Policy Brief

In September 2015, at the UN General Assembly, member states will define a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including for education, to be achieved by 2030.

This policy brief is designed to help governments and the international community prioritize actions for the post-2015 agenda. In doing so, it draws on the evidence-based analysis in the most recent EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges.*

Recommendations

1. Finance

National governments should increase their commitment to education to meet the new targets.

The primary responsibility for financing education lies with national governments, and domestic resources are the most important source of funding.

- Governments should mobilize additional domestic resources, and use them more efficiently, in order to ensure a sustainable source of funding.

- Low and lower middle income countries, in particular, should spend at least 3.4% of GDP on pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education or 5.4% of GDP across all education levels.

- Governments should spend between 15% and 20% of their national budgets on education. Countries furthest from the targets will need to aim for the higher end of this range.

International aid will also have a crucial role to play in filling the annual funding gap.

The ambitious targets of the new agenda mean that even after governments increase their commitment to education, these is a remaining US$22 billion external financing gap. Donors should:

- Increase the volume of aid for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education in low and lower middle income countries by at least four times.

- Redistribute aid to education from upper middle income countries to poorer countries.

- Reallocate much of the US$2.6 in aid currently funding post-secondary education objectives in low income and lower middle income countries to fund pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education.

- Increase the share of humanitarian aid allocated to education to protect students and teachers living in conflict zones and experiencing emergencies

Examples:

- In Tanzania, the government increased expenditure on 'priority sectors' from 27% to 46% of the budget, leading to a dramatic expansion in the provision of education, health, water and sanitation.

- Ghana doubled education spending and saw the number of children enrolled in school rise from 2.4 million in 1999 to 4.1 million in 2013.

- Denmark increased the volume of aid to basic education six-fold between 2002 and 2012.

2. Equity

Equity needs to be front and centre of the new post-2015 education agenda.

The essence of the SDG on education is to provide inclusive and equitable education of good quality for all. However, lessons from the past 15 years show that progress often leaves behind children, adolescents and adults from poor and marginalized backgrounds.

- Successful policies to make schools more inclusive of children from marginalized groups should include guaranteeing a free education (i.e., abolishing all costs related to school uniforms, transportation, tuition and textbooks), training

teachers to diversify their teaching styles, and making language and curriculum policies better aligned with student needs.

- Governments should develop realistic and targeted cash transfer programmes to help poor households meet the costs of schooling.

- Governments should prepare contingency plans to meet the education needs of children in emergency situations and zones of armed conflict.

- Governments must prioritize the use of disaggregated data from school, household and labour market surveys to sharpen education planning, better target national policies and allocate resources to those most in need.

Examples:

- Participants in a cash transfer programme implemented in China were 20% more likely to attend pre-primary than non-participants.

- School feeding programmes, such as those implemented in India and El Salvador, have helped boost enrolment.

3. Basic education

Universalizing an expanded cycle of basic education is vital.

A key challenge in the coming years is the universalization of primary and secondary education by 2030.

- Governments should provide every child with at least 9 years of free, equitable and compulsory primary and lower secondary education.

- Policies to promote access and completion of basic education should seek to reduce inequalities based on gender, poverty, location, ethnicity or disability and groups in which these disadvantages intersect.

- To increase participation and reduce drop-out, governments should implement intersectoral programmes in areas such as health and nutrition, as well as investments in roads, water and electricity infrastructure.

Examples:

- In Uganda, fee abolition for primary education reduced delayed entre into school and provided an incentive for enrolment, particularly for girls and those in rural areas.

- Legislative changes in India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan making lower-secondary education compulsory have led to increases in access.

4. Pre-primary education

Investment in early childhood care, development and education is vital and can yield significant impacts as children mature and among the marginalized.

Countries must provide every child with at least one year of pre-primary education.

- Governments should ensure that the salaries of pre-primary teachers are brought in line with those of primary teachers.

- Governments seeking to expand pre-primary provision should incorporate pre-primary sections into primary schools.

Examples:

- Viet Nam has hugely expanded government provision for pre-primary education, which led to an increase in enrolment and a move of students out of private institutions.

- Pre-primary school teachers in New Zealand and Portugal have achieved pay parity with primary and secondary school teachers.

- South Africa has made strong progress in pre-primary provision by incorporating one year of pre-primary education within primary schools.

5. Good quality education and learning

Supporting teachers with the training and curricula necessary to ensure relevant and inclusive learning is vital to the provision of quality education.

- All teacher candidates should have at least completed secondary education with good grades.

- Teacher education programmes should review the teaching styles and methods they promote to respond better to diverse cultural and classroom contexts.

- Governments should provide incentives (such as housing, allowances or career advances) to motivate teachers to work in remote and challenging schools.

- Teachers should be trained in the use of diverse assessment methods to detect and address student learning difficulties early.

Policies to support good quality education and equitable learning outcomes are needed.

- Countries need to improve their capacity to conduct learning assessments that reflect national priorities and help monitor trends in learning achievement.

- Countries must ensure that assessment results are used to improve teaching practices, curricular contents and learning outcomes.

- Mother tongue learning should be implemented in multilingual societies, especially in the early grades of primary education.

- The decentralization of school governance should be considered as one means of promoting good quality education in local communities.

Examples:

- In the Republic of Korea, teachers in disadvantaged schools benefit from additional stipends, smaller class size, less teaching time and greater promotion opportunities.

- In Argentina, learning Spanish and mathematics improved at the secondary level after 5 years of decentralized administration.

6. Adult literacy and lifelong learning

Governments must significantly expand adult education and learning opportunities.

Adult education systems should be strengthened and should specify the levels of skills to be attained.

- Literacy policies should link to the needs of communities, health development programmes, agricultural innovations and actively engaged citizens.

- The promotion of mother tongue literacy programmes should be scaled up to improve literacy rates among members of minority communities.

- Governments and employers must expand initiatives to promote the acquisition of job related skills.

Examples:

- South Africa's Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Programme facilitates a successful approach to monitoring literacy outcomes, drawing on language experience and whole word concepts.

- Literacy levels in Mexico have improved in the past decade due, in part, to mother tongue literacy programmes that focus on indigenous groups.

- South Korea increased participation in adult education programmes from 26% in 2008 to 36% in 2012 by promoting job-related skills for employees.

7. Gender

Countries must shift policy attention from gender parity to gender equality.

Progress towards parity since 2000 should not detract from the fact that serious obstacles remain to equality in education opportunities between boys and girls.

- Curricula should be gender sensitive and include reproductive health and sexuality teaching.

- Governments must ensure that children are provided with a safe learning environment and that policies are implemented to tackle gender-based violence at school.

- Programmes should be developed to encourage higher proportions of female teachers to enter the workforce.

- Governments should invest in improvements in the availability of sanitation and water facilities to improve retention.

- Gender-specific initiatives such as school feeding programmes, boarding facilities and grants should be applied to improve participation.
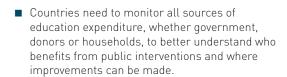
Examples:

- The Abriendo Oportunidades project for girls in Guatemala, which aimed to combat teenage pregnancy, found that 97% of girls remained childless during the programme, compared with 78% non-participants.

- In Tanzania, the Gender Budgeting Initiative has helped reduce girls' household labour time by providing better community water facilities.

- A reduction in time by one hour for collecting water increased girls' enrolment rates by 8-9% in Yemen and 18-19% in Pakistan.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

The knowledge base of national educational systems must be improved to close critical data gaps.

The past 15 years have shown that measuring progress is a powerful tool for making progress.

- Closer collaboration is required to monitor progress in learning over time and across countries.

- The availability of literacy data should be expanded to improve planning and policy making.

■ Countries need to monitor all sources of education expenditure, whether government, donors or households, to better understand who benefits from public interventions and where improvements can be made.

Strategies for implementing the education agenda need to be followed up and evaluated.

Countries and international partners are accountable to the people for the progress made towards the targets; therefore they need to draw the lessons learned and feed them back into action.

■ Countries should participate in the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development that will oversee state-led and voluntary reviews of SDG implementation to facilitate the sharing of best practices.

■ Evaluation strategies must include all actors, governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society in order to promote mutual accountability.

■ Strategies must integrate global accountability mechanisms with established national institutions, such as parliamentary oversight committees or the judiciary and legal system.

Examples:

■ The focus of the international education community on measurable targets led to increased credibility of internationally comparable education data reported by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

■ A major increase in the availability of household survey data has enabled monitoring of inequality across countries, for example through the World Inequality Database on Education.