**ESP Portfolio Review Summary: Attempts to Influence Agendas for Education Change at Multilateral (Presidential Review, Stone 12th September 2014)  
Presenters: Ian Macpherson and Dierdre Williams**

The review focused on grants that support ESP’s work in fora that influence and shape global education discourses, agendas and funding architecture. This work is as an essential counterpart to ESP’s promotion and support of the right to education at grassroots level through social mobilization and activism. It is framed programmatically as ‘insider’ work through which ESP advocates for policy processes and financing structures that support education as public good and a way to hold space open for civil society voices in line with its principles of democratic participation and social justice in policy formation. The portfolio included 29 grants to ten (10) grantees working in education in emergencies, privatization in education, the right to education, national civil society coalition support, international EFA monitoring, international student assessment, teacher professionalism and the post-2015 education agenda. ESP spent $3,101,6679 on the grantees in this portfolio between 2010 and 2014. The significant non-financial resources (i.e., staff time) necessary to advance this portfolio was also highlighted.

Opening remarks by the presenters noted that the portfolio aimed to promote education as a public good, which is essential for the development of deliberative democracy, the promotion of tolerance and diversity, critical thought and respect for truth. Within this framework lie education ‘issues’ of equity (of access and inclusion), quality(pedagogy, teacher professionalism and curriculum) and the purpose of education (human capital formation, political participation and citizenship).Addressing these within the framework of a public good requires ESP to build networks that are broader and more durable than the programme itself, which ESP pursues through a combination of grant making and engaging on steering committees, advisory groups and governing boards.

The review confirmed that interaction at the global and multilateral levels is often necessary to supplement ESP’s work. However, we must be modest about the impact we expect to achieve; be specific about our choice of methods (e.g. board memberships, convening meetings and processes, building coalitions) and focus our involvements through clear, precise, time-bound objectives. Some of this learning is highlighted in the mixed results of ESP’s engagement with governing boards of institutions or in its engagement at strategic levels within organizations.

For instance, ESP was instrumental in establishing the private foundation/private sector constituency which now occupies a seat on the board of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and had a representative role for the constituency on the board and its committees, thereby creating an important counter voice to private corporations. However, after completing our term, the vacated seat was occupied by foundations closely aligned to private sector interests, indicating that ESP could have caucused more with likeminded foundations to ensure the voice in the foundation seat promoted education as a public good more fully. In some instances, ESP combined grant making with engagement on advisory or executive boards in attempts to make international organizations more durable, including the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and the Network for Education Policy Centers (NEPC). This impact might have been bolstered by consolidating gains rather than pressing for expansion, such as with NEPC and the Asia Pacific Bureau for Basic and Adult Education (ASBPAE), allowing the independent voices of these organizations to be further strengthened.

In similar fashion, ESP noted that we could also have been more ambitious in our engagement with OECD, and perhaps less swayed by their reputation. The OECD’s real strengths lie in data collection and achieving government buy-in and ESP could have been more direct, earlier on, asking more difficult questions on the data they collect versus what they publish. Raising these critical questions might have allowed ESP to access data that could bolster some of the key arguments and ideas of this portfolio, particularly in relation to the post-2015 debates. Part of ESP’s ambition in this engagement with OECD is to secure government contributions to support the Tom Alexander Fellowships in years 7 and 8 (after the existing support from OSF concludes). ESP will use the good relationship it has with the governing board of PISA to turn their attention to equity-focused data.

ESP also has experience of building communities of practice from its work on privatization and education financing, and the approach of identifying an issue – such as learning metrics – and building a network of key individuals and organizations with a deliberate strategy for impact could be better employed. Such deliberate action earlier on would minimize instances where ESP is playing catch-up in some of the global debates.

ESP was advised not to preempt or shy away from articulating a programmatic position that may be at odds with an organizational position of OSF. Rather, it should ‘embrace the contradictions’, a reality that not only our grantees but peer foundations grapple with.

**General Implications for ESP’s Strategy:**

1. The portfolio is dealing with complex processes and ESP needs to articulate clear links between the vision, goal, purpose and strategies of engagements that aim to influence international agendas and shape how international organizations support education as a public good. Similarly, it needs to define some key objectives and tie these to indicators that would enable it to evaluate progress on influencing these agendas. The use of a variety of tools to influence these agendas and organizations is another reason to have clear objectives and indicators as this would help determine whether the time and effort is yielding results.
2. When engaging with governing boards, advisory or steering committees, ESP should have clear and time bound objectives of what it intends to achieve and aim to complete these in one cycle or term. The implications of engaging in governing boards should also be better understood as any individual sitting on a board is legally prohibited from discussing the activities and proceedings with colleagues.
3. ESP should make better use of communications and social media to build a stronger body of evidence that relates closely to its ideas in order to strengthen the degree of communication within ESP’s network as well as between some of the key organisations reviewed in this portfolio.
4. ESP should explore the use of different financing arrangements to support partners at international level, including the use of endowment funds. It will be important to weigh potential benefits against known risks of such approaches including complacency and consequent loss of relevance to the field, as well as leadership changes.