Global Campaign for Education (GCE)
One Billion Voices: Policy Statement

The 'One Billion Voices' campaign led by GCE aims to provide a way to urgently address the lack of education financing, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also worsen the progress of the entire Sustainable Development Agenda and specifically SDG4.

Domestic financing for education

International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect. States are the duty-bearers under international human rights law and hold the principal responsibility for the direct provision of the right to education. Like all human rights, the right to education imposes three levels of obligation on States: to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education.

- The obligation to ***respect*** requires States to avoid measures that hinder or prevent the enjoyment of the right to education.
- The obligation to ***protect*** requires States to take measures that prevent third parties from interfering with the enjoyment of the right to education.
- The obligation to ***fulfil*** means that States must take positive measures that enable and assist individuals and communities to enjoy the right to education.

In accordance with the principles established by international human rights law, particularly articles 2 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the states must ensure the maximum amount of resources are made available to education and this financing must be progressive. Without financial resources that make it possible to cover the expenses associated with the operation of education systems, the provision of education is simply impossible.

Policy frameworks have been agreed upon by the international community under UNESCO frameworks, recently reflected in the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, which alongside the Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG4) proposes a series of priority targets that require financing as a condition for their implementation. In other words, these targets require sufficient and adequate public investment for their realization.

Domestic resources remain the most important source for funding education, providing around 97% of total education funding globally. There must be a clear commitment by states to provide equitable financing commensurate with national educational priorities, needs and capacities to advance the progressive realization 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 training, access to cultural assets and lifelong learning, among others.

Compliance with the SDGs implies a progressive increase in investment. The main estimates suggest a general, annual requirement for additional public financing equivalent to around 27% of GDP in low-income countries and 7% in average-income countries. Education accounts for about a fifth of that requirement in low-income countries and a third in middle-income countries. The additional financial requirement is estimated at $ 1.4 trillion annually[1].

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 scrutinize government management at different stages of the budget cycle and at different levels. This is a central principle of accountability that must be promoted.

The 4S-framework is used to discuss the extent the law is consistent with the Education 2030 Incheon Framework for Action: the ***share*** of national budgets they spend on education; the ***size*** of their budgets; the ***sensitivity*** of their public spending on education, and the ***scrutiny*** of their education budgets[2].

The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action calls on states to:

- 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.

The assurance and progressiveness of public education financing is the main guarantee for access to educational opportunities and the most effective resource to fight against

[1] Shiroya, Naoko and Browne, Marcela. C20 report from Civil Society Organizations. 2019.
[2] The 4S scheme was jointly proposed by GCE-Action Aid and IE. See Perez Murcia, Luis Eduardo. Education Financing Laws. Promises and Shortfalls for Securing the Right to Education for All. Policy Briefing Series. GCE. March 2020, and: https://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/2016/03/29/financing-matters-a-toolkit-on-domestic-financing-for-education-global-campaign-for-education-education-international-and-actionaid-2016/

the growing privatization of education, which can take advantage of institutional gaps to enrich small sectors of the population at the cost of others.

Public financing is related to the economic and financial capacities of states, their gross production and their institutional strategies, which are fundamentally based on the collection of taxes, social investment and the control of public spending. Therefore, taxation is crucial to obtain the necessary resources for education, so it is essential that states adopt tax justice frameworks, where the burden falls on the richest sectors.

Tax reforms are then considered necessary to increase the size of the overall government budget as well as the share of the budget going to education.

GCE believes 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 year.

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%.

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 International Monetary Fund (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.

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 urgent action to alleviate or cancel debt are not 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" (Munevar's 2020:1).

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

Multilateral and bilateral aid

According to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was adopted in 2005 and reaffirmed in Accra in 2008, a new level of supranational economic governance above the World Bank and the regional development banks ensure developing countries the chance to access predictable international aid to education. This framework is also consistent with the commitments made by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries.

Despite these clear obligations, in 2017 UNESCO stated that aid to education was stagnating and not going to countries most in need since the global official development assistance (ODA) rose from US$145 billion in 2014 to US$152 billion in 2015, an increase of 5% in real terms. That increase is partly explained by the migration and refugee crisis in Europe, which peaked in 2015. However, the cumulative increase of ODA between 2010 and 2015 was 24%. However, even as overall aid increases, aid to education was reported as stagnating[3].

According to GPE, funding for education among country donors in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has declined significantly overall since its 2010 peak, from US$8.1 billion to US$7.6 billion, or 6% and most funding went to post-secondary education[4].

GCE recommends improving aid effectiveness through the Global Partnership for Education and the Education Cannot Wait fund in order to have better coordination and harmonization, especially in emergency settings, where the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was felt most dramatically and education has been disrupted by armed

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[3] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000249568
[4] https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/how-do-donors-support-global-education-findings-deep-dive-education-aid

conflicts, forced displacement, climate-change induced disasters and protracted crises. 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.

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. GCE supports the GPE replenishment process aiming to secure at least $5 billion and calls for donors to pledge as such. 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.

As a response to policy and political context in relation to education financing and COVID-19 the Global Campaign for Education have developed the One Billion Voices campaign which will launch on the 25th January 2021. The campaign has a Call to Action of policy recommendations which if we as citizens and education actors stand by, together, can help us achieve the urgent change that is needed.