

Open Working Group brief:

Sustainable Development Goal on Equitable Learning

Call to Action

As the UN General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) moves into the report-drafting phase of its work, we, the undersigned organizations, call upon Member States to include an ambitious sustainable development goal on education framed around equity and learning. In particular, our organizations underscore the importance of focusing on two of the priorities identified in the OWG's Focus Areas document: *“ensuring equitable access to education at all levels with a focus on the most marginalized”* and *“ensuring effective learning outcomes at all levels.”*

In the letter and Focus Areas document sent to Member States on 21 February 2014, the Co-Chairs of the OWG identified education as one of the areas of sustainable development necessary for transformative change to *“build prosperous, peaceful and resilient societies that also protect the planet.”* We commend the acknowledgement that education *“opens up lifelong opportunities and is critical to achieving poverty eradication across generations”* and that access to *“quality of education is also important in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, and in shaping values and creating the necessary skilled and productive labour force.”* Within OWG sessions and other post-2015 development agenda discussion fora, Member States, UN agencies, private sector leaders and civil society representatives alike have called for “access plus learning”—equitable access to quality education plus relevant and measurable learning outcomes for all—to be central to the sustainable development agenda. A robust equitable learning goal is crucial to ensuring sustainable development, equity and inclusive growth in the post-2015 agenda.

Global consensus on a post-2015 education goal.

There is broad consensus for an education goal focused on access plus learning across all major post-2015 reports to date. (See Table 2 for proposed goal frameworks.) The *World We Want* Thematic Consultation on Education galvanized the global education community and others around an overarching standalone post-2015 goal on “Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All”. Building on such positive momentum, we call upon the OWG to include an ambitious equitable learning goal in the SDG framework.

There is a global learning crisis, which is hitting the poorest, most marginalized children and youth particularly hard.

Learning Crisis. The last decade has witnessed significant progress in expanding access to school for children. However, enormous challenges remain: 57 million children are out of school and millions more suffer from the “hidden exclusion” of being in school but not learning. It is the most marginalized—including the poorest children, girls, and those living in conflict affected areas—who are most at risk of both being out of school, or in school, but learning very little.

The Facts. According to estimates in the 2013/2014 EFA Global Monitoring Report:

- Approximately 120 million children either never make it to school or drop out before their fourth year;
- In 123 low and middle income countries almost 200 million youth have not completed primary education, 58% of these are female; and
- At least 250 million primary school-age children around the world are not able to read, write or count well enough to meet minimum learning standards, including girls and boys who have spent at least four years in school.

Education: a catalyst for sustainable development.

The dividends that result from investments in education are immeasurable: greater economic growth for individuals and societies; improved public health; increased efforts towards environmental sustainability; and more resilient, peaceful and just communities and societies. However, for these benefits to accrue, *all* girls and boys must have educational opportunities both inside and outside of school and they must be *learning*.

Access to quality, relevant education that empowers all to utilize environmental resources sustainably is a necessary foundation for sustainable development. Good learning outcomes enable individuals and communities to take greater control of the circumstances of their lives and to shape, rather than merely endure, the changes that affect them.ⁱ For instance, educating children on disaster preparedness and climate change in a child-friendly school setting can reduce their vulnerability to risk while improving local action for environmental sustainability.ⁱⁱ

A child born to a mother who can read stands a 50% greater chance of surviving past age five.ⁱⁱⁱ

Education for inclusive growth and global health.

Quality education and learning play an important role in empowering people to make informed decisions that impact their families' well-being and equip them with the skills to live secure and healthy lives. Children of better-educated parents have a higher chance of survival and are more likely to go to school and receive regular health checks. Women with several years of quality education have lower maternal and infant mortality rates, improved reproductive health, and display greater economic productivity. For girls in particular, every additional year of schooling beyond the fourth grade increases her future wages by as much as 20%.^{iv}

Given this, the post-2015 development framework should not only have an explicit education goal focused on equitable, quality education and learning for all, but it should also include education as a cross-cutting issue that affects all other development goals. The OWG Focus Areas document rightly identifies the linkage between progress in education and other focus areas, such as employment and decent work for all, equality,

and sustainable consumption and production (focus areas 11, 12, and 14 respectively).^v

Equity. The right to an education, as guaranteed under international and national laws and conventions, must be grounded in and promote non-discrimination, gender equality and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The new development framework must focus on reducing the learning gap between different groups, such as the poorest and richest children and between girls and boys. This should include a pledge that no target will be considered met unless it is met for all. An explicit focus on equity will mean that the poorest children currently out of primary school will be in school and learning well.^{vi} This will require action, including targeted funding, and redoubled efforts by national and local governments, families and communities to reach the poorest and most marginalized children.^{vii} Indicators should track progress across all relevant social and economic groups, including by age, gender, disability, ethno-religious groups, region and income.

Data continues to show that learning levels—not necessarily years in school—are what drive many social and economic returns.

Learning. Being able to read, write and calculate are critical for enabling all girls and boys to continue their education and thrive to the best of their potential in life. Without learning these core skills, children are more likely to drop out of school and fail to make progress. But alongside these core skills, a more holistic framework of learning is required. In addition to reading, writing and numeracy, children need to learn relevant transferable life skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, civic values, mental health and well-being skills. Twenty-first century skills such as

G77 and China statement on education within OWG session 4 (June 2013):

“When developing SDGs, more attention needs to be placed on relevant and measurable learning outcomes... Special attention must be given to traditionally vulnerable groups, who are girls, working children, rural and indigenous children, those with disabilities, children living with HIV/AIDS, children in conflict, migrants, orphans and linguistic and cultural minorities.”

Italy-Spain-Turkey statement on education within OWG session 4 (June 2013):

“While noticeable achievements have been made in the context of MDGs, there are still vast disparities between countries’ access to schooling, equity and quality of education and in resulting levels of learning achievement. Analytical studies and international researches provide robust evidence that learning, rather than schooling, has a direct impact on growth and development.”

communication and technological literacy are also necessary to prepare children for the workforce and to be active, productive members of their communities and nations.^{viii} Education systems for the future must be pragmatic, innovative and facilitate learning in changing contexts. To ensure that students are taught by qualified and motivated teachers, more investment is needed in teacher education and ongoing professional development, teaching and learning resources, deployment of good teachers to the poorest areas and adequate and timely remuneration.

Learning Continuum. There is abundant evidence that education beginning at birth and continuing through post-primary benefits families and societies most. Quality early childhood development (ECD) opportunities—which include health, nutrition, and stimulation—contribute powerfully to reducing poverty by ensuring girls and boys are nurtured at a young age. ECD programs are also strongly correlated with on-time school enrollment and have a long-term impact on students’ learning outcomes in primary school and beyond.^{ix} Similarly, post-primary education, including formal secondary schooling and non-formal programs such as technical and vocational education, can lead to many social and economic returns such as increased individual wages, improved health outcomes for youth and their families and increased civic engagement.

The impact of education cannot be measured in the number of students enrolled, or the number of hours in a classroom. It must be measured in the mastery of knowledge and skills that are relevant to the lives of all students.

Measuring Learning. A “data revolution” in the form of strengthened capacity is needed to enable policymakers, teachers, caregivers and community leaders to better collect, disaggregate and analyze data on learning in order to identify the accompanying actions needed to improve learning outcomes in all countries. Under the umbrella of the Education For All Steering Group, the Learning Metrics Task Force partner organizations are working collaboratively to develop global indicators for a holistic vision of learning that can help inform the post-2015 discussions (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Learning Metrics Task Force identified seven areas for global tracking and measurement.

Areas of Measurement	Description of Indicators
Learning for All	Combine measures of completion and learning (reading proficiency at the end of primary school) into one indicator.
Age and Education Matter for Learning	Measure timely entry, progression and completion of schooling, and population-based indicators to capture those who do not enter or those who leave school early.
Reading	Measure foundational skills by Grade 3 and proficiency by the end of primary school.
Numeracy	Measure basic skills by end of primary and proficiency by lower secondary school.
Ready to Learn	Measure acceptable levels of early learning and development across a subset of domains by the time a child enters primary school.
Citizen of the World	Measure among youth the demonstration of values and skills necessary for success in their communities, countries and the world.
Breadth of Learning Opportunities	Breadth of Learning Opportunities: Track exposure to learning opportunities across all seven domains of learning

Accountability. The realization of equitable access plus learning for all requires systems of accountability that better monitor delivery of education services at global, national and local levels. As a right, education should be free, compulsory, and result in relevant learning outcomes that enable all children to achieve their full potential and positively contribute to society. Bringing in the voices of learners and teachers will be critical in monitoring progress and ensuring that all children, including youth, are provided with the skills needed to thrive in adult life^x. Other local stakeholders such as caregivers and community leaders are uniquely positioned to hold education providers to account for learning, both through direct accountability relationships and through feedback to local and national duty-bearers^{xi}. Ensuring that all people achieve the right to learn, regardless of their circumstances, must be at the heart of a goal on education.

Building on the many discussions and reports within the Rio+20 and post-2015 processes, we call upon the Open Working Group to adopt an ambitious equitable learning goal for education in the sustainable development framework.

Table 2. Major post-2015 reports include goals and targets on equitable learning for all.

The consensus for an education goal framed around access to equitable, quality education and learning, including target areas calling for measurable learning outcomes, is apparent across major post-2015 reports to date.

Report	Goal	Targets/ Priority Areas and Indicators
<i>World We Want</i> Global Education consultation report: <i>Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda</i> (September 2013)	Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) All girls and boys are able to access and complete quality preprimary education of an agreed period (at least one year) 2) Equal access to and completion of a full course of quality primary schooling, with recognized and measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy 3) All adolescent girls and boys are able to access and complete quality lower secondary/secondary education with recognized and measurable learning outcomes 4) All youth and adults, particularly girls and women, have access to post-secondary learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, including technical and vocational, that are relevant to work and life and necessary for further learning and forging more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies
UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda report: <i>New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development</i> (May 2013)	Quality education and lifelong learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Increase by x% the proportion of children able to access and complete pre-primary education 2) Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, completes primary education able to read, write and count well enough to meet minimum learning standards 3) Ensure every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to lower secondary education and increase the proportion of adolescents who achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes to x% 4) Increase the number of young and adult women and men with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work by x%.
UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's report: <i>Indicators for Sustainable Development</i> (draft, February 2014)	Effective learning for all children and youth for life and livelihood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) All children under 5 reach their developmental potential through access to quality early childhood development programs and policies 2) All girls and boys receive quality primary and secondary education that focuses on a broad range of learning outcomes and on reducing the dropout rate to zero. 3) Ensure that all youth transition effectively into the labor market.
<i>Ending Poverty in Our Generation: Save the Children's Vision for a Post-2015 Framework</i> (January 2013)	By 2030 we will ensure all children receive a good quality education and have good learning outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ensure that girls and boys everywhere are achieving good learning outcomes by the age of 12 with gaps between the poorest and the richest significantly reduced. 2) Ensure that the poorest young children will be starting school ready to learn, with good levels of child development 3) Ensure that young people everywhere have basic literacy and numeracy, technical and life skills to become active citizens with decent employment

We, the undersigned organizations, call upon the Open Working Group to adopt an ambitious equitable learning goal in the Sustainable Development Framework.

Akanksha Foundation, India
Addis Development Vision, Ethiopia
Action For Sustainable Change (AFOSC-Kenya), Kenya
Action Health Incorporated (AHI), Nigeria
Action on Post 2015 Agenda Framework (CAA Post 2015), Senegal
AEPAM, MET & SHE, Pakistan
Afghan Institute of Learning, Afghanistan
Africa Educational Trust, Kenya
African Women Empowerment Guild, Nigeria
African Youth Development Foundation, Nigeria
Agha Foundation, Pakistan
Alif Ailaan, Pakistan
Ali Trust, Pakistan
Al-Asar Development Organization, Pakistan
Al-Kousar Welfare Organization, Pakistan
Alpha Learning, Nigeria
Amani Girls Home, Tanzania
ANCE, Pakistan
Anhui Guangshan Social Assistance Center, China
Anhui Taiyangshan Children Relief Center, China
*Annual Status of Educational Report (ASER Pakistan), Pakistan
Annual Status of Educational Report (ASER India), India
Arpan, India
Asian Network for Culture and Development (ANCAD), Sri Lanka
Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED), Senegal
Association Culturelle d'Auto Promotion Educative et Sociale (ACAPES), Senegal
Association for the Development of "Saafi" Language (ADLAS), Senegal
Association for the Promotion of Senegalese Women (APROFES), Senegal
Atma Foundation, India
Avante-Educação e Mobilização Social, Salvador-Bahia-Brasil
Balochistan Education Foundation, Pakistan
Batonga Foundation
BeiChuan Qianghun Social work Center, China
Beijing Peasants' Children Culture Development Center, China
Better Living Foundation (BLF), Nigeria
Bukasa Women's Development Association (BWDA), Uganda
CAFSSO-WRAG for Development, Nigeria
Campaign2015+ International, Nigeria
Camfed International
Center for Development Support Initiative, Nigeria
Center for High Level Studies on Defense and Security (CHEDS), Senegal
Center for Infant Studies, Language Learning Lab, Stanford University, USA
Center for Leadership, Matrix and Network, China
Center for Social Action, Yunnan Youth Foundation, China

***Center for Universal Education at Brookings, USA**
Center for Youth Innovation, Ningxi, China
Central Organization of Teachers, Pakistan
Central Square Foundation, India
Changsha Shanxing Social Work Center, China
Chengdu AITE Social Service Center, China
Chengdu 'Ayi Tudou' Public Welfare Service Center, China
Chengdu Zhengyang Public Welfare Service Center, China
Child Development and Concern Foundation, Nigeria
Children's Global Network, Pakistan
Children's Literature Festival (CLF), Pakistan
Chongqing Huangjueshu Social Work Development Association, China
Civil Forum Thies (Forum Civil Thies), Senegal
Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA), Nigeria
Creating Hope International
Coalition pour une Education de Qualité, Gratuite, Inclusive et Accessible (COSDYEP), Senegal
Comic Relief, UK
Community and Family Aid Foundation, Ghana
Community Development Network Organization, Pakistan
Community Health Information Education Forum (CHIEF), Nigeria
Community Initiatives RACI, Uganda
Connected Development, Nigeria
Defence for Children International, Nigeria
Democratic Commission for Human Development (DCHD)
Development Action Association (DAA), Ghana
Development Expertise Center, Ethiopia
Disability Development Institute (DDI), Nigeria
Douglas B. Marshall, Jr. Family Foundation, USA
Educate Lanka Foundation, Sri Lanka
Education Department, Government of Balochistan, Pakistan
Educational Initiatives Pvt. Ltd, India
Elimu Community Light (ECOLI), Tanzania
Enterprise Development & Governance Facility (EDGF), Cameroon
Environmental Protection and Development Association (EPDA), Cameroon
Federal Ministry of Education, Education For All (EFA), Nigeria
FEMMES PLUS, Senegal
Foundation to Educate Girls Globally, India
Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
Genderfiles, Inc., Zambia
Global Campaign for Education-US, USA
Groupe International pour le Renforcement des Capacités Féminines (GIRCAFEM), Togo
Global Prosperity Interfaith Network (GlobalPin)
Grace Association Pakistan, Pakistan
Groupement Féminin Pag-La-Naam (Ouahigouya), Burkina Faso
Guangxi Xinxiang Social Work Center, China
Guiyang Volunteer Service Center, China
Help and Care Organisation (ALFACARE), Niger

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Human Development Foundation (HDF), Pakistan
Human Dignity Foundation, Switzerland
Human and Environmental Agenda (HEDA) Resource Center, Nigeria
Humanity Family Foundation for Peace and Development, Nigeria
HWA Foundation
*Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, Pakistan
IDP Foundation, Inc., USA
Information Aid Initiative (InfoAid), Kenya
Initiative for Development and Empowerment Axis, Pakistan
Indus Resource Center, Pakistan
Innovative Strategy for Human Development, Nigeria
Institute for Professional Learning (IPL), Pakistan
Integrated Rural Community Center for Agriculture (IRCCA Foundation), Cameroon
Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO Cooperation), Africa
International Reading Association, International
IT for Change, India
JAQTRUST, Pakistan
*Jangandoo, Senegal
Joint Efforts for Youth Uganda (JOY Uganda), Uganda
Juarez & Associates, Inc.
KCA University, Kenya
Kenya Primary School Headteachers Association, Kenya
Kikandwa Rural Communities Development Organization (KIRUCODO), Uganda
Kindernothilfe, Germany
Khoj- Society for People's Education, Pakistan
Khwendo Kor, Pakistan
Lagos State Civil Society Partnership (LACSOP), Nigeria
Lahore Association of NGOs, Pakistan
Lahore College for Women University (LCWU), Pakistan
Lichuan Poverty Reduction and Social Development Center, China
Lydia Hearts Initiative, Nigeria
Madni Women Development Organization, Pakistan
Master Source Ltd, Kenya
Media for Education and Development, Kenya
Mexicanos Primeros, Mexico
Mustard Seed Communication Women Empowerment Center (MUSCOWEC), Cameroon
Naandi Foundation, India
Nagarik Aawaz, Nepal
Nanchang 'YixinYiyi' Social Service Organization, China
National Taxpayers Association, Kenya
National Women's Collective of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
NCHD, Pakistan
New World Child Protection Center, China
Noor Educational & Capacity Development Organization (NECDO), Afghanistan
Noor Women Welfare Organization, Pakistan
NRSP, Pakistan
Œuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel (OMAES), Mali

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ONE Foundation, China
On Action, China
Organization for the Support of Educational Research and Training (CAREF), Senegal
Organization of African Youth, Cameroon
Ovie Brume Foundation, Nigeria
Oxford University Press, Pakistan
PACADE, Pakistan
Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE), Pakistan
Pameer Development Society, Pakistan
Pastoralist Child Foundation, Kenya
Peace Advancement and Sustainable Development Initiatives (PASDI), Nigeria
Pemba Island Relief Organisation (PIRO), Tanzania
Perkins International, USA
Plan International Ethiopia, Ethiopia
PNG Education Advocacy Network, Papua New Guinea
Pratham, India
Promoting Education for Girls (SCOFI), Senegal
Quaid-e-Azam University, Pakistan
Regional Associates for Community Initiatives (RACI Uganda), Uganda
Research and Community Development Organization, Pakistan
Research Center for Applied Economics and Finance of Thies (CREFAT), Senegal
Rift Valley Reading Association, East Africa
Right to Play, Pakistan
RTI International, USA
Ruili Women and Children Development Center, China
Rural Support Program Network, Pakistan
Rural Women and Youth Development (RUWOYD), Nigeria
Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal), Nepal
Sanjan Nagar Public Education Trust (SNPET), Pakistan
***Save the Children**, International
SCSPEB, Pakistan
School of Education Science, Sichuan Teachers University, China
SHE, Pakistan
Shingirirai Trust, Zimbabwe
Sir Syed Memorial, Pakistan
Sindh Development Society, Pakistan
Slum Aid Project, Uganda
Social Transformative Action Network for Development (STAND), Sri Lanka
Society for Promotion of Action, Research and Knowledge, Pakistan
Support with Working Solutions, Pakistan
Synergy of Congolese Women's Associations (SAFECO), Democratic Republic of Congo
Talent Youth Association, Ethiopia
Tanzeem Haqooq-ul Ebad, Pakistan
Taraquee Foundation, Pakistan
Teach for India, India
Terre des Hommes, Nicaragua
Tharaka Women's Welfare Program, Kenya
The Akshara Foundation, India

The Citizens Foundation, Pakistan
The Dignitas Project, Kenya
The Hunger Project, USA
The MasterCard Foundation, Canada
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, USA
Thermax Social Initiative Foundation, India
Testify Africa, Cameroon
Tikondane Positive Living Support organization, Malawi
Tostan, Senegal
UBS Optimus Foundation, Switzerland
Ufaq Development Organization, Pakistan
***Uganda National NGO Forum, Uganda**
***Uwezo, East Africa**
Voice of Women Uganda (VOWU), Uganda
Volunteer Network of Emergency Relief- Xinjiang, China
Weiyang Environment Protection Volunteer Association, China
Well Told Story, Kenya
Womankind Family Enhancement Initiative, Nigeria
Women and Children's Empowerment Network in Africa (WACENA Uganda), Uganda
Women and Development Movement (WADEM), Nigeria
***Women Educational Researchers of Kenya (WERK), Kenya**
***Women Thrive Worldwide, USA**
Women Protection Organisation (WOPO), Nigeria
Women's Global Education Project, USA
Xinfu Volunteer Agency, China
Xinjiang Nature Protection Association, China
Youth Advocacy Group
Youth and Environmental Development Association (YEDA), Nigeria
Youthcare Development and Empowerment Initiative, Nigeria
Yunnan Health and Development Research Association (YHDRA), China
Yunxihongta Women's Association, China
3.2.1 Education Foundation, India

**This brief was coordinated by the ASER Pakistan, Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Jangandoo, Save the Children, Uganda NGO National Forum, Uwezo, Women Educational Researchers of Kenya and Women Thrive Worldwide.*

ⁱ *Beyond 2015: Education for the Future*, UNESCO.

ⁱⁱ Allison Anderson and Morgan Strecker. "Sustainable Development: A Case for Education." *Environment Magazine*, December 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Global Compact on Learning: Policy Guide*, Center for Universal Education at Brookings.

^{iv} Psacharopoulos, George, and Patrinos, Harry Anthony. "Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2881*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2002.

^v "Focus Areas Document", Open Working Group (OWG) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2014.

^{vi} *Ending Poverty in Our Generation*. Save the Children, 2012.

^{vii} Ibid. See also: *Global Compact on Learning: Policy Guide*.

^{viii} *Beyond 2015: Education for the Future*. UNESCO Bangkok, 2012.

^{ix} *Global Compact on Learning: Policy Guide*.

^x *Thematic Think Piece: Education and Skills for inclusive and sustainable development beyond 2015*, UN System Task Team on post-2015/UNESCO, 2012.

^{xi} *The Right to Learn: Community Participation in Improving Learning*, Save the Children, 2014.