



Mona Foundation Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:

A field-generated view of measuring sustained change

INTRODUCTION

When 164 countries agreed to the Education for All Framework in the year 2000, only 84 percent of school age children were enrolled in school.ⁱ Fifteen years later, school enrolment had risen to 93 percentⁱⁱ – with more children enrolled in school than at any other time in human history. This rise in school enrolment was achieved due to the concerted efforts of government, civil society, and donors working diligently toward a shared goal.

While the high rate of enrollment is to be celebrated evidence suggests it masks challenges. When the data is analyzed by region, socio-economic status, and gender it reveals wide variation among groups. Children from poor families, rural areas, marginalized groups, and girls still face significant barriers to getting an education. In addition, research shows that 100 million children do not complete their primary education due to high dropout ratesⁱⁱⁱ. Findings from the research also show that many children are not learning.^{iv}

The 2018 World Development Report by the World Bank presents data showing that 80 percent of children in Malawi and Ghana could not read simple words by the end of 2nd grade. In rural India, only half of the 5th grade students could read a 2nd grade paragraph^v. This means that the benefits of education that are widely documented and acknowledged (employability, increased income, improved health) are still out of reach for too many children. Increasing access to schooling is not enough. We need to focus on making sure that children are learning.

The challenge lies in the *how*.

The Brookings Institute's report, *Millions Learning Scaling Up Educations in Developing Countries* explored the elements that support scaling up of quality learning. One of the insights highlighted in the report is that *“successful scaling of quality learning often happens when new approaches and ideas are allowed to develop and grow at the margins and then spread to reach more children^{vi}.”* Yet, few organizations focus on investing in the development of the quality education ideas and approaches.

Over the last nineteen years, Mona Foundation has been doing just that.

Since 1999, Mona Foundation has awarded over \$12 million in grants to support 38 education initiatives in 18 countries, supporting the education of 258,000 students, teachers and parents annually. Through long-term partnership, grounded in respect for their knowledge and their work, Mona Foundation's long-term investment has supported these organizations to develop and refine their own models and expand their programming in response to the needs of the children and youth they serve.

Site visits and data from these organizations show evidence that students are learning. In order to share their approaches and tell the story of their impact authentically, Mona Foundation set out to develop a framework and metrics to systematically document the results achieved by their partners. Using quantitative data and stories would allow Mona Foundation to powerfully share how grassroots organizations are providing quality education to children in their communities, and how as a result individual lives and communities are changed for the better.

BACKGROUND

In January 2016, Mona Foundation received a grant from the Glaser Progress Foundation to support a process for defining Mona Foundation's theory of change and lay the groundwork for developing a framework to document impact. That goal was accomplished with Mona Foundation developing a theory of change, partnership framework, and strategic goals.

In June 2017, the Glaser Progress Foundation awarded Mona Foundation a grant to identify the metrics and process for documenting change. A committee, made up of several external representatives with expertise in education and evaluation and two Mona Foundation staff provided guidance and feedback on the process.

PROCESS

The process of developing a framework and metrics was informed by the same principles that guide Mona Foundation's approach to partnership with grassroots organizations. Mona Foundation is guided by a belief that:

- Individuals and communities have the capacity, the right, and the responsibility to fully participate and lead in the process of social and economic development of their communities.
- Social and economic development is a process that requires long term and deep partnerships with grassroots organizations.
- Without building capacity at the grassroots level, any model of development is not sustainable.

In recognition of the knowledge and experience in communities, Mona Foundation did not suggest or impose metrics on its partners. Mona Foundation's approach was to engage the partners and use their knowledge and information to inform the development of a framework and metrics. Mona Foundation brought the partners into the process through a well-designed process which:

- Provided an overview of Mona Foundation's objectives in monitoring and learning
- Invited each organization to participate in the monitoring and learning process by responding to a survey reflecting on the components of their monitoring system and indicators

Reviewed mid-year reports and proposals to identify the elements of their program frameworks and capture the indicators reported in the narrative reports.

PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

Based on the review of the reports and analysis of the survey, the information gathered was used to develop an overall framework. The core of the framework is grounded in partners' shared philosophy of education – an ongoing process to develop the three capabilities of human reality, namely:

- The mind, or the rational faculty, the capacity to learn, think, explore, innovate, and discover
- The soul, or the capacity to create subjective beauty as in music or fine arts
- The spirit, or the altruistic capacity to love, care, serve and search for meaning beyond the obvious

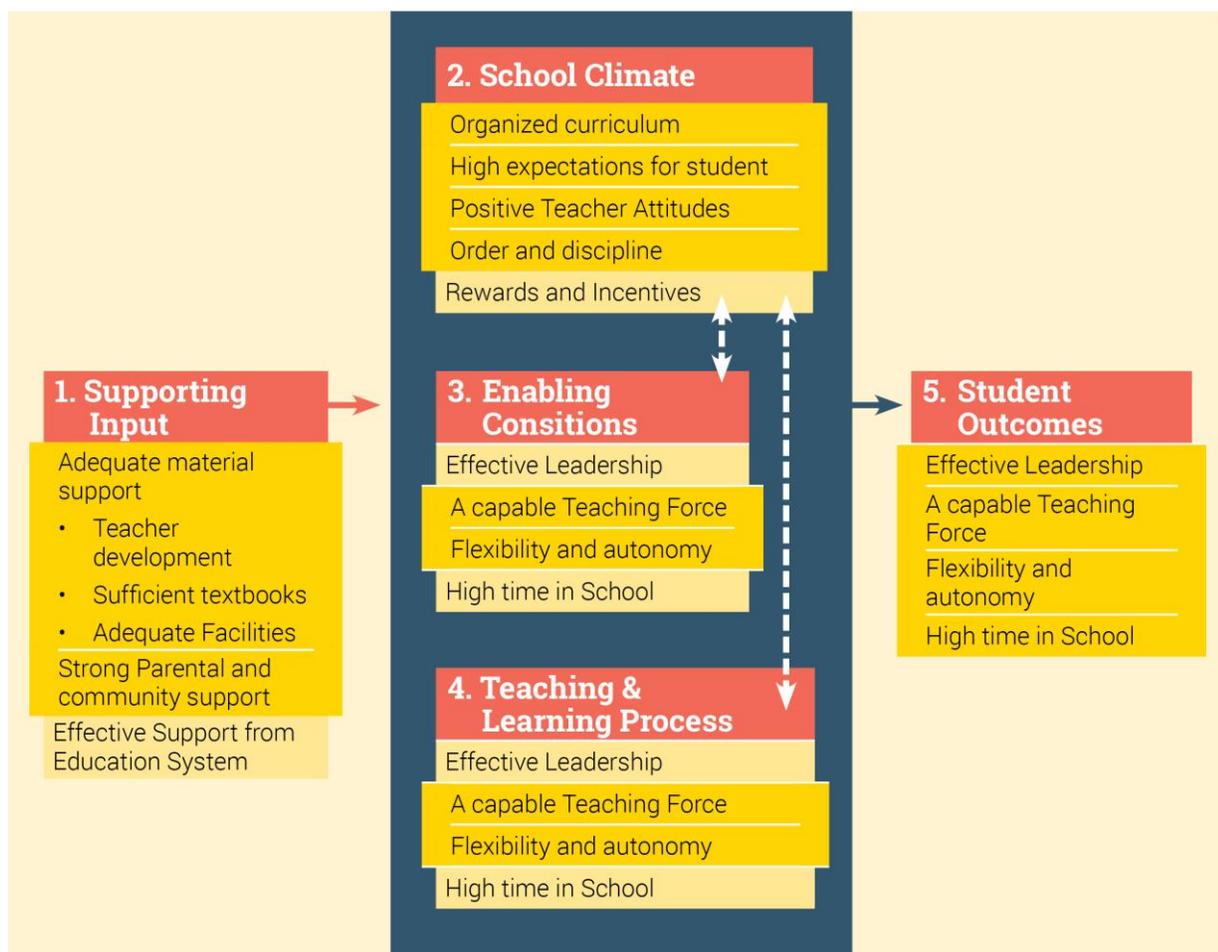
The framework, reflecting the world of Mona Foundation's partners, focuses on three areas:

1. **Improve access to a quality education:** Partners address this goal with different strategies, which largely fall into three categories:
 - Invest in the inputs of schooling, such as infrastructure and school supplies
 - Reduce barriers to education, this might include scholarships, campaigns to reduce early marriage, providing students with food, housing, or transportation

- Increase caregiver and community engagement in education
- 2. Support teaching and learning:** In support of learning the Mona Foundation partners:
 - Invest in teacher training
 - Invest in development of curriculum and learning materials
 - Support students to learn
 - Support students to transition to a higher level of learning or to work
 - 3. Facilitate student transformation:** A differentiating aspect of their program is the integration of programs that:
 - Build up character development and life skills
 - Nurture commitment to community service and altruism
 - Provide enrichment activities

The framework reflects the work of the grassroots organizations, not Mona Foundation’s design. What is exciting is that these core components of programming align to the elements that define education quality, as defined by the World Bank, in the report, *Education Quality, Defining What’s Important*,^{vii}. **The areas highlighted in the Diagram 1 below illustrate the areas of focus for Mona Foundation partners.**

Diagram 1: Elements of a Quality Education, World Bank report, “Educational Quality: Defining What’s Important”



INDICATORS

The development of a framework provides a comprehensive picture of the components that come together to create change. Based on a review of the data from the partners, both using the reports and the survey, Mona Foundation will use a core set of seven indicators as suggested by our partner projects to track change among partners. The indicators, summarized in Table 1 below, are specific to partners focused on primary and secondary education.

Table 1: Indicators as identified by partner projects in the field

	FRAMEWORK	RESULT	INDICATOR	LEVEL
PROGRAM OUTCOMES	 Improving Access to Education	A quality learning environment to support teaching and learning	Improved infrastructure and sufficient supplies (qualitative)	Outcome
		More students with access to education or vocational training	Increase in number of students who enroll in school (quantitative)	Outcome
		More parents and community members are engaged and supportive	Increase in number of caregivers and community members who support the school (quantitative)	Outcome
STUDENT OUTCOMES	 Improving Teaching and Learning	Teachers have improved skills and knowledge	Increase in teacher skills and knowledge	Outcome
		More students achieve passing grade on national exams	Increase in number of children or youth who achieve passing grade in national exam (quantitative)	Outcome
		More students transition to next level of education or work	Increase in number of children or youth who transition to next level of education or into work (quantitative)	Outcome
SOCIETAL OUTCOMES	 Transformation	Improvement in character development and life skills	Most significant change story (qualitative)	Outcome

The indicators align to the three program areas:

- Improve Access to Education:** The Mona Foundation partners use a variety of metrics to track improvements to improve access to education. Indicators to track the outcomes focus on how investments lead to change in infrastructure and community engagement. Most importantly, the partners capture data on how their work impacts school enrollment.

For example, Barli Institute in India not only tracks their enrolment, they also track the increase in applicants to their school, which shows an increase in demand for learning. Anis Zunuzi in Haiti tracks the level of caregiver financial contribution in the school as a show of increased caregiver engagement.

- Support Teaching and Learning: A major component of the investment is in teachers.** Mona Foundation partners use both qualitative and quantitative measures to document improvement in teachers' skills and knowledge, in addition to tracking its impact on student learning by documenting pass rates, and understanding rate of transition to the next level of education.

Mongolian Development Center not only collects data on the number of teachers trained, they document how many of those teachers become facilitators based on their training. Badi School in Panama not only analyzes the pass rate, they track how many of their students get the highest results and how many attain university scholarships and graduate from tertiary education.

Similarly, Digital Study Hall in India collects and analyzes data on test scores of students attending their informal schools but they also track how many of those students transition to public school system.

Facilitate Transformation and Sustained Change: A critical component of the work that these organizations is to build up the life skills and support the students' character development so to train capable, ethical, and altruistic leaders who will become the agents of positive change in the betterment of their own communities. While difficult to measure, the results of this focus are critical differentiators for the young people who are in these programs.

In addition, the stories shared by the schools illustrate how they impact other areas of students' academic life. By taking a systematic approach to documenting the change, the Mona Foundation and its partners will be making a significant contribution to the field. The Badi Foundation in China documents the number of community service projects that are carried out by youth who participate in their program. The Anis Zunuzi School not only looked at how many students benefitted from their youth empowerment program, they tracked its impact by tracking levels of discipline problems of students who had benefitted from the program.

In each area, improving access, supporting teaching and learning, and facilitating transformation, the Mona Foundation will be paying particular attention to differences between females and males, to understand if they are achieving similar outcomes, and when there is a difference to understand the underlying reasons for those differences.

The ultimate value of this process is to deepen our learning, the partner's learning, and the learning of the wider community of organizations and funders working to improve education across the globe.

TELLING A STORY

The process of collecting data is only meaningful when it is framed by a question and the answers derived through data analysis are used to inform improvements of the work or to learn about the work. Three primary questions will guide the analysis of data and stories in order to help Mona Foundation to understand: 1) what, 2) so what, 3) then what? Specifically, Mona Foundation's Learning questions are:

1. **How do grassroots organizations use Mona Foundation Funding to [improve access to education, improve teaching and learning, and to support individual and community transformation]?** Based on the information and data, Mona Foundation can develop a "picture" of the focus and approach that the organizations use to improve education and training for young people in marginalized communities. This information will come from a systematic analysis of the activities proposed and the use of funds.
2. **What results are achieved because of their programs and engagement?** Here we understand the immediate results of the action that partners make in how they use the funding. This data will come from the set of indicators that partners report on annually.
3. **What change do these results catalyze in the lives of students and their communities? In this we are asking the so what question.** This is not about assessing impact, but identifying clues into the direction of intermediate outcomes. Many of the higher capacity partners in the cohort are seeking ways to systematically measure their impact. It is important to distinguish between measurement of impact and stories of impact. A single story tells us how one student's life has been transformed. Measurement of impact uses data over time to identify not only what change has happened but also the extent of the change experienced.

The answers of these questions will come from the i) narrative in the reports and proposals, ii) data on specific indicators; and iii) the process of aggregating and analyzing the data for patterns and engaging with the partners in a dialogue to interpret those patterns.

CONCLUSION

The growing evidence that large numbers of children enrolled in school complete their education with low levels of literacy and numeracy creates a sense of urgency to find out what works across contexts and scales. The World Bank's 2018 Report^{viii} points out some of the top-level change that needs to happen includes

- Assess learning to make it a serious goal
- Act on evidence to make schools work for all learners
- Align actors to make the whole system work for learning

The report expands on what action will help to achieve each of these goals. Its recommendations focus on a systems level. Research and evaluation by other actors drill down closer to what needs to be done at the school and classroom level. However, as the Hewlett Foundation's report, Learning to Improve Learning suggests, the body of knowledge that identifies the most effective ways to improve learning across diverse settings is still limited^{ix}. More and better documentation of how we can support children's learning and success in and out of school needs to be developed and shared.

This first step in identifying the program and monitoring framework lays the foundation for Mona Foundation to contribute to that body of knowledge as a measure of our best understanding at this time. In its focus of supporting grassroots organizations with long-term support, Mona Foundation's approach builds up the kinds of local programs that result in high quality learning. Systematic documentation of the process and the outcome of that change help to document the story that is often not visible to development practitioners.

In taking this approach, Mona Foundation is not just using data for accountability. It is focusing on learning. According to Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)^x, **developing a practice of monitoring and learning provides the content that learning organizations can use to understand the results of their work and improve their programming.** In order for monitoring to support organizational learning, it must integrate learning processes into the way in which information and data is gathered, analyzed, discussed, and used. FSG^{xi} identifies five key processes that are key to learning: (1) engaging in reflection, (2) engaging in dialogue, (3) critical analysis, (4) identifying and challenging values, assumptions, and beliefs, and (5) seeking feedback.

This is the approach Mona Foundation used to develop a framework and metrics. It is also the approach that will guide the process forward, leading to an enriching and rewarding process for Mona, its partners, and the larger field of development practitioners.

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ⁱ UNESCO. 2015b. Education for All 200 – 2015: Achievements and Challenges – Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015. Paris: UNESCO

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington D.C. World Bank

^v Ib

^{vi} Perlman-Robinson, J., R. Winthrop, and E. McGivney. 2016. Millions Learning: Scaling up Quality Education in Developing Countries. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution

^{vii} Heneveld, W. 1994. Planning and Monitoring the Quality of Primary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. AFTHR Technical Note No 14, Human Resources and Poverty Division, Technical Department, Africa Region. Washington D.C.: World Bank

^{viii} World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington D.C. World Bank

^{ix} The William and Floral Hewlett Foundation. 2014. Learning to Improve Learning: Lessons from Early Primary Interventions and Evaluations in India and Sub-Saharan Africa. Menlo Park. Hewlett Foundation.

^x A global community of practice made up of more than 5,000 grantmakers collaborating to improve grantmaking practices. <https://www.geofunders.org/about-us>

^{xi} FSG is a mission driven consulting firm. It has worked with the Global Fund for Women to bring about social impact and lasting change (www.fsg.org/about)