

# Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts

Research and policy in international development

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An introduction

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## An introduction

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This book represents our tribute to Professor Christopher Colclough (1946–2017), one of the most influential world-leading development economists who was devoted to rigorous evidence for tackling educational inequalities. Chris’s influence went far beyond academia. Throughout his career, whether at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University or at the University of Cambridge, Chris worked to ensure that research was relevant to the field of education and international development, to the needs of educational policy-makers and to national governments and communities. In addition to his impressive research and publications record, he spent four years at UNESCO establishing and directing the flagship *Education for All* Global Monitoring Reports (UNESCO 2002, 2004, 2005), providing independent evidence-based assessments of progress towards providing every child in the world with an education. Throughout his career, he produced evidence for international agencies and national governments with the aim of shifting their priorities towards the world’s poorest and most disadvantaged children.

For the editors of this book, Chris was our much-esteemed colleague, a mentor and a great friend. Support for the training and careers of others was important to him, including for many of the authors of the chapters in this book. The tributes to him that poured in at memorial events referred movingly to his exceptional collegiality. We are all deeply indebted to his scholarship and wisdom and greatly admired his persistent, firm pursuit of social justice, in particular in some of the poorest countries in the world. His humanity spoke through his research at every level. Colleagues from many different institutions and countries were fulsome in their praise, with some describing him as having ‘intellectual distinction with a human face’;<sup>1</sup> he was said to mix ‘the science of argumentation with the art of kindness’.<sup>2</sup>

On 3rd November 2017, when we sadly came together at the memorial event held in his honour, we became aware that his colleagues were keen to celebrate his work and its continuing relevance. This led to a conference on 9th March 2018 held at the University of Cambridge, including presentations by many of the contributors to this book.<sup>3</sup> We decided that a fitting tribute to Chris and his great contribution to the field of education and international development was to build on it, demonstrating how his agenda of tackling and reducing

education and social inequality in Southern contexts is being taken forward into the contemporary climate.

In 2016, Chris pointed out in a major speech celebrating 25 years of IDS work that the macro strategy of neoliberals letting the market work was associated with an enormous rise in inequality. His analytical acuity recognised that, globally, social inequality was a growing not a lessening problem that needed addressing continuously and with detailed analysis. His insights into the world's predicaments were highlighted in his conclusion:

[I]nequality has risen enormously over the past two generations. Its consequences are patent everywhere from the ballot boxes of the rich industrialised nations to the migrant boats from Africa and Asia. Its impact is felt in the rise of nationalism in countries of both the South and the North, and even, partly, in the growth of terrorism. These matters should have a closer focus.  
(Colclough 2016)

As editors, we have therefore chosen as the theme of this collection an investigation into how patterns of social inequality have been addressed by educational reforms over the last few decades and how these reforms are reshaping social inequalities today. We invited Chris's colleagues to contribute to this collection by revisiting their research data in light of contemporary changes or by offering critical insights into how the expansion of education in their own countries was now impacting on social inequality.<sup>4</sup>

The relationships between schooling and social inequalities must be looked at holistically and dynamically. By their nature, they can be aggravated by even the most well-intentioned reforms. The starting point for authors in this volume is a recognition that schooling systems have a history of sifting and sorting generations of children (such that educational inequalities are produced internally), but that the unequal patterns found in educational access and in the outcomes of schooling are also shaped by wealth, power and status inequalities in the wider society. Therefore, attempts to address the problem of education inequalities only through education reforms, whilst important, are likely to fail if they do not take account of the economic and social contexts surrounding schools. Such contexts are nationally shaped, leading to a vital need to get to grips with the particular contextual factors that influence national and local educational scenarios. Policy processes, for example, are fraught with difficulties and outcomes are, more often than not, unintended. Social inequality is not, as sometimes assumed, greater within urban spaces rather than rural cultures. The latter tend to be represented as homogeneous and collective, yet as authors of several studies in this volume indicate, within the collective lie many complex sets of unequal power relations. Within each space and culture lie inequalities not just of wealth but also of capability (Sen 1999; Walker & Unterhalter 2007), of different forms of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and of status, value and respect (Jeffrey et al. 2007; Jeffrey 2010).

A major challenge for educational policy-makers and practitioners, therefore, is how to address those inequalities that lie outside of schooling institutions, but which enter into its classrooms and shape the identities and aspirations and strategies of young people, their teachers and parents. Research on these patterns and restrictions is vital to achieving the ambitions set in 2000 by the international development community through the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All agenda and, more recently, with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Sachs 2012). Sustainable development as an ambitious set of goals affects all global, national and local development contexts. Its overarching concern for ‘leaving no-one behind’ sets an agenda beyond income alone, to incorporate both economic and social dimensions of disadvantage, associated with factors such as poverty, gender, caste, disability, migration and locality. Over the last ten years, many resource-poor countries have expanded their education systems dramatically, moving from elite to mass systems of schooling, designed to be universal (UNESCO 2014; World Bank 2018). While such moves have provided new opportunities for some children and their families, the goals of universal coverage are still to be achieved. Wide diversities in classrooms pose new challenges for teacher education, teachers, schools and approaches to teaching and learning (Akyeampong 2017; Moon 2013; Sayed 2018; Schweisfurth 2015).

With its emphasis on addressing cross-sectoral challenges for sustainable development, the SDG agenda for 2030 presents new research questions that require sustained attention. In particular, researchers need to focus on the nature and extent of social inequalities within specific national development contexts and on how such inequalities affect, transform and militate against current educational reform initiatives (e.g. Unterhalter & North 2019). It demands new research approaches that take account of the political economy of reform processes within countries (Pritchett 2018). For example, the long-standing debate on whether marketisation and privatisation in education perpetuate inequalities (Colclough & Manor 1993; Colclough 1997) has, if anything, intensified in recent years and deserves closer scrutiny (Day Ashley et al. 2014; Macpherson et al. 2014; Srivastava & Walford 2018; Verger et al. 2012). In the context of this ambitious agenda, it is also now particularly important to reassess how social-economic and related unequal relations such as gender, caste, disability and sexuality shape the choices made of these different types of schooling or the ways in which different school experiences shape future lives – how, in effect, the inequalities associated with such relations hold back progress. These issues require careful consideration of the relations of power and elite privilege that underlie the failure so far to develop effective policies and practice.

These challenges are taken up by the community of authors in this book. We begin by identifying the intellectual agenda which we associate with Chris, before describing the contributions which individual authors bring to this agenda. We highlight, in particular, the continued relevance of drawing upon different disciplinary perspectives and a range of methodologies, the importance of linking

the international agendas to national, institutional and local structures, processes and experiences and the need to work in close partnerships with colleagues in the South.

### **In tribute to Christopher Colclough**

Sir Richard Jolly, a long-time close friend of Chris describes in his foreword how and why Chris was recognised as a world-leading development economist working in education. Chris promoted an agenda, based on his own and colleagues' research, on the ways in which education was a vital lever for poverty alleviation and economic development. Through his immense personal influence, and extraordinarily successful engagements with the aid community, Chris encouraged world leaders and global institutions and agencies to develop wide-ranging accountability systems that would encourage all governments to engage in the task of implementing the principle that all children could achieve their right to education, regardless of their background. His co-authored book *Educating All the Children* (Colclough with Lewin 1993) drew the world's attention to the economic and social value of primary schooling, specifically in Southern contexts, and to the financing that would be needed to address the costs of it. Another early seminal intervention, as Richard Jolly points out, was the edited book *States or Markets? Neo-liberalism and the Developing Policy Debate* (Colclough & Manor 1993), which engaged with the issue of who should provide education in the name of human development and under what conditions. Chris's publications repeatedly addressed the strong links of education to labour market outcomes, health and gender (Colclough 1997; Colclough et al. 2003). The debates provoked by his findings are still central to our understanding of policy options and possibilities.

These empirically based convictions notably led Chris to support the need for interdisciplinary dialogue and contextual relevance through bringing together contributions from a wide range of disciplines and national settings. He recognised that the economic approaches to education (in particular through the adoption of human capital theory), while important, were not sufficient in themselves. In a reflexive piece in 2010, Chris also argued strongly that the most challenging of international debates in comparative education and development studies should come together in a 'common cause' (Colclough 2010). If such a cause could be found, research in these two fields of study could find a way in which educational reforms (locally, nationally and internationally) contribute to the transformations in economic, political and social orders in lower-income countries so that they reduced the widespread poverty found worldwide. Arguably, the bringing together of these two fields of study would allow national comparisons of the effects of decentralising or privatising policies on different educational systems; the external factors (such as poverty, gender, race/ethnicity, disability and sexuality) affecting schooling outcomes (such as literacy and numeracy and the significance of cultural diversification); and the promotion of empowerment as an educational goal. In this context, we welcome the number of country case studies in this volume.

Drawing on his experience of working and living in Botswana and researching in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, Chris was aware that the economics of education needed to take account of the diversity of cultural, social, economic and political factors that are integral to the uneven economic development of Southern contexts. He recognised the complexities of structural inequalities and how these are further manifested through a complex interplay of colonial histories and current local norms and values. Consequently, Chris was also keen to connect his quantitative evidence with qualitative researchers for more nuanced perspectives on global challenges such as poverty alleviation. This approach was initially apparent in the Rockefeller-funded research on ‘Gender Inequalities and Primary Schooling in Africa’ (Colcough et al. 2003), which Chris led at the Institute of Development Studies and later in the DFID-funded research programme that he led at the University of Cambridge through the Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP) (Colcough 2012).<sup>5</sup> Both projects, using quantitative and qualitative methods, offered original analyses of education’s role in Southern contexts in reproducing social disadvantage. In each of these programmes, quantitative data highlighted the extent of disadvantage some children faced in terms of their access to a good-quality education, while qualitative data usefully exposed the complexity of the reality of people’s lives that influenced their children’s education. Such data had a major contribution to make to those policy-makers who might be tempted by uncausal explanations of complex social patterns or by ‘quick fixes’. Unusually for someone with a strong quantitative background, Chris also supported those of us who produced evidence of social inequalities that seemed initially to be far from policy-makers’ agendas, but which he recognised were essential contributions to the field of education and international development.

Research openness requires learning from researchers who are most knowledgeable about challenges and possibilities in their local contexts and the impact of international agendas on their national governments and societies (Mitchell et al. 2020; Tuhiwai Smith et al. 2018; Denzin et al. 2008; Robinson-Pant 2005; Robinson-Pant & Singal 2013; Bredlid 2012). When leading major empirical research projects, Chris worked in partnership with scholars based in Southern institutions and those who strongly identify themselves as Southern researchers, given their personal and professional positionings. A number of such partners have contributed to this collection (Anuradha De, Geeta Gandhi Kingdon and Nidhi Singal, India; Monazza Aslam, Feyza Bhatti, Rabea Malik and Arif Naveed, Pakistan; Florence Kyoheirwe Muhanguzi, Uganda and Leslie Casely-Hayford, Ghana). Such knowledge allows for richer perspectives and research that engages with the complexities of their contexts (Aikman & Dyer 2012; Aikman et al. 2016; Connell 2007). As Connell (2007, p. 21) points out, the knowledge and power of social science from Southern contexts is a ‘tremendous resource that has been disregarded by mainstream social science’ – a knowledge source that has ‘wide-ranging implications for social science in the 21st century’.

Individual chapters reflect Chris's priorities when they consider evidence in relation to education and social inequalities in various South Asian and sub-Saharan African contexts, some of which are furthest from achieving global goals, including some countries that have made rapid progress in terms of increased enrolment numbers but less so in global learning metrics associated with literacy and numeracy (including Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Uganda). Using a range of disciplinary perspectives, contributors to this collection employ different types of data – from large-scale internationally generated quantitative data sets, through to national and local surveys, classroom observations and qualitative interviews with teachers and other key education stakeholders, to in-depth analysis of family voice data. These data are used to understand how educational trajectories, choice of types of schooling, professional identities and school practices, patterns of social deprivation and social and individual aspirations come together. The contribution of the book therefore, as Chris would have wished, is its diversity, as well as the range of issues and contexts it addresses, drawing on the perspectives of scholars based in institutions in both the North and the South. In the following pages we describe the key themes addressed in individual chapters.

## **Key themes**

Continued challenges in closing inequalities within and around educational systems internationally can largely be traced to their historical, economic and political roots. The interconnections between these roots are highlighted in many of the chapters in Part I which show variations in this influence in different contexts and across types of schools. In some instances, the root causes of inequalities have been or are being more successfully challenged than in others. In Part II, authors delve deeper into the lives and realities faced particularly by families living in poverty and the choices and aspirations of parents and young people – sons, daughters and children with disabilities. Authors further consider how the social distance between teachers and their students can affect children's educational experiences.

### *Part I: the economics and politics of educational reform*

Part I begins by establishing the links between the economics and politics of reform processes and their implications for social inequality, particularly the impact of economic differences between families and the impact of poverty, social class, caste and region on young people's prospects. It identifies the economic benefits of expanding access (Chapter 2) as well as the costs of doing so (Chapter 3). Recognising the distance that many education systems are from achieving SDG4 which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', the chapters analyse the political challenges of successful reform associated with tackling the quality of education and diversified forms of provision that has resulted in differential progress for populations within countries such as Ethiopia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Building on his work with Chris for RECOUP, and related to his own PhD which Chris supervised, Harry Anthony Patrinos employs human capital theory to highlight the benefits that education has for achieving economic returns. In Chapter 2, he develops his influential work on the patterns of returns to education to show how these have changed over time, shifting from more emphasis on primary schooling to returns becoming more apparent at higher levels of education. Patrinos attributes this to three possible facts that: primary schooling is now near universal globally, resulting in a fall in returns at that level; the expansion of primary and secondary schooling could be at the expense of quality; and technological change is resulting in demand for higher-order skills. From an equity perspective, Patrinos highlights important policy considerations that derive from his analysis, notably that public funds should continue to support the development of basic cognitive skills from early years of education, while also highlighting a need to expand the education system at secondary and higher levels to avoid a widening of income inequality. This approach is influential in making the case to national governments and international agencies to invest even more in education, as well as to guide the distribution of public resources across different levels of education in ways that are beneficial for economies and for addressing inequalities.

In Chapter 3, Keith M. Lewin provides an insightful analysis of how the educational landscape for low- and lower middle-income countries has changed in the last three decades and the factors that continue to shape unequal access to education and the pattern of educational financing. He employs a typography of four different transitions that shape how education in low- and lower-middle income countries will develop: demography; the flow of students through patterns of enrolment; gendered participation; and, the number of children out of school. Building on his work together with Chris for the Jomtien World Education Forum in 1990 (Colclough with Lewin 1993), he identifies the consequences that unequal patterns in access have for aid and national spending for education, noting that aid is diminishing in importance. Highlighting shifting trends in financing over the past 30 years, he identifies the need for a two-pronged approach in educational financing. The first prong is to support research and investment in education system planning and management to promote durable gains in efficiency and effectiveness so that education systems can be financed from domestic revenue. The second prong is to invest in supporting fiscal reforms that can increase domestic revenue.

Angela W. Little, who also collaborated with Chris at the 1990 Jomtien World Education Forum, went on to study in-depth the historical and political 'drivers and interests' shaping egalitarian education reforms in India and Sri Lanka in pre-colonial and post-colonial times. In Chapter 4, she compares and contrasts the political paths taken by the two countries leading up to, but especially after, national independence in relation specifically to social inequality in access to basic schooling. Her detailed account identifies how Sri Lanka has been more successful in promoting equitable education progress which could, in part, be attributed to India's greater diversity, resulting in a greater degree of competition and



conflict between a larger number of diverse interests groups. She suggests that this potentially slowed the ability of successive Indian governments at all levels to introduce and implement policies designed to reduce inequalities in education. Even so, enrolment overall has expanded in both countries, which leads Little to ask if the changing social composition of state and private enrolments could promote or thwart the ability of the education system in each country to increase social equality in the longer term.

Linking this question to a contemporary context, in Chapter 5, Monazza Aslam and Geeta Gandhi Kingdon build on their work with Chris for the RECOUP project to explore the possibilities and challenges faced not by private schools *per se* but by different models of public–private partnerships (PPP). They consider if such models offer an ‘enabling environment’ that helps reduce inequalities or whether the aims of improving access to education and achieving better quality education through PPPs could reinforce or even exacerbate inequalities that exist in the education system. Through a careful assessment based on rigorous reviews of evidence in the Indian and Pakistani contexts (two countries where experimenting with private–public partnerships has been particularly common), they argue that these partnerships have the potential to extend access and may also improve the quality of education, including for the poorest. They highlight different forms of partnerships, ranging from charter school-type models where the private sector takes over the management of public schools to voucher schemes that aim to provide parents with a choice for their children’s schooling. Recognising that this is a highly contested area of reform, they conclude by identifying the importance of adopting an explicit plan for when, how and why the potential of public–private partnerships should be recognised and adopted with the aim of achieving equity in education, rather than the *ad hoc* approach that is currently the norm.

Chris had a particularly close interest in sub-Saharan Africa, having started his academic career in Botswana and subsequently led a major nine-country study in collaboration with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in the late 1990s. His co-authored book *Achieving Schooling for All in Africa: Costs, Commitment and Gender* (Colclough et al. 2003) offered an analysis of new, rich, quantitative and qualitative data that complemented the, then, existing economic evidence on the determinants of gender differences in schools across different contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. The value of the study was to bring gender into the heart of discussions on education reform, importantly with respect to debates on the financing of schooling. Given this record, it was not surprising that gender was embedded in the Education for All Global Monitoring Reports which Chris led, with one report specifically dedicated to this theme (UNESCO 2004). Returning to one of the countries in the original study, Ethiopia (some 30 years later) has allowed Pauline Rose along with Louise Yorke and Alula Pankhurst to demonstrate that there has been considerable progress in moving from an elite to a mass system of primary schooling. However, Chapter 6 reports that, although throughout the period there has been explicit commitment to gender equality,

this commitment has not sufficiently been realised. Gender gaps remain with respect to enrolment and wider societal factors that result in girls' early marriage as well as sustaining their burden of domestic work. Drawing on an innovative approach to understanding how politics influences education systems, they adopt the lens of Hickey and Hossain's (2019) *domains of power* framework to identify how formal and informal institutions as well as Ethiopian officials and educators shape and reinforce gender inequalities in and around education. The authors advocate a more transformative approach to girls' education, with political leaders moving away from the dichotomy of mainstreaming and targeted models and from simplistic notions that an increase in girls' access and retention will lead to greater gender equality. They also emphasise that the politics of educational reform demand that all stakeholders are included in reforms to tackle gender inequalities.

### ***Part II: challenges and opportunities in addressing inequalities through education***

The six chapters in Part II contribute to these ongoing debates by offering deep insight into how inequalities in the wider society impact on, and are embedded in, schooling itself. The first three chapters, using socio-cultural qualitative analyses, highlight the importance of looking beyond the school to understand how education shapes and is shaped by aspirations. Chapter 7 by Arif Naveed and Chapter 8 by Feyza Bhatti and Roger Jeffery are both based on family-focused research carried out in Pakistan in the original RECOUP fieldwork sites. They consider the meanings and values attached to schooling of villagers who are poor or in precarity, just above poverty lines in Punjab villages.

The appeal of schooling for families living in poverty is that it is an aspirational resource which can be within their compass to achieve, at least to a limited extent. Arif Naveed's chapter takes us deep into the relationality of family life to explore this aspect. Using data from a follow-up study of the same families used in the RECOUP project, he employs Appadurai's (2004) concept of 'capacity to aspire' to understand their negotiation of social inequality in the village. His novel methodology draws on intergenerational interviews (with mothers, fathers, sons and daughters in the same family) to show the complex engagements with what he calls the *pentagonal structure* of the village – the inequalities associated with land-ownership, kinship and caste structures, religion, patriarchy and relationships of patronage. Whilst families have high hopes of using schooling to achieve a form of social mobility or *taraqqi* (a better life), these structural power relations and their material realities reduce or even destroy such aspirations, thus sustaining the cycles through which social inequalities are reproduced. Educational and economic reforms need to break such painful cycles, not just at the individual level but for the collective. Failing to do this has led to increasing evidence that families living in poverty are giving up on formal schooling when they see the route

to better forms of employment is blocked. The educational aspirations of families and communities could be used by policy-makers more effectively, as Appadurai noted:

[I]t is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as of those about the past, are embedded and nurtured. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty.

(Appadurai 2004, p. 59)

Feyza Bhatti and Roger Jeffery's (Chapter 8) research indicates that schooling itself can be a way of raising the 'capacity to aspire'. Their study of attitudes to fertility and childbearing of young mothers in Pakistani Punjab shows how their own schooling is closely linked to their aspirations for their children. As family systems are reshaped under modernising pressures, young women – whatever their own schooling – are increasingly aware of the need to limit their families (both boys and girls). Although schooling outcomes are unpredictable, household ambitions involve heightened aspirations, internalised by these young women. In this revealing study, young women have more freedom, in conjunction with their husbands, to take decisions relating to their own fertility and they use this shared decision-making power in similar ways across these lower-class households. Household ambitions for their children, the expenses of everyday life and within them, schooling costs (especially if paying for increasingly highly priced and often private schooling) are all changing the ideals of young mothers with respect to family size, the use of contraception and the value of girls when compared to boys. At the same time, despite the resulting fertility decline, the new staging of childbearing and more investment into childrearing, the 'liberating force' that education could represent for young mothers and their families may be insufficient to make a real difference to their futures.

Florence Kyoheirwe Muhanguzi and Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo (Chapter 9) pick up on themes from the research programme on Gender and Primary Schooling in sub-Saharan Africa and links with Chapters 7 and 8 by going deeper into the relationships between gender, sexuality and education. Their work demonstrates the importance of recognising that, whilst increasing girls' schooling is beneficial, the global agenda on education does not yet engage with sufficient understanding about the ways in which teenage pregnancy represents a major impediment to schooling achievements and acts as a cause of continuing gender inequalities. Drawing on an illuminating qualitative study that uncovers the perspectives of young women and men and community members in Uganda, the authors show how beneath the surface of such pregnancies are the realities of poverty, sexual pressure on girls and male-dominated cultures. Despite the government's high-level commitment to both improving girls' schooling and reducing

the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, its policies have been poorly implemented. Prevention strategies have included sexual and reproductive health education in schools, but this has been resisted by teachers and village elders. It is anyway thought by girls to be inadequate, leaving them being blamed when they become pregnant. Strong patriarchal norms and patterns of behaviour protect young men but not the young mothers whose education careers are badly affected. To prevent this tight coupling of teenage pregnancy with poverty, schooling – not just schools – needs to provide more support to young women to avoid pregnancy, and policy-makers need to hear and take heed of young women's views about the pressures they face.

The final three chapters explore how education systems interact with social inequality, and bring classroom practices and interactions into focus. All three chapters include researchers who were centrally involved in the RECOUP programme. The authors report on their recent research, which includes mixed methods approaches, linking survey data to in-depth understandings of the culture of schooling systems. Their work provides windows into these pedagogic systems by focusing on some of the classroom experiences offered to the most marginalised: children who are out of school, those with disabilities and those who live in relatively unstable, precarious households. They emphasise the need to look beyond efforts to increase school access for children from traditionally excluded groups by offering a critical analysis of what happens in the classroom.

Leslie Casely-Hayford, Adom Baisey Ghartey and Justice Adjei-Quartey revisit findings from a major study of complementary basic education for out-of-school children in two communities in the northern region of Ghana (Associates for Change 2013). Chapter 10 describes how parents and children, when asked about why they choose complementary rather than formal education, describe the mismatch between the pedagogy, discipline and culture of mainstream primary schools and their own perspectives on how schools should be organised. The authors' extensive investigation of the complementary basic education programme provides important lessons for formal education provision, such as the importance of using enthusiastic local teachers, introducing mother tongue as the medium of these early years of schooling and drawing on indigenous cultures. Parents of those children who would be out of school normally value fee-free education, flexible timescales and a less disciplinary and more supportive child-centred pedagogy that develops children's confidence in their learning ability. All these features of the complementary system could offer lessons for the formal system that would enhance the educational experience of their pupils.

The authors of Chapters 11 and 12 address the danger that children who have entered schools in recent years as enrolment has expanded have little opportunity to learn. The poor quality of schooling they receive disproportionately affects those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In Chapter 11, Nidhi Singal draws on her influential work on poverty and disability to explore teachers' engagement in promoting inclusion for children with disabilities and the challenges they face in doing so in rural north India. She first demonstrates that, although inclusive

education has been a major policy shift with respect to the schooling of children with disabilities over the past two decades in India, little has been written that illuminates and engages with the complexity of how to deliver on this promise. She argues that, in international development literature, global proclamations driven by a largely Northern lens of the what and the how of inclusive education have stifled deeper engagement with the challenges and opportunities in Southern educational systems. Drawing on classroom-based data, and using Minow's (1990) *dilemmas of difference*, she moves the discussion of inequalities experienced by children with disabilities to a deeper understanding of the difficult and dilemmatic decisions that teachers are faced within 'inclusive' school settings. Evidence shows that teachers in these schools were not simply rejecting children with disabilities, rather a closer look at their practices highlights the many quandaries that they are faced with on a daily basis as they navigate teaching and learning in complex and resource-constrained classrooms. Her chapter argues that, in order to address the continued exclusion of children with disabilities, there is a need for more contextually driven engagement with some fundamental questions around the purpose and value of schooling, rather than continuing to uphold the rhetoric of 'inclusive education' which is, in itself, shrouded in ambiguity. The real challenge here is to listen to teachers working in these contexts, as makers of change, rather than positioning them through a deficit-driven lens and blaming them for inadequacies.

In Chapter 12, Anuradha De and Rabea Malik add to Nidhi Singal's concern about teacher practices by showing how teachers are affected by their social distance from the students they teach. Building on their work with RECOUP, their chapter draws on rich data collected as part of the 'Teaching Effectively All Children' (TEACH)<sup>6</sup> research project, based in India and Pakistan, to provide a deeper focus on how differences and potential inequalities were addressed by teachers. Their work recognises what a tragedy it would be if children who are in school do not learn. In that context, their study reports on the expectations of a sample of Indian and Pakistan teachers and their characterisations of pupils which, they show, can strongly influence the capacity of pupils to learn and to do well in class. Through their interactions with students, teachers communicate their expectations about how students from different backgrounds will perform. The teachers' conceptualizations of 'good' students are much more likely to be present in children from socially and economically stable and well-off homes, somewhat similar to the teachers' own backgrounds. While teachers engage more with 'good' students, they might not openly exclude the others; nevertheless, there is a 'silent process of non-inclusion'. Through these expectations and their practices, teachers may be reproducing within class the disadvantages that the student arrives with, instead of addressing and alleviating the disadvantages that such children face. If this is the case more generally, then educational reformers need to engage far more deeply with the personal and professional identities and practices of teachers in such settings.

Taking the educational research agenda forward, these two chapters forefront the need for more research focusing on what teachers do, alongside understanding

how they explain why they act in these ways. Critical exploration of classroom processes provides a powerful lens for re-examining processes of inclusion and exclusion and pointing to how classroom spaces become important sites for the reproduction of social inequalities. Therefore, for educational reforms to be successful, these must be located firmly in the everyday happenings of classrooms in mainstream schools.

## **Reforming education**

This collection of research studies reveals new directions in the field of international development, identifying how education might more successfully challenge a range of social inequalities. The research it showcases contributes critical insights into how educational reforms in the name of social inequality can be investigated globally, nationally and locally, through different disciplinary fields, using a diverse, broad and deep set of methodologies and data. There are benefits of comparing and contrasting the experience of national government-led reforms across countries to assess differential progress towards global goals. At the same time, there is also a need to delve more deeply into particular national contexts, communities and institutions from a variety of perspectives. Attention should be paid to the range of different types of educational provision (from PPPs to complementary basic education) and to different governmental and non-governmental organisation initiatives, locating them in specific demographic contexts. What are revealed here are some of the restrictions on closing large learning gaps and the loss of talent and opportunity at national and regional levels. What are also revealed are the rising reform agendas and shifts in the patterns of thinking about poverty contexts but also the unevenness of such reform agendas in terms of affecting communities, families and individuals (whether teachers, students or parents).

The authors' ambitions are diverse, but they share a goal of reviewing and moving forward policy debates such that they engage with the economic and cultural complexity and intersectionality of inequalities and also about the play of power of governments, elites and interest groups. Such power relations limit the resourcing and possibilities of those who wish to make education genuinely accessible and effective and the achievements of communities, families, teachers and students who wish to take up the opportunities that education can offer. Spurred on by the influence of Christopher Colclough, our community of researchers believe that, without insights into the various dimensions and factors explored and reviewed in this volume, genuinely inclusive education systems will not easily be achieved.

On the 10th anniversary of the Education for All, Chris wrote a blog for UNESCO<sup>7</sup> in which he noted that by 2010 some 40 million more children than in 2000 were managing to get to primary schooling. But he admitted that one should not be too optimistic. There are indeed now worries that numbers out of school will increase again and, that with the global COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a manifold increase in poverty and a simultaneous cutting back of aid

budgets. As Chris noted, it needs a determined effort by wealthy countries to help lower-income countries, if the formers' own economies are shrinking. The goal, he said, is clearly 'morally right' but, objectively, the truth is that it is in the interests of donor nations as well as recipient states to continue to support the sustainable education goals of quality schooling for all.

## Notes

- 1 See Adrian Wood at [www.ukfiet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Chris-A-selection-of-appreciations-from-colleagues-and-friends-in-IDS-and-Sussex-University.pdf](http://www.ukfiet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Chris-A-selection-of-appreciations-from-colleagues-and-friends-in-IDS-and-Sussex-University.pdf).
- 2 Madeleine Arnot speaking at the 29th March 2019 Conference, *Celebrating the Work of Professor Colclough*, Conference, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.
- 3 The conference was organised by the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre in the Faculty of Education and was attended by over 100 participants, many of whom had worked with Chris over the years.
- 4 This anthology adds to the Routledge series on *Education, Poverty and International Development*, established by Christopher Colclough and Madeleine Arnot in 2010, which has as its mission to publish 'Sharp, critical and innovative studies' that are likely to have 'a strategic influence upon the thinking of academics and policy-makers'. [www.routledge.com/Education-Poverty-and-International-Development/book-series/EPID](http://www.routledge.com/Education-Poverty-and-International-Development/book-series/EPID)
- 5 See RECOUP project website: <http://ceid.educ.cam.ac.uk/researchprogrammes/recoup/>
- 6 See the TEACH research project website: [www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/researchthemes/teachingandlearning/effectiveteaching/](http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/researchthemes/teachingandlearning/effectiveteaching/)
- 7 See <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2012/06/04/protecting-education-aid-is-more-vital-than-ever/>

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