

# ENVISIONING EDUCATION IN THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Executive Summary

Global Thematic Consultation  
on Education in the Post-2015  
Development Agenda



## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right in itself as well as an enabling right, fostering the accomplishment of all other social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights. It is the bedrock of sustainable development, contributing to its social, economic and environmental dimensions, and underpins peace and security. The interconnected benefits of investments in quality education are immeasurable – generating greater economic returns and growth for individuals and societies, creating a lasting impact on health and gender equality, and leading to safer, more resilient and stable societies. It plays a crucial role in shaping personal and collective identities, promoting social capital and cohesiveness, and in the formation of responsible citizenship, based on principles of respect for life, human dignity and cultural diversity.

### An inclusive and participatory consultation process through:

- **An online education platform structured for e-discussions** has to date garnered the voices and participation of over 21,000 people from over 100 countries.
- **Leveraging the ongoing EFA regional meetings** held for the Arab and African states in 2012 and the Asia and Pacific and Latin American and Caribbean states in 2013; and the Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA in 2012. This involved 430 participants, including 210 Government representatives from 91 countries and representatives from 90 international, regional and national NGOs.
- **A Member States** briefing in New York, involving over 40 governments, held in March 2013 and facilitated by Canada and Senegal.
- A consultation with representatives from the **private sector** and from **donor agencies**, facilitated by the Brookings Institution in March 2013 in Washington, DC.
- **A global meeting** held in Dakar in March 2013 involving over 100 participants, including representatives of Member States, multi- and bilateral development partners, youth groups, teacher unions, the private sector, civil society and UN agencies.
- **'My World' UN Global Survey** where education ranks as the **#1** priority in the post-2015 agenda for **393,000** of the 600,000 participants from 194 countries. 64 per cent of these responders are under the age of 30 and over three quarters of participants are from developing countries (as of May 2013).

The Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda is co-led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with the support of the Governments of Senegal, Canada and Germany, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The overall objective of the consultation was to assess the progress and remaining challenges in meeting the education-related [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\) adopted in 2000 and the broader Education for All \(EFA\) goals](#) with a view to developing a holistic vision of how best to reflect education, training and learning in the post-2015 agenda.<sup>1</sup>

The education consultation process<sup>2</sup> emphasized that regardless of the structure the post-2015 agenda may take, **education must claim an explicit goal** focusing on equity, access and quality learning. Accordingly, **'Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All'** is proposed as the overarching goal for education. It is expected that this goal will enable all societies to develop the skills, knowledge and innovations needed to overcome current and future political, economic, technological, health and environmental challenges and to ensure that we remain on the path of sustainable development.

This summary is a synthesis of the key messages and recommendations emerging from the consultation process.

## ENVISIONING THE POST-2015 AGENDA

### Key messages from the consultation

In affirming that **quality education and lifelong learning are key to sustainable development** in the post-2015 framework, the consultations highlighted that universal access to quality education, training and learning is an essential prerequisite for individual empowerment, the development of equitable societies and the promotion of social justice. The provision of education contributes to the eradication of poverty, the promotion of social cohesion, good governance and participatory citizenship, and improved health and gender equality. The education consultation as well as the other thematic consultations noted that education is a catalyst for inclusive economic growth, equipping people with the training, skills and competencies needed to secure decent work and be productive citizens. Education also has a key role to play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as well as in disaster preparedness and risk reduction.



In Peru, children attend a math class at the UNICEF-supported Francisco Bolognesi School in Ventanilla District. The district includes a town built on sand dunes that is inhabited by poor families.

### Addressing the unfinished education agenda

The efforts to achieve the MDGs in the past 13 years have yielded unprecedented progress: aggregate reductions in household poverty, rapid reduction in child death rates, more children in school than ever before, and rising access to clean drinking water illustrate that ambitious and measurable goals can have an impact. The impact on education has been substantial: from 2000 to 2010, more than 50 million additional children were enrolled in primary school.

However, progress has stagnated and there is a long road to travel before the commitments of the EFA goals and the Millennium Declaration are fulfilled. There are approximately 57 million children of primary school age who are not in school, including 32 million girls and almost 30 million children living in situations of conflict.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, many children do not complete primary school – in developing countries only 87 out of every 100 children complete their primary education.<sup>4</sup> Seventy-one million children of lower secondary age are out of school, and millions of young people are not provided the education and training to develop the skills and competencies needed for a successful transition to adult life and decent jobs.<sup>5</sup>

The consultation collectively identified several gaps linked to *access, quality and learning, equity and gender equality*. These include:

- **Excluding primary education, progress on education goals remains uneven.** There has been slow progress on the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) as well as on the target of reducing adult illiteracy by 50 per cent.

“ Young people want to see universal access to quality, relevant education that extends beyond primary schooling, and which integrates life skills, vocational training, and non-formal education. We demand to contribute to the design and delivery of curricula and ask for more of a focus on comprehensive sexuality education, and education for sustainable development. ”

*Open Letter to High Level Panelists from youth partners in development by Beyond 2015 Children and Youth Working Group and the Major Group of Children and Youth.*

- **The education-related MDGs are perceived as having narrowed the focus on access and completion**, at the expense of what children actually learn in school. In addition, both the MDGs and the EFA goals failed to provide indicators to measure learning outcomes. As many as 250 million children fail to read or write by the time they reach Grade 4.<sup>6</sup> In the least developed countries, one quarter of young men aged 15 to 24 and one third of young women aged 15 to 24 are illiterate.<sup>7</sup>

- **Education and training is not meeting the needs and demands of all young people to thrive and participate fully in society.** There are more young people than ever. They are disproportionately concentrated in the developing world and are about three times as likely as adults to be unemployed. Unequal access to education locks many young people, particularly poor young women, into a life of disadvantage.

- **Inequality remains a big challenge**, and poverty and exclusion the major markers of disadvantage. Exclusion from education – including being left out of consideration in education-related development planning, policies and budgeting – occurs most often among girls, rural and indigenous peoples, working children, children living in conflict, orphans, migrants and nomads, children with disabilities, persons living with HIV/AIDS, and persons living in conflict and disaster contexts, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as linguistic and cultural minorities.<sup>8</sup> Ninety per cent of children with disabilities do not attend school in developing countries, and those with disabilities are rendered even more invisible by the lack of relevant data to identify the number of disabled children.<sup>9</sup> Equitable provision of quality education remains a challenge in disasters and conflict or post-conflict contexts, where education programmes received just 2 per cent of humanitarian aid.

- **Despite the narrowing gender gap, girls continue to account for the largest number of out-of-school children of primary school age.** Poor, rural girls often face multiple disadvantages through gender discrimination and violence, sexual and reproductive health issues including teenage pregnancy, and poverty, which bar them from enrolling and lead to greater dropout rates than are seen among boys.<sup>10</sup> Girls are also more likely to be out of school at lower secondary age than boys, regardless of the wealth or location of the household.<sup>11</sup> Almost two thirds of the world's 775 million illiterate adults are women.<sup>12</sup> Poor quality of education, extreme poverty, discriminatory gendered norms and practices, structural inequality and violence against girls maintain this disadvantage. In the absence of effective sexual and reproductive health education, adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to pregnancy and sexual violence, which negatively impact school participation and attainment.

- **Inadequate attention has been paid to the financial, human capital and resource constraints** that undermine progress towards achieving effective learning environments for quality education.<sup>13</sup> A notable gap is an inadequate focus on teachers, who are the key agents for quality of education. Despite the progress that has been stimulated by increased domestic spending on education over the past decade, international aid to education has stagnated in recent years.

- **The emphasis on global targets has imposed one-size-fits-all targets for countries, irrespective of countries' diverse starting points, financial resources and capacity.** Such a 'one-size-fits-all' approach has often compromised national priorities: for instance, by stalling the education agenda in countries where key challenges

have been to improve quality in primary schooling, to boost access to secondary and higher education, and to ensure the relevance of the skills acquired.

## Addressing the emerging priorities

Without a strong education system, many of the structural deficiencies and inequalities will persist, hindering the realization of the post-2015 agenda. In addition, current global trends, including population growth, the 'youth bulge', consequences of climate change and other environmental threats, and shifting inequalities make attention to the equitable provision of quality education ever more relevant and urgent for all countries, developed and developing alike, in a globalized, interconnected world.

The consultation clearly acknowledged that the post-2015 agenda for education must build on what has been achieved while continuing efforts to meet the unrealized goals as well as those set to create the world we want in 2030.

**The recommended priorities include:**

- (1) **Expanded access to quality learning should be ensured for all and at all levels of education.** A lifelong learning approach should encompass learning throughout the life cycle, including access to ECCE, primary and post-primary education – both formal and non-formal – vocational training, and higher education according to country contexts, development challenges and priorities. This expanded access should include an explicit commitment to providing opportunities for adult learning and literacy, particularly for women.
- (2) **Focused attention on the quality of education**, including its content and relevance, as well as on learning outcomes. This implies:
  - *Ensuring that there is an adequate supply of well-trained and motivated teachers and school leadership.* This involves improving teachers' training, conditions of service, deployment and opportunities for professional development.
  - *Focusing on relevant, measurable and equitable learning outcomes across the life cycle,<sup>14</sup> including foundational literacy and numeracy as well other relevant social, civic, economic, environmental and health-related skills and competencies.*
  - *Internalizing the principles of sustainable development* in primary, secondary and adult learning so that learners develop the skills and competencies to make informed decisions for a sustainable future. Education and training should include environmental education to promote awareness and action to address current and future threats to the global environment.
  - *Strengthening training and skills for work and life.* Ensuring that young people are equipped with social, employability and technical skills and competencies in order



A tenth-grade student speaks to her class at a public school in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia.



© UNICEF/LAOA2008-5767/Jim Holmes

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a pre-primary school teacher leads an interactive story reading session.

to be informed, responsible and active citizens, find decent work and contribute to peaceful societies. This effort should include collaboration across sectors for developing transversal skills (teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, etc.), specific technical or vocational skills, and the school-to-work transition.

- *Strengthening the provision of enabling learning environments.* This means ensuring safe and healthy learning environments, including safe, disaster-sensitive school buildings and classrooms, safe and clean drinking water, school feeding programmes and gender-sensitive sanitation and hygiene; and the integration in the curriculum of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education as well as indigenous knowledge and knowledge relevant to the lives of rural populations.

(3) **A greater focus on equity.** The need of disadvantaged children, youth and adults, especially girls and women, to acquire literacy, numeracy and relevant technical and vocational skills combined with the necessary transversal skills for a decent life and work should be fully reflected in education policies and strategies. Reaching out to out-of-school children using innovative, flexible and mobile interventions and partnering with non-state education providers and communities should be a priority.<sup>15</sup> To ensure learning is measured and improved in an equitable way, information collected and reported should describe progress over time and across population groups, in addition to average achievement levels.

(4) **Gender equality remains a strong priority,** with a renewed focus on enhanced access to post-basic and post-secondary education for girls and women in safe, supportive learning environments. Evidence demonstrates that the multiplier effect of girls' education development only becomes evident when girls complete secondary education. Furthermore, gender equality cannot be addressed only through a narrow focus on access to education; rather, it must be addressed within the larger society simultaneously on multiple levels and sectors, including economic, social, political and cultural.

## FRAMING THE GOAL

The post-2015 development agenda should therefore include **education as an explicit goal as well as a cross-cutting issue across all development goals.** In order to be relevant, education must prioritize the acquisition of

knowledge, skills and competencies that are linked to twenty-first-century livelihoods, and must also contribute to shaping learners' attitudes and behaviours that promote social inclusion and cohesion as well as environmental sustainability. These skills include critical thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution, living and learning to live together in a multicultural world. Other relevant content knowledge should include environmental and climate change education, disaster risk reduction and preparedness, sustainable consumption and lifestyles, and green technical and vocational education and training.

Inequalities in education are not limited to particular countries and the post-2015 education agenda should therefore be **valid for all countries**, while emphasizing the need for international support to the poorest nations. The agenda must strike a balance between providing internationally comparable goals while allowing for national ownership by setting ambitious goals, targets and indicators that are applicable to the national context and challenges.

The achievement of this vision demands a **single harmonized global education framework**, informed by the successes and challenges of the MDG and EFA agendas. Based on the overarching education goal of '**Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All**', the recommendation is to develop specific goals, indicators and targets around the following four priority areas:

- 1) All girls and boys are able to access and complete quality pre-primary education of an agreed period (at least one year);
- 2) Equal access to and completion of a full course of quality primary schooling, with recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy;
- 3) All adolescent girls and boys are able to access and complete quality lower secondary/secondary education with recognized and measurable learning outcomes;
- 4) All youth and adults, particularly girls and women, have access to post-primary and post-secondary learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, including technical and vocational, that are relevant to work and life and necessary for further learning and forging more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies.

**Global and national targets** should be set for each of the above areas, with due attention to vulnerable groups in order to address inequalities and discrimination by gender, wealth, ethnicity, location, etc. While goals should be relevant to all countries, target-setting at the national/local level should remain flexible so as to allow for the diversity of social, economic and cultural contexts.

**Appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms** are needed both globally and at country levels to prioritize transparent, effective and accountable education systems capable of delivering high-quality education to all. The meaningful **participation** of key actors



Kadia Diarra is happy after solving a math problem on a chalkboard at Benena Primary School in Mali.

© UNICEF/M/LIA-2011-01067/Kelley Lynch

is essential to implement and track an education agenda and to uphold the principle of mutual accountability – of education ministries and other partner ministries to citizens, donors to national governments, schools to parents, and teachers to students and vice versa. A priority going forward is to ensure that there is adequate and sustainable financing for a comprehensive education agenda and its implementation, with a strong partnership among multiple actors, including governments, community bodies, households and the private sector. All **partnerships** should be explicitly strengthened or designed to address inequalities and quality and their interplay with education progress.

A common post-2015 education agenda must include strengthened monitoring and reporting mechanisms and processes at all levels, including schools and communities. There should be a reliable and disaggregated database linked to past and current data from nations' education systems to **effectively monitor progress towards the goals of the new agenda**. Advances in technology and engagement with real-time data collection provide opportunities to avoid some of the monitoring limitations in the previous framework, such as the failure to focus on relevant, context-based, measurable and equitable learning outcomes, skills and competencies.

## CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE

The conversation on the post-2015 development framework has, thus far, focused on sectoral or thematic interests. Going forward, there is a need to discuss how the sectoral and other thematic conversations converge. That education is a powerful catalyst for development and significantly affects other sectors and vice versa has been emphasized by the education consultation and in all other thematic consultations, especially the ones on inequalities, environment and conflict fragility. Good education, along with better health care and good governance, has been voted a top priority in the My World survey.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Henceforth, the term 'education' encompasses training and learning where relevant.
- <sup>2</sup> All documents available at <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/317535>; due to time constraints, the Europe and North America regional consultation was not held.
- <sup>3</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2013. [Schooling for Millions of Children Jeopardised by Reductions in Aid](#).
- <sup>4</sup> United Nations, 2012. [The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012](#).
- <sup>5</sup> UNESCO, 2012. [Education for All Global Monitoring Report – Youth and Skills: putting education to work](#).
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> UNICEF, 2012. [Progress for Children: A report card on adolescents](#).
- <sup>8</sup> Henceforth, the term 'disadvantaged' or 'vulnerable' groups refers to those listed here as well as others.
- <sup>9</sup> UNESCO Portal, Education/Primary education – Children with Disabilities. Accessed on 3 June 2013. [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=32969&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=32969&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- <sup>10</sup> Brookings Institute, 2012. [A Global Compact on Learning: Policy guide](#).
- <sup>11</sup> United Nations, 2012. [The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012](#).
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> To provide quality primary education for all, 114 countries will need at least 1.7 million more teachers by 2015.
- <sup>14</sup> Learning Metrics Task Force, 2013. [Toward Universal Learning: What every child should learn](#).
- <sup>15</sup> Currently, about 8 countries in the world account for nearly half of the 61 million out-of-school children – UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). Reaching Out-of-School Children is crucial for Development. UIS Fact Sheet, June 2012, No.18.

### For more information contact:

**Jordan Naidoo**  
**Senior Advisor, Education**  
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
Education Section, Programme Division  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
[www.unicef.org/education](http://www.unicef.org/education)  
[jnaidoo@unicef.org](mailto:jnaidoo@unicef.org)

**Olav Seim**  
**Director of the EFA Global Partnerships Team**  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
7, place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris 07 SP, France  
[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)  
[o.seim@unesco.org](mailto:o.seim@unesco.org)



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

