

Learning Exchange Brief

A view from the Civil Society Education Fund's engagement in local education sector planning groups

Learning Exchange Briefing Series

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is a civil society movement that calls on governments to realise the right to education. With members in more than 90 countries, the network brings together grassroots organisations, teachers' unions, child rights groups, NGOs, parents' associations and community groups. GCE's collective work as a network encompasses collaboration at global level to influence international frameworks and policy debates. It also includes networking, and communication between members for shared learning. This work helps to strengthen impact at national and regional levels, and to build the movement-based character of GCE. This learning exchange series is produced by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to support greater shared learning and capacity development on key strategic areas for the network, by synthesising knowledge and lessons learnt across the network.

The Global Campaign for Education's engagement in national education sector processes

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) promotes education as a basic human right and mobilises civil society organisations (CSOs) to put pressure on governments and the international community to fulfil their commitments to provide free, high quality and inclusive public education for all. The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) aims to influence policies and practices of governments and other decision-makers. GCE does this in a number of different ways, including by increasing civil society participation in the education sector, as social participation in policy debate and policy decision-making is a right, recognised in many international and regional treaties. GCE has observed a global trend towards a shrinking space for civil society participation, and under this context it works to ensure that civil society voices are heard and taken seriously with regard to education issues at the global levels, and through regional and national coalition members' efforts in as much as possible.

GCE supports civil society engagement in education sector planning in 62 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Eastern Europe through the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF). The CSEF is coordinated by GCE and regional partners and financed largely by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a multi-stakeholder partnership and funding platform that aims to strengthen education systems in developing countries by supporting governments to develop good quality national education sector plans.

The CSEF programme seeks to ensure consultative national policy dialogue and strengthened government accountability to citizens for the achievement of equitable, inclusive and quality public education in all countries in which it operates. In order to achieve this, the CSEF works toward three mutually-reinforcing objectives related to policy participation, firstly, civil society and citizen awareness and engagement; secondly, quality research and analysis; and thirdly, building of knowledge and networks across countries and regions.

The CSEF requires all national education coalitions involved in the programme to actively participate in key sector policy forums, committees and review processes, bringing together a wide range of

voices and perspectives, including those not usually heard in policy-making. In most of the GPE participating countries education planning and proposal development processes are run through a Local Education Group (LEG).

Box 1. What is a Local Education Group?

At the national level, the GPE encourages governments to bring together all education partners in a collaborative forum called the Local Education Group (LEG), led by the Ministry of Education. A LEG is a multi-stakeholder body usually convened by the government to support education sector planning, policy development, implementation and monitoring through joint sector reviews. LEGs ideally include government representatives, development agencies, donors, civil society organisations and teacher organisations. The GPE strongly encourages the participation of local CSOs and teacher representatives in LEGs.

LEGs may be called different names in different countries, such as: Education Coordinating Group, Education Local Consultative Group, Education Sector Development Committee, Joint Education Sector Working Group etc.

The size and composition of LEGs varies in different countries. Membership can range from less than 10 members to more than 100 members.

LEGs support the alignment and harmonisation of technical and financial support for education sector policies. A coordinating agency is selected among its members to facilitate the work of the LEG. Additionally, a grant agent is chosen by the government and approved by the LEG to oversee the implementation of GPE grants.

To receive a GPE grant, eligible countries embark on a participatory planning process including local partners to ensure ownership and accountability. This process is used to inform and develop a medium-term plan. The LEG oversees coordination of donor support for the country's national plan thus promoting the principles of aid effectiveness.

The LEGs are forums to foster mutual accountability across the partnership, which is emphasized in the GPE model.

CSEF-funded coalitions 2016-2018



1

Purpose and origins of this learning exchange paper

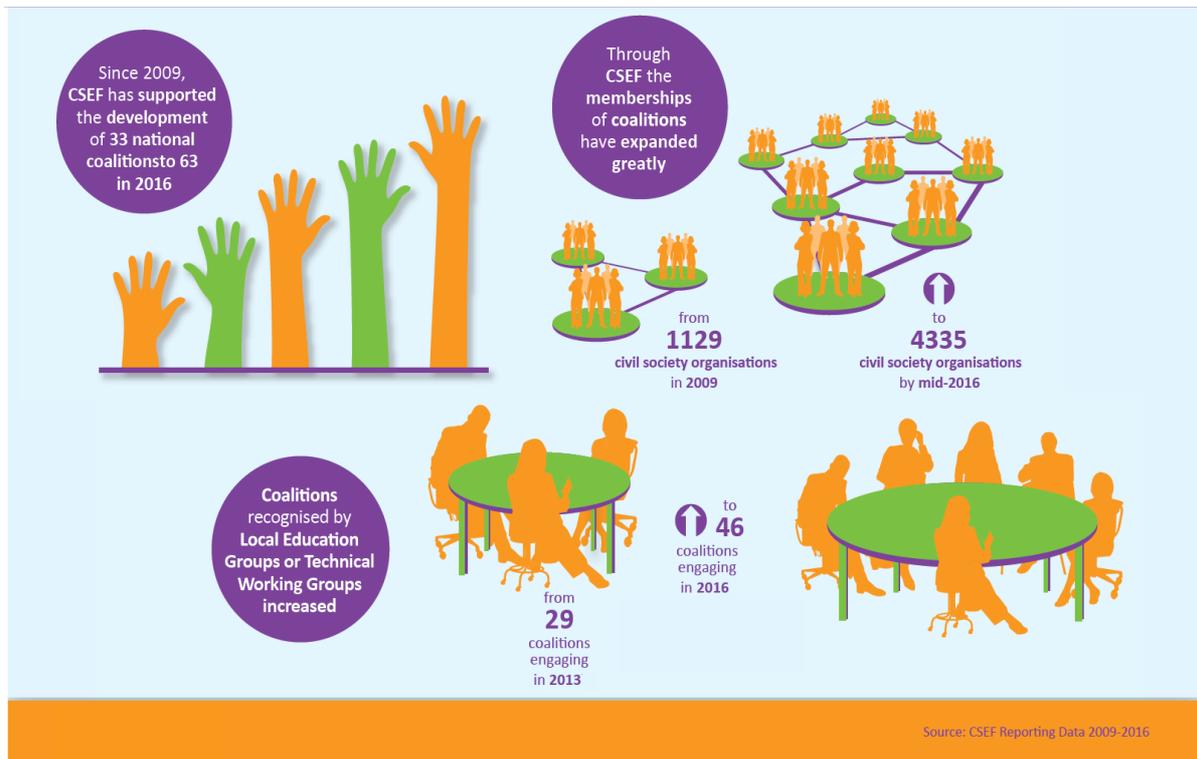
This paper aims to share learning emerging from the CSEF programme. It utilises information gathered from country level experiences within the CSEF programme as well as data generated through CSEF's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system². It focuses on engagement within LEGs, acknowledging that coalitions participate in a range of education policy related forums and spaces³

The Learning Exchange Brief presents a brief quantitative cross-country snapshot of key data. It then identifies 6 key lessons learned by national education coalitions. The 6 lessons are linked to good practices in LEGs identified by the GCE.

¹ Twenty-nine (29) national education coalitions operating in fragile or conflict-affected countries: 19 in Africa, 5 in Asia and Pacific, 1 in Latin America and the Caribbean; and 4 in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe. That is; 29 of the total 62 national coalitions reached and supported by CSEF 2016-2018: Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, DRC, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

² The Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) online system is a core reporting and information management tool of the CSEF programme which exists to collect, transmit, process, and store data and programmatic resources systematically to understand the progress being made through various interventions at three different levels: national, regional and global. The data used to inform this report was extracted from the MEL online system, specifically from sections of 2016 annual reports and 2017 proposals, where coalitions reported on their LEG engagement work.

³ Specifically, in 2016, the Global Campaign for Education developed an 'Education Sector Planning and Local Education Group (LEG) Monitoring Tool' to support civil society organisations to engage with Global Partnership for Education (GPE) processes in their country. The tool has been developed using various guidelines of good practice in sector planning, and against common benchmarks of good practice in the management of Local Education Groups. This helped guide inputs into this paper.



Increased Engagement of CSEF Coalitions

Two important issues to consider in assessing the effectiveness of engagement of coalitions into education policy processes are: (a) the extent to which they are broad-based and able to represent different groups of society; and (b) the extent to which they engage in education policy process (including with LEGs). The box below demonstrates the strengthening of national coalitions.

Since 2013, the number of organisations that are part of the CSEF initiative has doubled, and now stands at over 4000 across 62 countries, which represents a wide spectrum of voices, especially the most marginalised.

Box 2 Engagement in Local Education Groups over time – in numbers

- ❖ Currently, 86% of all coalitions in countries with an active LEG are engaged in the process.
- ❖ A third of all coalitions reported more than a third of their policy recommendations on specific topics had been adopted in LEG discussions.
- ❖ In 2016 alone, 80% of all coalitions submitted a total of 156 written submissions and 196 oral submissions into national political processes, including LEGs.
- ❖ Nearly half all coalitions reporting having 'strong' engagement in Local Education Groups.
- ❖ In countries where a formal agreement is required, 80% of coalitions have forged/secured this or are working towards one, which includes an explicit role for the national civil society coalition in the LEG.
- ❖ In 2015, 98% of coalitions, included member organisations representing women's associations, organisations of people with disabilities, or youth assemblies.
- ❖ In 2016, the programme represented more than 4,335 civil society organisations from around the world, with coalition members increasing by 50% from 2013.

In sum, most of the national coalitions are participating in LEGs, generating citizen-led evidence, and driving forward broad-based civil society engagement. National coalitions reported making a measurable impact on, or contribution to, education policy reform, contributing to meaningful change.

6 KEY LESSONS FROM CSEF NATIONAL COALITION'S ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL EDUCATION GROUPS:

LEGs are meant to include the voices of various education stakeholders, among which civil society plays a key role. One of GPE's guiding principles clearly states "Enabling inclusive, evidence-based policy dialogue that engages national governments, donors, civil society, teachers, philanthropy and the private sector. The CSEF programme has been explicitly requesting its coalitions to include engagement with LEGs within their priorities. As such, this assisted coalitions to become active, credible and respected participants in LEGs and other similar spaces of dialogue about education policies, and to demonstrate their value to governments and donors.

Factors influencing participation of national coalitions varied from one country to the next and included both internal and external factors. External factors include government willingness, responsiveness, or capacity to engage a wide variety of stakeholders (including civil society), or the receptivity of LEGs to include a broad range of stakeholders in the partnership. This is addressed in the first two lessons discussed below. Internal factors include the capacity of civil society to demand more collaborative and robust relationships, the strength of the citizen voice, actions to hold government accountable, and the technical and advocacy skills of civil society. Clearly, civil society has more control over the internal factors, and can work towards overcoming these barriers more directly.

This section outlines the 6 key lessons learnt:

1. Local Education Groups don't always exist, and they are not always open to civil society, but doors can be opened through positive engagement.
2. Local Education Groups are more inclusive when they follow GCE good practice guidelines and have strong national leadership.
3. A policy focus or niche can be key to building civil society credibility in LEGs
4. The voice of civil society must be broad, but also strong, in LEGs
5. Engage with good evidence, to build credibility in Local Education Groups
- 6: Effective participation in LEGs can help create a virtuous cycle of civil society engagement

Lesson 1. Local Education Groups don't always exist, and they are not always open to civil society, but doors can be opened through positive engagement.

Most of the GPE member countries have functioning LEGs.⁴ The way in which LEGs are structured however varies from one country to the next. This may not necessarily be a formal or official structure, and it is not always known, or open, to local civil society groups.

Monitoring and evaluation carried out by GCE found that in some countries, civil society is intentionally excluded from LEGs. This is particularly the case in countries where civil society is excluded from policy making forums generally.⁵ Fragile states or those impacted by conflict and natural disasters, have struggled to set up and maintain LEGs. In some countries, substantive education sector decision-making is made outside of LEGs.

In closed environments, it can be very difficult for civil society to gain access. Despite these constraints, CSEF supported/established national coalitions have worked hard to improve the engagement of civil society in LEGs and the number of coalitions reporting engagement has increased. As a result, the

⁴ GPE recently reported that only 4 of their developing country partners do not have a functioning LEG. See 2016-2017 GPE Results Report.

⁵ For instance, in Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Ethiopia and Rwanda civil society organisations have had difficulty accessing LEGs, which mirrors broader civil society exclusion in policy processes.

number of CSEF national education coalitions recognised in LEGs rose from 29 to 46 – or in 86% of countries in which CSEF operates.

The GPE in its 2016 Results Report noted that in all countries in which it operates (including countries with no LEG) 77% have engagement from some form of civil society organisation (i.e. an international NGO or or local civil society groups). The growth in participation of national education coalitions can be attributed to persistent efforts in engaging stakeholders, including Ministries of Education. In some cases, strengthening cooperation with strategic partners within countries (UNESCO offices, lead agencies or managing entities) and intensifying communication with GPE’s Country Support Team, has been key to unlocking official policy space. This was the case in Zimbabwe, where the Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI), was able to work with UNICEF, the Grant Agent, and DFID, the Coordinating Agency, together with the Minister of Education to gain access and inclusion in the LEG. The Somali coalition, Education for All Somalia (EFASOM), was excluded from Education Sector Coordination meetings, but after communication by GPE’s Country Support Team with the Ministry of Education, was formally invited to take part.

Box 3: Minimal levels of multi-stakeholder engagement, and civil society engagement in LEGs.

GCE calls for LEGs to include all education sector stakeholders of GPE, including, the Ministry of Education (and other line ministries), donors, CSOs; teacher organisations; private sector/foundation partners.⁶ Specifically, the CSEF measures the quality of engagement by civil society as follows:

- Weak: Participation of one person with undefined links to representing other civil society organisations.
- Minimum inclusion: More than one representative of civil society which represents diverse views.
- Good: Broad representation, through a coalition with multiple people invited, who have clear links to their constituency.
- Excellent: Active representation of both a broad national coalition and teachers’ unions, with clear links back to their respective constituencies.

Lesson 2. Local Education Groups are more inclusive when they follow GCE good practice guidelines and have strong national leadership.

Meaningful civil society engagement and participation is a right that allows better decision making in policies. GCE developed good practice guidelines for effective LEG functioning which set out the conditions that would allow for optimal participation.

Box 4. Good practice guidelines identified by the Global Campaign for Education in LEG functioning

1. The full spectrum of planning and monitoring processes is happening in an ongoing basis, with space for engagement from all stakeholders (including CSOs) in:
 - Overall education sector planning process and related education policy dialogue;
 - Development of a specific GPE proposal to be submitted for funding;
 - Review, reflection and learning processes e.g. a Joint Sector Review (JSR)⁷ / annual review.
 - Engagement in monitoring of implementation (e.g. including tracking of financing / budgets)
2. The extent to which the government is genuinely leading the LEG, or whether in-country donors/others are disproportionately setting the agenda.
3. The role of the LEG is formally mandated, for instance, with a Terms of Reference (TOR) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which clearly outlines roles and ways of working.
4. Systematic sharing of information in order to facilitate LEG engagement.

⁶ [GPE's 2015/2016 Results Report](#) a GPE analysis established from 2016 data, which included 60 country partners, found that only 48% of them included teacher’s representatives. And only 44% had both civil society organisations and teachers’ unions. Much more should be done to ensure greater inputs from teachers in particular.

⁷ Monitoring and evaluation of progress in the education sector happens on an ongoing, annual and long-term basis. A formal review of ESP implementation usually takes place through the ‘Joint Sector Review’ (JSR), which is a collaborative effort between governments, donor partners and other stakeholders, to assess progress with implementing national sector plans and achieving objectives.

5. Donor alignment and harmonisation: donors should be genuinely harmonising their efforts behind the education sector plan/GPE/LEG process.
6. Good quality oversight functions for the LEG: Whether one donor is playing the role of a “Coordinating Agency” and the Supervising Agency (any GPE multilateral agency partner or GPE donor country partner designated to receive transferred funds and supervise an activity) is giving oversight; It is important these oversight roles do not detract from country-level ownership.

Monitoring and evaluation carried out by the GCE and contained in national education coalition reports found that in some LEGs, civil society was represented, but participation was limited and not influential. Barriers included the timely sharing of minutes, reports and documents. Such constraints hindered national coalition representatives’ ability to fully engage in processes. Access to information with enough time allowed to feedback as well as formalised agreed ways of working, can make all the difference. This can be just as important as whether CSOs are given formal space in meetings.

For instance, one study previously showed that not all coalitions active in LEGs had full access to key documents,⁸ which limited their capacity to fully engage in processes. Yet higher numbers of coalitions – around 70% - are now reporting that one or more of their submissions are being incorporated into policy documents. This implies an increasingly strong voice of civil society, and uptake by the LEGs.

Country-level ownership of the LEG was reported to be critical to a higher quality functioning group. Country-level ownership was more likely when LEGs were built onto or within pre-existing national structures and processes rather than being externally imposed.

“The basic idea of the LEG is to provide a consultative platform for all stakeholders to improve education and monitor the implementation of the education sector plan. This can only be done if the process is inclusive, participatory and transparent. Information related to budget and its expenditures along with governance system should also be accessible to citizens.”
K. Zehra Arshad, National Coordinator, Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE)

LEGs are supposed to be led by the national government, which fosters country-level ownership. In practice, this is not always the case. According to the 2014 GPE LEG Capacity Report, just under two thirds of groups were chaired or co-chaired by the Ministry of Education. Attention needs to be given to provide consistency and leadership within the LEGs by national stakeholders.

Meaningful country ownership requires careful management of the participation of different stakeholders; as such it has been found to be helpful to develop a code of practice that ensures engagement and ownership by a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society. Decisions also need to be clearly taken within the LEG. Some coalitions noted that decisions were sometimes taken outside of the

formal group by donors and government. In some cases, civil society organisations helped to take a lead in ensuring national ownership. In Senegal, the LEG was only officially established and chaired by the Minister of National Education after focused lobbying by civil society organisations.

Civil society participation in LEGs was strengthened through written and official agreements or MOUs. Most coalitions that have engaged in LEGs either already have, or are in the process of securing, an official memorandum of understanding or terms of reference with a clear role for civil society. While such agreements can be key to securing meaningful participation, in some countries they were not necessary.

For the Coalition Nationale pour l'Education Pour Tous (EPT), Burkina Faso (CN-EPT/BF), securing an agreement strengthened its influence. CN-EPT/BF put ongoing pressure on the government to ensure

⁸ See Xavier Rambla, Antoni Verger, D. Brent Edwards Jr, Clara Fontdevila & Xavier Bonal (2017) Meeting development goals: evidence from the Civil Society Education Fund, *Development in Practice*, 27:6, 851-864, DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2017.1343275

inclusive planning processes over several years. A major accomplishment was the development of a document that institutionalised the relationship between civil society and the Ministry of National Education. This document stipulated civil society's involvement in developing, validating and assessing the action plans and budgets of the Ministry. The Ministry displayed its commitment to transparency by making sector documents and school budgets available to the public and allowing the participation of civil society in Ministry of Education Councils at county, regional, and national levels.

In Kenya, LEG members share a joint understanding of the role of civil society as a mutual player in the group. The coalition reported it is particularly important to ensure the clarity of the mandate that the LEG has within GPE processes. This is echoed in the Honduras experience, where the coalition reported that common principles agreed and adapted by the LEG – of respect, recognition, acceptance, collaboration and independence –helped to create a sense of shared purpose and collaboration.

In some countries, such as Papua New Guinea, Uganda and Haiti, groups have been reported to take on LEG type characteristics which later lapse or revert to being more exclusive forums. This can be due to a change in the Minister of Education, national elections or after the approval of GPE grants. This might be due to a change of Minister, national elections or after the time of approval of GPE grants.

LEGs should meet regularly, with a clear schedule, to encourage rigorous, truly participatory approaches. This is especially true given this is a pre-condition of receiving a Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant. Eligible countries must not only submit a credible medium-term plan but also follow a participatory process (which can take over 18 months to be done well, according to some analysis⁹) and should then be followed with monitoring and review. LEGs need to be a part of the process from the onset to ensure credible local ownership and accountability to national stakeholders (and to prevent national or international experts from taking over). In some countries, regular spaces for policy engagement are built into the annual cycle, which ensures robust and ongoing engagement of all actors. For example, in Nepal, joint annual reviews, budget review meetings and quarterly meetings are the major forums which bring government, development partners, civil society organisations, teacher groups and parent associations together.

Lesson 3. A policy focus or niche can be key to building civil society credibility in LEGs

A number of coalitions have been able to secure a particular niche and voice in LEGs. Sometimes this involves being a mouthpiece for the marginalised or the excluded. This helps to build the credibility of civil society.

In Senegal, the Comité des Ong et Syndicats pour la Défense de l'Éducation Publique (COSYDEP) coalition, promoted the rights of the poorest and most marginalised population. In Cambodia, the coalition aimed at strengthening its members' advocacy capacity and ability to facilitate community engagement in selected provinces and bringing that voice to the table. While in Honduras, the coalition focused on pushing for a rights-based approach of education, as outlined in international law, the Law of Indigenous Peoples to bilingual intercultural education, the right of people with disabilities to an inclusive and equitable education and the guarantee of the right to a quality education for those who fall outside of the system. In Vietnam, since its establishment in 2010, Education for All in Vietnam (VCEFA) has worked on advocacy activities

"In our view, a coalition which aims at being really national should be much more present on the ground. It means that the organisation has means of transport to get to places like Tambacounda, Kédougou or Ziguinchor, where people live. The organisation has to meet and help the local activists on a regular basis, because they often lack the necessary expertise." (Member of the NEC-Senegal)

⁹ See GPE and IIEP-UNESCO (International Institute for Educational Planning-UNESCO). 2015a. Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal.

to improve policies on early childhood care and quality education for disabled groups. This has led the VCEFA to consistently raise issues around discriminatory practices in the recruitment of deaf teachers, advocating for access to education in sign language, the lack of funding support for inclusive education, and the need to establish a specific department on inclusive education. In so doing, VCEFA has gained a reputation as a credible and authoritative voice, which has helped to gradually raise the profile of the coalition with the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders.

Lesson 4. The voice of civil society must be broad, but also strong, in LEGs

Building diverse coalitions, that are able to advocate on behalf of a coordinated civil society voice, is a crucial objective, including voices and perspectives not usually heard in policy-making. While such a model is never easy, it has a powerful impact when it works.

To ensure robust engagement there must be well defined mechanisms for inputs from the civil society constituency and feedback (see box 3 for GCE's evaluation of different forms of civil society engagement in LEGs), as well as clearly defined roles within LEGs. In Burkina Faso, six thematic working groups were defined on different themes (i.e. non-formal education, financing education etc), and the coalition draws on the strength of the working group members to ably and competently represent them in the LEG.

To ensure representation of voices of the poorest and most marginalised, it is important that coalitions are connected to the communities in which they live. This means working with community-based organisations (CBOs) and in large and populous countries, building sub-national coordination structures, such as district, and federal state-level chapters.

The Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) in Bangladesh has a strong national presence, with sub groups focusing on thematic areas, and a civil society platform such as Education Watch which helps to coordinate work at local level. They work with communities helping to empower them to understand their rights and channel concerns all the way up to the Education Ministry and into the LEG. There are almost 1,000 organisations which together form CAMPE.

To create informed and unified civil society positions, CAMPE actively engages its members by sharing information and seeking inputs on policy positions and proposals. This takes place through discussions at regularly organised national and subnational meetings, or by online consultations with the wider membership. Findings from these consultations are drawn on or presented to the government during policy discussions, for example in the Local Consultative Group for Education, Bangladesh's equivalent of a Local Education Group (LEG), and education sector dialogues.

In Pakistan and Nigeria, where a federal model of government exists, the national coalitions focus on engagement with decision-making structures of the LEGs at state and provincial level. The National Campaign for Education (NCE) in Nepal works closely with its 339 members and 23 district coalitions (chapters). NCE conducts evidence-based policy advocacy as well as grassroots, district and national level consultations to inform and monitor education policy development such as the recent School Sector Development Plan. NCE then builds the capacities of civil society organisations to enable them to engage the government meaningfully on issues such as equity, quality and inclusion in education.

Successful and strong engagement often depends on a strong civil society base to succeed, and not all national education coalitions are starting from the same place. Some LEGs operate in countries with mature national education coalitions which have developed relationships over time. Others, are in countries where civil society is nascent, or with limited ongoing collaborative relationships between civil society and government. Some difficulties experienced by national coalitions are related to capacity gaps on the side of 'young' or emerging coalitions, or where political environments do not enable civil society participation.

To overcome these difficulties new and emerging coalitions have been supported in their collaboration, and peer learning shared across the network. For example, the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) assisted the Mongolian coalition in their processes of lobbying for the formation of the LEG that will provide space for civil society participation (see Box 5).

Box 5. GCE and CSEF support – linking local to global

GCE, through CSEF, provides funding, technical support and capacity-building opportunities through regional partners across Africa, Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East. This support helps national coalitions to more firmly take up their position within LEGs. Regional coalitions have played an important role in supporting national coalitions to effectively participate in the LEG and to engage with GPE.

At the global level, in 2016 GCE developed an Education Sector Planning and LEG Monitoring Tool. The tool is intended to help civil society to more actively hold their governments accountable, improve sector engagement by CSOs, give guidance on key principles to monitor in a uniform way, use various guidelines for good practice in sector planning, and against common benchmarks.

Lesson 5. Engage with good evidence to build credibility in Local Education Groups

When civil society is able to bring robust evidence-based advocacy to LEGs, they can strengthen their ability to influence processes. Bringing this evidence base from the community or robust data to policy discussions is a particularly unique role for civil society.

For example, NCE Nepal collected the suggestions at local level on the amendment of the scholarship provisions of the government, securing many of their demands in the final policy. Through its monitoring mechanism, Education Watch, CAMPE carried out systematic research, surveys and studies to assess the progress of Education for All in Bangladesh. Under the Education Watch banner, CAMPE submitted around 40 major recommendations to the National Education Policy Formulation Committee – all of which were reflected in the National Education Policy adopted in 2010.

The national education coalition, Coalition Nationale EPT du Burkina Faso (CN-EPT/BF), was able to monitor local level school management and ensure funds reached intended beneficiaries by pursuing citizens' oversight and tracking budgets and spending. The information gathered by the coalition was fed back to the Ministry of Education, with recommendations for how to maintain democratic governance of education at local levels.

The Civil Society Action Coalition for Education for All (CSACEFA) works in various areas in Nigeria, including the Kwara region, located in the northern part of the country. Here the local government put in place the 'Every Child Counts' policy, aiming to improve quality education in the region. Yet barriers remained, particularly in relation to teacher deployment in the most rural locations. In 2013, CSACEFA conducted research consulting teachers as well as parents, pupils and government officials. CSACEFA used these findings to advocate for improvements in teacher recruitment, teacher deployment, monitoring and retention, and teacher welfare. As a result, enhanced transparency in teacher deployment processes was introduced, and the House of Assembly initiated a process to develop legislation on increased teacher allowances in rural areas.

Lesson 6: Effective participation in LEGs can help create a virtuous cycle of civil society engagement

When LEGs work well, they can have a long-term positive impact affirming the valuable role of civil society in policy making. This can help national coalitions to be recognised by governments, and to gain access to key spaces of agenda-setting and decision-making.

Through CSEF support, national education coalitions have had an impact on strengthening civil society participation in LEGs. Governments, and international organisations in a number of countries see national coalitions as key educational stakeholders as a result - to the extent that some national coalitions participate in governmental committees and are included in various consultation and decision-making platforms of governmental actors and donors.

The overall effect – in terms of prestige and recognition – depends on the different political contexts where national education coalitions operate. In countries such as Cambodia or Senegal, where civil society organisations were traditionally seen by the government as obstacles to policy-making, the increase in political recognition of LEGs has made a significant impact and has been a considerable achievement for civil society.¹⁰

Conclusion

In this Learning Exchange Brief, six key lessons for strengthened and meaningful engagement with Local Education Groups (LEGs) were presented based on CSEF national coalitions' prior experience. Although various barriers remain, and those dependent on external factors, such as lack of political will, and specific national contexts like conflict-affected environments, being most difficult to manage, civil society can still make use of other means and tools, such as those described in this paper, to effect change, and ensure their voices are heard in LEGs.

The support provided through GCE's Civil Society Education Fund has positively impacted national coalitions' strengthened participation and engagement in LEGs. Going forward, as GPE is in the process of developing "effectiveness principles" for LEG engagement, which aim to outline the basic elements of a well-functioning LEG, as well as an operational guidance, to support the effectiveness of the LEG, it will be important to tailor these new tools to be flexible for different contexts, and allow for a balanced approach between principles and operational guidelines.

¹⁰ See Xavier Rambla, Antoni Verger, D. Brent Edwards Jr, Clara Fontdevila & Xavier Bonal (2017) Meeting development goals: evidence from the Civil Society Education Fund, *Development in Practice*, 27:6, 851-864, DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2017.1343275