

GCE GLOBAL ACTION WEEK FOR EDUCATION 2017

Accountability for SDG4 and citizen participation | Campaign overview

1. About GAW 2017: background and context

The theme for GCE's Global Action Week for Education in 2017 will focus on ensuring accountability for SDG4, and active citizen participation – with a particular emphasis on reminding governments and people that democratic governance is a cornerstone of the SDGs¹, and that credible roadmaps are needed to deliver quality, inclusive, free and public education – which are at the heart of SDG4.

We are at a critical point in ensuring delivery of the Education 2030 agenda². One round of regional and national meetings has been undertaken in 2016 that explored how to adapt and contextualise the agreed agenda. 2017 will herald the first full year in which governments will be reporting back on the SDGs, which provides scope for evaluating the extent of their focus on the implementation of the agenda and progress made. Early experience has, unfortunately, suggested that progress has been slow and inconsistent calling for a stronger civil society push for implementation.

Despite the successful efforts made by civil society and governments in achieving the Education 2030 agenda, which places the right to free, quality, public education and lifelong learning at the forefront, several alarming developments are threatening the realisation of this goal:

- The dispute over what is meant by quality education, with tendencies to reduce it to testing of measurable learning outcomes in mathematics, reading and writing, rather than a broad and humanistic understanding of quality as promoted by GCE;
- Deviation from the commitment to free education (and a push for fee-charging, 'affordable' education);
- The undermining of public education and government responsibility for the right to education, arising from the growing influence of increasingly aggressive actors from the private sector;
- The tendency to elevate some SDG4 targets (e.g. primary and secondary) over others (e.g. early childhood, adult literacy/adult education, teachers, and post-secondary/technical and vocational education and training);
- The failure to make sufficient progress on financing in order to deliver the full SDG4 agenda;
- Shrinking space for citizen involvement in many countries – undermining the right to active participation, transparency and accountability; and

¹ SDG16 affirms the commitment from Member States to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". Among the SDG 16 targets, one prompts States to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels as well as to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms and to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development. As an Agenda which claims the pledge to ensure the participation of "all people", is "people-centred" and aims at being "an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people", it will be hindered if spaces and mechanisms for inclusion and engagement on decision-making are not guaranteed at the national level. The SDGs will be under threat if governments do not recognise and act to stop the trend of shrinking civil society space.

² The Education 2030 agenda encompasses SDG4 and the Incheon Declaration

- Attempts to change the globally agreed architecture to follow up SDG4, creating new unrepresentative and unaccountable structures.

The culmination of the first year of the SDGs also calls for renewed focus on national implementation of this universal agenda – in both northern and southern countries. For GCE members in the global north, this might call for greater attention to domestic aspects of the implementation of Education 2030. It is important to note too that the 2017 Global Education Monitoring Report will focus on accountability.

Global political developments are also likely to impact on education advocacy and policy in 2017, bringing with them both challenges and opportunities.

It is undeniable that there has been a growth in right wing, populist movements in several parts of the world; this carries with it the risk of (further) decelerating the process of global consensus-building needed for the implementation of the SDGs and risks decreasing aid levels further. At the same time, the leadership and administration of the UN has changed from that which drove the development of the SDGs, and the new UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, may renew vigour behind the agenda in leaving his distinctive stamp at the UN.

A clear risk to the commitment and achievement of the SDGs is that of continued conflict across the world, as well as the threat of disaster. These include the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, but also hidden and protracted crises in other parts of the world. Crises and disasters are exacerbated by climate change, calling for a greater focus on education's role in sustainable development. With an estimated 535 million children – nearly one in four – living in countries affected by conflict or disaster, the roll out of the Education Cannot Wait fund offers scope for bringing much needed attention and funds for this critical issue. However, a challenge remains the apparent trend from donor governments to allocate monies from development budgets, rather than domestic or immigration budgets, to refugee efforts at home. The Netherlands, France, Germany and the UK all in various stages of discussion or decision-making around this kind of shift in budget allocation.

The planned 2017 replenishment campaign for the Global Partnership for Education, could offer some scope for enhancing the quantity and quality of budget allocation for education. This is a critical concern, given that aid to education overall has been in decline in the last few years, and the education movement should be mindful that the shift of development monies to in-country spending on the refugee crisis could also threaten the GPE replenishment process.

Another external policy process of significance is the continued growth of private provision of education, alongside cutbacks to funding for essential services in several parts of the world. It is crucial to have a concerted push towards strengthening public provision of education and ensure that private providers adhere to human rights principles. Last year's Human Rights Council resolution (A/HRC/32/L.33) is a step forward in terms of the recognition by members of the inherent dangers of privatisation. The coming year will see the finalisation of the World Bank's World Development Report devoted to education, the Bank's first. This is likely to influence the terms of debate on education in general, and specifically the World Bank's own support for education; it will be important to monitor – or influence – its recommendations on the privatisation of education, and to push for the implementation of the comprehensive vision of education as a collective good and a human right.

Civil society must be given a voice in any decision-making process which impacts on the lives of citizens, at all levels, and this is critical to the realisation of the SDGs. Yet in too many countries the voice of citizens is being stifled; across all regions of the world, certain national governments have

taken more aggressive action to limit civil society activity, from restrictions on funding, ‘political activity’ or protest, to direct criminalisation of civil society activity. Specific challenges to education civil society have been experienced by GCE national coalitions in the last five years, and on a global level challenges are being made to the existing accountability mechanisms for education, threatening the hard-won spaces for civil society participation. Efforts must be made to improve these mechanisms, rather than to start again, and civil society must work together to ensure its voice is not erased from the debate.

There are key opportunities to bring national attention to the status of education, and to leverage political will. National elections are due in over 20 countries in which GCE member coalitions operate, and many others have provincial elections. 40 countries are taking part in Voluntary National Reviews for the High Level Political Forum. Several national education coalitions are also submitting reports to treaty bodies in 2017. These opportunities provide space for pushing for the implementation of the Education 2030 agenda nationally, and raising issues pertaining to state failure at the international level.

Finally, the true meaning of accountability must not be hijacked. The education community, and in particular the education civil society movement, campaigned hard to achieve SDG 4 targets and a Framework for Action which are rights-based and encompass the full extent of the education agenda, from birth onwards. GCE strongly supports all efforts made to improve the level and quality of learning achieved by children and adults, but accountability cannot be reduced to the measures of testing and teacher performance. This reduction ignores the role and responsibility of governments as duty-bearers, and serves to erode that which lies at the heart of the targets: the right to inclusive, quality, public and free education for all.

2. GAW 2017 campaign aims & objectives

Global Action Week for Education 2017 will focus on holding governments and the international community to account for delivering on the full SDG4 agenda, ensuring citizen participation – asking governments to “keep your promises”.

In this context, the overall aims of GAW 2017 are to ensure that governments:

- Develop, fund and implement credible plans for the implementation of the full SDG 4 agenda.
- Recognise the criticality of strengthening public systems and state capacities to ensure that education is free, quality, and equitable.
- Ensure that there are credible, transparent mechanisms for participation of civil society in the monitoring and accountability processes for the agenda.

The specific objectives are to:

- Advocate that member states develop credible roadmaps for implementation of the full SDG4 agenda – including the targets for early childhood, youth and adults that are being widely overlooked, and ensuring no one is left behind – including girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and refugees.
- Advocate for direct and easy-accessible mechanisms for accountability and transparency to citizens, and for the active participation of civil society in policy making and in monitoring progress. There should be spaces for CSO and youth participation at all levels.

- Draw attention to (and reverse) the shrinking space for civil society – both nationally (where, in many countries, regressive legislation is diminishing civil society space, and where there is criminalisation of dissent/social protest), and internationally (where representative structures risk being replaced with high-level, unaccountable bodies).
- Reassert the central importance of the globally agreed commitment to free education³. We will renew the call for full financing of genuinely free education (abolishing user fees and other charges in primary and secondary education – and opposing the discourse of ‘affordability’ and so-called low-fee private schools).
- Highlight public education and the central role of governments, and challenge rising privatisation.
- Call for credible plans for financing the full Education 2030 agenda – including through action on tax justice and the share of budgets spent sensitively and transparently on education. We will call for bold pledges from both developing countries and donors to finance education (linked to the GPE replenishment in 2017), reversing the recent declines in spending on education.
- Call for a broad concept of quality, as already defined by the GCE, halting and reversing increasing trends of reductionist conceptions that equate quality with achievements around standardised tests, in particular those around reading, writing and mathematics.
- Demand the full realisation of the commitment to increase the supply of qualified teachers and to “ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems”⁴.

3. Policy Demands

All governments must:

- Develop credible and clear roadmaps for the implementation of the full SDG 4 agenda. Governments must:
 - “...ensure the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education” (Education 2030 Framework for Action)
 - Plan to provide for genuinely free education through abolishing user fees and other charges in primary and secondary education, and end support to so-called low-fee private schools.
 - Prioritise hitherto ignored targets on early childhood education, youth, adults and postsecondary/technical and vocational education and training.
 - Put in place comprehensive and long-term national plans to ensure that the supply of qualified teachers is substantially increased, and to ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported.
 - Review education plans, budget proposals and spending for differential impact on girls and women, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, refugees and displaced persons and other disadvantaged groups, through gender and inclusion audits to address educational inequalities.

³ Education 2030 Framework for Action: “We will ensure the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education”

⁴ Education 2030 Framework for Action

- Resist the narrowing of the definition of quality of education to attainment of narrowly defined learning outcomes as measured by standardised tests, and ensure that curricula, textbooks and assessment systems are in line with the existing human rights understanding of the aims of education.
- Strengthen education governance frameworks and the overall public education system by
 - Allocating a minimum of 6% GDP and 20% of national budgets to education, of which at least 50% must be dedicated to basic education.⁵
 - Maximising revenue available for investment in education and to address inequality through building progressive and expanded domestic systems of taxation, reviewing tax and royalty agreements in the natural resource sector, and closing loopholes which enable tax avoidance and evasion by the private sector.
 - Reversing rising privatisation of education through enhancing the scale and quality of public provisioning and improving capacities for planning, monitoring and implementation.
 - Putting in place robust mechanisms for oversight and regulation of private sector players in line with the Human Rights Council resolution calling for regulation of the private sector.
- Put in place clear mechanisms for transparency and accountability to citizens to ensure delivery on the Education 2030 Agenda and the Right to Education in general. This entails:
 - Providing a formal and structured space for meaningful active participation of civil society, including teacher unions and associations, as part of social dialogue around policy making, planning, budgeting and in monitoring progress
 - Ensuring that these mechanisms are responsive to and prioritize the participation from women, persons with disabilities and representatives from marginalized communities
 - Repealing any policies or legislations that penalize civil society activists and reversing shrinkage of civil society space.

Donor countries must also:

- Play their part to ensure domestic implementation of the universal SDG agenda.
- Set out clear national plans to deliver 0.7% of GNP as ODA by 2020 and commit at least 15-20% of all ODA to education. At least half of education aid must go to basic education.⁶
- Allot at least 4% of humanitarian aid to education.
- Make bold pledges to finance education (in the GPE replenishment and to Education Cannot Wait), reversing the recent declines in spending on education.

The private sector should:

- Transparently pay all applicable taxes in developing countries where they make a profit and refuse to accept tax holidays/incentives, transfer pricing, aggressive tax avoidance and the use of tax havens, all of which can deprive governments of funds to invest in education.
- Pledge financial contributions to the Global Partnership for Education during the 2017 replenishment.

The UN system and the international community should:

⁵ Please see footnote 2

⁶ Please see footnote 2

- Support member states in the above objectives to fulfil the vision of free, publicly funded, equitable, quality education.
- Take steps to ensure regulation of the private sector in education in line with the Human Rights Council Resolution.
- Ensure adequate financing for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to support implementation of the Education 2030 agenda.
- Build a more inclusive humanitarian system that recognises the need for sustained action for delivering education in emergency settings, including in chronic emergencies.
- Reiterate the value of education as a public and collective good, reiterate the need for public education and call for stronger regulation of private providers in line with Human Rights Council resolution in this regard.
- Call for an increase in expenditure to promote equity, inclusion and quality education for learners from marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities, pastoralist communities and indigenous peoples.

4. Key messages

- Governments must keep their promises. Pledges made to SDG4 and to Education 2030 must be put into practice, or we will fail our citizens and the generations to come.
- Education underpins the achievement of all development goals: failing to deliver on education puts the fulfilment of the entire SDG agenda at risk.
- The Education 2030 agenda intends to meet the needs of all citizens, and governments must take commitments to youth, adult, and marginalised populations seriously in national education plans.
- The fulfilment of human rights is central to the SDG agenda, and the measurement of the success of the SDGs must maintain this commitment and standard.
- Education is a public and collective good: it is critical that governments play their role in delivering public systems of education and reverse actions which place education into the hands of the private sector.
- Pledges mean little without financial commitments: no government will meet the education goal or targets without adequate and reliable financing, of good quality.
- The SDG4 commitment to 12 years of free education – from early childhood to secondary – must be backed by prioritisation in national education plans, budgets and in ODA to education.
- Citizens have a right and a responsibility to hold governments to account for reneging on their commitments and this right must be respected.
- Youth and adults have been systemically failed by decades of neglect: this trend must be reversed to ensure that future generations can fulfil their potential, engage in active citizenship, and increase their contributions to communities and societies.
- Tax is the most sustainable source of financing for developing countries, and a concerted effort must be made by states to drive up revenues from tax to provide a stronger funding base for education – and for all of the SDGs.
- Every child and student should be taught by a professionally trained, qualified, well-supported and motivated teacher.