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# Reshaping the International Education Agenda to Include Youth in Situations of Fragility and Crisis

Preparing Effective and Efficient Advocacy

## Introduction

With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) Goals reaching their term in 2015, humanitarian and development stakeholders are preparing for the next round of targets that will shape the "world we want" during the coming decade. In less than two years, a new set of goals will carry on from where MDGs and EFA Goals will have ended.

The decade-long formative process behind the EFA Goals (established in Jomtien in 1990 and restated in 2000 through the Dakar Framework of Action) and the MDGs declaration at the Millennium Summit in 2000 will have affected the operations of stakeholders for 15 years[1]. The EFA goals and the MDGs were developed by different processes with different concerns[2], but nevertheless, they drove the global education agenda.

Youth education in general, and more specifically youth education in crisis contexts, is not clearly represented in the current development agenda (MDGs and EFA). Consequently, the needs of the youth have fallen through the cracks and have received little attention from the international community.

In the run-up to this new set of goals, the international community has been engaged in a broad consultation for over a year. It is now time for all concerned stakeholders to position themselves within the post-2015 education agenda and identify the issues that are missing from the current debate. Priorities must be defined and agreed upon to allow effective and efficient advocacy capable of influencing high-level policy decisions. If core common concerns are not formally identified and pushed forward with a certain unity, youth education in fragile contexts will once again be left out of the global agenda. Talks and advocacy may sometimes seem abstract, but the result for vulnerable young people will be very real and long-lasting if we fail to act.

## How the Post-2015 Goals are Being Shaped

### UN mechanisms

To advocate for the relevant issues within the preparation process, numerous stakeholders actively participate in the UN's systematic multi-level consultation mechanism for post-2015. Under the leadership of the Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the post-2015 consultation processes are carried through various channels incorporating geographical, gender and sectorial representations[3]. These channels assess a goal's present progress and situational changes, and engage experts, governments, organisations, networks and affected interest groups[4]. The MDGs and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are discussed through separate channels[5], but both goals will be intertwined towards the development agenda and brought before the UN General Assembly in 2015[6].

The process is supported by consultations such as the UN System Task Team, established in 2012 by the Secretary General as a designated body aiming at preparing over 60 UN entities and agencies for the post-2015 agenda, while bringing together member states, other humanitarian and development stakeholders, academia[7], and the UN Global Compact which focuses on the corporate sector and provides discussion venues for a sustainable development agenda[8].

The UN Development Group and the Regional Economic Commissions organise the thematic

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[1] LMTF (Learning Metrics Task Force). 2013. *Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force.* Montreal and Washington, D. C.: UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution: 19
[2] Yusuf Sayed. September 2013. *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda,* The World We Want. UNESCO and UNICEF: 4.

[3] Yusuf Sayed. *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda,*
[4] Swati Narayan. 2012. *Mapping Current International Actions to Define the Post 2015 Education and Development Agendas,* Education for All: Beyond 2015. Paris, France: UNESCO.
[5] Yusuf Sayed. *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda,*
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] UNGC. June 2013. *Corporate Sustainability and the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda.* Report to the United Nations Secretary-General. UNGC.

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global consultation, bringing the national and regional level consultation to the discussion[9].

The High Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP) serves as an advisory body to the Secretary General and produced a significant report in 2013[10]. This report has proposed the post-2015 illustrative targets and sub-goals furthering the post-2015 discussion[11].

All the above and other UN-led entities involved in the post-2015 development goals are coordinated by the office of the Secretary General's Special Advisor on post-2015 Development Planning, to ensure timely and efficient preparation.

The process is therefore complex. This strong inclusive consultation mechanism that reaches out to stakeholders is however the UN's response to heavy criticisms the MDGs faced over the years[12]. The concise and deliberate message carried by the MDGs does speak volumes on the willingness to reduce the worldwide poverty levels and has driven global initiatives, but it also suffered from the gaps and limitations of simplified goals[13]. This broader inclusiveness from the consultation mechanism is therefore an opportunity, which should be taken advantage of, in order to bring forward the needs of youth.

## Community of practitioners and academia

The UN mechanisms described above are not the only venues for stakeholders to push for issues absent in the MDGs, EFA Goals or even the recently published HLP post-2015 report with its illustrative goals.

Interactive discussions are also accessible, particularly through a series of practitioner and academic conferences (UKFIET 2013 - Education Post-2015, reflecting, revisiting, re-visioning; UNESCO/IBE "Learning in the post 2015 education and development agenda[14]", etc.). Other

discussion venues such as the World We Want online education consultation[15], campaigns like the Global Education First Initiative, and networks such as the Inter-Angency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), through its advocacy group, « Education Cannot Wait[16] », are also contributing to the overall discussion on education priorities after 2015.

The above-mentioned venues of interactive consultation and discussion build communities whose outputs constantly resituate the post-2015 development debates. Nevertheless, recent past and current discussions have not addressed yet, in a comprehensive way, the education challenges from the perspective of young people, in general, and from those living in fragile contexts in particular. In 2002, RET has held in Geneva the first *International Symposium on Post-primary Education for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons*, and INEE held, eight years later, the INEE Policy Roundtable *An Enabling Right: Education for Youth Affected by Crisis*. However, few events are solely dedicated to address the issue of youth education in emergencies.

Multilateral partnerships like Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and think-tanks and forums such as the Brookings Institution, (through its Learning Metric Project with UNESCO Centre of Statistics[17]) and the Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training (NORRAG) are also contributing to the post-2015 discussion and indicator building[18]. Their actions are influencing the current debate. Unfortunately, these messages and visions are not being pushed with enough consensual and collective support from other actors in the development/humanitarian fields.

## The Progress Already Made

In 2010, the UN General Assembly's sixty-fifth session adopted the Resolution 65/1 "Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals" in which the education goal

[9] Swati Narayan. *Mapping Current International Actions to Define the Post 2015 Education and Development Agendas,*
[10] Ibid.
[11] UN. 2013. *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*, The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. New York, USA: UN.
[12] Manzoor Ahmed. June 2013 "Looking Beyond EFA and MDG 2015," *Bangladesh Education Journal* 12, no. 1.
[13] Ibid
[14] UNESCO-IBE, September 2013. "Learning in the post-2015 education and development agenda" UNESCO-IBE Statement on Learning in the Post-2015 Education and Development Agenda (inspired by discussions which emerged from the International Experts' Meeting on "Key Curricular and Learning Issues in

the Post-2015 Education and Development Agenda" held in Geneva, Switzerland 23-25 September 2013).
[15] Manzoor Ahmed. "Looking Beyond EFA and MDG 2015,"
[16] Please see recent advocacy paper produced by the group on Call for Action : http://www.globalpartnership.org/media/2013-09-Education-cannot-wait-Call-to-Action.pdf
[17] LMTF. *Toward Universal Learning*.
[18] Kenneth King and Robert Palmer, *Education and Skills in the Post-2015 Global Landscape: History, Context, Lobbies and Visions*, Occasional Paper 1. Geneva: Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training (NORRAG).

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strongly asserted young people's role in employment and the economy[19]. Three years later, the Secretary General submitted a report "A Life of Dignity for All: Accelerating Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and Advancing the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015" to the General Assembly. The section on youth education states:

> "Young People should be able to receive high quality education and learning, from early childhood to development to post-primary schooling, including not only formal schooling but also life skills and vocational education and training"[20].

This statement reflects the evolution of the youth agenda through the UN multi-level consultation mechanism. As clearly summarised in the report, quality education, lifelong learning and youth education have gained appropriate weight in the post-2015 preliminary debates and are beginning to be sought by some intergovernmental actors as the essential key to the successful outcome of education interventions[21].

It is understood that each UN report and resolution is a marker in the consultation process. The absence in the reports and resolutions of issues otherwise recognised by stakeholders, is a strong indication that they are not sufficiently defined and advocated.

From the above-mentioned multi-level consultation mechanisms and initiatives, attention has also been brought to support a paradigm shift concerning the essential elements behind new education goals. The most conspicuous is the acknowledgement that the promotion of quality education should be given greater importance in future interventions than the present MDG's focus to increase enrolment rate[22].

The shift to the quality of education is observed to be a general trend in present post-2015 dis-

cussions. A number of studies have shown that the expansion of enrolment rates do not equate to actual learning[23], in fact, it could mean no learning at all takes place. Studies have shown that great portions of graduating learners (graduates of primary school included), especially in emergency contexts, leave school without actually learning the life skills needed for generating sustainable employment, individual and social wellbeing, peace building, and self-reliance[24]. Indeed, without relevant and quality learning, efficiency of interventions drops and discourages learners from continuing to study[25]. Increased quality in education produces greater overall positive changes and synergy with other development goals[26] and increases the cost effectiveness of interventions, as well as, resilience amongst those living in hardship.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the results of the on-line consultation "My World Survey[27] ", which was completed by people from nearly 200 countries, ranks a "good education" as their top priority. However, education as a priority of human development is certainly no less important at times of conflict or crisis. Unfortunately, resources have not kept pace with the demand for quality education in the world's most difficult and dangerous places. Only 1.4% of all humanitarian aid is given to education[28].

Another change observed in current debates, even if it still needs to be more nuanced and given greater support, is the increased emphasis given to youth as a key group with the potential to make a difference in governance, social cohesion and the economy[29]. However, hardly anything is mentioned on how to turn such statements into concrete international policy priorities.

Successful enrolment rates (reaching 89% of primary school-aged children [30] ) does not change the fact that the MDGs have weak provi-

[19] UN General Assembly, Sixty-fifth Session, Resolution 65/1, *Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, adopted by General Assembly. A/RES/65/1, September 2010.
[20] UN General Assembly, Sixty-eighth Session, Official Records, *A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015*, submitted by Secretary General in pursuance of UN General Assembly Resolution 65/1, A/68/202, July 2013.
[21] European Commission. 2013. "Education and the Post-2015 Process: Conference Report." European Commission (presented at the EU High Level Conference on Education and Development : From Challenges to Opportunities, Brussels).
[22] Swati Narayan. *Mapping Current International Actions to Define the Post 2015 Education and Development Agendas*,

[23] Ibid.
[24] Yusuf Sayed. *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*,
[25] Frances Ellery and Katy Webley. 2010. *The Future Is Now: Education for Children in Countries Affected by Conflict, Rewrite the Future*. London, United Kingdom: Save the Children.
[26] EFA Global Monitoring Team. 2005. *Education for all: Imperative of Quality Learning*. Summary, EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris, France: UNESCO.
[27] Please see UN My World Survey Results:
http://www.myworld2015.org/?page=results
[28] EFA Global Monitoring Team, July 2013. *Children still Battling to Go to School*, Education for All Global Monitoring Report. Policy Paper 10, Paris, France: UNESCO.
[29] Manzoor Ahmed. "Looking Beyond EFA and MDG 2015,"
[30] LMTF. *Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force*: 19

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sion on youth education or post-primary education, adolescent and young people's literacy rates and gender disparity in post-primary school programmes[31].

Compared to the MDGs, the six EFA Goals engage more with youth education mentioning youth learning and life-skills programmes (Goal 3), the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and the achievement of gender equality in education by 2015 (Goal 5). However, it does not fully include promotion of post-primary education[32]. Moreover, Goal 3 does not have a clear set of performance indicators allowing a proper tracking process of global and national achievements. Therefore youth education has been underrepresented when prioritising funding and planning, particularly in emergency and crisis contexts.

From the HLP post-2015 report, it is noticed that two out of four illustrative sub-goals and targets partially address the provision of quality education and the support to a specific type of life-long learning for youth:

> c) 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%;
> d) Increase the number of young and adult women and men with the skills, including technical and vocational, needed for work by x%[33].

In addition, Goal 8 of the HLP report on job creation, sustainable livelihoods and equitable development "[b)] Decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or training by x%"[34] also provided a sub-goal target that calls for a decrease in the number of youth out of education, employment and training.

Although these goals only serve an illustrative function without specific binding indicators yet, they are expressive enough to indicate the changes in priorities that are to come in the post-2015 development goals, as compared to the present MDGs. Up until then, the discussions on post-2015 youth education revolved around establishing basic principles in addressing post-2015 education and then forming consensus on the extent of youth education, training and employability issues that need to be included in the post-2015 goals[35].

Overall, the HLP's presentation of post-2015 education goals and targets have taken a step further and provided detailed proportional indicators of access to education for each stage of education and age group[36].

This shift in the education agenda indeed benefits the 71 million young people who have finished primary education without an opportunity to proceed to secondary education[37], 200 million adolescents who may have finished secondary education but still do not have skills for life and employment[38] and 122 million illiterate youth[39]. However, the coverage of youth education is still limited at best, only nuanced by selective employment related dimensions.

## The Remaining Gaps

Considering that about 85% of world's youth live in developing countries with greater risk of conflict and natural disaster[40] and that they will eventually be the main social group in each State and potential further leaders of them, the lack of more explicit and nuanced targets, goals and indicators directed to the systemic gaps in youth education in post-2015 agenda is worrisome.

The acknowledgement of youth in the post-2015 education agenda or the strong focus on employability and life-skills training are not enough in themselves to respond to the actual need of youth living in fragile contexts. Of course, in least developed countries where youth face unemployment rates as three times higher than adults[41] and may participate in, or enhance con-

31 Manzoor Ahmed. "Looking Beyond EFA and MDG 2015,"
32 UNESCO. 2000. "The Dakar Framework for Action," in Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments. UNESCO (presented at the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal).
33 UN. A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development: 36.
34 UN, A New Global Partnership: 46.

35 Kenneth King and Robert Palmer, Education and Skills in the Post-2015 Global Landscape.
36 UN. A New Global Partnership.
37 EFA Global Monitoring Team. 2012. Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work, Summary, EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris, France: UNESCO: 229.
38 LMTF. Toward Universal Learning: 9.
39 EFA Global Monitoring Team. Youth and Skills: 91.
40 LMTF. Toward Universal Learning: 19.
41 Burnett, Nicholas and Colin Felsman. 2012. Post-2015 Education MDGs. Results for Development Institute and Overseas Development Institute: 11.

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flict or harmful practices[42], the promotion of these policies are greatly welcomed, however the scope needs to be broadened.

Other essential education aspects impacting youth's development are missed: youth civic/political and social participation[43], psychosocial support, learning to live together in peace (social cohesion)[44], strengthening resilience capacities and cultural diversity, creating a sense of citizenship[45] belonging and common respect of human rights, as well as enforcing sustainable development visions, etc. All these issues that are not only fundamental in "normal living circumstances," but also critical to cope with the dramatic effects of fragile and crisis contexts, such as violence and abuses, youth association with armed groups[46], youth affected by disasters[47], lack of preparedness and planning in emergency education, etc. should be integrated in the education perspective of the next humanitarian and development agenda.

Not having indicators reflecting other aspects of youth education and development could lead to an important lack of support to education interventions that go beyond employability skills. With a strong push to meet the post-2015 education goals, the governments, donors and humanitarian and development stakeholders may be more inclined to focus their resources on improving the official indicators rather than spreading resources to the youth issues that have not been sufficiently discussed to produce consensus on the need. This would be even worse for youth education in fragile context, as the education budget within humanitarian work is small to begin with[48].

As millions of youth live in areas of conflict, post conflict, violence and disasters, collective outlining of the real needs in the field and advocating for their inclusion in the post-2015 education agenda, through clear priorities is essential to secure youth's right to quality, inclusive and relevant education in all contexts.

## The INEE-RET Round Table

As described above, numerous issues are essential in youth education in fragile contexts: employability and livelihoods, gender equality, human development[49], social justice, environmental sustainability, food security, health, democratic governance and responsible citizenship[50], peace-building and state-building[51] not to mention the issue of long-term post-conflict psychosocial recovery[52]. A holistic representation of youth education concerns should be expressed through the consultation of concerned stakeholders. However, despite the evident need, opportunities for this discussion are hard to find.

At this time when the post-2015 goals are being defined, it is imperative to create a space where experts can fully discuss and define the core priorities for youth education in contexts of fragility and crisis.

The INEE-RET Round Table proposes to critically examine the gaps found in different facets of youth education. Specifically, the Round Table will address the gaps between primary and post-primary education; the gaps between post-primary education and livelihood/employment; the gaps in education in emergency planning processes; the role of curriculum development in fragile contexts, and youth's perspectives in advocating for education in emergency and crisis settings.

The end goal of the Round Table is to produce agreed upon priorities for youth education in crisis and fragile contexts. These priorities will serve as an advocacy tool to influence the definition of the post-2015 goals. Only if we speak together do we stand a chance of being heard.

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[43] European Commission. "Education and the Post-2015 Process: Conference Report."
[44] Ibid.
[45] LMTF. *Toward Universal Learning*: 20-21
[46] EFA Global Monitoring Team. 2011. *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*, Summary, EFA Global Monitoring Report. Paris, France: UNESCO: 6
[47] Kenneth King and Robert Palmer, *Education and Skills in the Post-2015 Global Landscape*.
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