

HIGHLIGHTS

Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments

WHY ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS

Despite strong progress in education, there are significant challenges to achieving the global education goal, **SDG 4**: Children cannot read after several years of school in sub-Saharan Africa; examination pressure is having an impact on gender gaps in China; the excess focus in education on employability is being questioned in Germany; decentralization is posing challenges for underfunded rural schools in Pakistan; low-quality private universities are proliferating in Paraguay; refugee children have severely constrained education chances, especially those fleeing war in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Faced with education challenges, the public wants to know who is responsible and policy-makers look for urgent solutions. Increased accountability often tops the list. When systems fail, people call for someone to be held responsible and for mechanisms to be in place that ensure corrective action.

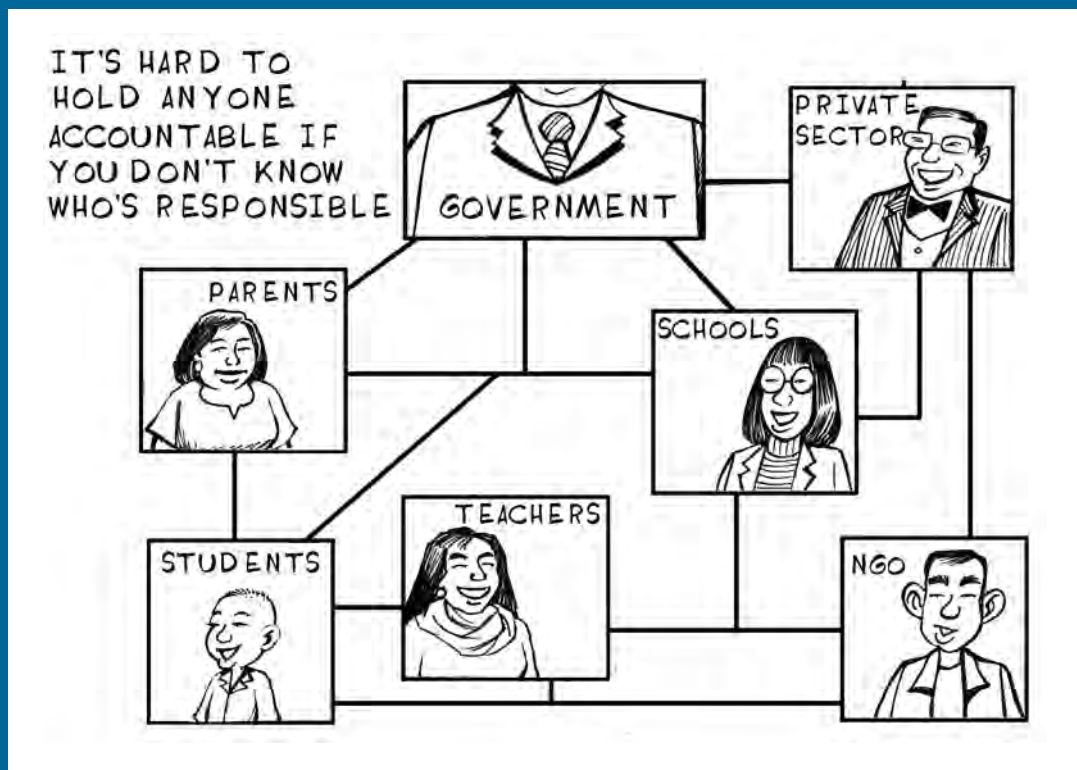
WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY? WHOM DOES IT INVOLVE?

Accountability is a process, aimed at helping actors meet responsibilities and reach goals. Individuals or institutions are obliged, on the basis of a legal, political, social or moral justification, to provide an account of how they met clearly defined responsibilities.

But reaching **SDG 4** is often a collective enterprise. Ensuring inclusive, equitable and good-quality education requires all actors to make a concerted effort to meet their responsibilities.

Accountability, therefore, does not easily rest with single actors. For instance, schools may be responsible for providing supportive learning environments, but to deliver on this they rely on governments providing resources, teachers respecting professional norms and students behaving appropriately.





Increasingly, however, voices call for holding people accountable for outcomes beyond their control.

Individuals cannot be held accountable for an outcome that also depends on the actions of others.

WHAT DOES AN EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

Everyone has a role to play in improving education.

Student movements have often swayed policies on equitable and affordable education. The media plays a key role in investigating wrongdoing and reporting corruption. Civil society support can be crucial.

But accountability starts with governments. They are ultimately the primary duty bearers of the right to education.

A credible education plan is the basis for accountability.

It should have clear targets and lines of responsibility and allocate resources through transparent budgets that can be tracked and queried.

Policy processes must be open to broad and meaningful consultation. In Brazil, about 3.5 million people participated in the national education plan consultation.

Transparency of information is vital to make accountability work. Around half of countries have produced a national education monitoring report analysing progress related to their national education plan and budget since 2010, although only one in six have done so annually.

Independent checks and balances help hold governments to account. The ombudsman offices in Latin America from 1982 to 2011 helped increase access to education, despite the lack of sanctioning power. In the Philippines, volunteers monitored up to 85% of 7,000 textbook delivery points helping reduce costs by two-thirds and procurement time by half.

Legal and regulatory routes to accountability are the backbone of a well-functioning state. In Kenya, the Education Board closed down private schools

not meeting standards. But standards need to be set at a level compatible with the available human or material resources so that countries do not overburden themselves with regulations that are ignored in practice.

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS CAN BE DETRIMENTAL IF POORLY DESIGNED

There is little evidence that performance-based accountability, when focused on outcomes over inputs and based on narrow criteria, improves education systems. Incentives have often been limited to punishments to force compliance or modify behaviour. A blame-focused approach to accountability is associated with undesirable consequences. Rewards, such as performance-related teacher pay, have had detrimental effects: peer collaboration deteriorates, the curriculum is narrowed, teaching to the test is emphasized.

A market-based approach creates competitive pressure that marginalizes disadvantaged parents and schools.

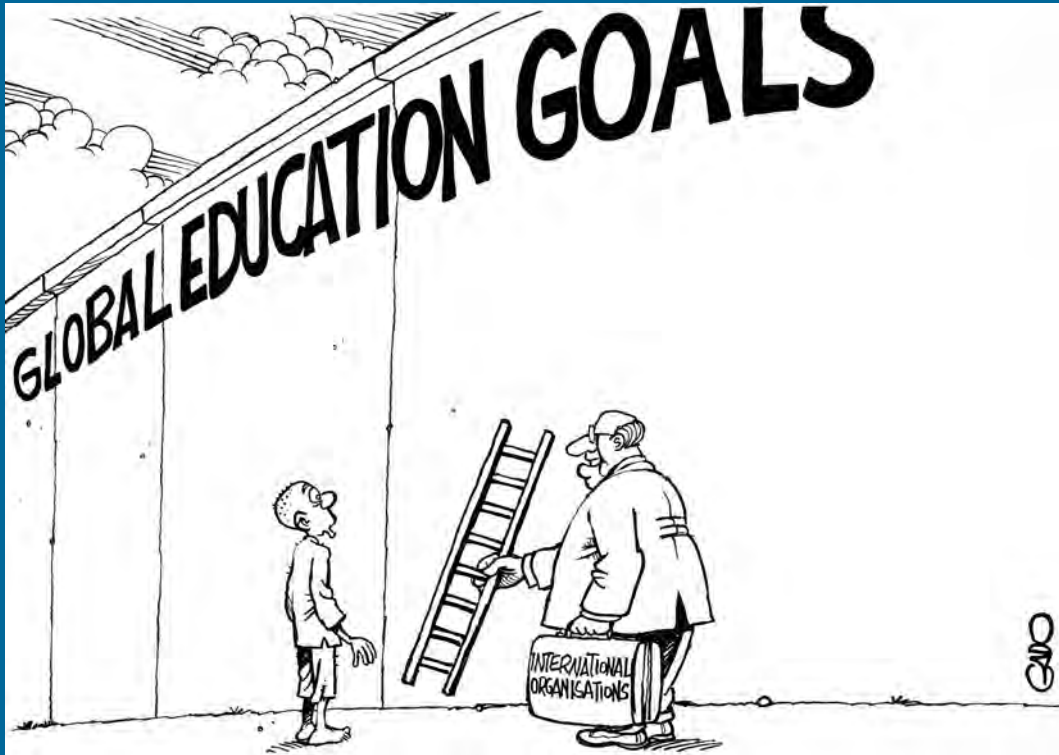
While targeted vouchers in some countries have helped overcome constraints, in other cases schools have simply increased their fees. School choice approaches have undermined efforts towards inclusive, equitable, high-quality education, leading to greater segregation. Information is a foundation for a market but is often not available and, even if accessible, may not be usable: 72% of parents in Kenya reported not knowing how to use student learning data.

Many approaches to accountability, often externally funded, have not been designed in a sustainable way. Systems relying on government to respond to donor demands are disappointed when funding disappears.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO KEEP ACCOUNTABILITY WORKING?

Adequate resources, capacity and genuine commitment are essential. Governments should spend at least 4% of GDP on education, or allocate 15% of total government expenditure. But one in four countries do not reach these benchmarks.





Donor support is needed in the poorest countries.

In 2015, only 6 of 28 OECD-DAC countries met their commitment to allocate 0.7% of national income to aid. Aid predictability, at least in the short term, slightly decreased between 2010 and 2015. Donors should be careful when making aid available through results-based mechanisms that shift risk to countries that are little prepared to bear it.

Transparent and relevant data on the strengths and weaknesses of education systems should be available.

But countries need to be judicious in what data they collect and how they use them, keeping in mind the costs involved and the skills required to interpret, analyse and act on such data to improve teaching and learning. Many low and middle income countries cannot afford them. Over half of teachers in England argued that increased data collection created more unnecessary work.

Capacity development is essential. Actors need the skills to fulfil their responsibilities.

Governments need to ensure that teacher evaluators have the appropriate training to recognize good teaching and provide constructive feedback. In New Delhi, India, school inspectors are tasked with inspecting over 50 schools annually. Teachers' unions aiming to strengthen professionalism should build the skills of those entrusted with following through on internal accountability mechanisms.

Countries need to participate actively and monitor the work of international organizations.

An accountability vacuum exists concerning the role of international organizations and their responsibility in achieving international goals. This is due to the multiple roles and competing agendas among them. But countries should also be prepared to be held to account: the word 'accountability' is conspicuously absent from the SDG foundation document that was developed by governments.

Monitoring SDG 4

TARGET 4.1: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

- In 2015, there were 264 million primary and secondary age children and youth out of school.
- In 2010–2015, completion rates were 83% for primary, 69% for lower secondary and 45% for upper secondary education.
- About 387 million children of primary school age, or 56%, did not reach the minimum proficiency level in reading.
- Less than one in five countries guarantee 12 years of free and compulsory education.

TARGET 4.2: EARLY CHILDHOOD

- In 2015, 69% of children participated in organized learning at the pre-primary or primary level one year before official primary entry age.
- In 2010–2015, across 52 low and middle income countries, the richest 3- to 4-year-olds were five times as likely to attend organized learning as the poorest.
- Just 17% of countries legally stipulate at least one year of free and compulsory early childhood education.

TARGET 4.3: TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL, TERTIARY AND ADULT EDUCATION

- More women than men graduate from tertiary education but fewer women than men obtain science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees; in Chile, Ghana and Switzerland, women account for less than one-quarter of these degrees.
- There are vast disparities in tertiary education opportunities in low and middle income countries between richer and poorer students. In El Salvador, 51% of the richest fifth but less than 2% of the poorest fifth attended any form of post-secondary education.
- Very few adults who have not completed primary education go back to school. In Mozambique, just 20% of adults had completed primary but only 0.5% were enrolled in formal education.

TARGET 4.4: SKILLS FOR WORK

- Most adults in low and middle income countries do not have even basic computer skills. In 2014–2016, only 4% of adults in Sudan and Zimbabwe could copy and paste files.
- There are wide gender gaps in ICT skills. About 75 women for every 100 men could use basic arithmetic formulas in a spreadsheet in Italy, Germany and the Netherlands.
- Establishing regulations and accreditation processes for skills training providers, public and private, is important for accountability but requires resources and expertise many countries lack.

TARGET 4.5: EQUITY

- There is gender parity in participation at all education levels except tertiary. However, global averages mask gaps: only 66% of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, 45% in lower secondary and 25% in upper secondary.
- There tend to be more female than male teachers but far fewer women than men become school leaders. Only 6% of lower secondary head teachers are female in Japan.
- Inequality is underestimated, as survey design may exclude up to 250 million vulnerable people worldwide, while a further 100 million, such as slum dwellers, may be under-represented.
- In 42 of 86 countries, there is explicit reference to inclusive education in constitutions, laws and policies, although interpretations of the term differ.

TARGET 4.6: LITERACY AND NUMERACY

- The adult literacy rate increased from 81.5% to 86% worldwide between 2000 and 2015. It is below 60% in low income countries.
- The number of youth with no literacy skills has fallen by 27% since 2000 although more than 100 million young people still cannot read.

- In sub-Saharan Africa, 69% of adults with five years of education in systems that privileged local languages could read a sentence, compared with 41% of adults educated in part or wholly in colonial languages.
- There is some evidence that literacy and numeracy levels may be declining in high income countries, including Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

TARGET 4.7: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

- In 2009–2012, only 7% of teacher education programmes covered education for sustainable development.
- A 48-country review found that almost 80% had supportive policies for sexuality education but they are not always implemented.
- Almost 30% of 15-year-olds performed below the minimum proficiency level in science in the content areas of earth and space systems.

TARGET 4.A: EDUCATION FACILITIES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- In sub-Saharan Africa, only 22% of primary schools have electricity.
- In half of 148 countries, less than three-quarters of primary schools had access to drinking water.
- In 2015, about 40% of secondary school principals in Indonesia and Jordan and 25% to 30% in Israel and Italy reported that infrastructure problems significantly hampered instruction.
- There has been a sharp uptick in attacks on schools since 2004, disproportionately affecting Southern Asia, Northern Africa and Western Asia.

TARGET 4.B: SCHOLARSHIPS

- Aid spending on scholarships decreased by 4% to US\$1.15 billion from 2010 to 2015, on a par with the overall decrease in aid to education.
- Scholarship spending is underestimated, as many countries, including Brazil, China and India, do not include it in their aid programmes.

- In 2015, 2% of tertiary education students studied abroad. The percentage of those studying outside their home region increased from 57% in 2000 to 63% in 2015.

TARGET 4.C: TEACHERS

- Globally, 86% of teachers are trained at the primary school level.
- There is a need to agree on a common definition of what it means for a teacher to be trained.
- Information on teacher salaries is scarce. In OECD countries, primary school teachers earn 81% of what other full-time working professionals with tertiary education earn.

EDUCATION IN THE OTHER SDGS

- Those lacking formal education are 6.5 times likelier to smoke than those with at least secondary education in lower middle income countries.
- In 2013, the global shortage of healthcare workers was 17.4 million, including 2.6 million doctors and 9 million nurses and midwives.

FINANCE

- Public education expenditure was 4.7% of GDP and 14.1% of total public expenditure in 2015.
- Education was more exposed to corruption risk than even construction in the European Union in 2009–2014.
- The education share of total aid fell for six consecutive years, from 10% in 2009 to 6.9% in 2015.
- New estimates put the share of education expenditure borne by households at 18% in high income, 25% in middle income and 33% in low income countries.