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Equitable Quality Education: a Precondition for Sustainable Development

Education International¹ (EI) views education as a fundamental human right and a public good, and strongly endorses a rights-based approach to education. Therefore, equitable participation in quality education must be at the centre of the global sustainable development agenda.

Equitable participation in quality education remains an unfinished agenda. National enrolment figures often mask the differences between groups and regions, and those who tend to remain excluded are disproportionately: poor, female, socially/ethnically/linguistically marginalised, disabled children and adults, and migrants that live in distant rural areas and/or fragile states. A commitment to equity requires measures designed to ensure that the most marginalised children and young people have access to an education of the same quality as the least marginalised, and this has to be reflected in the targets and indicators of a new framework.

Quality education provides people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and creativity needed to solve problems locally and globally, and actively contributes to the sustainable and democratic development of societies. Thus, our aspirations for quality education must go beyond narrow learning outcomes. While literacy and numeracy are necessary and part of the broader set of competences that a quality education offers, they are far from sufficient. Limiting the outcomes of education to one or two easily measurable indicators may encourage teachers to teach to the test and restricts the transformative role and potential of education.

Tuition fees and the indirect costs of education still form the single biggest barrier to equitable access to quality education. A renewed commitment to free education is urgently needed. Being a public good and a basic right, education must be publicly financed, and the long-term goal should be sustainable education financing sourced primarily from domestic revenue. By 2030, no child should be excluded from quality education because of cost.

Equitable quality education can lead to peace, social justice and sustainable development; the challenge is to aim for more than measurable short-term outcomes. This is an opportunity to put in place a framework for sustainable development that is aspirational and courageous. EI advocates a broad notion of quality education, which covers all elements of the education process, including broad-based curricula, adequate teaching and learning materials, and reasonable class sizes. Every student has the right to be taught by a qualified and well-supported teacher, and to learn in safe schools with adequate infrastructure, facilities and resources.

Education International calls for a renewed commitment to universal free quality education, and for this to be at the centre of the sustainable development agenda. This must be coupled

¹ Education International represents 30 million teachers and other education employees worldwide, from early childhood to higher education



with commitments to financing the new framework. Education is a public good and it is the role of the state to ensure the provision of universal quality education.

Education International proposes the following goal, targets and indicators:

GOAL: ENSURE UNIVERSAL FREE QUALITY EDUCATION

TARGET 1 By 2030, every child completes a full cycle of continuous, free quality early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary education, which enables them to achieve their potential as human beings and to contribute positively as active members of society.

TARGET 2 By 2030, all young people and adults have equitable access to quality post-secondary education and lifelong learning, enabling them to acquire knowledge, skills and competences to achieve their full potential and participate positively in society and in the world of work.

INDICATORS

- Percentage of children and young people who participate and complete early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary education to the appropriate national standards, disaggregated by socio-economic status, location, gender, special needs, age and social group, among others;
- Percentage of children and young people who demonstrate learning achievement broadly-defined and determined through multiple measures and consistent with national standards, disaggregated by socio-economic status, location, gender, special needs, age, social group, among others;
- Percentage of educational institutions that are publicly financed, do not charge fees and are not for profit;
- Percentage of children and young people taught by qualified teachers with a reasonable student to qualified teacher ratio;
- Percentage of educational institutions that have adequate professional and student support, including teaching assistance, medical and psychological services;
- Percentage of educational institutions that have safe and adequate infrastructure, facilities, resources and learning materials for all students according to national norms;
- Breadth of curriculum, including an assessment of its contribution to active citizenship, life skills, sustainable development, health, employment etc.