

Concept note for a 2016 report on 'Education, sustainability and the post-2015 development agenda'

(Prepared by the EFA GMR team, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, 2 December 2014)

Introduction

The *Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR)* is an authoritative, analytical, evidence-based report, which has monitored progress on an almost annual basis towards the EFA goals, and the two education-related Millennium Development Goals since 2002. It is developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO. Drawing on the latest available data and wide-ranging sources of evidence, the GMR assesses the extent to which countries and the international community have met their Dakar commitments, and proposes policies and strategies to accelerate progress. In addition to monitoring the six EFA goals, most reports have examined a topical education theme in considerable depth and detail. Eleven reports have been produced to date covering diverse themes including quality, gender, adult literacy, youth and skills, early childhood care and education, inequality and governance, marginalized populations, and armed conflict. A final report on EFA achievements and remaining challenges is soon to be completed and will be launched in April 2015.

The EFA GMR series continues to respond to its original mandate and has evolved over the years. Monitoring and measurement tools were refined and augmented under the stewardship of successive directors. The GMR has supplemented information gathered from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics—its primary source of statistical information on national education systems—with quantitative and non-quantitative policy-relevant information from other partners and institutions, continually building its evidence base for monitoring major educational issues – globally, regionally and nationally.

As new sources of data became available, the GMR team found ways to enhance its monitoring instruments to reveal key issues such as inequality, both within countries and over time, in school attendance, attainment and learning outcomes. Of special note is the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE), which was created by synthesizing a large amount of information from household surveys and comparative assessment exercises.

The work of GMR team has been well evaluated. Three positive external evaluations of the GMR have been conducted, the most recent (2013–14) describing the GMR as '*a high quality report, based on robust research and analysis that has firmly established it as an important resource for the education sector ... [It] is playing an important and influential direct and indirect role in policy discourse and policy making.*'

In June 2014, the GMR Advisory Board met to consider the future of the reports based, in part, on the most recent external evaluation. Board members indicated their clear support for the continuation of the education monitoring team, anchored in the GMR model and drawing on its extensive knowledge base to monitor progress against new education targets and to analyse new policy and analytical themes.

Steps have since been taken to launch a new report series, with a new title, to be decided, which will monitor country progress—or the lack thereof—in relation to the post-2015 education goal and its targets, as well as other education indicators relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Future reports will also continue to examine the critical issues of the finance, governance and transnational aid needed to address post-2015 education priorities. Finally,

drawing from a newly constituted Advisory Board, each report will examine a special theme or topic.

The first report in the series, the 2016 Report, will establish a monitoring framework and discuss key financing challenges. The report will assess post-2015 developments in governance, financing and intersectoral integration that have implications for research and policy in education. The special theme, decided with support from the GMR Advisory Board, will be: **‘Education, sustainability and the post-2015 development agenda’**. Thus the 2016 report will not only focus on the complex interrelationships between education and key development sectors but will also determine which education strategies, policies and programmes are most effectively linked to the economic, social, environmental and political priorities of the new sustainable development agenda.

This concept note for the 2016 report is organized in four sections:

1. New concepts and changing emphases in the post-2015 era
2. Monitoring the post-2015 education goal and other targets
3. Financing issues and challenges
4. The theme of ‘Education, sustainability and the post-2015 development agenda’.

New concepts and changing emphases in the post-2015 era

In order to describe the new concepts and changing emphases of the post-2015 era, the 2016 report will first describe the initial situation in 2015 in order to set the baseline for future research and policy analysis. The report will provide detailed discussion of the required finances estimated as of 2015 and compare these figures with the varied previous costing exercises. The report will provide a systematic baseline for monitoring, developing core education indicators that relate to the achievement of sustainable development goals. The report will examine the current status of policymaking, tracing the development of discourse in international agencies on interrelationships between the education sector and other development sectors, and the major impact this is having on developing country governments and civil society organizations.

New concepts and changing emphases can be described in four areas:

1. Concepts of education for and within sustainable development: Post-2015 education priorities will be embedded in a broader agenda of global sustainable development. The 2016 report will outline concepts of sustainable development, as originating in the 1987 Brundtland Report, and trace the evolution of sustainability concepts in academia and policymaking. The report will similarly highlight developments in relation to education for sustainable development. The clarification of these key concepts will anchor future discussion and discourse in the new report series.
2. A lifelong learning approach: The education goal and targets proposed for the SDGs are broader in scope and ambition than the Dakar EFA framework. The new education agenda includes more education levels, different modalities (formal and non-formal, public and non-state provision) and new contents and ideas. While most existing evidence focuses on formal schooling, the 2016 report will use a lifelong learning approach as the framework for broadening coverage of education policies and programmes to include adult education, non-formal education and informal learning.

3. Universality: Universality is a central principle in the post-2015 education agenda. The 2016 report will expand its monitoring and coverage of issues that concern the Global North with more coverage of technical and vocational education, upper secondary and tertiary education. The thematic discussion of education's role in sustainable development will place emphasis on the world's interconnectedness, recognizing the need for a global, shared vision to combat climate change and inequality between and within countries, and to ensure sustainable consumption and production.
4. Linking education to sustainable development: The 2016 report will define education's role in the broader sustainable development agenda, and reflect consultations and partnerships with non-education specialists working in other development sectors. This will provide perspectives on other sectoral needs and ensure the integration of education in other sustainability initiatives.

Monitoring the post-2015 education goal and other targets

The 2016 Report will develop its approaches to international monitoring from three perspectives. It will:

1. Build on existing monitoring strategies carried out by successive editions of the EFA GMR and take note of lessons learned. The report will reconsider how to report on global education issues in ways that appeal to broad and diverse constituencies regardless of their location, institutional affiliation and links to education policy, practice and evaluation.
2. Respond to new monitoring requirements of the post-2015 global education agenda. This presents a triple challenge: monitoring a complex set of goal and targets still to be defined and established; examining a global sustainable development agenda still in flux; and identifying the intersection between education and sustainable development. The 2016 Report will identify the most appropriate indicators to measure success, work nimbly and flexible, and examine how different types and aspects of education are linked to other development priorities, in practice and in policy, and vice versa.
3. Refine the emergent education monitoring framework and, in parallel, explore alternative strategies and ideas for measurement and monitoring. A clear agreement on the precise parameters of the new global monitoring framework is unlikely before 2016. Several aspects of the education targets, such as inclusion, lifelong learning, global citizenship education, ESD and skills, are complex, contested and not easily monitored. Many components of the monitoring framework will be in the developmental stage; some will require years of work before becoming operational.

Based on these perspectives, the following steps will be taken to enhance the scope and quality of the education monitoring framework. The 2016 Report will:

1. Focus on national education systems and their role in achieving the post-2015 SDGs, including the education goal and its targets. Recognizing the central focus on 'equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all', the 2016 Report will closely examine inputs, processes and outcomes in education systems, and compile information on the features of education systems and all levels of formal and non-formal education. Considerable potential remains to improve the global monitoring of progress in education by using new and existing sources. UNESCO has launched the Global Database

on the Right to Education. The World Bank has expanded its Systems Approach for Better Education Results to more than a dozen themes, while incorporating qualitative data on governance. The International Bureau of Education continues to expand its World Data on Education database. And, the European Union's Eurydice network provides information on and analyses of education systems and policies in 36 European countries.

2. Map and extract lessons from national monitoring and assessment initiatives. Significant increases in the capacity for monitoring and reporting on education has taken place at the global level since 2000, as well as at the regional and national levels. The new report series will build on lessons from these experiences. For example, considerable information on the use of formative assessment practices can be culled from recently completed national and regional reports of EFA progress. Meanwhile, many national learning assessments are assessing learning areas not found in international or regional assessments, as reported in the 2015 EFA GMR.
3. Assess indicators of education participation and attainment for levels of formal education not prioritised in the EFA period. Reference to upper secondary and tertiary education is now included in the post-2015 targets. The 2015 EFA GMR, in anticipation of these expanded targets, will look at issues of access to upper secondary education, both from the perspective of gender equality and to assess the likelihood of achieving universal secondary education by 2030. The 2016 Report will build upon this work to review data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and policies at the upper levels of education.
4. Continue to report on progress in key outcome indicators that will continue to be developed in the coming years. For example, the development of global measures of early childhood development, learning outcomes at primary and secondary education (including on global citizenship education and education for sustainable development), and adult skills such as literacy and numeracy will require sustained efforts in the future. Education experts, statistical authorities and end users will need time to coordinate their efforts and achieve consensus. The 2016 report will focus on outstanding conceptual and practical issues, following the same adaptable and comprehensive approach the GMR team has taken in its work on other indicators, such as equity in education.
5. Develop standard procedures for the monitoring and reporting of equity. The 2016 report will build on the GMR's accumulated expertise in this area, by continuing to update its sources and expand country coverage to ensure that equity measures are globally representative. Despite the commitment to monitoring equity in the post-2015 development agenda, it is not clear if a mandate will be given to any international body to provide a baseline for monitoring educational inequalities. The GMR team can make an important contribution in this area.
6. Monitor relationships across sectors to achieve an ambitious and transformative sustainable development agenda. The [2013/4 EFA GMR](#) reviewed the effects of education on selected development outcomes. The 2016 report will expand its review of the consequences of education for sustainable development, and collect further evidence on how and why particular economic, social, political, gender-related and demographic patterns impact education. In particular, indicators will be identified to measure the strength of cross-sectoral relationships.

Financing issues and challenges

The 2016 report will continue to monitor domestic spending and international aid flows for education. In addition, it will examine in depth the following topics:

1. What financial architecture is emerging in the post-2015 global education framework?
 - A. What changes have taken place between 2000 and 2015? The 2016 Report will compare the outcomes from the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development in 2002 with those of the forthcoming Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Addis Ababa in 2015. Underpinning the MDGs was an assumption that governments were unable to mobilize sufficient domestic resources to finance the goals, and that the gap was to be filled by official development assistance or debt cancellation. This assumption has now changed. Ongoing discussions of post-2015 financial architecture appear to place responsibility on national governments to fund education through more effective domestic resource mobilization. Yet, international finance will be necessary to achieve targets by 2030. Even though aid to education is likely to decline overall during the next 15 years as a share of total national education expenditure, external assistance will continue to be vital for some countries. The 2016 report will examine how different sources of international finance, including emerging new funders (such as Brazil, China and India), might be used in different country settings, and the challenges of a weak global architecture for allocating education resources.
 - B. What is the potential of different sources for financing the new education agenda? The 2016 report will assess the role of financial sources, including domestic public financing, international public financing, household financing, and innovative sources and mechanisms (including from the private sector) for financing the new education agenda. Recognizing that government funding is key, domestic resource mobilization needs to be enhanced. Some argue that the extensive use of private investment and non-concessional finance after 2015 for education could undo the advances on debt sustainability; implications of using these and other sources of finance need to be analysed.
2. What are the key questions relating to education and finance post-2015?

Finance is necessary to achieve desired education outcomes but its use must be measured and analysed. While good learning outcomes require a minimum level of spending, simply increasing resources is not a guarantee for success. The 2016 report will move away from the narrow issue of resource mobilization to ask how existing resources can be made to go further, and therefore to examine how to improve effectiveness, efficiency and equity of education financing in different countries and with different sources. Also, the universality of the post-2015 education agenda calls for new financing issues to be addressed by the report. Some of the key questions relating to education and finance post-2015 include:

- A. How do education funders choose where to invest? The 2016 Report will examine how different sources of finance use different rationales for focusing resources. Government expenditure is typically influenced by economic and political considerations; private finance follows a market-oriented rationale and is attracted to areas where the level of profit is highest. What does this mean for financing education in a post-2015 framework?

Not every dollar invested in education will be equal. Discussion is needed on what types of resources will be specifically needed to meet targets.

- B. How can governments increase the effectiveness of spending, considering that in most countries, domestic public funding accounts for the vast majority of education finance? To improve the quality and impact of spending, the 2016 report will review advantages and challenges of different approaches and policies that seek to make public resource expenditure more efficient, as well as analyse inequity in spending within countries.
 - C. How can governments balance efficiency with equity? The 2016 report will examine how the rights of marginalized populations are ensured in this process and assess strategies such as public–private partnerships where governments channel public education finance through the private sector to provide more choice in the education system or recuperate costs.
 - D. What are the benefits and barriers of delivering aid through a global mechanism such as the Global Partnership for Education? Is it a sufficient mechanism to ensure that resources are aligned with needs? Effectiveness, efficiency and equity issues will continue to be pertinent for donor agencies in whatever form international education funding takes place.
3. How can better links be fostered between education and other sectors in spending decisions?
- A. The 2016 report will consider the interrelationships in financing the sustainable development agenda *across sectors*. Can effectiveness, efficiency and equity gains be realized from better collaboration and less duplication of efforts across sectors? Can the impact of spending in sectors, such as health and social protection, be measured in terms of its education outcomes? What are the trade-offs and costs of various aid allocation, such as helping countries develop better revenue-generating systems vs. funding a sector directly?
 - B. To what extent are countries and donors developing multisectoral strategies to achieve education and other goals? The report will look at case studies on government spending to determine which and to what extent ministries and donor agencies are planning and implementing this type of strategy.
 - C. The 2016 report will estimate costings of the requirements for education financing to achieve a sustainable development agenda. This will use new models of education financing that include items not traditionally costed, but are now relevant for education for sustainable development.

Education, sustainability and the post-2015 development agenda

The thematic focus of the 2016 report is education and sustainability, and so will highlight the intersectoral relationships between education and other development sectors, as represented by the other 16 Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the Open Working Group at the UN. The report will present a conceptual framework that clarifies the main assumptions and principle intentions of the emergent SDGs, in contrast to the poverty reduction focus of the MDGs. -

The report will highlight education’s integral role in ensuring that people understand the risks they face through a lack of sustainable development, how their actions impact on others, and what positive strategies are relevant and feasible in their local communities. This places

education in a central position in discussions of sustainable development, as a means to improve the quality of life, promote decent employment, encourage civic participation and enable all citizens to lead a life with dignity, equality, gender empowerment and justice.

To do this, education must be envisioned as moving beyond basic schooling to address the basic needs for livelihood and life, with broader purposes involving lifelong learning with innovative contents and curricula, as well as an emphasis on adult education, non-formal learning, ICT-based education, and the value of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

Rather than viewing education in isolation from development, the 2016 report will argue that education is integral to the new sustainable development agenda. Where empirical literature of specific relationships is weakly developed, this section will identify gaps in knowledge, research and policy and propose an agenda for providing stronger evidence.

The thematic section will address questions such as:

- How can the cross-sectoral ties with education be made more explicit?
- What policies, programs and strategies effectively strengthen links between education and sustainability?
- What are the deeper effects of formal education on cultural practices, gender equality, the environment, discrimination and social justice? How should these effects be measured in the future?
- What are the long-term consequences of non-formal education, technical skill training and professional development for adult development and sustainable practices?

The 2016 report will comprehensively examine the links between education and sustainable development by presenting literature-driven theoretical arguments, building on existing evidence from research, and analysing field-based interventions. Proposed initial themes are listed below, the final will be determined after considering comments from a special online consultation, including with members of the [Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#).

Agriculture, food security and improved nutrition: The link between food and education is found in many forms. Nutritious food for school children improves their ability to learn. Hunger, malnourishment and nutrient deficiencies pose a significant threat for brain development and learning capacity during early childhood. Meals provided in schools attract children to enrol and remain in school and help them learn. Meanwhile, education helps people understand how to live healthily and the necessity and components of a nutritious diet. Paternal and particularly maternal education significantly improves child nutrition and reduces child hunger. Research has shown that basic education can help rural subsistence farmers adopt and integrate new technologies.

Other tangible links will be explored, including analysis of the impact that good quality education can have on rural development and food security; the effects of curricula that include nutritional and environmental education; the importance of basic financial literacy and vocational training for increasing crop yields; and education's role in developing more sustainable forms of farming and produce distribution.

Healthy children, healthy lives: Significant amounts of research show that health and education go hand in hand, and that strengthening one sector leads to progress in the other. Education is better received in communities when paired with health interventions. Similarly, improving the health of school-aged children improves education indicators, such as attendance rates. The

provision of school-based health services, and non-formal learning programs—for example, water, sanitation and nutrition programs, oral health programs, and HIV awareness campaigns—promote healthy behaviour and increase the likelihood children will receive basic medical care. Likewise, educated parents are more likely to effectively disseminate health messages to their children and to the wider communities in which they live.

The 2016 report will make these links even more explicit by analysing the meaning of ‘health literacy’ as a skill needed to promote and maintain good health. The report will also consider how strong links between education and health impact broader transformations in society: capacity building, gender empowerment, economic growth, and civic participation, which represent key building blocks for sustainable development. It will also discuss the potential role of expanded schooling in helping to combat major health crises and epidemics.

Gender equality and empowerment: Education can be part of a social transformation process involving men, women, boys and girls towards developing a more gender-just society. A strong body of evidence already exists to show that education is an important factor in safeguarding girls’ rights and empowering them to take decisions that affect their lives. Improving girls’ attainment can reduce the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, and lead to smaller family sizes. Education supports progress towards gender equality, which is curtailed by persistent gender bias and stereotypes, as well as traditions, values and cultural norms that justify discrimination against women and girls in social institutions and everyday practices.

The 2016 report will consider the best means for keeping girls in school while ensuring girls and boys have access to comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly health services and gender-responsive teaching. The report will emphasize adult literacy and non-formal learning programmes, as women need to access different kinds of learning beyond education institutions to develop skills to participate fully in their families and communities. The report will address discriminatory gender norms, such as the uneven division of household labour that curtail girls’ and women’s education life opportunities, and stereotyping in school and employment cultures regarding career options (e.g. STEM fields). It will also consider how education can support gender equality in the labour market and in other public spheres. The report will address the prevention of gender-based violence in schools, including through curriculum, codes of conduct, safe spaces, effective reporting and referral systems, and community involvement that includes men and boys. Education’s role in curbing other areas of violence against women and girls, such as female genital mutilation, will also be examined.

Urban development and infrastructure, including ICT: Urban development requires special attention as cities are centres of productivity and opportunity, and the majority of the world’s population now lives in urban areas. The 2016 report will examine key themes linking urban development and education, such as role that cities can play in sustainable development and environmental innovation, with their concentration of individuals with higher education. It will assess the role of universities and research institutions in large urban areas for economic innovation and the extent to which urban planners and policymakers can harness educational institutions planning more sustainable cities. The report will argue that creating urban areas that are networked ‘knowledge hubs’ with socially and environmentally conscious citizens needs to start from the inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development in pre-primary and primary schools.

The report will also examine the theme of inequity, for example in the differences in types and levels of skills attained in urban, peri-urban and rural locations. Inequalities of access, wealth and power within cities and between urban and rural areas can be exacerbated by and through

education. One of the biggest constraints to achieving education and lifelong learning is a lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure. Amenities such as roads and public transport, clean water sources, usable gender-separated toilets, electricity and other efficient energy sources, are of huge importance for creating safe, healthy and secure environments that enable learning and increase school attendance, particularly for girls.

The 2016 report will also critically examine ICT's role in creating, disseminating and sharing knowledge, resulting in increased social mobility and reduced inequalities. As a result of post-2015 developments, ICT tools are being developed and envisioned to improve education, further global collaboration and awareness building, and use real-time data collection for monitoring and programme implementation.

Preserving the environment and its eco-system: The 2016 report will review evidence of whether educated adults have a greater ability to make informed decisions to care for the environment, for example in combatting climate change, responsible resource use, sustainable water and sanitation systems, and preserving ecosystems. The report will examine how people are more likely to alter their habits and engage in more sustainable behaviour, and ask: How and in what ways does education lead to everyday behaviour changes in relation to the environment? Can education and non-formal and adult learning bring about improvements of environmental awareness and conservation?

The report will consider the extent to which school syllabuses, teaching practices, and adult learning programs promote a 'green agenda', environmentally sustainable development, and responsibility towards the environment. Are themes of global interconnectedness and environmental sustainability integrated in official educational contents and pedagogical practices, such as the impact of buying cheap clothes on global warming, or the disposal of waste in regions beyond a student's immediate surroundings?

The 2016 report will also assess whether a lifelong learning approach can strengthen people's resilience and ability to adapt and respond to climate change. The report will consider recent evidence that shows how educated groups are utilizing new technologies such as SMS, Twitter and blogs to fight for the protection of the environment. Evidence will also be presented on how higher education and research institutions are training students and policymakers on sustainable development and whether they contribute to relevant professional development and training.

Peaceful and inclusive societies with a focus on human rights: The 2016 Report will pay particular attention to the influence of education on the development of more participatory, peaceful, inclusive and socially cohesive societies, based on the rule of law, which safeguard the civil rights of all individuals and groups. Peaceful and inclusive societies are more likely to expand and sustain equitable educational opportunities. Armed violence, child exploitation, sexual abuse and human trafficking are examples of contexts that undermine the ability of individuals to exercise their basic human rights, including to education. In some recent instances, schools, teachers and students have been targeted by armed groups. The promotion of human rights through education, laws and policies helps safeguard the rights of women, children and marginalized groups and facilitates peaceful societies.

Human rights education promotes the values and beliefs of human rights and can start with formal schooling. At the same time, increased access to secondary and higher education can contribute to the development of a critical mass of educated citizens, leaders and communities that can identify and address human rights abuses. Education can strengthen human rights by increasing public participation in decision making, facilitating access to legal recourse and

fighting against inequality. It can contribute to people standing up for their rights and those of others, self-organizing, engaging in peaceful resistance and demanding greater social justice.

The 2016 report will examine a range of issues related to inclusive communities, including governance, protest and safety. Good governance is a key factor in the promotion of a peaceful and just society. Effective and equitable governance require an educated citizenry. Effective governance requires broad competencies and flexibility, built on a foundation of basic education and science literacy and includes the ability of institutions to engage and resolve problems, engage in long-term planning for sustainable development, and collaborate across sectors.

Conclusion

The 2016 report, the first of a new series of post-2015 reports, will establish a new set of tools and a toolkit for monitoring the post-2015 education goal and its targets. The thematic section of 2016 report will examine the reciprocal links between education and major aspects of the post-2015 development agenda, and present how the role of education can be re-envisioned to contribute to the ambitious sustainable development agenda. The report will document cross-sectoral initiatives that are cost-effective, contextually relevant and sustainable. Such initiatives, backed by appropriate cross-sectoral indicators, can lead the way for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. To facilitate the post-2015 development priorities, a variety of financing mechanisms will be crucial, including for funding cross-sectoral approaches.

The new Sustainable Development Goals require education to be re-envisioned. The goals go beyond accessing formal education to require an interrogation of the quality and purposes of education, whether education is equitable for all, and how education is placed in a context of lifelong learning, where people and communities learn to be inclusive, peaceful, cohesive and – create a world that is sustainable for future generations.