



Moving the Post-2015 Education Agenda Forward

A summary of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda



As the 2015 MDGs target date approaches, a process has been initiated by the UN Secretary-General to generate discussion and dialogue about the post-2015 framework. To this end the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda was established to coordinate the process. The process includes national and regional consultations as well as 11 global thematic consultations¹. The education thematic consultation is co-led by UNICEF and UNESCO with the support of the Governments of Senegal, Canada and Germany, the Hewlett Foundation and with the collaboration of UNDP. The objective of the education thematic consultation is to inform the development of recommendations on how best to reflect education, training and learning in the post-2015 agenda.

This summary report provides an overview of the main ideas and suggestions emerging from an inclusive and participatory consultation process. This includes an online consultation² involved more than 3,500 registered participants with some 14,500 individual visitors and 24,000 page views. The online consultations generated about 550 responses. Consultations also included regional meetings for the Arab States, Africa Region, Latin America and Caribbean Region, and the Asia and Pacific Region. In total about 428 persons participated in these meetings, with 210 country representatives (from a total of 91 countries). NGOs were consulted through a Collective Consultation of NGOs (CCNGO/EFA) meeting involving 84 NGOs and 17 as observer NGOs representing different regions. Donor consultation took place at a meeting convened by Brookings in February 2013 involving about 20- participants representing the private sector organisations/foundations and 15 representing donors/international agencies³.

The consultations to date express optimism in moving forward but also provide powerful reminders that promises made in 2000 have not been realised, particularly for marginalised groups, stressing that the education agenda remain “unfinished business”. The consultations also highlight areas of convergence and issues requiring further consideration about a post-2015 education agenda.

By and large, the consultations have not yielded any major surprises, most calling for the retention of current priorities with important shifts of emphases in some cases. In general, many participants were critical of what has been perceived as a narrow focus on access to primary education at the expense of other priorities, in particular, the quality of education. Furthermore, inadequate attention has been paid to gender equality and education in emergency and conflict settings, children with disabilities, and other marginalized populations including people living in remote and underserved areas such as urban slums, and rural areas who we have collectively failed.

The synthesis covers the following aspects arising from the consultations: the unfinished education agenda; principles and priorities to frame education in the post-2015 agenda; framework and goals for the post-2015 development agenda; areas requiring further deliberation including the post-2015 education architecture, the prioritisation of goals and measures for monitoring progress, and the enabling conditions for the realization of a post-2015 education goal.

The unfinished education agenda

¹ The 11 thematic consultations include Conflict and Fragility, Education, Energy, Environmental Sustainability, Food Security, Health, Governance, Growth and Employment, Inequalities, Population Dynamics, and Water.

² The online consultations took place between 10 December 2012 to 3 March 2013

³ Convened by Brookings to include the private sector and donors on 28 February 2013. Included 37 participants who participated in person (14) or virtually (23), representing 20 private sector organisations/foundations, 16 representatives from international development agencies/donors/think tanks

Between 2000 and 2010, there has been impressive progress towards the education-related Millennium Development Goals. Over 50 million more children are enrolled in primary school and gender parity has improved. There was also a doubling of aid to primary education⁴. All of this is positive - yet significant challenges remain and we are not on track to achieve the EFA goals and education MDGs by 2015. Since 2010, the number of out-of-school children has remained at 61 million and aid to education static. 71 million children of lower secondary school age are still out of school. Moreover, many children do not complete primary school⁵.

While the gender gap has narrowed, girls still account for 53% of those out of school - 39 million girls are not enrolled in either primary or secondary education. Only about one-third of countries have achieved gender parity at secondary level. In developing regions, there are only 83 women per 100 men in tertiary education.

Progress on early childhood care and education (ECCE) has been too slow and not accessible to those who need it most.

The focus on education access ignores what people learn – estimates are that 120 million children do not reach Grade 4 — and an additional 130 million in school are failing to acquire basic reading and numeracy skills. This further deepens the gap between education and the skills needed for the world of work.

With 775 million illiterate adults, two-thirds of whom are women, the target of halving adult illiteracy by 2015 will not be achieved.

People from war-torn zones, those suffering natural disasters, remote communities, and ethnic minorities still face difficulties accessing relevant good quality education. 28 million of the 61 million children out of school reside in conflict-affected contexts.

99 countries will need at least 1.9 million additional teachers by 2015 to provide quality primary education for all. More than half of the additional teachers are needed in sub-Saharan Africa.

The financial commitments made in Dakar are not being honoured - an additional US\$16 billion is needed to provide basic education for all by 2015.

The current global education agenda has neglected the rights and needs of the most vulnerable, and vast disparities between and within countries in access to education and learning persist. This is why there is a substantial agreement that we must accelerate progress on the current education goals and continue to focus on the current EFA and MDG commitments in the post-2015 agenda, making the necessary adjustments to address new and emerging challenges.

Principles and Priorities for framing the post-2015 education agenda

The consultations emphasize that education is the single most important investment states can make and should therefore be at the centre of the post-2015 development framework. Education is perhaps the most effective means to overcome inequality, eradicate poverty, and promote growth and development. Moreover, it is importantly a fundamental human right and the basis for the realization of all other rights. Good quality education, as the other thematic consultation have noted, is important in realising some, if not all, development priorities.

⁴ Information collated from different sources including UNESCO GMR Report, MDG Reports, consultations

⁵ UIS <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/out-of-school-children.aspx>

The post-2015 education agenda should be firmly anchored in a **rights based** approach underpinned by the values of universality, non-discrimination and the indivisibility of rights. Equality, the right to education and redress of historical and structural inequities in access to quality education and learning should frame the post-2015 agenda. This agenda should apply universally to rich and poor countries, and cover both the rich and poor within countries as well. A rights based approach implies making clear that the provision of education is the responsibility of states as duty bearers. No education system can be seen to be providing good quality, if the inclusion of the most vulnerable is not accorded priority.

Gender equality in education should continue to be a goal on its own as well as organically tied to all aspects of quality and access.

Disaster and conflict contexts remain two situations where the challenge of access and quality is greatest, requiring concerted attention and action.

Quality education and a focus on **learning** outcomes have to be at the heart of the post-2015 education agenda. This should include both a focus on learning proficiency in literacy and numeracy as well as relevance. Quality education which is relevant; equips people with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to obtain decent work, live together as active citizens nationally and globally, understand and prepare for a world in which environment degradation and climate change present a threat to sustainable living and livelihoods and understand their rights. Relevant education includes sexuality education anchored within a **Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights** perspective. Instruction in home language and the affirmation of minority languages is also important for quality education.

Innovation and ICTs are emphasized in relation to relevance to develop the necessary competencies and 21st century skills for a digital world. It is also important for improving learning, increasing access and supporting teacher professional development. Yet some also caution that ICTs are not the panacea for all education problems and may reinforce inequities.

The shortages of **teachers** and teacher conditions of **service and professional development** remain priorities needing attention in striving towards the goal of good quality education.

A focus on good quality education and learning should not be at the expense of **an enabling learning environment** including basic minimum facilities such as the provision of adequate classrooms, particularly for the poor.

Access to all levels and types of education: A narrow focus on UPE has not kept pace with national changes where basic education incorporating lower secondary education is becoming more of the norm. The education access target should, at the least, be extended to 9 years of schooling, as is the case in many countries. Transition to and completion of relevant post-primary and secondary education, particularly for the marginalized, is a priority for many despite financing challenges. Creating the conditions for growth and innovation requires countries to also invest in youth and adult education and in higher levels of skill development and knowledge generation and consequently in upper secondary and tertiary education.

Strengthening the capacity of **national monitoring and evaluation systems** is vital to assessing progress. National monitoring and evaluation is critical in identifying what works and what does not, and under what conditions. Moreover, national monitoring systems are vital for identifying challenges that impede progress, and tracking inequities.

Education system strengthening should continue to be one of the top priorities for the post-2015 education agenda. This should include ensuring sufficient national funding for education, improved education human resource management and leadership, and capacity development of all those involved in education including teachers and parents. Without strong education systems, many of the current structural deficiencies and inequalities will persist, hindering the realisation of the post-2015 education agenda. Well-functioning, **effectively governed** education systems in which all stakeholders have a role to play in assuring good quality education is an important principle.

As education ambitions for the post-2015 education grow in scale and scope, assuring **adequate financing** becomes a major challenge. Consideration should be given to identifying innovative financing strategies for education nationally and globally to realise an expanded vision of equitable education access and quality. Lack of attention to aspects such as financing can stymie the realisation of a post-2015 education agenda.

Effective governance is intimately linked to **participation**, and requires contextually relevant models of decentralising education responsibility to lower levels of the education system. Effective participation needs to be genuine and authentic and involve *all* relevant stakeholders - including parliamentarians, civil society, the private sector, academia, local communities and families.

Meaningful participation is closely allied to **accountability**. Accountability of education ministries to citizens, donors to national governments, schools to families, teachers to students, requires transparency of processes.

Realising a future education requires effective and well regulated **public-private partnerships** united around a common vision of education working towards the common good of society. Such partnerships should move beyond antagonism to identifying points of convergence focused on strengthening national education systems.

The post-2015 education architecture

The agreed education goal/s should be clear, easy to understand and communicate – they should be able to effectively convey the power of the development agenda with a strong emphasis on eradicating inequality to, in, and through education.

The global education agenda should be framed so that there are global education goal/s which set global priorities and universal standards, which are tailored to specific national contexts and address particular local challenges. This may include spelling out the means to achieve the goals.

The post-2015 education framework should bring the EFA goals and education MDGs frameworks together.

Developing targets and indicators for education goals

At the current stage of the consultations process, more attention has been paid to identifying priorities rather than agreeing goals with related targets and appropriate indicators. While targets warrant further discussion, some areas of consensus include:

- a. targets and indicators should be globally aspirational but contextually specific and relevant;
- b. the measurement of targets should include both quantitative and qualitative measures and should place emphasis on processes, and outcomes as well as inputs providing disaggregated data using an equity lens;

Prioritising emerging education themes as goals

1. *Priority Goal One: Equitable Access* - A foundational commitment should be made in the post-2015 education framework to a goal focused on equitable access conceived of as universal coverage of ECCE and basic education for all children and youth, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups. Basic is understood as covering nine of years schooling and thus includes lower secondary education. ECCE is understood as all provision for children from birth to school entry (0-8). Since access to post basic and post-secondary education remains a key priority, this goal may be progressively extended within the available means of nation states prioritising access for marginalised and vulnerable groups.
2. *Priority Goal Two: Equitable quality education, specifically learning* - There is an emerging consensus that learning as a measure of quality should be a separate goal. This could be couched in broad terms such as ensuring that **all** children, particularly marginalised and vulnerable groups are prepared for school entry (which captures the importance of ECCE in relation to learning) and that children and young people leave school with measurable learning outcomes. Such outcomes could include having the skills, knowledge and values to be informed, active and productive members of society and the world. Approached in this way, this goal may capture the importance of basic learning proficiency as well as a concern with the multiple dimensions of relevance emerging from the consultations including Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship, Sexual and Reproductive Rights Education, and Skills for work. Further development of the dimensions of relevance could occur at the national levels where specific targets for these areas could be developed. Whether the measurement of outcomes is set nationally or globally remains an issue of some debate.

An issue for discussion is the target date for the achievement of the next set of education goal/s. Proposal thus far suggests a target date in the range of 10-15 years (2025 – 2030) with intervening 5 year reviews.

Continuing the Conversation

The Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 Agenda on 18-19 March in Dakar, Senegal represents an important next step in the process to seek further clarity and consensus on the shape of the post-2015 education agenda. Some of the questions to be addressed further at the meeting are:

- a. Should education goals and targets be universal (i.e. applicable to industrialised countries as well as MICs and LICs)?
- b. How should goals and targets be adapted to diverse national and regional contexts?
- c. Should indicators be absolute (e.g. ‘getting to zero’) or relative (e.g. reducing the difference in learning achievement between the rich and the poor) or a combination of both?
- d. How should the EFA goals be linked to the MDG framework?

Following the meeting, this report will be further revised to reflect the deliberations at the meeting. In addition, further contributions will be sought as well as a review of emerging proposals to shed light on any unresolved issues resulting in the issue of a final draft report for comment. After revisions, the report will be submitted to the UN Development Group.