

Learning Brief

National SDG4 Benchmarks: A Formative Tool for Progress towards 2030

February
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Image 1: 7th GCE World Assembly

This Learning Brief was compiled by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) following the webinar held to highlight how the National SDG4 Benchmark Mechanism can be used to set national targets and monitor commitments made at the Transforming Education Summit (TES) as an accountability mechanism. A key outcome of the Transforming Education Summit was to add three more indicators to the SDG4 monitoring framework with associated national benchmarks on greening education, digital transformation, and youth and student engagement in policy making. This Learning Brief provides GCE coalitions with an update on ongoing work defining these indicators. The brief highlights how the national SDG4 Benchmark Mechanism can also be used to set national targets and monitor commitments made at the Transforming Education Summit (TES), sitting at the heart of its accountability mechanism.

About the webinar

On the 23rd of February 2023, the GCE in partnership with the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, convened the ‘National SDG4 Benchmarks: A Formative Tool for Progress Towards 2030’ learning and sharing webinar which informed the development of this Learning Brief. The objective of the event was to present national SDG4 benchmarks to GCE coalition and affiliates and demonstrate how they are a key tool for measuring progress towards SDG4 and an invaluable new resource for education advocates operating at the national, regional and international spheres. Panellists were Mr. Manos Antoninis-The GEM Report-presented the national SDG4 benchmarks and demonstrated their linkage to the TES and monitoring of commitments made at the Summit, Ms. Nora Gonzalez-Agenda Ciudadana por la Educación (ACED)/Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE)-presented CLADE’s contributions and what needs to be done in advancing the findings of the UNESCO document: 2023 Report on the National Progress of SDG4, with a special focus on early childhood., Mr. Abideen Olasupo-Brain Builders' Development Youth Initiative (BBDYI)-discussed youth perspectives on how young people can hold duty bearers to account in line with their commitments towards the promotion of SDG4, and Mr. Kouame P. Junior-National Coalition of the Ivory Coast-shared the challenges and solutions being adopted in Ivory Coast in relation to flagship indicators on climate change, school feeding and connectivity.

Background

In 2015, the international community committed in the Education 2030 Framework for Action to establish “appropriate intermediate benchmarks” for SDG4 indicators, seeing them as “indispensable for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets”. Following the approval of the SDG monitoring indicators by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group and the UN General Assembly in 2017, the Technical Cooperation Group developed, in 2019, a proposal on seven SDG4 indicators that could be benchmarked. The Global Education Meeting in 2020 then requested that countries “accelerate the progress and propose relevant and realistic benchmarks”. A technical and political process was established to set benchmarks for these seven indicators: early childhood, basic education, teachers, equity, and financing.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report have been working with countries to set national SDG4 benchmarks for 2025 and 2030 on seven indicators based on their past trends and education sector plans. By mid-2022, over 90% of countries had directly or indirectly taken part in setting these benchmarks. The analysis has shown that even if countries reach these benchmarks by 2030, the world will still fall short of the ambition expressed in SDG4, before even accounting for the potential impact of COVID-19 on education systems. Yet, countries appear to be committing to accelerate progress beyond what they managed to achieve over from 2000 to 2015.

National SDG4 benchmark objectives

In his opening remarks Mr. Manos Antoninis, from the GEM Report, indicated that the Education 2030 Framework for Action (according to the tool) is being pursued and implemented within these following objectives:

- Mark contribution each country is making to global agenda.
- Bring climate change agenda approach to education.
- Make progress monitoring context-specific, as each country's starting points differ but be more ambitious than 'business as usual'.
- Link national, regional and global education agendas: coherence and common language.
- Focus attention on data gaps on key indicators that every education system needs for management purposes.
- Strengthen national planning: all plans should include targets.
- Help monitor global initiatives as part of SDG 4 processes=linchpin of global education cooperation mechanism.

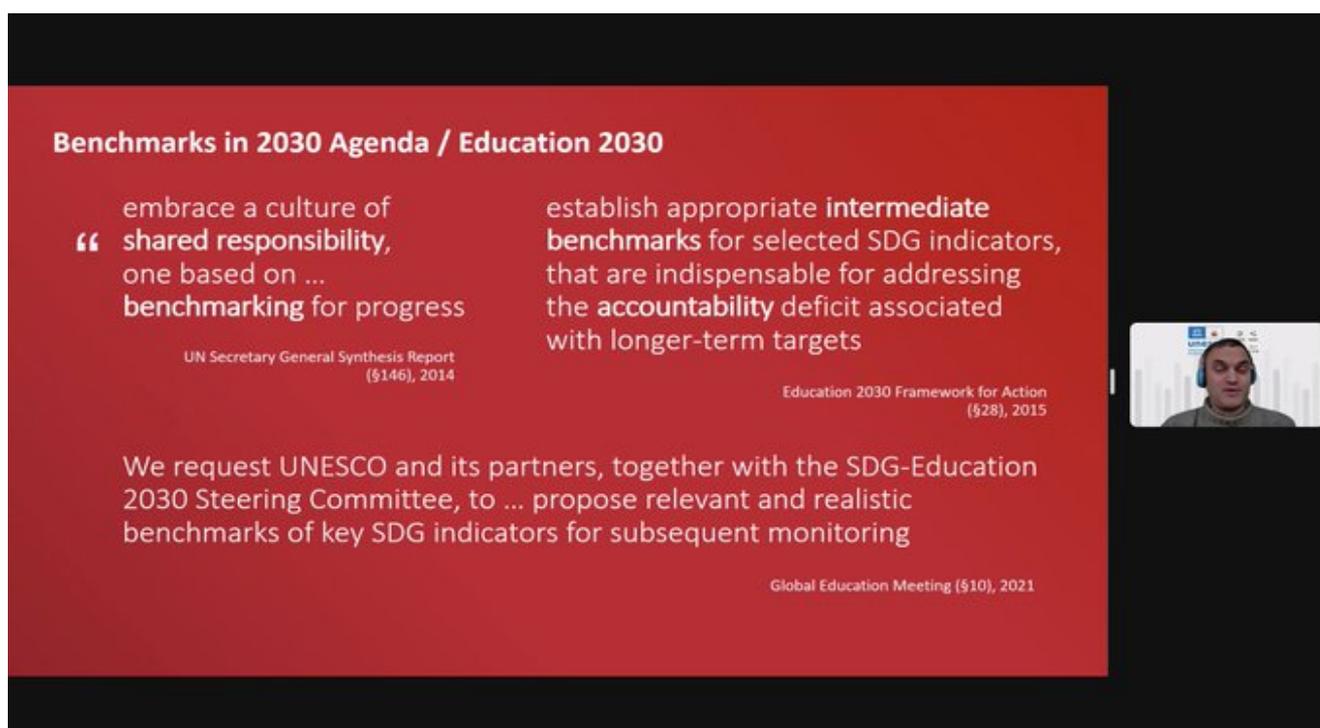


Figure 1: Benchmarks in 2030 Agenda/Education 2030.

Presentation of the National SDG4 benchmark Tool

National SDG4 Benchmarks: Turning Commitments into Action

This section features the experience of setting national SDG4 benchmarks. The process brings to education an approach that is consistent with the UN Secretary General's call on 'benchmarking for progress' and which resembles the process of nationally determined contributions, which has been used in the climate change sector. The presentation was made by Mr. Manos Antoninis, GEM Report Director.

The results of the national benchmark-setting process:

- The [SDG4Scorecard](#) on national [SDG4benchmarks](#) shows that 3 in 4 countries have submitted benchmarks, or national targets, to be achieved by 2025 and 2030 for at least some of seven SDG4 indicators: early childhood education attendance; out-of-school rates; completion rates;

gender gaps in completion rates; minimum proficiency rates in reading and mathematics; trained teachers; and public education expenditure.

- The GEM Report and UNESCOstat [SDG4Scorecard](#) shows how fast countries are progressing towards their national education.
- The 2023 [SDG4Scorecard](#) shows an acute lack of data on our education targets. Half of countries have no data on learning or the percentage of trained teachers in primary schools.
- In the case of the upper secondary completion rate, most countries have made slow rather than fast progress. Rwanda is the only low-income country to have achieved fast progress; most other low-income countries either have insufficient data or no national target. Most lower-middle-income countries are managing only change, although seven countries stand out for their fast progress: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan and Nepal.
- In the case of the pre-primary education participation rate, high-income countries are more likely to have achieved fast progress. By contrast, lower-middle income countries have achieved slower progress and are less likely to achieve their national target by 2025. Nevertheless, there are 14 low- and lower-middle-income countries that are on track to achieve their benchmarks: Burkina Faso; Burundi, Bhutan, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, India, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Vanuatu, and Vietnam.
- 1 in 3 countries – and 2 in 3 low-income countries do not meet either of the two minimum benchmarks on education finance. Among countries with data, 64% of low-income countries relative to 29% of middle- and high-income countries fell below both benchmarks. Data availability is a more important issue in poorer countries: 24% of low-income countries, 15% of middle-income and 6% of high-income countries report no data on public expenditure.

Assessment of links between policies and countries' progress towards their targets: the case of the pre-primary education participation rate

The purpose of the benchmarking exercise is not only to show progress, but help countries see the links of progress with specific policies. One indicator is being reviewed at a time. 3 policies are shown to be important for the pre-primary education participation rate:

a. Legislate: Offer free and compulsory pre-primary education: In 2020, 91 out of 188 countries guaranteed zero years of free and compulsory pre-primary education in their legislation. Yet, countries which guarantee at least one year of free education, have higher participation rates and higher benchmark values.

b. Regulate: Given the large share of private providers in pre-primary education, governments must regulate them to ensure quality and equity. While 97% of countries regulate approval, licensing and establishment of private pre-primary education providers, only 26% of countries support specific vulnerable populations' tuition fee payments and just 15% prohibit non-state providers from operating for profit. In countries where tuition fees for specific population groups are subsidized, the percentage of children who participate in organized learning one year before entry to primary school is higher by 13 percentage points, whereas countries with fee-setting regulations have a 7 percentage-point higher participation.

c. Finance: Spending on publicly provided pre-primary education increases enrolment. Among the 80 countries with data in 2018–20, 0.43% of GDP was spent on pre-primary education. Four countries

spent above 1% of GDP: Belarus, Ecuador, the Republic of Moldova and Sweden. Doubling spending from 0.25 to 0.50 of GDP, triples participation rates from 20% to 60% on average.

Insights from Education Advocates and Flagship Indicators on Climate Change, School feeding and Connectivity

This section provides first-hand insights into how advocates can utilize the benchmarks-related analysis and online monitoring tools to further their national, regional and international advocacy objectives. Panellists also shared experiences and insights into the prospect of developing new benchmarks on climate change education, school feeding and connectivity and what opportunities this would present efforts to fulfil commitments made in 2015 as part of the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

Ms. Nora Gonzalez-Agenda Ciudadana por la Educación (ACED), Costa Rica/Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación Education (CLADE), Latin America

The Latin American Campaign for Education (CLADE) presented its contributions regarding the UNESCO document: 2023 Report on the National Progress of SDG4 (2023 SDG4 Scorecard Report on Progress towards National Benchmarks), focused on early childhood.

For Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), it was proposed that:

- a. On the financing of education measurement data: Although UNESCO defined as a goal for the financing of education an investment per State of 6% of the GDP and not less than 20% of the National Budget for Education, this organism must advance in a new proposal for the countries of the region based on prospective data of the socio-economic situation of each one. The amount should be defined in these items in each country starting from the minimum base of 6% of the GDP and 20% of the National Budget.
- b. There is urgent need for UNESCO leadership in the economic reactivation of the region. Latin America and the Caribbean's political and economic vulnerability requires UNESCO leadership to put education at the centre of economic priorities, otherwise, work will continue to maintain structural inequalities. The agenda for LAC must contain two priorities: i) adaptation of national budgets and agendas to education as a priority and ii) the elimination of tax evasion and avoidance, progressive taxation of large fortunes and transnational corporations operating in the region (CLADE, 2022).
- c. National budgets must contain variables and indicators for measuring results that allow evaluating the degree of fulfilment of goals in the medium and long term. Measure the investment in vulnerable populations such as women, minors, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples and many others, so that effective state strategies can be promoted to create conditions of access to education throughout life if they respond to the needs and interests of the entire population and of society as a whole.
- d. The poverty index of the child and adolescent population in LAC is 45%. Today, priority must be invested in early childhood, preschool and secondary education so that in a period of approximately 50 years, the conditions that allow a generational structural change in access are consolidated and the physical and legal conditions that give legal security to over the years. This would significantly eliminate access barriers for reasons of negative and

multivariate discrimination that prevail today in the region. One consequence of this is the strengthening of the dignity of almost 80% of the people in LAC, in addition to strengthening a continent that would offer better living conditions, a better distribution of wealth and knowledge, contributing to regional and global development. This means that this underage population will be guaranteed primary, secondary, technical and university education. If this is not the case, their conditions of exclusion and poverty that would reach their immediate descendants would be postponed.

About the lack of data on educational goals

- a. The national statistics and census institutes must have scientific autonomy and political autonomy. One of the challenges of the region is to achieve the autonomy of the public entities that collect information to generate statistical data of the region, contributing to those requested by international organizations to measure the fulfilment of the goals, but also contributing to the measurement of the effective exercise of the right.
- b. The SDG4 indicators for LAC must include outcome indicators that make it possible to account for and measure the true impact and commitment of the States in meeting the goals. The summit on the transformation of the United Nations Education (2022), shows that the SDG4 indicators are mobile and contextual, while, 8 years after the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, green education, and digital transformation are included in this objective and the participation of young people. For example, the most affected populations in access to education according to ECLAC (2022) are early childhood, disability and within them women, so that the indicators of compliance with the goal must measure the number of programs, territorial and population distribution and the budget of the programs that are promoted so that they can measure the achievements in relation to the initial situation of intervention.
- c. Regarding the encouragement of countries to establish more objectives and their links with politics (UNESCO, 2022, p.33), LAC notes that the indicators of results by goals should measure a minimum and maximum threshold of compliance with the same, which in turn includes political measurement variables such as the participation of civil society, parents and students in decision-making and in the development of education policy; concrete and effective regulation of private educational centres; programs, coverage and quality of public education in content and infrastructure to name a few. In short, the SDG4 indicators should be increased (as the report suggests) with new ones that measure the structural problems of LAC and that their assessment allows the examination of the minimum and maximum aspiration of democracy, the realization of the right and a dignified life. For this, it is reiterated, measurements must be made of structural variables of a public, state, free, secular, inclusive diverse, critical, democratic and dialogic, intersectional, decolonial, transformative, political and citizen education, emancipatory, updated, anti-discriminatory, guarantor of rights and intercultural (CLADE, 2022).
- d. Structural variables will not allow an Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) report to indicate that goals 4.3 (equal access to quality professional technical and higher education training), 4.5 (elimination of gender disparities and ensuring equal access to all levels of education, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and vulnerable children)

and 4b (scholarships in universities and technical programs) are being addressed (ECLAC, 2022, p. 48). These data are contradictory to one of the results of the Monitoring for SDG4 report that motivates this document, in as much as the latter indicates that the completion rate of the upper secondary cycle and the participation rate in pre-school education in most of the low-income countries is slow, that there is a lack of data in these countries and that they do not have a national target.

- e. Structural variables that allow a prospective analysis of the fulfilment of the goals according to the "speed of progress of each country" as indicated in the UNESCO analysis report.

Insights on the attainment of national SDG4 benchmarks and accountability mechanisms in Nigeria

Mr. Abideen Olasupo from Brain Builders' Development Youth Initiative (BBDYI) in Nigeria presented his contributions towards the promotion and protection of the human right to education.

Below are their views towards the attainment of national SDG4 benchmarks and accountability mechanisms:

1. **Accountability:** The SDGs are a global commitment to address pressing economic, social, and environmental issues. Regularly tracking progress towards the SDGs helps hold governments, policymakers, and other stakeholders accountable for their commitments to achieving the goals. These accountability processes must be data driven and evidence-based towards the promotion and protection of the right to education. Students and the youth must know where they are where they are going in relation to investment in lifelong learning.
2. **Transparency:** Public reporting of progress towards the SDGs provides transparency and enables citizens to monitor their government's actions and hold them accountable. National targets should be translated into local languages so that everyone has access to information. Youth and student organizations in partnership with other stakeholders should come together and produce materials which speaks to the day to day struggles of local people and the benchmarks. Localization of benchmarks is very important in ensuring that that no-one is left behind and that the voice of the marginalized is heard. EdTech can be used to demystify the right to education. A SDG4 tracker can be developed so as to monitor and evaluate the progress made towards attaining Agenda 2030. It is unfortunate that most young people do not know the SDG4 and its indicators, hence it is important to step-up advocacy initiatives.
3. **Learning and best practices:** Tracking progress towards SDG4 provides an opportunity for countries to share their experiences and best practices in implementing strategies to achieve the goals. This can facilitate learning and collaboration between countries, leading to more effective solutions and faster progress towards SDG4.
4. **Resource allocation:** Comparable and public information on progress towards SDG4 can help allocate resources more effectively, both within countries and between countries. This can help prioritize investments in areas where progress is lagging, and ensure that resources are being used efficiently and effectively. Youths and students should approach duty bearers and ask them how they intend to fund education and attain SD4 indicators.

5. Long-term planning: SDG4 requires a long-term, multi-sectoral approach, and public information on progress can help countries assess their progress and plan for the long-term. This can help ensure that progress towards SDG4 is sustained and that gains made are not reversed.

Insights on the attainment of national SDG4 benchmarks and accountability mechanisms in Ivory Coast

Mr. Kouame P. Junior from the National Coalition of the Ivory Coast shared his insights on how the National Coalition of the Ivory Coast made its submissions during the webinar and it was highlighted that:

Aspects such as statistical data are on track due to the existence of a mechanism for regular data collection, there is access to education at all levels due to the notable evolution at the level of the primary cycle, there is significant funding allocated to the education/training sector, and in terms of gender equality, there is perfect parity at pre-school and primary level. In Ivory Coast, the government and other stakeholders are mostly focused on promoting access to education (Target 4.1 and 4.6, inclusion, (Target 4.3), and quality education (Target 4.1)

However, it was acknowledged that there is considerable effort required in learning due to very low results at the level of primary school students, literacy because there is still a large segment of illiterates within the Ivorian population, inclusion in light of the lack of no real policy (s) to take into account children with disabilities and finally, improved governance in light of the inefficient management of human and financial resources to promote education in Ivory costs. Just like in most African countries, Ivory Coast is not adequately syphoning sufficient resources to promote education as a human right.

The challenges Ivory Coast is facing in its education sector are further compounded by flooding of schools following rains, loss of roofs and fences of some schools due to high winds, school dropouts linked to the economic situation of the parents (poverty), the lack of Internet coverage not accessible to all, and a low number of teachers trained/competent in the use of digital technology in teaching. In light of these problems, it is evident that more needs to be done in the Ivory Coast to promote and protect education as a human right.

To counter these setbacks, through political dialogue for advocacy, the Coalition convenes:

- Monthly LEG meetings.
- Meetings with sector Ministries.
- Joint sector reviews.
- Global Action Weeks for Education (GAWE).
- Pan-African Education Policy Forums.

Lessons and recommendations from the open discussions

- When making global comparisons on the attainment of national targets, it is important to contextualise the benchmarks as this differs from one country to the other.
- There had been some progress in Persons with Disabilities (PWD) tracking, but there is a need for more global coverage and assessments to achieve equity.
- When trying to communicate benchmarks, it is important to adequately package the messaging so that we obtain the impact that we anticipate. SDG4 benchmarks messaging can be localised through translation of communication materials to ensure that all citizens are involved and have a voice in the processes.
- Let us get the process working, invite other partners and step-up our advocacy initiatives for countries to set targets, although we acknowledge that it is not easy.
- When it comes to localisation of targets, countries should use mechanisms that are already there and connect the local, regional and international processes.
- Partners can also develop plans which will facilitate submission of national targets and report progress to organise advocacy campaigns and joint actions towards the achievement of national benchmarks.

Resources

The webinar recording can be accessed: [here](#).

Publications

1. Setting Commitments - National SDG 4 benchmarks to transform education Report (September 2022) is available: [here](#).

Which includes:

- Analysis of where countries plan should be by 2025 and 2030;
 - Methodology for progress monitoring;
 - 12 country case studies;
 - Annex with benchmark submission status by country; and
 - Annex with benchmark values by country and indicator.
2. **SDG4 Scorecard** (i.e. first benchmark progress report) (January 2023) (expected to be published annually on International Day for Education):
 - Report is available: [here](#).

Factsheet:

- English version is available: [here](#).
- French version is available: [here](#).
- Spanish version is available: [here](#).

3. **Online Tool: Global Education Observatory**

- SDG4 Benchmarks: 2025 and 2030 target values by country and indicator can be accessed: [here](#).
- SDG4 Scorecard: progress towards national benchmarks can be accessed: [here](#).