

RISE Annual Conference 2022

**Political Contexts and Learning
Outcomes:
Influences & Entry Points**

Brian Levy,

School of Advanced International Studies

Johns Hopkins University

Outline

1: Politics, institutions and education systems

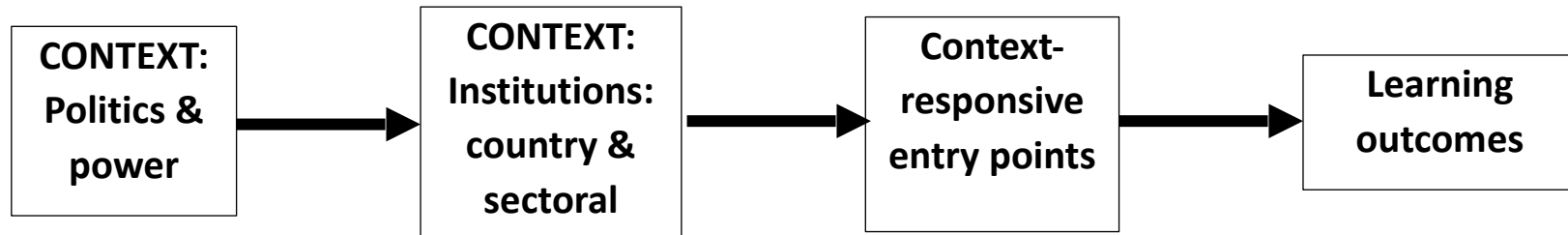
- Education systems:
 - The learning sweet spot.....
 - Other patterns.....

2: Three country contexts

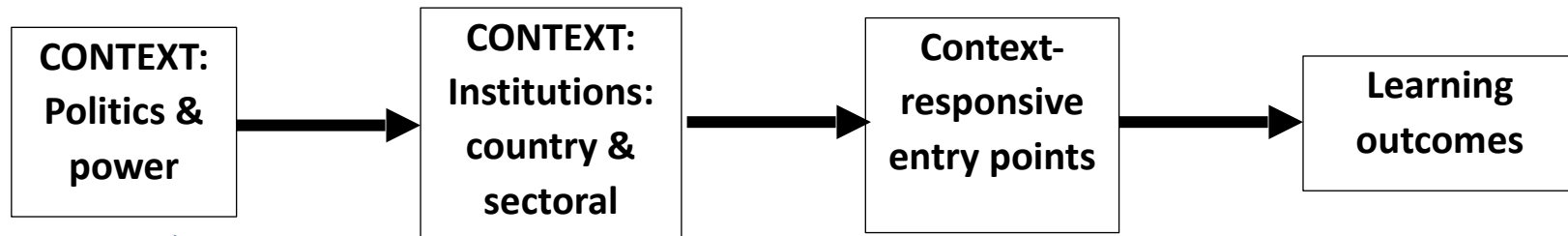
- each with distinctive institutional patterns, and distinctive entry points

3: Entry points – a (surprising) cross-cutting finding...

Contexts, Entry Points and Learning Outcomes

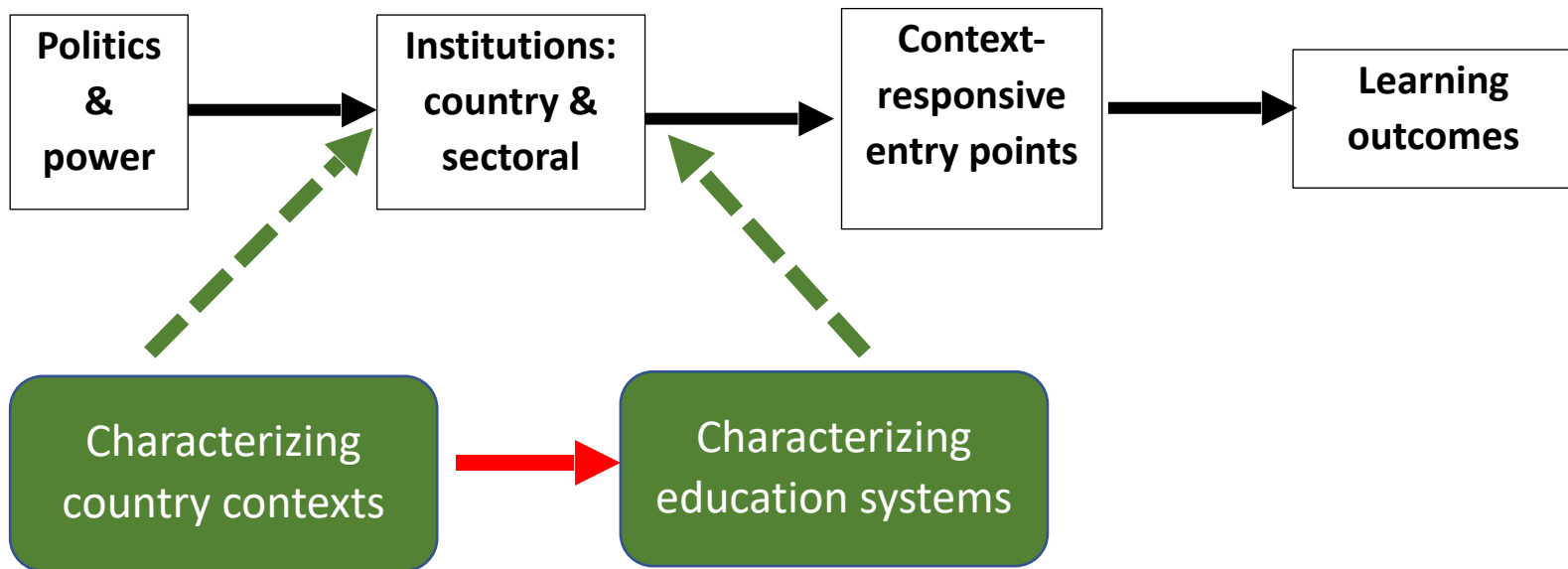


Contexts, Entry Points and Learning Outcomes



POLITICS:

- (i) Shapes institutions**
- (ii) Sets 'boundaries' of what reforms are feasible**



Analysis is a synthesis of 12 RISE-commissioned political economy papers

Core RISE countries : Ethiopia; Indonesia; Nigeria; Tanzania; Vietnam

Other RISE PE studies: Chile; Kenya; Peru; South Africa

Other : Ghana

Characterizing education systems: Coherence and alignment *(WDR 2018)*

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

Education systems: Three patterns

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

**#1: The learning 'sweet spot':
'Good enough' coherence and
alignment**

**#3: Fragmented systems:
(How) can learning gains
be achieved within
fragmented systems?**

**#2: Coherent – but
around goals other
than learning.
WHY?**







Pattern #1: The learning 'sweet spot'....

- **With 'good enough' system coherence & alignment to learning**
 - Sector-specific technical interventions can add substantial value (*eg: teacher support + scripted learning*)

But country contexts can constrain education systems getting to the 'sweet spot'

⇒ **How?**

⇒ **'context-sensitive' entry points?**

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

Preview: a striking conclusion

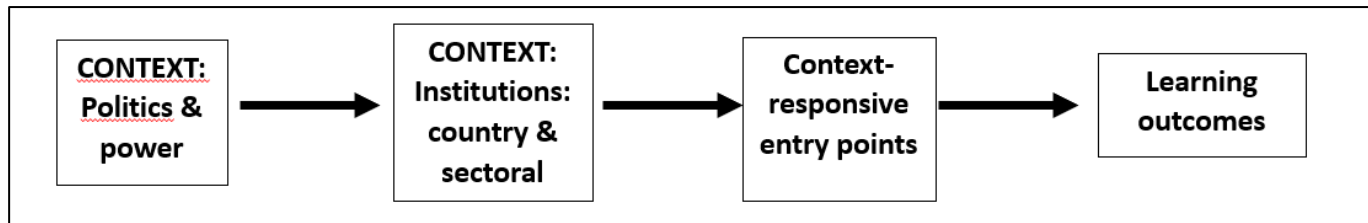
For education systems outside the 'sweet spot':

- Limits of institutional, incentive & sector-specific technical interventions

Across all non-sweet-spot systems:

- Surprisingly large role for 'soft' governance
 - Ideas and norms.....

Country contexts shape education systems



Three *heuristic* contexts

- **Institutions:**
 - **personalized** vs **impersonal**
- **Power:**
 - Concentrated vs Fragmented
 - **Dominant** vs **competitive**
 - Inclusion:
 - Broad versus narrow

- 1. Dominant**
 - *Developmental or predatory????*
- 2. Competitive I:**
 - *Multistakeholder & impersonal*
- 3. Competitive II:**
 - *Multistakeholder & personalized*

Categorizing the countries

V-DEM electoral democracy indicator

V-DEM clientelism and rule of law indicators

DOMINANT	COMPETITIVE
<p>Ethiopia (1970-)</p> <p>Indonesia (1971-1998)</p> <p>Kenya (1970-2002)</p> <p>Nigeria (1970-1999)</p> <p>Tanzania (1970-2020)</p> <p>Vietnam (1970 -)</p>	<p><u>Impersonal</u></p> <p>Chile (1990-)</p> <p>Peru (2001-)</p> <p>South Africa (1994-)</p> <p>[Western Cape, SA (1994-)</p>
	<p><u>Personalized</u></p> <p>Ghana (2001-)</p> <p>Kenya (2003-)</p> <p>Nigeria (2000 -)</p> <p>[Eastern Cape, SA (1998-)</p>

Country Context #1: Dominant

*Dominant contexts support coherent education systems:
But towards what purpose?*

Key features of dominance:

- *Top down governance of state institutions*
 - Generally coherent bureaucracies, including systems of education
- *Ideas of top leadership are trumps*
 - But ‘improving learning outcomes’ not necessarily high on the agenda

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

**Education sector goals:
In dominant contexts....
...ideas are trumps!!!!**

- **Vietnam:** universal access, learning-oriented
- **Ethiopia** from narrow & elitist (under Haile Selassie) to universal access (during military Derg government) to mixed developmental and subnational rights under Meles Zenawi
- **Kenya** under Moi: expand access
- **Tanzania** rationed access, until political pressure + 'manpower for socialist agrarian development' brings shift to universal primary (Opalo)
- **Indonesia:** "priority to training students to be loyal and obedient to the Indonesian nation, the Indonesian state and, to some extent, their religion rather than promoting acquisition of basic skills
- **Nigeria:** initially access, then patronage and predation

- **Rwanda:** national language French to English

Key entry point to improve learning outcomes in dominant contexts.....

....IDEAS.....

Top-level goal setting
=> Engage political leadership around purposes of education system

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

Country contexts #2 and #3: **COMPETITIVE**

- In all competitive contexts: the allure of expanding access.....
- Personalized vs impersonal
 - Rules vs deals
 - Each involving distinct constraints and opportunities
- Where might pressure for improving quality come from?
 - Business
 - Parents (what feedback mechanisms?)

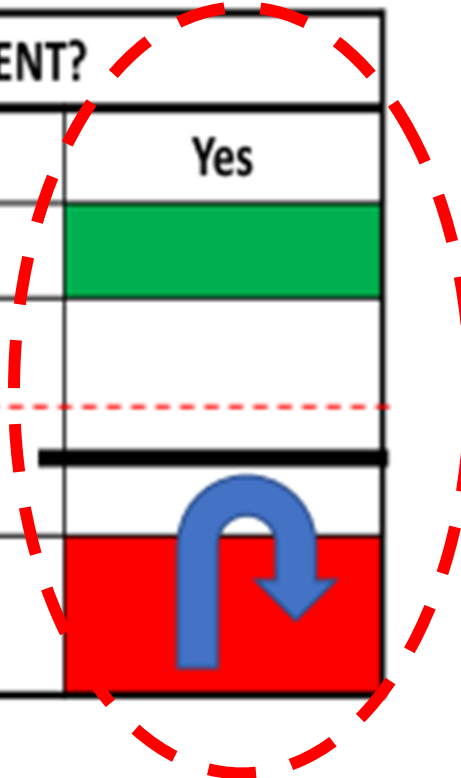
#2: Impersonal competitive contexts

(Chile, Peru, South Africa)

- ***Goals set politically***
 - Navigating multiple stakeholders and interests
- ***Political-bureaucratic interface governed by rules***
 - Weberian bureaucracy.....
 - Formal relationship is arms-length
 - Hazard of process compliance
- ***Control versus discretion***
 - Hazard of process compliance

Impersonal competitive contexts can breed process compliant bureaucracies

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			



The politics-bureaucracy interface

South Africa: process compliance & isomorphic mimicry

- Rooted in challenges of political and racial transformation

“Politicians can be expected to ask for too much of their bureaucracies. The problem arises when they make their requests to under-capacitated planners.... They adopt strategies that allow someone else to be blamed when failure hits”

Chile: seemingly gets ‘Weberianism’ right

“An elite/expert consensus was established in early 90sTechnical experts’ capacities are reflected in pieces of legislation that follow a smooth legislative process, where legislators have little to add or modify because they are not expert in the field.”

Peru: seemingly chaotic political-bureaucratic interface

“Political and sectoral instability caused by the general weakness of the country’s political and institutional system have had a profound influence....The education sector has been led by 20 ministers in 25 years – illustrative of the radical discontinuity in policy making.

Chile and Peru learning outcomes

(PISA: *reading, mathematics and science literacy*)

	2000	2009	2018
Mathematics			
Chile	384	421	417
Peru	292	365	400
Reading			
Chile	410	449	452
Peru	327	370	401

Impersonal competitive contexts:

Control vs discretion

Challenge: “A huge amount of organizational theory revolves around a single, central problem: while efficiency requires the delegation of discretion in decision-making and authority, the very act of *delegation creates problems of control and supervision.*”

Response: “All good managers know that it is ultimately *the informal norms and group identities* that will most strongly motivate the workers in an organization to do their best, and thus spend much more time on *cultivating the right ‘organizational culture’* than on *fixing the formal lines of authority*”.

Chile, Peru & the paradoxical interface

Chile:

“Good intentions to improve educational quality, resources and carrots and sticks have not been enough to move the Chilean educational system in the direction that its political authorities wanted....

“The top down character of Chilean educational policy making and the insufficient use of institutional voice mechanisms might backfire as the mounting social tensions and the 2019 social movement casts some doubts about its survival”

Peru:

“There have been several attempts to strengthen institutions and processesThese mechanisms, however, have not been very successful in a country where informal relations are the rule, and, agreements are often ignored by ministerial administrations and political parties.

“Civil society organizations – NGOs, universities, think tanks and research centers – have also played a key role in defining policy agendas [and] in the development of education policies and reforms. Though not always able to contain either technocrats’ or other policy makers, they have certainly contributed to the continuity of agendas and to the advancement, through piecemeal, of reforms.”

Autonomy & sense of shared purpose is **won politically**, not simply conferred hierarchically

(Harvard's Daniel Carpenter)

- ***Strengthen internal capabilities:*** “Bureaucratic autonomy requires the development of unique organizational capabilities.....the belief by political authorities and citizens that agencies can provide solutions to national problems found nowhere else....”
 - ***Achieved in both Chile and Peru, but not South Africa***
- ***Build external alliances:*** “Bureaucratic autonomy requires political legitimacy, strong organizational reputations embedded in an independent power base.....linkages to the numerous power bases of politics.....”
 - ***Achieved in Peru but not Chile or South Africa***

What works in impersonal competitive contexts?

- *incentives, formal institutions & technical capability are not sufficient*
- *‘Soft governance’– legitimacy & shared norms (...**IDEAS...**) – are key*

Country context #3: Personalized competition

- Only small disparities in power between contending factions
- Few formal rules, beyond election agreement
- Discretionary conferral and withdrawal of favor as basis for stability
- Short time horizon

⇒ ***Fragmented bureaucracies are unavoidable.....***

⇒ ***Entry points for improving learning outcomes***

***In personalized competitive contexts:
politics constrains options for improving coherence of
education system***

***Personalized competitive politics and education system
fragmentation are two sides of the same coin.....***

		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

Fragmented education systems: Entry point A

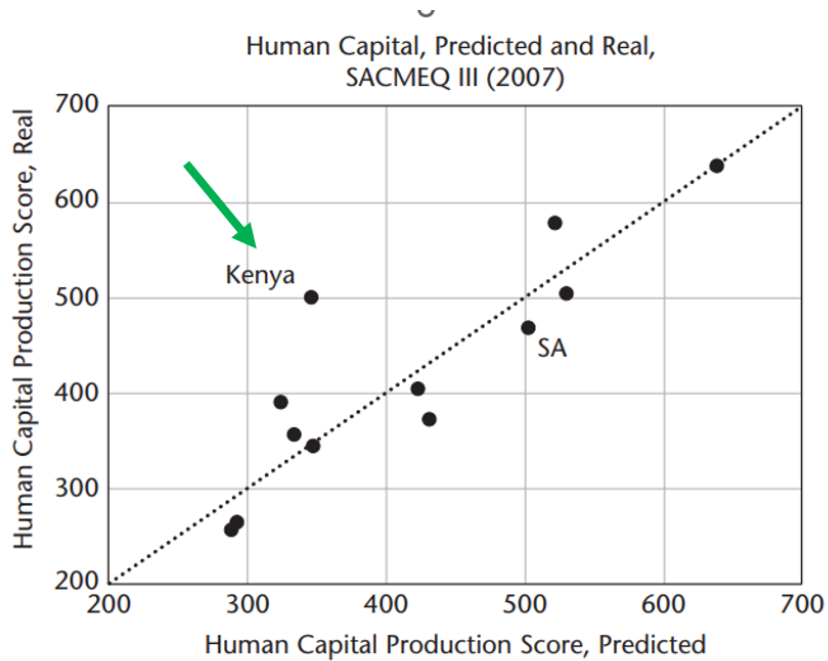
		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some			
	No			

Support emergence of Islands (pockets) of effectiveness

- **South Africa's Eastern Cape:** Positive outlier schools where principals, school governing bodies & communities work together to keep predators at bay..... (Levy & Shumane, 2018)
- **Ghana:** In some districts, *“there was evidence of the emergence of a developmental coalition between community-, school- and district-level actors in education which was able to circumvent the problems emanating from conditions of competitive clientelism, incoherent district- and school-level governance arrangements, and vested interests at the local level”*. Ampratawum, Awal and Oduro, p. 58 in Hickey and Hossain 2019)

Fragmented education systems: Entry point B

Kenya's remarkable overperformance



		COHERENT?		
		No	Some	Yes
ALIGNED TO LEARNING	Yes			
	Some		Kenya's active citizens	
	No			

“ALL FOR LEARNING”

How Kenya translates learning outcome measures into pressure for performance

BEN PIPER (RTI, Nairobi”)

“What one sees in rural Kenya is an expectation for kids to learn and be able to have basic skills....”

“Exam results are far more readily available in Kenya than other countries in the region. The scores for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education are posted in every school

“Head teachers are held accountable for those results to the extent of being paraded around the community if they did well, or literally banned from school and kicked out of the community if they did badly.”

- **Citizens’ ideas:**
 - **Expectations vis-à-vis learning**
 - **A deeply rooted participatory culture**



**IDEAS,
again.....**

Three broad conclusions

1. *The political and institutional pre-conditions for getting to the learning-aligned ‘sweet spot’ are demanding*

- But outside the ‘sweet spot’, many (RCT-‘proven’) sector-specific technical initiatives will be ineffective...

2. *There can be no institutional leap-frogs*

- Country-level political & institutional contexts set limits on what is feasible
- Reform possibilities vary systematically across country-types
- Stakeholder engagement can open up space for incremental institutional reforms

3. *For non-sweet-spot systems, ‘soft governance’ initiatives (ideas and norms) can be important for improving learning outcomes*

- Engage political leadership on goal-setting
- Build education-sector stakeholder coalitions around shared purpose
- Strengthen shared norms within organizations
- Foster “all for learning” vision

THANK YOU