

GCE GLOBAL ACTION WEEK FOR EDUCATION 2018

Accountability for SDG4 and citizen participation | Campaign overview

1. About GAWE 2017: background and context

GCE's flagship event, Global Action Week for Education is here and the theme for 2018 is Accountability for SDG4 and Citizen Participation. The theme calls for increased citizen participation in holding governments and the international community accountable to commitments made for the SDG4 and Education2030 agendas. The year 2018 started positively when various governments, the international community and other partners made financial pledges at the GPE replenishment conference in Dakar, Senegal to fund education. Public commitments amounting to US\$110 billion from developing countries, of which US\$30 billion was new as well as an additional US\$2.3 billion from donors were made. It is now the critical role of civil society to ensure that commitments are tracked and delivered. SDG4 is a binding promise made by world leaders and governments to reverse the global education crisis, and it is against this commitment that the GCE is mobilising citizens across the world to remind governments to keep the promises made.

The focus for GAWE 2018 was further inspired by the 2017 Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) whose theme is Accountability in Education: Meeting our commitments. The GEMR foreword by Irina Bokova, former Director-General of UNESCO, states that "Accountability means being able to act when something is going wrong, through policy, legislation and advocacy, including through ombudspersons to protect citizens' rights. We need stronger mechanisms across the board to enshrine and enforce the right to education and hold all Governments to account for their commitments, including donors." Though the GAWE is a weeklong activity, the theme and activities must be sustained during the year.

We are at a critical point that demands collective accountability of all partners in ensuring the timely delivery of the Education 2030 agenda. The end of 2017 marked the first year of setting country implementation and monitoring plans, and in 2018, we will continue to encourage and demand the full participation of civil society in education sectors at all levels. The exclusion of civil society by various governments at national and regional level undermines the commitments made towards mutual accountability and violates the right to inclusive participation in decision-making. We urge governments and the international community to depart from a culture of dishonest rhetoric about "leaving no one behind" when too frequently, citizens, students or teachers in many countries are either detained or arrested for demanding government accountability.

Accountability for the full implementation and monitoring of SDG4 demands the participation of all partners in order to scale up efforts and keep the Education 2030 promise. The GEMR opening statement reminds the global education community on the rationale for its creation, namely that 'The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action specifies that the mandate of the Global Education Monitoring Report is to be "the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG 4 and on education in the other SDGs" with the responsibility to "report on the implementation of national and international strategies to help hold all relevant partners to account for their commitments as part of the overall SDG follow-up and review.'

The Global Campaign for Education supports institutionalised civil society participation in the monitoring and implementation of SDG4 and Education 2030 at national, regional and international levels. Despite numerous commitments towards collective and inclusive participation by

governments and the international community, a number of national education coalitions and various civil society organisations are excluded from planning, implementation and monitoring of SDG4, and in particular, education activists and students are often criminalized for the important work that they do. The exclusion of legitimate civil society is a contradiction of the collective commitment made to implement and monitor SDG4.

The GPE replenishment conference has given positive momentum on the commitment of various governments and partners towards financing education. Yet a number of countries from the donor community decreased their commitments in comparison to previous years; the conference also noted the absence of some of the developing country partners. Financing for education was one of the major setbacks to the Millennium Development Goal target for education in 2015. As such, it is important that we do not make the same mistakes – governments must actively mobilize resources for education and citizens must hold them to account by monitoring the implementation and allocation of resources to ensure that the Education 2030 is met in a timely manner.

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 the scope for bringing much needed attention and funds for this critical issue. However, a challenge remains: trends show that donor governments allocate monies to refugee efforts from development budgets, rather than domestic or immigration budgets.

It is and will continue to be the role and responsibility of the state to provide free, quality and public education to all, especially excluded/marginalised communities and persons. The alarming growth and support for private provision of education undermines the various commitments made by governments in support of free, quality and public education. It is saddening to see a number of public officials and governments championing the call for increased private provision of education that excludes the majority of people. Data has shown that so called “low-fee” private schools are unaffordable for most, and only reproduce forms of stratification and inequality. Governments and the international community risk contradicting the SDG call to leave no one behind, in support instead for the commercialisation of education.

It is also important that civil society holds government to account for ensuring that inclusive education is provided. Education for children and adults with disabilities and special needs is part of the Education 2030 agenda, but is often neglected by states and ministries of education. It is not acceptable that progressive education policies regarding access, equality, equity and inclusivity are omitted from education policy and education sector plans. When advocating for the achievement of SDG4, we must ensure that we are advocating for the full SDG4 agenda, ensuring that education is provided for all, ensuring that marginalised groups are brought to the table and have equal say.

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 people, especially girls, boys and youth, 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 education civil society activity, in particular education activists and students. Specific challenges to the education movement 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, which threatens 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 multiple and diverse voices are not erased from the debate.

Country ownership and leadership by the governments and citizens is central to the full implementation and monitoring of SDG4 and Education 2030. Various opportunities such as the national and regional annual SDG reporting and working groups provide a dedicated space for civil society to influence and engage the state and other partners in the monitoring and implementation process. The Voluntary National Review process is another important mechanism where effective engagement and advocacy has potential for policy and practice change.

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 oversimplified and unfair 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. GAWE 2018 campaign aims & objectives

Aim of GAWE 2018:

This year, we aim to intensify the mobilisation of citizens and civil society to hold governments and the international community to account for delivering on the full SDG4 agenda, by asking governments to “keep your promises”. This is the year to stress the state obligations on building democratic systems and governance through quality, inclusive public education.

Objectives:

1. To advocate for states to provide leadership in the development and implementation of all the SDG4 targets through a transparent and inclusive process that involves the participation of civil society and other partners at national, regional and international levels.
2. To advocate for direct and easy-accessible mechanisms for accountability and transparency for citizens, and for the active participation of civil society in policy-making as well as in monitoring progress - there should be spaces for CSO and youth participation at all levels.
3. To 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).
4. To reassert the central importance of the globally agreed commitment to free education.² 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).
5. To highlight fundamental importance of and citizen’s inalienable entitlement to public education, as well as the central role of governments in developing public education systems, thus challenging rising privatisation in education.

6. To 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 2018), reversing the recent declines in spending on education.
7. To 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. 8. To 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.

3. Policy Demands

Governments must:

- Develop credible and transparent roadmaps for the implementation of the full SDG 4 agenda.
- Put in place clear mechanisms for transparency and accountability to citizens and civil society 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 and student unions and associations, as part of social dialogue around policy making, planning, budgeting and in monitoring progress
- Ensure that these transparency and accountability mechanisms are responsive to and prioritize the participation of 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.
- “...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 in any form 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, well-paid, professionally qualified, motivated and supported.
- Review education plans, budget proposals and spending for to address educational inequalities, ensuring a positive impact on girls and women, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, refugees and displaced persons and other disadvantaged groups, through gender and inclusion audits.
- 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 at least 6% GDP and 20% of national budgets to education, of which at least 50% must be dedicated to basic education.
- Maximise 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.
- Reverse rising privatisation of education through enhancing the scale and quality of public provisioning.

Donor countries must:

- Play their part to ensure domestic implementation of the SDG agenda. Set out clear national plans to deliver 0.7% of GNP as Overseas Development Assistance by 2020 and commit at least 15-20% of all ODA to education, and furthermore, at least half of education aid must be allocated towards basic education.
- Allot at least 4% of humanitarian aid to education
- Deliver on the pledges made during the GPE conference and make bold pledges towards Education Cannot Wait and other education agencies, reversing the recent declines in aid spending on education.

The private sector should:

- Transparently pay all taxes in all 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 national governments of funds to invest in education.
- Continue to make financial contributions to the Global Partnership for Education

The UN system and the international community should:

- Support the inclusive and timely participation of civil society in the full implementation of SDG4 at national, regional and international levels
- Support states in the above objectives to fulfil the vision of free, equitable, inclusive quality education.
- Ensure adequate financing for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to support implementation of the Education 2030 agenda.
- Build a more inclusive humanitarian relief system that recognises the need for sustained action for delivering education, even in emergency settings
- Call for an increase in expenditure to promote equity, inclusion and quality education for learners from marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities, rural or pastoralist communities and indigenous peoples.

4. Key messages

- Citizens and civil society have the right and responsibility to hold governments to account for their commitments to education, and this right must be respected in all circumstances.
- Governments must keep their promises and walk the talk. Pledges made to achieve SDG4 and 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, therefore governments must take commitments to girls, boys and 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.
- Financial pledges mean little without financial commitments: no government will meet the education goal or targets without adequate and reliable domestic 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.
- Girls, boys, 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 all countries, and a concerted effort must be made by the developing countries and the international community to drive up revenues from tax to provide a stronger funding base for education – and for all of the SDGs - by supporting global tax reforms.
- Every child and student should be taught by a professionally trained, well paid, well-supported and motivated teacher.
- Governments must ensure that civil society is granted safe spaces to participate meaningfully in education policy dialogue and implementation. The criminalisation of civil society actors must be stopped immediately.
- Citizen participation allows for ownership, participation, democratic governance and transparency in education sectors, and this must be actively fostered by governments.
- Youth participation must be central to education decision making processes. Criminalization of student protest must be stopped and prevented.