



# Story of EGRA

## Possible Applications to Youth and Workforce

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The Challenge of "Soft Skills" Measurement: Toward a Common Approach

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# “Big” Motivator

## “Origin” story

- Major concern low learning as a moral and economic outrage:
  - Median (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) of kids in poor countries learning as little as the lowest 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> percentile in rich countries
  - Kids not able to read a single word in spite of years in school
  - Yet by late 1990s increasingly all in school, but wasting their lives
  - System is wasting money in taking 4 years to do what could be done in 1
- Education aid funding early 1990s: 160% more than health; by 2005, about 30% less.
- World leaders explicit: education had no measurement tools and no clear sense on how to act even if it had measurement tools
- Need for a paradigm of measure → awareness/outrage → act → re-measure → document
- Similar to child survival initiative of UNICEF-WHO-USAID: GOBI
  - Growth monitoring, ORT, Breastfeeding, Immunization
- What in education is similar? “Immunize” children with reading, develop similar approach
- Question: how similar is this to WFD and youth? Reading can be similar to child survival. But youth? Yet, issue is not absolute similarity, but, to the degree there are SOME similarities, trying to take advantage. Focus and measurement galvanize attention and earn one respect.

# Chronology

- Tested informally Peru 2005
- WB's Helen Abadzi informally trying simple reading assessments, doing theoretical work
- Others (Pratham, Save) working on similar ideas
- WB and USAID contracts to develop further 2006
- Scientific panels, lit reviews → test instrument
- Piloting 2006-07
- Workshops to disseminate findings 2008
- Usage to inform improved instruction
- Many more workshops 2008 onwards to disseminate knowledge on measurement and also intervention strategies

## Possible reasons for success – 1

- Built gradually, proved utility in small steps
  - Shows market demand, meet market test on ongoing basis
- Taking advantage of timing
  - Awareness and dissatisfaction with “access only” focus of EFA goals
  - Calls for “Global Learning Goal” – 2005 or so
  - Awareness in key actors of learning crisis
  - Learning from health sector, Under-Five mortality, vaccinations, health funds, etc.
- In public domain
- Solid scientific backing from academics
- “Enough” consensus, not 100% consensus
- Useful for informing very specific actions, not just studies
  - But start with awareness

## Possible reasons for success - 2

- Convergence of at least a few key actors with similar tools
- Empirical work on reliability (high), validity (high)
- Key actors driven by mission
  - Not “just a contract”
- Don’t try to change what you can’t measure, don’t measure what you can’t change
  - If narrowly interpreted, ok; too broadly interpreted, dangerous
- A nucleus / core of a few activists with a) time, b) both brains and heart, c) willing to share / collaborate

## Some consequences - 1

- Interest in math (EGMA)
- UNESCO, writing: EGWA
- Made possible consolidation of global learning goals (why have goals you cannot measure) such as LMTF (Learning Metrics Task Force—WFD and youth should track this process)
- Randomized controlled (or other reasonably rigorous) trials show you can improve quickly
  - Why measure what you can't change?
  - USAID: “we have proof that serious instruction works”: now what aspects work?
  - Somewhat standard package emerges (not “imposed” – evolutionary)

## Some consequences - 2

- Research moving away from testing a package to:
  - Deciding which specific elements
  - Testing methods for each specific element
    - E.g., improvement of books and books distribution
  - New themes (e.g., 2<sup>nd</sup> language oral language development and transition to 2<sup>nd</sup> language reading)
- Early childhood as pre-requisite, likely similar trends: tool (measure) – test (improve) – re-measure
- WFD interest
- Branching “down” (Early childhood) and “up and over” (youth and WFD)

## Possible caveats and conclusions

- Early grade reading and math relatively easy:
  - To measure
  - To intervene
- Early childhood (pre school) and WFD will be tougher
  - Therefore start NOW!
  - May require more resources.
  - Pay attention to the lessons learned in EGRA.
  - Fact that an issue is “more complex” than another (reading more complex than immunizations, youth more complex than reading) should not be an excuse for inaction or an excuse for lack of focus and measurement
  - The moral and intellectual responsibility is to push the measurement and focus issue as far as one can, but no further