermore, Grindle observes that the institutions within which the potential losers (and winners) defend their positions have "histories that shape values and behaviors and that create ongoing incentives for conflict and cooperation over time" (p. 14).

In addition, if other actors are to become involved as part of the institutional capacity mobilized to support reform, then space also needs to be cleared in terms of how governmental and nongovernmental institutions (NGOs) interact. Can ministry officials partner with NGOs or private sector firms? Are there mechanisms within the bureaucracy for formalizing relationships with community-based organizations? In Mali, in 1995, the Ministry of Education created an office and wrote specific policy to promote and support the establishment of community schools. This created a new, official way for the government to interact with NGOs in providing schooling. A coalition of NGOs, with USAID support, worked to convince Ministry officials that it was in their interest to officially recognize and support these schools because they were reaching children that the public sector could not. Those NGOs cleared enough institutional space so that the new office and policies could be put in place.

"Clearing space" thus refers to the need to reduce the influence of traditional interests and views. The tools one can use to carry out this space-clearing are listed in section 5, but, to summarize, the task generally involves bringing hard evidence, and countervailing political power, to clear away obstacles. It implies trying to isolate narrow interests or traditional modes of belief both intellectually and politically and trying to demonstrate the negative effect of these interests on the general good.

FILLING SPACE

In education, as in physics, nature abhors a vacuum. If intellectual, political, or institutional space is cleared in the education landscape, something will fill that space. There is no lack of "solutions" waiting to be proffered—often by the very political and institutional interests that needed to be cleared out in the first place. Educational quality needs to be improved? The teachers' union is always prepared to argue that one needs to increase salaries to attract and retain high-quality teachers. The computers-in-education lobby is ready to argue that connectivity to the Internet is the key. The business sector will press so that English or tourism studies are stuffed into an already overloaded curriculum. Because space gets filled no matter what, projects that support sustainable reform need to invest in filling space in conjunction with their investments in clearing space. But how do we know which space-filling activities to promote?

Space-filling activities should be judged primarily by whether they are effective and whether they achieve their effectiveness at reasonable cost.

Easterly (2006) argues that most development projects fail to systematically evaluate whether the innovations they introduce actually produce measurable impact. While the details of education sector reforms and innovations are obviously context-specific, there is an identifiable set of reforms that research and experience show is most likely to contribute to greater educational effectiveness. Space needs to be filled in such a way as to create clear objectives for the schooling system; provide sustained, adequate financing to schools to achieve those objectives; give principals and teachers sufficient autonomy to manage for results; and create accountability systems to monitor and respond to results (Pritchett, 2004, p. 65).

ENSURING SCHOOLS HAVE THE RESOURCES AND AUTHORITY THEY NEED

Space-filling activities that are most associated with tangible improvements in outcomes for students include what the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) refers to as changes that ensure schools have the power and resources that enable them to respond to the needs of their students. School administrators and teachers (and their communities) must have the knowledge, authority, and organizational capacity to respond to their day-to-day challenges if reform is to be visible in the daily work of schools (Earl, Watson, & Katz, 2003). For example, research on effective community schools has highlighted the important roles that local governance and decision making play in organizing schools that more consistently provide rural, poor children with better opportunities to learn (DeStefano et al., 2006). Research on autonomous schools in Nicaragua found that those schools with greater local authority have better student outcomes (King and Ozler as cited in Winkler, 2006). Two cross-national studies using Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data found that schools that manage their own budgets and recruit their own teachers have higher test scores than those that don't (WoBmann and WoBmann & Fuchs as cited in Winkler, 2006).

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

A growing emphasis on local control is not limited to delegating more power and resources to schools. Ample research now argues for increased school-community collaboration as a vital component of improved local governance and decision making. Doherty and Abernathy (1998) state that improving relationships between schools and their communities is a vital part of making any kind of lasting change in the learning environment. Dyakowska (2004) notes that professionals need to recognize that parents can be considered experts in knowing what is best for their children. Warren (2005) emphasizes that community initiatives can improve the social context of education so that children come to school better able to learn. Mastro and Jalloh (2005) report there is growing evidence that successful collaboration between school and community groups has led to improved academic and social/emotional outcomes.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to greater local control, purposeful public-private partnerships hold promise as effective space-filling strategies. Nongovernmental organizations have continued to play increasingly significant roles in promoting, supporting and, carrying out educational improvements around the world (Shanti, 2001; Miller-Granvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002). The growth of charter schools in the United States; the success of large-scale nongovernmental complementary education programs as diverse as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the School for Life in Ghana; and the increased role of nongovernmental actors in shaping policy and supporting implementation all demonstrate how the notion of education system capacity needs to be expanded to include more than just the official ministerial education apparatus (Bray, 2000; Care International, 2003; Lake & Hill, 2005; Miller-Granvaux et al., 2002; Nath, Sylva, & Grimes, 1999).

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

If schools are to have greater authority and control over resources, then part of what fills space in the education landscape must also be mechanisms for increased accountability. Annenberg argues that accountability should not be limited to an accounting of resources, but should focus on demonstrating that additional resources and authority are being used to produce better results for students. Schools and local districts need to know current and past results so they can track how their strategies are (or are not) contributing to improvement. Local districts and their partners need data systems that enable them to monitor student, school, and partner performance as measured against the results they expect. Are resources actually available and used as intended, are programs being implemented up to expectation, are results improving as fast as hoped? Making these kinds of data publicly available requires communication techniques and savvy (Sexton, 2004)—for example, knowing or being able to figure out the best ways to share information on finances, on program implementation, and on student performance so that the various groups can have equal understanding of the issues involved.

Making public the budget allocated to each school in Uganda—by requiring that it be posted on a wall at the school and having it published in the newspaper—greatly enhances each community's capacity to hold the school accountable for demonstrably using those resources to improve education. School performance appraisal meetings in Ghana bring communities and their schools together to discuss student achievement results on the national examination, culminating in joint agreements about what can be done to improve student outcomes. A similar process of school self-assessment has become national policy in Namibia.

TIMELINESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL AND TEACHER SUPPORT

If schools and their communities are going to be held accountable for results, then, concomitantly, the system needs to be accountable for making sure the supports and interventions that can assist struggling schools and communities are available and effective. Timeliness and effectiveness of support interventions are critical system capacities for successful reform implementation. DC VOICE, a community-based reform support organization in Washington, D.C., organizes an annual survey to determine if schools are ready—in terms of staffing, materials, resources, and programming—for their students when they open in the fall (DC VOICE, 2005). This activity is an exercise in holding the school district publicly accountable for making sure that schools have what they need to succeed.

Space needs to be filled with the infrastructure that can support and sustain improving schools. Research on community schools reveals that effective programs include regular teacher support and ongoing training. Frequent observation and feedback regarding instruction, demonstration of specific pedagogical strategies, and organized meetings among teachers all contribute to improved school quality (DeStefano et al., 2006). Research also points to the importance of decentralized structures in making the education system better able to respond to and support schools and their communities. Galiani and Schargrodsky (cited in Winkler, 2006) found that provinces in Argentina with better management capacity at the decentralized level saw improvements in test scores when authority was decentralized, while those with poor capacity saw test scores decrease. The 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2004), which examined how services like public education could be made more responsive to the needs of poor people, concluded that communities need closer, more direct links to the authorities that make decisions regarding their children's schools.

FILLING SPACE AND THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Most school-level projects do invest in what can be characterized as space-filling activities, often ones that are consistent with the research summarized above. However, filling space requires not just introducing the innovations, but also structuring the way in which they are introduced so that their impact can be evaluated, the conditions required for successful implementation can be documented, and obstacles that may need to be "cleared" for those innovations to be sustained can be identified.

This goes far beyond the usual institutional capacity issues—for example, district supervisors being trained to provide pedagogical support to teachers. At issue is whether the prevailing institutional environment permits, promotes, and rewards the new job performance standards—for example, on what basis are district supervisors evaluated, what traditionally has been their source of power and prestige in their jobs, and what is the history of their relationships to individual schools and teachers. Unless these other issues can be identified and understood, we cannot mount credible strategies for truly assembling the conditions for success needed to support teachers trying out new pedagogy in their classrooms.

How do the space clearing and space filling activities that support reform get implemented and strategically coordinated? Whose job is it to see that space is cleared and that sound, cutting-edge innovations and improvements are introduced?

REFORM SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Space is cleared and filled all the time in education systems. If the newly named minister believes strongly in vocational and technical high schools, he'll clear space for investment in building or equipping some of them by reducing funds for other things. Numerous projects fill all kinds of space with the solutions they offer—new textbooks, HIV/AIDS education, girls' scholarships, construction of secondary schools, Internet connectivity, and on and on.

San Juan Metropolitan Alliance for Education (SJMAE): An Example of a Multifaceted Reform Support Infrastructure

In forming the SJMAE, several organizations came together, each bringing different capacities to the table. Sacred Heart University contributed expertise in teaching and learning and institutional capacity for teacher professional development and support. ASPIRA, a nonprofit organization steeped in community organizing, brought to the collaborative proven methodologies for training, mobilizing, and supporting parents and communities. The College Board of Puerto Rico contributed expertise in developing and managing assessments and using a variety of data on student development. The Puerto Rico Community Foundation had ties to the local community. This group of organizations all shared a common vision of schools as learning organizations, school-community relationships as central to improving education, and reform as a process grounded in what works at the school and classroom level. The Alliance formed relationships with 11 schools and the district office in Cataño, a poor San Juan neighborhood. It cleared intellectual space in the local community by challenging the prevailing mental model of quality education and worked to fill space with school-level innovations in teaching, school organization, community engagement, and district support activities (based on personal knowledge of the authors).

What is missing is a coordinated attempt to clear space for reforms that actually improve educational opportunities and outcomes for the vast majority of students. And what is too often missing is a coherent set of space-filling activities that provide the supports needed to implement those reforms thoroughly.

It is too much to expect that any education system on its own can clear and fill space in the coordinated and strategic manner needed for specific reforms to be developed, promulgated, implemented at scale, and sustained. As we stated in our introduction, politics and institutional context dictate most of what can or cannot occur in an education system. Many of the actors within the system are affiliated with the political interests benefiting from the status quo arrangements. It is politically naïve to think they will suddenly become advocates for reform. These actors are also part of the very institutional context that needs to be changed. And the complex policy strategies needed to carry out reforms far surpass the implementation capabilities of most policy makers and education system managers (Kronley & Handley, 2003). If a country is not effectively providing even basic education services, common sense suggests that the "meta" skills and attitudes needed to fix the policy problems (clear space, fill space with new ideas) are likely to be even scarcer than implementation skills. Reform-minded governments and the donors supporting them thus have to "bootstrap" the ability to carry out reform by helping bring together networks of actors who can start and carry on this work.

The original ERS series coined the term, "reform support infrastructure," to describe the network of organizations and individuals that can best help bring about successful reforms. The work of a reform support infrastructure is complex and spans a full range of competencies and capacities, such as generating demand for specific reforms, creating opportunities for and facilitating dialogue among diverse stakeholders, organizing and mobilizing constituencies, engaging in strategic communication campaigns, developing specific technical "fixes" or models of effective management and administration, presenting data and analysis in compelling formats, etc.

No single organization could possess this vast an array of capabilities. For this reason a viable reform support infrastructure, by necessity, depends on the collaboration and coordination of a variety of organizations and individuals. What unifies a collection of actors is their commitment to a specific reform agenda. A network of public, private, and nonprofit entities could come together as a reform support infrastructure. The particular set of actors needed depends on both the nature of the reform challenge at any particular point as well as the sociopolitical context within which reform is being pursued (Healey & DeStefano, 1997). For example, the San Juan Metropolitan Alliance for Education was founded in 1994 by a diverse group of institutions in Puerto Rico with a shared interest in supporting and sustaining meaningful changes in the learning experiences of students (see the text box on the previous page).

What a reform support infrastructure does at any point is totally context-specific, yet certain types of activities are fairly common. For example, if the need is to generate demand from a mobilized interest group to counterbalance the entrenched interests that prevent reform, then the reform support infrastructure could concentrate on using data and information in a communication campaign to generate demand, and on using organizing and mobilizing techniques to gather constituencies to promote the necessary reforms.

If what is needed is to broker agreement or negotiate specific trade-offs among competing political and institutional interests, then the reform support infrastructure could organize and facilitate policy dialogue and deliberations.

If what is needed is ongoing help designing procedures and practices for implementation, then the reform support infrastructure could mobilize technical expertise and implementation capacity in the needed areas.

In each case, what is required is a flexible network of organizations and individuals capable of responding strategically to the emerging challenges and opportunities associated with a reform agenda. In reviewing a Ford Foundation initiative aimed at supporting reform support networks in eight U.S. cities, Bodilly, Chun, Ikemoto, & Stockly (2004) concluded that the success of the reform support infrastructure in each city depended on the amount of time, interaction, and trust among collaborative members; the legitimacy and authority of the lead organization (which was different in each site); the adept use of data to inform the group's theory of action; the group's commitment to continuous reflection and re-strategizing based on hard evidence; and early attention to scale and sustainability as key long-term goals.

The experience of District Community Voices Informed for Education Change (DC VOICE) related in the box below illustrates the strategic actions of a reform support infrastructure.

The Strategic Actions of District Community Voices Informed for Education Change

DC VOICE brought together a number of community organizations and individual activists to work initially in one cluster of elementary schools and a middle school. The collaborative then set its sights on the broader education reform agenda, conducting research and focus groups to identify critical system-level factors that affect the quality of teaching and learning in D.C. classrooms. The framework they developed, "Supports for Quality Teaching," highlights needed reforms in how teachers are hired, developed, supported, and evaluated. The framework was used to clear intellectual and institutional space for thinking differently about the human resources challenges in the District. In addition, through partnerships with university-based researchers, data were gathered to analyze the experiences of first-year teachers. Enlisting the community-organizing and -mobilizing skill of DC ACORN, DC VOICE used the data to clear political space by informing and mobilizing parents and other community members to advocate for better induction and mentoring for new teachers. DC VOICE testified before the school board and worked with school district staff to fill the cleared space with well-crafted induction and mentoring policies and programs (based on personal knowledge of the authors).

4. Education Reform Support Activities and Projects

The foregoing sections have noted the importance of supporting reform and the "big picture" aspects of reform support. From these sections it should be clear that supporting reform, as a donor activity, is different from traditional donor education projects and from donor approaches that assume reform is a simple matter of laying down some policy suggestions and conditions, and engaging in a one-time formal discussion or workshop. Implementing projects that build schools, make curricular changes, or train teachers is at least a known art, even if it is not a simple blueprint process. There are models to follow and experienced staff in donor agencies who can mentor others who have never set up such projects. And holding a workshop or two to suggest a few policy changes or discuss some conditions is also something donors have experience with. But implementing reform support activities in the manner discussed above is relatively new ground. What does it take? It might appear that supporting reform is an arcane and purely intuitive "political" art. However, ERS proposes that reform support, like any project, can be thought of as being composed of discrete inputs, processes, and activities aimed at contributing to a reformed system, and, therefore, that donors can apply technique to the messy process of supporting reform in a proficient manner. This section suggests approaches and activities that can make reform support itself a "projectizable" activity.

"…reform support, like any project, can be thought of as being composed of discrete inputs, processes, and activities aimed at contributing to a reformed system…"

ERS does retain some of the messiness of political activity. The process is indeed inherently nonlinear and difficult to plan very rigidly. While one can come up with discrete, projectizable activities ("tools in a toolbox") to constitute a reform support process, the number and order of activities or tools one deploys is likely to change during the lifetime of a reform support effort; with certain tools in the toolbox being deployed ahead of plan, and others relegated for later, depending on political opportunity, timing, and what seems to be working. More than traditional projects or one-shot dialogue sessions, ERS is opportunity- and event-driven. It requires that donors have a well-stocked "toolbox" and a deep awareness of the environment, so they can use many different tools in the toolbox as opportunities permit or situations demand, rather than according to a preset and linear plan. We realize this poses a challenge to donors' planning. In the examples that follow we try to emphasize some of the nonlinear and opportunistic aspects of the process, to highlight their importance and thus the need to rise to the challenge of being responsive to opportunity, and to show that with a little effort and creativity such changes can readily be made.

The easiest way to think of "projectizable" ERS activities, and the one followed in the ERS approach, is to adapt the classical corporate decision support paradigm: data-gathering leads to analysis, which leads to a rational decision. In trying to support transparent public decision making, we alter this basic paradigm in two ways. First, the objective is not to reach a single bottom-line rational decision, but to promote deliberation concerning public policy trade-offs that leads, in a "searching" approach, to better decisions at the margin. The ERS approach, however, also turns the sequence around and suggests that it is policy competition (dialogue, discussion, debate,

social marketing) that leads to the demand for analysis, which, in turn, leads to the demand for data gathering. It is the dissatisfaction, competition, and social tension created by policy debate that lead to demands for more serious analysis; without such demand, serious analysis tends to fall on deaf ears. The ERS approach also augments this decision support paradigm by proposing that donors need to help institutionalize within a country the ability to perform these dialogue, analysis, and data functions. One can then propose activities in any or (ideally) all of those areas to support a reform process. The text box below provides some brief examples of activities that can be supported relating to data, analysis, dialogue, and communication and building reform support capacity. Further discussion and specific examples from donor projects follow.

Data	• Use of surveys, for example, on school quality, to demonstrate need for reform • Use of existing data to drive discussions on equity of resource allocation • Gathering political "data" through meetings and surveys to create political maps of interest groups' positions on key reform proposals
Analysis	• Cost-effectiveness analysis of various policy options, such as analysis of the cost effectiveness of more spending on salaries versus spending on materials • Traditional internal efficiency (repetition, dropout, flow-through) and external (rates of return, labor market impact) analysis • Inequality analysis on distribution of learning results, school access, or input and expenditure distribution • Cost projections and other simulation tools to underpin debates about the need to prioritize or to lobby for improved funding for the sector • School effectiveness analysis to underpin debate about management reforms
Dialogue & Communication	• Forums for dialogue • Policy presentations, debates, and deliberations • Social marketing and mobilization campaigns • Use of media
Networking & Reform Support Infrastructure	• Encouraging and financing reform coalitions and networks • Encouraging and financing analysis and advocacy NGOs by giving them performance-oriented contracts rather than general purpose support • Developing analytical and advocacy capacity in civil society and government itself • Developing sustainable funding for advocacy and analysis institutions

DATA

Ultimately, empirical data must underpin the analysis and promotion of reform ideas. However, promoting reform does not require that donors spend much energy and funding on the creation and maintenance of traditional, supply-driven EMIS or recurrent, general-purpose school or household surveys. On the contrary, there are good reasons to believe that, when there is no demand for data arising from the competition of policy ideas or the need to manage the sector in a publicly accountable fashion, the data generated by EMIS systems will tend not to be used, and the systems will tend not to be sustained (Crouch, 1997). Furthermore, countries already have many more data than they are using. Data use is currently far more constrained by demand and by the lack of technical skill and imagination in using what is already gathered, than it is by the supply of data.

The sorts of "projectizable" data activities recommended for ERS use existing data to feed into dialogue processes, or, alternatively, gather original data but, again, for a specific policy discussion purpose. This approach is very different from usual EMIS or general-purpose school (or household) survey sorts of activities. The recommended approach reasons first and foremost from the demand side: the data are gathered (or compiled if they already exist) to enlighten a specific policy dilemma. What follow are three examples of different ERS data activities from a variety of contexts. In each case these activities were identified as useful in advancing elements of the different reform agendas from different starting points, through different interactions with education officials and the broader public, and with varying specific tactics. What they have in common is an overarching approach: data, used strategically, are an essential component of reform support. These examples are not meant to be copied, but we hope they and the others elaborated throughout this section of the paper will convey how ERS activities work, and demonstrate that they can accompany projects that include more traditional education components.

Example 1. Data for policy-level dialogue in Peru. A case in point is a recent (2005 and 2006) World Bank experience in Peru, where simple data on children's reading were gathered to feed a policy dialogue process focused on school quality and learning. Peru, which had participated in PISA in 2000, carries out a survey-based national learning assessment approximately every three years. These surveys are useful, but it was felt that something more dramatic and simple was needed to really focus attention. The World Bank team hit upon the idea of simply asking children to read in a small but representative sample of 254 children in 22 schools, and recording (in both audio and video) the difference between a child who can read fairly well and an average child (not reading very well, if at all), so that policy makers and opinion makers could see the difference. The reading assessment was extremely simple; it focused just on fluency (words read per minute in a simple paragraph) and comprehension. A video was then created showing the difference between children who can read and children who cannot read, pointing out that too many children cannot read, and indicating that there are already quite a few schools where children can read. These schools are characterized by the use of standards and monitoring, teacher accountability and devotion, and support to teachers on instructional techniques. Shown in live policy dialogue settings in four localities to more than 2,000 persons, as well as on prime-time TV, the video led to discussions on talk shows, editorials in the newspapers and magazines, and so on. A healthy debate on quality and learning standards ensued, and is continuing. This policy dialogue was held during the presidential campaign, and one of the political parties adopted the issue of early-grade reading, including fluency goals (words read per minute) as an educational standard. The winning president adopted similar standards and highlighted them in his inaugural speech. These sorts of goals have also been embodied as preferred performance indicators by the Ministry of Finance. While the idea all along was to use children's reading as a simple and dramatic way to illustrate the

need to improve policy around school quality, the whole notion of using a video, which ended up being extremely powerful, only arose because the analysts and World Bank staff observed stakeholders' powerful reaction when they heard simple audio recordings of some children's halting reading compared to what a proficient child's reading sounds like. Thus, the innovation that turned out to be perhaps the most powerful one in the whole process, in terms of generating debate, was an opportunistic rather than a planned one (see Alvarado Perez, 2006).

Example 2. Data for local accountability in Namibia. Another case of using information to support reform, but this time at the school level rather than at the policy level, is from Namibia. A post-independence priority in Namibia was addressing the disparities of economic opportunity in society, particularly in the Northern provinces, where the largely poor, black populations lived. USAID programs had supported education development for years, and by 2000 were highlighted by a project that supported key reforms built on a foundation of active learning, continuous assessment of student progress, and community-supported school improvement planning in four Northern provinces. With support from the USAID project, some senior Ministry of Education officials proposed a school self-assessment system that was designed by project staff working with education officers and tried in a few schools with parents, teachers, and principals starting in 2001. The project worked with the Inspectors of Education, advisory teachers, and resource teachers who form the circuit support teams in the regions to implement the system. These same teams then worked on revising the indicators and methodologies, thus acquiring further ownership of the system. Eventually, 404 schools and more than 2,500 teachers were participating in the School Improvement Program, which included implementation of the school self-assessment process. The participating schools used the system regularly to evaluate their effectiveness and improvement progress. With the self-assessment, teachers are expected to reflect on their own practice and use that reflection to participate in the overall school improvement discussion. Namibia's school self-assessment system has become a powerful means to include parents and community members as well as teachers, principals, and local education officials in the process of defining and implementing school improvement activities using empirical evidence. School Self-Assessment (SSA) has enabled regional education offices to provide site-based teacher development and school improvement support activities based on actual needs, and it has been institutionalized as the Ministry's tool for operationalizing the newly introduced National Standards of School Effectiveness at the local level.

It is interesting to note that this SSA was not part of the original work plan in this project. Opportunity presented itself when a few regional officers and Ministry officials took part in a study tour to another country, where they saw such a system in operation (which was, in turn, an adaptation of the Scottish system) and became interested. The opportunity was seized and an approach was collaboratively designed with the Ministry. Furthermore, as use of the tool developed, and as local actors became involved in a thorough adaptation rather than simply copying a tool from somewhere else, its purposes and uses diverged somewhat from the original design, and its interpretation became richer. The success of the SSA system as an engine of system reform required a mix of initiatives, strategies, and circumstances. The Minister's leadership was obviously a key element, but success depended on clearing space and enabling active support at several levels. Schools, teachers, and communities had many historical reasons for resisting honest reporting to central authorities. The strategy of using information to support reform was itself a challenge. Much of the success depended on establishing ways to use information at the school level to address local problems, to protect elements of school data to enable honest reporting, and to use the information in a supportive and nonjudgmental way (personal communication, Donna LeCzel, Chief of Party, BES3 Project, June 6, 2006; Carolyn Pugliese,

Program Associate, BES3 Project; see also Muhammed & LeCzel, 2003).

Example 3. Use of data to drive community awareness and solve equity problems in Nigeria. In various pre-selected local governments, USAID provided support to improve equity in resource allocation via the use of data. A series of stakeholder forums was convened to discuss the level of funding allocated to primary education and the equitable distribution of existing resources among schools. Stakeholder analysis identified participants, who included representatives of parents, schools (teachers), local businesses, political parties, religious leaders, and local government administration and elected representatives. Facilitated by local government education administrators, the forums took place over one year. Stakeholder representatives were first asked to identify and prioritize the most important problems of the schools in their local government. Information on those problems was based on existing school census surveys presented back to the stakeholders at a subsequent forum. Data were presented graphically, representing the distribution of resources among schools, using indicators such as pupil:teacher ratios, pupil:classroom ratios, pupil:seat ratios, and books per child. However, feedback from stakeholders suggested discrepancies between the reality in the schools and the data reported. It was decided therefore to collect data collaboratively (parents and educators) and present to stakeholders again before they were asked to use the information to establish minimum criteria for each of their problems and develop action plans.

Two subsequent forums monitored implementation compared to the action plan and then, in the final forum, data were used to assess progress. Important elements of the process were that (a) district education officers led the process; (b) comparative data were used to engage the interest of politicians and parents; (c) emphasis was placed on using information to find local solutions to problems; and (d) problems referred to higher authorities were pursued by political and community stakeholders. USAID did not initially aim to improve situations by adding resources. However, resource constraints limited progress in implementing action plans developed by the stakeholders, so a one-for-one matching grant component was introduced, which leveraged funding from public and private sector. By leveraging data, dialogue, and the grants, the project enabled local resources to be allocated more efficiently and equitably. For example, the project helped to (a) increase resources from a variety of local sources; (b) reallocate physical resources (benches and teachers) among schools first, before providing additional resources, to ensure that every school met minimum criteria; and (c) change state policy in response to local advocacy for a specific reading hour in the curriculum. It should be noted that while the process was generally effective and well received, it worked better in some areas than in others, and this variation in itself is instructive about the ERS approach. For example, changes tended to be more sustainable when there were changes in government (after elections) in areas where dialogue involved not just the incumbent politicians, but where the dialogue was broader. The notion of involving non-incumbent politicians, also tried out in the Peru example listed above, was highly innovative and somewhat criticized at first (personal communication, Alastair Rodd, June 10, 2006).

ANALYSIS

Raw data do not say much, without the value-added of an analytical process. Most traditional data gathering in education, however, assumes that data are used for some vaguely specified function, called "management" (thus the "M" in EMIS), and therefore emphasizes the production of relatively raw data, which, not surprising, are not used for much of anything, except, perhaps, reporting to international organizations.[1]

[1] At least in most education systems in most developing countries where donors work. Once data production is sufficiently agile and sufficiently based on actual management functions, and once there is sufficient demand for management decisions to be publicly defensible, raw data use for immediate management applications does increase, and supply-side interventions make sense. But this typically begins to happen only in upper-middle-income countries where most bilateral donors are absent or have a marginal presence.

Analysis itself ideally has to be driven by debates about issues that require reform; it also should not be supply-led. Thus, analysis of school finance, for example, should be driven by a sharp policy concern over funding equity. Or analysis of school effectiveness has to be done in response to sharp budget pressure leading to a need to increase efficiency. If analysis is promoted solely out of a vague perception, or conventional wisdom, that it is "right" and "professional" to carry out analysis before making decisions, then the effort typically will not find much echo or sustainability. What is also often lacking is rigorous analysis of the effectiveness of educational innovations. We expect projects to demonstrate the effectiveness of methodology, curriculum, or teacher training reforms, but most of them fail to establish the baseline facts about how effective their innovations actually are. Easterly (2006) calls for donor-funded efforts to do more systematic experimentation and evaluation to establish fact-based foundations from which to leverage broader implementation and impact. The two examples below show how analysis can work from both the demand and supply sides.

Example 4. Demand-driven analysis in South Africa. A case of demand-driven analysis, and donor support for it, comes from South Africa. (This case also illustrates effective donor creation of reform support infrastructure.) As is well known, education funding in South Africa during apartheid was extremely and purposely inequitable. Not surprising, the new government, even before it came to power, wanted to change this. In the mid-1990s, USAID provided two major forms of support to reform the funding system. First, was analytical support to revamp the school funding and resourcing formulas. Second, was support to the training and capacity development of (mostly) government officials, some NGO officials, and some academics, in the nature of the financial reforms, in both theory and implementation practice. The training was well coordinated with the policy development, in the sense that the assistance providers working on the policy also developed the training materials and provided the training itself. The capacity development took the form of patient, long-term collaborative work between technical assistance providers and local counterparts over many years. Several years after the original reforms were designed, it was clear that they had some unintended consequences. In 2003 the national government issued a sophisticated reanalysis of the situation and proposed certain "reforms of the reform," such as requiring that poverty targeting be based on a national definition. This reanalysis did not require intense donor support, as the ability to carry out this analysis had been internalized to a large degree. In this case, the training, even though extremely intensive, was an add-on. The provider of technical assistance, and the provider's counterparts, were aware that demands of day-to-day activities and problem solving were preventing knowledge transfer. Counterparts and the technical assistance (TA) provider started an informal "club" on Friday afternoons to devote voluntary time to capacity building. After a year, this effort was transmuted into a formal course, and this course—based as it was on a real need, having been informally field-tested, and being offered by the same technical assistance provider who had worked on the policies (training thus being tightly linked to need to implement policy)—was quite successful. Being aware of the environment, having a well-stocked toolbox, and having donors willing to be flexible were all keys to success (based on personal knowledge of the authors; see Crouch, 2006).

Example 5. Data and analysis to drive sector visioning in Pakistan. A visioning process and use of a projection model in Pakistan show how different kinds of analyses can support a reform. A major policy problem in Pakistan is the general lack of a shared vision of what an affordable but desirable education system might look like. Accordingly, policies are both unaligned and unrealistic, reforms do not work toward a common end, and donor support projects do not contribute much toward reform. The reform support work undertaken to deal with this situation unfolded in three phases. First, efforts were made to facilitate stakeholders' understanding of the need for a vision: to gen-

erate demand for one, given the predominant view that their existing policy frameworks amounted to a vision. Through informed discussions with stakeholders from around the country, this understanding was facilitated, but not without tension. Stakeholders first tended to think they had a vision, but the fact that it was not a practical one was not clear. This led to the realization that the process could benefit from a costing model to support the entire visioning effort. Second, these same stakeholders were then asked to delineate their depiction of the present-day system with a particular emphasis on planning, management, professional development, and finance flows (knowing that these emphases would manifest issues germane to standards, performance appraisal, accountability, and career ladders). With this understanding, these workshop participants were then asked to envision a system in which all of the problems and issues they just identified no longer existed and to delineate those elements of the system that were crucial to its eventual realization. For example, from a goal of well-trained teachers in every classroom, the discussion addressed the mechanisms needed to ensure well-trained teachers in every classroom, say career ladders to bring about demand-driven professional development and accountability systems. This became the material for an emerging vision that was put forth in a discussion document distributed for comment around the country. Feedback on this discussion document was gathered in written form and in a series of stakeholder workshops that furthered the emerging vision. Here the process faced a key choice: how to elicit feedback from thousands of people, yet keep it both focused and manageable. A decision was made to present the emerging vision in chunks—classrooms, schools/communities, districts, etc.—and ask a number of key questions about each chunk, the answers to which would help flesh out critical elements of the vision (and engender widespread ownership of those elements). Finally, the cost of the emerging vision had to be assessed. It is one thing to envision a well-equipped classroom with a qualified teacher in it; it is quite another to determine just what well-equipped classrooms and qualified teachers cost and how this adds up to an affordable or unaffordable education sector budget. A second round of workshops focused on cost. With the use of a computerized cost-projection model, the costs of various scenarios were assessed, and an optimal solution was finally realized vis-à-vis enrollment growth, cost-saving measures, and quality-enhancing reforms (personal communication, Hank Healey, June 8, 2006.)

DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION

Perhaps the most important part of the ERS approach is fostering communication, debate, and dialogue. As can be seen in the data and analysis examples just presented, communication and dialogue are often integral parts of the data and analysis activities. In fact, communication and dialogue are what create demand for analysis and contribute to sustainable results.

> "Perhaps the most important part of the ERS approach is fostering communication, debate, and dialogue."

Donor support to dialogue processes can take at least two forms. A relatively common one is for the donor itself to engage in dialogue, as an actual actor. This is useful, and sometimes is a good way to put some issues quickly and proficiently on the debate agenda, but is not really ideal. Worse, in some of these situations, "dialogue" becomes an imposition on a task manager's checklist, and the donor will consider itself to have "dialogued" if it holds a semipublic seminar or workshop. Alternatively, the "dialogue" may be just a discussion of policy conditions on a loan or grant. This sort of approach does not take to heart the notion that debate and seeking solutions are keys to sustainable and endogenous policy reform. It continues to assume that counterpart governments are rational, tend to arrive at "rational-comprehensive" solutions based on discrete bits of evidence, and such solutions are socially optimal and can lead to development. To put it in Easterly's terms, this is a "planner's" solution (Easterly, 2006). As noted, on occasion this kind of approach is useful, because it can,

indeed, put issues on the table quickly and proficiently, but it is not the best way to proceed.

An alternative, which the ERS approach defends, is to foster more genuine dialogue, where debate is encouraged, opposing actors are brought to the table, and the donor either simply finances the dialogue process or truly sees itself as just one more actor. This does not mean that the donor has to shy away from espousing a particular position or defending a particular approach, and even engaging in intense social marketing of the approach. But it does mean that the donor has to see itself as fallible, abandon a "planner" mentality, and adopt a "debater" or "searcher" mentality. It is important to note that this ERS position is not based on an emotional or politically correct viewpoint that suggests donors have to be "nice," but, instead, on the empirically supported sense that large-scale solutions based on supposedly rational analysis often do not work, and that sustainable, implementable solutions that do work (particularly for implementation-intensive sectors, such as social service delivery) emerge from of a process of competition as well as a process, searching or "feeling one's way" (Easterly, 2006). Fostering this kind of debate is closely linked to the need to create an ongoing reform support infrastructure, as discussed below.

The four examples of policy dialogue presented here below highlight how strategically chosen supports, with astute attention to the politics of the context for reform, can advance national processes of dialogue and shape the way reform issues are defined and taken on. In addition to these kinds of dialogue activities, communication more broadly defined is also integral to sound ERS.

Example 6. Continental policy dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean. PREAL is a joint activity of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington and the Corporation for Development Research (CINDE) in Santiago, Chile, seeking, as its Spanish initials indicate[2], to promote education reform in Latin America. PREAL promotes reform not only through debate, but also by tracking and reporting on progress through its well-known "education report cards" on individual countries and country groups, and by disseminating best practices. PREAL's approach relies on involving civil society and sociopolitical leaders chosen for their personal qualities and history, rather than for their official position.

Over more than a decade, PREAL has grown from a relatively limited effort to promote policy debate in six countries to a region-wide initiative aimed at building a broad and active constituency for education reform. It has become the leading non-government voice on education in Latin America and a strong advocate for involving civil society leaders in the work of education reform. Much of its work has been experimental, including pioneering the concept of country education report cards in Latin America, developing user-friendly publications that address key policy issues, convincing respected leaders from outside the education sector to work for education reform, helping national advocacy groups engage local leaders in discussions on education policy, and establishing region-wide, issue-specific working groups that identify and debate policy implications in areas such as national standards, assessment, the teaching profession, and school autonomy.

PREAL is an excellent example of a donor activity that promotes real debate and discussion, while not shying away from its own advocacy and points of view. For example, PREAL promotes the notion that standards and assessment are key to educational improvement. While it would be foolhardy to attribute the causality behind continental trends to a single institution, the reality is that the drive for measurement and assessment in Latin America has increased tremendously in the last 10 years. While PREAL has been only one of the voices

[2] Programa de Promoción de la Reforma Educativa en América Latina y el Caribe, or "Program for the Promotion of Education Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean" in direct translation (note that the English name is not a direct translation of the Spanish name).

pressing this drive forward, it has been perhaps the most insistent, consistent, and proficient voice, at least in the countries where it has been most active. Dissemination of PREAL points of view takes place through an extensive publications program, national and international seminars, its web page, study tours, and task forces and working groups that encourage international collaboration (created from personal communication, Jeffrey Puryear, Director, PREAL, June 2 2006, and the authors' personal knowledge of the PREAL process; for more information see www.preal.org and www.thedialogue.org).

Example 7. Policy dialogue around finance and other issues in Guatemala. After the elections in 2003, and following the failure of the previous administration to deliver on high expectations, USAID was committed to supporting the new government in substantive reforms, and particularly the Minister of Education, a dynamic leader from the private sector. USAID identified two key issues—low levels of investment in the social sectors (education and health) and policy instability from one administration to the next. A bridging, one-year project in 2004 was intended to support a national dialogue among the full spectrum of political actors in Guatemala and to develop a broad-based commitment to increased investment. The initial design sought to use the project as a neutral entity to convene all stakeholders in an empirical assessment of the problem and an exploration of solutions that would have support from all elements of society. This effort to implement the core philosophy of the ERS approach immediately ran into resistance from the Ministry, which was concerned about inclusion of political opponents and saw the Ministry of Education (MOE) as the only legitimate convener of such a dialogue. The project was modified to support a national visioning process, led by the Ministry but including a range of institutions. This decision had significant implications for the project: it established a critical enabling relationship with the key stakeholder, but at the same time, the donor and project lost control of the schedule and structure of the process. The project became a technical secretariat for a national policy dialogue, conducting technical analyses and research in response to working group concerns. The USAID approach uses an explicit analysis and communication methodology to work with stakeholders, identify audiences, identify behaviors to be targeted and the factors that affect those behaviors, and develop communication strategies that respond to those factors (see USAID, 2006). The result was a country-led process with a high degree of ownership, but with implementation delays from the USAID project management standpoint.

Success of the project led to a Ministry request for follow-on support for social investment policy dialogue, with two components—improving the financial efficiency of the education sector, and expanding the broader societal dialogue. In this stage of USAID support, the project has faced greater challenges. The national political environment began to focus on future elections, the Minister's leadership was challenged by opponents (and congress), and resistance to broad-based dialogue (and perceived empowerment of political opponents) increased. The project is currently working to balance the interests of maintaining key ownership and support of the Ministry with the longer-term USAID interest in assuring sustainability of the reforms through a broad-based social compact (personal communication, John Gillies, June 2006).

Example 8. Postwar dialogue in El Salvador. Through a negotiated settlement, El Salvador emerged in the early 1990s from a long period of civil war. During the civil war, education had been neglected, though interesting experiments were carried out, particularly in the guerrilla-controlled areas. These experiments tended to emphasize self-help, community involvement in schooling, and the spontaneous creation of "communities of practice" among the teachers in the guerrilla-held zones. While not necessarily providing higher-quality education than that offered by traditional schools, both parties saw these schools as a promising way to increase enrollment and involve communities. The new right-wing government called on USAID to support a process of dialogue that involved all key

segments of society, including those associated with the left. Ten integrated teams were formed, each of which was to draft a report on one of 10 critical technical areas in the education sector. An advisory committee (mini-parliament) of about 50 representatives from some 30 organizations was created to vet the reports. This committee met with the technical teams every week for 12 weeks. The process succeeded in generating an approach to reform that was legitimate across a fairly broad spectrum of society. Reasons for the success of the process included a) a focus on the feasibility of solutions as opposed to fundamental values; b) a focus on process itself and the use of good process management based on clear rules and procedures; and c) selection of representatives of various organizations for their personal characteristics, such as the ability to stay focused on solutions. Agreements were reached that laid the foundation for an approach to sustained reform based on community-controlled schools (based on Schiefelbein, 2006).

Example 9. Political maneuvering to support reform in Brazil. In the mid-1990s, Brazil instituted some of the most far-reaching education reforms undertaken in developing countries in recent decades. These reforms have had major impact, particularly on access. The primary completion rate went up by 20 percentage points between the mid-1990s and 2001, and secondary enrollment improved greatly.[3] There were many large-scale changes within the education sector, but certain financial reforms were key to driving improvements in access and equity. These financial reforms had two particular features. First, the funding was reformed so as to be driven by formulas that rewarded enrollment, as opposed to ad hoc or tradition-based financial allocations, or, worse, allocations based on each municipality's own revenue-raising capacity from its own sources (as was partially the case before the reforms). Second, the funding greatly reduced underspending in poor regions by creating state-level equalization funds that pooled all within-state funding, thus preventing poor municipalities from under-spending, and by using federal funds to create a floor of per-student spending within states and municipalities. At the school level, transfers were set by an enrollment-driven formula, but schools had to set up parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and bank accounts before they received funding. Thus, funding was used to drive governance changes at the school level. The number of PTAs increased from 11,000 to 60,000, so incentives, it seems, do work.

These reforms were not easy and required considerable political maneuvering and mobilization of public opinion. At the parliamentary level, the then-Minister pushed the financial reforms through largely by stealth rather than by debate and dialogue; for example, it is not clear that legislators were totally aware of the implications of what they were approving. This got things done quickly, but some analysts think it made subsequent changes more difficult. It should also be noted that financial reforms tend to be more cut-and-dried than, say, reforms in teaching or governance processes. Reforms that are less implementation-intensive, and mostly require only a few decisions, may be easier to carry out via quick politics and maneuvering than via open dialogue. However, in many of the reforms, the Minister did mobilize public opinion and debate, based on data analysis, adroitly. He increased the funding and capability of the data systems and used the data to draw attention to inequality and other issues in dialogue with the public. The Ministry began to display the newly acquired data and assessment information in useful formats that created a new transparency with civil society. The Minister participated in radio talk shows, created a publicity campaign entitled "Wake Up Brazil! It's Time for School," and used a thirty minute slot during the federal government's nightly newscast to relay education news and respond to citizen letters. He engaged and empowered civil society to hold their local and state governments accountable for quality education, even creating a Federal 1-800 line that citizens and PTAs could use to

[3] While the key financial reforms were in primary education, these had a ripple effect on secondary education.

report local misuse of education policy. Using a combination of political acumen and mobilization of opinion and dialogue, the Minister and his team were able to pursue reforms with profound and far-reaching impacts unusual in the developing, or, indeed, developed world (based on personal communication, Audrey-marie Schuh Moore, September 2006; various presentations by Paulo Renato Souza; and discussions with Brazilian analysts).

BUILDING REFORM SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

All of the activities discussed above can help support a given reform, or a given package of reforms, but they do not institutionalize a country's capacity to debate and design reform in an ongoing way. Designing a given package of reforms is, of course, better than nothing. But designing one package of reforms is still too much like a "planner's" solution and not enough like a "searching" solution. The ultimate goal of donor assistance and capacity building should be to help create the infrastructure whereby data-based analysis, policy dialogue, and strategic communication can be ongoing and adaptive, so that the system can continue to carry out gradual improvements creatively. This point of view is based on the notion that policy reform itself has to be sustainable and on the awareness that every policy reform raises new problems to be solved.

"The ultimate goal of donor assistance and capacity building should be to help create the infrastructure whereby data-based analysis, policy dialogue, and strategic communication can be ongoing and adaptive…"

Activities that might help institutionalize reform support can be divided in two groups: those oriented toward government and those oriented toward institutions outside government.

The advantage of supporting government units to carry out ongoing policy reform is that such units have access to a tax base, so, in principle, they might be sustainable. The conundrum, of course, is that if there was real governmental interest in supporting proper analysis, the donor intervention would not be needed to begin with. Thus, the very need for donor support or intervention is itself prima facie evidence of governmental failure, or at least governmental weakness, and suggests that the donor intervention may well not be sustained after direct support ceases. Government actors fail to carry out proper analysis not primarily because they are technically weak, but because analysis is not a priority or results in too many inconvenient truths. The observed incapacity to carry out analysis and proper debate in the education sector is, to a large degree, a consequence of lack of political interest in objective analysis, and not due to an inherent lack of access to brainpower or skill. And the common donor reasoning that "once governments see what good things data and analysis can do, they will be enthused and will sustain the effort" is usually wrong, as has been proven by the constant failure of governments to sustain EMIS and policy units. Unsatisfied with the lack of interest and sustainability of data and policy units in government, the donors have turned to NGOs or think tanks that work in the public interest and have gone beyond service delivery and into policy analysis and debate.

But this approach is also problematic, because private willingness to support policy reform units, beyond the duration of the donor's funding, is also hard to find. Weak states usually coexist with weak private sectors and civil societies, where the notion of policy-oriented and sustained philanthropy (such as endowing a think tank) is foreign indeed. Service delivery or corporate social responsibility kinds of philanthropy can be found, but policy-based philanthropy is rare in poor countries. Generally, the poorer the country, where good policy is most sorely needed, the weaker the state, and the weaker the private sector and civil society at providing funds to nongovernmental policy reform units. Is there no way out?

Partly the answer is, indeed, no. Donors may simply be called to support this kind of activity for a long time in the weaker countries. It is most likely wishful thinking to expect policy

activities (government or otherwise) to become self-sustaining in most very poor countries in the short term. (Note that local consulting firms, which carry out studies for a fee, or carry out advocacy processes also for a fee, can indeed become sustainable as institutions, but the source of financing is still, typically, donor money—donors continue to underwrite policy work, even if they do so through contracts rather than through institutional support grants.)

But countries vary a great deal, and one can find privately based policy reform work even in relatively poor, small countries, and no activity at all in bigger, richer countries. Ultimately, deciding whether to support government or non-government institutions as "reformist" agents has to rely on a case-by-case analysis of each situation. If government is receptive and truly reform-minded, most likely investing in government units is a good idea, as there is some hope of sustainability through a tax base. If government is not very receptive, and the private sector is enlightened enough to support policy reform ideas that go beyond the usual corporate philanthropy and problem-fixing approaches, then donor partnerships with the private sector can be fruitful. If neither condition can be found, donors may find themselves in the situation of directly funding NGOs that can take on research and advocacy roles, and this may need to be carried out for a long time. If there is sufficient funding, some mix of these approaches is, of course, recommended. NGO analytical and data-based pressure can keep government analytical units honest, for example, so even where governments are receptive and reform-minded, supporting NGOs makes sense. The basis of good decisions is competition of ideas.

Example 10. Institutionalization of reform support via private sector in El Salvador, weak private sector support in Peru. In El Salvador, FEPADE (Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo—Entrepreneurial Foundation for Educational Development), created in 1987, got much of its early support from USAID and tended to engage only in very traditional philanthropy and service delivery or narrow policy issues (around vocational education issues). It has evolved, however, into a remarkably multifaceted institution with some of the most visionary policy activities of any private education group in Latin America. FEPADE divides its activities into "point" actions (traditional philanthropy and privately funded service delivery, such as adopt-a-school schemes, donations, corporate social responsibility); "programmatic" actions (such as supporting school-level, public sector pilot projects that teach schools how to implement existing policy reforms); and "strategic" interventions (such as direct policy debate and analysis, mobilization of private sector opinion on reform issues, support to the public sector on policy analysis; see Freund, 2005). In contrast, in a much bigger country, Peru, private sector and civil society support to public education policy rarely transcends philanthropic or corporate social responsibility interventions, though things may be changing recently. Thus, it is very hard to predict where the private sector might pitch in with ongoing support to public education debates. Donors can test the waters by supporting initial activities (say, via matching grants) that may be in the service delivery area, and then gradually encourage a shift toward policy-oriented activities with full private support.

In other situations, direct support of government and NGO policy reform infrastructures is a worthwhile investment.

Example 11. "Distributed" institutionalization or reform support capacity in South Africa. In South Africa, for example, USAID and other donors, such as the Netherlands, invested in capacity development of governmental officials, academic actors, and NGO actors, thus creating a robust reform support infrastructure over a period of about 10 years. After providing policy advice assistance on post-apartheid financial reforms, USAID supported capacity development in implementing these reforms at two levels. First, at the provincial head office level, USAID helped train government officials to understand and be able to implement some of the key reforms. Second, USAID helped school-

and district-level staff understand and apply many of the reforms. Other donors provided similar assistance; in fact, often more than one donor assisted the same units. Both USAID and the Netherlands embassy supported the Education Foundation, an NGO that specialized in policy debate and analysis and providing data digests, among other services. After the end of apartheid, many of these NGOs collapsed, as donor funding turned toward government itself. But, even though some eventually ceased to exist, these NGOs provided useful services for 10 to 15 years or so, helping see the country through a remarkable transformation. In that sense their legacy and contribution has certainly been sustained, even if as institutions they may not have been. Others have made a successful transition to contract-based providers of analytical services to government or the private sector, as opposed to being supported by donors' institutional grants. While South Africa may be unique in the sharpness of the contradictions it faced and exemplified, much of the same sorts of issues can be found in all countries, albeit in a less dramatic way (based on personal knowledge of the authors).

The need to institutionalize reform support is not peculiar to developing countries. The United States, for example, has a similar need. In spite of the fact that routine management of education usually works better in the United States than it does in most developing countries, countries like the United States have similar problems in sustaining reform. The following example documents efforts to develop a reform support infrastructure in a domestic U.S. context.

Example 12. Institutionalization of reform support in the United States: San Juan and Washington, D.C. The San Juan Metropolitan Alliance for Education (SJMAE) in Puerto Rico is a reform support network that was initially seeded and supported by the Ford Foundation. SJMAE was founded in 1994 and initially worked with the 11 schools in the Cataño district in San Juan. The Alliance provided school-level support for reforms in classroom practice and school organization and management, but linked those supports to efforts to reshape policies regarding how district-level support needed to be structured. After working to establish a record of success in Cataño, the SJMAE knew it had to turn its attention to the issues of scale and sustainability: how could they affect education on a broader scale in Puerto Rico, and what policy innovations could ensure the sustainability of what was happening in Cataño? The Alliance's leaders would dialogue regularly with policy makers, but a more systematic assessment of the policy implications of their work was called for. A study conducted in 2001–2002 drew lessons from the Cataño experience for island-wide policy concerning the role of district offices in supporting school improvement. That study served as the basis for facilitated dialogue among all Puerto Rico's superintendents and the Department of Education. As a result, the Puerto Rican Department of Education and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation committed sufficient resources to the Alliance's work to allow the program to expand to six other districts. Based on its success at linking school-level interventions to policy reform, the Alliance formed the Institute for Education Policy and Community Development in 2005. The Institute evaluates effective grassroots initiatives to discover their policy and institutional implications for the Puerto Rican education system. A private university, several community-based organizations, the College Board of Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican Community Foundation, and the Conservatory of Music and Museum of Art constitute a reform support infrastructure that has grown out of the SJMAE's original work supporting school-level change and has evolved to encompass a variety of strategies for promoting, supporting, and sustaining education reform in Puerto Rico (based on personal knowledge of the authors).

In the spring of 1998 a group of teachers, parents, and community activists started meeting to explore ways to work collaboratively on education reform in the District of Columbia. With a planning grant from the Ford Foundation, District Community Voices Organized and Informed for Change in Education (DC VOICE)

came together as a reform support network of numerous organizations and individuals working to improve education in Washington, D.C. They saw a more informed and better organized public as essential to generating greater demand and accountability for improved education in the city. They also realized that many organizations and activists already worked on education issues in Washington, so that better collaboration among those entities would be most productive (as opposed to one more NGOs competing for funding). As part of how it promotes collaboration and ensures the relevance of its reform support work, DC VOICE annually brings together its numerous members and partners to identify key issues the collaborative network will take on or support. And it carries out its data, analysis, communication, and community-organizing work through its various constituents. DC VOICE attracts funding from various foundation and corporate sources to fulfill its mission of promoting a more informed and active public voice for quality education (based on personal knowledge of the authors).

PROJECTIZING DATA, ANALYSIS, DIALOGUE, AND SUPPORT TO A REFORM SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

The institutions or groups that implement these various activities can form a formal or informal reform support infrastructure. If donors have a conscious and planned approach to supporting a broad front of reform agendas through an array of actors among whom relationships are actively promoted, then the Reform Support Infrastructure that emerges will tend to be more formal and self-aware.

A particularly effective way to "projectize" reform support is to set up projects that have some school-level components that consciously try to implement, on the ground, the policies that the policy-level components are helping to develop. In this way, policy-level projects can "walk down the ladder" from policy reform to school implementation. Thus, for example, a donor project might have a policy-level component that could design school financing policies to discriminate in favor of the poor (by creating formulas in which poor students carry a heavier weight), while a school-level component could be training district and school officials on how to implement these formulas. However, it should be noted that this ideal approach (twinning the same policy-level and school-level issues in continued donor activity) can be done only in a country where there is considerable continuity of donor approach. The reason for this is that there is often a lag of two to three years between the point at which a donor can assist with a policy development and the point at which a counterpart government begins to seriously try to implement the policy in question and thus requires school-level piloting of the policy. Alternatively, if such continuity does not exist, a project can support implementation of policies that were set in place two to three years ago, while taking advantage of the goodwill this generates to put in place advisory and dialogue services that assist the government with ongoing issues that may not require implementation for another two to three years.

Furthermore, school-level interventions can contribute to reform support by documenting the conditions needed to assure the success of improvement initiatives. A project can then work with education sector authorities to define the changes in the policy and institutional environments that are needed if those conditions for success are going to prevail. In this manner, a fairly traditional school-level pilot project can identify reform issues—changes in the law, in governance policy, in administrative structures, in relationships—around which data, analysis, and communication activities could be mobilized. This how a school-level project can walk up the ladder to policy-level reforms (which ERS activities could then help address).

5. Limitations (and Advantages) of the ERS Approach

In this section we recognize that there are limitations to the ERS approach and discuss ways to overcome them. Evidently, though, in some countries the limitations are harder to overcome than in others. The table below shows situations where the limitations are likely to be very difficult to overcome and where, therefore, more traditional "input" projects are likely to remain the optimal type of donor assistance, or where serious adaptations may be needed for an ERS approach to work.

Type of Country Problems Rendering ERS Inappropriate or Less Likely to Succeed	Reasons and Possible Reactions
Emerging from disaster or conflict	Need for immediate relief; policy reform is a long-run process. There is likely to be impatience with long-term approaches. Nonetheless, countries in transition are often more amenable to new polices. ERS could be a fruitful way to invest in such situations, but the investment would have to be proportionately small.
Government institutions that are nontransparent and hostile to open discussion, evidence-based policy suggestions, or innovation in general, in a context of generally poor delivery of services and management	The best approach most likely is, again, an inputs-based project, since policy-based work will typically not progress in such settings. Presumably there is a foreign policy reason to be involved in such a country, since countries where these conditions prevail are not likely to benefit from assistance oriented toward economic and social development. On the other hand, only government institutions are hostile to dialogue, but there is a reasonable civil society or community life, and government will not prevent donors from working at that level, then a good place to start is by reinforcing civil society, including parents' groups at the "micro" level.
Counterpart government strong and resilient, but has own ideas, in context of good or improving governance and service delivery—counterparts therefore not very open to discussion about policy directions; tendency may be specific to one ministry, depending on team in place	A policy-based approach can still work in such settings, but the donor agency has to decide to "trust" the overall direction of policy and provide advisors and support to help implement overall policy. There will be reduced scope for supporting policy reform ideas that run contrary to government's ideas in particular areas, since overall policy and service delivery is improving. Such countries are often in a strong bargaining position with respect to donors, particularly if, in addition to improving governance overall, they are of foreign policy or geopolitical importance to the donor country's government.

In addition to the context-related caveats mentioned above, there are disadvantages to the ERS approach as well as the advantages. We raise these disadvantages and advantages for three reasons. First, because such awareness can prevent the disappointment that might ensue if one is excessively optimistic at the outset. Second, and more important, because being aware of the problems can help mitigate them. Third, because colleagues and leaders in donor agencies may be aware of the problems but may not be as aware of the advantages. In short, knowing the limitations and advantages of the approach is an operational consideration, because it can affect how one implements ERS, and a "salesmanship" consideration, because it affects how one defends the approach to one's colleagues in a donor agency.

The table below shows the limitations and, in each case, suggestions for dealing with them. It also shows the inherent advantages. Note that while the two first columns can be read across from each other (the concepts in the same rows match), the last column cannot.

Limitations and Advantages of an ERS Approach

Limitations of an ERS Approach	Means to overcome Limitations	Advantages of an ERS Approach
The process is not quick—it may take some time to see results.	Redefine outcomes so they are similar to those in a governance, citizen participation, or local development project—seek allies and models in democracy and governance, local governance, or local economic development sectors.[4]	It is the most highly leveraged form of donor input into a country's development strategy. For the few hundred thousand dollars of investment needed to provide advice about and advocacy for a policy change (e.g., altering a school finance formula so that it benefits the poor), a donor can "leverage" millions or billions of dollars of the host country's own spending in favor of the poor, or in favor of rural areas. It is likely to lead to the most sustainable and replicable results, because the host government's systems and approaches change. The results are "owned" by the national authorities and are demand-driven. To generate reforms, citizens have to be mobilized to express demands, for example, for more quality education, or school nutrition. Getting policy change through citizen demand will foster increased accountability in implementation, because citizens will learn to express their demands and will continue to use this knowledge beyond the policy change process and into the policy implementation process.
The process is not easy—there are fewer blueprints than for standard, input-enhancing projects.	Select the most experienced implementers. Select an implementation approach that allows the funding provider to seek the most experienced guidance before singling out a particular implementer.	
It is easy to get misled and "played with" by various interest groups.	Invest a lot of time in the initial foray into the policy issues, in getting to know the actors and their inter-relationships before committing to guides through the local politics and policy circles.	
The process is risky. If one defines the impact as an actual policy change, particularly a policy change that goes in a particular direction (e.g., a decision to decentralize school purchases), there is a significant chance of having no output.	Many mechanisms can be used to minimize this risk. One can redefine the impact measure as learning how to analyze, debate, and make policy. Alternatively, one can accept the risk as inherent in the process and spread the risk by backing many policy changes, not just a single one. One can ally oneself with other donors to pressure for the same change; some donors may use conditionality, but conditionality may lead to superficial adoption of policy changes. Finally, one can make the reform activity only a small portion of an overall project that also includes traditional input and process activities such as teacher training or textbook provision.	
Host-country governments, particularly in poorer countries, may not understand the approach and may prefer traditional projects of a more "philanthropic" nature. They may oppose an approach that tries to enhance the transparency of the policy process and empower citizens.	One may need to accept that the approach is not suitable in all countries. (See section on preconditions for success.) Alternatively, the policy-based approach may be only one part of a larger project, most of whose components are of a more traditional kind.	

[4] For suggestions on this, see USAID (2003). For a description of a combined education and governance program, in Ghana, see the description of the Strengthened Decentralized Local Governance project, at http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2005/afr/pdf/641-005.pdf. For a description of typical governance indicators, see USAID (1998). Note in particular sections 5 and 6 on civil society and governance, respectively. These are easy to adapt to the education sector.

An important consideration below is the possibility of redefining education goals as governance goals. At least two prominent donors, namely USAID and the U.K.'s Department for International Development (DfID), are making governance the centerpiece of their overall development approach, and are already defining projects whose sectoral emphases are governance-related. Using governance goals even in sectoral activities is thus likely to gain increasing legitimacy and may be a structural trend.

To summarize the table above, one can say that the advantages and disadvantages of the ERS approach, as opposed to a traditional school-based approach, are the same as the advantages and disadvantages of truly developmental activities as opposed to philanthropy or giveaways. This is the well-known trade-off between immediate impact or relief on the one hand and sustainability or replication on the other. Naturally, there is a whole spectrum in this matter, not just a trade-off between two polar opposites. "Giving away" textbooks or money is the least developmental possibility, but has the most immediate impact on relief; providing funding for textbook writing or textbook procurement management advisors moves in the direction of sustainability; and reforming budgets and policies (e.g., by ensuring that teacher salaries do not eat up 90 percent of the budget), so that countries provide themselves with the expertise on how to write textbooks, is the most leveraged and sustainable approach.

The "Advantages" column in the table to the left notes that ERS—or any policy-based approach—is the most highly leveraged donor activity available. This suggests a simple way to avoid the risk that one may simply have no impact, or very little impact. What allows a policy-based approach to bring so much leverage is that it is inexpensive—the input being purchased might be one or two advisors for one or two person-years and some support for a policy dialogue process. This usually costs very little, compared to massive school building, teacher training, or almost any other commodity or training-based assistance. The low cost of policy inputs means that one can attempt to change more than one policy, thus spreading one's risk, or that one can have a relatively small policy-based component in a project that has larger, more traditional input- or process-based components. In that sense the policy-based component of a set of activities is similar to one's more speculative investments in a balanced portfolio: high risk, yet high payoff. Thus, a donor might invest in either a variety of such ventures, spreading the risk, or in some high-risk ventures but in more secure ones as well.

6. Justifying an ERS Approach

Thus far the ERS approach has been justified from a "developmental" or "theoretical" point of view. Given what we know about development, supporting high-leverage reform activities, as opposed to simply donating commodities or undertaking pilot experiments, is the "right" thing to do. And, given what we know about reform, it is hard to imagine designing reform support interventions that do not take into account the politics and institutional context in the ways described above. However, we recognize that within international development agencies, operational staff are challenged to "justify" their programs and project designs in more operational or bureaucratic terms. Precisely because of the political nature of ERS, and because the management of politically driven processes requires greater flexibility, adaptability, and timely, strategic decisions, development agency staff will need to lobby for the room to support the kinds of activities we have described (it is ironic that they will need to clear space in their own agencies for this work). Confronted by the press for fast results, donor agency officials might well ask themselves how reform support activities can be justified bureaucratically in the agencies where they work. In fact, we have voiced this specific concern.[5] This section therefore looks at the particular issue of how agency staff can sell decision makers on using resources for reform support activities.

In explaining or justifying reform support project activities, or a reform support component within a more traditional approach, there are two basic choices. One is to try to justify the approach in terms of the most recent trends in one's own donor agency. Because these trends can change quickly, this approach has its dangers. But this approach can also be of some use, particularly if it can be demonstrated that more recent trends are not really inconsistent with longer-term trends. Another approach is to focus directly on longer-term trends, ideally not just in one's own agency, but in donor agencies in general. These longer-term trends in thinking are fairly sustained within given agencies and are surprisingly similar across agencies that would otherwise appear to have different approaches.

Starting with the longer-term trends, one can note that USAID's most current education policy statement (USAID, 2005) still makes systemic reform USAID's premier approach to improving education, as did agency policy statements from 10 years ago:

> Systemic reform is the foundation of USAID's work to strengthen education systems. Over the past decade, the Agency has developed and refined a sector-support approach that emphasizes support to sector reforms and capacity-building efforts developed and led by host-country governments. This approach helps ensure sustainability and focuses on what children are actually learning in the classroom or nonformal educational settings.
>
> USAID missions work with host governments to adopt and implement policies that increase educational efficiency, promote equitable access, and raise educational quality...
>
> An important aim is to help host countries develop their own capacity to design appropriate policies on an ongoing basis, manage human and financial effectively, and build sustainable capacity. This includes developing effective policy analysis units within education ministries. (USAID, 2005, pp. 8 -9).

[5] Participant comments and feedback from the USAID Education Overview Course in, Hagerstown, Maryland, October 2–13, 2005.

Similar concerns can be observed in other donors' approaches. For example, the World Bank noted the centrality of the politics of reform for sustainable education change as far back as 1995, and probably earlier (World Bank, 1995, p. 137). In the World Bank's popular "core" course on education reform, the politics of reform receives significant attention, using an approach similar to ERS's. Finally, "reform" items that emphasize accountability and sustainability have been a growing component of World Bank loans over the past decade or so (see Crouch & Fasih, 2004).

While USAID does not currently sponsor budget support, sector-wide approaches, other donors do so, and USAID has done so in the past, with the non-project approach of the 1990s. As noted above, a current incarnation of this modality, fairly popular with European donors in particular, is the Sector Wide Approach (SWAP), which tends to pool donor resources and work though countries' own procurement systems, as a way to promote systemic reforms. SWAP has much in common with ERS: it is a process-oriented approach that emphasizes policy dialogue (Association for the Development of Education in Africa [ADEA], 2002), and that trades off donors' prerogatives to choose particular projects (ideas, geographical areas) against the privilege of gaining a seat at the table where fundamental government policies are discussed. Reform support could be considered a technique additional to SWAPs, or that could support SWAPs. Unlike SWAPs, however, reform support does not necessarily use funding as a form of leverage. Nor does reform support require a comprehensive, sector-wide reform program and/or project. Reform support activities can enhance the policy impact and sustainability of more traditional input-based projects and provide well-targeted supports as implementation-focused companions to a sector-wide reform program.

Shorter-run trends are not mutually exclusive with longer-term trends. In spite of pressure for results, the most recent trends emphasize the importance of sustainability and local ownership:

> We've often created parallel systems of service delivery that have allowed governments to shirk their responsibility and shifted citizens' expectations from their own governments to the international donors. But despite the noblest of intentions, outsiders cannot with sustainability, secure citizens' health and safety, educate a critical mass, or create the conditions needed for economic growth, all of which are necessary for development, and all of which are the responsibilities of government… We know that in "developing" countries, where government accountability may be lacking, we must address issues of governance and democracy even as we support programs in health, education, and poverty alleviation. (Tobias, 2006)

And this is not taking place only at USAID, so it is not likely just a short-term trend. DfID is also putting governance at the center of its whole approach.

In short, while one could focus on recent trends to justify a concern with reform and sustainability, it seems that an interest in sustainability, and hence reform, is a deeper and longer-term trend that can be tapped to make the internal case for reform support activities.

As noted by many observers, there is an apparent contradiction between a drive for measurable, relatively fast results, and a simultaneous interest in sustainable reforms. But there is an aspect to this contradiction that is not often noticed and probably resolves the contradiction (which is why we note that this contradiction is more apparent than real). The dissatisfaction with the lack of results is not necessarily dissatisfaction with all processes that take time to deliver ultimate yield. The pressure for better results might arise from high-level officials observing projects that should seek short-term impact, because they are typical pilot projects, but that fail to deliver those effects. Many education projects, for example, are nominally oriented toward "quality," but they have no goals expressed in terms of learning outcomes or any other palpable quality outcome. Unfortunately this has been much more common in education

than in, say, the health sector, where outcomes in terms of reductions in infant mortality, for example, are commonly used to describe a donor's efforts. It seems reasonable to expect traditional projects that emphasize inputs like teacher training or textbook distribution to actually contribute to measurable improvements in learning within three to five years.

An important hypothesis, thus, is that donor agency leadership is not necessarily impatient with approaches aimed at sustainability, but is, indeed, and reasonably, impatient with delivery projects that do not deliver measurable outcomes. This creates the impression that donor agency leadership would be impatient with anything that takes a long time to deliver results, even reform approaches that work. This may not be the case. After all, donor agencies engage with projects in governance issues, which take a long time to demonstrably affect "people-level" indicators such as infant mortality. By the same token, though, activities such as ERS ought to have goals definable in terms of the reforms themselves—goals similar to those used in governance projects—so they can deliver something measurable within a reasonable planning horizon.

Justifying and explaining reform support activities, then, requires some mixture of the following:

- Reference to longer-term trends and standing policy and, if desired, noting that emerging thinking is not inconsistent with the longer-term trends. These trends refer to the need for reform support or ERS-like approaches to generate ownership and sustainability.
- Noting that reform support activities provide the highest leverage. Investing a few hundred thousand dollars in policy advice, analysis, or strategic communication that can help shift local spending of millions of dollars in a particular direction (toward the poor, or in improved systems of accountability to citizens, or to deliver actual results definable at the child level) is a good investment.
- Ensuring that reform support approaches, if tried, are addressed at a few policies, instead of just one, in case there is a failure at the one policy one tries to promote. This is also necessary because the policy environment in developing countries is unpredictable, and one has to be ready to strike at opportunities. A timely memorandum or well-written but relatively casual position paper can influence policy making in ways that a planned policy advice process might not be able to, if the memorandum or position paper is presented at a critical time.
- Including reform support activities as smaller components of more traditional projects aimed at immediate results. Precisely because reform support activities can be inexpensive, compared to providing infrastructure, teacher training, or vehicles, they can be an effective though small component of larger, more traditional projects. ERS activities can connect school-level pilots or demonstrations projects to the broader policy agenda by documenting and communicating the results obtained and the policy and institutional conditions that support those results.
- "Bringing forward" the results of reform support activities by justifying them in terms of outputs or outcomes borrowed from the field of governance. This may require an explicit alliance with the governance interests in a donor agency, either at headquarters or field mission level.

7. Jump-Starting Education Reform Support (What Can Be Done Now?)

Section 4 provides examples of activities that can make up an education reform support project; section 5 explains that there are certain circumstances in which an ERS approach might not be a good idea, or might need important adaptations; and section 6 suggests ways to justify and explain the importance of such interventions in operational or bureaucratic terms. As a matter of practicality, though, smaller reform support interventions can be carried out quickly, within the confines of an existing project or when smaller amounts of funding are available for quick-start activities. These typically require less complex planning and less justification and can yield quick impact or lay experimental foundations for a more serious and well-thought-out reform support intervention. Following are six particularly promising possibilities:

1. A project can inject fresh data, gathered inexpensively, on schooling quality (see the discussion of reading in Peru in example 1 from section 4) into policy dialogue sessions that foster dramatic awareness of the poor quality of schooling. For example, most policy makers have seldom heard a poor or rural child read and have little idea of how poor the quality of schooling is, in terms of simple metrics such as children's reading ability, compared to the quality of schooling their own, middle- or upper-middle-class children receive. They also have little idea how unequal their systems are—for example, Angola's education system today appears more unequal than South Africa's did before the end of apartheid. Such dramatic comparisons and illustrations can be useful. Simple data exercises (whether with fresh empirical data or powerful analysis of existing data) can be used to focus attention on resource inequality or poor and unequal results, and can underpin policy reforms oriented at quality and equity. Policy dialogue impact can probably be had for as little as US$100,000 using these sorts of techniques.

2. Policy developments in most countries take place on a calendar that has nothing to do with donors' analytical or dialogue plans. At certain points in the policy process, there will be a sort of climax in the debate, and discussion around a particular topic (the introduction of free secondary education in Uganda at present, for example) will become super-heated. These sorts of climaxes in the policy process can take place in the lead-up to a new piece of legislation, in an election campaign, or in the early days of a new government. An intervention at those points can be leveraged many more times (and hence more cost effectively in terms of policy impact) than a constant barrage of analyses and forums that obey the donor's planned cycles or a policy unit's supply-side analytical offerings. Being ready with a very proficient analysis and position paper that can be offered to a government within weeks, in the middle of a policy decision climax, is a good way to have impact way out of proportion to the cost of the activity, if the paper and policy dialogue sessions organized around it are constructive in spirit, extremely well argued, and use good marketing technique. This kind of effort is not expensive, but it can enable entrée into further policy debate. It requires constant watchfulness and timely intervention as well as some preexisting connection and access to data. This kind of intervention can take place within the context of a more traditional project, with a small policy reform add-on.

3. Even if one cannot have immediate and dramatic input into policy making, existing projects can be used to lay the groundwork for future impact. Using existing projects to create grassroots knowledge and pressure on simple education quality and equity indicators (see Nigeria example in section 4 above) can develop experiences that could be taken to scale in later projects that focus primarily on quality and equity of policy reform, if the smaller activities seem to work.

4. An existing school-level project can also pursue data, analysis, and communication that address some of the policy issues that it learns about from its on-the-ground experience. Data can be gathered that show how the conditions for success need to be changed at the school level to maximize the impact of, say, teacher training, by managing the school day in a way that makes it possible for teachers to do joint planning and/or to observe each other's lessons. These conditions for success often have policy or institutional implications that will require communication and dialogue to clear space, mobilize supporters, and advocate for necessary reforms. In this manner a pilot activity can have broader impact, not by replicating its activities, but by altering the larger-scale environment so its activities can be applied more widely.

5. Projects can also supply, on an opportunistic and demand-led basis, training to countries that are serious about reform. The World Bank's core course on education reform (normally offered once a year, but offered twice in 2006 in response to high demand) is now oversubscribed, which attests to both the quality of the course and the growing interest in reform. Collaboration with the World Bank on this course, perhaps offered at a country level, and perhaps with more emphasis on the political economy aspects, might be a good way to place some reform ideas on the agenda more firmly.

A sixth possibility worth considering concerns the challenge of working in fragile states or those emerging from conflict or a disaster. In these cases, external funding focuses on helping to rebuild a completely collapsed education system, as in southern Sudan, Afghanistan, or Sierra Leone. Schools need to be rebuilt, massive numbers of teachers need to be found and hired, curriculum needs to be redefined, etc. So much attention focused on basic inputs, however, could actually be treated as an opportunity to help rethink how the education system can best support the fundamental challenge of assuring effective schooling. Documenting which supports are needed to help schools reestablish themselves and thrive in strife-torn areas, or investing in learning from the community-based or NGO-supported education activities that may have grown up during the period of conflict or in its immediate aftermath, if taken with an ERS approach, can form the foundation of a broad national dialogue about how to rebuild an education system. Instead of reflexively recreating the standard image of an education sector, well-timed analysis, communication, and facilitated dialogue could help rethink which system supports are actually needed and how central, regional, and local ministerial entities should or should not be reestablished.

8. Conclusions

Even if the developed countries were to commit as much of their budgets to foreign aid as even the most idealistic among us dare hope, aid will be at best a fraction of countries' total spending on their own education sectors.[6] With such meager resources, and if resources were all donors had to work with, only a trivial dent could be made in the developing world's educational backlogs. One step in the right direction, away from the thought that simple resource transfers will make much of a difference, is to promote improvements via demonstration projects and the transfer of technical innovations. But if these projects enter sterile policy environments, then the receptivity is poor, pilot projects remain at the pilot stage, and little is scaled up or sustained. Parallel implementation processes are set up that do not do enough to build up capacity. This has been noted again and again, even with the most promising technologies, such as interactive radio instruction, or certain teaching techniques. Donors thus seek to improve the policy environment, as a way of both ensuring that countries use their own funds well, and to help improve the scalability of innovations the countries introduce as pilot projects. But this policy-level work may, in turn, affect people's lives only indirectly. Furthermore, fostering policy improvement is a very difficult art, requiring more than setting conditions on loans, providing technical advice, or "donor harmonization.

The ERS approach provides a way for donors to bridge the gap between pilot projects and policy change, and to work with counterparts within host countries to bring about policy change. It is predicated on the notion that while fostering policy change is difficult, it is not simply a matter of political intuition, luck, a sort of mysterious wisdom, or arcane art. It is—at least partly—a matter of technique and craft that, like all technique and craft, can be largely codified, practiced, and learned. This document, like the earlier ERS series, tries to codify some of this knowledge and attempts to inspire by providing a number of cases that exemplify how others have approached the problem and have solved it. The requirements are having a varied toolbox, deploying the tools in a harmonious and logical way, being nimble and sensitive to the policy environment, and being able to adapt to conditions. And, in all of this, the foremost point to remember (which perhaps best summarizes the whole ERS approach) is that the right to criticize is earned by engagement.[7]

The recent trends toward greater coordination of external assistance, articulated comprehensive strategies and plans for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and pooled funding to support countries that demonstrate sound governance indicate an encouraging increase in donor engagement in supporting country ownership of and commitment to education reforms. However, ERS is founded not just on greater funding agency engagement and policy skill, but even more on increased engagement of a variety of actors within a country—the individuals and institutions that ultimately will determine whether policies genuinely reflect local will, and whether they can be implemented and, indeed, translated into tangible improvements in education.

[6] Given commonly accepted perceptions of donor dependence and large proportions of budgets in some countries, due to the share of education coming from donor support, this may seem a strange thing to say. But this impression is created by the large donor role in countries that are simultaneously very poor and "donor darlings." If one extends the analysis to all developing countries (i.e., all low- and middle-income countries), total current spending on education is somewhere around US$400 billion per year (estimated from the World Bank's EdStats service). If foreign assistance were to increase somewhere between 100 percent and 200 percent of current levels (current levels being about US$8 billion per year, estimated from DAC online data at http://www1.oecd.org/scripts/cde/DoQuery.asp)—and this is surely on the outside range of optimism—the assistance would cover about 5 percent of total education spending. Thus, what countries do with their own money matters a great deal. The picture changes in the very poorest countries, where donor input can, indeed, make a material and direct difference, at the margin, if well managed, sustained, and replicable.

[7] The authors acknowledge George Taylor, Chief of Party, CBE Project, Cambodia, who coined this phrase.

ANNEX A

In 1997, the United States Agency for International Development published the series, Education Reform Support (ERS). The six-volume series presents an integrated approach to the challenge of scaling up and sustaining education reform in developing countries, with a particular emphasis on Africa. It includes:

Volume One:	Overview and Bibliography
Volume Two:	Foundations of the Approach
Volume Three:	A Framework for Making It Happen
Volume Four:	Tools and Techniques
Volume Five:	Strategy Development and Project Design
Volume Six:	Evaluating Education Reform Support

ERS aims to integrate traditional public policy analysis (using information and analytical techniques) with public policy dialogue, advocacy, awareness, and political "salesmanship" (using communication techniques). ERS seeks to invoke these mechanisms as a means of improving the policy-making process so that it is 1) much richer in the use of information and analysis; 2) more competitive, transparent, and accountable; and 3) more open to broad stakeholder participation.

The ERS approach consists of 1) an operational framework for getting things done and a process for maneuvering strategically within that framework; 2) a set of analytical and policy-dialectical tools that are the substance of that maneuvering; and 3) a set of suggestions for designing (typically) donor-funded ERS activities. The ultimate aim is to build the national institutional capacity to apply this approach, helping to establish and nurture a permanent "reform support infrastructure."

Volume One of the series provides an overview of the entire series, an extensive bibliography, and an explanation of some of the jargon that is used to explain the ERS approach. The overview includes 1) background and justification to place ERS within the context of current development thinking; 2) a definition of ERS; 3) how to make it happen; 4) available "tools and techniques"; and 5) how to define fundable activities that could become ERS projects. Each of the areas covered in the overview is taken up in greater detail in the remaining volumes.

Volume Two introduces the problem and establishes the justification and basis for the approach in terms of past donor activities in the sector, and it critiques from both "left" and "right" perspectives. This volume also lays out some of the main lessons learned to establish a basis for the procedures and strategies that are described in the remaining volumes. The volume concludes that, at least in regard to donors' responsibilities, the aim should be to 1) enhance system-wide reform, and 2) develop a new type of education project that embodies a "modernization" or "reformist" agenda (accountability, client orientation, targeted financing, competitive access to public funding for education provision, etc.) An annex reviews some issues surrounding conditionality as a mechanism for effecting policy change.

Volume Three provides an operational perspective on how to support reform activities. This volume is a practical guide to making Education Reform Support happen. In particular, it describes a range of implementable, fundable activities to establish the structures, mechanisms, and mind-sets needed to facilitate learning-driven, ongoing development of an education system.

Volume Four discusses in depth the analytical and communication tools and techniques that can be used to initiate and motivate reform, and places these tools and techniques in the context of past and ongoing donor activities. This volume provides considerable space to two key concepts—systematization and policy communication. Systematization is described as a multifaceted strategy that works on several aspects of ERS in combination and

systematically. Policy communication covers the range of communication settings and techniques, from dialogue, to policy marketing, to mass marketing, to negotiation, to advocacy.

Volume Five lays out the specific steps for launching a major level of support to an ERS process. This volume concentrates on the development of (typically donor-funded) projects to carry out all of the operational and technical activities discussed in previous volumes. The volume concludes that the essence of a successful process of ERS is constant "restrategizing" and redesign, based on monitoring how the process is going. Annexes include instruments for 1) determining country readiness for participatory policy reform support, 2) assessing stakeholder institutional problems; 3) analyzing interest-group pressure; and 4) identifying qualified long-term technical assistants.

Volume Six presents ideas for how to monitor and evaluate an ERS process. This volume explores how to construct a framework that permits objectively verifiable measures of the impact of policy reform support activities in a way that does not subvert the basic intentions of ERS efforts to build local institutional capacity and promote indigenous demand for reform.

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