ESRC – FCDO RAISING LEARNING OUTCOMES (RLO) PROGRAMME

A synthesis of outputs produced from Call 3: 'Accountability Structures and Processes in LMICs'

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ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
LMIC	low- and middle-income countries
PAL	People's Action for Learning
PPP	public-private partnership
RLO	Raising Learning Outcomes
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSA	sub-Saharan Africa
ToC	theory of change

1   Introduction: How do accountability systems and processes influence learning outcomes?

The delivery of quality education for all is increasingly believed to be dependent on the existence of education systems where individuals and institutions are held to account, and where they are incentivized, monitored and supported in effective ways.[1] Government education systems across many low-and middle-income country (LMIC) contexts, however, are often characterized by poor incentives, a lack of effective governance and support, an inability to implement in practice the stipulated accountability measures, and strong teachers' organisations that resist reform, with consequent implications for equity as well as the delivery of quality education. Ultimately, the reason to care about accountability is that more accountable schools and teachers are likely to produce better pupil outcomes, including higher learning outcomes. Recent work on education systems has tended to focus on coherence (e.g., the 2017 World Development Report[2] and the RISE programme[3]), including accountability and incentives, but much of what is produced also looks at the extent to which aims, incentives, resources and information are aligned.

The advice from academics working on these issues unequivocally suggests that 'business as usual' expansion of educational spending on standard inputs is unlikely to have significant impact on learning outcomes, and that interventions aimed at improving pedagogy, governance and teacher accountability have the potential to yield higher returns (Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2015; Day Ashley *et al.*, 2014). Despite increased real expenditure on education across the globe, there has not been a commensurate improvement in learning outcomes. The world was deemed to be in a 'learning crisis' – where many students were in school but learning very little – even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020 (World Bank, 2018; Angrist *et al.*, 2021). Covid-related school closures have compounded the crisis with emerging studies suggesting large learning losses and huge opportunity costs (in terms of future health, income and life chances lost) as a direct result of school closures and lost learning. The World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (2021) estimate that school closures of one year generally equate to an average of one year's learning lost.

Even before the pandemic hit, the research and policy community knew little about how to improve learning and the quality of education in LMICs. Recognising the need for further research to improve understanding of the complex contextual dynamics that influence educational quality as well as the policies and interventions that can raise learning outcomes, the Raising Learning Outcomes (RLO) programme aimed to fill critical gaps in knowledge. It recognised, in particular, that despite the view that quality education somehow rests on more 'accountable' institutions, there is limited understanding of both what 'accountability' means, as well as how different aspects of 'accountability' interact to guide improvements in learning outcomes, especially among the most disadvantaged and marginalised.[4] In light of this, the RLO programme aimed to enable research to reveal more effective policies and interventions by providing policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning for all and an understanding of how those ideas will translate to their specific contexts and institutions. A portfolio of research was funded with the intention of improving the knowledge base pertaining to the complex relationships between elements of the education system, the context in which they are embedded, and the dynamics operating within the system and how they impact on efforts to raise learning outcomes for all. Three annual research calls have taken different but complementary themes within this overall

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[1] ESRC Call, 2016.

[2] See https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2017

[3] See https://riseprogramme.org/

[4] ESRC Call, 2016

focus on interactions between system elements, context and dynamics and how these impact on raising learning outcomes. Whilst Call 1 focused on effective teaching as a system element (see the synthesis paper on 'Effective Teaching') and Call 2 focused on challenging contexts (see the synthesis paper on 'Challenging Contexts'), the third and final call for funding focused on the dynamics of accountability. More specifically, the third call focused on examining how accountability relationships and processes within low- and middle-income education systems enable or inhibit the raising of learning outcomes. In total, 30 projects were funded through the RLO programme across these three themes (ESRC & DFID, 2019).
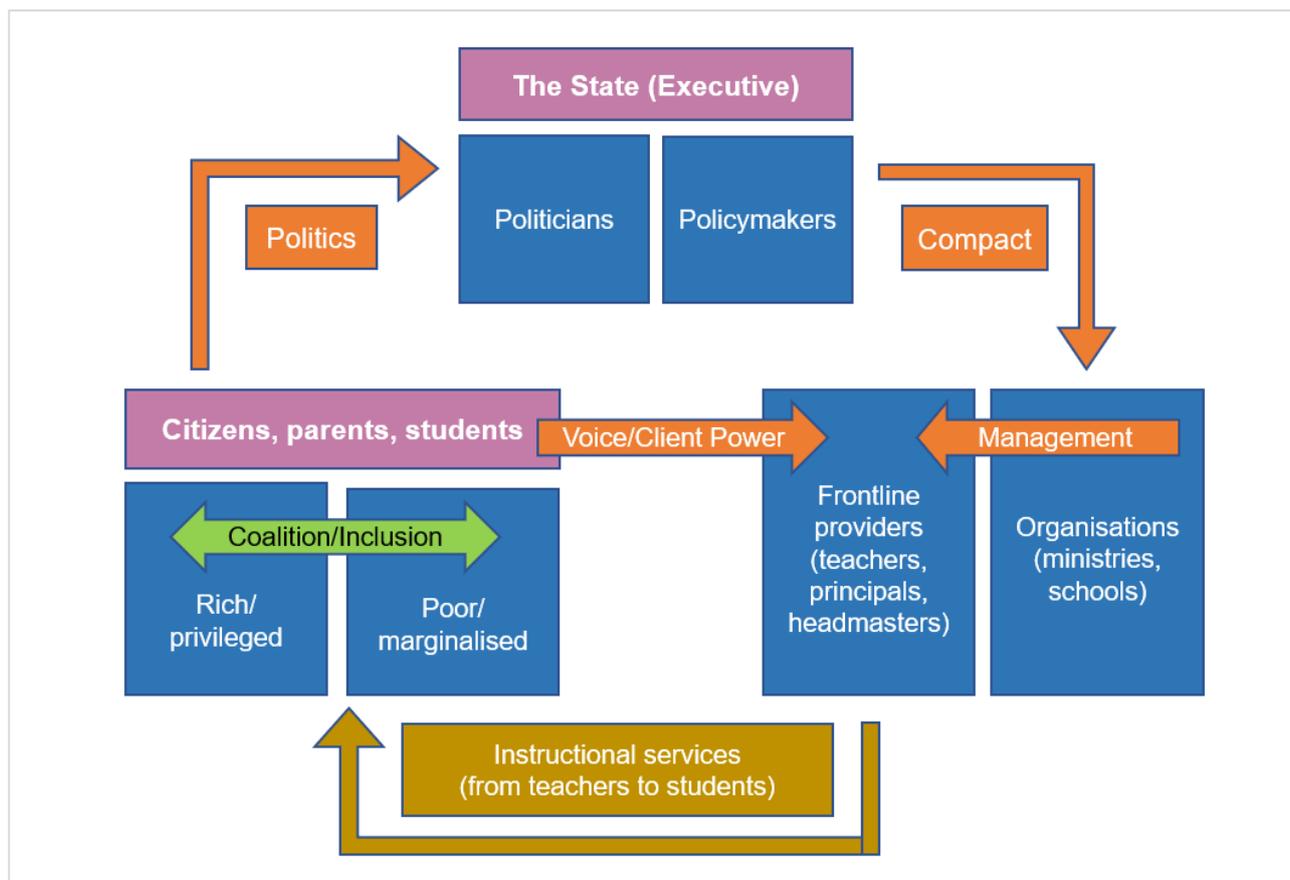
The complexity of the learning process means that it cannot be disentangled into individual and discrete actions that can be executed to deliver quality education for all. In addition to this, simply implementing technical solutions to address systemic elements of the education system such as school management, curriculum and teacher development will not necessarily result in improvement in learning if there is not a commensurate understanding the contextual factors determining whether they have been implemented effectively. A key dynamic for the delivery of quality education for all has been identified as how individuals and institutions are held to account and by whom, as well as how they are incentivised, monitored and supported to take up and translate these technical solutions. This increasing focus on accountability in education has been driven to some extent by emerging evidence from cross-country studies that highlight the importance of accountability measures, such as greater local decision-making authority and school autonomy (Fuchs & Woessmann, 2007; Bruns *et al.*, 2011). In recent years, bottom-up social/citizen accountability has been shown by research to have had limited influence on learning outcomes and, therefore, within development economics, there has been a return to focus on top-down or state accountability.[5] Within this framework of top-down accountability, there are a range of means through which schools are held accountable for their performance, with three key areas evident: 1) student test scores; 2) professional judgement (e.g., based on lesson observation); and 3) student feedback. A major and well-regarded report by the Gates Foundation in 2013[6] concluded that whilst each of these areas has its advantages and disadvantages, the best evaluation systems combine all three.

However, it remains that accountability is defined and approached in varied ways, resulting in different assumptions but limited knowledge about how it can contribute to raising learning outcomes, especially for the most marginalised. Much of the research on accountability in education has drawn insights from the 2004 World Development Report (World Bank, 2003), which set out a framework bringing together accountability gaps and pathways to service delivery outcomes through the long and short routes of accountability (with the former referring to citizens holding systems to account through politicians and the latter referring to 'client power', whereby schools and school systems are held directly to account by citizens). Social accountability research has developed these concepts by going beyond use of simple vertical relationships to explore horizontal and diagonal relationships (e.g., government checks and balances, community monitoring and management of schools etc.). An updated and more granular view of the relationships between various actors in the education ecosystem has been provided by Pritchett (2015), as seen in Figure 1 below.

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[5] https://riseprogramme.org/node/355

[6] https://usprogram.gatesfoundation.org/news-and-insights/articles/measures-of-effective-teaching-project

Figure 1:   Basic design elements in accountability relationships

Source: Pritchett (2015, p. 17)

Figure 1 summarises the four design elements within accountability relationships: delegation, finance, information and motivation. Each arrow in this diagram has analytic content: the orange arrows represent a relationship of accountability which embeds within the elements of design, finance, information, and motivation. This framework proposes that there needs to be a concept of system coherence across these elements. In the accountability triangle framework, improvement in education for all can happen when the demands of the citizens (as heard in the system) are inclusive and equitable. Given the widespread recognition of this framework, it forms an appropriate basis for analysis conducted under the 'accountability' theme and is referred to within the evidence that is presented here, which has emerged through RLO-funded research. This analysis is also presented in light of the broader shift in focus to coherence with accountability, as mentioned previously.

This paper presents the evidence produced by six projects funded under Theme 3 on accountability structures and processes in LMICs. This synthesis is based on the review of available literature produced by the RLO-funded projects across the third call as well as relevant outputs from the Impact Initiative.[7] It forms the third and final of three such syntheses, with the other two focusing on 'Effective Teaching' (Call 1) and 'Challenging Contexts' (Call 2). These syntheses aim to present common and differentiated findings across the RLO research grants – focusing particularly on what the research tells us regarding how to improve learning outcomes, how these findings are situated within the wider literature on education and improving learning outcomes, and policy lessons and achieving impact emerging from this analysis. The syntheses

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[7] The Impact Initiative website is linked here. Relevant outputs include four Research for Policy and Practice reports, nine Impact Stories and one briefing paper.

focus specifically on important cross-cutting themes such as gender and girls' education, education for children with disabilities and education systems. Table 1 summarises the evidence discussed within this report. Figure 2 illustrates the geographic spread of where the projects under this theme are based.

Table 2:   RLO evidence on 'Accountability'

	Number of outputs
Journal article	9
Book chapter(s)	3
Working paper, technical paper, or background report	6
Conference paper, presentation, or abstract	2
Policy brief	1
Blog[8]	2
TOTAL	**23**

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[8] This number does not account for all blogs produced by programmes under this theme, but it instead refers to the blogs which were included within this synthesis. As noted in the other papers, blogs are an important tool for reporting programme impact, especially given their immediacy and the longer timeframe needed to produce formal outputs through journals, book chapters, and book publications. There were blogs available which fell under this theme but were not included in this paper because they reflected themes and findings that were later formalised in other outputs.

Figure 2: **Geographic spread of projects under 'Accountability' theme**
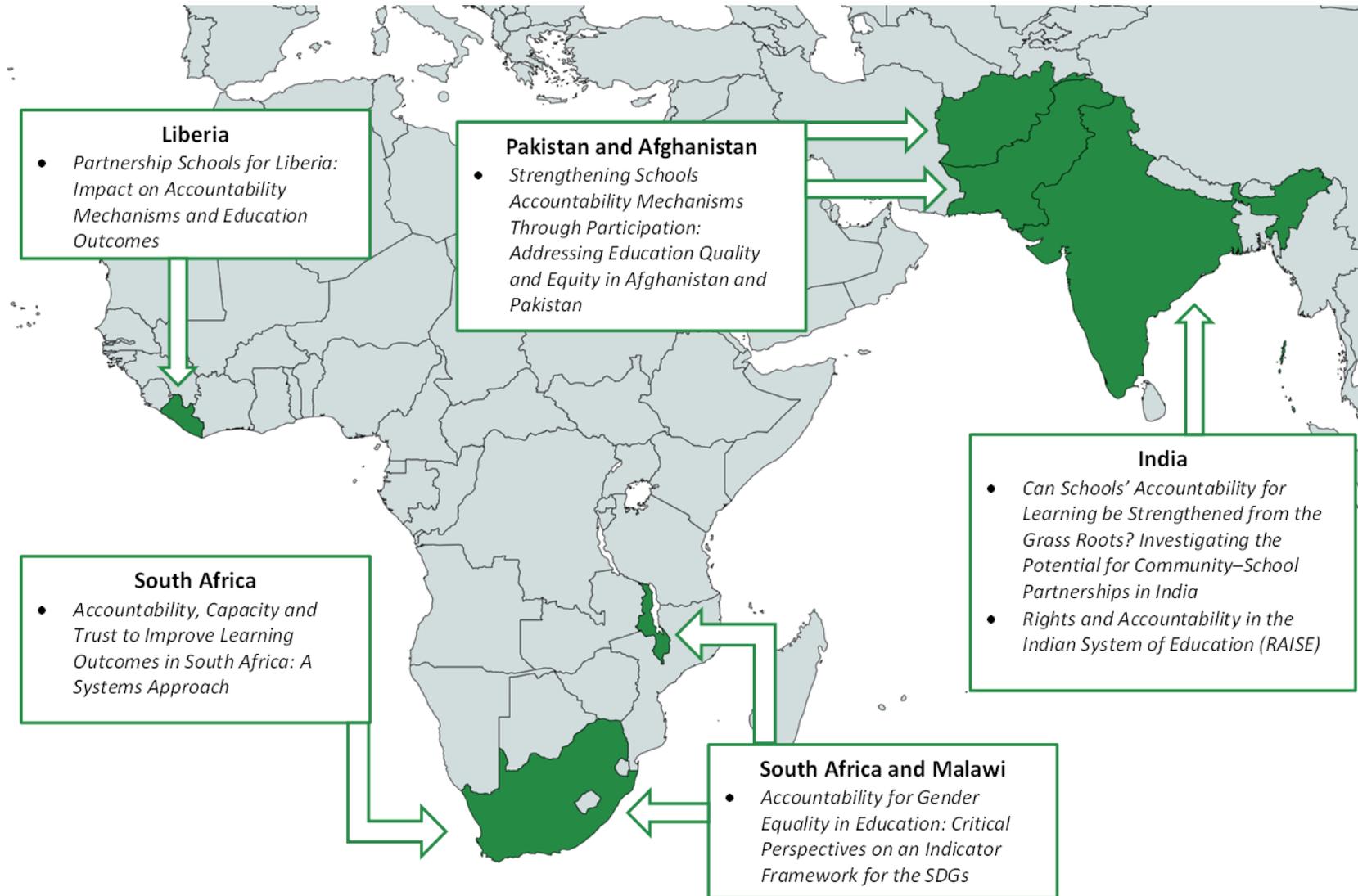
2   Methodology

This synthesis report began with a full scoping of the outputs published in association with the 30 RLO projects. Each grant holder disseminated published outputs on the Impact Initiative website (linked in the footnote above), as well as the UK Research and Innovation Gateway to Research website.[9] ESRC also maintains a spreadsheet of all reported outputs categorised by project/grant.[10] To locate actual copies of these outputs, searches were made across academic databases, Google, and conference websites (to find specific abstracts or presentations). In total, searches resulted in the location of 134 actual copies of published outputs across the three calls. Researchers then created an Excel spreadsheet categorising each of these outputs by both call and associated project to better identify common themes and connections. Methodologies and summaries of each output were added to the excel sheet to serve as a robust database of RLO outputs.

A challenge in the initial phases of data synthesis for this report came in the form of locating accessible copies of all the listed outputs for RLO projects. Every author self-reports outputs to ESRC (see footnote below), and the databases and websites only keep track of citation information and do not link to actual copies of the documents themselves. Thus, more than 30 self-reported outputs were not located with initial search methods. Of these, the vast majority were classified as conference papers, presentations or abstracts. Due to the nature of these outputs, most or all of them simply may not have been digitally archived in any form, as there was no expectation that these types of outputs would have a digital presence. Nearly all of the remaining unlocated resources were categorised as books or book chapters. For these, researchers emailed the individual authors directly to obtain assistance in tracking down soft copies. For the books and book chapters listed, three of the five contacted authors responded by providing copies of materials, resulting in five additional outputs for a final total of 139. Consequently, this challenge should not be considered a gap in this synthesis report as the authors utilised all available data at the time of writing.

The acquired sources had a broad range of output types, lengths, and depth of research explored. Therefore, each document was carefully evaluated for quality, relevancy and redundancy before making the final list of outputs for each synthesis. In the accountability call, 23 of the original 30 documents are highlighted in this report. For more information regarding each of the utilised sources, including a brief overview of their methodologies, the contexts covered, and type of document, refer to Appendix C. To better see how these outputs aligned with the different RLO projects highlighted in Figure 2, refer to Appendix A for a breakdown of project titles, contexts, intended objectives, and the number of outputs this report utilised for each project. Of note, several projects that fall under the challenging contexts call have yet to produce publicly available outputs at the time of analysis for the synthesis report. Appendix B highlights these projects, the contexts they are working in and an overview of their aims.

The final list of outputs for the accountability call was synthesised using a narrative synthesis approach along thematic lines. Though each individual project focuses on a specific context or theme, which allowed for natural categorization, further analysis highlighted more interconnected

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[9] https://gtr.ukri.org

[10] It is important to note that the library of outputs available for these synthesis papers was limited to what was available at the time of writing (January to March 2022). In a dissemination workshop held with grant holders at the end of the revision process (May 2022), grant holders noted that there were outputs published that were not included amongst the materials reviewed in the three papers. This is because the Gateway to Research site, which collates grant holder submissions via ResearchFish, would not be updated to show the latest round of ResearchFish submissions until after the writing and feedback period, meaning that much of what was submitted in 2021-2022 is not reflected in these three papers.

categories, and four major sub-themes emerged around accountability. These four sub-themes provide the structure for Section 3. Other background documents and pertinent literature have been included in this synthesis to provide context and additional information surrounding these categories. After utilising similar methods for the other two synthesis reports in this series, final analysis consisted of discovering cross-cutting themes throughout all the RLO programme's outputs (see synthesis reports on 'Effective Teaching' and 'Challenging Contexts' as well as notes in this report for more detail).

3 Key findings on Accountability in Education Systems from the RLO work

This section presents the work being undertaken in the Raising Learning Outcomes research programme and focuses specifically on evidence generated under the third call on accountability. In doing so, it responds and contributes to some of the wider debates on social accountability as a means of education system strengthening. Even though the call for funding went out in 2016 (two full years after the initial call for projects on effective teaching) and the projects were commissioned from 2017/2018 onwards, a relatively large body of evidence has emerged under this specific theme. It can be broadly categorized into the following subthemes:

- Evidence that has focused on widening the discussion on defining/understanding accountability in a changing world;
- The role of trust and development of accountability especially in education systems where trust is historically low;
- The role of accountability structures and incentives in learning across different school types; and
- How participation in education governance (for example through the inclusion of parents in school-management committees), through community-led monitoring of school performance and budgeting, or through involving learners and community members in the co-creation of knowledge can change learning outcomes.

3.1 Defining/understanding accountability in a changing world

Evidence under the RLO umbrella has suggested that the development of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators may have resulted in metrics that fail to capture all of the aspects targeted within these goals. A paper by Unterhalter (2019c) resulting from RLO work suggests that further exploration examining measurement and the meanings of quality and equality in education are required to enhance participation, accountability and inequities in education. It is suggested that viewing inequalities in education primarily as distributional and demographic is unlikely to address substantive inequalities in education, with the author suggesting widening consultation in the development of indicators in order for them to be more meaningful.

The pandemic has led to even further and more substantial challenges and changes in accountability relationships within the education sector and the wider economy. In another article from the same project, Anand *et al.* (2020) highlight how Covid-19 has altered global economic governance and has led to the need for new levels of cooperation and coordination across national governments to deal with the systemic challenges posed by the pandemic. Unterhalter (2020) also assesses the impact of the pandemic on global education systems and suggests an approach that places rights and capabilities at the centre of education discussions and planning in the post-pandemic education agenda.

Understandings of accountability intersect with evidence on gender equality within one RLO-funded project, titled 'Accountability for gender equality in education: critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the SDGs', where the aforementioned Unterhalter (2019c) paper was located. This project, running from January 2018 to May 2021 and working with NGOs and social movements, aimed to co-create indicators that link learning outcomes with gender equity in order that new indicators will be both locally relevant and robust for global governance. The indicators, then, aim to be an accountability mechanism for democratic participation rather than only serving the purpose of monitoring and management.

In the body of published research resulting from this project, Unterhalter and colleagues have engaged extensively with the re-framing of accountability to address global inequalities, especially as related to gender. Unterhalter (2017) begins with a paper which highlights the difficulties of measurement, stating that measuring gender parity alone will not be able to help policy and strategy in developing substantial equality, particularly when aspects such as agency, injustice and autonomy are not considered. To address these inadequacies, Unterhalter *et al.* (2018) reflect on the four facets within accountable environments that were used in the GEM Report (UNESCO, 2017), namely, capacity, motivation, trust and information. The authors suggest the need to connect all of these aspects to ensure that uneven systems of accountability in education do not have perverse effects on actors' responsibilities to achieve gender equality. In a related piece, Unterhalter (2019a) suggests that there are five areas where gaps exist in our understanding of gender equality in education: knowledge/evidence, tools, networks, innovations and capacity and peer learning. As such, there is a need to regularly review education research, policy and practice using intersectional analysis; these reviews can include institutional intersectionality to look at how intersections of institutions produce inequalities and how forms of inclusion can be monitored to combat gender inequalities in education (Unterhalter *et al.*, 2020). Finally, in a piece of research exploring empowerment through the capability approach, Unterhalter (2019b) aims to map the connections between empowerment, different modalities of education and participation of women in education. The research notes that the modalities of education, including how teachers are trained and supported and how learning is organised and resourced, and how relationships of inclusion, tolerance and equality are built, provide an ideal point for investigation.

From that same 'Accountability for gender equality in education' project, additional theoretical work emerged from North and Longlands (2019), who suggest that in the post-2015 education era, promoting gender equality entails engaging with institutional structures and legal/policy frameworks through coordinated, collaborative and multi-layered interventions that fulfil the needs and human rights of some without compromising those of others. This approach will require building on examples of good practice to ensure that sufficient resources are targeted towards national and local efforts. Additionally, within a similar vein, Peppin Vaughan (2019) suggests that the current framing around gender equality may be explained by the relatively weak involvement of non-governmental women's groups in proportion to the strong involvement of multilaterals, bilateral agencies, national governments and, more recently, private sector organisations.

Box 1: The relationship between rights and accountability in the Indian context

The RLO-sponsored project 'Rights and Accountability in the Indian System of Education' investigates how the Right to Education Act has shaped interactions within the education system in India. From that project, research by Dyer *et al.* (2019) suggests that the current approach to education reform and accountability is 'functionalist' in nature and fails to accurately conceptualise the education system, which, in actual practice, takes on a 'relational' approach. The authors suggest an understanding of accountability that aims to work across scales and actors, each with different interests, practices and norms. By seeing accountability as systemic and relational, this research argues that meaningful governance reforms lie in acknowledging the informal, invisible and every-day relations of accountability as much as the visible and formal practices within the education system. Evidence from extant literature further reiterates how insights into how these relations of accountability converge and diverge around the most disadvantaged learners can help improve the delivery of education services for equitable education inclusion (Gaventa, 2006, p. 30).

3.2 The role of trust in improving learning outcomes in LMICs

Decades of history of Apartheid and oppression continues to have a profound impact on the education system in South Africa, even long after the fall of Apartheid itself. RLO research there has focused on the inextricable interaction between trust and accountability within a specific project: 'Accountability, capacity and trust to improve learning outcomes in South Africa: a systems approach'. This research indicates that within the South African context, corruption has been identified as a fundamental factor related to systemic failure in educational improvements and so examines how external control in this setting of distrust can undermine agency and improvement of learning outcomes.

The research coming from this project finds that unfairness in the system of funding and accountability mechanisms, which are designed to favour schools that are already effective, lead to distrust and demotivation within the education system. Differing power dynamics and malpractice are noted to have emerged as a source of deep mistrust and feelings of lack of agency (Baxter & Ehren, 2019). Lack of trust has been identified by this project as a fundamental factor which underpins opposition to accountability and monitoring (Ehren, 2018). Strong bureaucratic accountability is also found to create further inefficiencies within the education system, where there is pressure to report on aspects of education that may not necessarily improve the quality of teaching or provide best practice examples (Ehren *et al.*, 2020). In this piece of research, the authors find that this opposition to accountability is due to multiple factors, including a lack of support for schools who fail to meet accountability targets due to lack of capacity; a lack of expertise of those who monitor schools (district subject advisors and heads of department) and are unable to provide relevant support and advice; and a lack of a shared view on goals underlying the accountability exercise. The inability of the state, province and district to collaborate and allocate resources where needed across the entire system has created opportunities for other, more organised groups (such as teacher unions) to take control over the system and to mould formal accountability structures.

Ehren's (2019) research has suggested that education systems need to move away from current high-stakes, top-down, standardised approaches which create a culture of fear and anxiety where schools and their environments are focused on complying with inspection standards. There is, instead, a need for more localised and 'intelligent accountability' that builds on existing goal-free and constructivist models of evaluation which support schools to become learning and enquiring organisations. As such, schools can take on more self-evaluation while striving to use research and evidence of best practices to inform their decision making.

3.3 Private schooling and accountability structures

A wide body of non-RLO evidence from several contexts suggests that non-state schooling has exponentially grown across the globe. A review of the evidence on the provision of private schooling in LMICs by Day Ashely *et al.* (2014) found very few studies rigorously addressing how private schools maintain accountability to users. In those private schools which did have accountability measures, the research found that users can participate in and influence decision making. A small body of mainly anecdotal evidence also noted that teachers and schools may respond to parents' demands and complaints and ultimately the potential threat of parents' exercise of choice, but no evidence was found in the studies reviewed to demonstrate that users are able to change schools in response to quality concerns, or that they are more likely to do so in cases involving private schools rather than government institutions. The authors call for more research on how everyday accountability relationships between schools and users operate in practice and to what extent, if any, they differ between private and state schools. Further, the authors suggest that in order to reach a better understanding of the operation of accountability in

market and state systems, there is a need to examine factors such as gender, informal power relationships and incentives, all of which may affect the extent to which parents can exert pressure on schools.

Other non-RLO research by Aslam *et al.* (2017) finds that many countries around the world have experimented with initiatives that seek to broaden the decision-making autonomy of schools and promote accountability, while still retaining different levels of public control depending on the type of arrangement being advocated. These experiments have taken the form of concession schools, charter schools and voucher-funded private and public schools via public-private partnerships (PPPs). The study notes that increased accountability for PPP schools leads to stronger accountability for all schools within an education system as the government has a clear framework and greater capability to hold all schools to account. This positive evidence has been attributed to better management systems, more flexible and innovative teaching approaches and better accountability in non-state and PPP schools as compared to what is available in state schools. Aslam and Rawal (2018), in their review entitled *Public-Private Partnerships and Private Actors in Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (SSA) for the Mastercard Foundation find that environments which help foster accountability are those that encourage the growth of educational provision in an effective manner. Their review of evidence from SSA shows that a crucial element required of these enabling environments is related to the existence of clear and transparent government policies for private partners. They also note the importance of balancing autonomy and accountability by encouraging independence within clear parameters for accountability. A key policy point to emerge from this research pertains to encouraging an environment of social accountability, whereby both governments and private providers are responsible to the children being educated within the country, particularly those facing multiple forms of disadvantage and whose education needs are yet to be met.

Likewise, RLO-funded research by Romero *et al.* (2020) provides experimental evidence on partnership schools in Liberia by using geographic and infrastructure characteristics to create pairings of public schools and randomly assigning one within the pair to be run by a private provider. The 'Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes' project delegated management of 93 public schools to eight different non-state education providers in the hope that higher accountability in the private sector would lead to circumventing weak public-sector management, thereby improving learning outcomes. Romero and colleagues found that this outcome did occur and was not due to student 'cream skimming' by treatment schools on the basis of student's age, gender, household wealth or disability, as the student test scores in privately managed schools were higher than those at non-treated schools, even after controlling for those characteristics. However, it was found that costs in treated schools were higher. Due to the nature of the contract between the government and the private sector, particularly as pertaining to class sizes (reduced as a result of hiring more teachers) and admission policies, learning outcome improvements were observed within those privately managed institutions. This research is one of the few experimental studies that has examined the effects of outsourcing management of existing public schools to private providers in a low-income context.

3.4   Benchmarking and measuring learning for social accountability

Reliable information garnered through examinations has been suggested as a key component of the accountability relationships between various actors. Data from assessments can help determine performance and design interventions more appropriately. A RISE working paper (Burdett, 2016) emphasises how testing is critical to improving education outcomes and suggests that well-designed, valid and reliable assessments can provide evidence on student effort and learning, and teaching effectiveness. In many LMICs, education systems can only access information from educational management information systems or high stakes examinations and

have limited evidence from formative assessments or other tools which monitor learning performance.

Research funded under the third call of the RLO programme has emphasised the importance of accountability stemming from the grassroots, which encourage engagement between schools, teachers, parents and the wider community to use assessments in raising learning outcomes particularly for those who are the most disadvantaged. Much of the evidence on these specific aspects emerges from two RLO-funded projects: 'Can schools' accountability for learning be strengthened from the grass roots? Investigating the potential for community–school partnerships in India' and 'Strengthening schools accountability mechanisms through participation: addressing education quality and equity in Afghanistan and Pakistan'.

The last few decades have seen increased momentum in the use of citizen-led approaches for collecting data on student learning. Starting in 2005 in India through Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), large-scale household-based assessments on student enrolment and basic learning have expanded exponentially across the globe – emerging in neighbouring Pakistan and across many sub-Saharan African and Latin American contexts. The People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network is a South-South partnership of organisations working across three continents whereby member organisations conduct citizen-led assessments and/or citizen-led actions aimed at improving learning outcomes[11]. Such endeavours have illustrated 'the power of informed citizenry to influence national and global agendas for education and learning' (Aslam *et al.*, 2018, p. 2) and provide millions of children with results representative at the national, provincial and district levels. The assessments are conducted orally and with a one-to-one approach within households, and this evidence base is used to encourage collaboration between government and non-state actors in the education sector to implement programmes to improve learning.

These innovative initiatives engender widespread engagement across a wider range of stakeholders (including parents, teachers and community members) to promote new mechanisms for accountability. One commendable aspect of these initiatives is the scale at which they have managed to collect data using volunteers and ordinary citizens (R4D, 2015). In the R4D evaluation of citizen-led assessments, authors conclude that such assessments have had significant impacts at the national and international levels by highlighting the focus on learning in global agenda-setting. The assessments can contribute by providing evidence on the gravity of the learning crisis whilst showcasing how a low-resource model can be used to assess learning at scale. Banerji (2021) has noted how community-based learning assessments helped raise awareness in India at the local level whilst influencing policy and practice at the more macro level. In particular, the author notes that the ASER survey has created 'village ownership' of children's' learning by using tools such as village report cards. Further, Pratham's engagement with communities and parents over the years was particularly helpful in mobilising action during the pandemic.

Several RLO-funded research pieces contribute to this important and expanding body of work, including research examining the PAL network's assessment for action and accountability. Alcott *et al.* (2018b) note that the PAL network is characterised by a number of commonalities and unique strengths: in particular, its organic growth and free-range adaptation. The researchers find that network members are provided with a structure and platform that harnesses the diversity in their backgrounds, and they use assessments to design and implement interventions aimed at improving learning for the disadvantaged through different activities that meet the needs of specific contexts. These common principles are also examined in Alcott *et al.* (2018a), who find that learning interventions developed by the PAL network over the recent years have shared two common principles. First, they work with children's actual rather than their expected learning levels

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[11] https://palnetwork.org/

(an approach also taken in Teaching at the Right Level [TaRL] programmes[12]). Second, education is deemed to be a collective responsibility between stakeholders, which includes citizens, communities, governments and school systems, and, as such, interventions require collective solutions. Alcott *et al.* (2020) produced innovative research that documents the development of theories of change (ToC) across ten countries, identifying similarities and differences in their approaches. Whilst they find similarities between the beginning and end points of the ToC, the processes and mechanisms through which these are achieved vary and are adapted to context. The authors find that an important aspect of PAL network member ToC is the ongoing mutual sharing of experiences, allowing feedback and adaptations in processes. Thus, they conclude that ToC need to be flexible, iterative tools that allow for ongoing assessment of contextual realities and sharing of experiences across contexts.

More research emerging from RLO funding in the project 'Can schools' accountability for learning be strengthened from the grass roots? Investigating the potential for community–school partnerships in India' has highlighted the lack of engagement between schools, teachers and parents which result in negative consequences for learning outcomes. These effects on learning outcomes occur because teachers and schools tend to be primarily accountable to education authorities rather than to the communities where they work, which, in turn, has particular consequences for more disadvantaged learners (Bhattacharjea & Ramanujan, 2020). This research suggests the need to strengthen mechanisms for school/community engagement, which could involve implementing mechanisms for regular communication, coordination and collaboration between teachers, parents and communities to support children's learning and encourage parental participation and support. Within that same RLO project, a unique study by Cashman *et al.* (2021) identifies wealth as a marker for the level of parental engagement. This particular study identifies the influence of household wealth on parental involvement in activities at school and in the home and finds that wealthier parents have higher involvement levels in resource-constrained Uttar Pradesh, India. There is, therefore, a clear need to better understand how learning outcomes for all can be raised in India, with potential lessons for other contexts at a similar stage of educational development (Sabates *et al.*, 2020). Researchers from these projects have noted that learning among school-going children has remained low over the past decade and, if anything, it has declined as children from more marginalised backgrounds have entered classrooms for the first time (Alcott & Rose, 2015).

Finally, in another strand of research from that same project, Sabates *et al.* (2020) suggest that community-based interventions could be more effective at improving learning outcomes, namely through encouraging collaboration between communities and schools to raise awareness of the importance of education and to clarify relations of accountability between teachers and parents. Together, these interventions can promote mutual responsibility for children's learning. The interaction of gender, socio-economic status and caste was also examined in this research, and it was found that females with uneducated mothers faced greater learning disadvantages than their peers. These findings were also reiterated in another RLO-funded project in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan (Trani *et al.*, 2019), which tested whether better social accountability could be achieved through engaging a wide spectrum of stakeholders (including illiterate children, parents etc.) in the learning process. The study finds that using workshop approaches within the community can be the first step towards improving inclusion. Workshops allow for advocacy training and raising awareness about the barriers to inclusion, and they encourage participation from school principals, staff, teachers, parents and children, as well as members of school/village education committees. Separate sessions for different stakeholders allow each group to elaborate on their views for inclusion in the learning process. Another critical finding of this study was that the provision of feedback to the participants as a systematic means of reflection was a valued aspect

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[12] https://www.teachingattherightlevel.org/

within the intervention. As such, this research propagates the use of bottom-up, grassroots stakeholders to influence and question global agendas and hold education systems to account.

4 Policy lessons and achieving impact

- RLO research has identified the importance of creating a new culture of accountability that focuses on encouraging cooperation and collaboration across a wide range of stakeholders to shift relationships, knowledge and actions. At the global level, some RLO research conceptually reframes accountability in terms of democratic participation rather than solely for monitoring and management purposes.

- The critical importance of trust has also been highlighted across RLO work, suggesting that education systems need to move away from complying with those standardised benchmarks and high stakes approaches which can create a culture of anxiety. Instead, they can move to adopt a more localised and 'intelligent' accountability. Systems need to work to develop accountability indicators that delve deeper into more everyday, relational realities.

- With regards to accountability in gender equity, policies should aim to go beyond simple monitoring for gender disparities and instead aim to promote democratic participation.

- Engaging with non-state providers has also shown to have promising results in terms of improved learning outcomes through the balance of autonomy and accountability. Policies that encourage non-state and government school partnerships need to ensure the provision of an enabling environment (e.g., funding arrangement, flexibility in the curriculum, governance and management arrangements, clear and transparent policies for private partners, appropriate targeting of beneficiaries and accountability systems under which providers operate) that can allow this fine balance to maintained. Enabling factors also include a conducive regulatory environment and a buoyant private sector with equality considerations at the forefront to ensure that existing inequalities are not exacerbated in this type of provision of education services.

- The increased availability of education data can encourage community and parental involvement, address information asymmetry and enhance student performance through improved accountability through a wider range of stakeholders above and beyond government/state stakeholders. This approach can, in turn, act as a lever for change. However, household characteristics (especially wealth) can continue to determine parental engagement and consequently impact learning outcomes. These need to be sufficiently addressed by policy. Developing policies that utilise communities for accountability measures may be an effective option, especially in the most disadvantaged areas.

- Emerging evidence has also shown that simple interventions that raise awareness about the importance of education, barriers to inclusions etc. can be an important first step towards making macro changes through improved advocacy and knowledge-building at the local level.

- In national or bureaucratic systems that lack trust, building more 'bottom-up' or constructivist policies that give more autonomy to schools and local communities may be beneficial.

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Annex A   Overview of RLO Accountability projects

Project title	Contexts covered	Intended objectives	Number of outputs covered in synthesis
Accountability, capacity and trust to improve learning outcomes in South Africa: a systems approach	South Africa	The project aims to promote more positive and effective accountability relationships in South Africa's public primary education system with the goal of improving learning outcomes of disadvantaged children and closing achievement gaps. The study will highlight where relationships need to be improved and how to improve learning outcomes. Initial scoping of the South African landscape and conversations with key stakeholders suggest that an overall lack of trust in the system (particularly between national authorities, teacher unions, principals, and teachers) needs to be addressed in order to improve relationships.	4
Accountability for gender equality in education: critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the SDGs	South Africa and Malawi	This project aims to contribute to building accountability for achieving an expansion of education provision worldwide and enhancing gender equality. It seeks to i) review the scholarly literature to refine insight into what is entailed in definitions of learning outcomes linked with gender equality, ii) discuss some of the critiques and limitation of indicators as a technique for building accountability, and iii) develop an indicator framework for gender equality in education that can support the work of Education 2030, particularly the monitoring of the SDG targets on gender and education, while also responding to concerns of organisations that work at international, national, and local levels.	10
Can schools' accountability for learning be strengthened from the grass roots? Investigating the potential for community–school	India	This project explores the potential of community-based accountability relationships to raise children's foundational learning outcomes, with a focus on the most disadvantaged primary-school learners: namely those who are from poorer households and, within these, girls. Researchers ask both whether and how changes occur when school actors are supported to view themselves as	6

Project title	Contexts covered	Intended objectives	Number of outputs covered in synthesis
partnerships in India		accountable to the local community and to view improved learning as their ultimate goal.	
Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes	Liberia	Researchers working on this project propose a large-scale field experiment to study the effect of the Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL), comparing 120 schools that have been delegated to management by private operators with 120 control schools still under government management. The randomized field experiment will allow investigation of three main aspects of accountability: 1. Managerial accountability (of teachers to private operators); 2. Bottom-up accountability (of teachers and operators to parents); and 3. Top-down, results-based accountability (of private operators to the Ministry of Education).	1
Rights and Accountability in the Indian System of Education (RAISE)	India	The RAISE research project focuses on accountability towards 'disadvantaged' learners in primary education in India. The project investigates norms around access, participation, and monitoring held across the scales of families, schools, communities, and the educational bureaucracy. It follows a sequential mixed methods approach to track how specific policy initiatives stemming from India's Right to Education Act are understood across these four system scales in the project sites of Bihar and Rajasthan.	1
Strengthening schools' accountability mechanisms through participation: addressing education quality and equity in Afghanistan and Pakistan	Pakistan and Afghanistan	Promoting processes of accountability is recognised as a way of promoting quality and equity in education. This project argues that the role that parents and community members can play in improving the quality of education through innovative social accountability mechanisms has not been sufficiently explored in low-income countries. Therefore, this project will develop, implement, and evaluate a social accountability intervention - combined with inclusive education training - engaging	1

Project title	Contexts covered	Intended objectives	Number of outputs covered in synthesis
		parents, teachers, and children. The researchers will assess the intervention's impact on basic cognitive but also psychosocial skills of learners as well as parent's expectations and engagement, and teachers' confidence with regards to inclusion of children with disabilities.	

Project title	Contexts covered	Intended objectives	Number of outputs covered in synthesis

Annex B   Overview of RLO Accountability projects yet to produce outputs (at the time of writing)[13]

Project title	Contexts covered	Intended objectives
Disadvantage and participation accountability processes: theory and evidence from school development and management committees in Karnataka, India	India	This interdisciplinary project will carry out innovative, policy-relevant research, focused on addressing the research question: 'How do interacting dynamics in the social, political, economic and cultural context enable or inhibit the delivery of quality education in specific developing country contexts?' In this project, the researchers will, first, develop a conceptual framework using insights from education research, behavioural economics and game theory to examine, both theoretically and empirically, how poverty, marginalization and exclusion (collectively referred to as 'disadvantage') impact on the beliefs and agency of parents. Second, they will collect evidence, combining both quantitative (baseline/endline surveys and Randomized Control Trials) and qualitative methods (focus groups, semi-structured interviews), on the potential impact of a pro-poor accountability framework. The baseline survey will lead to a Citizen Report Card and the Community Score Card. The fieldwork will implement and evaluate a training programme to encourage active participation and critical engagement by disadvantaged groups.
Improving learning: developing measures of accountability and evaluating their association with students' gains in achievement in Nepal	Nepal	This project has two major aims: 1. To develop and pre-test a suite of Nepali Accountability Assessment Tools (NAATs) for use by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and to pilot these tools within the Chitwan Valley of Nepal. Importantly, the tools will be designed so that Nepal's MOE can both assess and potentially improve its current accountability processes at multiple levels of the increasingly decentralized Nepalese education system. 2. To investigate the relationships between accountability processes, environments for student learning in schools, families, and communities, and student learning. The three main research questions being investigated are: Are accountability processes systematically related to socioeconomic disparities among communities, schools within communities, and families within schools? In school and community settings where accountability processes are more intensive, is the quality of instructional service delivery higher? And, controlling for socioeconomic disparities related to student achievement, is student learning higher in schools and communities where accountability processes are more intensive?

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[13] Please see the comment on inclusion of outputs in the Methodology section of the paper.

Project title	Contexts covered	Intended objectives
Organizational Perspectives on Accountability and Learning (OPAL): school management models and the social impact of schooling in Mumbai and Kathmandu	India and Nepal	The project will investigate how the accountability of schools differs according to the school management model and whether accountability is linked to differences in learning outcomes. The researchers propose to take a more sophisticated approach to accountability than previous research by examining the perceived accountability of multiple stakeholders: parents, teachers and school management. The project will involve quantitative data collection on the perceived accountability of various school stakeholders (i.e., parents, teachers, and management), cognitive learning outcomes, and children's well-being and social inclusion. These data are collected using established research instruments that have been employed in international contexts. Data from the quantitative component of the study will be used to examine how different models of school management are related to perceived accountability, student learning outcomes and social value (i.e., inclusion and cohesion). Additionally, researchers will undertake in-depth qualitative case studies on a subset of schools, which will provide insights into the engagement between different stakeholders and the perception of accountability relationships.
Technology, monitoring and teacher support in Niger	Niger	The growth of mobile phone technology throughout sub-Saharan Africa has the potential to affect the relationships between teachers, communities and education service providers in remote rural areas. This research team ran a randomized evaluation in Niger between 2014-2016, which showed that a mobile phone monitoring intervention in the context of an adult education program - whereby teachers, students and village chiefs were called on a weekly basis - significantly improved students' test scores. The current research builds upon this initial basis in five ways. First, it will expand the program to more villages in order to test the intervention at a larger scale. Second, the research will test different types of mobile monitoring to determine which approach is the most effective in increasing teacher performance and learning. Third, the program will assess the potential for using mobile phones to provide pedagogical support to teachers. Fourth, this research will seek to understand how education and technology affect intra-village dynamics, as well as the dynamics between the teacher, community and education service providers. And finally, these interventions will be piloted in a small number of primary schools to understand whether the dynamics of teacher monitoring and support are different in a primary school setting and with governmental institutions.

Annex C   Accountability outputs categorised by project

Title of output	Author(s)	Date published	Contexts covered	Type of publication	Methodology (adapted from the document itself)
Project: Accountability, capacity and trust to improve learning outcomes in South Africa: a systems approach					
Accountability and trust: Two sides of the same coin?	Ehren, M., Paterson, A., Baxter, J.	2019	South Africa	Journal article	This systematic literature review started with a conceptualization of 'trust' and 'accountability'. The authors identified six key sources which include recent meta-analyses or systematic literature reviews in each of the two areas. This resulted in a set of 554 unique references. Abstracts were extracted for each reference and coded according to type of study, type of sector, type of country, and type of variable. In the third phase, the team read the 554 abstracts to select papers for full reading. The selection of 111 sources were first marked by all three team members as including (1) empirical findings or conceptualizations on the interaction between trust and accountability, or (2) papers which were situated in South Africa's education system. Of these 111, only 38 met both criteria in addressing interactions between trust/accountability of/in South Africa's education system.
Accountability structures that support school self-evaluation, enquiry and learning	Ehren, M.	2019	Global	Book chapter	This chapter first explains how current standardised accountability systems, such as high stakes testing and school inspections, have standardised aspects of a school's organisation. DiMaggio and Powell's work on isomorphism is used to understand how formal and informal pressure, uncertainty and professional networks and norms lead to high levels of standardisation of schools' cultures and structures which are narrowly organised around the standards in accountability frameworks. The conclusion of

Title of output	Author(s)	Date published	Contexts covered	Type of publication	Methodology (adapted from the document itself)
					this chapter draws on work of Alkin to present an alternative, more localised and subjective model of evaluation which would support schools in using research evidence to improve their practice and develop a research-engaged organisational culture.
Corruption and trust in South African education: Perceptions of teachers and school boards.	Baxter, J., & Ehren, M.	2019	South Africa	Conference paper	This paper draws on data gathered during an international funded project examining the relationship between trust, capacity and accountability to improve learner outcomes in South Africa. The analysis draws on two sources of data: a) Thematic Analysis of a report into corruption in South African Education, and B) data from focus groups with teachers, head teachers and district officials from a single province. Data collection from researcher facilitated focus groups with teachers, district representatives and heads of education in (between 18 and 24 participants over 3 sessions), took place during a field work visits in February 2019.
Rebuilding trust in a context of suspicion: South Africa's failing education system	Ehren, M.	2018	South Africa	Blog post	In this research, the author hopes to find examples of where trust has been rebuilt and where school staff are working in an effective and supportive environment of transparent accountability and are building capacity for improvement of learning outcomes.
Project: Accountability for gender equality in education: critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the SDGs					
Accountability for gender equality	Unterhalter, E., North, A., & Ward, O.	2018	South Africa	Background paper for the 2018 GEMR	In this paper, the authors look at a range of different meanings of accountability, distilled in the main Global Education Monitoring Report and consider their implications in relation to debates about gender and gender equality in

Title of output	Author(s)	Date published	Contexts covered	Type of publication	Methodology (adapted from the document itself)
				Gender Review	education. The aim of the paper is to develop a 'bespoke' interpretation of accountability and different forms of gender equality in education through which the researchers can assess a number of research studies and country examples of forms of accountability.
Achieving gender equality in and through education.	Unterhalter, E.	2019	Global	A knowledge and innovation exchange (KIX) discussion paper	In this paper, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) commissioned a senior author to review GPE documents and analytical work from other sources related to achieving gender equality in and through education, conduct a desk review, consult with developing country partners and experts, and write a discussion paper. The author worked with GPE's senior education specialist on gender equality and other members of the GPE Secretariat to draft an initial discussion paper.
Balancing pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will: Some reflections on the capability approach, gender, empowerment, and education	Unterhalter, E.	2019	Global	Book chapter	This chapter begins with a review of some of the recent discussions among feminist activists of how the term empowerment has been co-opted and taken away from meanings of solidarity and opposition to injustice. It sets this struggle over the meaning of empowerment within a wider historical context, exploring how two meanings of empowerment have long existed, drawing on some of Gramsci's ideas about hegemony, transformism, the complex forms of institutions, and the interplay of moments of pessimism and optimism to understand this process. In the second part, the chapter looks at work on empowerment and capabilities considering the different modalities of education they invoke. It discusses how a number of moves associated with the capability approach suggest some ways of anchoring the concept of empowerment in relation to

Title of output	Author(s)	Date published	Contexts covered	Type of publication	Methodology (adapted from the document itself)
					balancing analytically between Gramsci's pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will.
COVID-19 as a capability crisis: Using the capability framework to understand policy challenges	Anand, P., Ferrer, B., Gao, Q., Nogales, R., & Unterhalter, E.	2020	Global	Journal article	From the 1980s on, a growing number of economists and other social scientists have argued for a framework that brings ethics into economic and social analysis more explicitly. They pointed out that there was a need for an approach to economic development that monitored human outcomes directly as well as through the lens of income. As a global crisis, COVID-19 warrants this view as the protection of lives and livelihoods has rapidly risen in the health, economic, social, and political agenda. At its core, the capability approach is a paradigm that provides several pathways that can be used to connect policy analysis and ethical foundations.
Global campaigns for girls' and women's education, 2000–2017: Insights from transnational social movement theory	Peppin Vaughan, R.	2019	Global	Journal article	In this paper, the author applies concepts from social movement analysis to explore the reasons for the emergence of girls' education as a global campaign issue, and the role of national and international women's organisations in this. The analysis draws on literature on transnational social movements, documents from international conferences, and data on aid flows. The analysis is also informed by a series of exploratory interviews conducted in 2016-17 with actors in a number of international and national organisations addressing girls' and women's education.

Title of output	Author(s)	Date published	Contexts covered	Type of publication	Methodology (adapted from the document itself)
Gender, poverty and educational equality	North, A., & Longlands, H.	2019	Global	Book chapter	The chapter is organized around three main sections. In the first section, the authors consider global trends in relation to gender equality in education from the 1990s to the present and discuss the significance of key policy moments. In the second section, they engage with debates regarding the conceptualization of gender equality in relation to education. Finally, in the third section, they consider the implications of these different approaches to understanding gender equality for educational practice, drawing on findings from a range of empirical research studies which have examined attempts to support gender equality through education in contexts of poverty.
Negative capability? Measuring the unmeasurable in education	Unterhalter, E.	2017	Global	Journal article	This article to the special issue of *Comparative Education* on measuring the unmeasurable in education considers measurement as reflecting facts and uncertainties. The notion of negative capability is used metaphorically to depict some limits of what is measurable, and portray aspects of the process of education, associated with uncertainty and public scrutiny of complexity. Four overarching questions – what, when, why and how – have guided the reflections of the authors who have contributed to the special issue.
The many meanings of quality education: Politics of targets and indicators in SDG 4	Unterhalter, E.	2019	Global	Journal article	This historical review is used to reflect on some of the possibilities to develop a critically informed approach to metrics for SDG4, enhancing discussion and practice to develop indicators which more closely express the values of the goal. The possibility is considered of mobilisations for better measures. The discussion is organised in four parts. Part 1 briefly summarises SDG4 and details the targets and indicators. Part 2 outlines some of the politics entailed in the

Title of output	Author(s)	Date published	Contexts covered	Type of publication	Methodology (adapted from the document itself)
					framing of SDG4 and the selection of the targets and indicators. Part 3 highlights some key omissions in the indicators which illuminate features of distortion and difficulty associated with numbers. Part 4 explores some of the possibilities and limitations for mobilisations around equity and inclusion linked to SDG indicators and what potential and difficulties there may be to build critical dialogue around metrics that better depict the key tenets of the education goal and targets.
The politics, policies and practices of intersectionality: Making gender equality inclusive and equitable in and through education	Unterhalter, E., Robinson, L., & Ron Balsera, M.	2020	Global	Background paper for the 2018 GEMR Gender Review	The concept of intersectionality allows for an expanded understanding of many facets of gender inequality associated with education, and a more nuanced approach to thinking about inclusion in education systems that go beyond equalising the numbers of girls and boys enrolling or progressing. The discussion presents three ways of understanding intersectionality drawing on McCall's distinction between intra-categorical, inter-categorical, and anti-categorical formulations. The authors interpret these as entailing a policy approach that highlights descriptions of overlapping differences within groups defined by gender (descriptive intersectionality as an interpretation of intra-categorical intersectionality), undertaking an analysis of the ways that formations of power and powerlessness operate in and through education (institutional and normative intersectionality, an interpretation of inter-categorical intersectionality), and engaging with discursive critique of the ways ideas of gender and inclusion are formulated in education policy and practice (discursive intersectionality, an interpretation of anti-categorical intersectionality).

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Whose tomorrow? Six ideas for education in a different world	Unterhalter, E.	2020		Blog	Author's opinions stated in the form of a blog. No methodology highlighted.
Project: Can schools' accountability for learning be strengthened from the grass roots? **Investigating the potential for community–school partnerships in India**					
Accountability from the grassroots: Children's foundational reading and arithmetic in Sitapur District, Uttar Pradesh	Sabates, R., Bhattacharjea, S., & Wadhwa, W.	2020	India	Policy paper	To evaluate the impact of the intervention on learning outcomes, the authors designed a mixed methods impact evaluation in rural villages of Uttar Pradesh. 400 villages which have at least two government schools were randomly selected from the District Information on School Education frame for 2016-17, and randomly assigned to: i) villages where Pratham's interventions work with schools and communities (200 villages); ii) villages where Pratham's interventions are only with the communities (100 villages); and iii) villages where no intervention is taking place (100 villages). Since measuring learning is a key part of the project, this paper describes the assessment tool and summarises reading and arithmetic achievement data from the baseline measurement of a sample of 23,970 children studying in grades 2, 3 and 4 across all 400 villages of Sitapur district in Uttar Pradesh, India.
Assessment for action: An organic, free-range approach to	Alcott, B., Rose, P., Sabates, R., Cherfils, M., & Alonso, M. L.	2018	Global South	Policy paper	This analysis is based on a combination of interviews with People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network members, participation in PAL Network events, and documentary analysis. Members of the research team held two individual interviews each with ten of the Network's country members, as well as an interview with the PAL Network Secretariat.

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raising learning for all					Members of the research team attended the PAL Network's annual meeting in Mexico, March 2017, and held a workshop focused on the current project in Uganda, May 2018, which was attended by the Secretariat and representatives from each of the ten participating Network countries. Documentary analysis was undertaken on a combination of published and grey literature provided by PAL Network members.
Experience and lessons of learning intervention programmes across the PAL Network members	Alcott, B., Rose, P., Sabates, R., & Cherfils, M.	2018	Global South	Policy paper	This analysis is based on a combination of interviews with People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network members, participation in PAL Network events, and documentary analysis. Members of the research team held two individual interviews each with ten of the Network's country members, as well as an interview with the PAL Network Secretariat. Members of the research team attended the PAL Network's annual meeting in Mexico, March 2017, and held a workshop focused on the current project in Uganda, May 2018, which was attended by the Secretariat and representatives from each of the ten participating Network countries. Documentary analysis was undertaken on a combination of published and grey literature provided by PAL Network members.
From assessment to action: Lessons from the development of theories of change with the people's	Alcott, B., Rose, P., Sabates, R., & Ellison, C.	2020	Global South	Journal article	The analysis in this article is based on a range of activities and points of engagement with PAL Network members, and combines documentary analysis, interviews, feedback meetings, and participation in PAL Network events. First, PAL Network members provided documentation about each of their organization's relevant activities, including theories of change as they had been developed so far. Further

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action for learning network					documents were obtained by the research team from published and unpublished literature. To grasp a better understanding of why PAL Network members differed in their approaches to Pathways to Impact, members of the research team held two individual interviews each with each of the PAL Network's country members, as well as an interview with the PAL Network Secretariat. Further insights into how the PAL Network members perceived their work and the underlying theory of change that could explain their activities as a Network were obtained during a workshop. This workshop was attended by the PAL Network Secretariat and representatives from each of the 10 participating PAL Network countries as well as the research team.
Parental involvement in low-achieving children's learning: The role of household wealth in rural India	Cashman, L., Sabates, R., & Alcott, B.	2021	India	Journal article	This study aims to quantitatively assess the role of wealth on parents' involvement in activities that support low-achieving children's learning and schooling. To do this, this study analyses cross-sectional data from the 'Accountability from the Grassroots' project. The school sample included 853 government schools across 432 villages, which emphasized low-income students, as a majority of students attending government schools fall in this category. Field staff then tested children using the ASER literacy learning assessment tool and then the ASER numeracy learning assessment tool. The final sample was of 24,060 children. This study ran regressions on samples between 13,558 and 14,306 parents depending on the information available in each observation.

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Strengthening accountability of schools at the grassroots	Bhattacharjea, S., & Ramanujan, P.	2020	India	Policy brief	The project 'Can Schools' Accountability for Learning be Strengthened from the Grassroots?' explores how children's learning can be improved by school and community-based interventions designed to help head teachers, teachers, parents, and communities develop a shared understanding of children's learning levels and take action to improve these. The research is being conducted in 400 randomly selected villages in one district of rural Uttar Pradesh, and uses a longitudinal mixed methods design to evaluate two interventions. One intervention focuses on activities to build communities' awareness and capacities to support and improve children's foundational learning in grades 3–5. The other intervention includes similar community-based activities but adds an additional component focusing on school actors' awareness and engagement with these issues. Villages were randomly assigned: they were either where (i) Pratham's interventions work with both schools and communities; (ii) Pratham's interventions work only with the community; or (iii) no intervention was taking place. The baseline survey included around 24,000 pupils from grades 2–4 from 853 government primary schools in 400 villages.
Project: Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes					
Outsourcing education: Experimental evidence from Liberia	Romero, M., Sandefur, J., & Sandholtz, W. A.	2020	Liberia	Journal article	The authors study the impact of this program by randomly assigning existing public schools to be managed by a private provider. They paired schools (based on infrastructure and geography), then assigned pairs to providers, and subsequently randomly assigned treatment within each matched pair. Researchers conducted one-on-one tests in which an enumerator sits with the student, asks

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					questions, and records the answers. Researchers also surveyed all the teachers in each school and conducted in-depth surveys with those teaching math and English. They asked teachers about their time use and teaching strategies and obtained teacher opinions on the PSL program. Furthermore, they conducted school-level surveys to collect information about school facilities, the teacher roster, input availability (e.g., textbooks), and expenditures. For the second wave of data collection, researchers surveyed a random subset of households from the student sample, recording household characteristics and attitudes of household members. They also gathered data on school enrolment and learning levels for all children 4-8 years old living in these households.
Project: Rights and Accountability in the Indian System of Education (RAISE)					
Relational systems of inclusion and exclusion: A cross-scalar analysis of educational access and participation in India	Dyer, C., Thomas, N., Jacob, S., & Mukhopadyay, R.	2019	India	Conference paper	Focusing on two districts in the states of Bihar and Rajasthan, the authors' cross-scalar analytical approach traces how norms around access, participation and monitoring within families, schools, and the educational bureaucracy interact to produce differential and often inequitable outcomes for children. The paper is based on findings from the first, qualitative, empirical phase of the RAISE research project. Drawing on empirical data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focused group with teachers, school staff, school management committee members, local government officials, parents and family

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					members, community members, and members of educational bureaucracy from Bihar in Patna, the authors demonstrate the importance of understanding inclusive education systems as relational, i.e., being always attentive to the interaction and reshaping of norms within specific political economies of education.
Project: Strengthening schools accountability mechanisms through participation: addressing education quality and equity in Afghanistan and Pakistan					
Strengthening child inclusion in the classroom in rural schools of Pakistan and Afghanistan: What did we learn by testing the system dynamics protocol for community engagement?	Trani, J. F., Bakhshi, P., Mozaffari, A., Sohail, M., Rawab, H., Kaplan, I., Ballard, E., & Hovmand, P.	2019	Pakistan and Afghanistan	Journal article	Using Community Based System Dynamics (CBSD) and a mixed method cluster randomised controlled trial for its evaluation, the present study aims at identifying ways of improving school social accountability mechanisms and evaluating their impact on the quality of the learning experience of children. In the paper, the authors present the outcomes of three pilot workshops first with teachers and then with children of the group model building (GMB) protocol from rural schools in Punjab province of Pakistan and Badakhshan province of Afghanistan. The overall study aims at carrying out GMB workshops in 108 randomly selected intervention schools. School principal and staff, teachers, parents and children as well as members of school management committees in Afghanistan or village education committees in Pakistan will participate in separate GMB sessions to elaborate their vision of factors that influence inclusion in the classroom learning process.