

EFA SC Meeting

Paris, 9 and 10 October

Report by the GCE (Camilla Croso)

Introduction

This meeting focused essentially on recalling progress made so far in developing education targets, on debating indicators for the education targets, the Post 2015 Education Agenda and Framework for Action to be adopted in the Republic of Korea and the preparations for the 2015 World Education Forum (WEF) in May 2015. In January, the EFA SC will meet again and will then return to proposed text amendments for the SDG targets and Muscat-agreed targets, once the Secretary General issues his Synthesis Report in November 2014.

UNESCO and the EFA SC Chair opened the meeting underlining the importance of the Education for All Steering Committee's work in the setting of the post 2015 education agenda, both ahead of the WEF as well as in regards to the setting up of the post 2015 development agenda. The importance of having presented the EFA Joint Proposal in NY to the OWG was recalled, given that the latter has taken up many of the targets put forward in the Muscat Agreement, and the fact that the EFA SC represents the education global community, with member states, UN agencies, CSOs, private sector, representatives from Oman and the Republic of Korea.

The 2014 United Nations General Assembly

In regards to the last United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2014, it was reported that there was adoption of the Report of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) released on 10 September 2014 and that countries welcomed intergovernmental negotiations starting in January 2015. The Secretary General will issue a Synthesis Report in November which will set the tone for the intergovernmental negotiations. There are two major trends at the moment: one that wishes to reduce the number of goals and targets, and another which does not want to reopen a debate and a consensus reached with great difficulty. The G77+ China leads on the latter position. There is a strong recommendation for Member States not to cherry pick goals and targets and that they adopt and respond to the full agenda. It is worth noting that an inter-agency committee on indicator development for the SDGs will be established by the UN to begin its work in early 2015. A key message coming from the UNGA is that we should NOT lower our ambitions, and not just go for measurability.

As regards to next steps, it was highlighted that the EFA SC must be proactive, working with Member States, partners and civil society, claiming a role in the final definition of goals, targets and indicators not only in regards to the EFA process culminating in the World Education Forum but also the NY process culminating in the adoption of SDGs.

Considerations on the current text of proposed education targets

In relation to changes that need to be made to the SDG text:

- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): explicit reference to one year of free and compulsory preprimary education as it stands in the EFA SC proposal should be incorporated in the SDG text. Furthermore, the SDG text must retain the notion of ECCE (recognizing it as the first stage of education, as an integral part of the right to education, as was framed in the UNESCO ECCE conference in Russia in 2010), which is currently not the case.
- The notion of “affordable” education in reference to higher education in the SDG text is unclear and must be removed.
- In the Means of Implementation section (4c) teachers are only superficially mentioned. This is a core change needed in the SDG text, which not only must be improved but ideally, the reference to teachers must be recognized as a target, not a means of implementation.
- A financing target is needed altogether.

In relation to changes that need to be made to the EFA SC text:

- Currently, the EFA SC targets make reference to “X’ and “Y”s, being still open ended in terms of % targets aim to reach. The EFA SC recommended deleting such references and instead taking on a perspective of “ALL” (in other words, 100%) in the targets. Other mechanisms to draw national nuances will then be put in place.
- The OWG Means of Implementation (4a) speaks on educational facilities which are gender and child sensitive, providing safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments. Reference to these dimensions must be made in the new Framework for Action being developed for approval in the Republic of Korea.

During the debate important points were made, among which we underline: (a) GRULAC recalled that UNESCO must be the leading agency in the implementation of the post 2015 education agenda. While NY looks at the development agenda, the EFA SC is discussing the global education agenda, from a broader and deeper perspective, which should be the reference point to the education community. As education is a priority, the education agenda must be holistic and we must not accommodate ourselves into a reduced version if that is what is finally approved in NY. We must, nevertheless, incorporate any good dimensions of the NY agenda into our global education agenda; (b) In a similar direction, the E9 recommended that we spoke of HARMINAZATION and not alignment of targets with the NY SDG process, assuming the agenda the EFA SC is putting forward is broader; (c) EI underlined the importance of being ambitious and sending this message clearly to NY, refraining from lowering the bar; (d) ASPABE underlined that the regional EFA meeting in Asia pointed to a more ambitious goal in adult education, with 100% adult literacy being put forward as a goal, and also in terms of financing targets, embracing 6% GDP and 20% Public Expenditure; (e) GCE recalled that in the Framework for Action we should ensure the issue of education in contexts of conflict be addressed, as it is not present in any of the targets; (f) GPE recalled that universal targets are helpful and that in the framework for Action, we should define stepping stone targets; (g) UNESCO finalized by saying that the Muscat agreement must be used as a reference document. The expectation is that the outcomes of World Education Forum be an integral part of the development agenda.

Work on indicators

The definition of indicators is now a major challenge in the upcoming months ahead of the World Education Forum. The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) presented its work on indicators so far carried out. The EFA SC recalled that the exercise of drawing up indicators is political and not technical, and that final decision making should lay on the SC and not the TAG. Overall, it was felt that the TAG's proposal on indicators does NOT reflect the broadness of the education targets presented, and that if we are not careful, we run the risk that reductionist indicators will diminish the scope of the targets themselves. It was reminded that there are international standards Member States must abide to, based on legally binding Conventions that have already been signed (for example, the dimension of free education must be among the indicators). It was pointed out that in the current TAG proposal, there is a lack of attention to equity and a narrow understanding of quality as read, write and count, which contradicts the spirit of the targets. Furthermore, it was noted that the TAG's current proposal has an overemphasis on outcome targets, and that a much more balanced approach that takes into account inputs and process must be put in place. In fact, there are currently NO process indicators. It was also pointed out that the TAG should place greater emphasis on national and regional indicator development experience, which are more aligned to national priorities. It was also noted that as the expectation is that the post 2015 education agenda will be embraced by the post 2015 development agenda, inter sectorial indicators should be developed.

Some follow up includes:

- The CCNGO coordination group will send in a written contribution to the indicator document the TAG prepared;
- Brazil will join the TAG;
- Education International will be holding a meeting on indicators and will share recommendations.
- Other initiatives on indicator development will be shared with the TAG, such as those that come from a human rights perspective, taking the 4As as a starting point and looking at indicators of structure, process and outcomes.
- The EFA SC will send a letter to Ban Ki Moon and leaders of the new negotiation phase in NY, to reiterate the importance that UNESCO, in dialogue with the other EFA convening agencies, continue its coordination role in the implementation of the post 2015 education agenda and also to share the work done on indicator development (once the above mentioned restrictions have been tackled).

Benchmarking

The TAG also presented different proposals regarding grouping countries that have similar contexts or educational scenarios, in order to acknowledge the fact that when monitoring initiatives, it must take into account the fact that different countries have different starting points. And that harsh contexts, such as conflict, must also be taken into account when monitoring progress, so that it be a fair, productive and engaging exercise, helpful for furthering the implementation of the targets being set. This proposal was overall well received, but more work needs to be done in order to define under which criteria countries could be grouped.

Framework for Action (FA)

It was underlined that the Framework for Action should include (a) an introduction; (b) the principles we stand on (c) our vision (d) the global goal and targets with a short narrative (e) Governance, Financing, Civil Society Participation, Monitoring and Accountability (f) National level: considerations suggestion on clustering and benchmarking according to national context.

Other recommendations included:

- In what refers to governance, the Framework for Action must mention that UNESCO must keep up its coordinating role, alongside with other EFA co-conveners, in the post 2015 era;
- The governance architecture must take as a starting point the current structure and improve from it (retain EFA SC, CCNGO, etc.);
- A reference to the GPE must be made, which must deliver on the approved agenda coming out of the WEF.
- A reference to GMR must be made: the latter was already recognized in the Muscat Agreement and in the CCNGO statement, but needs to be further confirmed in regional conferences, in the framework for action and in the global SDG process. In this regards, it was underlined that editorial independence and sustainable funding is crucial. It was pointed out that the GPE could finance the GMR. Lastly, it was said that the GMR does more than just monitoring. It does opinion pieces, blogs and other forms of communication. The new Framework for Action must acknowledge its role in this broader sense.
- A clear reference to civil society must be made and the CCNGO will contribute with text that relates to participation in policy dialogue and policy making.

In terms of process, other recommendations included:

- The FA should be a concise document, but we should not pre determine the size at this point.
- A process to develop Framework for Action and indicators must be put forward that is transparent, and that may involve all stakeholders, so there is ownership.

World Education Forum (WEF)

The objectives and agenda of the WEF were presented and overall well received. We should aim to have high level people at the opening, such as the President of the Republic of Korea, Irina Bokova and Ban Ki Moon. The WEF will be preceded by a one and a half day Civil Society conference, which will be convened by UNESCO and have CCNGO coordination group fully involved in its preparation.

Important points and recommendations to note:

- The Framework for Action will be circulated previously so there is increased ownership ahead of the WEF.
- The EFA SC should be the starting point of the drafting group in WEF, and invite other Member States to join.