Does Watching Help?
In Search of the Theory of Change for Education Monitoring[1]

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In 2015 Education for All (EFA), concludes its 25-year cycle, and the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) publishes its final assessment of triumph and defeat in reaching the six EFA goals. Before the United Nations adopts new Sustainable Development Goals, it is essential to consider the underlying theories of monitoring. This essay address two basic questions and then reviews the theoretical basis of the "soft power" of monitoring. It first asks: Was there progress toward EFA goals since Jomtien? Yes, as seen from evidence presented in the GMR. Do policy reforms, state-action, and global governance promote this progress? The evidence is less clear. After touching on these questions, the essay discusses how monitoring effects change from the perspective of either neo-realism or constructivism. Both theories offer insights about monitoring, but constructivism provides a clearer view. The implications for capacity building are then discussed.

In 2015 Education for All (EFA), the world's most sustained social movement in education, concludes its 25-year cycle, and the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) publishes its final assessment of triumph and defeat in reaching the six EFA goals. Now international efforts are focused on defining new Sustainable Development Goals, including education as just one of 17 comprehensive goals. But now is also the time to stand back and ask hard questions.

The twin assumptions behind declared goals are, first, that progress is possible and, second, there is some purpose to measuring, comparing, and publicizing progress. The first assumption seems safe, provided governments and international organizations are serious about the goals they endorse. Defending the second assumption, after a critical review, is the aim of this essay. Before the United Nations (UN) adopts a new monitoring framework based on new targets that will replace those of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the EFA movement, and before the UN authorizes a new accounting of progress, it is important to ascertain the effect of monitoring. Doing so would require an empirical effort beyond the scope of this essay. As a first step, however, it is essential to consider the underlying theories of monitoring.

The hope of periodic reports from UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, WHO, or the World Bank is that assessments of change can promote the very changes they try to monitor. It is only a "hope" because these organizations have no enforcement apparatus to hold nations or multilateral organizations to account for neglecting declarations or national ratifications of treaties. Soft power works because of the accepted legitimacy of the apparatus for assessing and reporting on adherence to shared norms. What were the shared norms or treaties monitored by the GMR?

In reality, there were no EFA treaties, and so the monitoring of educational progress differs from reports mandated by international law. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child required periodic reporting on possible violations. Also, when thinking about public health, there is near universal agreement about the need to eliminate disease, reduce infant mortality, and promote longevity. WHO's campaign of Health For All during the 1980s was not controversial, and so could achieve progress without a treaty or legal sanctions. By contrast, EFA never generated the unanimity that is reflected in public health goals, and neither could it coerce nations into compliance since there are no "violations". What EFA did generate was

something few movements have sustained over such a long period: an independent, research-based progress report.

However, even before addressing this article's main questions about how watching and reporting on EFA may advance the very change it documents, there are two issues that should at least be considered. First, was there indeed progress needing to be explained? And, second, does any agency at all *cause* such change, or are policies and declarations themselves the endogenous effects of deeper demographic or economic change?

Was there progress toward EFA goals since Jomtien?
It is a question well worth the volumes of research it provoked. Much of the research has been funded, synthesized and published by the GMR, whose findings are widely available in UN languages since 2002 (the first monitoring report of 2001 was administered by UNESCO, authored by New York Times columnist Edward Fiske, and directed by Abhimanyu Singh, who is discussed further below). The 1990 targets formulated in Jomtien, Thailand were deliberately imprecise, and EFA targets became only slightly more precise ten years later at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. However, it has been possible to document substantial movement toward the six EFA goals, as well as in finance.
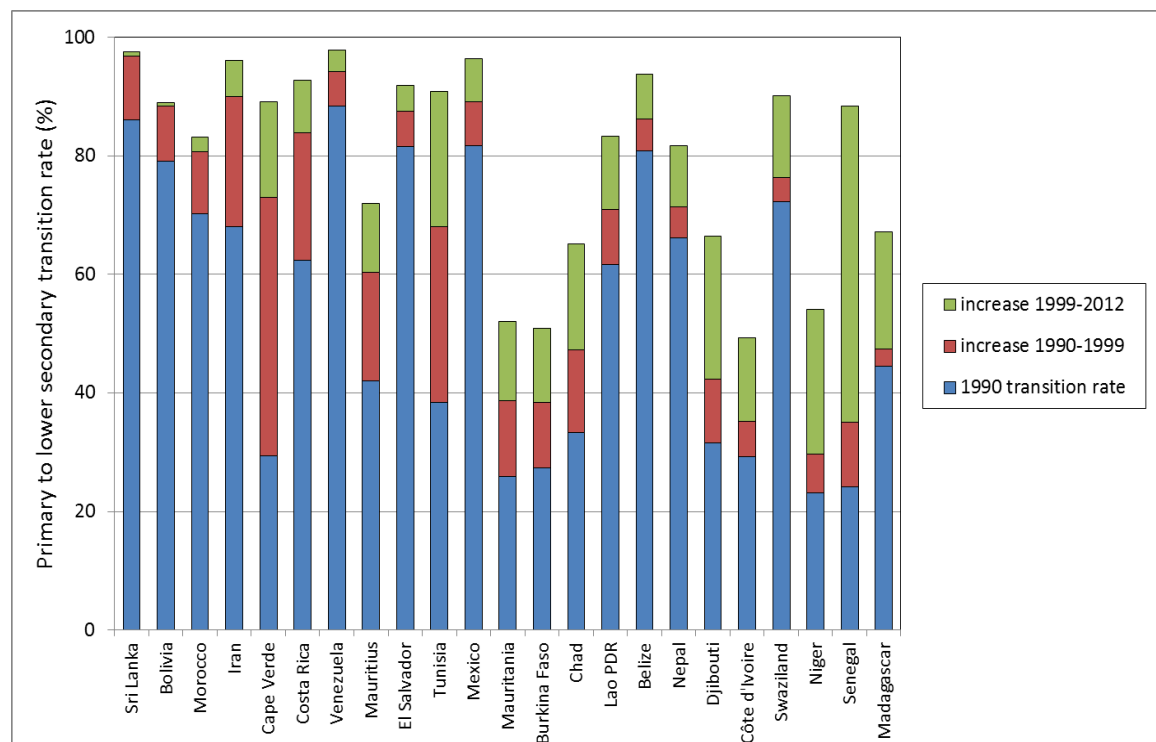

Figure 1. Growth in continuation rates from primary to lower school, 1990 – 2012.

Source: UNESCO Institute For Statistics. Notes: For 1990, 1999, and 2012, the bars indicate the numbers of students in seventh grade as a percentage of children who had studied in sixth grade the previous year. Countries are ordered by the relative size of increase since 2000, compared to increase during the 1990s. For details see the 2015 Global Monitoring Report.

Close reading of the GMR's research (including some that I contributed over the last year) shows there were countries that continued and countries that even accelerated their progress since the inception of EFA, notwithstanding that none of the EFA goals have yet been fully

attained worldwide. Two examples illustrate the extent and difference in national-level change: the first regarding youth access to schooling, and the second indicating equitable progress in adult literacy.

The EFA movement never created a post-primary school target, but the transition rate by primary students to the lower secondary level is a good indicator of the availability of basic education. Figure 1 illustrates the transition rates in 1990 for a range of countries where there was still room for progress. Most countries shown in Figure 1 universalized primary schooling since 1990, and so they might have been expected to decrease their transition rates as the primary denominator expanded. Nonetheless, all the countries we considered in the 2015 GMR showed visible and positive change. So far, so good: there *is* a phenomenon to be explained!

Figure 1 also shows the timing of when change occurred. In countries on the left side of Figure 1, most change happened during the 1990s. Countries on the right side clearly accelerated their provision of lower secondary school in more recent years, after the Dakar Framework for Action, and after progress began to be tracked and publicized by the GMR. In at least one case the EFA itself played a direct role. Senegal – host to the World Education Forum in 2000 – used the Dakar Framework for Action in its rationale for extending free and compulsory education in 2004, and EFA also helped reconcile proponents of state-administered and religious schooling (Villalón and Bodian, 2012).
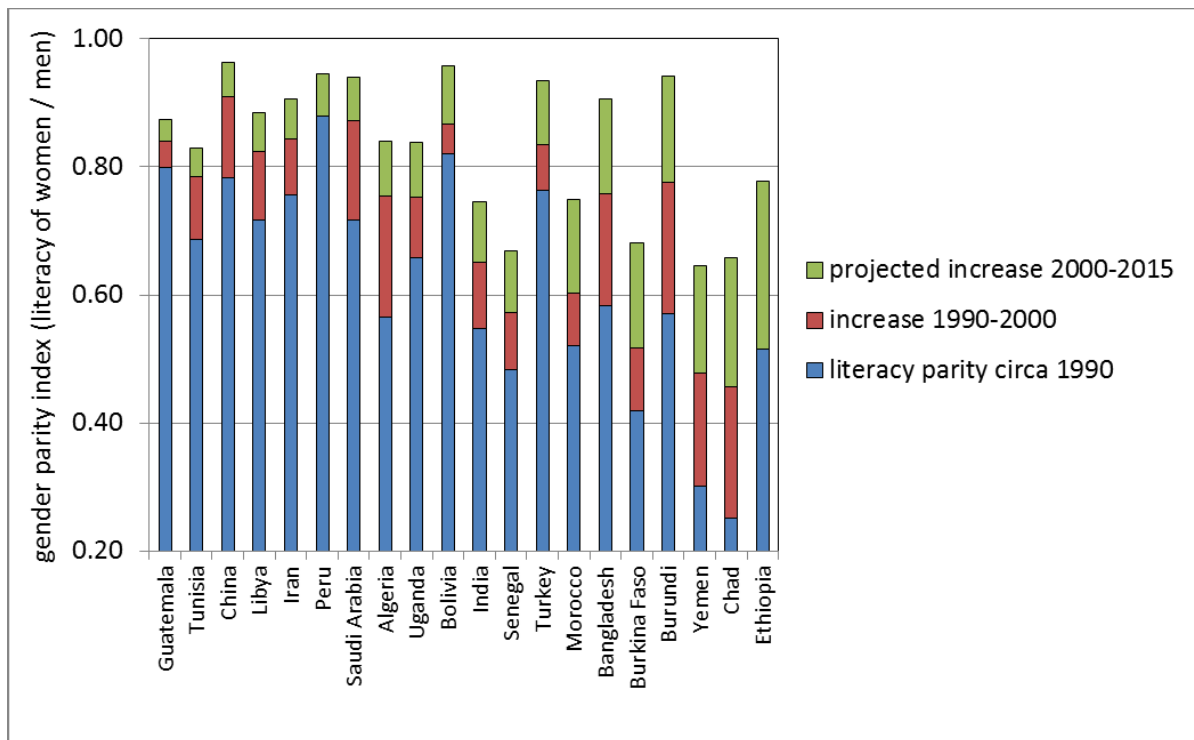

Figure 2. Growth of gender parity in literacy rates, 1990 - 2015

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Note: Countries are ordered by the relative size of increased gender parity since 2000, compared to increase during the 1990s. Literacy rates are self-reported by household members in a national census or household survey; they are not based on direct assessments of literacy. For details see the 2015 Global Monitoring Report.

A different indicator of progress is for equitable adult literacy. The Dakar Framework for Action declared not just that countries should improve literacy, but that special attention should be given to women's literacy because most illiterates were women (at least according to records of national censuses that were then being used to measure literacy as a binary variable). The 2015 GMR reveals that only a handful of the countries with low levels of literacy increased their rates to reach the ambitious targets set in Dakar. Yet women's literacy rates are increasing faster than men's rates, and so rates of women's literacy are moving toward substantial parity with men's literacy rates. Figure 2 shows literacy parity around 1990, around 1999, and the parity statistic estimated for 2015 by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). As in Figure 1, the trends for women's parity are presented in countries where there was information at these three time points and where parity was originally low. There was obvious change and, again, this is good news, mainly for the women living in these countries, but also for education researchers, because there is something to be researched and explained. The left side of Figure 2 shows the countries that made greatest progress during the 1990s. The right side shows the countries where increased parity occurred mainly since Dakar (and since countries' progress began to be monitored).

Do policy reforms, state-action, and global governance promote this progress?
A big assumption lies beneath the specific questions about how monitoring might advance education. For, underlying the specifics, there is a premise that should be clearly stated because it, too, has been questioned and problematized: planned actions by states and their lobbyists – so goes this assumption - drive educational expansion and improvement. While it seems reasonable, the question has been debated over generations of comparative education research (it is a debate avoided, interestingly, by practitioners and advocacy organizations). At issue is whether *any policies at all* expand educational opportunities. Alternatively, education could grow exponentially as a function of urbanization, population, or economic growth, just as paved roads and electric power spread worldwide, even without a global movement of "Electricity for All."

This question of causation concerned the classic social theorists. Dialectical materialism viewed education merely as the by-product of economic structures profiting the ruling class. "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production," Marx famously wrote in *The German Ideology*. Max Weber shared with Marx a view of education as an epiphenomenon, as a side-show. Weber saw schooling as an outgrowth of the new bureaucratic authority's need for "expertise" and, hence, the need to train experts (Collins 1979). Emile Durkheim saw the division of labor as fundamental to education and he saw school curricula as functioning to prepare workers in a diverse economy. The legacy of these classic views assigned education only a supporting role in a script starring other leading actors.

But that script came under a new, bold direction when human capital and modernization theorists began to steer UN actions during the 1960s. Together they took for granted that education can be a force for change and that education was not merely an economic by-product and it did not play merely a supporting role. Education advocates became important protagonists.

This protagonism reached its height during the 1960-1970 UN "Development Decade," when member states and the UN Secretary General were urged by the UN General Assembly (1961) to promote education in order to promote economic development. The Secretary General was requested to take "measures to accelerate the elimination of illiteracy, hunger, and disease." The General Assembly also called for new measures "for further promoting education in general and vocational and technical training in the developing countries." These and other measures

(including land reform) were to lead to the 5% annual growth rate target of the Development Decade Resolution.

The optimistic assumptions by manpower planners, human capital theorists, and modernization theorists were problematized in the 1970s. Material prosperity did not materialize everywhere. Also, by then it became clear that education was expanding rapidly, often without any planning at all but as a consequence of increased social demand from the public. There were known historical cases – Japan following the Meiji Restoration, according to Ronald Dore (1976) - where state action preceded educational growth. But there were many other cases where legislation to universalize free schooling (as in the 1944 Education Act for England and Wales) *followed* a period of expansion, and came after most children already were attending school. The Act was less the driver than the manifestation of broad social change and political movement.

In the field of comparative education, this argument found new expression though contributions by John Meyer and his students. Meyer (1971) published his first analysis in the *Comparative Education Review* showing that the expansion of education was autonomous from particular policies or intentions. A more sweeping finding, published later with his collaborators was that "education has expanded everywhere as a function of the available population to be educated and of the level of education existing in 1950. Education everywhere expanded independent of the constraints and stimuli that economic, political, and social structures provided in previous times" (Meyer et al. 1977, p. 255).

One possibility is that there was an emerging global consensus by publics and governments about the value of schooling. This notion led eventually to a theory of a "world culture" with shared values about the equal individual worth of potential citizens (Boli and Thomas, 1999). That interpretation has never been fully accepted by critics, who are skeptical of the rise of universal values about education and who see profound cultural and political differences worldwide. Critics also note that, if we zoom in to the national level, state actions and local politics clearly can shape the construction of education (Fuller and Rubinson 1992; Anderson-Levitt 2003; Carney et al. 2012). And yet, general exponential growth is undeniable if we zoom out to view evidence over long historical periods. In all regions, and with only a few exceptions, education has expanded – for girls, for minorities, and for the poor - regardless of differences in particular government policies.

This expansion underscores a need for some humility when assessing the impact of EFA or its monitoring. The pattern of long-term exponential growth is especially challenging for researchers who wish to interpret acceleration at any particular moment as an effect of historical events (perhaps a "Jomtien effect" or a "Dakar effect"). If education is indeed expanding exponentially, then asking whether change accelerated after any particular year will usually lead to an affirmative finding. That is, after accounting for ceiling effects,[2] it usually appears that progress quickened in the years following any presumptive event, whether it is the fall of the Berlin Wall, the terrorist attacks of 2001, or the World Forums in Jomtien and Dakar. As seen in Figures 1 and 2, some countries made greater progress during the 1990s in terms of secondary school transition rates or women's parity in literacy. Some countries made more progress after 2000, but all countries made progress relative to their situations around 1990.

Clues for a theory of change
So, there has been demonstrated progress toward EFA goals, and there has been regular public accounting about this change. If watching helps promote progress, then how might that work? One possibility is that the apparent causality is reversed: only countries already subscribing to EFA goals and already able to improve education would agree to join a movement where they must share information about themselves. In this sense, treaty conventions or informal

declarations like the EFA merely affirm the coincidence of existing values among the parties to an agreement. However, this possibility cannot explain change when virtually every country joins in a world declaration (as with EFA) or ratifies a treaty convention almost universally (as with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)).

There is more research on change due to human rights accords than about education declarations. In the 1990s, rights theorists began to understand that treaties and declarations did not merely reflect interests of their signatories, but also socialized them through changing the discourse and the framing of problems. One way this could happen is by redefining what issues are considered "problems." As Burstein (1991, p. 346) wrote about the United States, policy domains, as social constructions, are created through interactions among organizations. This means that policies can be changed partly by problem recognition and agenda setting, and this is likely not only inside countries but also on a global scale.

Outside the U.S., global norms and expectations for countries (whether concerning human rights, the environment, copyright protection, or education) are expressed through treaty conventions within the United Nations legal system. In at least some cases, there is evidence that they can help protect rights of citizens in signatory countries (for a review, see Hafer-Burton 2012). Boyle and Kim (2009) showed that a nation's ratification of child and human rights treaties indirectly affected children's well-being by empowering civil society organizations. Byun et al. (2014) further showed that the timing of ratification of a child labor treaty was related to the degree of the disadvantage suffered by working children in their academic proficiency.

One example of how international agreements affect education can be seen from Mexico's ratification of the CRC. Indirectly, the CRC changed the politics of education and child labor advocacy by recognizing children's activities outside of schools as problematic. The Convention imposed a mandatory requirement of reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This reporting then fueled the advocacy by several agents, as well as the Mexican government (Post and Sakurai, 2001). There was a competition among child advocates over the terms of debate and the ideals to be invoked for defending children. The competitive relationships between political coalitions, NGOs, and the Mexican State created a public bidding to promote children's rights and welfare. Competition over the terms of debate and evidence took place before international governing authorities, including UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (see Figure 3). The process led to much greater publicity of child labor as a problem as NGOs and political opposition groups proposed solutions to address child labor. These solutions involved more inclusive and more relevant schools.

There is nothing unique about Mexico's competitive mobilization by different actors who, each for their own reasons, problematized child labor and sought improved education. Based on their analysis of human rights campaigns, Rise and Sikkink (1999) found that

> socialization processes start when actors adapt their behavior in accordance with the norm for initially instrumental reasons. Governments want to remain in power, while domestic NGOs seek the most effective means to rally the opposition. The more they 'talk the talk,' however, the more they entangle themselves in a moral discourse which they cannot escape in the long run. (p. 16)

In recent years, political scientists have shown that a human rights regime – once acceded to by governments – begins a spiral of activity leading to public awareness and demands.

The puzzle remains of why any country would cede its domestic sovereignty. As Simmons (2009) asked: "Why should a sovereign government explicitly agree to subject its domestic rights practices to the standards and, increasingly, the scrutiny of the rest of the world?" (p. 59).
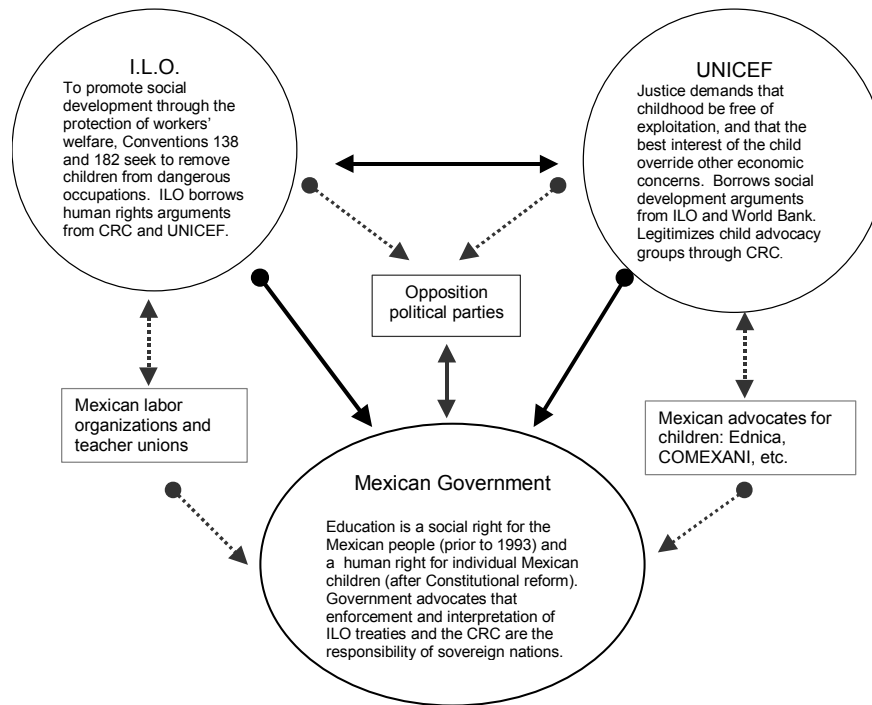
Figure 3. International Agencies and Domestic Political Actors in Mexico in 1990s

Source: Post and Sakurai (2001)

Perhaps one answer is that such "agreements" are illusory. Political scientists in a Neo-Realist tradition argue that states never *voluntarily* concede sovereignty over domestic affairs, and suppose that any change brought about from international pressure must result from incentives, the threat of force (enforcement), or coercion. Risse and his colleagues (2013) have usefully summarized the mechanisms, modes, and underlying logic of change that has been theorized in the human rights literature (see Table 1).

Table 1. Possible effects of human rights regimes

Mechanisms	Modes of social interaction	Underlying logic of action
Coercion	Use of force, Legal enforcement	Hierarchical authority
Incentives	Sanctions, Rewards	Logic of consequences
Persuasion	Arguing, Naming/shaming, Discursive power	Logic of arguing and/or logic of appropriateness
Capacity-building	Institution-building, education, training	Creating the preconditions for logics of consequences or appropriateness

Source: Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, 2013, p. 16

Neo-realists thus focus on the coercion and incentives for nation-states under an international legal order or alliance of power. By contrast, constructivists emphasize the persuasive and capacity-building potential of global agreements. Capacity-building is crucial for weak states

with limited abilities to implement agreements, even when their leaders intend to do so at the time of joining a movement such as EFA. Which of these interpretations makes best sense of the function of monitoring and publicizing of information about progress in education?

Neo-realism
As a first answer to this question, it seems that neo-realist perspectives on power can elucidate some elements of the EFA movement. Countries may not have entered voluntarily into the declaration but, instead, could have been pushed by non-state actors (Chabbott, 1998; Chabbott, 2003; Mundy & Murphy, 2001). Countries may also have been incentivized by the promise of greater financial assistance from donors. In either case, a neo-realist interpretation could help to explain the importance of monitoring and the publication of information. Access to information plays a key role in enforcement of legal treaties. Information about educational inequality can give national interest groups the tools to mount a successful legal challenge to governments.[3] Another type of enforcement could be through economic disincentives for ignoring an apparent global consensus. During the 1980s, as economic recession created dependency on international donors and lenders, aid began to be conditional on countries adjusting their spending and prioritizing certain education reforms (Samoff 1994; Klees et al., 2012). What might appear, on the surface, as an expression of a "world culture" in support of education has been interpreted as sometimes the result of domination (Carney et al. 2012).

Closely related to the coercive power of disincentives was the promise of incentives to ensure progress, a feature also sensible from a neo-realist perspective. The Dakar Framework for Action famously affirmed that "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources," and it promised new international assistance for countries that commit to reaching the ambitious EFA goals. Monitoring progress was suggestively linked – though never explicitly – to financial support from international partners.   Although finance is not the focus of this essay, something ought to be said about the success of the envisioned feedback loop between monitoring and financial support. The story is brief, unfortunately. Economists at the beginning of the EFA movement had tried to estimate the costs and international aid needed to universalize primary school (Haddad 1990; Colclough and Lewin, 1993). But, even before the creation of the Global Monitoring Report, no evidence could be found of any substantial effect of EFA on increased donations during the 1990s (Bennell and Furlong, 1998).   The summative 2015 GMR assessment of finance shows that donor responses to the Dakar Framework were anemic at best. The EFA coordination architecture did not match country efforts with international support to achieve goals. Could there be a feed-back loop specifically from monitoring to donor activity?   Gaps in financing are reported regularly by the GMR. But there appears to be no impact of this information or about country progress on the availability of additional funding. Donors and governments responded more to national mobilization than to global assessments of progress. It is unlikely that monitoring promoted education for all by its linkage to funding, and thus the neo-realist interpretation of information-gathering and dissemination appears doubtful.

Constructivism
A constructivist perspective probably offers an even stronger argument and explanation for monitoring than does neo-realism. Except in the most extreme and exceptional cases, human rights treaties (and, possibly, non-binding declarations like EFA) effect policy change through persuasion and capacity building, not the sanctions and incentives hypothesized by neo-realism. Global movements like EFA work by publicizing information, which can affect ideas and strategic calculations of publics. That international human rights regimes diffuse information is an assumption of research on how such regimes effect improvement. In the words of Hafer-Burton (2012), "for regimes to socialize or persuade people into upholding human rights, they must convey some new information that changes people's beliefs about the value and appropriateness of their actions.…" (p. 283).

The regulatory influence of published indicators is not mainly exercised directly by the organization promulgating the information. As Davis et al. (2012) have shown, in many cases "indicators have regulatory effects primarily because they have been embraced as guides to appropriate conduct by actors within the state shaping national governmental decisions on national governance" (p. 16). The prestige that accompanies positive evaluations can incentivize countries to seek to upgrade their world status by responding to domestic as well as international pressures (World Bank, 2015, p. 44).

One inspiration for information gathering and publicity - in children's rights, world health, labor conditions, or corruption - comes from reports by civil society organizations. These include, for example, Anti-Slavery International (founded 1839) and Amnesty International (1961), both of which directly opposed governments' violations of human rights. However, there was another more immediate inspiration for monitoring EFA goals. As a social movement, the EFA comprised governments which publically - albeit informally - agreed to goals for their own national progress. EFA monitoring thus does not openly oppose governments but, instead, publicizes their progress toward or retrogression from their own declared goals. In this sense, monitoring in education owes a debt to Helsinki Watch, which was established to monitor the Soviet Union's compliance to the Helsinki Accords.[4] After Helsinki Watch was established in 1978, there were other Watches created for the Americas (1981), Asia (1988), Africa (1989) and the Middle East (1990). The independent Watch groups were eventually merged to create the present day Human Rights Watch (Neier, 2012). The reports of these Watch groups serve as a template for the monitoring of education progress.

The success of Helsinki Watch and its offspring, at the end of the Cold War, helped to inspire the EFA movement to adopt a human rights approach while downplaying the early development decade expectations and agenda. One consequence was that research into the benefits of education appeared less urgent than it had been during the Development Decade. A renewed focus on sustainable development after 2015 may re-energize investigation of the social and economic consequences of different forms of education for youth and adults. It may also connect education monitoring with other "Watches" that have continued to take a developmentalist view of social progress, including the NGO-led *Social Watch* and the UNDP's own *Human Development Report*, both of which followed less in the human rights tradition of Helsinki Watch than in the tradition of the World Bank's *World Development Report*, which began in 1978. Details on the early Development Reports are found in Yusuf et al. (2009).

Rights reports effect change by speaking directly to citizens, not governments, since governments already possess information about their own rights violations (or their failure to make educational progress). Simmons (2009) argues that:

> Nobody cares more about human rights than the citizens potentially empowered by [rights] treaties. No external – or even transnational – actor has as much incentive to hold a government to its commitments as do important groups of its own citizens. Citizens mobilize strategically. But these strategic calculations are influenced by what they value (or come to value) as well as the probability of succeeding in realizing these values. An international treaty regime has the potential to influence both the ideational and strategic components of mobilization's expected value. (p. 154)

From a constructivist theoretical interpretation, information works because states are not the only or even the main agents of educational change. NGOs and transnational social movements – of which the EFA is a prime exemplar – are equally as important even though they lack financial resources or coercive power. The UN has legitimated the GMR's delivery of information because the UN has "generative powers" (Barnett and Finnemore, 2009). It is able

"to constitute or construct new actors in world politics, create new interests for actors, and define shared international tasks." Monitoring progress or a lack of progress helps to define while focusing attention on these shared tasks. However, as Hafer-Burton (2012) concedes, "we know surprisingly little about what information international human rights regimes actually convey and to which audiences, or how it affects individual decision making on human rights" (p. 283).

The experience of EFA can help us to address the larger question raised by Hafer-Burton of how information effects change. In the case of EFA, new non-state actors have used concessions to human rights declarations to influence domestic politics. In what is still the most important single study of the Jomtien forum, Colette Chabbott (1998; cf. Chabbott, 2003) showed that "international development professionals… used the Declaration of Universal Human Rights and other existing declarations as a basis for drafting a declaration and plan of actions couched in terms of human rights so often repeated that no nation-state could resist the invitation to accept by acclamation" (p. 9). Chabbott's analysis of the role played by development professional at Jomtien was amplified in a study by Mundy and Murphy (2001) of advocacy at the Dakar World Education Forum. The umbrella organization of the Global Campaign for Education pushed the framers of the EFA movement to accept free (not just affordable) education as a central goal.

How might governments alter their support of education as a consequence of a watch by national or international agencies that then publicize these countries' records? On the positive side, political parties, civil society organizations, and NGOs can use information publicized by a legitimated, non-partisan, international source as a tool to lobby for change. However, there also could be negative consequences of negative publicity. Twenty-five years ago, when information was far less available about progress and failures (e.g. about reaching universal primary coverage or gender equity), government leaders were more willing to join the club by supporting social movements, responding to peer pressure and exhortations to do the right thing. Signing a declaration, or even a treaty convention, was costless for repressive or negligent governments when there was no way to verify compliance.

Today, by contrast, could successful monitoring lead to reluctance by some governments to embrace universal, common targets, including universal targets in education? A current debate within the United Nations system is over the universality versus nationally-specific targets that ought to be included in Sustainable Development goals (including targets advocated by UNESCO). Some governments appear more hesitant than in 1990 to embrace universal goals that later become mandates for "naming and shaming." This shows the power of information gathering and the near instantaneous publication of information in the internet age. Ministries realize today more than in 2000, and certainly more than in 1990, what it means to be "monitored." One of the participants in Dakar Forum was Cream Wright, who subsequently became chief of education at UNICEF. In a recent commentary, Wright (2014) urged greater ownership of the EFA movement by countries. "It is time for countries to own EFA. Countries should not have to embrace … goals and targets that are unrealistic…. A country should adopt goals that are within its reach and for which it can exercise full agency."

Capacity Building?
The need for local ownership of a global movement underscores the fourth theoretical channel whereby Risse et al. (2013) hypothesize that rights regimes effect change: through building a capacity for nations to monitor themselves. In fact this was an implicit aim of the EFA movement. In Jomtien, countries pledged that "each country, in determining its own intermediate goals and targets… will, in the process, establish a time table to harmonize and schedule specific activities…." Jomtien envisioned a shared responsibility whereby

"governments, organizations and development agencies [will] evaluate achievements and undertake comprehensive policy review at regional and global levels."

This was made no more precise in the Dakar Framework for Action (DFA) which, although it referred often to "monitoring," never specified exactly the entities to do this at different levels. Nor did the DFA spell out the consequences of failure to provide information for monitoring, nor offer incentives for cooperation in monitoring. To the contrary, the DFA stated that "the heart of EFA activity lies at the country level. National EFA Forums will be strengthened or established to support the achievement of EFA. All relevant ministries and national civil society organizations will be systematically represented in these Forums" (paragraph 17). The DFA also affirmed (paragraph 18) that:

> Systematic involvement of, and co-ordination with, all relevant civil society and other regional and subregional organizations are essential. These Regional and Subregional EFA Forums will be linked organically with, and be accountable to, National EFA Forums. Their functions will be: co-ordination with all relevant networks; setting and monitoring regional/subregional targets; advocacy; policy dialogue; the promotion of partnerships and technical co-operation; the sharing of best practices and lessons learned; monitoring and reporting for accountability; and promoting resource mobilization.

National and regional ownership of EFA and coordination by stakeholders was important to Abhimanyu Singh, who helped plan the World Education Forum in Dakar after serving as the national EFA coordinator for India. He not only chaired the global drafting committee of the Dakar Framework for Action, but he also was the director of the first post-Dakar monitoring report. In that 2001 UNESCO report, EFA activity at the national level, through partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), was considered of paramount importance (p. 11). The report also identified the establishment of national EFA forums and their quality as a major indicator of progress, finding with concern that 48 out of the 66 countries responding to a survey had no capacity for data collection or monitoring (p. 24). Singh (2014) has recently looked back with disappointment on the failure to develop national capacities for monitoring, commenting that "the expectation that the GMR would stimulate preparation of annual monitoring reports to assess EFA progress within countries and regions has not yet materialized."

To build a capacity to achieve change may be unrealistic for a report that is not even translated fully into all UN languages. Connecting with publics and building national capabilities remains an opportunity for future monitoring. Electronic dissemination of messages (at least in English) can help with this. According to an independent external review of the GMR in 2014 by UNESCO, there was an average of more than 13,000 Facebook page visits every week to the GMR page, and a total of 125,000 unique views of its online blog columns. Perhaps because of language barriers, this circulation (as with the printed reports) is better among readers based in NGOs, academic institutions, governments, and development agencies. A survey of 384 users of the GMR reported it provided far less information for public opinion generally, beyond education professionals. From a constructivist theoretical perspective, there do seem to be further opportunities to promote capacity by greater engagement beyond the existing NGOs and CSOs and development organizations. However, to begin to promote this would require decentr alizing the means to analyze information. The GMR has recently begun to do this with an interface for household survey data sets, though still only in English.

Aside from technical and language-related barriers to capacity-building, there is another theoretical obstacle that should be considered in order to advance further. As the EFA movement became more like a hierarchical organization – both globally and within countries – it achieved greater efficiency. But grass-roots participation – essential for a national-level

interest in monitoring – may be left behind, especially in countries such as Ghana where there are relatively few users of English in everyday life even though the main EFA coalition used English in its relations with international partners. A survey of education stakeholders in Ghana found The Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC), while visible internationally and in the Global Partnership for Education, was "woefully unnoticed" outside the capital. Strutt and Kepe (2010) found that the EFA movement had effectively delegated policy goals formulated at the global level to a CSO without deep roots in local communities. Echoing the comments by Cream Wright, their critique urged greater ownership of the international agenda. However, they also observed provocatively that "there has been no willingness on the part of donors, international organizations, and INGOs to relinquish, or at least share, their decision-making power. As such, the greatest potential of what development processes could harness, local participation and ownership, has been sacrificed…." (p. 274).

Conclusion: Shaman or Meteorologist?
Only recently did anyone attempt to watch education in hopes of improving it in the countries being watched. But many readers of CICE know that international comparisons began after the French Enlightenment. The first systematic catalogue of education policies, processes, and results grew from the faith that learning would liberate humanity from ignorance, poverty, and despotism. M.A. Jullien catalogued the educational practices of Swiss cantons (counties) by collecting responses from detailed questionnaires to school administrators. Jullien's purpose was not to change education elsewhere but to discern general principles that could be used to improve schools in France. Following Jullien, Victor Cousins brought his observations of Prussia to France, again with the idea of improving French policies. Americans like Horace Mann and Mann Butler toured Europe to bring new ideas to their state systems of education (in Massachusetts and Kentucky). They would have been puzzled by the notion that their research should be used to effect change in the schools in Prussia or Switzerland.

The language we now use to research and disseminate knowledge about the Education for All movement differs from the project of recent comparative education research. To "monitor" health cross-nationally, or to monitor the world's economic growth, poverty, inequality, or monitor the world's progress toward shared education goals, means more than merely to "follow," to "observe," or to "track" change over time.[5] Rather, the intention and connotation in English is to audit nation states and civil societies, to judge them, and to hold them to account, using an analogy with fiscal accounting.

One early working title for the 2015 Global Monitoring Report was "What have *we* achieved?"(emphasis added). Fortunately, this was soon dropped. People with the job of monitoring trends have no divine power to change which way the wind blows. Then again, watching is not without effect. If successful, it highlights some ideas (while obscuring others) and changes the way that ordinary people talk about education.

In this essay, I have tried only to address the basic theoretical questions about the processes wherein research and reporting by monitors – be they linked to EFA or to other goals – could effect change at the national level. Hopefully, after further reflection, we will generate empirical questions that can be investigated in the coming years. We still know little about when and why monitoring reports enter the political discourse and become used in legislation. Where are they taken up by national institutions, by teacher organizations, by religious leaders? How do NGOs use the monitoring reports produced by the GMR and by other agencies? These questions can be addressed through documentary sources and careful case studies of policy change, supplemented by interviews. After 25 years of EFA, and after 14 years of tracking global change, it is time to track the tracking and to assess its agenda-setting and capacity-building impact.

Notes:

[1] The opinions expressed in this essay are those of the author, but are not necessarily the views of UNESCO or the EFA Global Monitoring Report. I am grateful for useful suggestions by the CICE editors and from Mark Ginsburg, Nihan Blanchy Koseleci, Sobhi Tawil, Stephen Carney, Asma Zubairi, Colette Chabbott, Paula Razquín, Yoko Mochizuki, and Riho Sakurai.

[2] A "ceiling effect" refers to the slowing growth of any demographic change as the population nears 100% saturation. It is more difficult and takes longer to cut illiteracy rates by half if a country starts at a 95% literacy rate than if its starting point is a 50% rate of literacy.

[3] For example, readers of CICE will be interested to know that a 2005 collaboration by researchers (many of them then students at Columbia Teachers College, Loyola of Chicago, and Penn State) submitted an Amicus Curiae legal brief to the Inter-American Human Rights Court to support the case of two girls in the Dominican Republic who were of Haitian origin and who had been denied a right to education (Yean & Bosico v. Dominican Republic, Case No. 12.189). In the short term, the lawsuit led to a ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights requiring the Dominican government to reform public policy to address historic discrimination in its birth registration and education systems. However, in the longer term since 2005 there have been political and legal reverses for this progress, and citizenship is still in limbo for many Haitian-Dominican children. Even legally binding agreements to abide by international law do not necessarily change state actions.

[4] The Helsinki Accords were part of the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation (held in Helsinki) in 1975 between the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union and European countries. These accords permitted independent monitoring of rights in the signatory states.

[5] The terms for "monitor" in Spanish- and French-versions of the GM – *seguir* and *suivre* – are closer to those non-judgmental meanings.

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