Indicators of Education Systems

PROGRESS SINCE 1995 AND REMAINING GAPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OECD EDUCATION INDICATORS REPORT FROM THE EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

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PROGRESS SINCE 1995 AND REMAINING GAPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OECD EDUCATION INDICATORS

REPORT FROM THE EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

Introduction

1. In preparation for the fourth INES General Assembly, the INES Steering Group invited three experts, Ms. Jeanne Griffith, Mr. Norihiro Kuroda and Ms. Maris O’Rourke to assess INES from an external perspective. The external evaluators were asked to consider issues such as:

   – the contribution that INES has made to international comparative policy evaluation and analysis in education;
   
   – aspects of international collaboration at both policy and scientific levels;
   
   – the appropriateness of management structures and operations and their cost-effectiveness;
   
   – the effectiveness of INES in developing, implementing and taking advantage of appropriate and innovative methods; and
   
   – the appropriateness of mechanisms for scientific appraisal and quality assurance.

2. Ms. Griffith was formerly Acting Commissioner of the United States National Center for Education Statistics and has played an important role in reorienting INES towards education outcomes in the early 1990s. Mr. Kuroda is Professor at the Japan National University in Hiroshima. Ms. O’Rourke is the Director of the Education Sector at The World Bank.

3. This document presents the reports from the three experts.
1. I have been asked to reflect on the history of the INES project and to consider whether there are any lessons to be drawn for enhancing the effectiveness of the programme in the future. Since I have been involved with this project since the beginning in various capacities, it is indeed a pleasure to attempt to fulfil this request.

What was the initial impetus for INES

2. The impetus for INES was multi-faceted. In the mid-1980s, many of our countries were interested in comparing our own educational systems to those of other nations. Through these comparisons of the characteristics and performance of other nations education systems, we could learn more about our own. Many countries were concerned about the availability and quality of international education data for these comparisons. As noted in the summary from the last General Assembly in Lahti, Finland, “The INES Project within the CERI Programme of Work in 1988 was a response to the growing dissatisfaction at the disparity between the simplicity of the instruments and definitions used for gathering data on education at the international level, and the perceived complexity of the education and training realities.”

3. The data available for comparing aspects of our education systems were incomplete. In early meetings, we examined the only extant international education database and found many places where data were not present, often inexplicably. Representatives from countries often believed that relevant data might be available, but they were not included in the database. The data were typically not comparable. There were very few guidelines available to ensure consistent applications of definitions and quality control standards regarding the data sources and analyses used in generating the data. While these may seem like arcane statistical nuances, concerned policy makers in many of our countries repeatedly found themselves frustrated by precisely these problems.

4. In the context of growing awareness of the importance of international connections in economic, social, and cultural spheres, there was a driving force for action to improve this situation. Senior policy-makers recognised that without education statistics that were comparable across countries, one could not place any sort of international context around examinations of national educational performance. And there was a growing interest in doing just that. The original drive for the programme, then, came from policy makers frustrated by a lack of useful, high quality information for better understanding their own education systems.

5. Curiously, the programme started without directives as to exactly what data should be developed. The mandate was far more general. The OECD should organise representatives from Member countries to work together to develop a system of international education indicators that would serve the needs of policy-makers interested in understanding what was happening in education outside their own countries. There was no consensus on the importance of different data outcomes, particularly with regard to the outcomes of education. Nor did countries agree on what to monitor related to school characteristics and
attitudes and expectations of students, teachers, parents, and the public about the education systems. But one theme emerged even in the early stages of INES: the focus strongly emphasised the policy relevance of the indicators and the new statistical information.

6. The strength of indicators is that they focus attention on critical issues. “Indicators” are selected from a wealth of detailed statistical information because they convey important information about key policy-relevant issues. Because of this, they can, in themselves, become levers for change. They work as tools for reform. Policy-makers use them to identify issues, to serve as focal points for discussion with their constituents and each other, and to benchmark systemic improvements. It is for these reasons that policy-makers were clear in their requests that the OECD work with Member countries to develop a system of international education indicators. They did not ask for a statistical system to broadly describe educational programs. They wanted participants to make informed judgements as to what statistics were of policy importance and how they could be presented in ways to render them interesting and useful to the policy debate.

7. CERI, living up to its name, responded with a highly creative approach. It established several networks, each one focusing on a different topic relevant to education policy. Key individuals were asked to chair each of the five networks, and countries were invited to participate in those networks that were of interest to them. Although we have all become accustomed to this approach to the work over the last twelve years, it is useful to think back and reflect on how unusual it was at that time. Before INES, data were requested on a questionnaire shared jointly by UNESCO and OECD. The data elements were determined... somewhere, but country representatives were not involved. Although it was surely hoped that the data might be useful to somebody, somewhere, gaining feedback on the usefulness of the topics, the measures, and the presentation had no priority. In short, there was, at best, minimal country participation in determining the nature of the system. And it showed. The network approach promised to involve countries in making decisions about what topics would be included in the indicator system, how statistical elements would be defined, and how data would be analysed and presented as indicators.

8. The distribution of participation in the different networks varied considerably at first, ranging -- to the best of my recollection -- from all countries joining the network on educational participation to just a few in the network on attitudes and expectations. It was not a style of work that was immediately comfortable to all. There were stylistic differences in how people from different cultures participated in meetings; there were concerns about who or which countries dominated decision-making; and there was anxiety about the relative power of the countries in contrast to the OECD. These concerns have not disappeared over the years, but I think it is safe to say that everyone involved has come to place greater trust in the network process as an outstanding means of bringing country concerns to the table.

Has progress been sufficient since the third INES General Assembly in Lahti, Finland?

9. INES and all its associated activities have come a very long way since the last General Assembly. In reviewing the points of agreement and proposals that stemmed from that meeting, I was struck by the thought that, while the points of agreement were well documented and quite detailed, they have clearly formed a basis for the work that has taken place since then. In one way or another, nearly all of the points had been acted upon, and, viewing activities in this context, a great deal of progress has been made. Indeed, I believe it is quite rare that one can return to documents such as this and find such comprehensive work responsive on such broad scope.

10. It would serve us all to briefly review this progress, in an effort to determine just how much progress you have made together. Key points of agreement were reached in the areas of:

   – objectives;
− management principles; and
− operational structures.

Objectives

11. Under Objectives, the key agreements were made to improve the policy relevance and usefulness of the products of INES. The OECD and the General Assembly identified priority domains of student attainment, tertiary education, the transition from school to work, lifelong education, and national disparities in education. These topics are currently reflected in initiatives as broad ranging as the revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), studies of Cross-Curricular Competencies (CCCs), the Programme on International Student Assessment (PISA), the Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo), the diversification of data sources for indicators, and -- of course -- indicator development in *Education at a Glance*. Further work is clearly needed in the areas of lifelong education and tertiary education.

12. Participants in the General Assembly also identified the need to improve the reliability and comparability of the basic indicators and to develop additional qualitative information to explain the indicators. I believe progress towards these goals is evident in the dramatic improvements in *Education at a Glance*. A recommendation to develop data analysis methods and an interpretative approach to the indicators while targeting INES publications at various audiences have led to improved formatting and presentation of information in *Education at a Glance* as well as to the excellent accompanying publication, *Education Policy Analysis*. The production of *Education at a Glance*, I must note, has been a story of continuous improvement, from the first edition to the present. Each volume has had major improvements over its predecessor. The last volume has many excellent features that improve its accessibility to a wide variety of audiences. The introductory essay is now excellent and more accessible to a policy audience than ever before. The pullout page with key indicators is an innovative addition. Substantial analysis and creativity obviously support the development of charts with such rich information. And the variety of ways in which information is presented -- including bullets, detailed texts, charts, tables, chapter introductions, and sidebars -- assures reaching all audiences.

13. The analytic content in *Education at a Glance* and in other reports now emanating from the INES project in many respects represents major developments for the project. The analysis makes this far more than a data book, which some indicator reports tend towards. *Education at a Glance* is now a publication that consumers can dig into as quickly or as deeply as they wish, because of the variety of modes of presentation of information. The analytic reports are enormously helpful for education researchers, but also for policy-makers and their staffs who want to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues. People outside the field of education research but interested in the findings often need help in thinking through how they can use research results in a constructive way. These analyses contribute greatly in this direction.

14. This observation leads to the last point of agreement in the area of Objectives, which was to keep as a priority the information needs of policy makers. While I believe there are still improvements that can be made in this area (which I will discuss later), this perspective has clearly been dominant in the work on the INES project. There has been a policy focus in all activities ranging from the selection of the indicators, to the presentation of the material, to the publicity for the products. This has been a key distinguishing characteristic of INES.
Management and control procedures

15. The agreements reached on management and control procedures were all aimed at streamlining the complex programme of work that INES has become. The goal remained to have central control, through the OECD, while maintaining a certain degree of flexibility. Member countries were still to be central to the broad decision-making process, though ways to ensure transparency of activities were to reduce the perceived necessity for all countries to participate in all activities. These goals have largely been met with the use of a Steering Group with rotating membership, the National Co-ordinators playing a larger role, national participation in the networks, and ad hoc groups working on special topics. All of these activities led to broad participation in the policy and decision-making process surrounding the INES project. A key means of enhancing both flexibility and transparency was by making better use of modern communication technologies. The use of technology to enhance communication and reduce necessary meeting times seems to be working, in spite of the fact that work such as this is, by nature, highly intensive requiring repeated actual meetings.

Operational structures

16. Points of agreement on operational structures focussed on the networking process as a major innovative feature of the INES Project. From discussions at the Lahti meeting it was clear that this feature was key to the success of the project and to the enhancement of data systems and their use in policy debate in Member countries. However, it was also agreed that future networking should involve more actors operating in different sectors to strengthen the efficiency and efficacy of the activities. As a result, networks were retained as working groups, along with the Technical Group. Cross-network groups have been used, though co-ordination across networks continues to be an area for development. More characteristically, the OECD and the networks have created working groups to pursue special studies in wide-ranging topics such as public attitudes towards education, education finance, Cross Curricular Competencies, and the ISCED revision. The networks remain, however, the key means to share knowledge, ideals, goals, and needs across countries. I believe the high level of participation and the extraordinary products that have resulted from the work over these last five years indicates their success.

17. But it is interesting to me, in retrospect, that none of the points of agreement reached at the Lahti meeting addressed directly trying to increase or monitor the impact that Education at a Glance and the INES project were having in countries. Given the strong policy focus of the programme, it is fascinating to reflect on these results, for they have been strong and multi-faceted.

Has INES had an impact on policy and decision-making?

18. In a word, yes.

19. The effects of INES have been multi-faceted. It has changed the nature of our work and the debate in education statistics and policy in many positive ways. Before I note specific examples, let me just review the many different types of influence that many have observed. The consequences of participating in INES have shown up in:

- Stimulating policy debate in countries;
- Sharing education policy and data ideas among countries, in creating a “learning enterprise”;
- Creating national databases;

- Developing international databases;
- Producing related publications;
- Increasing the interests of international organisations; and
- Stimulating data development and policy debate in non-Member countries.

Policy debate

20. We must be certain that the public and policy-makers are interested in the results of our efforts. Having more and better national and international databases and having numerous interesting reports would be of little use alone. I believe it is easy to document that these key audiences find the results of our work both interesting and useful.

21. The key characteristic of the INES data, obviously, is that it is international in scope. This permits policy-makers and policy researchers to observe a far wider range of educational conditions, policies, practices, and outcomes than can be observed in any of our countries studied individually. Consequently, we can gain insights about related factors that are far richer than anything that can be gained from purely domestic investigations. Simply by expanding the range of our observations, we learn from one another about what is possible in education. The international context in and of itself provides a highly valuable perspective.

22. Indicators and other statistical data enter the policy debate in a number of ways. Data are sometimes used directly in programme administration. Although this is probably its most visible use, it is probably one of the least frequent. Data are often used in policy planning and evaluation. In such cases, researchers’ data analyses provide statistical information that helps policy-makers expand their knowledge base for decision-making. Such data analyses are intentionally targeted to influence specific policy debates. Data are also used in considerably more indirect ways to influence policy through the conduct of basic policy research -- work that is produced either inside or outside of government in the interests of generally expanding knowledge and understanding of issues. In large part, the identification of issues that the government decides to address stems from such basic research. Basic research influences public policy decision making by identifying issues, presenting new insights to ongoing concerns, clarifying aspects of continuing debate, and drawing new attention to old issues. The findings from such research frequently filter into public policy debates through media coverage and broad public discussion about emerging issues or insights provided into ongoing issues. This research is often conducted using data such as INES is producing, influencing public discussion in many of our countries.

23. In The Netherlands, for example, one edition of Education at a Glance stimulated strong national debate about the level of teacher salaries in public education. Policy-makers were surprised to learn that their teacher salaries were not as competitive with similar countries as they had believed. Publicity about this situation led to considerable concern among policy-makers and the public, and the Parliament ultimately did raise teacher salaries. I am surely simplifying a much more complicated policy debate, but the data here did stimulate public discussion of an important policy issue.

24. In the United States, we have for several decades considered that while some aspects of our educational system may be lacking, we could take pride in the fact that worked hard to educate a very high share of our population through the upper secondary level. In the absence of hard data to the contrary, we could assume that more of our young people had the opportunity to complete a substantial basic education. However, INES again upset a comfortable way of thinking. We learned through participating in this effort
that our high school completion rate was lower than that of many OECD countries. Although this was known for several years, it did not get public attention until last year, when it gained broad public attention following front-page coverage in several major national newspapers. This information has not yet worked its way through policy discussion, but it has certainly entered into the public debate about the performance of our education system.

25. These are but a few examples of how INES has changed the nature of the public policy debate about education in participating countries. There are many other examples that participants in this General Assembly could provide. One of the key goals of the project, from the beginning, was to provide information that would be useful to policy makers in our nations -- areas of difference and also areas of unexpected similarity. I believe these examples demonstrate amply that INES has been highly effective in doing just that.

**A learning enterprise**

26. The entire process of networks, advisory groups, special study groups, survey development, and publication production has been one that has been intensely international and highly effective as a learning enterprise. None of us should underestimate the importance of this programme for helping everybody involved to learn and grow from gaining knowledge and insights into how all these different types of activities are conducted in different countries and different settings. We have learned about international collaboration, which was not necessarily one of the diverse professional skills that most of us brought to this work; indeed, many of us had had no international working experiences before this effort. But much more than that, by working in an international setting, we learned more about the substance and style of the work we were already involved in. Researchers and statisticians learned to expand their views of education research and education policy, to incorporate ideas from other settings and other cultures that nevertheless fit into the scheme of their own national debates. The INES project can be viewed in this context as an enormously successful capacity-building programme.

27. For example, in the United States, we gained insights into much broader conceptions of the outcomes of education. We learned to think of these outcomes not only in their economic senses, but also in terms of cultural, social, and psychological outcomes. I am not sure we have all thoroughly internalised these perspectives, but I believe we have begun to think in new ways about the breadth of the value of education. We have also been challenged to understand and measure the diverse ways of organising and financing the educational enterprise.

28. I believe countries have learned a great deal from one another about the importance of rigorous statistical methodologies in mounting large-scale surveys of students, schools, or populations. This work has been an essential part of filling many of the data gaps identified through the network process, and countries have learned a great deal through participating in them. We have learned that international collaboration and consensus building is time consuming and costly -- and absolutely essential for such a study to meet all our needs. We have learned that unless agreement is reached on a range of high statistical standards, they are unlikely to be met and the results of the study will be questioned (even possibly dismissed) by our key audiences -- policy-makers in all our countries.

29. In short, the collaborative process of INES has enhanced the abilities of all the participants to work in an international setting, but also to improve the quality, scope, and perspective of the work they were already conducting in their domestic education systems.
National databases

30. In its efforts to improve the comparability (and consequently the scope and quality) of data across national systems, INES has stimulated improvements in national databases across OECD countries. There are many examples, and I will identify just a few to illustrate my point. Across the board, the ISCED revision has led to improvements in identifying levels of education to permit greater understanding of participation and financing of education at different educational levels in our national systems. Although we have organised our education systems differently, it has been tremendously helpful to search for common threads to describe them. We now have a much better understanding of how students advance through our different systems. In the area of post-secondary education, where our systems vary most dramatically, many of us continue to struggle with how to create appropriate data for the new ISCED 4 level, to reflect post-secondary, not tertiary education. As this is a category with considerable participation, it was most important to separate out from other tertiary education, but it challenges our statistical programs to respond. In the long run, we will have a better understanding of different aspects of our education systems.

31. By themselves, the exercises to address data issues have helped to stimulate thinking about how national structures vary. This work helps us to think about components of our education programs in new lights, providing insights that could come in no other way. By understanding that not all systems are organised the same, and seeing how various cultures, norms, and structures are integrated in different settings, we gain greater appreciation of what might be mutable in our own systems. For example, the efforts to understand how academic research and development funds are integrated in different degrees in different countries led not only to greater understanding of how to identify and isolate those funds for statistical purposes, but also to thoughts of how such funding might be stimulated in new ways.

32. A number of countries actually used the INES system to stimulate development of a national education data system. Some countries, typically characterised by highly decentralised education systems, had little or no national data on the process or performance of their systems. The INES process presented a special challenge for these countries, as sub-national data were not useful in this context. Over a long period of time -- to be expected -- some countries have built national data systems to be able to participate in this process and to compare their country’s performance in meaningful ways. For example, the INES programme motivated the development of a national database in Canada. They published a report this year comparing provinces across the country that was modelled on Education at a Glance. Other countries benchmarking their own data systems on this programme include Spain and Switzerland. The Flemish community in Belgium has also worked on such benchmarking.

33. In other cases, countries have modified parts of their data systems to accommodate the INES definitions and standards. A prime example that has affected the way most of us collect, process, and report data in one way or another has been in the area of countries’ investments in education. A key study to improve our understanding of differences in reports about education finance showed many differences in how we categorised and reported our investments. For example, prior to INES, most countries thought primarily about public expenditures -- even where private schools represented an important component of education. The absence of private expenditures led countries to realise that they were sometimes substantially underestimating total investment in education. Thus, a number of countries have sought out new data on expenditures, integrating data from creative sources of such information (e.g. from household consumer expenditures surveys) to develop a better measure of their overall investment in education.

International databases

34. This is the arena in which INES has been, perhaps, most visible. The work to create international databases has been responsive to data needs for INES and in many respects represents a maturing of the programme. Several of the networks have developed or commissioned their own studies or worked closely
with data providers to ensure that databases were developed to meet these needs. Network D on Attitudes and Expectations, for example, conducted a study of public attitudes towards secondary education. Numerous publications were produced from these data, beyond the international report. Countries such as Finland, Denmark, and the United States used these results to present findings on attitudes to their publics. In some cases, these reports were couched in an international context, but in other cases they simply used the national data to present an analysis on domestic issues. Either approach relied on the INES experience to enhance public discussion on the importance of public attitudes towards education.

35. Network C has conducted surveys on the context of schooling to fill in important data gaps about the school environment and the processes through which education takes place. Their first effort was a study of the locus of decision-making in education systems. This was a difficult survey, and developing it in a way to gather comparable information across countries was most challenging. But the result was a perspective on the degree of centralisation of decision-making in various aspects of school policy that has served as a basis for much discussion about differences in national policy setting. This information has served as a context for understanding other aspects of many of our education systems. They have also conducted a system level survey on staffing and intended curriculum and a survey of primary schools to fill important gaps in indicators. Planning is currently underway for a survey of upper secondary schools.

36. Network A, as I am sure you are all aware, has been the generator of the largest independent international surveys. This has likely been the case because of the paucity of information available at the beginning of the INES project to address questions about educational performance with quality data. INES was a major audience for the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Although the OECD was not directly the key player in developing these surveys, the overlap among staff from many countries between the projects ensured that the data needs for INES were primarily met. Without the impetus of INES, it is not at all clear whether these surveys would have been carried out in the manner that they were, with a high degree of emphasis on meeting information needs of policy audiences with high statistical standards.

37. And now, INES has directly entered the picture of student outcomes surveys through the Programme on International Student Assessment (PISA). The Board of Participating Countries (BPC) has been formed to provide policy oversight for the effort; the OECD Secretariat manages a competitive bidding process to select an organisation to conduct the survey, and monitors progress of the work. Numerous international groups are participating in different aspects of the programme, ensuring that the content, context, quality, and products of the programme are responsive to the data needs for education indicators and subsequent analyses.

38. In considering all these international databases, it is useful to reflect a moment about the perspective on such developments at the very beginning of the INES project. At the first General Assembly, in Semmering, Austria, there were some early discussions about key data gaps and ways these could be filled. At that time, I believe the considerable weight of opinion was that neither the OECD nor the INES project could directly be involved in instigating major international data collections. It was acknowledged that the project would most likely stimulate countries to improve their own data systems. Indeed, this influence was an objective of the project. But sponsorship of international data collections, with all the complexities involved, was thought to be infeasible and outside the purview of this project.

39. But time and experience changed all that. As Member countries worked together in the networks, it soon became abundantly clear that the data gaps were large, that they were hindering development of important comparative perspectives, and that the only way they would be filled was if participants in this project stepped forward and developed mechanisms -- surveys -- to fill them. The only way to address the scepticism about the feasibility of such work was to dig in and do it. The OECD and the network representatives did just that, and the results have been phenomenal. It is surely easy to find shortcomings in each effort, particularly the early ones. But in comparison with attitudes at the beginning
of the INES programme, one cannot help being impressed at the significant changes in the perspectives and capacities of all countries involved in these efforts.

40. Indeed, the results are convincing enough that in some cases the international data base development is influencing national data efforts. For example, Germany is using PISA as a platform to obtain a much wider range of information in a national assessment. The plan of work they have laid out for building on to PISA is most impressive and illustrative of the potential for this international work to contribute creatively to national education debates. Canada is incorporating elements of PISA into a longitudinal study to permit association of the international assessment results with long term results of education. Switzerland is using PISA to stimulate debate about what kind of data they should have to support national education debates, and has drawn a representative sample in each of the French-speaking cantons. The United States is seriously considering co-ordinating PISA with its next major longitudinal survey.

Related publications

41. Even more visible in each of our countries than the improvements in our data systems have been the many publications that we have produced in direct response to our participation in the INES project. Some of these have been attempts to replicate as many of the INES indicators as feasible at the sub-national level, to enable comparisons of states, provinces, departments, lander, cantons or other divisions among themselves and to other nations. In the United States, we issued *Education in States and Nations*. It was, much to the surprise of some of our national education specialists, an exceptionally popular publication that permitted comparison not only with other states but also with other nations with which they shared similarities. Similar reports were issued in other countries such as Canada and France, where they also proved popular.

42. Many nations, the United States included, have also issued publications modelled on *Education at a Glance*, but more targeted towards each of our own national audiences. These publications allowed us to use the international databases, but to analyse them to address more relevant issues in our own countries. The INES programme involved not only the publication of a single report, but also the provision of a major new database to support the indicators. We were then able to use that database to develop new, related indicators and to provide additional information for policy makers. And we could discuss the data with a focus on our own national situations, to clarify the meaning of the data in that context. These reports were national in scope, and supplementary to but not redundant with *Education at a Glance*.

43. In addition to these general purpose indicators publications, there have also been a large number of specialised publications produced as a result of the more focused work of the various networks and working groups associated with INES. These publications have been useful in stimulating national debate on single topics, with an international perspective for background information. For example, from the efforts of Network D, several countries, including Scotland, Denmark, Finland, and the United States, produced national reports on public attitudes towards secondary education. In each of our countries there were some surprising findings that demonstrated differences between how our citizens thought about the content and style of secondary education in contrast to citizens of other countries. In many cases, these findings gained public notice because they were unexpected and such data had never been presented to the public before.

44. Similarly, from the other international studies mentioned earlier (e.g. IALS, TIMSS, the Public Attitudes Survey, etc.), member countries produced numerous reports to publicise those aspects of these studies that were deemed most interesting and important in a national context. So these studies have all been important not only in providing data for the development of INES indicators, but also because countries were able to individualise reports that the public and policy-makers have attended to.
International organisations

45. There are others at this General Assembly who can speak far more authoritatively than I about the impact of the INES programme on the work and goals of other international organisations. I would merely like to note that it is clear that other organisations have been working with OECD to see how to utilise the INES model for improving national education data systems. Such data form a key basis for developing education systems, and the absence of good data is as critical an issue in other nations of the world as it is in the OECD nations. Both UNESCO and The World Bank have been working with the OECD to try to expand the INES system and to see what lessons can be drawn from the experiences of the last decade in building these data systems.

46. The results of these collaborations and the worldwide interest in education indicators can be seen in the number of non-Member countries participating in the process of developing *Education at a Glance*. Just in the time between 1995 and 2000, the number of “World Education Indicators” countries contributing to the report expanded from 4 to 16 countries, covering almost two-thirds of the world’s population. Each year, the data also become more complete for all the participating countries, including those within the OECD. This is a remarkable development, and greatly enhances the usefulness of this volume for all participating nations.

Can such a good programme be further improved?

47. Of course it can. Any programme of the scope and complexity of INES must continuously change and improve or it will decline.

48. Please understand that I come from the perspective that participants in any effort as substantial and complex as INES can find improvements, usually without searching too hard. And the progress of such efforts will be enhanced, if ongoing, incremental improvements are introduced. The series of General Assembly meetings for the INES projects have been instrumental in providing systematic feedback for small, but important, corrections in course. Therefore, my reflections on how some continuing improvements might be made to the programme are offered in this spirit. This is an enormously important and successful programme. Its contributions to the world of education research in all of our countries as well as internationally have been unarguably critical. But there are some improvements that should be sought. I would like to make some modest suggestions in four areas:

- policy relevance;
- resources;
- research; and
- Networks.

Policy relevance

49. Since the beginning of the INES programme, OECD and the member countries have placed a very strong emphasis on targeting a policy audience with the work. The Education Committee, the CERI Governing Board, and each of the different steering groups involved have emphasised this aspect of the work. But this is an aspect of a project that needs constant attention. If an organisation thinks it has covered this, and reduces the focus on it, the policy arena moves past with lightening speed. If we do not keep current and constantly re-examine the policy screen, we will fall prey to the potential weakness
inherent in all indicator systems. That is, they focus attention on what they measure. But they can also focus attention on the wrong issues, potentially causing more problems than they help solve. Balance must be sought, to be sure, between addressing current issues of high visibility and focusing on enduring issues. But staying current in the policy arena is the only way to find this balance.

50. The target for INES is an international perspective. Participants in the programme need to keep their eyes on that target and to listen to what policy makers need in different settings. Policy will be made, with or without adequate data to inform the decisions. It is up to us, as participants in the programme, to assure that we provide useful information in appropriate formats to support decision-making.

51. My suggestion, then, is that in all aspects of the work, participants need to repeatedly view their efforts from the perspective of whether they best meet policy needs. “Best” is an odd word here, for in using it I mean to convey that there are many ways to take a policy perspective. As I noted above, basic research is sometimes the best way to investigate an issue, and other times creating a highly targeted publication is the most appropriate means. But it is always a challenge, in conducting statistical studies, to maintain this key perspective. Those immersed in the day-to-day work, on the networks and in the working groups, need ongoing support in this respect. The creative work of the INES programme needs to continue to focus on policy-relevant products, from the selection of topics to study, to the development and measurement of concepts, the construction of indicators, the detailed analytic work, and the development and dissemination of publications and other data products. Policy-makers search for an accumulation of evidence from the social sciences in developing their thinking; the multi-faceted ways INES has come to provide information from various sources is most useful in this respect.

52. Since each General Assembly meeting seems to issue forth one key new publication series, I would like to propose a small series that would involve very little additional effort. That would be to publish each of the essays in Education Policy Analysis as a small, separate publication. Although this report was viewed as basic research and targeted at education researchers, each edition contains an excellent set of small, in-depth considerations of important issues in education. As currently formatted, it is not likely to be used widely by a time-pressed policy audience. But when essays such as this are published in a booklet type of format, they tend to draw much greater attention to themselves.

Resources

53. Countries invest a great deal of effort and other resources into the INES project, both individually and collectively. The project would benefit a great deal, however, from some additional marginal resources centralised at the OECD. (I acknowledge that this argument for more resources is frequently heard and nearly as frequently rejected. That makes it no less compelling.) If it is impossible for the OECD to free up the resources, the participating countries should find ways to support some additional core resources.

54. What is needed? Both staff and support work. Staff are needed for the basic work of organising the multitude of meetings and producing the actual reports. These are labour intensive activities, and there are insufficient resources currently available to carry out this work in the long term. Support work is needed to contribute to a wide variety of activities that can be included under the description of scientific quality control. One of the recommendations from the Lahti meeting that has not been addressed was for an ongoing group of scientific advisors to review key features of the INES process as needed. INES, Education at a Glance, and Education Policy Analysis have come a very long way over the years, but they would still benefit greatly from more scientific review and serious quality control. Relative to the overall investments, such work is not terribly costly, but, as I understand it, there are currently no resources available for it. In serious scientific work, such input and review is not optional; it is an integral component of the programme. Somehow, a small increase in resources must be identified to support such an effort at the OECD.
55. In addition, future developmental work will continue to draw on resources from countries directly. A major challenge for the future will be to identify the most exciting investments along with key countries willing to support work in these areas. Many countries have made very substantial investments thus far, and that will need to continue as a mode of support for the INES work.

Research

56. In producing the series, *Education Policy Analysis*, INES has moved beyond indicators to a programme of important research in education issues. This is a natural evolution that benefits from the type of central focus that INES has provided it. The OECD and the member countries should be encouraged to continue this vein of research as an integral part of the INES programme. The next components of the research programme have already been identified and some preliminary work at varying stages has begun.

57. It is clear, even just examining the agenda for this General Assembly, that the international education community would benefit greatly from a co-ordinated longitudinal study. It is not possible to fully understand the economic and social returns to learning without data that are collected over a period of student’s school and work lives. Similarly, the key determinants of educational success cannot be identified solely through cross-sectional studies. Particularly in an international setting, such returns and determinants may well vary from country to country. Models previously developed in national settings are likely to be inadequate for capturing the richness and diversity of these relations. Cross-sectional data are simply inadequate for the task.

58. Similarly, the work on cross-curricular competencies and the definition and selection of competencies should be continued. These efforts address a concern identified in many venues, to gain better understanding of all aspects of lifelong learning, including outcomes of initial schooling. This is a major focus for the OECD, serving as an appropriate context for much of their education research. These research studies, which will hopefully culminate in targeted data collections and analyses, will improve our understanding of the complex processes by which education in all settings supports the economic, social, and cultural development of individuals.

Networks

59. The network organisational structure has served the INES project exceptionally well since its inception. With the advice of General Assemblies, steering groups, and Member countries, the OECD has made modifications to the existing networks over the years in terms of their scope, structure, and modes of behaviour. They have incorporated the idea of sub-groups to work on special projects, and, overall, these have been highly successful for a reasonable investment. The network system offers many advantages, which I have been discussing from a variety of perspectives in my comments today.

- They contribute to capacity building for all staff involved directly and indirectly.
- They permit the sharing of ideas and slow development of consensus.
- They stimulate new ideas and creative research agendas.
- They contribute to a sense of “ownership” of the INES programme, its products and its methods, for all the member nations.
But we would be remiss without acknowledging that the network system also presents some difficulties for INES and the OECD. It is a considerable management responsibility for the OECD, and requires substantial personnel resources to oversee. And it is perceived as being costly, both in terms of funds to support it and in terms of staff commitment from all the member nations to participate in the meetings and the process. It must be understood that when a country is not involved in the activities of the networks, there is a loss of quality both for that country and for all the participating countries. The lack of input and perspective from a country diminishes the ability of networks to reflect the full variety of information needs and to improve their product.

These drawbacks to the network approach must be considered in the context of the enterprise that INES is trying to illuminate: the educational systems of all the member countries. These are large systems that absorb a very substantial proportion of the public expenditures in most of our countries, and, indeed, a significant share of the GDP. (We have learned that from INES work!) In that light, the resources required for INES are neither large nor disproportionate. In the long run, the insights these efforts provide to inform the education policy debate are extremely important. As I noted earlier, by providing this international perspective for understanding education, we can learn from one another about what is possible in educating our students. Without this perspective, we are more restricted in what we can learn from other cultures, and we tend to look internally for solutions that could be far more creative with international insights.

So, I can appreciate that the resources required are significant, particularly from the view of many of the sponsoring agencies in our countries. But I do not believe that they are excessive, and I am hopeful that efforts will be made to continue these highly important and profitable investments. While we do that, we should also examine the current network structure to see if there are adjustments that should be made to improve its functioning.

With the exception of the suspension of activity in Network D, the current network structure has been in place since the second phase of the INES project. I would hope that some of the discussion at this meeting would address whether any of the current networks has completed the most significant work in an area. At the same time, interested parties should examine whether adjustments to the networks are needed to address ongoing issues that have been identified over the last decade. One area that was noted at Lahti but has not yet received adequate attention is in-depth investigation of lifelong learning and the knowledge and skills necessary for citizens to play constructive roles in modern democratic society.

There is one other aspect of the work of the networks that has been discussed also in the past but which also needs continual emphasis, and that is the importance of collaboration among networks. There is very little work that can be done in one area of education research that is unrelated to any other areas. The work of the networks is interconnected, and participants need to actively collaborate to ensure that work is carried out as efficiently and effectively as possible. I am sure that we all can relate examples of when such collaboration has been successful as well as other examples of times when collaboration would have been most useful but did not happen. For the network structure to succeed in the long run, there must be more complete collaboration among the chairs and the members. This is an important activity that needs ongoing attention.

At the beginning of the INES project, the vision was focused. The goal was to produce a set of international education indicators that would be policy-relevant, of high statistical quality, with uniform data across countries. Although these are certainly still key elements of the vision for INES, that vision has grown. It now also encompasses an ongoing research programme to promote continued improvement of international information available for policy makers and the publics of our nations in the ongoing education debate. These developments have occurred because of the demand to provide more detailed
information to answer increasingly complex questions about similarities and differences in education policies, programs, and performance among our countries. It now both responds to and contributes to the international education debate. INES is the sort of programme that, if it did not exist, someone would now have to invent it.

66. It is clear from my remarks that I am highly supportive of the INES programme. It has experienced many shifts and changes over the last decade; these have typically been appropriate in response to the changing demands of the programme. And changes will have to be made in the future to help the programme continue responding to information needs from the policy world. But on balance, it is a critically important programme that has far surpassed expectations. It would have been difficult at the beginning to anticipate that the products from this programme would become the best sellers of the OECD.

67. I look forward eagerly to see how INES grows and develops in the future. I trust it will continue to have the highest levels of support from OECD, as I know it does in the participating countries.
Success of INES

1. This is a report attempting to grasp, for its further development, several important issues that have emerged in the evolution of INES over the past decade or so. This report draws mainly from various OECD/INES documents that have been sent to me, including responses from Member countries and the INES Networks to the evaluation questionnaires, and interviews and discussions with government officials dealing with INES in Japan as well as my personal experience as a former member of the Technical Group. Of course, the intensive discussions that I had in August 2000 with the OECD Secretariat and one of the evaluation team members were also extremely informative and useful for writing this report.

2. While the evaluation of the progress of INES over the last 5 years since the Lahti General Assembly is very well documented from the viewpoint of direct stakeholders in the replies to the evaluation questionnaires and the synthesis report, I will focus more generally, in this report, on the overall design of INES as an OECD education project, taking advantage of being an outsider who is currently not involved in this undertaking. Presented below are thus an outsider’s views on the future of INES, hoping that an onlooker may sometimes read the game better than the players themselves.

3. I myself was involved in INES during Phase 1 (1988-89), Phase 2 (1990-91) and the first half of Phase 3 (1992-96) as a member of the Technical Group. But at that time, very frankly I did not anticipate that INES would be so expanded and successful as we see it now. To my knowledge, INES is the first international undertaking strongly supported by the governments concerned to develop and compile education system indicators that are wide in scope, reliable, internationally comparable and relevant to education policy, though covering a limited number of countries. One may say that the collection of education statistics according to ISCED done by UNESCO and international comparative studies of students’ academic achievements conducted by IEA, for instance, were precursors in the development of education indicators. But the former is more mere data collection rather than an attempt to develop education indicators and data gathered are not necessarily wide in scope, reliable or comparable enough to use as a basis for Education Policy Analysis and formation in OECD countries; whereas, the latter is confined to particular indicators of education, though of course they are very important ones. It would not be exaggerated to say that INES is a historic and epoch-making undertaking in the development and establishment of education indicators.

4. INES has been thus far highly productive as exemplified by publishing seven editions of Education at a Glance, four analytical reports (Education Policy Analysis) and a number of other related reports. A Japanese expert in education statistics appraises that these publications may be the most reliable and useful attempt of international comparison in education statistics available today, although there still remain a number of conceptual and technical problems to be solved. Member countries have also reported that Education at a Glance has contributed to the results of INES reaching policy-makers and is now translated into 11 languages, and thus increasing use is made of the INES indicators for national policy analysis and development. I have never heard of such an OECD publication being translated into as many
as 11 languages. This simple fact alone shows how internationally comparable and reliable education indicators have long been awaited by policy-makers, and how effectively and productively INES has met the growing need for education indicators.

5. Apart from these intended achievements, INES has created enormous repercussions internationally and nationally. One of the great contributions of INES to international statistics of education was the OECD’s strong initiative to revise the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) that was initially a UNESCO’s instrument for collecting education statistics and is used for certain indicators in INES as well. This initiative was a natural consequence of the INES endeavour for collecting more internationally comparable and precise data. And thus finally ISCED was revised in 1997, particularly reflecting the development of post-secondary and higher education in OECD Member countries.

6. It seems also that as the INES project has been developing over more than a decade, it has gradually but certainly created a sense of “international standards” of education statistics. Unlike economic statistics and indicators that are highly internationally standardised, education statistics have long been deemed basically domestic in nature, because education systems and practices are established on the basis of different historical, social and cultural backgrounds of the countries and thus unique to the respective countries. Therefore, in most cases education statistics have been collected in such a way that suits educational practices in the different systems, without regard to international perspectives.

7. However as more and more issues and problems in education have been commonly shared among countries, particularly among OECD countries as can be seen in a number of OECD education projects that attract interest of many member states, it is now strongly felt that even in a national education statistics system, due consideration should be given to international comparability. For instance, the growing importance attached to life long learning which is an agreed education policy agenda in OECD countries, has now created the need for Japan to collect data on age of higher education students. Actually these are statistics required for INES, but have not been collected in Japan since Japanese higher education population was mostly young people within a narrow range of age and thus there was no need to do so. But in a life long learning society students of a variety of ages are entering into higher education, which certainly necessitates such data. This is a simple example showing that INES may have potential to impact on a national statistic system in education itself.

8. From my experience of being involved with ISCED in the mid 1970s and with INES in the late 80s and early 90s as a responsible official on the part of a participating country, as far as data collection and submission are concerned, at the beginning the major concern of countries seemed to be how to adjust and process data, for the reporting purpose, collected under the existing education statistics system in conformity with the international classifications and standards. The international statistical framework was seen somewhat alien to their domestic systems, having little impact on the system themselves. It was not even imagined that there would emerge the need for modifying and adjusting the national education statistics system itself in accordance with the international framework. When I mention INES creating a sense of “international standards” of education statistics, it is meant not merely that the INES statistical framework has gradually come to have great impact on national education statistics systems, but also that the adoption of the INES framework tends to become an internationally accepted norm in education statistics, whether consciously or unconsciously. If INES continues and develops say for another ten years, the advancement of a national education statistics system may be judged by the degree to which the national system is able to conform to the INES framework.

9. Another repercussion of INES would be the creation and diffusion of what might be called “indicator culture” in education. This can be defined as the practice of frequent use of employing quantified (in one way or another) measurements to assess performance of education systems and educational programmes and activities. There existed and still does at least in Japan some sense of resistance to using quantified indicators in the area of education particularly among educationists, because
it is often believed that education is an activity of human being to human being fostering and enhancing each other and therefore difficult to quantify or should not be quantified. Not to mention the area of economy, education may be the most underdeveloped field in the social sector in terms of the development of indicators. However since the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s public services have increasingly been subject to accountability and transparency as to their outcomes to the recipients of the services and taxpayers, and therefore there has emerged a growing demand for the development of indicators to evaluate the performance of public services. Education service is of course not an exception to this social requirement and thus the somewhat allergic attitude to education indicators often taken by educators cannot be maintained today.

10. Having gone through the documents that have been sent to me, I have the impression that INES has continuously been given top priority in the OECD education projects with many other education projects linked up with INES and the statistics section in the education sector of OECD strengthened from a unit to a division. The fact that Education at a Glance is one of the best sellers among OECD publications also indicates strong interest in and great importance attached to INES on the part of Member countries. While INES itself was born by the growing need for internationally comparable indicators relevant to education policy in Member countries, by now INES appears to take the lead in promoting practices to analyse and diagnose educational performance of respective countries using international indicators. It would not be hard to infer that as the indicators developed by INES have been improved in their reliability and comparability, many countries participating in INES have been using education indicators for the analysis of performance of their education systems more often than before. Thus it may be said that through INES an “indicator culture” has been promoted and diffused in the field of education.

11. There is no doubt that INES has been an extremely successful and influential undertaking as illustrated above. Therefore, the following comments concern important issues, which I think, need to be addressed in taking a next step toward further development. As mentioned from the outset, the focus of the views below will be placed on an overall design and organisational structure of INES as a long life project.

Issues to be addressed for the future of INES

12. By now, more than a decade has passed since the creation of INES in 1988, which is already a long life span for a project. Yet another five years are envisaged to continue with it from 2002 to 2006, and in fact PISA, which is an important part of INES, has already been launched as a 12-year activity until 2008. This means that INES is going to be a project for more than 20 years. While a long life project implies undoubtedly how important, rich and successful the project is, at the same time there is the danger of the project going on endlessly, lacking a clear long-term strategy that provides a project with an overall design and framework. It seems to be the time now to think of how far INES should go as an OECD project and define its long-term strategy. I am suggesting this not because INES has failed, but on the contrary because it has been so successful and expanding. This should not be taken as a negative suggestion either, but a positive one. Given that education indicators continue to be the major concern on the part of OECD Member countries and activities related to indicators are likely to be expanding, and in light of the long experience with the project for more than ten years, it might be required now to conceive not only the next phase of the project for another five years or so that is often a mere continuation of the previous phase with minor modifications, but also an entire design or framework of the project even beyond the next phase, so that all the stakeholders of the project can have a clearer picture about where INES is now and where INES will go in the end.

13. In order to cope with the further growing demand for indicators which has led to the continuous expansion of the INES project and related activities, and with a view to conceiving a possible long-term strategy of INES, several key issues should be addressed as follows:
− Does INES not need to work out a long-term strategy indicating an overall framework of the project beyond a single phase?

− How does INES prioritise and balance its three major tasks, namely development, standardisation and analysis of education indicators? Or does it continue to pursue these three together with more or less same importance attached to each of them?

− How does INES deal with a newly emerging demand for relative and causal analysis of education indicators?

− Is the INES operational organisation that is already complex and likely to be more so in the future manageable? What will be the roles for the OECD Secretariat to play in this complex organisation?

− How can the ever-growing INES project be financed?

14. As far as I understand, INES has been pursuing three major tasks that are “development”, “standardisation” and “analysis” of education indicators. One may add the dissemination and utilisation of indicators as the forth one, but this seems to be more of participating countries’ responsibility than INES itself. These three tasks are logically in continuous time sequence. First new indicators are proposed and developed, and if their relevance to education policy, feasibility of data collection and international comparability are assured, then periodic data collection is started to compile such indicators as established or standardised ones. And finally beyond a mere compilation and presentation of these indicators, they are analysed and interpreted with additional more detailed background and other necessary information. While it has been an essential part of INES to develop unexplored, innovative education indicators, in its history of more than a decade, great efforts have also been devoted to elaborating and refining numbers of already existing indicators in order to improve their reliability and international comparability. And in the latest phase of INES analytical work of indicators has been added as one of its major activities.

15. Looking back to the evolution of INES, in Phase 1 (1988-89) which was an exploratory stage, there seemed to be no clear distinction between “development” and “standardisation” of indicators with five Networks set up all aimed to explore and develop new indicators in different aspects of education. But it was gradually realised that the elaboration and standardisation of already existing indicators is a different task in nature from the development of new ones, and thus in Phase 2 (1990-91) the former task was taken over by two Technical Groups that were reorganisation of certain previous Networks with the OECD Secretariat playing a more direct role in their management (in Phase 3 further reorganised into one Group), while four Networks continued to engage in development work.

16. Phase 3 (1992-1996) could be characterised by the regular production of a standardised indicators set as indicated by the publication of four editions of Education at a Glance in this phase, that is a compilation of more or less standardised indicators, whereas once in a while the outcomes of the Networks were presented in it on an ad hoc basis. Of course INES did not claim at this stage that a complete set of fully standardised indicators had been achieved, but work for improving international comparability and reliability of indicators was continuously conducted mainly by the Technical Group. It appears that the regularisation or routinisation of indicator production was the key word for INES in this phase and thus the project entered the stage of standardisation, whereas the management of the Networks and the treatment of their outcomes remained unclear.

17. The 1995 Hirsch report reviewed the first three phases of INES (1988-1996) focusing on the management of the Networks as well as their roles in the project and pointed out that while they had encouraged a high level of commitment from a large number of people and been innovative in identifying and producing new indicators, at the same time there were drawbacks such as the danger of creating their
own “constituencies”, the lack of co-ordination between the Networks, the danger of the project as a whole becoming amorphous due to the lack of any effective control mechanism, etc. Therefore, one of the crucial issues for Phase 4 seemed to be how to more effectively link activities of the Networks with those of the Technical Group in terms of organisational structure as well as substance of their work. In other words: how to effectively transit from the stage of the development of indicators to that of standardisation and regularisation.

18. In view of the direction INES took in Phase 3 as described above, one may well anticipate that the main tasks of Phase 4, which is the on going phase from 1997 to 2001 would be i) to standardise to a possible extent a selected number of indicators and completely regularise their data collection and compilation, ii) to focus on analytical work of indicators and iii) to conduct development work of indicators under a direct administrative control of the OECD, limited to unfinished important indicators that may be feasible to be standardised, and thus the project would converge in the final shape that is the regular production of analytical reports on selected standardised education indicators. It seems to me that this could have been one of the conceivable scenarios of the life of the INES project for 14 years until 2001, although no written agreement on this scenario existed.

19. In fact in Phase 4 a certain number of indicators have become more or less established as appear regularly in Education at a Glance, and the publication of analytical reports has been one of the major activities, the report being published annually. In terms of administrative organisation as well, INES seems to have been consolidated by setting up a new administrative structure with the Steering Group playing an important role in overseeing the entire activities of INES and related projects including those of the Networks.

20. As to the development work, in this phase there has remained an indispensable work for INES unaccomplished that is the development of output indicators of education. As far as I understand, this has long been one of the very central purposes of INES since its inception. For this purpose the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has been created with substantial financial and technical support from participating countries. One important feature of PISA is that it covers as many as 33 countries including 3 non-Member countries. Also, it is run by its own established management structure with a new funding system almost entirely drawing on countries’ substantial participation fees. PISA is probably larger than all the other INES activities together in terms of the magnitude of financial resources. These organisational and financial arrangements, which appear independent of the INES project itself, are necessary and understandable because it certainly requires a solid administrative as well as financial basis to conduct international surveys on student achievement on a large scale instead of utilising already existing IEA data.

21. Other than PISA (Network A), however, substantial endeavour still seems to be devoted to development work with two Networks and 6-7 development groups working on new indicators. If the sequence of “development”, “standardisation” and “analysis” of education indicators is to be the ordinary scenario or long-term framework of the INES project, one may wonder to what extent this developmental work is well planned to fit in the sequence. In other words, questions to be raised are: i) Are the indicators produced from the work likely to be standardised for data collection in a substantial number of countries and internationally comparable?; and ii) Is it feasible to collect reliable data regularly to compile and analyse the indicators?

22. Phase 4 as a whole does not seem to have set clear priorities with regard to its three major tasks with a strategic long-term perspective beyond mere one phase of the project, and thus it is heading toward further divergence rather than convergence, embracing a lot of new development works. While organisationally INES and related activities seem to be well consolidated in this phase, there has been no clear direction drawn yet as to where INES finally should go or where all these activities converge, in other words, lack of a long-term strategy.
23. In the education sector the OECD as an inter-governmental education forum and think tank seems to have been adopting a very flexible method of work, not structuring a project too rigidly so as to quickly respond to changing and diverse needs of Member countries. This is a very mature way of doing business and made possible because projects are always proposed, decided and implemented on the strong initiative on the part of member states with the Secretariat playing a role of organiser and co-ordinator. Not the other way round. Indeed the success of INES is owed to this to a great extent. Particularly the developmental work in INES would not have been possible without the strong financial as well as technical initiatives of Member countries. On the other hand, however, this spontaneity of Member countries makes it difficult to co-ordinate the entire activities of INES and come up with an agreed long-term strategy, with Member countries sometime tending to pursue their own directions without giving due regard to the framework of INES as a whole.

24. To describe in a little simplified way, the current organisational structure of INES seems to be that under the umbrella of INES with the Steering Group functioning as an overarching co-ordinating body, three different types of players are playing in the field of education indicator: i) the Technical Group in which all the Member Countries participate is mainly working on the elaboration and standardisation of indicators for improved reliability and international comparability as well as the regularisation of data collection and indicators compilation, with close link to and strong support from the Secretariat. This group can be said to be the core and established part of the INES structure. ii) The Networks and development groups comprising interested countries and almost fully funded by participating countries in one way or another are conducting the development work of indicators relatively independently, informing the Steering Group and the Secretariat of their progress, and the results of their work, if successful, are expected to be taken over by the Technical Group in the end. This organisational arrangement is thus an ad hoc and tentative structure maintained, if successful, until newly developed indicators come out. iii) PISA which is a completely decentralised organisation in terms of legal status (it has its own Governing Board) and financing (entirely independent financial arrangements) is fully responsible for students’ achievements indicators including the development, standardisation and analysis of indicators as well as data collection. These are very realistic organisational arrangements that secure, on one hand, the established and regularised part of work of INES through the activities of the Technical Group, and on the other hand encourage Member countries’ initiatives and motivations, and financial contributions to INES.

25. But one thing that seems to be weak with this structure is again the lack of a clear framework or long-term perspective for INES, which should play an indispensable role in linking up all the three different groups of organisations and activities. Because the three groups are under the umbrella of INES does not simply mean that these activities are undertaken under the auspices of OECD/INES or that there exits a list of indicators to be developed, standardised and analysed during one particular phase of the project on which these three groups are to work. The umbrella should mean more than that, all the stakeholders sharing a common framework which may contain a possible structure of indicators to be developed (a kind of indicators map), scope of activities, time frame, focus of activities in each phase and the place of the phase in the entire perspective, etc. Despite the flexible and in a sense uncontrolled structure of INES, providing that a long-term perspective is shared, all the stakeholders may pursue the same direction. Now that rich experience has been accumulated with INES for more than ten years since its inception, INES is established enough to discuss a long-term strategic perspective.

26. Careful consideration should be given to how to deal with a newly emerging demand for relative and causal analysis of education indicators? Really this is an interesting and even exciting undertaking, because policy-makers and educationists are eager to know what factors affect education and school, and in turn what variables of education contribute to changing the economy and society. While as far as students’ achievement indicators are concerned, this analysis has already been a built-in component of PISA, this new analytical work necessarily involves substantial additional human and financial resources, since doing relative and causal analysis of various factors requires quite a lot of research work that goes beyond mere indicator development and compilation. The second, third and even fourth “PISAs” may need to be organised to meet this demand. There is also the danger of coming up with trivial and common
sense results that are not new or useful to policy-makers after having conducted a large-scale research project. In any case, if INES is to embark upon this work, then it will enter a distinctly new stage of life, conducting a different nature of work and expanding the scope of activities. This is an open question to be carefully discussed among all the people concerned.

27. How to manage a large, jellyfish-like organisation is a really difficult task. In other words, the task of the management of INES is to organise activities of producing education indicators relevant to education policy effectively and efficiently in an integrated manner, while encouraging and appreciating diverse initiatives and contributions of various stakeholders. The issue of management is therefore how to balance two opposite but complementing tendencies, namely convergence and divergence in the organisation. Among many players involved with the management in this phase such as the Steering Group, National Co-ordinators, representatives of the Networks, Education Committee, CERI Governing Board, and of course the OECD Secretariat, etc., the first one is practically functioning as the decision-making body. But perhaps the weakness of this body is that it is not represented by all the Member Countries, though its members are highly knowledgeable and influential people. Sometimes countries may not be quite satisfied with the final decisions made on matters of their concerns by the body where they have no seat. While no concrete proposal for the management of INES cannot be made here, in discussing a new shape of the management structure it could be taken into account how the structure would be like if INES could have a long-term strategy as I have repeatedly suggested.

28. The issue of financing is also a crucial one for the further development of INES. Since the scope of INES and other related activities has been extending, it is a very logical and wise decision that activities other than those of the Technical Group basically be conducted on the principle of cost sharing among participating countries to cover the running costs of the activities as has already been practised in PISA. Perhaps there is no other way to finance ever-expanding INES activities that cannot be funded by the OECD regular budget and voluntary contributions alone. However, as a number of countries suggested in their replies to the questionnaires, it should be emphasised that cost sharing necessarily means assuring transparency and predictability in revenues and costs incurred on INES activities. Perhaps financial reports on INES and its related activities should be disclosed at least once a year. Another issue with regard to financing is that independent financing may tend, as time goes on, to lead to bringing the project to more divergence in its management and substance rather than convergence within an integrated framework. Here again the question returns to the issue of the long-term perspective of the project.

Conclusion - summary of the issues to be discussed

29. There is no doubt about the success of INES, but on the other hand it is also true that activities have been organised within INES, keeping an extremely exquisite balance between the two opposite tendencies toward convergence and divergence, which has necessarily brought instability to INES. Therefore the organisational structure of INES has changed phase after phase to strike this very delicate balance. My principal suggestion in this regard is, as repeatedly mentioned above, that INES should have a long-term strategy or perspective so that all the stakeholders can share the idea of where INES will go and where INES is, which thus helps stabilise the activities and organisational structure of INES. With this major concern kept in mind, presented below are some important issues, which I think are needed to discuss among stakeholders for further development of INES.

- The very first question is whether or not INES needs to have a long-term strategy, which goes beyond one phase. My suggestion is of course “yes”. I wonder if INES can proceed for another ten years or more with the current somewhat ad hoc five-year planning without any clear overall design.
If so, INES should clearly state what its major tasks are. While I have taken up three major tasks, namely “development”, “standardisation” and “analysis” of education indicators, one may add to these “dissemination” and “relative and causal analysis” as separate tasks.

Then INES should determine a sort of a time sequence of focal tasks in the respective phases. I do not think that it is a wise and productive way to always pursue these tasks together with more or less same importance attached to each of them in every phase. Each phase should have its focal tasks. In this connection, of course what is the timeframe of the strategy is an essential issue to discuss.

As far as I remember, at the beginning of INES an attempt was made to work out a conceptual map of education indicators, but it was felt premature to use such a map at the stage where no indicator had been developed yet. An inductive approach was adopted rather than a deductive one in order to meet practical needs to produce education indicators relevant to current education policy. However, now that INES has produced numbers of indicators meeting policy needs, it is time now to have such a map so that one can know the places of individual indicators in the total picture and what indicators are missing. This indicators map will be an indispensable component of the strategy.

In working out a long-term strategy, it is also very important to set criteria for selecting indicators to be developed as “INES indicators”. Otherwise there may be the danger of the scope of indicators expanding unlimitedly. Possible criteria would be i) policy relevance, ii) assurance of standardisation and thus international comparability, and iii) feasibility of regular collection of reliable data. Perhaps as a more practical criterion, development cost may be added.

As far as the management structure and the financial arrangement are concerned, it seems to be unavoidable that INES will tend to become more and more decentralised. One possible way might be to have more PISA type of arrangements, if countries are interested enough in developing certain indicators and can afford to pay for it. On the other hand, the Technical Group may need to be maintained to deal with already standardised and established indicators as well as elaboration work. In any case, once INES has an agreed long-term strategy, the role of a governing body, whatever it looks like, may be to oversee all the players playing within this framework, not to create the framework itself on an ad hoc basis.
PERSPECTIVES FROM ANOTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

Maris O’Rourke
Director of Education
The World Bank

1. Good morning everyone. It is a real pleasure for me to be here as one of the three external evaluators of the OECD Education Indicators Programme (INES) with my esteemed colleagues Dr. Jeanne Griffith and Professor Kuroda.

2. My association with INES has been a long and fruitful one. First, through membership of the OECD’s Education Committee and the CERI governing board as Secretary of Education for New Zealand and now as Director of Education at The World Bank. In both roles a strong partnership with the OECD has proved extremely beneficial.

3. And here I must acknowledge the vision and overall leadership of Mr. Tom Alexander and the excellent professional and technical leadership of Mr. Andreas Schleicher. Without them, many countries would not be as well placed as they are today.

Through INES countries have the capacity to:

- Develop and collect reliable national data on education
- Evaluate and assess performance through indicators
- Produce quality syntheses for policy dialogue and resource allocation discussions
- Compare themselves internationally

4. What do I mean by “well-placed”? I mean countries that have the capacity to develop, create and collect reliable national statistics and a set of useful performance indicators. Why does this matter? Put simply, statistics and indicators are the evidence on which policies are built. They help to identify needs, set goals, and monitor progress. Without good statistics, the development process is blind — policy-makers cannot learn from their mistakes, and the public cannot hold them accountable.
5. Countries can use the information to produce quality syntheses of data to use in their policy dialogues and discussions with Treasury on resource allocation, thereby ensuring a firm foundation to policy advice and decision-making.

6. Further, this advice can be comparative — countries can compare themselves regionally and internationally.

7. Also countries can create efficient evaluation and assessment systems which use, build upon and expand on the internationally agreed to set of indicators. I know many countries, including New Zealand, who have done this.

8. The entire exercise of participating in INES builds national capacity in an effective, efficient and economic way.

Effect of INES has been both:

- Direct (OECD developed countries)
- Indirect - (Developing Countries) (Partners)

9. The effects of INES have been both direct and indirect. The direct effects on OECD Member countries you are probably very familiar with but I will outline them as I see them nonetheless.
10. The model adopted by INES of bringing people from different countries together into networks has meant that, world-wide networks of technical experts emerged. Furthermore, a consensus on what to measure, how to measure and when to measure also emerged.

11. The INES Steering Group, created in 1996, oversees the management and implementation of INES and provides broad policy directions for the OECD’s measurement activities in education and related fields. It replaced PRAG, which replaced SAG, which replaced COG! Interestingly enough the link between policy and practice was probably strongest with the COG because a COG member was on each network and there was a direct relationship. Now there is an information divide and some disconnect which should be addressed.

12. Why do I say that? Direct links between policy and practice are needed because measurement and evaluation is a political as well as a technical exercise e.g. some things are more important, useful and timely to measure than others — this decision is a political one not a technical one. The analogy is giving instructions (the policy-makers) to a legal drafting group (the technicians) on exactly what a law is meant to achieve — they can then make it technically correct.

13. The world-wide network of policy-makers which emerged strengthened the work of the Education Committee and CERI. We all shared knowledge and experience and learned how to use the technically excellent comparative international information well in our national policy dialogues and discussions. From the many follow-on activities undertaken, we also learned how to design and implement appropriate interventions and see ‘what worked’. As a colleague of mine is fond of saying: measuring a pig won’t make it fatter. It is what you do with the information afterwards that counts.
14. There was also a direct effect on partners. I will cite two:

15. The first is the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). The old ISCED was ill adapted to the needs and imposed limitations on international comparisons of education statistics as well as on the analytical use and interpretations of the indicators. Changing this situation was led by the OECD who, with UNESCO and EUROSTAT, introduced a new set of instruments through which data are now jointly collected on key aspects of education (ISCED-97). The contribution of the INES networks to this work was substantial and substantive. There has been improvement in the collection, organisation and quality, as well as a reduction in the time taken to publish statistics and indicators.
16. The second was in 1996 when the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD selected six international development goals from the resolutions of various UN conferences. In 1998, building on that, a joint meeting of the UN, the OECD and The World Bank proposed twenty-one indicators to track progress toward those goals. Each year the World Development Indicators is published by The World Bank showing progress.

17. So that was my benchmark when I joined the World Bank in November 1995. INES was the model and recognised world-wide as having produced the best framework for education indicators and the best quality data available for developed countries. Furthermore, it promoted communications at both policy and scientific levels among the participating countries through training, conferences, publications, networks and formal and informal exchanges (e.g. the Ministers informal roundtables set up by Tom in the 1990’s. Education at a Glance as you all know has been a ‘must-read’ each year since it began. Imagine my dismay to discover this was not the situation for The World Bank’s clients in developing
countries. The only comparative data was from UNESCO collected by questionnaire, with no reliability checks built in and often well out of date.

18. Other data from household surveys, sector work, project preparation and individual systems was available country by country but was a real mixed bag — the wheel had been re-invented many times and in many ways, and useful comparisons could not usually be made. Yet countries wanted to make those comparisons.

19. Globalisation and liberalisation of trade meant that countries needed skilled, educated populations to become productive and competitive. Education had moved to front and centre and into the full glare of the spotlight. For probably the first time, governments (and taxpayers) wanted to know what they were getting for their money and whether the people coming out of the education system would be competitive in the international market place. They also wanted to know how their education system differed from their potential trading partners and competitors. They wanted details. They wanted (needed) the OECD indicators.

20. Concurrent with this was the “Education For All” movement which all countries had signed up to at Jomtien in 1990. Education For All of course meant indicators for all were needed to measure and assess progress.

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**So What Did The World Bank Do?**

- Used OECD/INES as the benchmark
- Supported UNESCO’s mandate to gather and disseminate statistics
- Set up EdStats
- Built regional data bases
- Worked with partners
- Built a ‘ladder’ for developing countries

21. So what did we do in The World Bank?

22. We had set up an Education Network across the Bank with a Sector Board of the six regional sector managers, key other people, and myself as chair. We decided to move forward strategically and on a number of fronts concurrently.

23. A major activity was to support UNESCO in its world-wide mandate to gather and disseminate reliable statistics. Following the recommendations of the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education (BISCSE) report, “World Wide Education Statistics: Enhancing UNESCO’s Role”, we helped set up the new UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) which came into being last year. This has been five years of solid effort by us and a wide range of other partners, notably the Netherlands and the OECD, as a member of the UIS Task Force.
24. We set up EdStats (which I have distributed to you on CD-ROM) so that staff could readily access, use, manipulate and compare all available data (including INES of course) by topic, country, region and so on.

25. Using the INES framework each region is developing regional indicators e.g. the EAP publication “Education Indicators for East Asia and Pacific”.

26. But probably most importantly, we decided as a Sector Board that a priority for us was to improve learning outcomes in developing countries and that an important way forward would be to use OECD/INES as the benchmark—the nirvana to reach. It was obviously too difficult to jump right to there from the UNSECO questionnaire methodology so we decided to build a ‘ladder’ and help countries to the next rung they could cope with.

![The ‘ladder’](image)

27. As I mentioned, closing the distance from filling in the UNESCO questionnaire to participating in OECD’s INES was too much for most of our client countries. So we worked with others to build a ‘ladder’ with a number of more easily reached rungs.

28. First, EFA assessment was required for Dakar 2000 and we supported:

   - a Global Technical Advisory Group (GTAG), with two of our best people, who helped produce 18 basic indicators;
   - regional TAG’s; and
   - the poorest countries’ participation in the EFA assessment exercise.

29. This came together in “Education For All. (Statistical Document and Global Synthesis)” the largest world-wide assessment exercise ever undertaken in education.
30. We also …

The following countries are currently participating in the WEI Project:
- Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay
- China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, India, Sri Lanka
- Russian Federation
- Zimbabwe
- Egypt, Jordan

The following countries plan to join WEI in this year’s data collection:
- Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Peru

31. … worked with UNESCO and OECD to design the World Education Indicator (WEI) where sixteen developing countries did an INES type exercise and produced “Investing in Education: an analysis of the 1999 World Education Indicators (WEI)”.

32. And we …
33. ... worked with the IEA, who had already proposed a repeat of TIMSS to support over 20 countries to participate in that.

34. Also...

35. ... we have a number of countries we are working with to support their participation in the innovative PISA programme.

36. And …
37. … Last but certainly not the least, we have some clients in common who participate in INES as OECD Members and demonstrate that it can be done.

The three C’s

• collaborative
• co-operative
• capacity - building

38. All this is working, and I think, begins to provide a model of a way forward. What I call the three C’s.

39. This is a way of operating which is collaborative across countries, regions and institutions both through cash and in kind activity.

40. It is co-operative through the sharing of technical expertise, knowledge and experience. We are communicating in ways we never did before.

41. And it builds capacity in-country, something desperately needed in many countries both developed, and developing.
42. So what’s the way forward? What should be the next leap for INES. It should be in more than one direction I think.

43. To reach forward, to keep raising the bar and producing increasingly sophisticated exciting and technically excellent ways of measuring and evaluating, e.g. PISA — the Programme for International Student Assessment. OECD Member countries and several WEI countries are now beginning to develop an instrument to compare the quality of outcomes produced by school systems, rather than just the numbers of people processed (educational participation) or internal effectiveness (curriculum based tests). PISA adopts a broad approach to assessment, rather than restricting itself to specific curriculum or subject-matter knowledge and offers an instrument that focuses on the interest of both the public and governments in ensuring that young people have and are able to use the knowledge and skills needed in today’s societies and economies. I think it will have far-reaching effects in driving curriculum reform. Second, to reach across, to work with the other agencies such as UNESCO (especially the UIS) and The World Bank. And finally, to reach back and, to stretch out a helping hand to those coming along behind and actively share your knowledge expertise and experience — while never compromising on quality or technical excellence of course.

44. This is not only the principled thing to do but the sensible economic thing to do.
45. What I see is a blurring between developed and developing countries — it is more like a continuum than a dichotomy, and including developing countries in INES can have many advantages. With globalisation and the liberalisation of trade unexpected economic alliances are being built between countries and across regions. These relationships require solid information in order to thrive and grow, particularly on the levels of education and skills and competencies of the potential labour force in all countries.

46. Then there is information on such things as how to run effective, efficient education systems on very little money; how to deal with economic crises; how to deal with the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged and so on. When I talk about The World Bank work to people in the USA, the first thing they say is “but that is exactly the situation we have in poor inner city areas — how can we deal with that?”.  

47. Finally, there is the inclusion of other knowledge, cultures and ways of doing things. This adds depth to indicators and ensures they are more culturally sensitive especially to indigenous and/or disadvantaged groups.
48. Of course all this requires extra resources both in cash and in kind. Where would it come from? I had a few thoughts.

49. Perhaps developed countries could subsidise the entry of developing countries. As you know overseas development assistance has been decreasing and is at an all time low. Activities of this type could be considered development assistance — and Foreign Affairs departments may be happy to help and or include the figures in their accounts and so improve their international record.

50. Countries could set up twinning or “sister” relationships.

51. In The World Bank, we are including participation in these activities as components in projects wherever we can.

52. You may have other thoughts as to possible ways forward to improve inclusion. All I would urge is that it be thoroughly discussed.

53. Thank you and congratulations again on your leadership and the global impact of INES.