



The Right to Education & Post-2015 Frameworks

A Statement by the Global Campaign for Education

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is a movement bringing together NGOs; teacher unions; child rights activists; parents' associations; organisations of women, disabled people and other marginalised groups; youth associations; community organisations and other civil society organisations. GCE members include international and regional organisations and networks, and national civil society coalitions in nearly 100 countries. GCE promotes education as a human right, and mobilises the public to put pressure on governments and the international community to fulfil their commitment to realise the right to education for all. This statement on the right to education and post-2015 frameworks derives both from the agreed values and policies of the GCE movement, and from extensive consultations on post-2015 frameworks within the GCE community over the last year, including a member survey and a number of discussions at regional events.

Overview

More than 60 years after global acceptance that education is a fundamental human right, more than 20 years after the Jomtien Declaration, and almost 15 years after agreement of the Dakar Framework for Action on EFA, education for all is still far from being a reality. There has, undeniably, been progress in this time, with tens of millions more children in school, a fall in the number of non-literate youth and adults and increased investment in education in many countries. Yet vast gaps – and inequalities – remain, in access to education, in its quality and in the equity of provision. Given this, and the fundamental importance of education in the fulfilment of all other human rights as well as in the promotion of individual and collective dignity and well being, GCE believes that there must be a specific goal on education in a global post-2015 development framework, and continuation of the Education For All agenda after 2015, and that both must be grounded in a human rights perspective. What needs to be done has been well established in treaties, conventions, and previous declarations and frameworks; what is missing is a global political commitment to all that is implied by the right to education – that is, a comprehensive commitment to educational access, inclusion, quality and equity and the willingness to create the conditions for success. This note sets out some of the core elements that must be included in post-2015 frameworks.

Free education

Ensuring that education is available and accessible to all, without exception, requires that education be free. As recognised at least since 1948, education is a right, not a privilege, and access to it should not depend on ability to pay. It has been explicitly stated in numerous international treaties over the years, from the 1948 Universal Declaration onwards, that education should be free at least at primary level, and progressively so at secondary and tertiary levels, and a number of countries have constitutional or legislative commitments to free and compulsory basic education.

In practical terms, there is overwhelming evidence that making compulsory education free of fees or related charges dramatically increases enrolment and access, while charging fees deters attendance particularly by poor and marginalised children, and by girls. The same logic applies to basic adult education: non-literate adults and youths are overwhelmingly likely to be poor and marginalised, and most are women. Any fee for acquiring basic literacy can put any education out of people's reach for their whole lifetime. Governments must therefore guarantee to provide all citizens with free primary and basic adult education, strengthen public systems of education and strive to ensure that education is increasingly free in early childhood and at secondary level. This fundamental principle must be embedded in post-2015 frameworks.

High quality education

The right to education is not the right to schooling. In saying that everyone must have access to education, the international community is stating that everyone must have access to something of substance, to an education that, in the words of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is "directed to the full development of the human personality", and one that, in the words of the Dakar Framework for Action, "includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential, and developing learners' personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies." At present, much education falls far short of this – dramatically so, such that, for example, an estimated half of all primary school leavers in Africa have not even learned to read and write, let alone developed the more complex skills and knowledge implied in these definitions of education. This is not surprising, if we consider the conditions under which much education is provided.

Teaching is recognised by all experts as the fundamental cornerstone to a quality education. Yet it has been systematically devalued in policy frameworks: there are huge gaps in the teacher workforce – 1.7 million additional teachers needed to achieve universal primary education alone by 2015 – and those teachers in place often have little or no training, poor working conditions and poverty-level salaries, no professional support, and are expected to teach classes of up to 100 children. Moreover, infrastructure is too often weak or lacking, textbooks absent, and curricula out-of-date or irrelevant.

Quality education also implies safe education, in spaces where all learners have their rights respected and are free from violence and abuse. The learning environment should also support learners to develop skills as well as experience and promote cooperation, human rights and non-discrimination, furthering citizenship and deepening democracies

A focus on a quality education in post-2015 frameworks will require a focus on the conditions needed to provide such an education for every child and adult learner, with an emphasis on well-trained, well-supported teachers. A narrow focus on test scores will not achieve this; on the contrary, it runs the risk of creating exactly the same problems as the MDG focus on access: a narrowing of focus, teaching to the test, or manipulation of results, which could mean that targets can be met without – or even at the expense of – a genuine quality education.

Universal, equitable, non-discriminatory education

The State is the guarantor of human rights, including the human right to education throughout life. Ensuring that public education is available and accessible, as the Dakar Framework states, to “every citizen of every country” will require a much greater focus on non-discrimination, inclusion and equity. Despite huge advances in enrolment over the last 20 years, there are still 126 million children of primary and lower secondary school age who are out of school, and 755 million adults who cannot read and write. And as school enrolment and adult literacy increase, those left behind are even more likely to be living in poverty, have disabilities, be from rural areas, be girls or women, or be from other marginalised groups. Moreover, when these marginalised populations do access education, it is more likely to be of poor quality, for instance without a trained, professional teacher, or in an overcrowded classroom without sufficient books, furniture, or basic infrastructure. Ensuring the right to education for all these children, young people and adults will require a much greater focus on non-discrimination, on tackling marginalisation, and on inclusion. This implies, for example, disaggregating data by relevant indicators to ensure that governments are tracking not just how many children overall are in school, or have access to a trained teacher, but how many poor children, or children with disabilities, or rural children have these opportunities. It will require examination of budgets for impact on different populations, and it may require targeted strategies and spending to tackle persistent exclusion. Post-2015 frameworks must find ways to measure progress on these efforts to achieve equity and universality.

Education from early childhood to adulthood

There should be no lessening of ambition on the target of achieving universal primary education, a target to which the world is much closer than in 2000, but which it has by no means achieved. This ambition must be understood as originally intended – as being about universal completion, not full enrolment – and it must also be expanded to other levels of education.

Governments must address the under-provision of education during early childhood, and ensure that every child does not just complete primary education, but makes a successful transition to secondary education, completing that also. Given the hundreds of millions of children and adults in the world for whom this has not been the case, universal provision of education must also be understood to include provision of educational opportunities for young people who have not had the chance to go to school, and for adults who have never learned to read and write.

Achieving the vision: sufficient finance and transparent governance

Past education frameworks have taught us that it is not enough to know what must be achieved: there must also be an emphasis on the conditions necessary for success. The two major elements of this are financing and governance.

Securing sufficient, well-directed and effective financing to deliver the right to education is a global challenge that is achievable – but which the world is not currently on track to meet. The total global gap in financing for basic education – early childhood, primary and adult basic – and for lower secondary education is \$38 billion each year. This is equivalent to just 2 percent of global military expenditure, and is well within the spending power of the world’s governments. Yet, despite

the efforts of many governments to expand education budgets in the last 15 or 20 years, the more recent global economic crisis has led many governments to cut back on education spending. A recent GCE report shows that donor governments are currently focusing aid cuts disproportionately on education, with basic education in low-income countries particularly hard hit. It is also vital for low- and middle-income countries to develop and ensure fair tax systems at home, increasing the domestic financing base for education.

If we are serious about achieving education for all, we must be serious about paying for it. GCE calls on all governments to spend at least 20 percent of their budgets on education, and all bilateral donors to allocate at least 10 percent of their aid to basic education.

At the same time, success does not arise automatically from having the right goals and enough finances: ensuring that policies are well-adapted, marginalised populations effectively targeted, budgets appropriately designed and money spent as promised necessarily requires the involvement and oversight of citizens. Post-2015 frameworks must explicitly acknowledge and create space for this, with targets linked to civil society participation and budget transparency.

Linking post-2015 frameworks to education rights frameworks

In terms of framing post-2015 goals, GCE is calling for an explicit integration of human rights frameworks. Using the right to education as a starting point will ensure that access, inclusion, quality and equity are treated as inextricable – a key demand of GCE members, one that has been evident throughout our consultations and reflects concerns about unacceptable “trade-offs” made in the past.

In particular, there should be consideration of using the “4As” framework put forward by the Committee of Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, which highlights the right to education as requiring that education be available (universally provided), accessible (free of fees, without barriers created by cost, geography, discrimination), acceptable (of good quality) and adaptable (responsive to learners’ needs and contexts).

What is crucial is that, whatever framework is used, States are held accountable for progress on realising the right to education in a way that helps to make education – and all the benefits that it brings to the world – a reality for everyone.

