

The Centre for the Study of Global Development's Inaugural Lecture

Revisiting the Sustainable Development Goals for the UN Decade of Action: Post-Covid Priorities and Possibilities

Keith Lewin is Emeritus Professor of International Development and Education at the University of Sussex and is a member of the Advisory Board the Centre for the Study of Global Development (CSGD) at the Open University. He delivered the inaugural address for the Centre on 24th June 2021. Keith argued that the framework for development needs to evolve during the UN's decade of action for sustainable development through to 2030. It is now more than 5 years since the SDGs were agreed by UN member states and it is already clear that some of the goals will not be met and others need to be changed. Covid has disrupted progress but has not altered the fundamental challenges that will preoccupy countries at different levels of development.



The SDGs need reframing to reflect the realities of an increasingly differentiated world where global goals have to be balanced with varied national priorities, equifinality is a precondition for ownership, and time is running out to commit to achievable outcomes that support sustainable futures. The challenges include reconsidering relationships between target setters and target getters, making better use of historic and dynamic data to inform decisions, understanding financial challenges and the strengths and limitations of external assistance, and addressing the political economies of development that determine who benefits from which kinds of investment.

Keith Lewin has published extensively on education and development since the early 1970s and has worked across the developing world on assignments for the World Bank, DFID/FCDO, the Commonwealth Secretariat, Australian Aid, UNICEF, UNESCO, GIZ, SIDA and the African Development Bank and other major bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. He has been a senior technical advisor to Ministries of Education in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and South East Asia. He was directly involved in the development of the architecture of UN led Education for All agenda from the 1990s and in the development of SDG4 for education post-2015.

**Centre for the Study of Global Development
Inaugural Lecture June 24th 2021**

**Revisiting the Sustainable Development Goals for the
UN Decade of Action: Post Covid Priorities and
Possibilities**

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University of Sussex**

Outline

- Developing the Sustainable Development Goals
- Issues for Sustainable Development – Five Challenges
 - Whose problem is the realisation of the SDGs?
 - Demographic transitions
 - Basic arithmetic of labour markets
 - Climate change
 - Financing development
- SDG Futures

Why the Sustainable Development Goals?

- **MDGs not fit for purpose** – *2008 financial crisis, geopolitical realignments, energy transformations, crises in access and quality*
- **Rights approaches and human capitals** – *economic investment is needed to reach the most marginalised and redistribute with growth*
- **The Goals and Targets are lists not recipes for development** – *country contexts are diverse and changing, context determines uptake*
- **Ownership and accountability**– *globalisation disempowers and undermines social contracts between governments and citizens*
- **Fragile Environments** – *climate change, seas without fish, air without quality, land without fertility, children without education*
- **Fragile States** – *social cohesion, forced migration, terrorism, civil war, lawlessness, weak institutions, dysfunctional economies*

Taking Stock - Principles claimed for the UN Process

- One set of goals for all countries.....rich or poor....
- Country led process rather than agency led.....
- Indicators are to be associated with each goal – global, national and local – 135 and counting.....
- Targets are for countries not for donors.....
- Finance is to be from domestic revenue and innovative financing.... No clear promise that no country would fail to achieve goals for lack of resources....
- “The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all”



What is Sustainable Development ?

Poverty, Health, Education, Equity, Energy, Economy, Environment

- Valuing the future over the present and sacrificing satisfaction *now*, for satisfaction in the *future*?
- Ensuring that technological innovation, increases in productivity, and food production exceeds the rate of population growth?
- Preserving biodiversity and nurturing a healthy planet?
- Minimising energy consumption or maximising clean energy?
- More or less? – equality, equity, freedoms, competition, employment, health, privatization, or leisure?

Sustainable Development Goals and Targets for Education?



SDG Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete **free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education K-12** leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to **quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education** so that they are ready for primary education.
- Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure **equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university**.
- Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including **technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship**.
- Target 4.5: By 2030, **eliminate gender disparities in education** and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.
- Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that **all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy**.
- Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners **acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development**, including through education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, promotion of peace, global citizenship and appreciation of diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
- Target 4.a: **Build and upgrade education facilities** that are disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.
- Target 4.b: By 2020, **substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries**, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for **enrolment in higher education** in developed countries and other developing countries.
- Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially **increase the supply of qualified teachers, through international cooperation for teacher training** in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

Time to Revisit the SDG4 Targets and Try Again

- **Some global education goals are unachievable** for some and irrelevant for others. No conceivable amount of aid can finance SDG4; domestic revenue from taxes will have to double to support 6% of GDP for education
- **There are no agreed theories of change** that explain why previous global goals have not been achieved as a result of previous projects
- **The current SDG4 targets and indicators do not capture sustainability;** energy audits and environmental impact are not part of SDG4
- **Equifinality** (different pathways to same goals) is acknowledged but not supported by the architecture of external assistance.
- **Multifinality** (different goals) is encouraged in contrast to convergence driven by global targets and indicators
- The mechanisms to **match SDGs to country context and development strategies** are uneven, unpredictable and lack resilience

Indicator of
Achievement

The Art of the Possible – Zones of Improbable Progress (ZIPs)

Desired Goal

Aspirational Planning

100

75

50

On Track Line

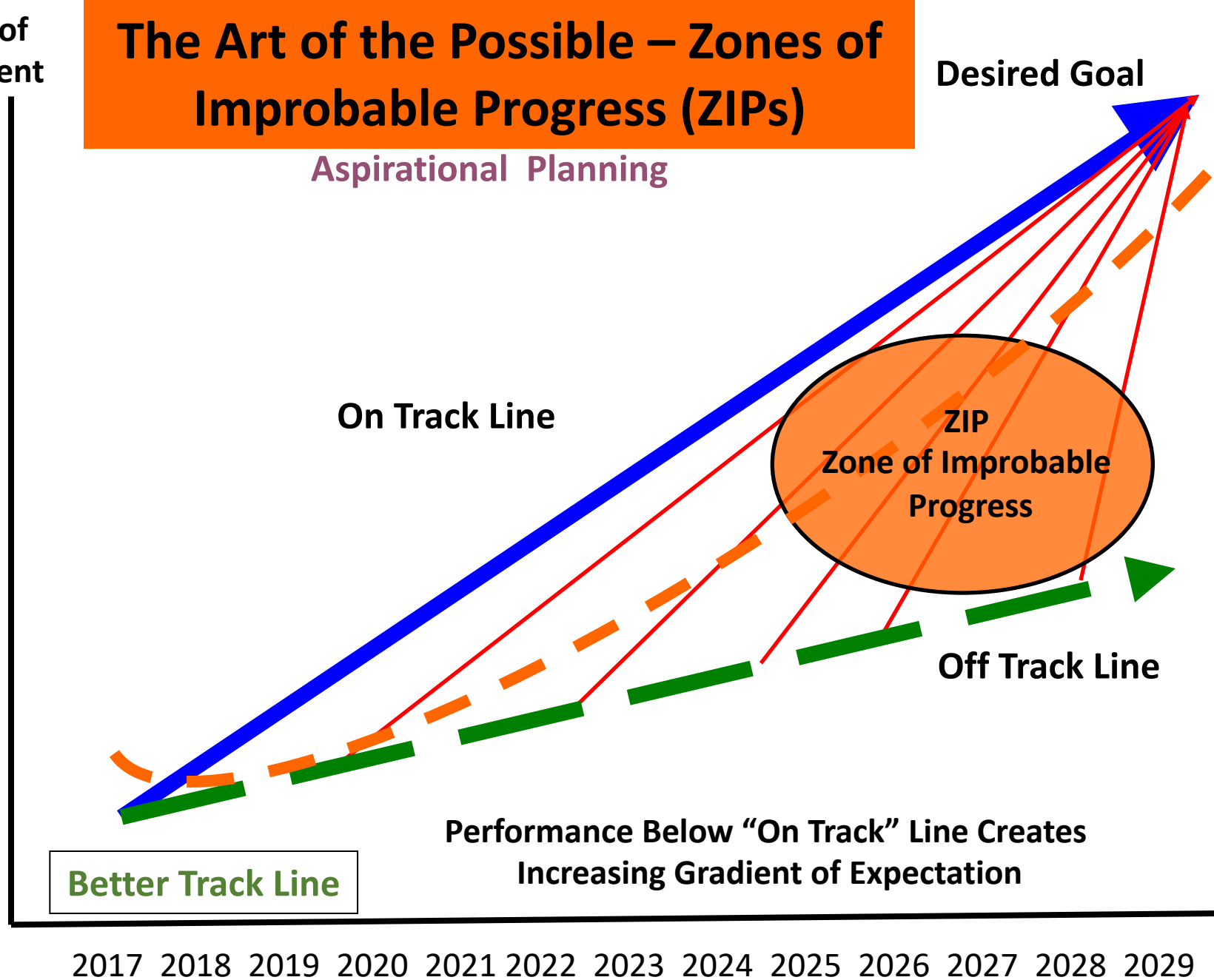
ZIP
Zone of Improbable
Progress

Off Track Line

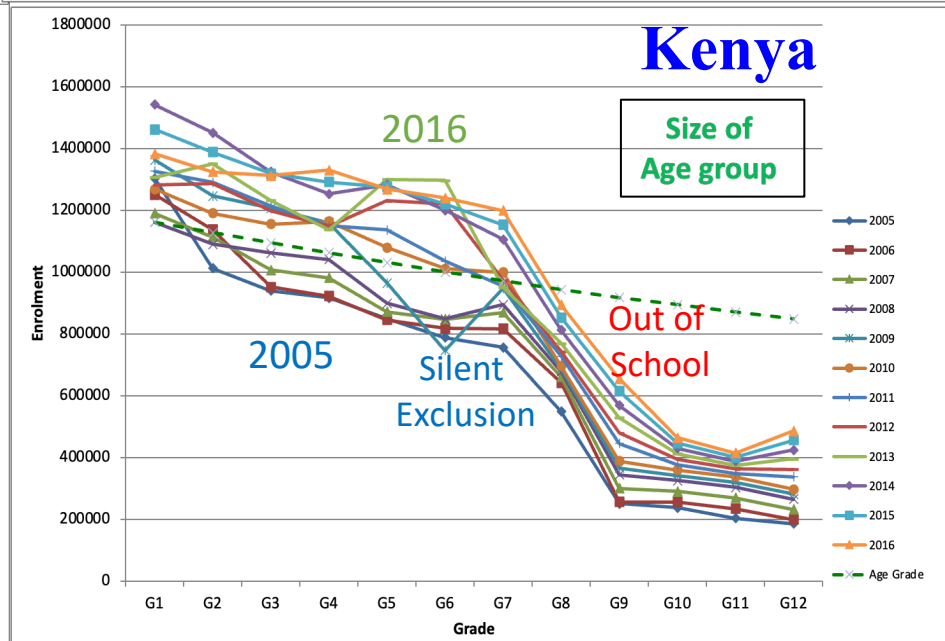
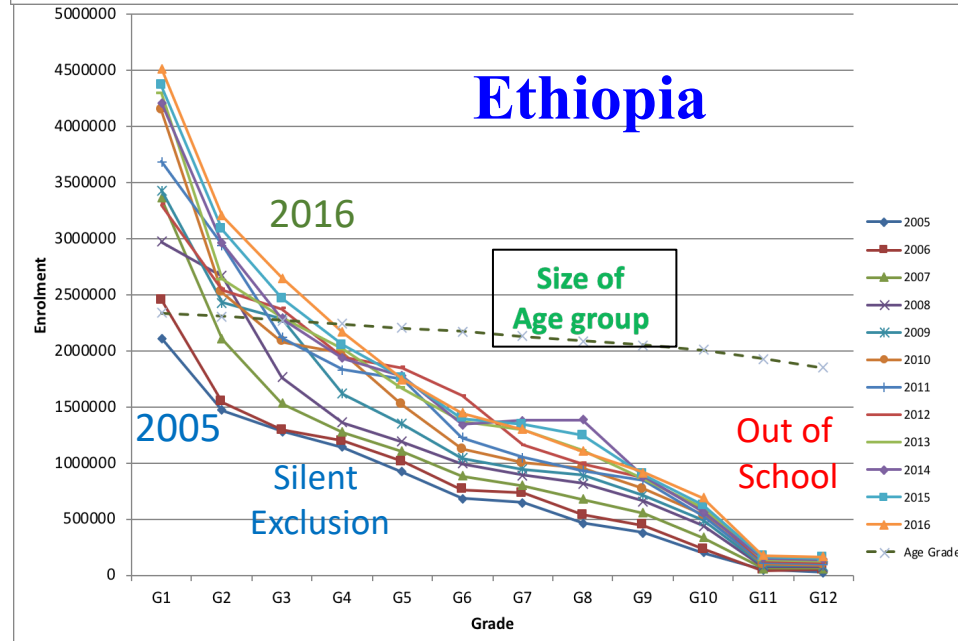
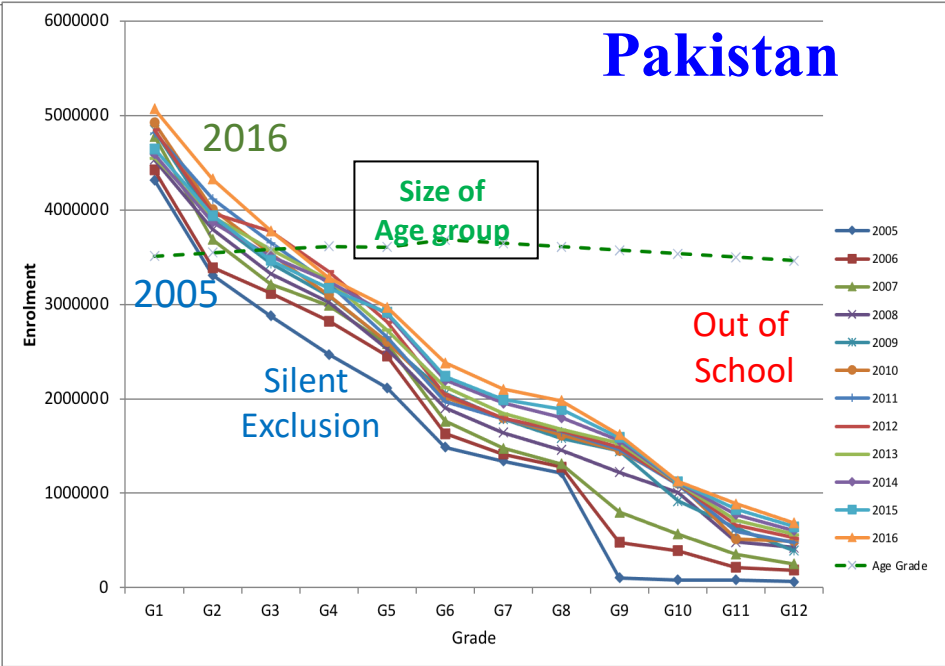
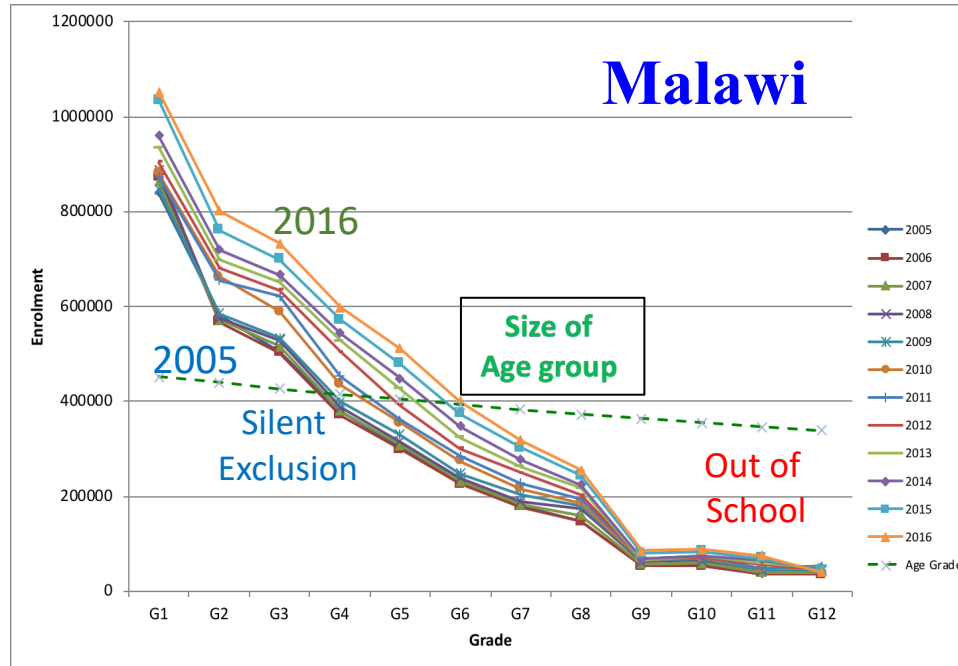
Better Track Line

Performance Below “On Track” Line Creates
Increasing Gradient of Expectation

2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029

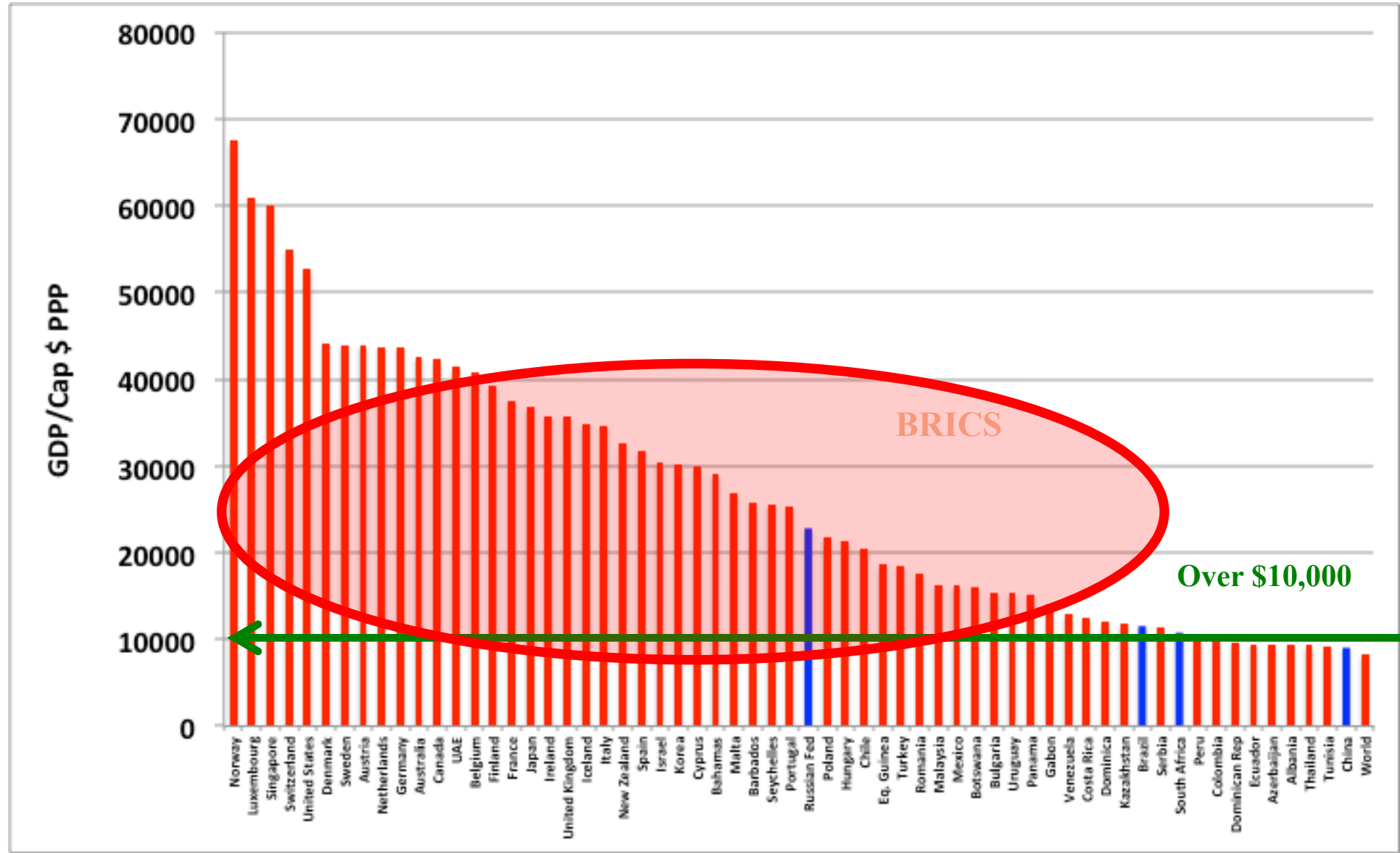


System Flows: Enrolments by Grade by Year

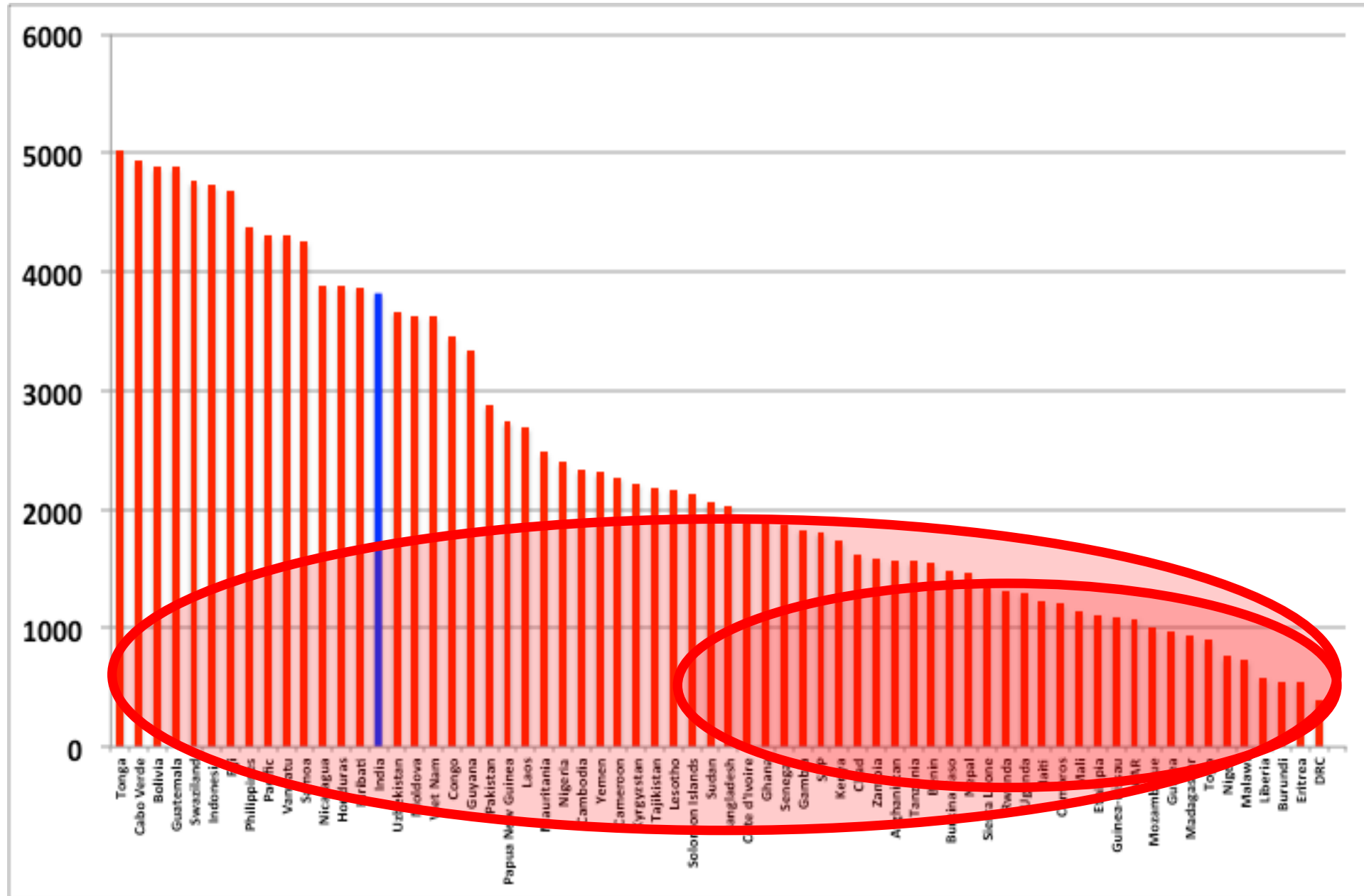


1. Whose Problem is the Realisation of Sustainable Development?

Richest in GDP per Capita – G7 or G20?

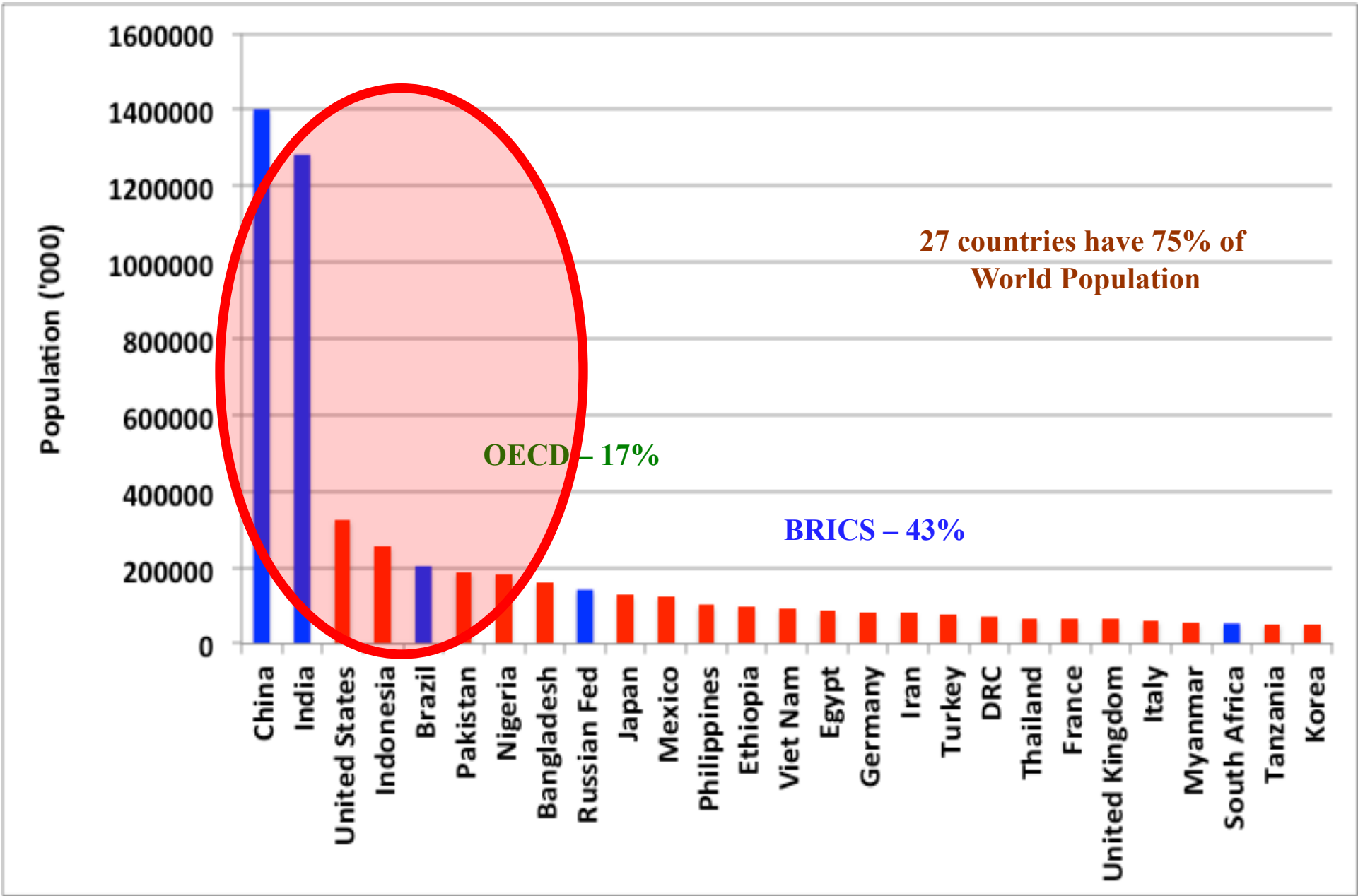


The 75 Poorest Countries - LICs and LMICs?

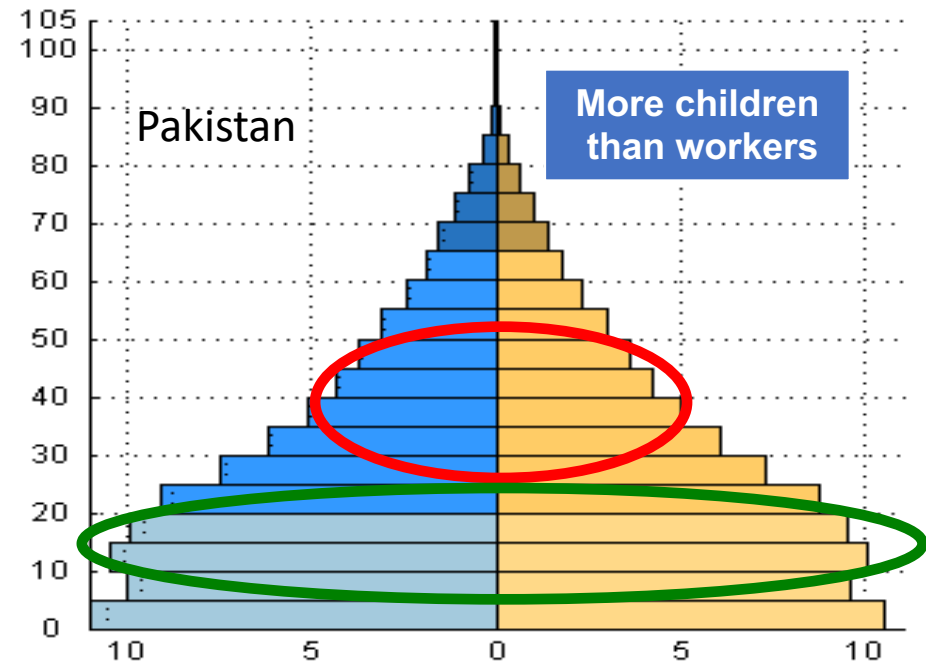
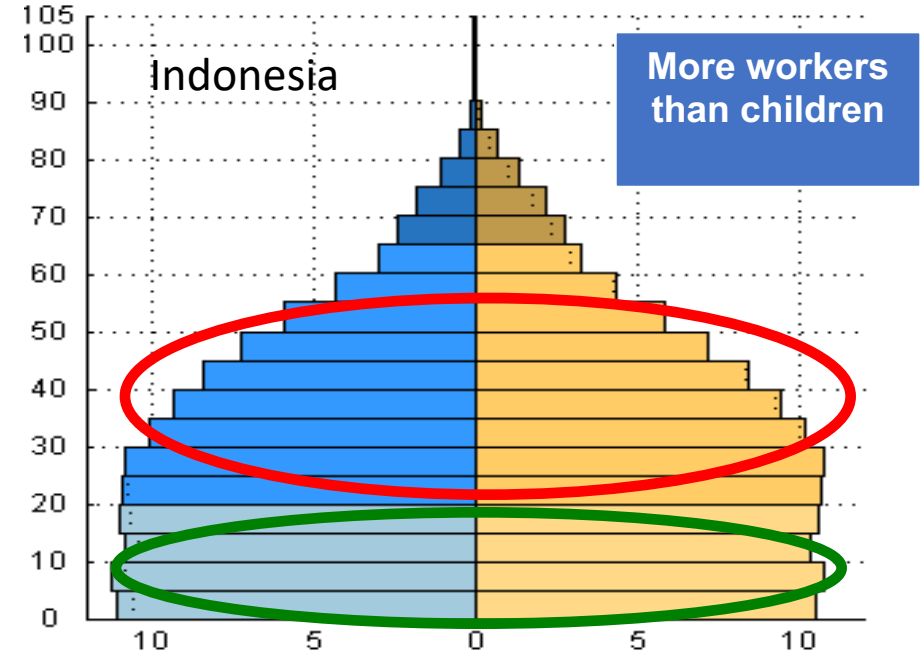
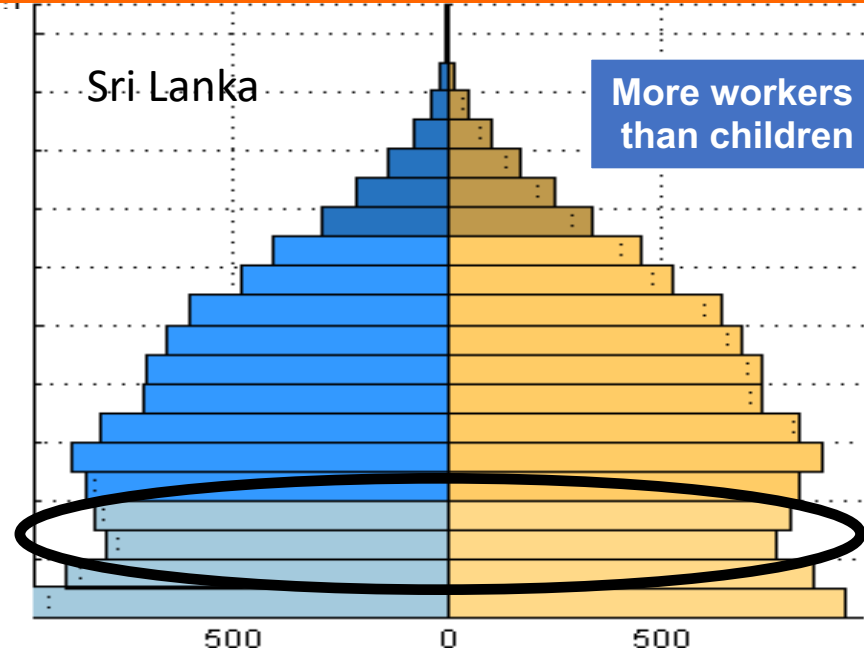
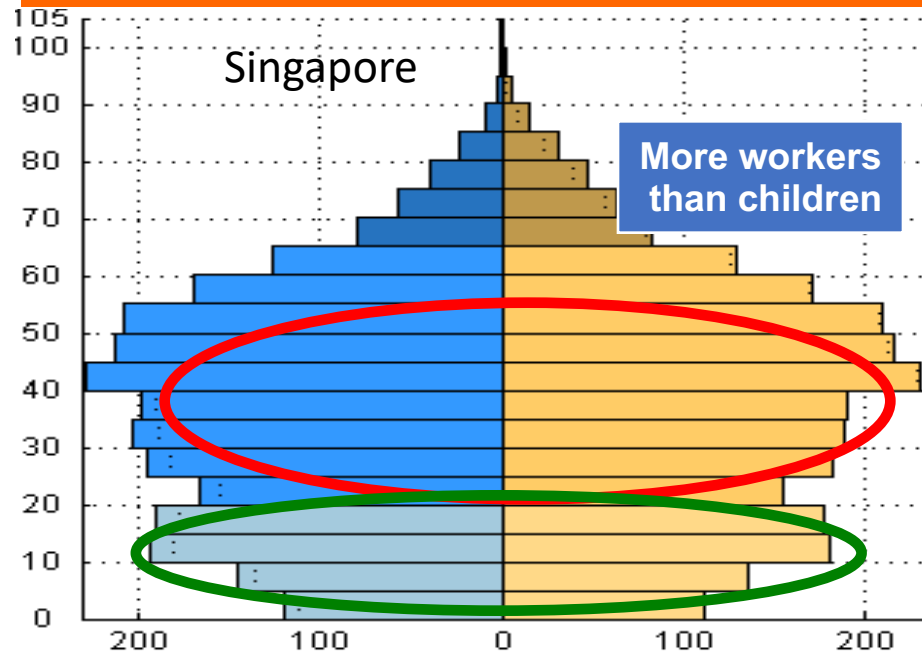


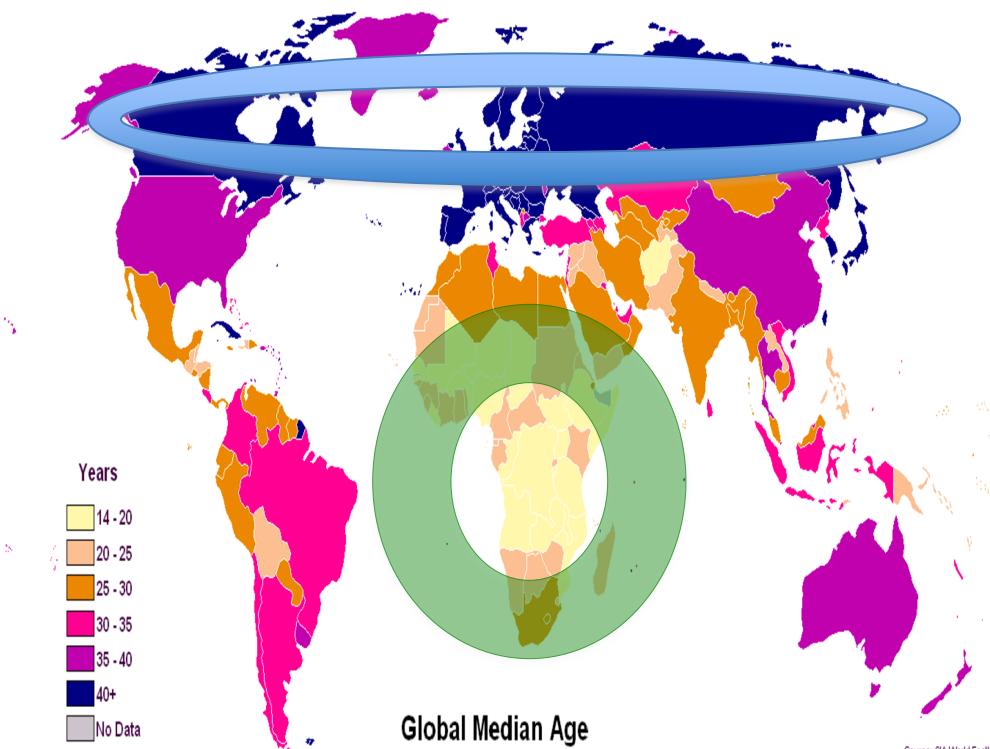
2. Demographic Transition

Population



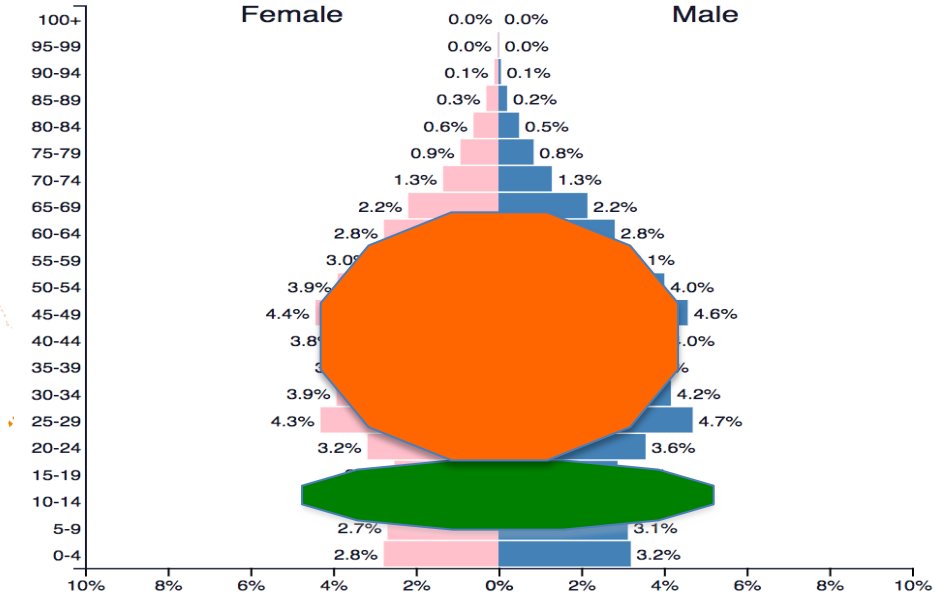
Demographics and Dependency Ratios





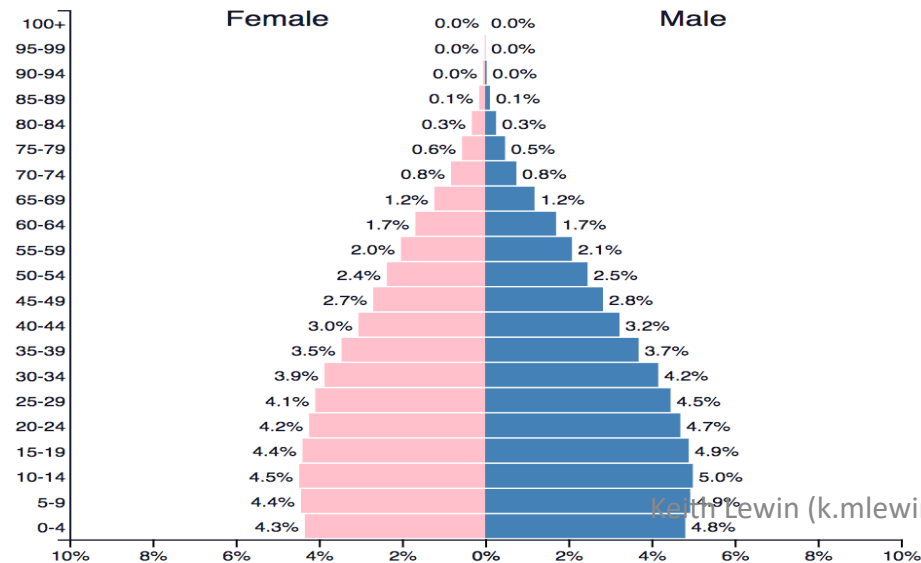
China ▼ 2017

Population: **1,388,232,692**



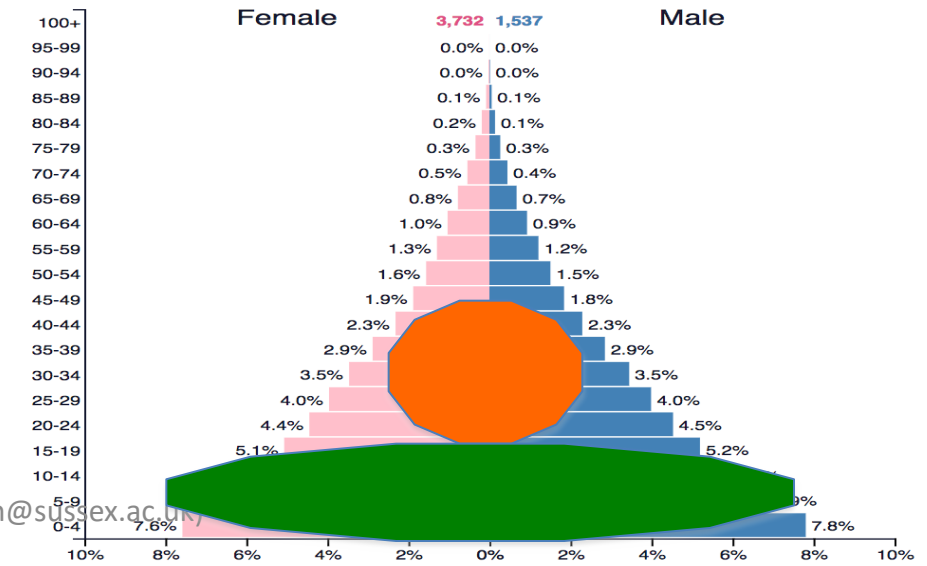
India ▼ 2017

Population: **1,342,512,705**



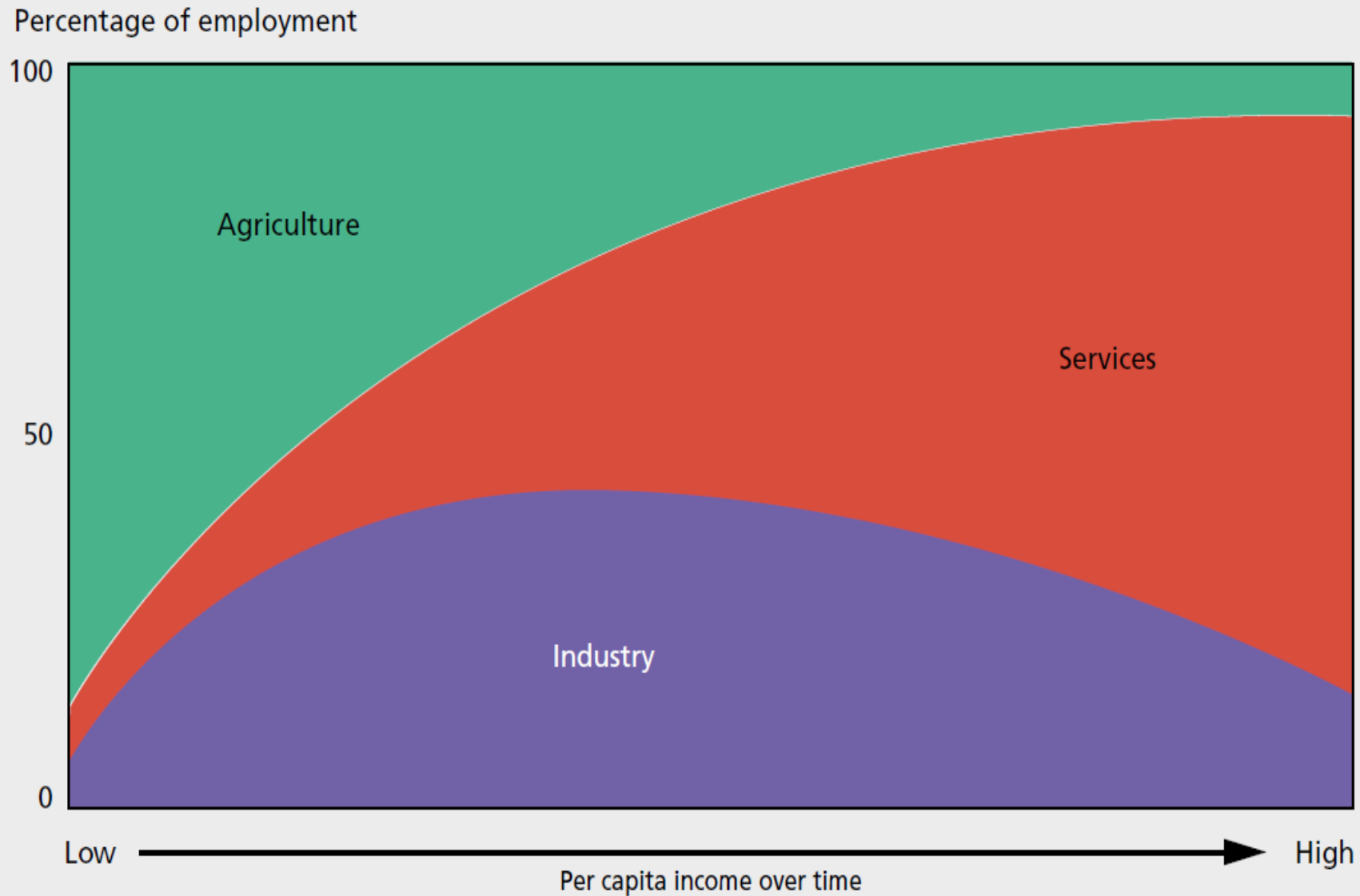
AFRICA ▼ 2017

Population: **1,246,504,864**

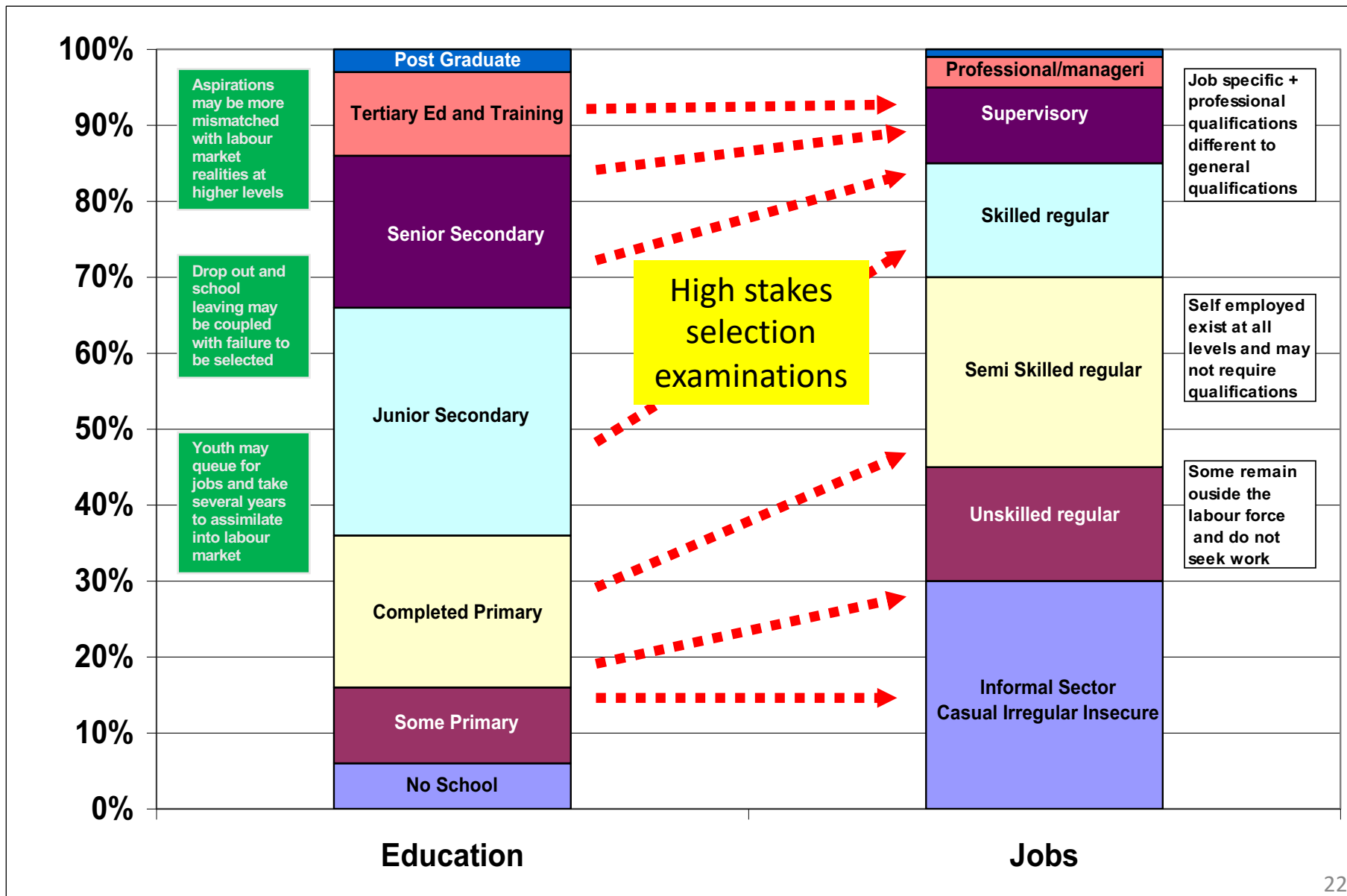


3. Changing Labour Markets

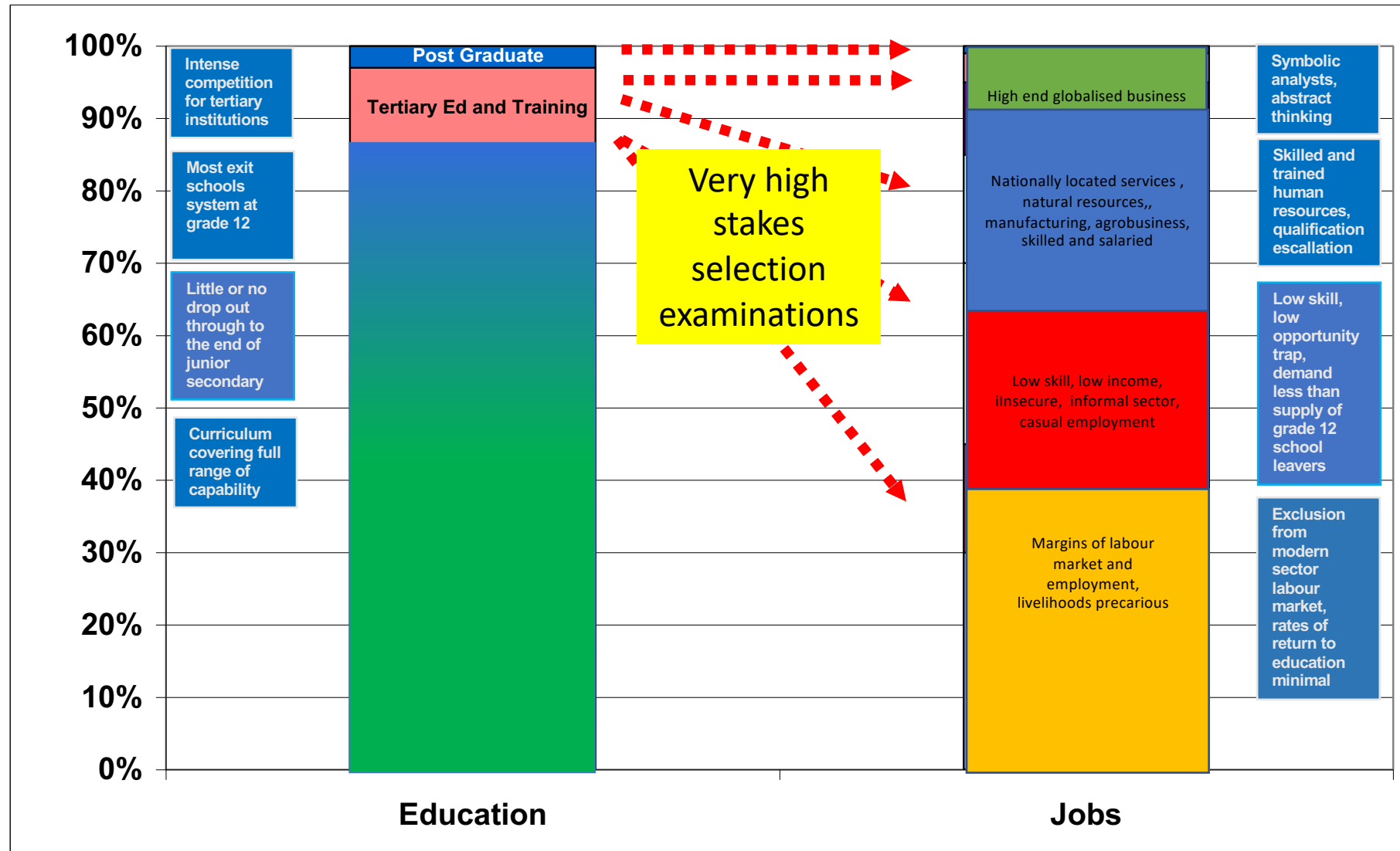
Employment and Per Capita Income



Basic Arithmetic of Youth Unemployment

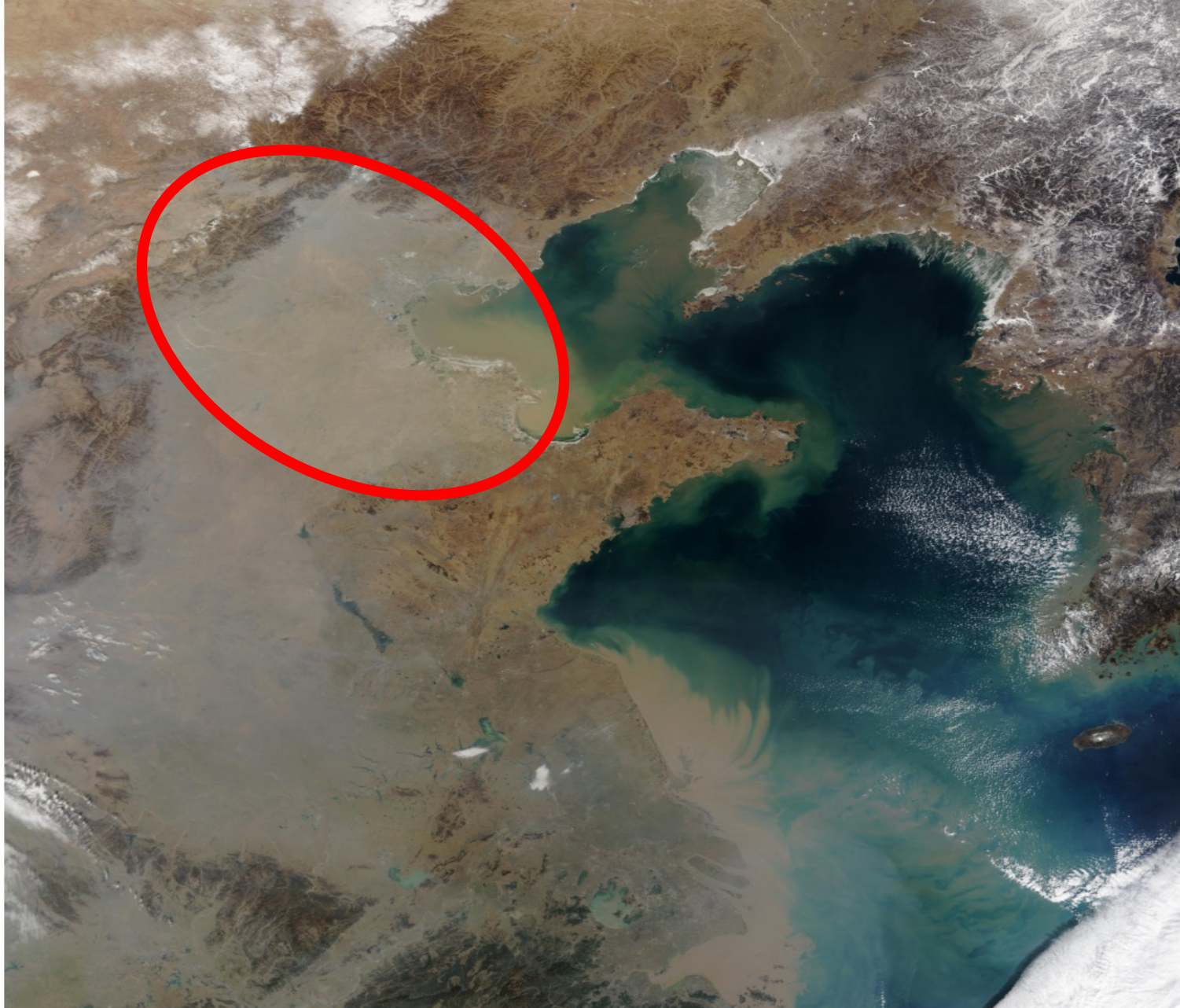


Basic Arithmetic of Youth Unemployment K-12 Education and Industrial Revolution 4



4. Climate change and the Anthropocene

Beijing - China



Bay of Bengal, Delhi

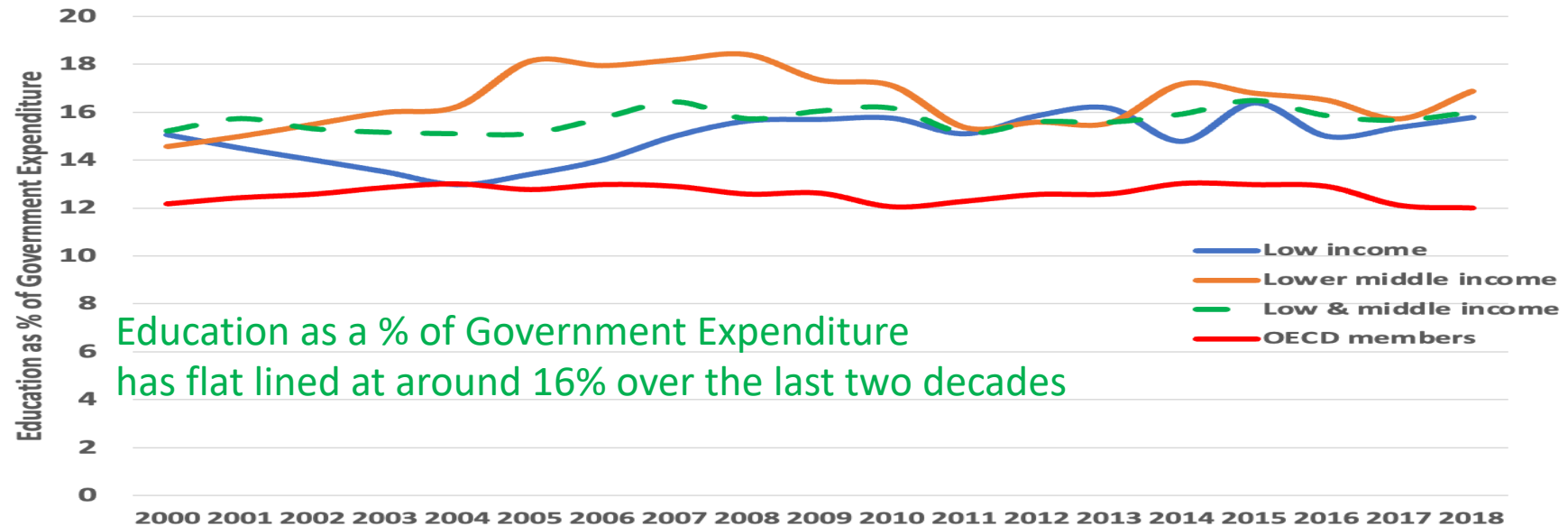
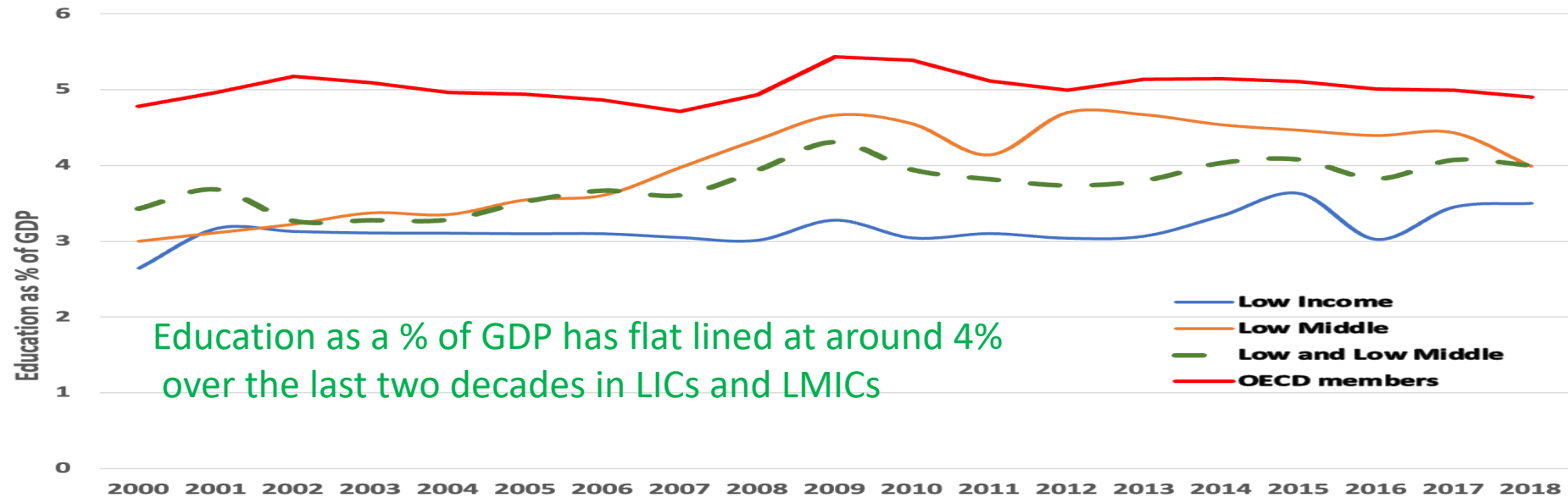


Global Citizens and the Distribution of Consumption

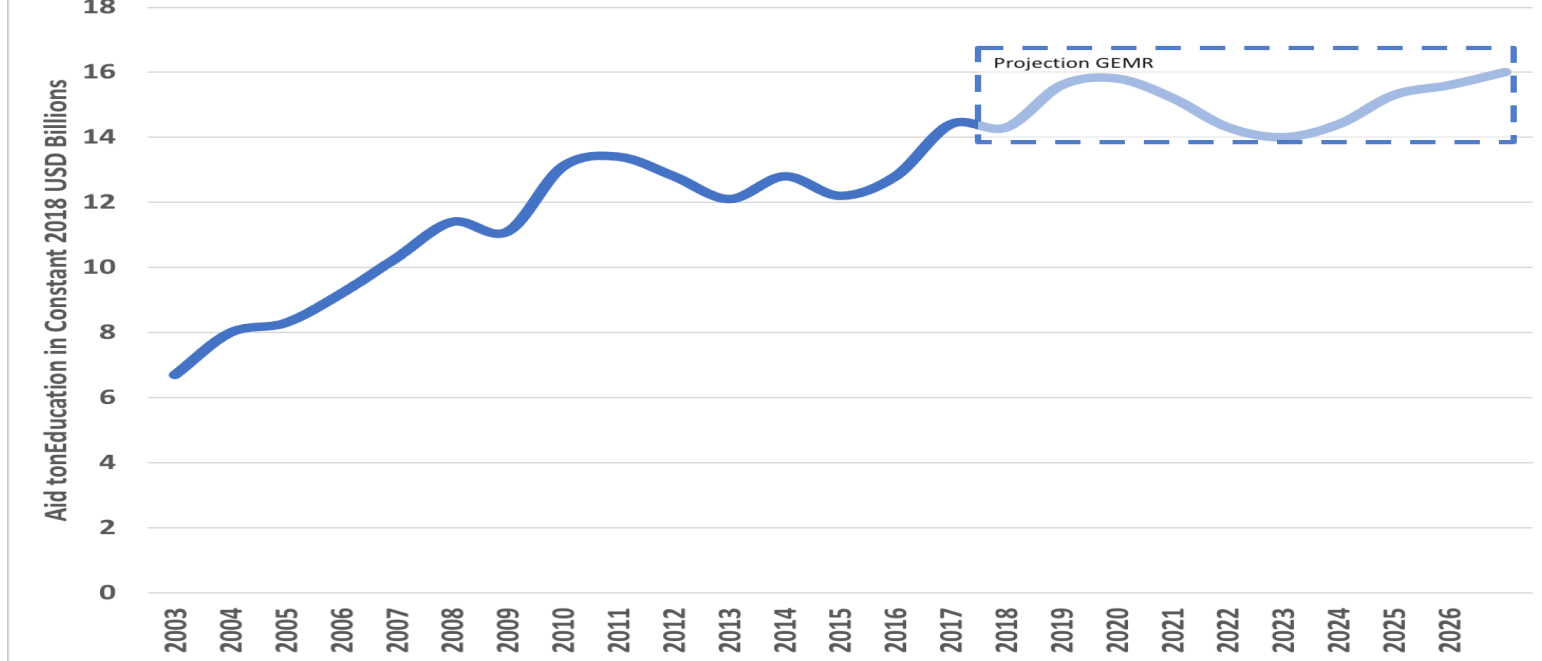


5. Financing Development

The Low Financing Trap

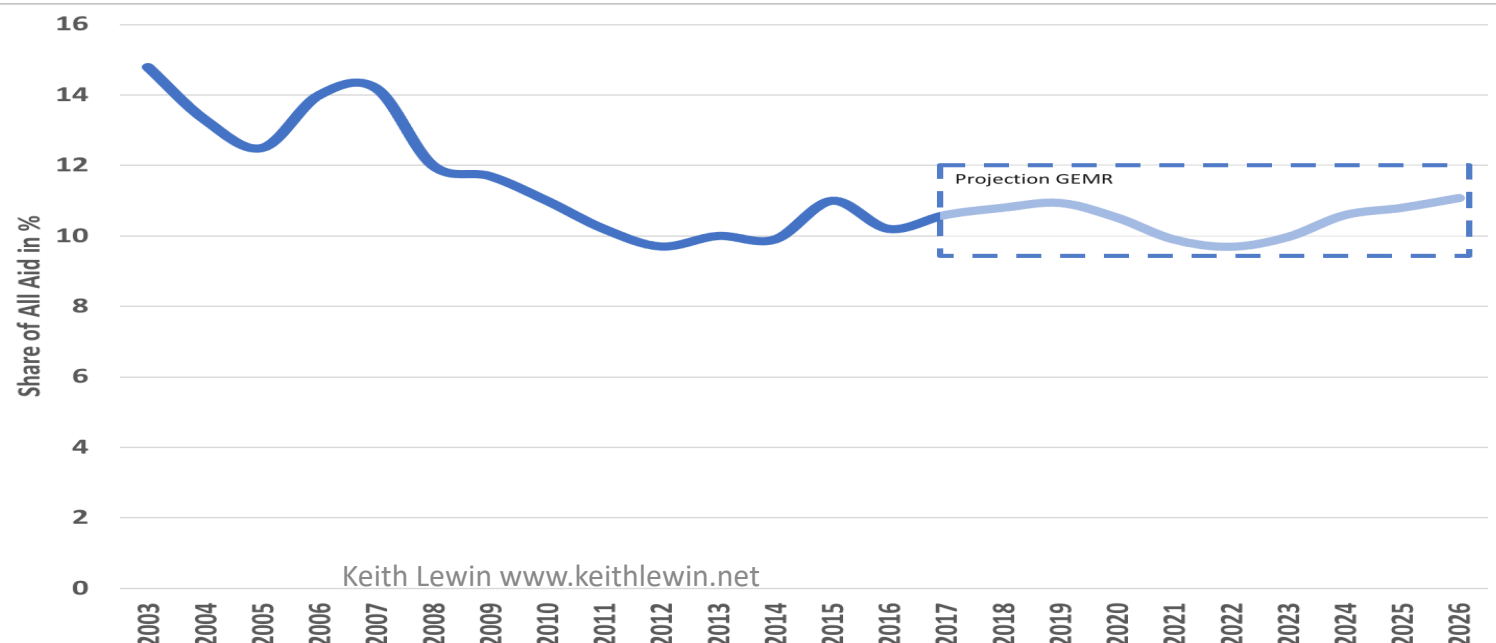


Total Aid to Education (DAC) 2003-2026 (\$ Billions)



Peak Aid?

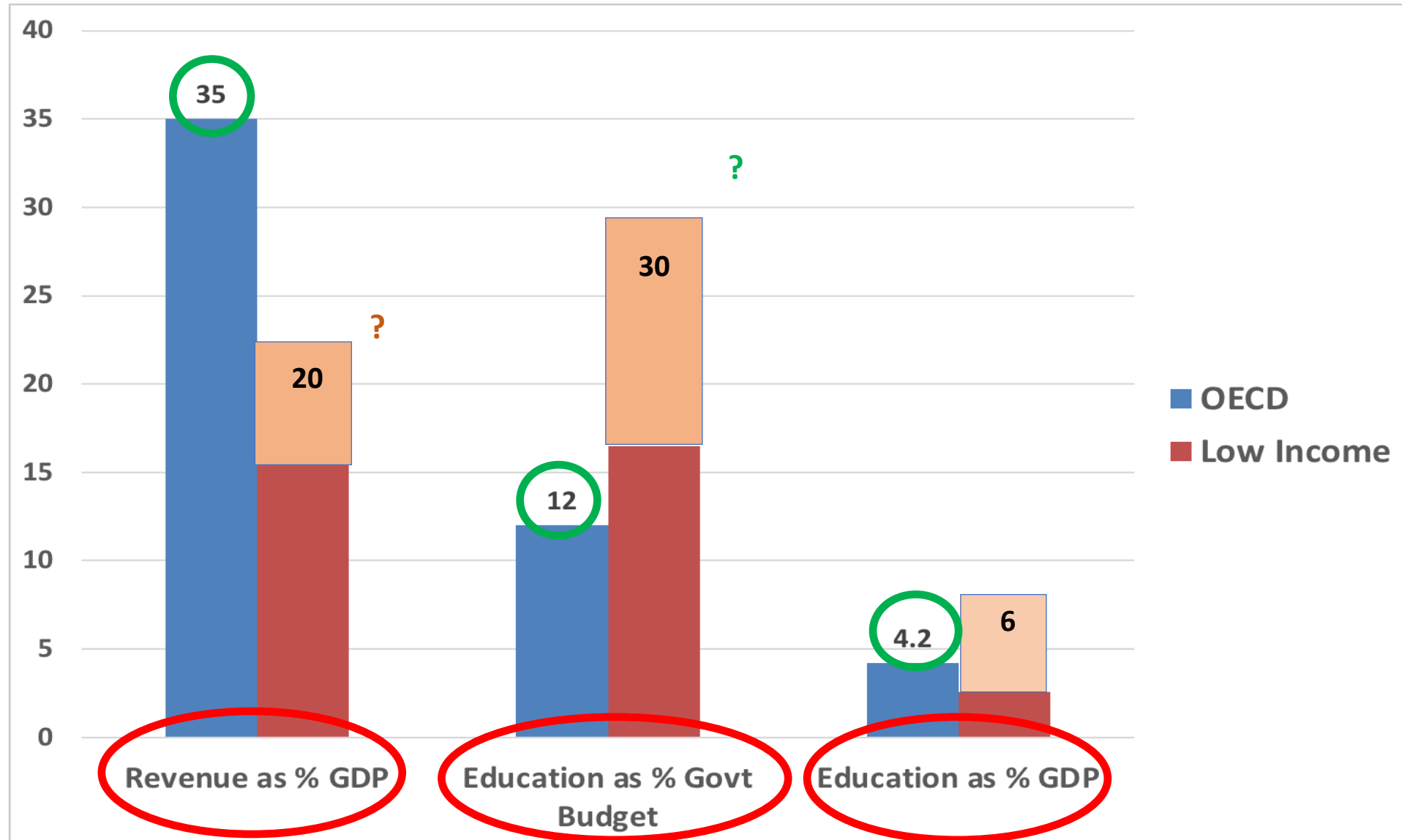
Aid to Education (DAC) 2003-2026 Percentage of Allocatable Aid



Basic Arithmetic of Educational Finance

Revenue, Expenditure and % GDP

A * B = C



SDG Futures

Sustainable Development

Poverty, Health, Education, Equity, Energy, Economy, Environment

**What is important for
Sustainable Educational Development
ESD?**

**What is important for
Education for Sustainable Development?
SED**

Sustainable Educational Development (SED) and Education for Sustainable Development(ESD)

On Sustainable Educational Development (SED)

(Keeping things running and reaching out)

- How can education systems be **planned** to make SED possible?
- How should **infrastructure and technologies for learning** change for SED?
- Will **privatisation of service delivery** promote SED?
- How can SED be **financed on scale and indefinitely as a public good**?
- Is the **national and international architecture** for SED fit for purpose?

On Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

(Transforming outcomes and changing consumption preferences)

- What changes in **curriculum and learning objectives** are needed for ESD?
- What new **learning and teaching methods** are needed for ESD?
- How can **high stakes assessment** be reformed to encourage ESD?
- How should **higher education + teacher education** evolve to support ESD?
- How can ESD promote learning that **values the future over the present**?

Catalytic Aid – A New Compact

Catalytic aid accelerates the rate of development without itself being depleted or creating recurrent deficits needing fund replenishment

- Grants and loans would be **conditional on an exit route** with financing from domestic resources
- Allocative efficiency would be enhanced to favour **catalytic inputs** over gap filling of financing shortfalls
- External financing would demonstrate its **unique comparative advantages** and complement not substitute for domestic resources
- Sustainability would be judged over a time period long enough to determine if **impact was resilient or transient**
- Concessional financing would demonstrate **net zero emissions** (or related measures) minimising adverse environmental impact
- Sustainable development would “**value the future over the present**” with low or negative discount rates

Opportunities during the UN Decade of Action

Poverty, Health, Education, Equity, Energy, Economy, Environment

Iterate the SDGs+ in country contexts, develop equifinalities and multifinalities and go beyond What You See is All There Is (WYSIATI)

Locate the SDG+s with theories of development; test against national and agency theories of change; check facts; interrogate the dependent variable

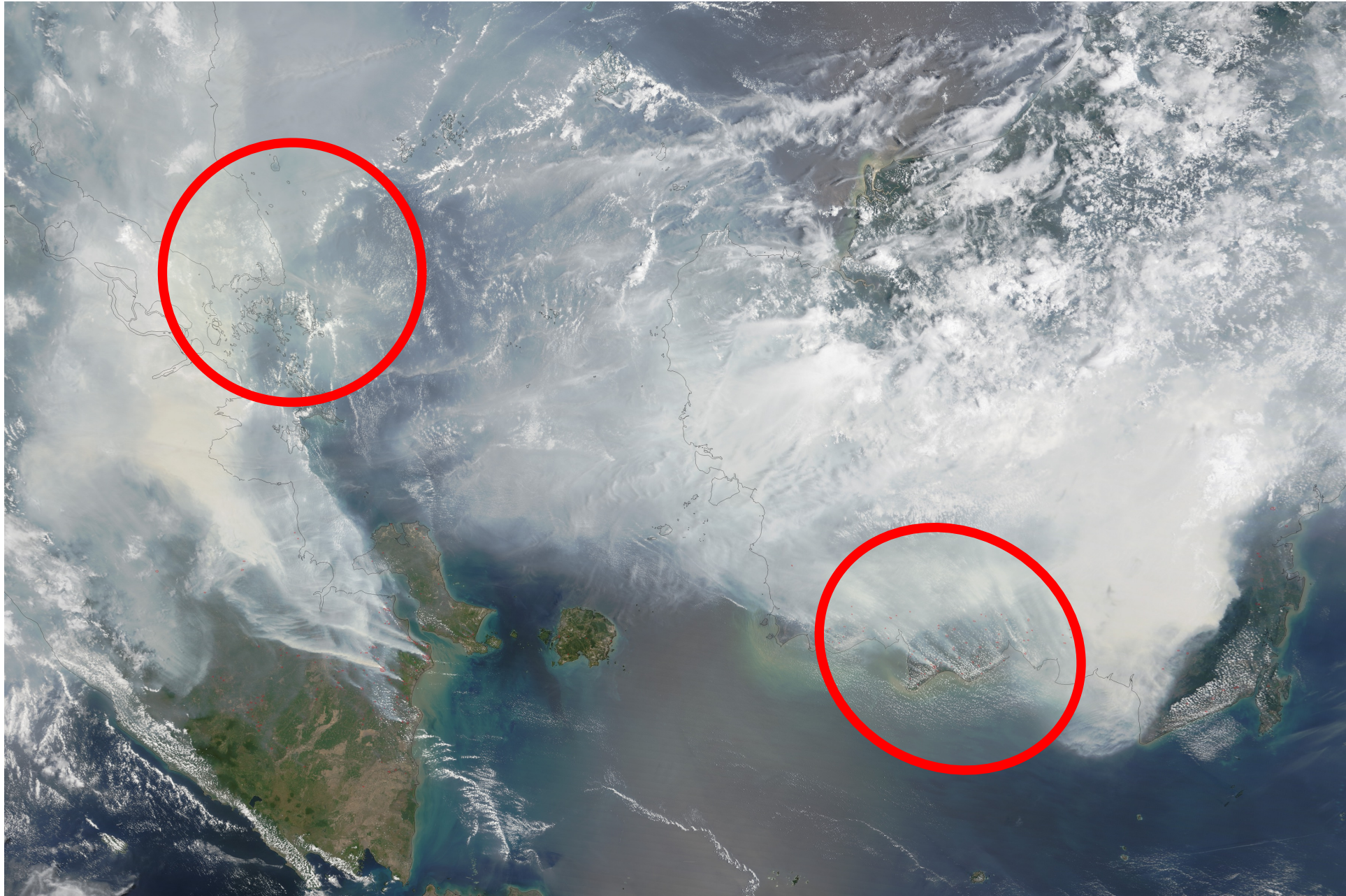
Inter-relate education futures with initiatives on poverty, health, equity, energy, economy and environment

Cultivate partnerships that share ownership, catalyse sustainable development, reduce dependence, identify sustainable financing and diminish the need for aid

Promote research on resilient systems that manage pandemics, natural disasters, political instability, economic recession, social evolution, and climate change

Mediate the impact of the anthropocene on planetary health and wellbeing through SED and ESD

Singapore, Sumatra and Kalimantan



1972. A Breath of Fresh Air?



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