



2015 NGO Forum Declaration

TOWARDS THE RIGHT TO INCLUSIVE QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING BEYOND 2015

1. We, the representatives of national, regional and international non-government and civil society organisations from different parts of the world have gathered at the NGO Forum in Incheon, Korea, from 18th to 19th May 2015. The Forum has been held ahead of the World Education Forum (WEF) 2015 scheduled to take place in Incheon from 19th to 21st May 2015, to prepare for our active participation and effective engagement.
2. We have taken note of the status of Education for All (EFA) based on the 2015 Global Monitoring Report, complemented by independent EFA assessments, discussed the contributions of civil society on EFA since Dakar in 2000, reviewed the status of the post 2015 process and analysed the WEF Draft declaration and Framework for Action. Following our deliberations over the past two days, we have adopted this statement, which reflects the aspirations of the Civil Society Organizations as we set our eyes on Education 2030.
3. We re-affirm that education is a fundamental human right and a public good that is key to promoting social, economic and environmental justice. States have the duty to provide free quality public education and lifelong learning for all and to ensure the right to education is enshrined in law and enforceable. We are however alarmed that today, 121 million children and adolescents are still out of school, with major inequalities in terms of access and quality. At least 781 million adults are denied the right to literacy, two-thirds of them being women. To address these and other challenges, the post 2015 education agenda must be rights-based, universal, holistic and within a lifelong learning perspective, drawing on lessons from the past, fully addressing the unachieved EFA goals and ensuring greater ambition to prepare young people and adults for life and to meet the challenges of the 21st century.
4. We welcome the **Draft Declaration and Framework for Action** (FFA) for the WEF on the assumption that the fundamental content will remain unchanged, that there will be no regression from the current human rights perspective and degree of ambition of the targets and that the recommendations in this Declaration are taken on board.

5. We furthermore expect that the education goal and targets will remain integrated as part of the United Nation's **Sustainable Development Goals** to be adopted in September 2015, thus recognising the critical role of education for social, economic and environmental justice and the indivisibility of human rights. We support the recommendation of the co-facilitators in the New York Intergovernmental Negotiations that where x% is used in the adult literacy, skills and teacher targets, these should be replaced by "all".
6. We agree that the goal to "**Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**" should stand as our collective vision for the post 2015 agenda. To this end, we call for the commitment to twelve years of free, publicly-funded formal quality education for all by 2030, nine of which should be compulsory. We furthermore call for ECCE from birth to school entry age group be progressively free. We reaffirm the right to progressively free and public quality higher education and vocational education and training. Each country should set clear benchmarks and milestones to outline how they will achieve this.
7. We need more attention to be placed on what the commitment to **lifelong learning** really means. It is an approach that is transformative, a commitment to a vision of learning that starts from birth and extends throughout life, and encompasses quality formal, non-formal and informal learning, recognising all people from children, youth and adults to older people as rights-holders. The foundation lies in early childhood care and education, which is essential both for promoting well-being and for enhancing social cohesion and national development. ECCE must be holistic and comprehensive, respecting the unique characteristics of young children and ensuring that all reach their full potential. Similarly, adult literacy and education policies and programmes must be prioritised and publicly funded, being appropriate to adulthood and designed with learners, focussing on empowerment. Achieving lifelong learning further requires that all barriers to progression through different cycles of education are eliminated, including the recognition of prior informal and formal learning.
8. We reiterate our call for ensuring that **access, equity** and quality are addressed together for all ages, within and outside formal education settings. Special emphasis should be given to the inclusion of those marginalised by gender, race, language, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, sexual orientation, health status, geographical location, refugee or migrant status, socio-economic status, age, emergency, manmade disaster and conflict, among others. We recognise that women and girls from marginalised groups face additional, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. States and organisations should never separate access and equity from quality, including in conflict-affected and disaster-prone areas. Indeed, the central challenge that most education systems face is to ensure equity in the quality of education, ending segregation and stratified systems that exacerbate inequalities in societies. Whilst ensuring quality for all education systems must celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity, resisting the drive towards standardisation which may undermine diversity. Particular emphasis should be placed on out-of-school children and youth, including those who live in conflict affected states, in providing education opportunities, as well as creating pathways to reengage them with the formal system. We support the commitment that no target be considered met unless met for all.

9. **Quality education** extends beyond literacy and numeracy by encompassing the acquisition of a broad set of knowledge, skills and values, as well as fostering critical thinking, creativity, solidarity, dialogue and problem solving. It is rooted in fulfilling and inclusive learning experiences, requiring safe, secure and inclusive learning environments; motivated and valued teachers, high quality materials as well as relevant, broad curricula that encompass human rights education, education for sustainable development and global citizenship education. Quality education values individual and cultural and linguistic diversity, strengthens democracy and promotes peace. The learning process must be based on a learner centred approach.
10. Central to the achievement of all education targets, equity, quality education and learning for all are **teachers** who are well trained, professionally qualified, and valued and have decent remuneration no less than that of professionals with comparable qualifications in the public service and/or private sector. Governments should increase investment in teacher education and the provision of continuous professional development and support, ensuring gender sensitive recruitment and training. They need to create decent and attractive working conditions for all teachers, education support personnel and educational leaders. Teacher organisations need to be respected and recognised as independent and legitimate actors. They need to be centrally involved in all social dialogue concerning education policies, salaries and conditions of service and this should be guaranteed through legislation. Given its centrality the teacher target should have a more immediate deadline of 2020.
11. Whilst supportive of the FFA as a whole we are deeply concerned by the narrow range of **indicators** in its annex. To achieve the goal we strongly recommend that national and regional indicators should show a progressive narrowing of the gap in access and achievement between the richest 20 % and poorest 40 %, measured each five years. We need to have a more ambitious and holistic set of indicators, both universal and thematic, which are consistent with existing human rights obligations and in line with the content and spirit of the goal and the full set of education targets. Particular attention is needed to ensure that there are diverse indicators for quality education that recognise and track inputs, processes and a wide spectrum of outcomes. In relation to learning, the focus should also be on strengthening formative assessment which can help to guide practical improvement, rather than an over-emphasis on internationally standardised tests and comparisons. There should be a clear recognition that setting indicators is a political, not purely technical, act and that final approval of thematic indicators must be subject to appropriate democratic oversight.
12. We welcome the recognition that **civil society participation** should be institutionalised and guaranteed in all processes – as this is crucial to ensuring governments are held to account and achieving inclusive, quality education for all. Accountability, transparency and the importance of civil society's watchdog role, including expenditure-tracking, during the implementation and monitoring of the post-2015 agenda must be underscored. We recommend that this explicitly includes all stakeholders including teachers unions, parents groups and representative student movements as well as NGOs, children and youth-led movements, communities, learners' organisations, disabled people's organisations, indigenous organisations, academic and research institutions, women's organisations and other social movements that represent excluded groups. These diverse actors should be meaningfully involved in all the stages of policy dialogue, planning, decision making, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 education agenda. Furthermore, human rights can only be fulfilled in a context of democracy that recognises participation as a right in itself. To this end, we condemn and call for an end to the

discrimination, persecution and criminalisation of activists and civil society movements that we are presently witnessing across all continents and which jeopardises the fulfilment of the right to education.

13. We are deeply concerned and also strongly condemn the continued threat to the right to education due to the rising incidents of **attacks and violence** in and around educational institutions, leading to casualties of students and personnel. In addition, school-related, gender-based violence needs to be recognised as a significant barrier to education, particularly for girls. More attention needs to be paid to addressing the root causes of conflict and violence. It is an outrage that many governments are disproportionately investing in the military and/or are increasing their military expenditure more rapidly than their education expenditure. Education systems, both formal and non-formal, should promote a culture of peace, intercultural understanding, harmony and tolerance, working to overcome all forms of conflict at all levels.
14. The post 2015 education agenda cannot be achieved without **adequate financing**. We therefore call for the following:
 - a. National governments should absolutely adhere to international benchmarks for ensuring increased domestic financing for education, by allocating at least 6% of the GDP and at least 20% of the national budget to education. The use of a range of 15-20% and 4-6% as it currently stands in the FFA dilutes this essential benchmark.
 - b. More attention needs to be paid to expanding the domestic resource base. Whilst we welcome the FFA's references to expanding the tax base and challenging harmful tax incentives we need to oppose not just tax evasion but aggressive tax avoidance, which, though technically legal, can be immoral in denying countries the funds needed for delivering on the right to education. We join the call for an empowered intergovernmental body on tax which is mandated to set tax rules and empowered to enforce these rules – as a key step to ending the abuse of tax havens.
 - c. Donors should commit to clear targets - whether doubling of aid to basic education or ensuring that at least 10% of aid is spent on basic education. The Dakar pledge on financing needs to be boldly reasserted in Incheon and delivered on seriously in the coming years. Donors need to prioritise their aid on low income countries and fragile and conflict affected countries. Aid to education in humanitarian contexts needs to be at least doubled from the low base of 2% to 4%. Furthermore, debt cancellation in favour of education should be re-emphasised.
 - d. Governments and donors should prioritise spending on achieving the goal and targets for the most marginalised communities. Spending to increase equity improves quality of life for everyone.
 - e. The Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa must come up with a comprehensive framework for financing the post-2015 sustainable development goals. We call on governments and all partners to ensure that the Addis outcome document has a commitment to financing the education goal and all of its targets, with the specific minimum benchmarks for domestic financing and external support described in paragraph 14 (a) and (c) above.
 - f. The Global Partnership for Education should align fully its strategic plan and financing mechanisms to the collectively agreed education goal and targets. It should support countries to develop comprehensive education sector plans and should avoid creating parallel goals, objectives or targets.

- g. Clearer commitments are needed to ensure all public money (including aid money raised from taxpayers) is spent on public education and is not supporting or subsidising for-profit provision in any way. Private sector contributions to the education sector should aim to reinforce the need for greater public investment in education and research rather than to replace the role of national governments. We therefore, reaffirm education as a public good and reject calls for increased privatisation or commercialisation in education, including any support for low fee private schools and for-profit universities. Equally we oppose any trade agreements that include education as a commodity and facilitate liberalisation of education services and loss of rights, as in the case of the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA). We also call on all governments to put in place stronger regulation of private provision of education to prevent abuse, fragmentation and increasing inequity.
15. We support the need to improve **monitoring and evaluation** of progress at all levels and the push for a data revolution, especially in ensuring that disaggregated data is transparently available to all in order to inform education policy and practice. The biggest challenges lie in strengthening national systems and capacity-building in qualitative and quantitative data collection as well as meaningful and effective analysis. This needs to be given priority over the aspirations for internationally comparable data. There needs to be a huge effort to track the extent to which all equity gaps in education are reduced.
16. We recognise the crucial role played by **UNESCO** as the mandated UN agency for education and we urge continuation of an inclusive, democratic process and architecture which engages member states, relevant UN agencies and civil society. This partnership is crucial to success. As civil society we value the Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA and the composition of the EFA Steering Committee, which includes civil society representation.
17. We, the representatives of national, regional and international non-government organisations and civil society organisations from different parts of the world **are committed** to work and cooperate with governments and a wide range of groups, individuals and institutions to reach our goal to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunity for all of quality education for all". In particular we commit to:
- a. Continue engagement and dialogue with UNESCO at all levels and other key stakeholders in articulating the education agenda with the UN SDGs agenda, in particular at the World Education Forum;
 - b. Engage all governments at local, regional and central level to fulfill their commitment to implement the 2030 education agenda and Framework for Action;
 - c. Increase our advocacy for education both within and outside of the education community and hold States and donors accountable for meeting their obligations;
 - d. Foster the active engagement of families, children, youth, students, teachers and communities, especially those most marginalised, so that their voices are heard in agenda-setting, policymaking and implementation;
 - e. Disseminate this outcome document throughout the CCNGO/EFA membership and the broader civil society at national, regional and international levels;

- f. Disseminating the Declaration from the World Education Forum 2015 and the Framework for Action “Education 2030”.
18. Together, we need to continue to make a compelling case that education is at the heart of the post-2015 agenda, facilitating achievement of all other SDGs. The new global compact on development requires a new generation of active global citizens of all ages in all countries, developing and sharing the attitudes, knowledge and behaviours which are essential for a sustainable planet. To achieve dignity and social and environmental justice, we need inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all.