

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Youth, Students, and their organisations

1. Background

Young people between 15 and 24 years old, are 1.2 billion strong and hence constitute 17% of the world population. Bearing in mind that many youths are still in education or have recently finished their education, their participation on the local, national, regional, and global levels and their ownership over education, as legitimate stakeholders, are vital to building sustainable democratic, people-owned decision-making processes in all areas.

Since our constitution amendment in 2015, youth-led and students' organisations became GCE members with full rights, reserving their representatives two seats in the Board representing their own constituency.

GCE member organisations have also been encouraged to include meaningful engagement of adolescents and young people progressively and structurally in their organisational decision-making processes including through representation on governance bodies. Member organisations are equally encouraged to facilitate children and young people to meaningfully engage in the planning, implementation and monitoring of their work according to their interests, needs and age.

The latest policy and constitutional norms and by-laws on youth engagement are based on the principles stated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other normative frameworks, which asserts that children and young people have the right to freely express their views and that there is an obligation to listen to children's views and to facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them within all social and institutional settings. According to this basic principle, GCE must increasingly work with children and youth and not just for them, recognizing that children and young people are active right holders as well as the main actors in the education processes.

Based on its Policy Statement (principle 3.1) and Constitution (articles 6 and 9) GCE has the mandate to create the opportunities for students and youth-led organisations to apply for membership and consequently for youth representatives to actively engage in decision making processes and governance structures. This not only has intrinsic value and legitimacy but will also benefit the GCE by learning from the unique perspective that they can bring to our work.

Integrating young people in the education movement's decision-making processes will generate new agendas and issues for the movement to take on. The process will foster young people's sense of having legitimate voices as well as enhancing their accountability, responsibility, and

conscientiousness. Such engagement fosters the development of local, national, and global citizenship, providing young people with the opportunity to better understand critical issues in advancing equitable access to education.

Through their meaningful participation, young people experience increased levels of ownership over decisions taken and projects implemented. The quality of education policy decisions will always benefit from the novel and unique perspectives youth can provide based on their own experiences and analyses.

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

Given the urgent need for transforming education to meet the needs of today's and future generations, the global movement for education needs a revival to re-engage citizens and harness new global dynamics and opportunities in close collaboration with grassroots youth movements and democratically elected student representatives of the student movement.

We made progress in strengthening and incorporating youth voices in our global advocacy structures and enabling youth-led policy dialogues. Youth and students were particularly active in GCE's Covid-19 recovery efforts. GCE supported fifteen youth-led country-level projects for youth and student-led COVID-19 recovery response strategies that involved participatory research, capacity strengthening, policy influencing, lobbying, and youth activism. The project results have then informed GCE's Global Report on the "State of Youth and Student Organising During a Time of Global Crisis".

Following these initiatives, the Global Student and Youth Caucus in Tanzania in March 2022 represented a tipping point for GCE's youth movement, consolidating the youth and student representative structures and paving the way for deeper involvement in the GCE. How to sustainably fund this engagement and make young peoples' and students voices heard even more effectively at all levels, tapping into existing youth movements and activism, needs to be on our radar for this new strategy cycle

The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027) effectively integrates youth and students in policy development and advocacy action at all levels.

3. Critical challenges

Youth and students are the experts of their own contexts, challenges and solutions to these challenges facing them and their futures. In this spirit, GCE has co-creatively documented the youth and students' engagement strategy, by centering the expertise and experiences of youth and students. During the 2022 Global Student & Youth Caucus, activists and representatives gathered to document the national, regional, and global contextual realities. Group discussions used PESTLE (Political, Environmental, Social, Technological, Legal & Economic) analysis as a tool to reflect, document and analyse contexts. The analysis revealed key themes which are unpacked and depicted in this strategy.

As GCE grows and strengthens its youth and student engagement, an imperative is the creation of spaces and platforms for youth and students to also build bridges of solidarity and capacity across the membership, especially in a ‘post-pandemic’ era. Having heard the resounding call of youth and student activists across the movement to centre decolonisation, feminism, and intergenerational solidarity, the GCE is ready to take up the challenge.

GCE led research and youth and student led action have demonstrated that youth and student organisers are innovators and creative-thinkers, unafraid of breaking the mould and challenging the status quo – regardless of limited resources, new challenges, and punitive responses from state and non-state actors. When given the space to influence policy, young people demand accountability and improvements to policies and programmes that fail them. Accountability for and improving corruption, policing, and censorship towards significantly reconfiguring power relationships in activist spaces.

Ensuring meaningful youth engagement at all levels of the movement is an ambitious task and the process must be seen as the primary goal. Youth and students should not be included as neutral participants but must be a driving force engaging in the general work and structures as equal partners of the movement to truly learn from their perspectives.

Given the contextual analysis and the lived realities of youth and student networks globally, the situation is clearly urgent, and it is up to youth and students to begin setting out an agenda and solutions to the challenges they face every day.

4. Way forward

The youth and students from across the GCE movement, in intergenerational partnership with coalitions and the GCE Secretariat, are now ready to take up the challenge to drive this momentum forward by ensuring youth and student voices, perspectives, leadership and participation are structurally and systemically driving the work of our movement. Young people and students have identified this agenda through which the strategy will be implemented according to the following objectives:

- **Maintain Youth and Student Supporting Structures:** Develop democratic representative and supporting structures to ensure representation from the grassroots level to the board level.
- **Foster Youth and Students’ Cross-Collaboration and Engagement:** Ensure well-coordinated and connected engagement across all levels of the GCE movement & beyond.
- **Create Space for youth and student-led strategic actions (advocacy, campaigns, and research):** Ensuring space for shared collaborative youth and student-led strategic actions which set the agenda for broader movement building.
- **Procure Sustainable Funding:** Ensure sustainable funding for the GCE youth and student constituency and ensure active participation in decision making around how funds are mobilised and utilised towards achieving GCE youth and student-led activities.

Under the above mechanisms and approaches, the key operational priorities for youth and student's engagement under the 2023-2027 GCE Strategy will include:

1. Youth constituency coordination and membership: Mapping, youth structures, coalitions' consultation on youth and student engagement.
2. Youth and student-led advocacy and policy engagement: Identification and coordination of opportunities and processes youth engagement in policy spaces.
3. Youth visibility, representation, and policy engagements: Participation in advocacy spaces and policy processes, youth-led campaigns, youth-led advocacy actions.
4. Capacity building: Identify capacity needs and respond to the capacity needs relating to youth and student engagement.

The key challenge now is how to transform these commitments into conscientious changes in our ways of working and engaging with young people. Now, more than ever, it is vital to transform intention into action. The GCE is committed to globally mobilising and spearheading this change through advocacy and the dissemination of the action agenda – spurred by the voices of youth and students across the world.