

Envisioning a world with access to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all

74th Session of the UN General Assembly

17-30 September 2019, New York, USA



The theme for the UN General Assembly was – *Make the coming decade one of action and delivery* – a theme that linked all the summits and events organised during the UNGA.

Make the coming decade one of action and delivery - this theme linked all the summits and events organised during the high-level week of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly. In the [Political declaration](#) of the SDG summit, Heads of State and Government - “resolve to realise our vision of a world with access to inclusive and equitable quality education” and to “promote and support quality education and lifelong learning to ensure that all children, youth and adults are empowered with the relevant knowledge and skills to shape more resilient inclusive and sustainable societies that are able to adapt to rapid technological change.” The Declaration also places emphasis on investing in data and statistics for the SDGs, mobilising

adequate and well-directed financing, and enhancing national implementation and global partnership.

In his opening statement, the President of the 74th session of the General Assembly, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, affirmed that, “we must ensure Member States can partner on teacher training, ensure access to free and primary and secondary education, and devise means to attend to the educational needs of all.” He recalled that quality education is one of the priorities of his tenure, together with eradicating poverty and zero hunger.

Highlights on the education front, in which the Assistant Director-General for Education was involved, include – (1) [Launch of UNESCO’s Education Futures initiative](#) to reimagine how knowledge and learning can contribute to the common good of humanity during a high level event at UNGA on 25 September. (2) [Education for Sustainable Development: Learning for climate action](#) brought together young leaders. The event, supported by the Government of Japan, showcased UNESCO’s work to make education a visible part of the international response to climate change, including through the development of teaching and learning materials, sharing of best practices and whole school approaches in 25 countries.



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Multilateral coordination

UNESCO convened the second meeting of Multilateral Education Partners, with agreement to support the creation of a Global Coalition for Education Data proposed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. This will encourage a coordinated approach to improve the SDG4 data challenge, by aligning investments in priority areas and taking action to improve education measurements on access,

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completion, and the coverage of learning outcome data in low-income countries, with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa.

Financing

Education Cannot Wait: US\$205 million in [pledges were made to Education Cannot Wait](#) (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies. Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the private sector (LEGO Foundation and ProFuturo) announced contributions. Since its inception in 2016, Education Cannot Wait, which invests across the humanitarian-

development nexus, has invested in 32 countries, reaching more than 1.5 million children and youth – half of them girls. UNESCO runs several projects supported by ECW on Education Management Information Systems, crisis sensitive educational planning, and psycho-social support programmes.

International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd): US\$600 million were pledged for this new Facility, which is expected to mobilise an additional \$2 billion in financing for education through the multilateral development banks. The UK and Netherlands were the first contributors. Read [more](#).

Global Education Forum

Bringing together development partners (Canada, Germany, EU, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UAE, UK, USA) and multilaterals (GPE, World Bank, UNHCR), the first Global Education Forum convened with the aim of mobilising additional finance to meet the scale and scope of the SDG 4 agenda.

Assistant Director-General, Stefania Giannini, stressed the need for stronger global and national advocacy to increase pressure on governments, showcase solutions, and mobilise financing. She affirmed that the success of the initiative rides on working together, building on existing ground, stressing the role of the Steering Committee.



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Several participants underlined the importance of prioritisation and cautioned that the Forum should not be a new mechanism. This echoes concerns raised by the Coordination Group of the UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CC NGO Ed2030), which expressed fears at how this formation can compete with the mandate of the Education 2030 Steering Committee – as outlined in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, endorsed by 184 UNESCO Member states. It is unclear who gets invited and with which criteria, or how CSOs can participate. Wrapping up, co-Chair, Tharman Shanmugatnam, said the Forum should apply

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Some concerns were raised on the formation of the Global Education Forum, as it may duplicate or compete with the mandate of the Education 2030 Steering Committee.

strategic pressure where it can count most. Immediate work could focus on pooled funding research, better information exchange on effective policies and practices, and helping countries to better mobilise resources. The second meeting will likely be scheduled in the margins of the Spring meetings of the World Bank.

The Forum is co-chaired by UNESCO, Tharman Shanmugatnam (Senior Minister, former Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore), Graça Machel (former minister of Education of Mozambique), and Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown.

Steering Committee member, Education Above All (EAA), brought together partners to discuss innovative financing to address ‘intractable’ SDG 4 problems. The event highlighted EAA’s use of innovative and blended financing, a joint partnership with Djibouti and the World Bank, and the priority placed on leaving no one behind by the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development and the Qatar Fund for Development. ADG Stefania Giannini underscored the importance of designing new models for public investment that can help governments make the case for education, the importance of accurate and regular data, accountability mechanisms, and partnerships across sectors.

Learning Poverty

Ending Learning Poverty: Steering Committee member, Jaime Saavedra of the World Bank, summarised the concept of learning poverty with a headline figure - more than half of all children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a short story by age 10. This high rate of learning poverty is an early warning that all the SDG 4 education targets are in jeopardy. UNESCO participated in this event alongside UNICEF to highlight the importance of investing in teachers, in data, and in environments that are violence-free and conducive to learning.

Higher Education: Recognition of Qualifications

Providing a pathway to education and jobs, UNESCO launched its [Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants](#) at an event hosted by the International Institute for Education on the sidelines of UN General Assembly. The Passport, which is modeled on the tested methodology of the European Qualifications Passport, is being piloted in Zambia, a country that has provided safe haven to 82,000 refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Angola; Rwanda and Somalia. The project is supported by Norway, in partnership with UNHCR. Aksel Jakobsen, State Secretary for



The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) participated in the UNGA events and expressed concern on the direction the global discourses on education financing is taking, particularly about the consequences on the reliance on loans to finance public education.

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GCE called for a greater emphasis on sustainable domestic resource mobilisation – on the need to step up efforts to support countries in expanding their tax bases in a progressive way, increase the share of budgets going to education, and for the international community to fight tax evasion.

workforce – school and district leaders, specialists, learning assistants, community experts, entrepreneurs, health and welfare professionals, parents, volunteers, and many others – to work together to help all children succeed.

Voices of Civil Society

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE), participating in the UN General Assembly events, expressed their concerns on the trajectory the global discourses on education financing are taking. In a statement [‘Debt instead of Aid?’](#), released to coincide with the launch of the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd), GCE raised concerns about the consequences on the reliance on loans to finance public education. *“Even low interest multilateral debt can contribute to debt crisis as a result of exchange rate shocks – because debts are owed in foreign currencies, so when exchange rates depreciate, the relative size of the debt increases.”* They further observed that there is *“a rising debt crisis which represents one of the major threats to domestic financing for education; for example, last year, Ghana spent 42% of its budget in debt-servicing.”*

GCE also asserted that banks should not be driving education policy reform and are concerned about how IFFEd could further empower the World Bank and other Multilateral Development Banks in their championing *“education marketisation and public-private partnerships, despite the evidence that these often undermine equity and inclusion.”* GCE called for a greater emphasis on sustainable domestic resource mobilisation – on the need to step up efforts to support countries in expanding their tax bases

International Development of Norway, participated in the event, together with representatives from UNHCR, the World Bank, Education Cannot Wait, and Dubai Cares.

Teachers and Teaching

“It takes a team to educate a Child” - this is one of the headline messages of the Education Commission’s report on [Transforming the Education Workforce](#) launched on the side-lines of UNGA. Teachers need leadership and support to be effective and to reach the most vulnerable. This report envisions learning teams that tap the potential of the broader education



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CSEP (Timor-Leste) held two events which helped build capacities of CSEP members on the education sector planning (ESP) process and defined the strategic plan of the coalition for the next three years.

targets which are distracting developing countries from focusing on this crucial issue: the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a simple story."

in a progressive way, increase the share of budgets going to education and for the international community to fight capital flight and tax evasion. *"Predictable financing for public education systems will come from governments committing their own resources and being held accountable by their own citizens."*

David Archer, Head of Participation and Public Services, ActionAid International, and former member of the Board of the GCE, challenged the World Bank in analysing its assertions in its new publication on Ending Learning Poverty. The World Bank claims that, *"...the Sustainable Development Goal on education is too ambitious, involving a set of unachievable*

Archer contends, *"There were good reasons for agreeing to a broad global goal to ensure inclusive education of equitable quality and lifelong learning opportunities for all. With over [64 million children](#) still not enrolled at primary level, many countries still need to consider access and not just quality."*

Further, he argued that, *"There are many potential unintended consequences in focusing on ["halving learning poverty by 2030"](#) and prioritising investment in measurement. To achieve this narrow goal, countries may focus on the children who are easier to reach — from better-off backgrounds — thus further exacerbating inequality. Countries may also focus so much on measuring learning that they fail to invest in some of the obvious steps such as investing in more trained teachers, which would actually improve learning."*



The education sector planning process is important for the coalition to engage to ensure that the government's national education plan is aligned with SDG 4.

Archer argued that, *"Rather than scaling down the globally agreed education goals, the World Bank should get serious about scaling up investments in public education systems, supporting links with global and national [tax reforms](#), and removing the financial constraints that block countries from achieving the full SDG 4 agenda."*

This write-up is based on an article appearing in the SDG 4-ED 2030 COORDINATION NEWS newsletter; on the GCE statement, [Debt instead of Aid?](#), and David Archer's article, [The World Bank Shouldn't be Setting Global Goals for Education](#) in Devex, 25 October 2019.