Schooling outcomes in the developing world: A new measure

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There is a well-established tradition of measuring schooling outcomes in terms of the gross and net enrolment rates (NERs and GERs) by level of education – typically, primary and secondary. NERs and GERs are routinely used in country assessments of schooling progress. Internationally, NER is used as an indicator for tracking progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of achieving universal primary education. Yet, even abstracting from the issue of the quality of schooling, assessments of schooling outcomes or deficits based on such traditional indicators can be limited and at times misleading. In this context, this paper does three things. First, drawing upon the poverty measurement literature, the paper proposes a new class of measures of schooling deprivation literature that explicitly build in the distribution of schooling deficits of school-age children. With no additional data requirements relative to the traditional measures, the paper illustrates the potential value of the new measures. Second, we use data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and the Demography and Health Surveys for more than 80 low and middle-income countries to draw a global map of gender-differentiated schooling outcomes for the developing world. Third, the paper also develops a simple typology of observed schooling deficits which forms the basis of a decomposition of the new measures by type of schooling deficit, offering further insights into the varied nature of the educational challenge faced by different countries. The results based on the new measures reveal several significant though diverse patterns across the developing world with important implications for policy that would not have been discernible through the conventionally-used measures.