Organizational Legitimacy in the Global Education Policy Field: Learning from UNESCO and the Global Monitoring Report

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In the field of global education policy, it is common for scholars to reflect on the progress made toward internationally agreed-upon agendas, such as Education for All (EFA). However, scant research has turned the gaze back on the major multilateral institutions that commit to taking the lead in meeting these agendas in order to ask, what implications do such agendas have for these organizations? We respond in this article by investigating the way in which UNESCO used its position as the coordinator of EFA to help it regain some of the legitimacy it lost in the preceding decades. To do so, the article first elaborates a tripartite conceptualization of organizational legitimacy and then applies it to the two prongs of UNESCO's strategy—EFA coordination and the production of the Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs) during a key period, 2000–2014, that were at the forefront of UNESCO's efforts to rebrand and reposition itself in the context of multilateralism.

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This case is particularly interesting because of the time period that it documents. By the late 1990s, UNESCO had become an institution well known for its problems and shortcomings (discussed later). By this time, it can be said that UNESCO was at a low point in terms of legitimacy and respect among its peer institutions and among many development professionals. Yet during the 2000s UNESCO steadily, if not altogether successfully, worked to change its image, and while it still may be an underdog—in terms of financial and political clout—in the field of education for development—we argue partial gains have been made, particularly in relation to the GMR. In the end, it is these gains that we seek to characterize, contextualize, and conceptualize. We also hope this study will bring a new perspective on the politics of EFA and on the dynamics of organizational legitimacy within the context of multilateralism, particularly within the field of global education policy.

The section that follows reviews previous literature on organizational legitimacy and highlights the need for a more nuanced conception of legitimacy in the context of multilateralism. Details of data collection and analysis are discussed next. The following section provides background to the present case first by characterizing the crisis of legitimacy that UNESCO experienced in the period prior to 2000 and then by detailing how UNESCO was conferred the mandate to lead on EFA, as well as the expectations of the mandate, since these expectations serve as the measuring stick against which UNESCO's gains in legitimacy have been judged subsequently. The findings section then assesses the efforts and impact of both EFA coordination and the evolution of the GMR. It is important to note that the findings and discussion sections are guided by the conception of legitimacy delineated at the outset—based on sociopolitical acceptability, reputation, and status, as will be discussed. As such, these sections are focused, first, on understanding the operation of EFA coordination and GMR production; the extent to which they were seen as high-quality and legitimate initiatives in their own right; and, most important for the present article, the extent to which they contributed to or hindered the overall organizational legitimacy of UNESCO. The final section also considers implications more generally when it comes to legitimacy building for organizations in the relational space that is the field of global education policy.

Organizational Legitimacy in the Field of Global Education Policy

Recent work by scholars has focused on describing and theorizing the field of global education policy (Verger, Novelli, and Kosar-Altinyelken 2012; Mundy et al. 2016). The thrust of this work has been to conceptualize the "international political space in which policy agencies compete for influencing the shape of national and international education policy" (Jakobi 2009,
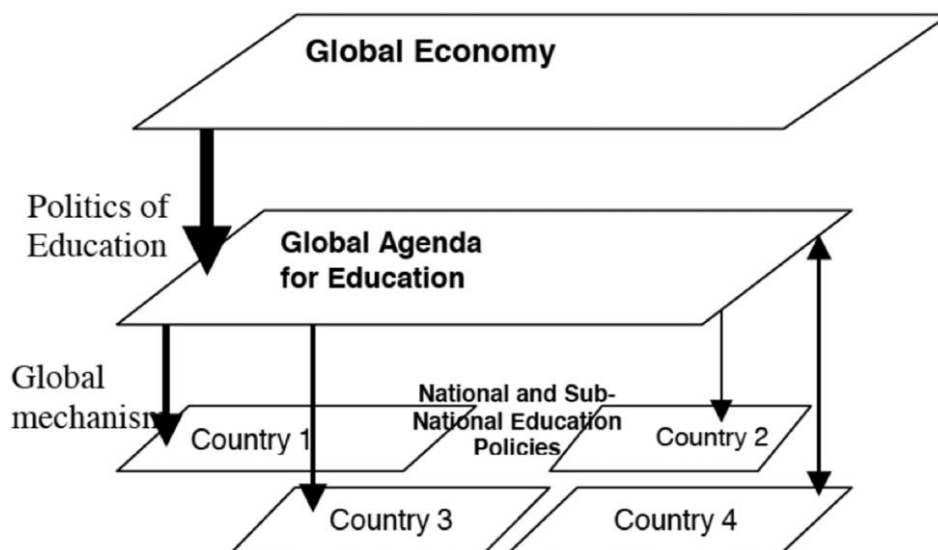
Fɪɢ. 1.—The global education policy field. Source.—Novelli and Verger (2008).

477). Visually, this space can be depicted as in figure 1. A key feature of this field is that it is inhabited by a range of actors who work at and across the national and international levels. The relevant actors in this field are multilateral organizations, bilateral aid agencies, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and national political actors, since they are the ones who compete and collaborate to define and advance global agendas for education (e.g., EFA; see Lingard, Sellar, and Baroutsis 2015). Using figure 1 as a heuristic, the present research focuses on the "global agenda for education"— in this case, EFA—and, within that, the dynamics of UNESCO's EFA coordination and GMR production.

In this space, scholars have yet to examine the issue of organizational legitimacy. The majority of research on organizational legitimacy tends to come from the field of business and examines company responses to crises such as oil spills or factory fires (see, e.g., Massey 2001; Desai 2011). And although international relations scholars have begun to discuss legitimacy in the context of international organizations, the literature has focused on legitimacy as a function of the democratic management of these organizations (see, e.g., Zurn 2004; Buchanan and Keohane 2006).[1] Put differently, international relations scholars have looked for the source of legitimacy within such or-

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[1] In this sense, UNESCO is among the most legitimate multilateral organizations, due to its democratic structure, where each member country has one vote.

ganizations. In contrast, in the present proposal, the focus is on sociopolitical legitimacy in the field of global education policy. Moreover, conceptualizing legitimacy in sociopolitical terms is most appropriate for the present research, since the field of global education policy is sociopolitical in nature (Lingard, Sellar, and Baroutsis 2015).

Drawing on the theoretical literature on organizational legitimacy, a more nuanced and—we would argue—more appropriate framework has been created by the authors that corresponds to the purpose of the present research (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Massey 2001; Bitektine 2011).[2] To that end, although scholarship on multilateral institutions has suggested that legitimacy results from a "generalized perception . . . that the actions of an entity are desirable or appropriate" (Suchman 1995, 574), we move beyond the notion of "generalized perception" and delineate a conception of legitimacy based on three interrelated components—sociopolitical acceptability, reputation, and status. These components are depicted in figure 2. As can be seen, an organization can dedicate itself to achieving sociopolitical acceptability by (*a*) adapting to its context, (*b*) responding to changing expectations, and (*c*) invoking or affiliating itself with symbols (or other organizations) that possess legitimacy. The other two components—reputation and status—are beyond the organization's direct control.[3]

Reputation also has a specific meaning. In this study, it is defined as (*a*) the "prestige accorded" to the organization "on the basis of how they have performed particular activities in the past" (Jensen and Roy 2008, 497), (*b*) the organization's "relative success in fulfilling the expectations of multiple stakeholders" (Fombrun and Shanley 1990, 235), and (*c*) the perception of the quality of the work of organization (Rhee and Haunschild 2006, 101). Reputation is therefore the counterpart to an organization's striving. That is,

[2] The framework has been developed through a review of the literature on organizational legitimacy that was conducted in an earlier phase of the research project. Thirty-six publications were collected through a systematic search for the term "organizational legitimacy" in Google Scholar and Web of Science. This literature was subsequently reviewed for how scholars define this term (i.e., organizational legitimacy) and the various factors that have been found through previous research to contribute to or detract from it. This review focused on both general definitions and discussions of organizational legitimacy as well as discussions of this concept within the literature on multilateral institutions specifically. During the review, we also sought out concepts and insights from scholars who approached organizational legitimacy as a sociopolitical phenomenon. We did this for conceptual reasons, since the purpose of the research is to understand organizational legitimacy in the field of global education policy and since this field is sociopolitical in nature (Lingard, Sellar, and Baroutsis 2015). Accordingly, the concepts included in the framework presented here are sociopolitical acceptability, reputation, and status. For a more extensive discussion of the 36 publications reviewed related to organizational legitimacy, see Edwards et al. (2015).

[3] It should be noted that status and reputation, while they are subcomponents of legitimacy in the present framework, also have their own literatures. See Washington and Zajac (2005) for their excellent review of the theory on status and Fombrun and Shanley (1990) for their treatment of the literature on reputation. Bitektine (2011) provides a very thorough review of different definitions of legitimacy as well as the relationships among legitimacy, status, and reputation.
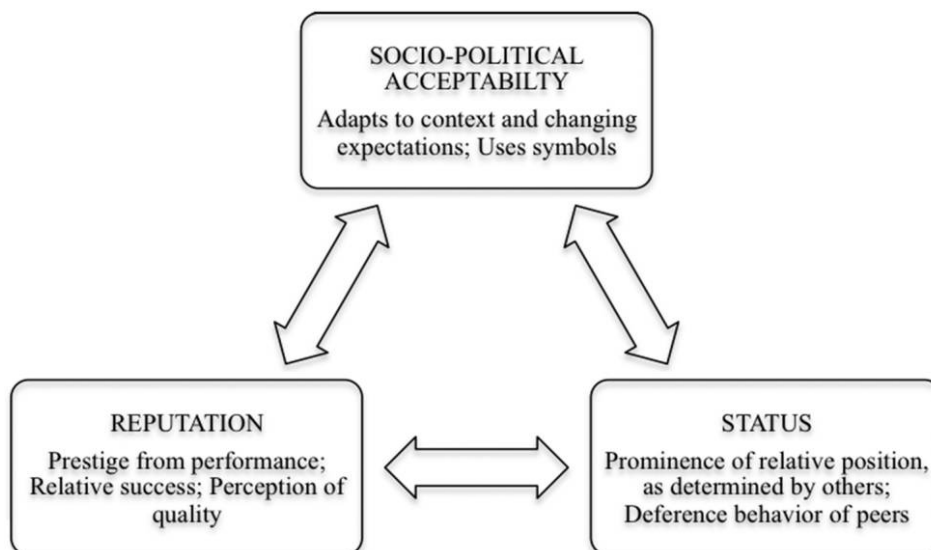
FIG. 2.—Components of organizational legitimacy

while an organization may strive for legitimacy, changes to reputation depend on how those efforts are perceived by others.

Sociopolitical acceptability and reputation are then linked to status. Though there are no guarantees, an organization can dedicate itself to improving the perception of its performance, fulfilling the expectations of its stakeholders, and ensuring that its work is perceived as high quality—in hopes of raising its status among peer institutions, where status is defined as the "prominence of an actor's relative position within a population of actors" (Wejnert 2002, 304) and where increased prominence is associated with increased "deference behavior" (Huberman, Loch, and Onculer 2004, 103). Of course, as status is based on perception, it is socially constructed and depends on agreement among the relevant actors in a social system (Washington and Zajac 2005). Thus, while it may be sensible for organizations to strive to improve their status, it should be noted that "legitimacy is not something that can be claimed by organizations, but is instead something that is given by stakeholders" (Massey 2001, 156).

Something that should not be lost in this discussion is the relative nature of reputation and status. Recall that the former is based on "relative success" while the latter is connected with "relative position." The implication is that actors in the global education policy field do not only judge an organization against the expectations that have been placed on it (sociopolitical acceptability) but also by the performance of this organization in comparison to its

peers (reputation), with that valuation affecting its overall position in the field (status).

Method

In order to contextualize the dynamics of organizational legitimacy around UNESCO during the period of interest, we began with an extensive literature review on this institution. There is a rich literature on UNESCO that not only details the actions of this institution in the realm of education but also analyzes the position and standing of this institution in relation to prevailing development trends, other development institutions, and global geopolitics. (See the appendix for a list of the literature consulted during this stage of the research.) We read this literature with an eye to previous characterizations and discussions of organizational legitimacy in relation to UNESCO. This literature provided excellent information on the nature of UNESCO's work as well as insight into the trajectory of its legitimacy beginning in the post–WWII context and continuing up to the 2000s. By engaging with the literature on UNESCO, we gained valuable insights that not only helped us to understand the trajectory of organizational legitimacy generally but also enhanced the interviews we would subsequently conduct.

In the second stage, we conducted interviews with 17 key actors and knowledgeable development specialists within and outside UNESCO during August and September 2014.[4] These interviewees have worked with UNESCO and/or other international organizations for extensive periods of time (in most cases, for decades) and in positions through which they have intimate knowledge of UNESCO's activity in the education sector and efforts during and prior to the period of focus. We specifically targeted these individuals based on their experiences and the insights they would be able to provide— that is, because they could speak to both UNESCO's actions and intentions as well as to how these actions were received by key actors and other organizations in the field of global education policy more broadly. More explicitly, four types of actors were sought out, with these groups corresponding to the different aspects of focus in the present study: first, actors who have worked with the GMR (identified by reviewing the authorship credits of these reports); second, actors who have worked on UNESCO's EFA leadership activities and mechanisms (identified by reviewing documents and reports of the High-Level Group on EFA); third, actors who have served in leadership positions in the education sector of UNESCO (identified through personal knowledge, document review, and snowball sampling); and, fourth, actors outside UNESCO with specialized knowledge on the GMR and UNESCO's EFA leadership (identified through literature and document review; e.g.,

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[4] Acronyms are used throughout this article to refer to the interviewees (e.g., INT1, INT2, etc.).

literature on the World Education Forum and documents related to participation by representatives of peer institutions in the High-Level Group).

To give an idea of the collective experience of the interviewees from UNESCO, consider that, in addition to speaking with core GMR team members from each year of its production during 2002–15, the individuals with whom we spoke have occupied such positions as GMR director and deputy director, GMR senior policy analyst, program specialist for the EFA follow-up and coordination unit, member of the high-level group on EFA, director of the executive office of the Education Sector of UNESCO, assistant director-general for the Education Sector of UNESCO, and UNESCO country office director. These insider perspectives were complemented by interviews with influential actors who have worked with (in alphabetical order) the Center for Global Development, Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Secretariat, Education International, the Fast Track Initiative, the Organization of American States, the Results for Development Institute, Save the Children, the UK Department for International Development, the UK Forum for International Education and Training, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Bank. This latter group of interviewees is particularly relevant to our study because they help to provide outsider perspectives on the extent to which UNESCO's legitimacy was rehabilitated during the 2000s and for what reasons.

In the third stage, we again consulted the literature, in order to hone in on the perceptions of actors in the global education policy—perceptions that could shed light on the legitimacy issues of focus here. The first subset of literature examined was written by development practitioners and commented on the role, performance, and impact of the GMR. Perhaps the best example of this is volume 43 of *Norrag News*, published in 2010, which was titled *A World of Reports? A Critical Review of Global Development Reports with an Angle on Education and Training*. This volume not only contained 10 commentaries on the GMR by leading experts in the field of global education policy but also included 32 additional commentaries on other reports in this field. The second subset of literature included commentaries and articles on the GMR, on UNESCO's EFA coordination, and on the changing landscape of the global education policy field in the post-2000 period. This literature was written by experts outside UNESCO.[5] There was literature as well by insiders.[6] An important point is necessary here: although it is reasonable to assume that publications written by insiders would be sanguine in their commentary, it was actually more common for insiders to be self-critical. This may

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[5] Although some of those cited here as outsiders would go on to become insiders, they were outsiders at the point when these publications were written. See, e.g., Rose (2003, 2005); Heyneman and Pelczar (2005); King and Rose (2005); Mundy (2006, 2007); Bown (2007); King (2007); Smith et al. (2007); Bermingham (2011); and (Heyneman 2011).

[6] See Limage (2007, 2009, 2010, 2012); Packer (2007, 2008); Benavot (2008, 2011); Daniel (2010); and Burnett (2011).

be because those who chose to reflect publicly—that is, in the form of publication—tended to have careers that included but went beyond their work in UNESCO, meaning that they have a broader perspective and informed opinions about how UNESCO and the GMR could or should be operating differently. Finally, this stage examined independent reports and evaluations that assessed a number of relevant issues, including UNESCO's performance vis-à-vis its multilateral peers (DFID 2011, 2013), UNESCO's leadership around EFA (Stern 2010), and the work of the GMR (Education for Change 2006, 2014; Univeralia 2006, 2010). Together the rich literature described here allowed us, first, to understand how actors within and outside UNESCO interpreted the efforts of this organization and the GMR and, second, to put these perceptions into context in relation to other organizations and monitoring reports in the field of global education policy.

Finally, supplemental documents and archives were collected, not only through UNESCO's extensive online repository but also from the personal collection of one of the authors of this study, Yuto Kitamura, who worked with UNESCO for three years starting in 2000. He was one of the original members of the Dakar Follow-Up Unit, which was tasked with putting together the team that would produce EFA monitoring reports. The personal collections of Kitamura—and his direct involvement with UNESCO during the early 2000s—provide a unique window into the thinking of UNESCO at the time, the pressures and expectations it faced, and the hopes of this institution with regard to EFA leadership and the GMR. His experience is complemented by the personal experience of one of the other authors, Taeko Okitsu, who participated during 2004–5 in the EFA Working Group, one of the core mechanisms for the EFA follow-up after 2000 (more on this in later sections of the article).

Carefully and repeatedly analyzing information from the above sources has resulted in a thorough understanding of (a) the dynamics and politics of the global education policy field during (and prior to) 2000–2015, (b) the internal organization and reorganization of UNESCO's education sector, (c) the efforts of UNESCO to lead the EFA initiative, (d) the role and activity of the GMR within UNESCO, and (e) the various ways that (c) and (d) have been perceived by a range of key actors and development specialists. Put differently, we specifically reviewed the data collected to generate insights related to points (a–e). In addition to coding—and then extracting and grouping—relevant portions of the literature and documents collected using codes related to (a–e), the review of data also entailed the development of a critical events time line, writing memos to record insights as they emerged, and the use of matrices to organize data by focus and level (e.g., GMR, UNESCO's EFA leadership, UNESCO education sector, UNESCO generally, dynamics with other development institutions, and general development trends) as well as periods of time (with subperiods based on those dates from the critical events

time line around which significant changes in, e.g., UNESCO's approach to EFA leadership occurred; see Edwards 2012 for additional discussion of these methods).

Background

Prior to 2000

A number of publications have detailed the attenuation of UNESCO's legitimacy during the 1970s and 1980s (see the appendix). Mundy, for example, describes this period as one in which UNESCO was beset by political divisions as newly independent member countries called for new world economic, information, and communication orders in the 1970s, which was followed in the 1980s by withdrawal from UNESCO, first, by the United States and then the United Kingdom and Singapore, with the United States claiming that it "was poorly managed, provided little functional value, and had steadily engaged in issues which were beyond the scope of its constitutional mandate" (1999, 42). The heart of the crisis experienced by UNESCO during this time was the result of a combination of factors, including "turmoil over alleged mismanagement, and a tendency to use UNESCO as a battleground for cold war politics" (Heyneman 1999, 68). This internal struggle over UNESCO's core rationale and goals occurred simultaneously with the rise of other influential multilaterals (e.g., the World Bank); moreover, in this context, "UNESCO's educational activities were no longer providing the organization with the kind of *legitimacy and authority* which they had once afforded in the 1960s and early 1970s" (Mundy 1999, 39; emphasis added). As one example, UNESCO's educational statistics—once the go-to source for educational data—came to be seen as unreliable (Heyneman 1999). Thus, while UNESCO was legitimate as a multilateral organization due to the democratic nature of its structure, it steadily lost legitimacy—at least among key Western members and northern development specialists—in terms of its reputation and status.

UNESCO thus entered the 1990s with "internal fears about losing its status as lead agency for education" (Singh 2011, 57). In order to reestablish its credibility, the leadership of the education sector (under Assistant Director-General for Education Colin Power, an Australian who was appointed in 1989) attempted to make this sector more functional (less philosophical) while also launching several flagship publications (such as the *World Education Report*). At the same time, the director-general sought to rebrand UNESCO as a "global intellectual forum" (Mundy 1999, 43), a role that it attempted to step into as it hosted world conferences on adult education (1997) and higher education (1998).

Of course, much of UNESCO's energy during the 1990s was directed, initially, at the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in Jomtien,

Thailand, and, then, in the years that followed, at maintaining the momentum behind the agreements made at Jomtien—for example, by facilitating the International Consultative Forum on EFA ("a body created in 1991 to monitor EFA and composed of representatives of the five international agencies that sponsored [WCEFA]—UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, and the World Bank—and of bilateral cooperation agencies, governments and NGOs, as well as some education specialists"; Torres 2001, 1). Thus, UNESCO, in the 1990s, focused on "high-level intergovernmental meetings, the monitoring of EFA goals, partnership with other multilateral and bilateral donors, and the rebuilding of UNESCO's global leadership through public relations, fund-raising and gala meetings of heads of states and ministers of education" (Mundy 1999, 44). While these actions clearly show the intention of UNESCO to raise its stature among peer institutions, it should also be noted that this organization was not entirely successful, as there was a "lack of sustained follow-up or monitoring mechanisms" following the WCEFA (Limage 2012).

Thus, by the end of the 1990s, UNESCO was still looking to set itself apart from peer institutions. As Mundy wrote: "UNESCO is still searching for some clear sense of its comparative advantage within an increasingly competitive group of multilateral organizations" (1999, 43). Other observers, such as Jones (1999) and Rose (2003), to name two, have echoed Mundy's (1999) sentiment, suggesting that during the 1990s, UNESCO was politicized and constrained and needed to reinvent itself in order to be relevant in the 2000s.

World Education Forum 2000

The World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, would, in fact, provide an opportunity for UNESCO to reinvent itself. Despite limited cooperation among multilateral institutions during the 1990s toward the goals established in 1990 at Jomtien, several factors converged to raise the profile of the EFA campaign during the ensuing decade: the World Bank, UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had been pushing the education agenda (in their own ways), as had strong coalitions of international NGOs who believed in education, such as the Global Campaign for Education, founded in 1999 (Singh 2011). To help direct and sustain this momentum, many international organizations and their representatives sought to ensure that the Dakar Forum (unlike Jomtien) resulted in specific action frameworks and targets (King 2007; Packer 2007).

A first step, however, was to decide which organization would be charged with the responsibility for EFA leadership. Although the World Bank "had assumed that it would take the lead in following up on the recommendations that emerged" (Daniel 2010, 42), in the end, the participants at Dakar awarded the coordinating role for EFA to UNESCO. This result came about because, as Packer explains, "distrust of UNESCO was tangible and yet many

developing countries rebelled at what they saw as the undue influence and self-importance of other international agencies. As a result they—with a little help from UNESCO—made it clear that UNESCO should have the central mandate for coordinating Dakar follow-up" (2007, 9; see also Torres 2001). Adding to this picture was the fact that many government delegations preferred UNESCO "as the specialized educational organization within the United Nations system" (Torres 2001, 4). Finally, it should be noted that the incoming director general was "lobbying like crazy" at Dakar to have the EFA mandate given to UNESCO (INT11), with the implication being that UNESCO was not simply charged with EFA coordination but that it actively pursued this responsibility.

The expectations against which UNESCO's reputation would be judged during the 2000s were laid out at the World Education Forum. The Dakar Framework for Action was the key outcome adopted by the 1,100 participants; this document specified steps that should be taken following the conference to meet the six agreed-upon education goals. Broadly, the document asserted that "a global initiative" should be launched that was "aimed at developing the strategies and mobilizing the resources needed to provide effective support to national efforts" (World Education Forum 2000, 9). More specifically, the framework stated that UNESCO would carry out "its mandated role in coordinating EFA partners" and that it would maintain collaborative momentum by annually convening "a high-level, small and flexible group" (later known as the "High-Level Group") that will serve "as a lever for political commitment and technical and financial resource mobilization" (World Education Forum 2000, 10). Finally, and important for our purposes, the Dakar Framework for Action not only placed great emphasis on monitoring "progress towards EFA goals and strategies at the national, regional and international levels" (9), but this document explicitly stated that UNESCO should be the organization to produce a "monitoring report" (10) that would feed into its coordinating work.

The Dakar Framework for Action clearly put a lot of pressure on UNESCO. The expectations for the years to come were high, even if confidence was low, particularly in comparison with the clout and technical capacity of the World Bank. Nevertheless, UNESCO's new Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura, whose term began just five months before Dakar, in November 1999, was committed to meeting the expectations for leadership, coordinating, and monitoring that had been laid out. Evidence of this is provided by Limage (2007), who explains that in December 2000 Matsuura sent out an internal memo declaring that "the entire Organization has to be mobilized for maximum effectiveness and success in the follow-up in order to *do justice to this show of confidence* by Member States in UNESCO and to *consolidate our pivotal role in the field of education* within the United Nations system" (Limage 2007, 466; emphasis added).

Findings

In what follows, we attempt to explain the successes and limitations of the GMR and of UNESCO's EFA coordination, in addition to discussing the larger constraints that have hindered UNESCO's efforts at repairing its legitimacy. The idea is to address the gains (and losses) made by UNESCO through the GMR and its EFA leadership, followed by an examination of the more macro internal and external constraints faced by UNESCO that have hampered the achievement of enhanced legitimacy vis-à-vis other actors in the global education policy field. Throughout our discussion, it should be remembered that changes in sociopolitical acceptability, reputation, and status are themselves the result of the accumulation of many smaller actions. This is understandable, since establishing a new track record for performance or for meeting expectations takes time and requires consistent performance or consistent results in the areas or dimensions along which the organization will be judged. As such, the discussion below of changes to UNESCO's legitimacy is not all or nothing but rather reflects the notion that legitimacy (and its component concepts) can be achieved in degrees and, importantly, is defined in relation to one's peers. For these reasons, in addition to making comparisons with the perceived abilities and demonstrated performance of other multilateral organizations, we will also talk about how various aspects of GMR production and EFA leadership contributed (or did not) to increasing (or damaging) UNESCO's legitimacy, as a matter of degree. As a final point before proceeding, it should also be noted that, even though our focus here is primarily on EFA and the GMR, there continued to be many other roles played by UNESCO across its many divisions (see, e.g., Jones 2005 for more).

About the Global Monitoring Report

The first monitoring report was finalized in October 2001 and was delivered to the members of the High-Level Group at their first meeting that same month. This report—produced by the Dakar Follow-Up Unit and titled "Monitoring Report on Education for All"—was not well received by the High-Level Group, which made a number of recommendations for its improvement (UNESCO 2001b; Packer 2008). Within its 51 pages, it contained brief sections that overviewed (*a*) progress toward the EFA goals, (*b*) cooperation with civil society organization, (*c*) resource mobilization for EFA, and (*d*) suggestions for follow-up actions. Going forward, the High-Level Group stipulated that "an authoritative, analytical, annual EFA Monitoring Report should be produced [. . .] assessing the extent to which both countries and the international community are meeting their Dakar commitments. As a matter of urgency, UNESCO should convene key partners to discuss how the report can best be prepared, managed and resourced" (UNESCO 2001a).

By mid-2002, the Dakar Follow-Up Unit had put together an 11-person team with a high-profile director that would work together with the head of the EFA Observatory at the UNESCO Institute of Statistics in Montreal. This team was housed within UNESCO, was given editorial independence, and was guided by an international advisory board (Packer 2007). Extra-budgetary support came from donors who saw the report as important to the work EFA but particularly from the UK Department of International Development, especially in the initial years (Daniel 2010). These donors did not want lack of resources, a common problem within UNESCO, to be a constraint on the report's success (INT8).[7]

Subsequent reports grew exponentially in size (topping out at 525 pages in 2010) and focused both on country-by-country progress on the EFA goals as well as on thematic issues. Importantly, it is these reports, starting in 2002, that fall under the label of Global Monitoring Reports. Themes covered in the initial years reflected the EFA goals themselves (e.g., gender, education quality, literacy, and early childhood care and education). The 2008 report was an assessment of whether or not the world was on track to meet the targets for the deadline of 2015. The years 2009–15 then covered other topics, decided in conjunction by the GMR director and its advisory board, with these topics including inequality and governance, marginalized populations, conflict and education, youth and skills, and teaching and learning.[8] In terms of timing, the GMR was launched annually at the meeting of the High-Level Group in October (INT3). Other forms of dissemination relied on the internet and, for the hard copies, at least half were sent to UNESCO's field offices (Education for Change 2014).

Sources of GMR Legitimacy

The legitimacy of the GMR was the result of the combination of many factors. First, its organizational context has been important. While the GMR was housed within UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, and while the GMR was part of UNESCO's overall administrative procedures, rules, and regulations (including financial control, contracts processing, recruitment of personnel), the GMR also enjoyed strategic freedom (e.g., with regard to how they spent their funds) and editorial independence (i.e., they did not need approval from the education sector or from the director-general for the report's content [INT9]; see also Education for Change 2014). As one director of the GMR stated, "what we produce is not vetted politically, or otherwise, by anybody, any of the senior leadership at UNESCO" (INT5). This independence was a gamble for UNESCO at first, and one that made it uneasy, particularly

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[7] The number of simultaneous donors grew to 10–12 from 2006 onward, with the GMR having a total of 17 different donors by 2014 (INT5).

[8] We refer to the GMR in the past tense because it has been replaced by the Global Education Monitoring Report in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

since the report bore the UNESCO logo and was, to the general public, seen as a UNESCO report (INT7; INT17). These feelings proved to be warranted as the GMR—at times—heavily criticized UNESCO for poor EFA leadership coordination (e.g., see GMR 2003/4 in UNESCO 2003, 255–63; and GMR 2006 in UNESCO 2005, 127–33). Other times, the GMR characterized the progress made by individual countries in terms that frustrated those countries and put UNESCO in an uncomfortable position. One observer with an extensive background in bi-/multiliteral agencies and international NGOs characterizes this dynamic well: "The GMR . . . its independence . . . that was quite hard fought for, . . . particularly in the early years. . . . It allowed the GMR to criticize nation-states and not be bound by the board of UNESCO when a country says that you can't publish that because we don't agree with it" (INT10).

Second, the GMR enjoyed latitude in hiring practices. As recalled by former Assistant Director-General for Education John Daniel (2010), "Director-General Matsuura made no attempt to interfere with the management of [the GMR] by appointing people to it for political purposes. This meant that we could appoint a series of outstanding leaders to direct the EFA-GMR: Chris Colclough; Nick Burnett; and Kevin Watkins" (42). According to numerous interviewees, these directors were credible across the global education policy field and were respected by UNESCO's peer institutions, including the World Bank (INT6). Notably, these directors had strong academic credentials but were also experienced at bridging research and policy (INT5). By hiring on merit, the GMR was able to ensure that it had quality human resource inputs, which are necessary to produce quality analytic outputs.

Third, the GMR earned an excellent reputation, which stemmed from at least three factors—its trusted statistics (provided by UNESCO Institute of Statistics), its quality production, and its incisive analysis. On the first point, though timeliness and incomplete information for some indicators have been persistent issues to some extent (UNESCO 2015a), a former assistant director-general asserts the following: "One of the great things about the monitoring report, it did oblige people to be honest. They couldn't just invent the figures themselves because they had to supply them to the [UNESCO] Institute of Statistics, which went over them quite carefully. And then they came into the GMR, which often checked it again. So if a minister came out with something quite different, then obviously the press reacted to it and usually believed the GMR over the minister, to his chagrin" (INT6). The production process then built on and complemented the statistics, and in a way that enhanced legitimacy. In the words of Rosemary Preston (2010), an academic and outsider to UNESCO with over 4 decades of work in the field of global education policy, "many find the EFA GMRs authoritative and attractive in their multiple modes (full and summary, in hard and virtual copy, and video and slide show versions), welcoming their guidance on educational

policy and practice to overcome disadvantage. Core texts derive from readily available background papers and syntheses of other research. Complex cross-national consultation suggests a holistic approach and applying lessons learned from earlier volumes implies commitment to relevance and accessibility" (2010, 61). The final factor for reputation is analysis. The GMR was been described as including "expert analyses in different parts of the world" (INT5), "cutting-edge analysis" of major topics (INT17), and, in the words of academic Michele Schweisfurth (2010), "cogent analysis of data, clarity of presentation, and an astute focus on crucial issues" (59).

Sufficient resources were undoubtedly required to produce GMRs of the quality described here, a point that has been highlighted by Universalia's (2010) evaluation of the GMR, which noted that staff costs alone for 2009 exceeded $2 million with individual GMRs after 2010 projected to amount to $4 million in total costs. However, the payoff from donor investment in the GMR was that the report was broadly seen as effective, in that it met (if not exceeded) the expectations that were placed upon it at the outset. This has been attested to by interviewees, by external evaluations of the GMR (e.g., Universalia 2006), and by academics. Per Gustafsson, "the GMR has gained international recognition and credibility in a short time as 'the' international report in education" (2010, 39). In terms of the analytic framework for this article, it can be stated that the GMR managed to develop a good reputation, first, because it met the expectations of relevant stakeholders in light of the commitment to monitor the progress of EFA made at Dakar; second, because its work has been perceived as high quality, and, third, because it established a track record of excellence, such that prestige was accorded to it.

The Impact of GMR's Legitimacy

The impact of the GMR has been felt across the global education policy field. In this section, it is important to highlight the various forms of its impact, because this understanding will facilitate a discussion of UNESCO's overall changes in legitimacy in the post-2000 context. Juxtaposing the GMR's success in this section with some of the challenges faced by UNESCO's EFA leadership in the next section will help to bring into relief the challenges that face UNESCO's legitimacy more generally. Four aspects of GMR impact stand out.

First, the GMR has left its imprints on UNESCO itself, for example, in that the report was regularly relied upon by Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura in his speeches (INT8). More generally, the GMR facilitated UNESCO's leadership around EFA and informed the work of the EFA Working Group and the High-Level Group. As one former High-Level Group participant described: "The EFA Global Monitoring Report was very instrumental in the sense that it was the basis of the work for, first, the technical working group,

and then for the meetings in the high-level working group. So, in that sense it was important because UNESCO's task was to monitor progress towards EFA, and the EFA [GMR] permitted that to be done because it was the nature of the work of the EFA [GMR]" (INT7). More specifically, it was stated that the GMR helped to "bring more substance into the discussions" of the High-Level Group by providing inputs for the ministers "to chew on and to think about and use as a basis [for discussion]" (INT5, 11). Even more broadly, Daniel (2010), observed not only that "The EFA-GMR provided an essential support for . . . the biennial meetings of the E9 (Education Ministers of the 9 most highly populated countries of the South)" but also that "as the informational foundation for these meetings . . . the reports were widely studied, reinforcing an already efficient dissemination system" (Daniel 2010, 32).

Second, outside of UNESCO, the GMR came to be used and relied upon by a wide range of actors, including transnational civil society; peer international organizations; academics; and, to a lesser extent, national-level NGOs and policy makers. The most thorough statement of its use outside of UNESCO is found within an external evaluation of the GMR:

> Overall, where stakeholders are aware of the GMR and have access to it, it is playing an important and influential direct and indirect role in policy discourse and policy making. This is particularly the case at international levels. However, the reach and awareness are too low at national levels to provide regular or consistent influence on policy dialogue in many countries. Stakeholders at both national and international levels use the GMR as a reliable and authoritative source of reference to inform and strengthen their work, particularly in research reports and presentations. Within academia it is commonly used to frame and contextualise research questions and is increasing in visibility. . . . Stakeholders most often draw on statistics from the GMR, but thematic and EFA progress analyses are also commonly used, as is, to a lesser extent, the work on education financing (where the GMR analysis is very strongly cited amongst those most concerned with this issue). At international and national levels, the GMR provides advocacy stakeholders with valuable and credible evidence to feed into their materials and activities. The annual publication of the GMR provides a vital regular window of opportunity for advocacy organisations as increased attention is drawn to education by the new report. The GMR is also used within international organisations to strengthen internal advocacy for education programming and resourcing. (Education for Change 2014, viii)

Notwithstanding the above, the GMR's usefulness for some advocacy organizations was at times tempered by its controversial findings, perceived lack of relevance, and tone (Education for Change 2014). Moreover, per an interviewee with experience inside and outside UNESCO, the World Bank "felt that its own data, . . . its own monitoring reports, albeit extending beyond education, were more important than the GMR" (INT14)—a statement that reminds us of the competition and tension that has characterized the relationship between these two organizations.

Third, and relatedly, the GMR affected agendas in the global education policy field. On this point, Schwiesfurth (2010) writes that the GMRs "reflect (and therefore help to set) agendas in terms of which themes and issues are at the forefront of development cooperation and national policy concern, and they pull together convincing evidence as to why these themes demand attention" (59). Some themes covered by the GMR that have garnered significant attention include early childhood education, primary education, adult literacy, gender equality, educational quality, education governance, and international cooperation (Limage 2012). Complementing Soudien's (2010) perspective that the GMR's impact was strong in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea, Buchert (2010) provides a few additional examples: "On an impressionistic basis and interpreted as a correlation between the publication of the report and reactions in policy constituencies, the report already had some success. Boys' underperformance compared to that of girls led to headlines and parliamentary debates in the United Kingdom and Sweden (EFA GMR, 2003/4). Lower ranking than neighbouring countries made Brazil reinforce support for education (EFA GMR 2006). The mid-term review established that progress is fastest in countries furthest from the goals" (EFA GMR 2008, in UNESCO 2007, 65). More specifically, though there is no formal mechanism by which the GMR directly feeds into or is tailored to national policy conversations (UNESCO 2015a), the evaluation by Education for Change (2014) concluded that there are four routes by which the GMRs informed policy: "regional/global benchmarking; contributing to momentum and policy action around a specific issue; providing tools and examples from which policymakers can draw; and provoking public reactions from policy-makers" (viii).

Fourth, the GMR has lent credibility to the field of global education policy generally. On the one hand, this was done by helping to keep the focus on all six education goals (as opposed to the two education goals specified in the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs]), thereby defending the range of issues that were seen as central within this field; on the other hand, it lent credibility through its systematic and evidence-based reporting of progress toward widely agreed-upon goals. One interviewee with senior leadership experience in the Fast Track Initiative went so far as to suggest that "[the GMR] gave the education sector a lot of credibility, the fact that we have this very robust evidence-based analysis of progress towards education goals coming out every year. It's the only sector with anything like that, you know. And very often [the] education sector comes out badly in comparison with the health sector, in particular, and infrastructure, water, et cetera. But on this particular issue, on a robust evidence-based report that assesses progress towards agreed goals, education was, and I think probably still is, the leader. I mean that was a great credit" (INT10).

Finally, the GMR , beyond having a solid reputation itself, arguably provided a partial boost for UNESCO's reputation. In part, this boost was the

result of the unclear relationship between UNESCO and the GMR. One interviewee with significant experience within and outside UNESCO explained: "I think there was a gradual realization that this product, which was generally welcomed and reflected—because people didn't understand the relationship between the GMR and UNESCO in its detail—actually reflected pretty well on UNESCO. Because here was a major annual report coming out which got a fair degree of publicity, which to all intents and purposes, was a UNESCO report published by UNESCO with a strong-ish forward each year from the Director-General" (INT14). Thus, the GMR was seen as being a UNESCO report despite its formal independence from UNESCO's leadership. Not only are the organizational details of the relationship unknown to many, but the GMR itself contains the UNESCO logo, is endorsed by the head of UNESCO, and is promoted by this organization.

GMR Shortcomings

It is important to emphasize that the GMR has also received criticism. As mentioned earlier, issues related to data timeliness and data completeness have persisted to some extent, with another shortcoming being the absence of any formal mechanism for including the GMR in national-level policy discussions (though, to be fair, this was not a charge given to the GMR at Dakar). Separately, the GMR was susceptible to the influence of its own funders who could impact the GMR by lending their staff to this group. These staff would then be in a position to highlight solutions or aid approaches (e.g., the Sector-Wide Approach) in the reports in spite of criticism. We also note that the selection of policy analysts and the GMR director were lacking in transparency and may have tended toward favoritism (of certain networks). Recently, the Education for Change (2014) evaluation highlighted the informal nature of GMR governance as a weakness, among other things. However, the views discussed here were not prominent, and, insofar as they are not widely held, they do not undercut the general perception of the GMR's legitimacy.

EFA Coordination Mechanisms and the Organizational Context of UNESCO

Subsequent to the World Education Forum in Dakar, while UNESCO's education sector directed considerable attention to supporting the EFA initiative—as "the only game in town" (INT6)— two of the primary mechanisms for EFA coordination were the High-Level Group and the Technical Working Group (UNESCO 2016). Packer (2007) clearly describes their roles as initially envisioned: "the former is . . . a mechanism to sustain and accelerate the political momentum created at the World Education Forum and serve as a lever for resource mobilization; the latter as a means of providing technical guidance to all partners in the Education for All movement and facilitate information exchange" (2007, 10). It was thought that a commu-

nique issued by the High-Level Group after each meeting would "link knowledge to action" through "global, rather than country-specific, action steps" (Buchert 2010, 65).

In practice, however, the discussion of the Working Group was not known for producing concrete recommendations for the High-Level Group, which—apart from encouraging UNESCO and the World Bank to come up with the initiatives that became the GMR and the Fast Track Initiative (FTI, discussed later)—was not seen as being terribly impactful (INT6). To that end, the influence of the communiqués of the High-Level Group was described as "uncertain" (Buchert 2010, 65). Adding to this, a former assistant director-general for education shared the following: "I'm not sure how much good the High-Level Group did, except that once a year it made a whole bunch of people focus on the EFA, which probably is not a bad thing in itself. But it wasn't all that well structured. . . . I got the impression that these High-Level Groups were seen as ineffective, particularly by the big donors. (. . .) [the director-general] was constantly changing the membership [which] was frustrating" (INT6). Compounding this situation, the High-Level Group was diluted by involvement from various international organizations and lacked truly "high-level" participation (as lower-level staff were often sent instead), with both of these characteristics making it more difficult for substantive dialogue to occur and for concrete recommendations to be advanced, in addition to weakening its ability to generate significant political and financial commitment from respective countries and organizations (UNESCO 2015a). Furthermore, the High-Level Group lacked clear lines of authorized communication within the wider United Nations system, consequently limiting the international impact of these communiqués (UNESCO 2005).

Separately, by 2002, UNESCO had developed a plan for the operationalization of the Dakar Framework for Action, which focused on working with countries to create their own EFA action plans. However, as early as 2003 the executive board showed concern about UNESCO's EFA leadership, particularly as FTI—that is, the parallel endeavor lead by the World Bank and launched in 2002 to ensure that countries in need of financing for EFA would receive it—was gaining momentum. More specifically, the FTI also required countries to develop strategic plans for the education sector, but the key difference is that these plans—and the technical support offered by FTI—were seen as being more credible and impactful because they "involved government systems, budget support, . . . and building government capacity to plan" (INT6). UNESCO's EFA Action Plans, on the other hand, occurred in a parallel fashion, outside government planning processes (Education for Change 2006; UNESCO 2015a), and were also seen as being more philosophical and open-ended—"you want to get all the children into school, how do you do it?" (INT10). Moreover, it was "unrealistic . . . to expect countries to prepare EFA plans without much more support than UNESCO was able to

offer them" (INT10). Writing at the time, Rose noted that "donor and NGO disillusionment at the lack of momentum generated around EFA by UNESCO, post-Dakar, led to a recognition that the World Bank needed to take on a stronger role in uniting major players around a common vision of the global initiative. The World Bank willingly undertook this role" (2003, 7). Thus, it was in this context that UNESCO's Executive Board ordered an internal evaluation of EFA strategy and coordination; the board wanted a better definition of "UNESCO's coordination role for EFA and the actual functioning of the Education Sector" (Limage 2007, 463).

This evaluation marked the beginning of a cycle that has been repeated during the ensuing 10 years. This cycle begins with a lack of confidence, frustration with performance, or outright controversy (e.g., about misappropriation of funds), followed by turnover in senior leadership, an evaluation (either internal or external), and then restructuring of the education sector generally and the EFA coordination mechanisms specifically. This cycle affected UNESCO's EFA mechanisms in 2011–12. During this time, the Working Group and the High-Level Group were combined into a single Global EFA Meeting (UNESCO 2011). The main purpose of this multiday meeting—with a technical segment for senior officials and a separate segment for buy-in from ministers and vice-ministers—was to "critically assess progress towards EFA *based on the [GMR]* and regional and national reports, and to agree on tangible actions" (UNESCO 2011, 3; emphasis added). The outcomes of the Global EFA Meeting would then, along with the recommendations of the EFA Steering Committee, guide the agenda of a new EFA High-Level Forum. The EFA Steering Committee—based on input from its 19 members, including member countries, EFA convening agencies, civil society, and the private sector, among others—then provided "strategic direction to the EFA partnership, monitor[ed] progress, and advise[d] on how to scale up efforts in order to meet the six EFA goals" (UNESCO 2015c). Subsequently, the EFA High-Level Forum (like the High-Level Group before it) was supposed to "mobilize political support for EFA beyond the education community and to raise the profile of education on the international development agenda" by relying on world leaders, champions of education, and heads of state who met annually in conjunction with a major event, such as the UN General Assembly (UNESCO 2015b). The relationships among the entities described here are depicted in figure 3.

Within the Education Sector, these mechanisms were complemented by an EFA coordination team. Previously known as the Dakar Follow-Up Unit, this team has experienced significant upheaval as well. Starting in 2007–8, this unit went from being its own division to a section within a different division, then was put under the supervision of the assistant director-general for education, at which point it became the EFA Coordination Team (INT12). The EFA team also had to confront funding constraints. While there were 10
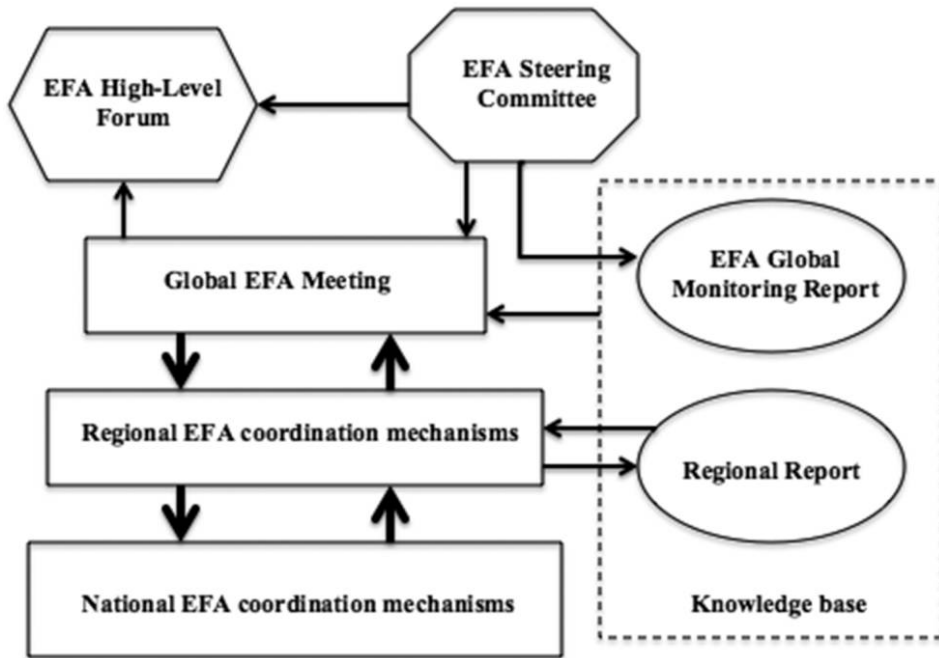
Fɪɢ. 3.—Diagram of global EFA coordination architecture, beginning in 2012. Source.—UNESCO (2011).

professionals in the EFA division in 2004, there were five in 2010, and three to four in 2014, in addition to not having a director (INT12).

EFA Leadership Potential Unfulfilled

As the above section indicated, UNESCO's EFA leadership is very much constrained by its organizational context. To summarize, that context has been characterized by a cycle of dysfunction, evaluations (internal and external), restructuring, and partial implementation of reforms to address systemic issues (e.g., lack of accountability, bureaucratization, centralization, politicization, lack of qualified senior staff; Limage 2010; Stern 2010). What is more, this cycle occurred in tandem with a restricted and unpredictable budget (in the absence of US contributions, paid during 2003–11, when it was again a full, fee-paying member, and which represented 22 percent of UNESCO's budget) and while not having a clear vision of the overarching vision or purpose of the organization (Education for Change 2006; Stern 2010).

It is thus not surprising that observers from peer institutions have judged UNESCO's performance on EFA poorly. An interviewee with extensive ex-

perience in a range of bilateral, multilateral, and international NGOs stated: "with one or two shining exceptions, they have not provided the sort of intellectual leadership that many people would expect UNESCO, as the leading UN agency on education, to provide. They have not been able . . . to recruit the best of the thinkers in the world on education. . . . It's a challenge for any big organization. But I think UNESCO is particularly bureaucratic, by all accounts, . . . particularly dominated . . . by internal micro-politics" (INT10). Another interviewee with a similar profile also commented not only on UNESCO's EFA coordination but also on its involvement in the more recent post-2015 negotiations: "I think it's been modestly successful, but it certainly hasn't lived up to—it certainly hasn't met the potential that it could have met. And we see that today in the discussions around what may follow EFA, or what may follow the MDGs. We see UNESCO scrambling to catch up, running late, not being very creative in ideas, and so on. So I think it's been . . . insufficient leadership would be the way I would put it" (INT8). The two assessments shared here by representatives of UNESCO's peer institutions both speak to the issue of expectations and potential. This is an important observation because these reference points serve as the basis for making judgments in relation to reputation specifically and legitimacy generally, since the former is a component of the latter. Of course, when it comes to the focus of this article, it is clear that leadership of EFA and production of the GMR were not only vastly different tasks subject to different organizational constraints but were also endeavors that were evaluated against vastly different expectations—as further discussed in the next section.

Discussion and Implications

In terms of the components of legitimacy discussed earlier in this article, UNESCO could have enhanced its reputation by meeting expectations around EFA leadership, but this would have required UNESCO to go beyond hosting and coordinating the required meetings of the various incarnations of the Working Group and the High-Level Group. It would have required that UNESCO—through its actions and through its communication strategies—be seen as having, first, successfully sustained the sense of momentum felt among the participants at the World Education Forum in Dakar; second, successfully coordinated and led its peers in the field of global education policy as these stakeholders contributed various resources to the EFA effort; and, third, successfully motivated and supported countries to develop and implement plans. If UNESCO could have done these three things, it would have met expectations around EFA coordination, and, to the extent that these actions were viewed positively, it would have improved its reputation and, subsequently, its status. However, the expectations coming out of Dakar were a very tall order, and one that some interviewees suggested was too tall for

any one agency, let alone UNESCO, given the internal and external constraints it faced (INT11). One takeaway here is the importance of expectations and the fact that, if baseline expectations are not met, it becomes impossible to make gains in the other two components of legitimacy—reputation and status.

Beyond an isolated focus on UNESCO's activity in the 2000s, it also needs to be underscored that the broader field of global education policy was shifting in ways that challenged UNESCO's legitimacy from the outside. Most notably, the creation of the FTI (in 2002) spearheaded by the World Bank (and later named the Global Partnership for Education) stole UNESCO's thunder with regard to EFA leadership. The attention of donors—and their money—flowed to FTI after its creation, putting pressure on the EFA agenda at the same time to focus primarily on the goal of universal primary enrollment, as FTI did since it was linked to the MDGs. Among the reasons for the attention that the FTI received: (*a*) it was focused on a measurable goal (enrollment), (*b*) it had significant financing (albeit too little in the initial years; Rose 2003), (*c*) it aligned with MDG#2 (important since, in the words of a senior member of UNESCO's education sector, "everybody . . . with all the money [was] around the MDGs" [INT9]), (*d*) it was seen as one of the first concrete efforts to materialize the agreement made in Dakar that "no countries seriously committed to Education for All will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources" (UNESCO 2000, 3) as well as at the International Conference on Financing for Development (in Monterrey, Mexico, 2002, with this conference being seen as an effort to seriously consider how to finance the ambitious development goals established in recent years), (*e*) it promised external funding to countries that developed plans in accordance with FTI requirements, and (*f*) it was predominantly managed by the World Bank, which was seen as more effective and which had more clout (at least among the donor crowd) in terms of the global governance of education.[9]

In terms of the conceptual framework presented earlier, FTI's efforts connect directly with each component of legitimacy and in ways that were beneficial for FTI. First, because FTI was not given the mandate at Dakar to lead on EFA, any action it took benefited from the absence of the cumbersome expectations to which UNESCO was subject. Second, since FTI was associated with the World Bank, it benefited from the World Bank's positive perception and clout in the field of global education policy. More practically, FTI was also seen as having a more tangible and relevant impact than UNESCO when it came to the integration of international targets (e.g., MDG#2) into

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[9] At the same time, as interviewees have pointed out, the creation of the FTI by the World Bank represented a commonsense division of labor between the World Bank and UNESCO because the World Bank is an expert in finance and because it already had relationships with ministers of finance in countries that were struggling to meet the development goals.

national-level planning processes and policies. While these points correspond to sociopolitical acceptability and reputation, they also connect with and explain FTI's high status as an initiative within the global education policy field.

To continue, an additional point must be made about the relational aspect of organizational legitimacy. Note that other conveners of the World Education Form at Dakar shifted their focus away from UNESCO's coordination. The UNDP, for example, decided to pivot away from education generally, while UNICEF focused on its own initiative around girl's education (INT11). As an interviewee with over 25 years of experience at UNESCO explained, these developments were "the kiss of death for EFA . . . because . . . no agency alone can handle such a complex task" (INT11). This perspective leads to the question of how much an organization with a legitimacy deficit can improve its status without collaborating with those who enjoy higher status. As noted in the conceptual framework, one strategy for an organization is to affiliate itself with other organizations or symbols from which it can enhance its sociopolitical acceptability.

In UNESCO's case, the size of the EFA coordination mandate, coupled with its internal challenges, meant that it could not address its root issue related to organizational legitimacy—that is, quality performance vis-à-vis expectations—without drawing on the resources, clout, or expertise of peer institutions, something that UNESCO was hesitant to do. Yet this was UNESCO's most promising recourse given that it could not alter the structure and expectations embedded in the playing field, that is, given that it—alone—could not alter the criteria for sociopolitical acceptability (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975), linked as it was to the expectations of others around EFA coordination. Furthermore, UNESCO's relative weakness needs to be understood in the light of changing global aid architecture since the mid-1990s, also something out of its control. The increasing popularity of the sector-wide approach and the trend to provide development aid in the form of direct budget support also marginalized UNESCO in policy and planning dialogue with its member states (Education for Change 2006). Ultimately, then, UNESCO's unwillingness to partner with other organizations, as well as changes in how those organizations were supporting EFA and engaging with country-level counterparts, were both strikes against UNESCO's reputation and status. UNESCO was not able to influence the global education policy field as it might have wished, and, at the same time, it did not keep up developments in the field. In these ways, the relational aspect of organizational legitimacy undermined UNESCO's efforts.

The experience of the GMR was the inverse of UNESCO's experience with EFA leadership in that it was an independent entity housed within a multilateral organization, funded by outside organizations (mostly with funding from bilateral donors), well staffed, and exempt from the internal politics of UNESCO. From this privileged position, the GMR was thus able to surpass

its own expectations as a report that would monitor and assess the world's progress toward the EFA goals. As such, the GMR, through its reputation and status, became a symbol with which UNESCO was associated and, consequently, from which UNESCO benefited.

In comparison, important differences emerge between the GMR and UNESCO. First, the GMR enjoyed a rather closed organizational arrangement that shielded it from UNESCO's larger organizational challenges while UNESCO (and its education sector) are faced with the bureaucratic and political challenges that accompany both large and democratic organizations. Second, the GMR enjoyed a robust staff that has been described as high quality and a budget that provided sufficient resources while UNESCO has suffered from resource shortages (particularly since the United States stopped paying its dues in 2012) and staff cutbacks (leading, e.g., to an EFA Coordination Team with only 3–4 people in 2014).[10] Third, the GMR was a new player that had realistic expectations to meet and which, in legitimacy terms, suffered neither from a track record of (perceived) poor performance that depleted its prestige nor from competition (or noncooperation) from rival reports. UNESCO, on the other hand, had the weight of the EFA mandate; the weight of decades of unmet expectations; and, further confounding its chances of success, the weight of peer institutions who were pursuing their own initiatives. Taken together, these factors explain differences in terms of perceived success, reputation, and status between the GMR, on the one hand, and UNESCO's EFA leadership, on the other.

In the final analysis, while the GMR, affiliated as it was with UNESCO's EFA coordination, helped this organization—partially—to meet its expectations, the other aspects of the EFA mandate were too cumbersome to be met in light of UNESCO's constraints and subsequent developments to the global education policy field more generally. Put differently, the GMR succeeded in creating a positive reputation for itself and, over time, gained in prominence (i.e., status) as a report on the state of education in the world; however, while the GMR reflects well on UNESCO, UNESCO is perhaps more well known in the global education policy field for its struggles in realizing the leadership and coordinating functions that were given to it at Dakar. Going forward, however, both UNESCO and the next incarnation of the GMR will have to carefully consider how to fulfill their new mandates and expectations in a changing context characterized by the Sustainable Development Goals and by evolving dynamics between such organizations as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the OECD, with each of these organizations—and others—competing for influence in the global education policy field.

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[10] The staff of the GMR began with 12 for the 2002 report and topped out at 26 for the 2012 report; from the 2006 report onward it had at least 20 staff.

Appendix
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