



One Billion Voices

A Call to Action to Improve and Increase Public Financing for Education

The 'One Billion Voices' campaign led by the Global Campaign for Education aims to provide a way to urgently address the global education crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and secure improved and increased public financing for education. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 1.5 billion learners had their education stopped or interrupted¹. Education systems continue to face a devastating crisis, the challenges around public financing and the ever-increasing pressure on resources for public services, are resulting in less prioritisation of education. While some learners have returned to school, the COVID-19 pandemic deepened digital exclusion of many especially marginalized and vulnerable communities and groups, including girls and children with disabilities.

The world faces a tipping point where a seismic reversal in significant education progress of the last decades has begun and has devastating effects on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of quality education in addition to many of the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be fulfilled by 2030. Furthermore, the World Bank projects a potential 10% cut in education budgets due to the COVID-19 pandemic². Austerity measures are not a way out of an economic crisis, multilateral institutions should support investment rather than austerity to enable social services, including education, should be the last areas to face cuts.

This Call to Action provides a set of policy recommendations for the Global Campaign for Education movement, and education actors and activists, to use to guide our coordinated and collaborative advocacy and lobbying efforts over the coming year, to achieve improved and increased public financing for education. If we raise over One Billion voices for Education and stand side by side as a global movement, we can and will achieve lifelong learning for all.

1. States must increase and improve domestic financing for education

States must deliver on commitments made to domestic financing within the Incheon 2030 Framework to Action, to protect the progress being made towards the achievement of SDG4. Domestic resources remain the most important source for funding education, providing around 97% of total education funding³. There must be a clear commitment by states to provide equitable financing commensurate with national educational priorities, needs and capacities to advance the

¹ UNESCO, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/learning-never-stops-tell-unesco-how-you-are-coping-covid-19-school-closures-0>

² World Bank policy briefing, May 2020 <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/734541589314089887/Covid-and-Education-Finance-final.pdf>

³ Education Commission, The Learning Generation, <https://report.educationcommission.org/report/>



progressive realisation of the right to education. National budget must have the sensitivity to respond to the poorest and most marginalised for counteracting inequality, discrimination and exclusion in education. It is known that the most marginalised groups often receive the least resources. By allocating a progressive budget to the most disadvantaged communities, the State must also guarantee that other targets can be achieved, related to learning quality, teacher's professional development, access to cultural assets, global citizenship education and lifelong learning.

Increasing and improving domestic financing for education also requires the improvement of democratic spending monitoring mechanisms. Communities and citizens in general have the right to scrutinise government management at different stages of the budget cycle and at different levels. This is a central principle of accountability that must be promoted.

GCE urges the commitment to existing international agreements and an urgent adherence to the following international benchmark for domestic financing of education:

- allocating at least 4% to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) to education and/or
- allocating at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education.

States must improve monitoring and financial planning, including the sharing of data for tracking spending and results, and increased accountability for how funds are spent. States must make education budgets publically available in a way that allows CSO to monitor and track education budgets and spending. To help enable this we call on the international community to support the development and launch of a new International Financing Observatory for Education.

2. States must increase their tax base in order to increase domestic resources available for education and other public services

Substantive tax reforms are needed to fairly increase the size of the overall government budget as well as the share of the budget going to education proportionately. GCE believe that the only practical and realistic way for countries to deal with these competing pressures on government budgets is to maximize the revenue available by building progressive and expanded domestic systems of taxation, reviewing tax and royalty agreements in the corporate sector, particularly the natural resource sector, and closing loopholes which enable tax avoidance and evasion by the private sector, through which developing countries lose \$138 billion a year⁴.

States must increase their tax base in order to enable an increase in domestic resources available for public services, including education. States must also examine new tax sources and work towards a minimum tax-to-GDP ratio of 20%.

⁴ Devex, A Fair Global Tax System, <https://www.devex.com/news/a-fair-global-tax-system-is-imperative-for-development-experts-say-90448>

GCE strongly believes that paying fair taxes is a moral obligation and a prerequisite for those private actors willing to contribute to the debate on education policy. The IMF suggests most countries could increase their tax to GDP ratios by 5% in the medium term (3 to 5 years) – and GCE believes all countries should develop ambitious strategies to do this using fair, progressive taxes.

3. Urgent debt servicing action must be taken including debt cancellation for the least develop and low development countries

The allocation of domestic financial resources to pay debt servicing rather than ensuring people's basic human rights, will significantly impact countries' development in the short and long-term if not urgent action to alleviate or cancel debt are taken. Recent evidence suggests that the international community's failure to provide upfront debt relief for countries whose financial resources have been allocated to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, have forced a significant number of countries to cut public budgets. Analysis reveals that 40 out of 80 countries have implemented "off-setting expenditure cuts worth 2.6 per cent GDP in 2020"⁵.

In order to release domestic resources to be available to increase investment in public services, notably free public inclusive education for all, GCE call for:

- Urgent debt cancellation for the least developed and low development countries;
- Debt alleviation for middle income countries and upper-middle income countries;
- And debt-swaps subject to signed agreements from countries to invest in education for middle and even high-income countries with debt distress.
- A new commitment or compact from creditors and debtors to require full transparency in agreeing future loans

4. States must ensure education systems promote equity, equality and focus on the most marginalisation

For education to contribute and fulfil the principles in the Sustainable Development Agenda of "Leave No One Behind", educational institutions must be inclusive and actively promote equity and equality. This means that barriers which exclude some students from accessing education or which impair their success once they are in schools should be addressed in all aspects of social and school life. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mdme Koumba Boly Barry states, "equitable approaches must go beyond ensuring equal access for all to ensuring that individual learners receive the support they require to succeed, according to their individual

⁵ Munevar's 2020:1



circumstances. Inclusive education is aimed at ensuring that all learners, regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, physical and mental abilities or other personal characteristics, learn together in a welcoming and supportive environment". Adults without education opportunities should have effective responses from public education systems too.

Public education expenditure should cover all levels and modalities and be focused on ensuring access and quality learning for the most marginalized including learners in conflict and disaster context, refugees, so-called lower caste, indigenous people, people in remote areas, girls and people with disabilities.

Despite being prioritized by children, youth and their families, education in emergencies is often neglected in relief and recovery operations. This has been evident in COVID-19 response plans around the world. Education and learning must be prioritised within emergency plans and be fully funded. Since 2010, less than 2% of humanitarian funding has been spent on education⁶.

States must specifically address the rights of girls' when distributing education funds and designing education systems and sector plans. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to alarming rates of child marriage and gender-based violence, both of which are acting as barriers to girls' ever returning to school.

5. States must provide free quality education for all and end the trend towards the privatisation and commercialisation of education

GCE urges the end of the trend towards the increased privatization and commercialization of education which was emerging ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic and has been accelerating since the start of the pandemic.

There are different types of private schools and in many cases they are subject to different domestic regulations, depending on the purpose of their activity. There are differences, for example, between not-for-profit schools run by NGOs, public-funded private schools, faith-based organizations, community-led initiatives and commercial for-profit establishments and chains.

The increasing privatisation of education is a global phenomenon. According to the World Trade Organisation, in all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members, for which comparable data is available, private funding on educational institutions represents around 15 percent of all expenditure, while in more than one-half of developing countries, private spending accounts for more than 10 percent of total education expenditure, with important

⁶ Education Cannot Wait, 2018, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/the-situation/>



variations. Today, private institutions globally account for some 30 percent of all students in higher education⁷.

GCE believes that public funding should always aim to strengthen free public education systems, as stated in the human rights law and all private institutions should be rigorously regulated under the national law, especially the so-called “low cost private schools”, facing numerous complaints of exploitative labour practices, discrimination, lack of transparency and failure to meet national standards for education, health and safety.

GCE believes that the growing privatisation and commercialisation in, and of, education systems have worsened inequity in education, as well as deepened broader economic inequality, threatened progress towards quality education for all and undermined the delivery of quality public education. GCE believes the expansion of for-profit and fee-paying education is contributing to increased inequality and exclusion in education systems, while diverting much-needed funds from public sector approaches that could reach goals of universality, equity and quality, and as such this is a trend that must be reversed.

The state should not encourage privatization and public private partnerships in education. GCE calls for the link between quality and privatization to be further questioned and researched and for private schools need to be held accountable to the same standards as ordinary schools and monitored the same way.

6. States must improve the quality of teaching through adequate recruitment, remuneration and continued teacher training

States must review, analyse and improve the quality of teacher training (pre-service and in-service) and provide all teachers with quality pre-service education and continuous professional development and support including **orientation about the use of technology for education purposes**.

The COVID-19 pandemic is challenging education systems and the teaching profession has been at the forefront of the response, leading the way to find and implement creative and innovative solutions and create new learning environments for their students. They have been vital in guiding students and communities through this unprecedented crisis to achieving the SDG4 agenda. However, the mobilisation of teachers to rise to the challenge at hand is in complete disconnect with the difficult working conditions, lack of means, support and recognition that teachers have experienced, even before the pandemic.

Around the world, teachers had to adapt and conduct online learning while often lacking basic Information and Communications Technology (ICT) training and tools. Teachers, the majority of

⁷ OECD Data sets on education spending <https://data.oecd.org/eduresource/spending-on-tertiary-education.htm>



whom are women, found themselves confronted with the growing injustices and broadening inequalities brought about by the pandemic when many households lacked the technology and connectivity to allow students to learn online, and many students fell behind as a result. According to UNESCO, globally, approximately 50% and 43% of learners, respectively, lack computers or the internet in the home⁸. And a recently global teacher survey undertaken by ActionAid showed that while most schools (81%) made some provision for distance learning, 76% of teachers said that less than half of their pupils were able to keep up with their lessons.

As teachers are a fundamental condition for guaranteeing equitable quality education, teachers and educators should be empowered, adequately recruited and remunerated, motivated, professionally qualified, and supported within well resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems.

In terms of financing for teachers the biggest obstacle faced by countries wanting to recruit more teachers or pay teachers more is the policy advice of the IMF that tells countries to freeze or cut overall public sector wage bills (in 78% of countries in the last 3 years). Teachers are the largest group on most payrolls – and in most education budgets over 90% of money goes on teachers. Education spending can't be increased without increasing spending on teachers. The solution is for governments everywhere to actively push back on this coercive policy advice and to see investment in public sector workers as a pivotal part of supporting an economic recovery post-COVID – as well as for delivering on education, health and other SDGs. Public sector wage bill constraints must be removed.

7. Developed countries must continue to work towards the goal of 0.7% overseas aid, with 20% of this spent on education, and increasing their contributions to the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait

GCE recognises that the fulfilment of all commitments related to official development assistance (ODA) is crucial, including the commitments by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries. In accordance with their commitments, GCE urges those developed countries that have not yet done so to make additional concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for ODA to developing countries, and to spend 20% of aid on education, in order to secure timely and predictable funding to reach SDG4. GCE recommends improving aid effectiveness through the Global Partnership for Education and the Education Cannot Wait fund in order to have better coordination and harmonisation, especially in emergency settings, where the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was felt most dramatically and education has been disrupted by armed conflicts, forced displacement, climate-change induced disasters and protracted crises.

⁸ UNESCO World Teachers Day briefing <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/wtd-2020-overview-en.pdf>



Multilateral and bilateral donors to education must continue to commit new funds to education.

GCE believes that GPE should play a leading role in scaling up funding to early education by increasing disability-inclusive early education and pre-primary funding for all countries in need. One Billion Voices supports the GPE replenishment process aiming to secure at least \$5 billion and calls for donors to pledge as such.

With timely and predictable funding from many donors since its inception in 2016, ECW's investments have reached nearly 3.5 million children and youth by end of 2019 in 30 of the world's worst humanitarian crises, but another US\$300 million are needed to support ECW's emergency education response to the COVID-19 pandemic in ongoing crises.

GCE also believes that multilateral and donor aid should avoid any form of indebtedness of lower-middle income countries, many of whom are already in high or moderate debt distress, and doing so at a time of rising debt vulnerabilities as documented both by civil society actors and the IMF. Loan mechanisms do not provide predictable and sustainable financing sources that help governments make the long-term investments that are needed to improve education.

GCE is also concerned about fragmentation of international education financing, that has taken the international community many years to build as a harmonised global architecture and we are concerned about the role of multilateral banks as drivers of the education reform, considering their record on lack of transparency, effective targeting and support for public education systems.

8. States must listen and respond to the voices of those affected and provide safe space for individuals and civil society to speak up

States and the global community must listen to those affected, hear their voices and respond. This includes teachers, students, parents and community volunteers. Over one billion individuals have lost out on learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. One billion individuals mean there are one billion voices who deserve a say on what has happened to them and what needs to happen now. GCE is committed to working hard to reach as many affected people as possible and help to elevate their voices and their experiences to mobilise the action needed to address the biggest education crisis of all time. GCE is here to help strengthen the grass-roots global network for education. It is critical that civil society, individuals and activists are given space and opportunity to safely call for the provision of the human right to education.⁹

⁹ *This Call to Action has been developed by and for the Global Campaign for Education movement, partners and education activists, it supports and reaffirms the 'Ten-point call to action on domestic financing of education post-COVID' undersigned by 190 organisations from 55 countries.*