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PISA for Development: How the OECD and World Bank shaped education governance post-2015

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Abstract
The year 2015 was significant for the arena of international development, as UNESCO's *Education for All* agenda was replaced by *Education 2030*, which would identify minimum standards of education quality. The OECD had been working on extending its existing PISA assessment into low- and middle-income countries through PISA for Development (PISA-D) and positioned the new assessment as a means of tracking progress on the post-2015 goals. The organisation maintains that PISA-D was introduced primarily in response to the demands of the international community, especially low- and middle-income countries, and that the assessment was developed in partnership with them. This paper investigates those claims through an analysis of the arrival of PISA-D in Cambodia, situating the analysis within UNESCO's shifting agenda, and the strategic visions of the OECD and World Bank that first emerged in the 1990s. The result is a very different picture to the portrayals of local agency, demand, consensus and partnership that adorn the official websites and pamphlets of global agencies and much academic research, raising serious doubts about education governance post-2015.

Keywords: SDGs, global governance, Cambodia, humanitarian assessment, PISA

I. Introduction
In 1990, world leaders gathered in Jomtien, Thailand, to develop a new agenda for international development, supported by representatives of regional groups, international organizations,

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donor agencies, NGOs and private organizations. A new vision emerged in the form of Education for All (EFA), a "global" agenda that would frame international development over the next 25 years. Tikly (2017) argues that there had been a longstanding tension in EFA between the promotion of universal access to education and improving the quality of schooling, which has been manifested in tensions and infighting among key stakeholders (in particular, UNESCO and the World Bank). Although 'quality' featured in the Dakar Framework (2000), it was not clearly defined. In the ensuing years, concern that expanding access did not always improve learning (GMR 2005) developed into an elaborate discourse that warned of a "learning crisis" (e.g. GMR 2012; GMR 2013/2104), nurturing the conviction that it would be necessary to identify basic minimum standards of education quality to measure and track *learning* post-2015.

Since the launch of PISA in 2000, the OECD has championed the assessment as the world's 'premier yardstick of education quality', with quality interpreted in economic terms as a proxy for human-knowledge capital. The PISA for Development (hereafter, PISA-D) initiative is an adaptation of the existing PISA test, specifically designed for low- and middle-income nations. It is now, at the time of writing, in the final stages of its pilot round in 8 countries. Writing for a UNESCO blog in March 2013[2], OECD analysts emphasised the "learning crisis", stating that it "has led to a general consensus that the post-2015 development goals should focus more strongly on the quality of learning", and asserting that "the challenge is how to measure learning". By August 2013, the OECD (2013) had identified seven countries, including Cambodia, and one jurisdiction (Punjab, Pakistan) as "currently being considered" for the piloting of PISA-D. Of these, five would be selected as participants within three weeks (by September 2013), pending discussions with national governments and foreign donors (i.e., 'development partners'). Up to seven additional countries would then be considered "based on interest and the availability of funding support" (3).

Two years on, Michael Ward (PISA-D Project Manager) and Pablo Zoido (OECD analyst) gave an overview of progress on the PISA-D initiative, emphasizing that "the selection of countries for PISA-D was demand-led" and "based on the following basic criteria: a middle-income or low-income country that has already participated in a regional or international assessment" (Ward and Zoido 2015, 22). During an interview for IIEP UNESCO in 2016[3], Michael Ward was asked about the motivation for PISA-D. He listed three main drivers: (i) the demand from developing countries[4]; (ii) the OECD's new strategy for development; and, (iii) the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular the focus on learning outcomes. Referring to a report on the experience of middle-income countries participating in PISA (Lockheed et al. 2015), Ward stated that the first of these drivers was the strongest, before elaborating on the selection of pilot countries:

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[2] The blog is authored by Michael Ward, Michael Davidson, and Alejandro Gomez Palma, see: https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/what-have-we-learnt/
[3] Ward is interviewed alongside OECD colleague, Miyako Ikeda, and the live stream, titled Hangout #5, is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLiWkz4eaVs
[4] The OECD is also promoting its Early Childhood Education Assessment, International Education and Learning Survey (IELS) as a response to the demands of the international community.

The strongest motivation is that countries really do want to benchmark their systems internationally, that is a very powerful driver. They want to be part of the international community, around PISA, that is focused on learning outcomes, and improving learning outcomes. They also seek to gain access to assessment experts…

To answer your question about selection, we never selected anyone, the countries came to us. And then, when the countries came to us, we said "can you finance this?", and if they said "Well… we can't finance all of it", then we worked together with their development partners to try to put a package together that would enable them to do it.

As highlighted above, Cambodia had been identified as a potential pilot country as early as August 2013. Given the time-frame, and the project's positioning as demand-led, it follows that these countries must have indicated their interest in participating well in advance of the publication of this document, and that discussions were already underway with national governments and development partners. Although Cambodia was listed as a confirmed participant in Ward and Zoido's 2015 project update, it was not until March 2016 that Cambodia eventually signed up as the final participant. Why the delay, and how was it resolved?

The answer cannot be found in documents in the public domain, but in the interactions that took place primarily between the donor representatives and Cambodian Ministry. This paper describes those interactions, telling the inside story of the introduction of PISA-D in Cambodia. This account was constructed primarily out of a series of interviews with those close to the events and supplemented with publicly available documentation. The interviews were carried out, in person and online, from 2016-2018. Those interviewed included leading donor representatives in Phnom Penh (most notably UN agencies and European donors), former and current policy advisors to Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (hereafter MoEYS) (including members of the Education Research Council, see Figure 1), and those charged with implementing PISA-D. The data collection qualifies as 'insider' because one author's previous work inside the World Bank had opened up a network of high-level contacts, communication channels, and conflicts otherwise inaccessible to researchers working on the 'outside' (see Rappleye & Leang 2018 for details). None of the data was collected, however, as part of official World Bank work.

We begin with a brief exposition of the OECD's 'new paradigm for development', situating this alongside the World Bank's 'Learning for All', which extended an agenda that had begun to focus heavily on quality from 2001. Against this backdrop, the analysis presents a detailed account of how the OECD and World Bank ensured that PISA-D would become the primary assessment framework in Cambodia, overcoming resistance from other donors, and despite the absence of local demand. Our approach responds to Lingard's call (in Addey et al. 2017) that in trying to document, understand and theorise the uptake of international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) it is necessary to combine 'granular' (13) empirical work in specific nations with attention to the *changing* rationales and agendas of international organisations. Our account ends in March 2017 when the implementation of PISA-D became a technical

exercise. Our account can be read alongside similar accounts detailing the arrival of PISA-D in other low-income countries, including Zambia (Gorur et al., *forthcoming*) and Ecuador (Addey 2017).

Locating 'agency' on the side of international organisations will undoubtedly provoke resistance in a field that increasingly subscribes to the view of a "global testing culture", one that is "part of a world culture that fosters both Education for All and a broader understanding of education overall" (Ramirez et al. 2018, 344-345). Valverde (2014) argues that accounts of testing regimes must also account for the fact that "there is a *demand* for international tests and for international monitoring reports," and issues a warning that those "who account for such demand as primarily created by global institutions" are guilty of a "curious form of analytical hegemony- a willful and blinding eagerness to discount the agency of weak, poor, or underachieving educational systems" (582). As Addey and Sellar (2018) illuminate, there are often multiple reasons that drive participation in ILSAs in any one case. Although we do not discount the agency of Cambodian actors and the drivers of participation in ILSAs are undoubtedly multiple, the evidence does not support the claim that demand for PISA-D originated within Cambodia. Herein we relay the voices of the "weak, poor, and underachieving" Cambodians close to the project to underscore these points.

We surmise that Cambodia is not unique, and that elsewhere international donors led by the World Bank pushed through PISA-D, retrospectively arguing that recipient countries 'demanded' the exercise. There is no evidence to indicate that Cambodia approached the OECD – an organisation it had no formal relationship with – to ask for a new PISA test as early as 2012-2013. Cambodia's Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2009-2013 (the highest-level statement of policy intent) makes no mention of the "need" for international assessments. The term "benchmarking" appears nowhere in the 155-page text, and "international" never appears in relation to "assessment". Instead, the ESP laments that a *national* "system for standardized learning assessment has yet to be fully implemented" (6). Exploration of these contradictions is particularly pressing given the ambitious goals of the PISA-D project, which is to serve as a gateway to PISA for low- and middle-income nations. It is also urgent as the OECD's PISA-D lead Michael Ward (February 2016, 27[5]) has indicated that the OECD's intent is to have 170 countries signed on to PISA by 2030.

II. Shaping the Global Architecture Post-2015
Before focusing on Cambodia, we lay out the strategic visions of the OECD and World Bank, and how they situated these within the frame established by the EFA agenda, and the SDGs. Initial insight is provided in UNESCO's (2014) position paper, which hailed progress under EFA but emphasised the need for a new "forward-looking agenda" that would go "beyond the current goals in terms of depth and scope", taking into account "changing requirements in the type and level of knowledge skills and competencies required for today's knowledge-based

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[5] Michael Ward (Feb 2016), PISA -D Presentation, Slide 27). The presentation can be accessed at: http://bangkok.unesco.org/content/capacity-development-workshop-pisa-development-cambodia-march-2016

economies" (1). The overarching goal was stated as: "Ensure equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030" (4), which was duly ratified at Incheon in Sustainable Development Goal 4.1.1 (UNESCO 2015).

Following Incheon, the question of how to define and measure quality preoccupied key members of the international community, eager to track progress on the post-2015 goals[6]. Notably, the World Bank and OECD do not have an internationally recognised mandate for producing education data, but the shifting focus, from ensuring access to enhancing quality, open the question of how to define quality. Moreover, with quality already being interpreted as a function of the economy and human-knowledge capital, the move dovetailed with the OECD and World Bank agendas, and what appears as a natural progression had in fact formed a central part of their strategic partnership at least a decade prior to its emergence in "global governance" forums, and its endorsement in Incheon in 2015.

The OECD's 'New Paradigm for Development'
Since its launch in 2000, the OECD has made strategic use of media channels to market PISA as the 'premier yardstick of education quality' (Grey and Morris 2018), positioning it as a reliable indicator of a nation's future economic competitiveness (Kallo 2009), and as a useful tool to put an "end to complacency" in education (Schleicher 2018, 20). Contrary to Ward's claim, the goal of extending the reach of PISA through PISA-D emerged much earlier than the post-2015 discussions. In May 2011, the OECD presented its 50th Anniversary Vision Statement at the Meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial Level in Paris. The vision emphasised their intention to implement a 'new paradigm for development':

> The Chair presented the Vision Statement… which celebrates the OECD'S history as a forum for policy development and dialogue and looks ahead to its important role contributing to better policies for better lives, implementing a *new paradigm for development* and moving toward a global policy network. (italics added)

The OECD was aware of the challenges to participation of low- and middle-income countries (Bloem 2015), and Sellar and Lingard (2013) argue that the OECD was concerned that it would lose the global traction it had attained through PISA, resolving to expand the *scale* and *scope* of its assessments. Addey (2017) has explored the OECD's attempts to extend and consolidate its influence through PISA-D with regard to: (1) efforts to align national assessments with PISA; (2) the development of PISA-D to maintain comparability with the main PISA; and (3) the interlocking of the OECD's development strategy, commensuration activities and the global education agenda. The last of these strategies is alluded to in the *Framework for an OECD Strategy on Development* (OECD 2011):

> The timing could not be more propitious with the upcoming Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, where the international community will gather to review

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[6] Here we refer broadly to institutions and organisations including, but not exclusively, Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNESCO Education Commission, Department for International Development (DfID), other donor agencies, and also private organizations.

progress and seek agreement on a broader partnership to support the achievement of the MDGs and contribute more effectively to development effectiveness and results. (2)

That the OECD should attempt to influence the nature of the post-2015 goals is uncontroversial. The 2011 strategic framework explicitly states that the goal was to "shape the future global architecture" (2), and OECD staff affirm that they argued for a greater emphasis on quality, and then proposed PISA as the most suitable global metric for defining quality (see Addey 2017). The 2011 strategic framework also celebrated the OECD's influence on the initial MDGs, highlighting the report, *Shaping the 21ˢᵗ Century* (DAC 1996), which it states, "was adopted by the OECD Ministerial Council in May 1996, was endorsed by G8 leaders in 1998, and provided the essence of the MDGs adopted by the United Nations in 2001" (2). If this landmark 1996 report provided the essence of the MDGs, the OECD's new paradigm for development would now provide the substance and shape for the SDGs.

The minutes of the Paris meeting, the accompanying framework (OECD 2011), promotional materials, official statements and scholarly commentaries indicate the key components of the OECD's new paradigm for development (see also Auld and Morris 2014; 2016), and include: (i) a universal standard of education quality (PISA); (ii) cognitive-economic model of education, with quality defined in terms of human or knowledge capital (PISA as the proxy)[7]; (iii) assessment as a public good, or 'human right' (merging human rights and human capital); (iv) alignment (or replacement) of national-level and regional assessments with a global standard (PISA); (v) a global policy network, mentorships, and transfer of 'best practice'; (vi) increased private involvement at each stage of the process; (vii) incentivized compliance, and punitive accountability (i.e. outcomes-based lending initiatives such as Disbursement Linked Indicators (see World Bank 2011).

The introduction of PISA-D represented an essential step towards realizing this vision, due to align with the regular PISA cycle in 2021 and the new OECD Learning Framework 2030 (OECD 2018), which is intended to "contribute to the UN 2030 Global Goals for Sustainable Development" (3).

The World Bank Rescues Human Capital Theory
In the same year that the OECD unveiled its new strategic framework, the World Bank also released its new strategy, *Learning for All* (2011). This stated that due to the success of the MDGs, the "gains in access have also turned attention to the challenge of improving the quality of educating and accelerating learning" (2). The focus on 'quality' and 'learning' reached back to the mid-90s, and its seeds are found in the World Bank Education Strategy report (1995), which emphasised, with regard to economic development, the importance of performance

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[7] This cognitive-economic focus has been nuanced by the inclusion of non-cognitive dimensions such as 'wellbeing' and 'global competencies' as part of the OECD Learning Framework 2030 (OECD 2018).

standards in education[8]. However, in an influential paper published in the World Bank Economic Review entitled *Where has All the Education Gone?*, Pritchett (2001) stated that "cross-national data show no association between increases in human capital attributable to the rising educational attainment of the labour force and the rate of growth of output per worker" (367). That is, enhancing 'quality' in education could not be statistically linked *in any way* to enhanced economic performance.

Rather than reconsider the basic premise, Pritchett (2001) attempted to understand why this fundamental "law" of economics could not be detected statistically. He identified three possible intervening factors: (i) the governance environment was so poor that the expected returns were lost, (ii) marginal returns to education fell drastically as the supply of educated labour increased, and/or (iii) "educational quality was so low that years of schooling created no human capital." (367). He concluded, "the quality of schooling across countries is impossible to measure without internationally comparable test examinations of comparable groups of students, and these, unfortunately, exist for very few countries." (378-379).

Soon after Pritchett's paper was published, the results of the OECD's new PISA exercise were announced (November 2001), presenting a fresh opportunity to prove the law. Over the next few years, the World Bank began to both (a) write articles arguing for learning outcome indicators (standardized test scores) to be included in the MDG's (Filmer, et al. 2006)[9] and (b) sponsor research on the relationship between quality (proxied by test scores) and economic growth. This culminated in a major report entitled *Education Quality and Economic Growth* (Hanushek and Woessman 2007), which claimed to have identified the predicted "causal" relationship. In the Preface, the World Bank's Chief Economist explained:

> The Bank will do its part in making learning outcomes part of the overall educational goal. It will contribute to ensuring that the measurement of learning achievements is undertaken in a more systematic way and is properly taken into account in the Bank's dialogue with partner countries. It will also invest in developing the appropriate evaluation tools to monitor this crucial part of educational development.

This logic defines *Learning for All* (2011), which stresses, "the new strategy focuses on learning for a simple reason: growth, development, and poverty reduction depend on the knowledge and skills that people acquire, not the number of years that they sit in a classroom" [10] (3). Meanwhile, Eric Hanushek began working with the OECD to demonstrate the economic significance of education quality, specifically as measured by PISA, producing the influential

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[8] Space does not allow for a fuller account of how the World Bank tried unsuccessfully to take the lead in coordinating EFA prior to Dakar. Moreover, it was after participants had 'rebelled' in favour of UNESCO that the World Bank created the Fast Track Initiative, "which stole UNESCO's thunder with regard to EFA leadership" (see Edwards et al. 2018, 53).

[9] The report was published by the Center for Global Development, which is positioned as 'an independent think tank', but was authored by three World Bank employees, including Lant Pritchett, author of *Where has all the education gone?* (2001). Filmer would later become a lead researcher in the 2018 World Development Report that put forth the idea of a global 'learning crisis'.

[10] It is disappointing here that extensive consultations with other donor agencies failed to elicit any challenge the underlying empirical study or the sole focus on human capital and economic growth. (see Verger et al. 2014)

reports: *The High Cost of Low Education Performance: The Long Run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes* (OECD 2010), and *Universal Basic Skills: What Countries Stand to Gain* (OECD 2015) (see Komatsu and Rappleye 2017). The theme has been continued in its latest iteration: *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Potential*, which argues that a primary cause of the "global learning crisis" is the lack of "information and metrics: Accurate, credible information on learning is often unavailable. This can divert attention from learning and hinder monitoring and evaluation of interventions aimed at improving outcomes." (World Bank 2018, 171).

Notably, recent studies have supported Pritchett's conclusion that there is no correlation between cognitive levels (scores on international large-scale assessments) and economic growth over time (e.g. Kamens 2015; see also Wolf 2004), while Komatsu and Rappleye (2017), using the same PISA data and procedures utilized by Hanushek, described Hanushek's findings -which formed the basis for World Bank and OECD claims- as based on "flawed statistics".

Converging Agendas

In this context, the appeal of PISA-D for both organizations should be readily apparent; it allowed the OECD to extend its ambitions in education governance by entering the world of international development, and the World Bank to resuscitate human capital theory (increasingly "knowledge capital", following Hanushek). Kallo (2009) notes that the OECD and World Bank had formed a strategic partnership in education by around 2006, a relationship reaffirmed by Schleicher and Costin in a World Bank blog:

> The OECD remains committed to working with the World Bank and other partners in maintaining and developing PISA as a global yardstick for education. Together, we will continue to contribute our expertise and platforms to encourage international collaboration on education through the PISA surveys, and to assist policymakers and practitioners throughout the world to use them more productively. (2015) [11]

Ward and Zoido (2015) note that the project design was informed by expert papers commissioned by the OECD and its partners. These include a systematic review, published by the World Bank on behalf of the OECD, *The Experience of PISA in Low- and Middle-income Countries* (Lockheed et al. 2015[12]), which acknowledges some of the challenges that PISA has faced, but elaborates Hanushek's economic projections to demonstrate the benefits of participation for such countries. Schleicher and Costin (2015) duly draw on Lockheed et al. (2015) to argue that "the report establishes a strong rationale and foundation for enhancing PISA to make it more relevant to a wider range of countries," and affirmed that "action is already being taken on these recommendations through the [PISA-D] initiative".

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[11] See: http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/challenges-widening-participation-pisa

[12] The report's lead author, Marlaine Lockheed, wrote some of the most widely cited Bank reports on education in the 1990s (e.g. Lockheed & Verspoor 1991). Notably, only two years previously, Lockheed (2013) had stated that demand for low and middle-income countries to participate on international assessments had not come from the countries themselves but had been fuelled by (i) "the analytic and policy questions of economists", and (ii) "increasing demand for evidence of aid-effectiveness" (178).

Ward and Zoido (2015) also include a section on 'capacity needs analysis' (hereafter, CNA), "an analytical framework for assessing the capacity needs of countries related to the management of large-scale assessments and PISA in particular" (23). The framework utilises benchmarks related to PISA standards as well as the World Bank's SABER-Student Assessment questionnaire. The need to help countries 'build capacity', both in terms of technical expertise and introducing reforms from outside, had become a major preoccupation within the EFA agenda, with a particular concern that some interventions may have exceeded the capacity and led to problems with implementation (see GMR 2015). A CNA would therefore be a prerequisite for countries to participate in PISA-D.

In Cambodia, the CNA was undertaken by a consultant hired by the OECD and World Bank, Fernando Cartwright[13], who was instrumental in aligning national assessments with PISA assessments and writing the software packages to convert data into globally "usable" comparative indicators (e.g., Cartwright et al. 2003; Shiel & Cartwright 2015). Before Cambodia had formally signed up, and before Cartwright's report (OECD and World Bank 2016) had been published[14], Ward and Zoido (2015) suggested that:

> The [CNA] framework has been applied by the OECD Secretariat with the help of its consultants to each of the participating countries and the resulting reports have been produced. These assessments have involved country visits and extensive consultations with stakeholders including ministries of education, national centres, development partners, NGOs, universities and think tanks. *The needs analysis reports reveal that there is a solid foundational capacity for implementing the project in each of the countries, particularly technical capacity and knowhow*. (24, italics added)

This claim completed the internally-constructed evidence base required to support the pilot of PISA-D. After highlighting a further series of OECD technical reports, Ward and Zoido (2015) affirmed that collectively "these expert papers, information and evidence have all been discussed in a series of technical workshops and international meetings involving the OECD, participating countries, development partners, institutional partners and selected relevant experts" (23). The evidence had aligned neatly in support, and yet it would be nearly another year before Cambodia signed up.

III. The 'arrival' of PISA-D in Cambodia

Cambodia was the last of the eight low-income pilot countries to launch PISA-D (signing its agreement only in March 2016), an indication that there had been complications behind the scenes. What was this back-story? Does it confirm the OECD's claims that PISA-D was developed in response to 'strong demand' from and in partnership with low- and middle-

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[13] Cartwright completed the CNA on Cambodia (OECD 2016) and Zambia (OECD 2015). Satya Brink wrote the CNA for Senegal (2014), while Leonor Cariola Huerta (Leonor Mencke) undertook the studies for Ecuador (2015), Guatemala (2015), Honduras (2016), Paraguay (2015), and Panama (2017).

[14] At this stage, the reports for Honduras (2016) and Panama (2017) had not yet been published either.

income countries?

a. Preference for Refining National Assessment: Fall 2013 – December 2014

In late 2013, Cambodia appointed a new Minister of Education[15]. In his first definitive action, the Minister cracked down on cheating in the Grade 12 exams (August 2014), a move that shocked the system. It revealed that only 18% of students who sat the exam could pass on their own merit (previously pass rates had been more than 90%). "Now we have a clear picture of what to do," the Minister commented, arguing that there would be "four priorities" for raising the quality of teaching and learning: (i) continued school inspections to cut down on corrupt practices, (ii) an overhauled incentive, recruitment, and management scheme for teachers, (iii) revision of the curriculum and textbooks, and (iv) spotlighting talented Cambodian teachers and sharing their approaches to content and classroom management. Three months later, in his main policy speech at the annual government-donor education retreat, he was emphatic about the need to *implement*, signaling to the donors in attendance he did not want to embark on new reform schemes:

> I believe that while reform is important there is a danger that we are always reforming and that we forget about the need to implement! I am aware that there are some areas where reform is required (higher education, teacher management and possibly the secondary curriculum) but I would like to stress that we do have our core policy platform for the sector expressed in the ESP [Education Sector Plan] which is built around the sub sectors. It identifies the education priorities and the strategies and the policy actions that are required...To reiterate, we should now be focusing now on effectively implementing what we have already developed.
>
> (Minister Naron, November 2014[16])

Reforms aimed at providing data to inform policymaking had been evolving in Cambodia for more than a decade. Under the World Bank-sponsored Cambodian Education Sector Support Project (CESSP) that ran from 2005-2012, a standardized national assessment test was developed, one that was a prerequisite for releasing Education for All Fast-Track Catalytic Funds (EFA-FTI). This measured student achievement in language (Khmer) and mathematics in Grades 3, 6, and 9, whilst an Early Grade Reading Assessment Program began around 2010. The National Assessments were conducted by the Ministry's Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD), a name adopted in 2009 to comply with the new World Bank discourse of 'quality.'

The World Bank hired international consultants to provide training for four persons who would lead EQAD, tutoring them on how to correctly sample, develop data collection instruments, create question banks, pilot the exercise in schools, create test booklets, clean data and prepare useable reports for policymakers. The National Assessment was beginning to yield rich data, and the annual exercise was becoming progressively more refined. It was also evident that more work needed to be done, with documents written by the World Bank for the Global

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[15] Minister Naron was the first Cambodian to hold a PhD since the tragic events of the late 1970s. In his previous post in the Finance Ministry he was highly regarded for his dedication and commitment to reform.

[16] Full speech available at: http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/minister-page/141123hcn.html#.WsQ-fL1uau4

Partnership for Education (GPE) in 2014 confiding that: "an institutionalized national assessment system has yet to fully take root, and the capacity to undertake assessments is constrained" (World Bank/GPE 2014, 6).

At the November 2014 Retreat, a presentation by the EQAD Chief provided an overview of the previous year's data (Grade 6 test scores), confirming the 'usual' picture: results were lower than hoped for, Cambodian students performed better in Khmer than Maths, girls performed better than boys in both Khmer and Maths, school repeaters did not improve levels of learning, etc. But he concluded his presentation with an appeal for Cambodia to join the OECD's PISA-D exercise (Ung 2014). As revealed in our interviews, the appeal sounded highly ambiguous to those attending. On the one hand, the EQAD Chief began by complaining that there would be "too many initiatives on assessment" if PISA-D was added, pointing out that there were already Grade 12 exams and the national assessments in place. He asked the Minister to think deeply about what "the value added" would be of adding yet another exam and listed off the (numerous) constraints that would plague participating in PISA-D, including a lack of competent technical personnel, financial resources, and tight timeline. On the other hand, he had raised the possibility.

Why had the EQAD chief broached PISA-D, despite the Minister's appeal for implementation, and after flagging the problems PISA-D would pose for EQAD? The reason – as later explained - was because a World Bank consultant still supporting the EQAD data analysis had insisted on its inclusion: The Minister was leaning away from joining PISA-D and raising the issue at the Retreat would allow World Bank officials in attendance to raise it with the Minister while again attempting to persuade other development partners to support the project.

In fact, the Minister had already been placed under pressure to participate in PISA-D. Months before the Retreat, the World Bank had floated the idea of Cambodian participation in PISA-D to other international donors, a move which followed the OECD's August 2013 announcement that Cambodia was interested. As revealed in our interviews, the World Bank's request occurred within the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), a group comprising the major donors to the education sector, which – in the interest of aid harmonization – had the power to endorse any sector-wide programs (as opposed to agency specific projects). The OECD was apparently eager to include at least one country from the Asia-Pacific region to ensure PISA-D (i) looked globally representative and (ii) could serve as a future regional training hub for future PISA-D candidates (e.g., Bhutan, Myanmar, Lao, Nepal, Sri Lanka). All the other pilot countries were from Latin America or Africa.

The immediate problem was that most other donors on the ESWG were opposed to PISA-D, with UNICEF and UNESCO the most vocal critics. The UNICEF representative argued that Cambodia was better served by regional assessments and should deepen its commitment to the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metric (SEA-PLM), which was led by UNICEF and had been approved as the official regional test by the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). According to UNICEF, it reflected the specific contexts of countries in the region, whilst focusing on a broader set of skills than PISA-D (e.g. global citizenship).

Our interviews revealed that UNICEF saw little value in drawing *global* comparisons. Moreover, whilst net enrolment rates in primary school where over 90%, these dropped to around 20-30% by the beginning of upper secondary: PISA-D would only capture at most a quarter of the age cohort, whilst SEA-PLM could achieve near total coverage. The UNESCO representative, who was Head of the ESWG at the time, was even more resistant:

> Regular monitoring of learning achievement is important, but I just don't understand the rationale of development partner's push for implementing/piloting international/regional assessment instruments. Despite knowing the fact that, for years, the education system continues to struggle implementing the instructional hours stipulated in the curriculum, teaching and learning is being delivered by underqualified and under-supported teachers in crowded classroom settings, with shortages of textbooks and learning materials, this is going forward. Further, the results from existing learning assessments, examinations etc. are already pointing to the fact that massive efforts and investments are needed in improving reading and mathematics from early grades on. So why get distracted or distract? I would rather use the scarce money to provide…teaching guides to the teachers. (UNESCO representative, interview conducted March 2017)

The representative's stance was consistent with UNESCO's (2014) insistence that "monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be country-driven" (10). His position as Head of ESWG helped in preventing the PISA-D discussions from advancing further on the agenda. This came at a crucial time: Global Partnership for Education (GPE) funds were available and donor efforts were supposed to be working toward that agreement. The ESWG ultimately refused to take the PISA-D initiative to the Cambodian government as a unanimous decision of the donors.

Undeterred, the World Bank appealed directly to the new Minister in closed meetings in the months leading up to the November 2014 Education Retreat. It would not be the first time the Bank made such a move to ensure its agenda succeeded (Edwards and Brehm 2015, 9). The Minister agreed to listen, along with his Director General for Teacher Training, to the OECD/World Bank consultant (Fernando Cartwright) who visited in Fall 2014 to explain why Cambodia would benefit from PISA-D. After he explained the technical specifications and OECD requirements that, for example, a National Centre be created and fully staffed, the Minister was further convinced it was not worth the time, resources, and effort. Consequently, the Ministry refused to override the ESWG decision and put PISA-D explicitly on the agenda of the Education Retreat – a major setback for the World Bank and OECD. When the EQAD chief used the final slides of his Retreat presentation to open the space for World Bank representatives to again make the case for PISA-D, the Minister, with support from the donors mentioned above, closed the discussion. Meanwhile, Cartwright stayed and began carrying out the research for the Capacity Needs Analysis (OECD 2016)[17].

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[17] Cartwright's CNA for Cambodia utilized elements of World Bank's SABER-Student Assessment questionnaires and PISA technical standards as benchmarks, while the tool used to enter data into the framework is listed as available online, at: http://polymetrika.ca/PISAforDev. Cartwright is the CEO of Polymetrika, and

The Minister's unwillingness to approve PISA-D underscored that the government priorities were on the implementation of existing initiatives (especially its fledgling national assessment) rather than embarking on new reforms. Not only did he refuse to establish a National Centre for administering PISA-D (a minimum but still today unfulfilled requirement of the Participation Agreement) and thereby resist (re)assigning a Permanent National Manager, but he also refused – as detailed below - to let EQAD members travel to OECD headquarters in Paris for the second meeting of the PISA-D International Advisory Group (11-13 March 2015).

b. Turning Up the Pressure: January 2015 – March 2016
Faced with the prospect that Cambodia might not participate, the World Bank and OECD took immediate action. Someone had apparently contacted World Bank headquarters to explain that leading members of the ESWG were resisting PISA-D, and the OECD subsequently phoned the UNESCO representative directly in Phnom Penh, who explained:

> One day not long after I got a call from Michael Ward from the OECD. I have no idea how he got my number. He was quite upset and listed off a large number of reasons why Cambodia should participate. These included the benefits of international benchmarking, capacity building in assessment, and joining a wider international community of assessment experts. The language sounded just like the language I had heard the Bank use in the ESWG. I patiently described to him that, while there must surely be some benefits to PISA for Development, it was too early for Cambodia and they should focus on getting the National Assessment right. I could not see any benefit, just a lot of work. (interview conducted March 2017)

The leading ESWG representatives held firm and would not agree to push PISA-D. This was crucial: ESWG approval would have released EFA-Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund (USD$57 million) to fund the PISA-D initiative. But with neither the Minister's approval nor ESWG basket funding, Cambodia would not be involved in the PISA-D pilot. It was now late February 2015, and with the OECD's key Second Meeting of the PISA-D International Advisory Group in Paris approaching, getting Cambodia on board took on a new urgency. The OECD's Director of Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher, intervened, sending an email to the Minister directly (March 6th 2015).

This followed an earlier, unsolicited correspondence with Minister Naron in 2014, in which Schleicher had first floated the possibility of Cambodia's participation. Now, as it became clear that the Minister's priorities lay elsewhere, and without the support of the ESWG, Schleicher reiterated the importance of Cambodia's participation, stating that the OECD was in the process of mobilising the necessary resources to make participation possible, and requesting the presence of two MOEYS representatives at the International Advisory Group meeting in Paris the following week, for which the World Bank would make the necessary financial arrangements.

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creator of the software that is used for carrying out the CNA, and for interfacing Cambodia's data with PISA-D. No conflict of interest is declared.

Schleicher's direct intervention suggested that the OECD were unaware of the Minister's priority for National Assessment, or cared little for his preferences. Still, the Minister did not release his staff to attend. Ultimately, the 'Cambodia Representative' at the OECD's International Advisory Group meeting was a young Cambodian scholar who happened to be visiting Paris on an unrelated academic visit to UNESCO Institute of Statistics. When we asked about his presence in the official group photograph[18], he explained that he was contacted unexpectedly and asked to join the meeting the day before, but had little knowledge of its purpose and was not involved in the project.

The alternative funding, promised by Andreas Schleicher, ultimately came (i) through the World Bank's existing funding (MOEYS, 2017), and (ii) by convincing other donors sitting outside the ESWG to take the lead. The major expenses would be the travel and salary for the consultant writing Cambodia's PISA-D CNA. As noted above, the CNA was a prerequisite to initiate the PISA-D implementation process, and had been in preparation since October 2014, long before the Minister agreed to join PISA-D. The World Bank and OECD appealed to the Korean bi-lateral development agency (KOICA) to provide funding for PISA-D, which KOICA could do as it sat outside the ESWG in 2015[19]. KOICA was interested because Korea's performance in PISA was seen to be a 'selling point' for Korean bi-lateral assistance that had - other than TVET programmes - had little presence in the education sector (Korea has since been assigned to Cambodia as a "mentor"[20] (OECD 2017).

KOICA sponsored a national conference entitled 'PISA for Development: Capacity Development Workshop' (29 February 2016 – 1 March 2016), organised in collaboration with the OECD. Attending the conference were: 40 key people from the Cambodian Ministry; representatives from the World Bank and other donor organizations; scholars from Korea's National Center for PISA); the OECD's PISA-D Project Manager, Michael Ward; representatives from potential second wave PISA-D countries (Bhutan, Lao, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka); and, Minister Naron.

Michael Ward gave two presentations. The details of the first is critical to understand why Cambodia ultimately signed on, positioning PISA-D as the official "means of verification" on indicator SDG 4.1.1[21], while another slide flashed the cover of the Incheon Declaration that carries the logos of the 'international community' (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank, etc.). In his presentation, Ward noted that the OECD had been working with Cambodia on the

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[18] See Slide 25, PISA for Development: Expected Results from the Meeting, *2nd meeting of the International Advisory Group OECD Conference Centre, Paris (France) 11-13 March 2015*, available at: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/Day-1-presentations.pdf

[19] There is indication that in addition to KOICA, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), financially supported this work at the initial stages but the relationship is unclear (see OECD and World Bank 2016, 8-9).

[20] See PISA for Development Brief 14, available at: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-development/14-Capacity-building.pdf

[21] Indicator 4.1.1, as it appears on OECD PISA-D presentation, as the official means of verification: "proportion of children/young people: (a) in Grade 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex."

project for more than two years, before elaborating on the context for PISA-D:

> I think all of you know participation in large-scale assessments such as PISA is growing, and growing fast…. In all, 115 countries have participated in international or regional large-scale assessments. The other big part of the context is what I mentioned earlier about the education sustainable development goals, which were put in place last September, and of course the (UNESCO) Education 2030 Agenda, Framework for Action, which was put in place at UNESCO in November 2015, which basically provides the strategy for achieving these education SDGs… Five out of these seven targets are focused on learning outcomes, and this is only going to increase the demand for measuring learning outcomes on a global scale. And PISA is included in the SDG monitoring framework, and is particularly relevant for the proposed global indicator 4.1.1… which has been proposed by the IAG SDG Group… and is almost certain, I think, to be adopted later this year by the UN… and ultimately at the UN General Assembly in September 2016. And particularly here in 4.1.1, the proportion of young people at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics. And, of course, the principal means of verification of the achievement of this indicator will be PISA…
>
> (Michael Ward March 2016)[22]

PISA is not included in the 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO 2016), and Ward's claims were not supported by official statements from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) at the time (UIS 2016)[23]. It was only recently that the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS 2017a[24]; 2017b[25]) actually presented proposals for a standardised measure on SDG4. *Meanwhile, OECD representatives had been telling local governments that PISA-D was official UN policy*. The consequences were clear, non-involvement could jeopardise future aid, and the initial pilot countries would have 'first-mover' advantage. The agreement was signed in May 2016, with Cambodia scheduled to join the regular PISA in 2021, the first cycle after the completion of the PISA-D pilot.

Returning to Cambodia a year later, Ward repeated to the mantra, this time speaking at the PISA-D National Project Managers Meeting in Phnom Penh (22-25 May 2017):

> Good morning again, and on behalf of OECD I'd like to give a very warm welcome to His Excellency, Doctor Hang Chuon Naron, the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport

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[22] Presentation available online at:
https://www.dropbox.com/s/9umkcn55kfz6nq0/MW%20PowerPoints%28Pisa%20for%20Development%29.mp4?dl=0

[23] The UIS (2016) report, *Laying the Foundation to Measure Sustainable Development Goal 4*, was still in the process of reviewing the different available indicators. PISA isn't mentioned with regard to goal 4.1.1. Regarding goal 4.7, relating to Environmental science and geoscience, it highlights an agreement with the IEA to revise it's International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) for alignment with Target 4.7, and notes that for the thematic component "OECD's PISA is a possible source but other sources are being explored" (68). See:
http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/laying-the-foundation-to-measure-sdg4-sustainable-development-data-digest-2016-en.pdf

[24] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS 2017a), September 2017:
http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs46-more-than-half-children-not-learning-en-2017.pdf

[25] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS 2017b), October 2017:
http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/unesco-infopaper-sdg_data_gaps-01.pdf

for Cambodia. And I've just been speaking to Doctor Naron in the other room about what we've been doing… This is a very important project for the OECD, of course, and for the countries. But also in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly… Education Sustainable Development Goal…Number 4... And we were talking about how in the United Nations, UNESCO, how PISA has been chosen as the metric, the global metric, for measuring progress towards the achievement of the education sustainable development goal [SDG4]. And so, Cambodia and all of our countries with us today are really in the first rank of countries, certainly from the middle-income countries and low-income countries, for using PISA to measure the performance of their education systems.

(Michael Ward May 2017)

Ward concluded his opening address by urging Cambodia to move quickly so it could, alongside the other 7 pilot countries, carry out the Main Survey in 2017 with results released in 2019.

And what of the resistance by the UN agencies? Several months before the Capacity Development Workshop in Cambodia (Feb-Mar 2016), UN offices had called to 'rein in' their wayward representative, who explained:

> In fall 2015, I got a call from regional headquarters, saying that I should cooperate fully with the OECD in its plans for PISA-D in Cambodia. I do not know what led to this intervention, but it was quite rare: they usually trust that we representatives know the local situation best and defer to us. But whatever the case, this created a very strange situation where I would speak at the February workshop alongside Ward. I made critical comments but those largely fell on deaf ears… I ended up having to facilitate that workshop. (interview conducted May 2017)

UNESCO (2014) had previously insisted that "monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be country-driven" (10), and that "the setting of the agenda… should not merely reflect indicators that already exist" (4). Why the sudden UNESCO support for PISA-D, an extension of the existing PISA? Unknown to the UNESCO representative, as he resisted World Bank and OECD advances in Cambodia, the battle to shape the post-2015 architecture had taken a decisive turn elsewhere. The SDGs had confirmed the focus on education quality, and the 'international community' had agreed on the need to identify basic minimum standards to monitor progress post-2015. Shortly after the SDGS had been confirmed, UN representatives were told to stand down, and towards the end of 2017, UIS reflected on the process of setting benchmarks, and the problem of reporting nations' progress on a standardised instrument scale:

> In theory, countries could collectively decide to use their own national definitions of minimum proficiency levels. However, this would make it impossible to produce globally-comparable indicators. A more pragmatic approach might be to use an existing set of benchmarks that are widely used (and validated) by countries participating in regional or international assessments as part of the process of reporting. (UIS 2017a, 21)

The idea of individual nations defining targets was no longer deemed practical, and monitoring

would have to be 'globally-driven' if it was to satisfy the international community investing in development. The UNESCO reports (UIS 2017a; 2017b[26]) duly combined aspects of various ILSAs (e.g. SACMEQ, PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, PASEC and LLECE) to put forward proposals for a standardised measurement, and to offer initial findings on the current state of learning outcomes[27]). TIMSS and PISA are the only relevant indicators covering enough countries in secondary education, and the UNESCO (UIS 2017a) report reveals that "the decision was made to use PISA benchmarks (to identify minimum standards) since there is no specific analysis for reading in secondary education in the TIMSS study" (18).

It is important to here emphasise that *PISA is not the official "means of verification" on SDG 4.1.1*, a fact of which the OECD is well aware[28], but is one of a series of ILSAs being used by UNESCO (UIS) to identify minimum proficiencies on various aspects of the SDGs and to be used "as part of the process of reporting" (17). At the same time, Addey (2017) reflects on the possibility that SDG 4.1 was framed this way as a result of the OECD's pressure to use PISA as a global metric, and OECD officials expressed satisfaction that the framing of the SDGs means that the OECD has a degree of 'ownership' over the post-2015 agenda that it did not enjoy with the MDGs. OECD representatives - with some equivocation - could promote PISA-D as a yardstick for SDG4, confident that UNESCO (UIS) would ultimately use PISA to help define 'minimum standards'.

To summarize, the arrival of PISA-D in Cambodia was initiated and pushed through by the World Bank and OECD, in ways that by-passed earlier aid coordination mechanisms (ESWG) and largely by-passed the Cambodian government. There was neither local ownership nor demand, let alone genuine partnership (other than between the World Bank and the OECD) and support for the whole policy direction from the beginning. In just under a year, the Cambodian Minister's priority for implementation and concerns that PISA-D would take vital resources and attention away from National Assessment had been silenced by the partnership of the World Bank and OECD, aided by UNESCO's (read: UIS) abrupt reversal to satisfy the "international community's" desire for universal targets.

c. Step 3: Implementation (May 2016 – April 2017)
With the Project Launch in May 2016, the next stages of PISA-D implementation were largely

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[26] The (UIS 2017b) abstract reads: "Monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 4 requires reliable, high quality and cross-nationally comparable data compiled at regular intervals. Launching such a global assessment scheme would be the ideal – but this will take years, perhaps decades. As a second-best alternative, we use a rigorous yet comprehensive methodology which provides globally comparable data for the proportion of students reaching the Minimum Proficiency Level (MPL) in reading and mathematics. Our approach creates indices of comparison between differing assessments where enough countries participate in both. This enables swift and efficient comparison, since no additional instruments or costs incurred in the anchoring process."

[27] UIS (2018a) identifies nine cross-national learning assessments which meet the criteria to measure SDG 4 Indicator 4.1.1.

[28] We note that in official statements the OECD (2017) makes the more modest claim that: "PISA has been selected by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the UN Statistical Commission (the two bodies responsible for monitoring progress towards SDG 4) *as an internationally comparable measure of this indicator* (SDG 4.1.1)". See: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-development/17-PISA-D-and-SDG4.pdf .

technical. Since it had already been written, the CNA for Cambodia was immediately published (OECD and World Bank, 2016). It specified what Cambodia needed to do to get ready for PISA-D, e.g., contextual questionnaires, data collection instruments, and cognitive assessment models. It laid out the following scheme of how PISA-D would be implemented:
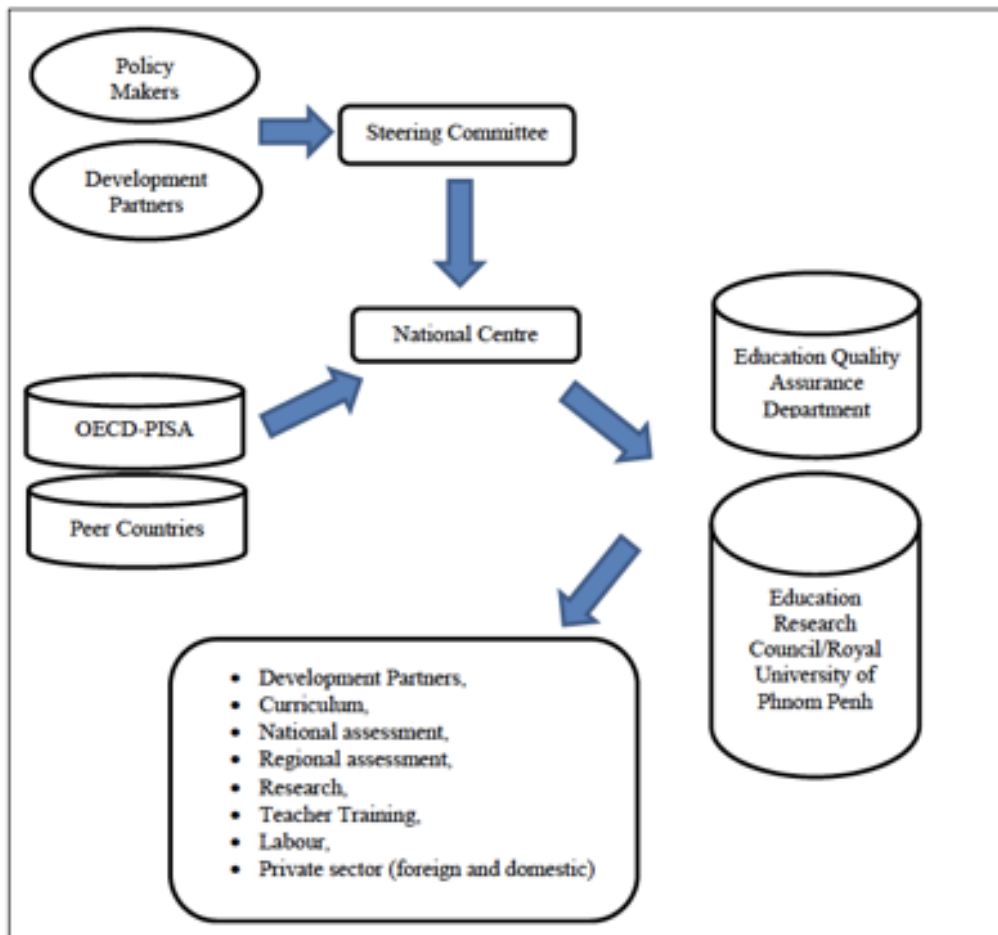

Figure 1. The OECD-World Bank Proposed Organization of Cambodia's PISA-D (OECD & World Bank, 2016, 22)

While it showed policymakers and development partners steering at the top, in fact, the OECD would be leading. As Addey (2017) points out, the OECD's intention is to use capacity building to institutionalise PISA methodology and conceptual frameworks in national evaluation centres, laying foundations for further use, for example in national assessments. What is notable is that the National Centre – a prerequisite for joining PISA-D– was and *is still not* approved by the Minister, despite OECD documents from July 2016 falsely stating that "participating countries have each established a National Centre and Nominated a National Project Manager" (OECD, 2016)[29]. Further, the CNA states:

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[29] PISA for Development Brief 1, available online at: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/PISA-FOR-DEV-EN-1.pdf

As of the writing of this report, Cambodia has not yet formally designated a PISA National Centre through a signed Participation Agreement with the OECD...the difficulty in designing a National Centre relates to the absence of a single institution with staff having both the skills and authoring required to implement PISA for Development. Conceptually, the responsibilities of the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD) have the closest fit to the activities of PISA for Development…*However, this institution does not currently have the capacity to conduct PISA-D. The current technical capacity of EQAD is represented by a single person… who is already performing both technical and managerial responsibilities related to core EQAD activities….* (OECD and World Bank, 2016, 21, italics added)

The portrayal here is one of lack of capacity, and ignorance or erasure of widespread local concern that PISA-D would distract attention from the National Assessment. That is, the OECD-World Bank sponsored CNA here implicitly confirms what the Minister and UNESCO had argued all along: refocusing EQAD on PISA-D would leave no time for its core activities, i.e. National Assessment. Indeed, the CNA reduces the two-year struggle of whether or not to move forward with PISA-D in Cambodia to a matter of mere 'priorities':

The public policy context supports large scale student assessment and the use of data to inform policy. This support is reflected throughout the larger stakeholder community, although there is some debate over how different international assessment opportunities should be prioritized (Ibid., 16)

At present, PISA-D is progressing swiftly in Cambodia. To relieve the burden on EQAD, World Bank funds were made available to hire a full-time consultant to handle PISA-D (MoEYS 2017), suggesting that it is still not part of the regular institutional architecture. Tellingly, the job description of the full-time consultant is devoid of any sense of partnership: the position holder charged with "implementing all activities set out by OECD/International Contractors and to ensure the successful and timely implementation and completion." The money comes from the World Bank's newest loan – the Secondary Education Improvement Project (SEIP) running from 2017-2022 – which allots several million dollars to cover all costs of PISA-D and the subsequent entry into regular PISA from 2021.

Conclusion: Humanitarian Assessment and the Dream of Global Governance
Roughly a decade before official discussions on the post-2015 agenda, the OECD and World Bank formed a strategic partnership, working together to revitalize human capital theory through comparative assessment and to extend their influence in low- and middle-income countries. Having officially clarified their strategic visions as early as 2011, the organizations emphasised the perceived "learning crisis", lobbying for clear standards of education quality post-2015, and promoting PISA (as a proxy for human-knowledge capital) as the most suitable metric to define these standards. In parallel, countries were sought to pilot PISA-D, ostensibly based on demand, a portrayal that encourages the common belief that, "in a globalized world, national educational systems are increasingly attuned to global models of what constitutes quality education" (Ramirez et al. 2018, 356).

Contrary to the OECD's portrayal, and research that relies solely on official policy statements, our analysis indicates that Cambodia had no interest in international assessments. This was readily apparent from: the lack of any explicit mention that Cambodia was seeking a strategy of international benchmarking (ESP 2009-2013); the Minister's emphasis on implementation rather than reform; the long delay between the OECD's announcement and official government approval; explicit conflict among donor partners; the agreement was signed only after the Minister was informed it was official UN policy; and, a National Centre for PISA has *still* not been approved.

The desire to *establish* a global testing culture is most evident in the rebranding of assessment as a human right, merging *access* and *quality* into one unitary thread, and reconciling the historic tension between 'human development' and the 'development of human capital'. The OECD and World Bank agendas can now be pursued under the auspices of UNESCO's globally-sanctioned goals, with national development agencies, international organizations and corporations becoming largely indistinguishable in the promotion of *Assessment for All* (i.e. humanitarian assessment), extending, entrenching and legitimating the Global Education Industry (see Verger et al. 2016). In further evidence of these shifting dynamics, we note that Andreas Schleicher has been appointed on the Advisory Board of the Global Monitoring Report[30], and anticipate closer alignment over the coming years.

The advent of humanitarian assessment provokes final reflection on the dream of global governance, moving beyond changing rationales to explore the deeper foundations upon which this agenda has formed.

This empirical account takes place against the backdrop of generations of development projects that have not been without their critics (Sachs, 1992; Dichter 2003; Easterly 2006), and vain post-War dreams of world federalism, which duly softened into global governance towards the end of the Cold War, epitomised by EFA. As 2015 approached, the international community was still debating how to construct the new 'global architecture', searching for targets that were both universal and quantifiable[31]. Gorur (2014; 2015) characterises such architecture as "calculable worlds", noting the core assumption that there exists a transcendental object 'out there' waiting to be measured (Woolgar 1991). Once identified, this transcendental object would sit atop the spire of the post-2015 Cathedral, providing a point of orientation, but the substance of this symbol remained uncertain.

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[30] The Advisory Board of the GMR meets once a year to provide guidance and feedback to the Report team, including the outline of upcoming editions, future themes and communication strategies. Details on the Advisory Board members can be found at: https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/advisory-board

[31] Here we acknowledge that SDG 4 does state the importance of attending to quality education at all levels from pre-primary to technical and higher education, and includes targets on 'unmeasurables', for example, developing understandings of equalities, wellbeing, citizenship and sustainability (Target 4.7). At the same time, the recent UNESCO (UIS 2018b) report, *SDG 4 Data Book: Global Education Indicators* does not have any discussion of the goals included under 4.7, and instead focuses on education quality as defined under target 4.1. Notably, the OECD has also been working on developing indicators relevant to other targets, such as wellbeing and global competencies, a move that can be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen its role in education governance post-2015.

Talk of *human rights* and *access* that had characterized EFA proved much too vague, was somehow insufficient, while defining *quality* remained divisive. The industry required a symbol that would transcend all nations to foster the sense of a true 'global community'[32]. Although the 'global knowledge economy' may indeed be an imaginary, as a symbol it satisfies this basic criterion, drawing each nation and individual into its inter-competitive embrace, with economic gain as the ultimate good, and education as the mode of self-salvation (aided by expert knowledge of 'what works'). In the hands of the OECD and World Bank (Hanushek and Woessman 2007), 'the law' has been reliably quantified. Finally, the universal symbol has scientific substance. Recast as a human right, it possesses the requisite moral authority.

It is no coincidence that the substance for this symbol has been provided most forcefully by organisations that have their own symbolic headquarters in Washington and Paris, and for whom the idea of forging One World forms a key aspect of their mission. Though the construction of such all-encompassing systems has a long history of both certainty and failure, the OECD and World Bank economists have given many within the international community what they desire: a source of meaning and control, and renewed certainty that we are managing and marshalling progress towards a universal *telos*. Buoyed by a righteous sense of purpose and mission, we note that each new wave of development has been characterised by such steadfast faith in its truth, its infallibility, and tireless evangelism (Rist 2014; Rappleye and Leang 2018).

This evokes Barnett and Finnemore's (1999) claim that, armed with "a notion of progress, an idea of how to create a better life, and some understanding of the conversion process", international aid agencies have become the "missionaries of our time (712). While the attempt at conversion will not remake Cambodia in Our own image, it will certainly leave its footprint, just as earlier religious and civilising missions, and the ideological systems that emerged with such force and promise from Europe in the 20th Century, have indelibly left theirs on foreign soil; a heavy imprint the Khmer people still feel acutely. And despite deep reflection on how these events unfolded, earnest plans to help rebuild the Cambodian nation by drawing on its own rich culture and traditions must remain in the shadows of the new global architecture for now.[33]

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[32] Although we here focus on the global knowledge economy, this line of critique provokes uncomfortable reflection on the closed 'universal' systems being constructed around concepts such as Equity (see Gorur 2014), Wellbeing (see Rappleye et al. *forthcoming*), and Global Competencies (see Morris and Auld *forthcoming*) that are central to this nascent phase of humanitarian assessment. At the same time, we draw attention to Unterhalter's (2016) insightful work on "measuring the unmeasurable", which analyses these issues, and remains open to the possibility that gains in knowledge advocacy and more critical reflective practice may arise despite failures in the precision of measurement.

[33] For examples of constructive alternatives see Gyallay-Pap 2007 Un (2017) and Brehm (2017).

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