



Swiss Working Paper on Education in the Post-2015 Agenda

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*“Education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can **lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.**(...)”*
(CESCR, 1999).

UNESCO (2013) estimates that there are 57 million out of school children and 774 million adults - majority of them women - who do not have the literacy skills. In addition to this data, we might consider the number of people who did attend school but whose basic learning needs were not satisfied. The current two education-related MDGs (universal primary schooling and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary levels) have improved access to education, however they have not come up to expectations regarding the targets of quality and equity inherent to the right to education.

Education as a fundamental right is one of the highest priorities of the main international reports produced until now on the post-2015 agenda. This has been asserted by many delegations during the 4th Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals from 17 - 19 June in New York. Switzerland welcomes the emphasis on advocating lifelong learning and quality education as a standalone goal as proposed in the Report of the Secretary-General “A Life of dignity for all” or in the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons “A New Global Partnership”. At this stage however, Switzerland considers that the proposals for the subgoals and indicators don’t encompass the basic element of the right to education since they are focused only on formal education and limit the definition on quality to minimum learning standards and measurable learning outcomes.

Switzerland supports a standalone goal on education for the post-2015 agenda going beyond the current education related MDGs (goals 2 and 3) and that refers to human rights

This is guided by the following elements:

- i. Alignment with the principles of our general position since **education is a fundamental human right** enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26, 1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 28, 29, 1989) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art.13, 1966).
- ii. The **current Education for All (EFA)** Dakar framework for action **is human rights based**, since it comprises six objectives referring to quality basic education for all. The EFA agenda is more relevant than the narrow focus of the MDGs (universal primary schooling and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary levels). In human rights based perspective it is more pertinent to have a goal referring directly to a comprehensive set of education objectives than a goal that refers only to single aspects that primarily serve the purpose of easy measurability.

I. Realizing the right of all to quality and relevant basic education and learning

Quality: Education should respond to basic learning needs, as stated in the Jomtien Declaration (1990) and the Delors Report (1996): **Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.** These four pillars of education systems continue to be appropriate guiding principles for reform¹, as well as for addressing the current and coming challenges in the areas of citizenship, gender equality, employment and sustainable social, cultural, economic, environmental and political development. A vision of learning based on the quality and the relevance of education to communities should be redefined. This expanded approach of quality would refer to the interactive and continuous process of learning throughout life. The approach needs to take into consideration learners, teachers, parents and educational institutions.

Equity: *The right to fundamental education extends to all those who have not yet satisfied their "basic learning needs". Equity is the right of everyone to benefit from a quality education that is relevant for their needs, at all ages.* Yet, the proportion of people (**children, youth and adults - especially girls**), whose basic learning- and skills-development needs are not met is still high in most low and middle-income countries - even in those where enrolment rates are high – and/or conflict-affected countries². This deficit constitutes non-respect for the right to education for all, a problem that cannot be tackled by means of access alone – an instrumental approach of development - but demands aspects of quality and relevance to be taken into account.

Education is an empowerment right

Democracy and good governance (peace and people's security, sustainable development, citizenship, economic growth, environment, poverty eradication, gender equality) require all human beings be empowered for active and autonomous participation, for well-informed decision-making and for the assumption for their responsibilities. **Equal** access to **relevant** knowledge, information, and training/skills development is indispensable in this regard. **It makes no sense to define education goals that are measurable if they do not address the issues of quality and equity.**

Education is an enabling right

Education is **both a fundamental right and an indispensable lever for realizing other human rights and ensuring sustainable human development.**

The right to education is an **effective lever** for asserting the right of expression and to information, the right to food, decent work, the highest attainable standard of health, as well as the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, participate in the cultural and political life of the community and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. Education strengthens freedom and improves the opportunities available to young people, adults and communities; it permits the promotion of social mobility, scientific and technological development, the strengthening of social-cohesion safeguards, peace, health, and the environment, and enables people to act as active citizens and autonomous human beings. Education and learning are driving sources for research and innovation which play a crucial role in shaping solutions to global issues and challenges.

Education is a social, economic and cultural right (art. 13 ESCR)

Education systems (formal and non-formal) should / has to ensure the right to access to relevant knowledge and skills. Children, young people and adults should be able to pursue their educational curriculum, ensure their transition from adolescence to adulthood and their integration into the social and professional life. The system should allow them to exercise their citizenship.

¹ S.Tawil, M. Cougoureux, UNESCO 2013.

² According to the annual EFA global monitoring report (GMR), in 2010, 61 million children were out of school. Half of these children were living in sub-Saharan African countries. It was also estimated that 57% of these children will never go to school. About 50% of them are living in fragile and emergency situations.

The general comment on article 13 of the Committee on economic, social and cultural rights (1999) defines four criteria for assessing the relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of an integrated education system (formal and non-formal): **Acceptability, Adaptability, Accessibility and Availability**. These criteria - or capacities of the education system - could be used as a universal framework within which regional and national values and priorities could be defined and used to build a framework for action. These criteria would respond in this regard to the need of a flexible framework.

II. Main focus of a standalone goal on Education:

Basic education and learning, that empower women and men for lifelong learning, enable them to exercise a profession and be active citizens, are still not accessible for everyone. It is the foundation of all further development and has to be given absolute priority. Therefore the main focus of the new agenda should be on:

- Basic learning goes beyond primary schooling. It should be available at every stage in a person's life and be provided by different (formal and non-formal) education facilities appropriate to the learner's context;
- Access to relevant knowledge and vocational and life-skills development for all throughout life and through a diversity of educational provisions, including "non-formal" that should be an integral part of the education system;
- Enhancing recognition, advocacy and promotion of the need for basic education in achieving other SDGs – which has been under-emphasized in the MDGs;
- Basic education and learning as a common minimum standard, and shared principles of quality in education established in partnership with and provided by both governmental and non-governmental actors (civil and private);
- The principle that quality basic education is a public good and should be compulsory and free of charge. The state's primary legal and financial responsibility should be emphasised. International organisations (IGOs), donor agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) should also play an important role and be accountable;
- Ensuring the individual's transition through all levels of education (formal and non-formal), from pre-primary education to primary education to secondary education and to vocational and technical training and/or higher education programmes (continuum).
- Putting due attention on girls' and women's access to quality education and life-long learning opportunities.

III. Main challenges

- A vision of education that integrates human rights and sustainable development perspective is not easy to **translate in to action**. Based on a holistic vision of education, the post-2015 agenda should underline and support the **need to continuously re-think education and propose new ways of how education can best** respond to fundamental individual needs and rights as well as to global issues. The main challenges are the lack of quality in basic education, the high rate of youth and adult illiteracy and/or the low relevance of skills development. The different components of quality education such as pedagogical approach, curricula, language of instruction, teaching and learning processes, teaching material, teacher training and learning assessment must shift from the margins to the core of the international education agenda in order to foster relevant, effective and efficient learning for all.

- With regard to the right to education, a **new balance** has to be found between **the economic-related dimensions of skills development** on the one hand and **the social and inclusive objectives of education** on the other. Emphasis on both basic education and skills development strengthens opportunities for individual to be an active citizen, have a fulfilling social life and find a decent job. Basic education and skills development forms the foundation of societies and ensures their sustainability. Indicators should encompass both social and economic dimensions. Identifying and defining **new and reliable methods for measuring progress towards achieving qualitative targets** are to be tackled in science and politics.
- A human rights framework entails **newly defined accountability** for many actors (states, teachers, recipients, donors, research, private providers, employers, labor unions, IGOs, CBOs, NGOs) with regard to both **respect for and implementation of the right to education and to the financing of quality basic education and relevant skills development**. The increasing role of non-governmental duty-bearers, the development of public-private partnerships, as well as private investment in education have to be better taken into account within the new agenda (**recognition, regulation and monitoring**).
- The contribution of all stakeholders (including communities, parents, civil society organisations, universities, the private sector, etc.) to define quality and relevant education and contribute to its delivery must be recognized and encouraged. NGOs and CBOs are very active in improving access to quality basic education for all. **New effective partnerships** with states and the private sector in policy design and implementation have still to be developed. Dialogue and collaboration between the private sector, the state, NGOs and CBOs must also be improved with regard to skills development for citizenship, employment and environmental protection.