

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit

PART 1(a):

Introduction

This document contains one section of the [RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit](#).

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| **Introduction**

| Applications of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic

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Download the full toolkit at: https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2023/09.

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit

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RISE

RESEARCH ON IMPROVING
SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

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Each section of the toolkit should be consulted during the indicated phases of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic:

- 1 Inception
- 2 Desk review
- 3 Stakeholder workshops & interviews
- 4 Analysis
- 5 Prioritisation workshop
- 6 Final report

More details on each phase are available in the *Application Guide (Part 2)*.

What is the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic?

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic is a set of tools to support local actors in selecting high-level strategic priorities to improve student learning based on the latest education systems research.

The Diagnostic can be implemented at the national, regional, or local levels. As of 2022, the Diagnostic has been implemented in seven field-based studies across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, led by diverse teams spanning NGOs, think tanks, consultancies, academic researchers, and government counterparts.¹ These teams have used the Diagnostic for a range of objectives, including:

- **Policy prioritisation:** Diagnosis of key misalignments between different parts of the education system, in order to identify and prioritise the policies that might resolve these misalignments and improve student

¹ For an overview of these applications of the Diagnostic, see the [Toolkit](#) section on *Applications of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic*.

learning. This objective would lend itself to strategic exercises and reviews of sector priorities and education sector plans.

- **Programme design:** Diagnosis of the alignments and misalignments between an ongoing or planned educational programme and different parts of the wider education system. This objective would be useful to organisations trying to ensure a soon-to-be-launched programme “lands” within the wider system and achieves its intended impact.
- **Retrospective policy analysis:** Backward-looking diagnosis of the education system and a policy in question to explain the success or failure of a reform and its impact on student learning. This objective would be useful to organisations seeking to understand success or learn from failure.

Systems thinking in the Diagnostic

This Diagnostic was developed by the [RISE Programme](#), a long-term, multi-country research endeavour studying how education systems can overcome the learning crisis² and cultivate learning for all children. A key premise of RISE and of the Diagnostic is that the challenges facing education systems are complex. Systemic educational challenges involve interactions and feedback loops among different actors, structures, processes, and resources. These interactions mean that introducing a standalone policy reform can have unpredictable consequences for schools, classrooms, and students. Instead, we need to look at education systems holistically and to identify reform priorities strategically. This attention to complexity, interactions, and different parts of a system is called systems thinking.

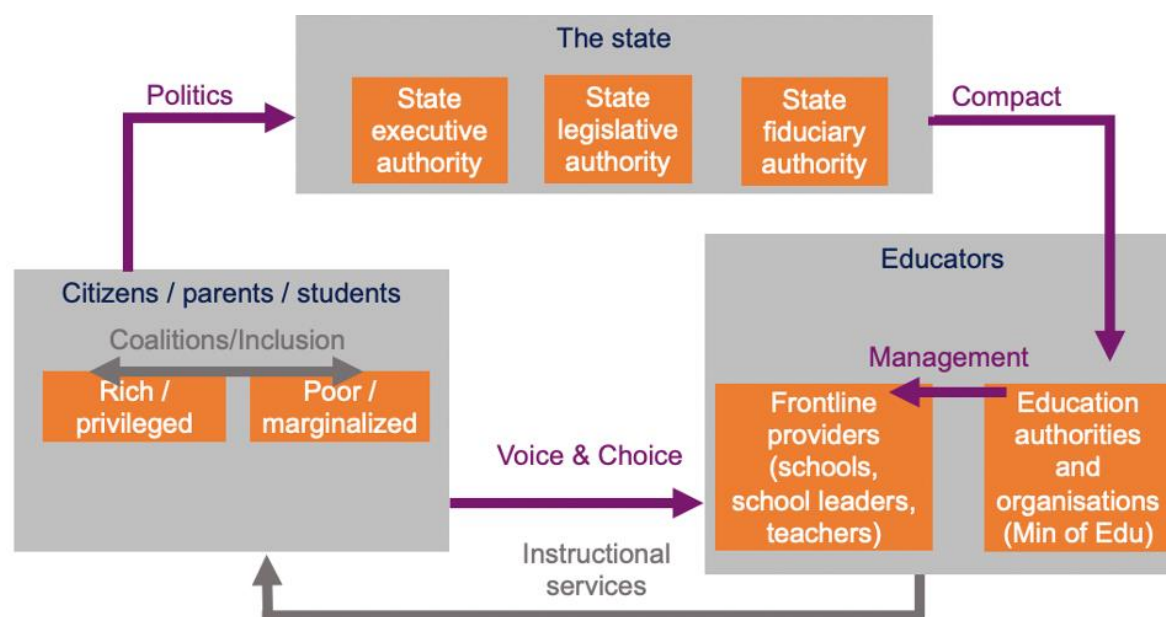
Accordingly, the Diagnostic is anchored in the RISE Education Systems Framework ([Pritchett 2015; Silberstein and Spivack, 2023](#)). This framework is encapsulated in a 5x4 matrix that lays out the key relationships of an education system, the elements that characterise them, and the interactions between them.³

Using this framework, RISE has designed, piloted, and refined this Diagnostic approach to identify constraints and priorities for reform in an education system. The approach identifies the key actors in the education system, specifies the relationships between them, identifies the primary alignment(s) of these relationships, exposes misalignments within the system, and identifies priorities for reform.

² The “learning crisis” refers to the fact that although the overwhelming majority of children today receive at least some schooling, many school-going children are not given meaningful opportunities to learn, such that large proportions of children finish primary school without learning how to read or to do basic arithmetic. For more on this, see <https://riseprogramme.org/systems-thinking/learning-crisis>.

³ For more on this framework, see [Silberstein and Spivack \(2023\)](#).

Figure 1. The Diagnostic is based on the RISE Systems Framework, which maps the relationships between actors in an education system and explores the effects of these relationships on systemic outcomes.



Source: Adapted from Pritchett (2015)

The Diagnostic in practice

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic has three purposes:

- **Diagnose:** Facilitate the use of systems thinking to diagnose the components of the education system that are not working together as well as they could to deliver learning.
- **Prioritise:** Facilitate high-level prioritisation of one or two key areas of the system for reform in order to create better alignment around improving learning outcomes.
- **Build consensus:** Foster a common understanding across stakeholders of both the diagnosis and the priorities.

To achieve this, the Diagnostic analysis involves three components:

- Identifying the **main alignment(s)** of each accountability relationship between different actors in the education system.
- Identifying **key misalignments** within the education system.
- Identifying **priorities for intervention** to improve system outcomes.

Typically, the Diagnostic is led by a local team. This team could be based at a range of organisations, such as a think tank, government advisory organisation, civil society organisation, consultancy, or a university. It often involves a collaboration with government. However, other configurations are possible, such as a research organisation conducting the diagnostic on its own, or an organisation conducting the diagnostic with stakeholders other than government. Additionally, a steering committee comprising stakeholders from government and other parts of the education system should be formed to advise the research team. This steering committee will be involved in formulating recommendations based on the Diagnostic fieldwork and analysis.

The Diagnostic aims to generate a shared understanding among actors about the challenges the education system faces, and to facilitate the identification of priorities for intervention. Accordingly, the process is highly participatory. Workshops with government and other stakeholders form the core of the diagnostic data collection process, and the final recommendations of the process are generated by the steering committee, based on the analysis conducted by the research team.

Besides this shared understanding, the tangible final output of the diagnostic is a final report: a narrative-driven document describing the major misalignments within the education system that hinder children's learning, and outlining top priorities for reform. From inception to final report, teams should plan on a timeline of approximately six months for implementing the Diagnostic.

How to use this toolkit

The RISE Diagnostic Toolkit comprises eight sections, all of which facilitate the implementation of the Education Systems Diagnostic. These eight sections are divided into three parts.

Part 1: Overview

Introduction

This introductory section aims to acquaint readers with the Diagnostic and to offer a **preview** of the rest of the toolkit.

Applications of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic

This section lets users **explore** the range of its possible applications. It gives a brief description of the Diagnostic pilot studies conducted thus far. Each pilot study is discussed in terms of its context, purpose, implementation partners, implementation approach and adaptations, and key findings.

Prospective users of the Diagnostic may find these summaries of prior diagnostic studies useful for determining whether the Diagnostic would be a good fit for their contexts and goals.

Part 2: Implementation

Understanding the RISE Systems Framework

This section lays out the conceptual background necessary to **understand** the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic. It describes the RISE 5x4 framework and how this framework applies systems thinking to education reform.

Key concepts explored in this section include: accountability relationships, the elements of these relationships, alignments of these relationships with various key objectives, and the types of misalignments that can emerge in education systems.

Guide to Applying the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic

This section provides step-by-step guidance in order to **apply** the Diagnostic through its six phases:

- inception,

- desk review,
- stakeholder workshops and interviews,
- analysis,
- prioritisation workshop, and
- final report.

This guide highlights points to consider in designing a diagnostic study, as well as potential adaptations of the Diagnostic approach to better suit different contexts.

Planning and Analysis Tools

The Planning and Analysis Tools, which take the form of a Microsoft Excel workbook,⁴ enable users to **analyse** the key alignments and misalignments within their education systems.

Three of these tools facilitate planning during the inception, desk review, and stakeholder workshop and interview phases.

- Tool #1. Steering committee list
- Tool #2. Stakeholder list
- Tool #3. Document list.

The other four tools should be used throughout data collection and analysis. These tools are designed to both inform the research process and record emerging observations during the desk review, workshops and interviews, analysis, prioritisation, and final report writing.

- Tool #4. Compact analysis
- Tool #5. Management analysis
- Tool #6. Voice & choice relationship
- Tool #7. Misalignments analysis

Part 3: Resources

Glossary

Users can **refer** to the glossary for quick explanations of all of the terminology used in the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit.

Training Video and Slide Decks

This video recording of a Diagnostic training session conducted in March 2022, along with slide decks from this and other training sessions, can help users to **equip** themselves (during the inception phase) for

⁴ Specifically, a macro-enabled Microsoft Excel workbook—with the file extension .xlsm rather than .xlsx—to take advantage of a macro that allows guidance notes in the spreadsheets to be shown or hidden as needed.

implementing the Diagnostic. The slide decks may also be adapted for informing local stakeholders about the diagnostic.

Example Materials from the Pilot Studies

This section showcases a selection of materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies conducted in 2022. It includes examples of data collection tools and workshop slide decks that have been used in the field, together with examples of inception reports, desk reviews, and final reports. The hope is that this section will **inspire** users as they design and implement their own Diagnostic studies.

References

- Pritchett, L. (2015). Creating Education Systems Coherent for Learning Outcomes. RISE Working Paper Series. 15/005. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2015/005.
- Silberstein, J., & Spivack, M. (2023). Applying Systems Thinking to Education: Using the RISE Systems Framework to Diagnose Education Systems. RISE Insight. 2021/028. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2021/028.

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