In 2015, citizens campaigned successfully for governments to commit to a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) which ensured that everyone has the right to quality education – education which should be public, equitable, inclusive, and free. Two years later, it is time for governments to prove they are working towards this goal – it is time to deliver. While there are challenges to the realisation of this right, from long-term conflict to national elections and policy changes, commitments to the SDGs, and to the Education 2030 agenda, are long term and cannot be ignored.

At the same time, citizens must be given a voice in any decision-making process which impacts on their lives. Yet, in too many countries, the voice of citizens is being stifled; across all regions of the world, certain national governments have taken more aggressive action to limit civil society activity, from restrictions on funding, ‘political activity’ or protest, to direct criminalisation of civil society activity.

It is in this context that Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) 2017 promoted the vital role of citizen participation in the development of education policies and monitoring progress. Led by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), the annual international campaign focussed on accountability and citizen participation towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It highlighted the importance of transparent, accountable, and participatory governance for delivering on the full SDG4 agenda.

In this year’s GAWE, GCE called on governments to:
- Develop, fund and implement credible plans for the full set of targets for the education SDG (SDG4)
- Strengthen public systems and state capacities to ensure that education is free, quality, and equitable
- Ensure that there are credible, transparent mechanisms for the participation of civil society in monitoring and accountability for the SDG4 agenda.

Accountability, a commitment of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030
The SDG Agenda is a comprehensive all-inclusive effort; it also includes new ways forward informed by the lessons learnt of inadequate resources, lack of focus and accountability from the unmet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Accountability is based on shared principles as well as national and international commitments to achieve the ambitious SDG agenda. All SDG goals and targets are expected to be backed by accessible and effective accountability mechanisms at global, regional, national, and sub-national levels. The new agenda calls for collaborative systems that collect and provide access to timely, comprehensive, and forward-looking data that will be used to review
Stand Up for Education! - Global Action Week for Education 2017 focuses on accountability for SDG4 and citizen participation
23-29 April 2017

progress on each SDG. It also calls for monitoring national progress in an open, inclusive, and transparent manner and with participation by multiple stakeholders to strengthen mutual accountability.

Civil society’s role for the Sustainable Development Goal on Education

Civil society’s role is two-fold for the SDG on Education (SDG4). Firstly, civil society must be a driving force for transparent monitoring of and reporting on education, including financing, helping to ensure that financial resources are used efficiently and equitably. Secondly, as a shared societal endeavour, education implies an inclusive process of public policy formulation and implementation. All stakeholders must be involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of education policies and strategies. To this end, the Global Campaign for Education is currently working on an application, which it plans to launch at the end of 2017, which will act as an alert system to warn about civil society being either not consulted or pushed out of consultations on education.

Assessing factors that make accountability work or fail

Concrete recommendations for policy makers on which accounting mechanisms are more effective than others, and assessing which political, economic, and social factors make accountability work or fail, will be made available in the next Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR), to be launched on 24 October 2017. This edition of the GEMR will investigate accountability in education, analysing how all relevant actors - the international community, government, teachers, schools, parents, students, civil society, and businesses - can provide education more effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

UNESCO fully supported the 2017 Global Action Week for Education and issued Key UNESCO Messages on Accountability and Citizen Participation:

1. Education is a fundamental human right and an enabling right. To fulfill this right, countries must ensure universal access to inclusive and equitable quality education and learning, at least nine years of which should be free and compulsory, leaving no one behind.

2. Education is a public good. As duty bearers, governments have the primary responsibility to deliver on the right to education, and a central role as custodians of efficient, equitable and effective management and financing of public education.

3. As a shared societal endeavor, education implies an inclusive process of public policy formulation and implementation. Civil society, teachers and educators, the private sector, communities, families, youth and children all have important roles in realizing the right to quality education.

4. All partners must be held accountable: multilateral organizations should be accountable to their Member States; education ministries and other related ministries to citizens; donors to national governments and citizens; and schools and teachers to the education community and, more broadly, to citizens.
5. Systems of mutual accountability should include transparent monitoring and reporting on education financing, with particular attention to ensuring that financial resources are reaching the most vulnerable populations and the least developed countries.

6. Improving governance and accountability can increase efficiency and effective use of existing resources and ensure that financing reaches the communities and learners most in need.

7. Governments should establish procedures to genuinely involve all stakeholders in the planning, implementation and monitoring of education policies and strategies. Participation must begin with the involvement of families and communities to boost transparency and to guarantee good governance in the administration of education.

8. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Here are snapshots of how GAWE 2017 was celebrated in the Asia South Pacific Region by a number of ASPBAE members –

**BANGLADESH:** Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)
CAMPE organised a national campaign for Global Action Week. The campaign included specific programmes and events in 39 districts selected by CAMPE’s partner organisations and Teacher Associations. Thousands of people, including government officials, public representatives, educators, researchers, NGO representatives, students, guardians, teachers, School Management Committee members, representatives of other civil society groups, and the media participated in the week-long programme and raised their voices for education, and to ensure accountability for SDG4 and citizen participation.

At the sub-national level, various rallies, roundtables, and a press conference were held. At the national level, CAMPE developed a position paper which was submitted to the Ministry of Education at a National Sharing Session on 29 April 2017. Furthermore, CAMPE and Citizen’s Platform for SDGs have jointly developed a Framework for Action to reinforce the issues of Education 2030/SDG4 and means of achieving the goal in Bangladesh.

**CAMBODIA:** NGO Education Partnership (NEP Cambodia)
From 26-29 April 2017, NEP-Cambodia, together with partner organisation P-ESWG, conducted activities in 5 provinces, including Koh Kong, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Preah Vihear, and Otodor Meanchey. The events were attended by over 400 participants, all showing their support for this year’s GAWE campaign.
INDIA: National Coalition for Education (NCE India)
In India, a host of advocacy and public mobilisation activities were held during Action Week, targeting both national policy and local level delivery of education. At the national level, NCE India is campaigning for a series of major changes, including the repeal of a child labour law which allows children below the age of 14 to work for their family businesses, increased financing with specific funding for children with disabilities, and targeted policies to help children from the most marginalised communities. Locally, one important campaign is for every child aged 6-14 to be registered and enrolled in education.

PHILIPPINES: E-Net Philippines
E-Net Philippines is advocating for the whole SDG4 agenda, but demanding that the more overlooked targets on early childhood, youth, and adults are given due attention in implementation policies. At the same time, demands are being made for increased financing for education and ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the education budget. E-Net held a public display of the SDG4 targets, a forum on the role of different SDG4 stakeholders, and a workshop on early childhood care and development.

VIETNAM: Vietnam Association for Education For All (VAEFA) and Aide et Action
Working together, GCE member coalition, Vietnam Association for Education For All (VAEFA) and Aide et Action mobilised the public to be involved in holding their local and national governments to account, as well as to provide information to parents, teachers, children, and authorities on removing language barriers at schools. They organised community-based mass communication events, including sharing good practice on removing language barriers in primary schools, and an interactive drama to promote quality parenting skills.

This write-up is based on the GCE website and an article on GAWE 2017 appearing on the UNESCO website.

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