EDUCATION
& ACADEMIA
STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Position Statement
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Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All[1]

I. Introduction

Eight years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and three years after the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, it seems that there is an emerging consensus that education systems need to be not only resilient and adaptable to ongoing crises, but also to be able to actively contribute to the answers that will prevent future crises or mild their consequences. They also need to be profoundly reimagined and positively transformed to make progress towards SDG4. However, questions of whether and how education and learning systems need to be transformed have received little scholarly and policy attention.

This paper examines some of the critical areas in which education systems should be transformed towards inclusion and quality to make progress towards SDG4 and make the promise of leaving no one behind much more than just a slogan. Drawing on contemporary debates in education policy and examples from different regions of the world, the paper argues that the confluence of multiple crises, including but not only those related to conflict and violence, disaster and climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resurgence of anti-democratic movements, have not only affected the right to education of million of children, youth and adults. They have also deepened social and economic inequalities that affect the most disadvantaged members of our societies - which further affects the right to education and leaves millions behind. In order to overcome those inequalities, profound transformations within and outside education systems are urgently required. For that purpose, it is urgent for governments and all education stakeholders to endorse and implement the TES Financing Education Call to Action (Financing Education | United Nations) and the Disability-Inclusive Education Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education (A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education). Continuing educational

[1] This report is drafted by Luis Eduardo Perez Murcia, Policy and Research Advisor of the Global Campaign for Education. It largely draws on the literature review and empirical data collected for the Global Campaign for Education: SDG4 Spotlight Report, December 2022. When relevant to further develop the paper's main arguments, new examples and references were added. June 11 2023.
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disparities and exacerbated gaps and setbacks underscore the urgent need to promote adult education and lifelong learning for all, therefore Marrakech Framework for Action, the outcome document of the CONFINTEA VII conference, should also be included into the lifelong learning policies of governments. There is a need for greater recognition by the international community of the need to promote lifelong learning, as exemplified by SDG 4 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education (UNESCO, 2021), Re-imagining our futures together: A new social contract for education, asserts the right to quality education throughout life and underlines the transformative power of education for building a sustainable future.

Following this introduction, this paper is organised around four thematic areas: transformative education; digital learning and transformation; education in emergencies and crises; and education financing.

1. Transformative Education

The notion of transformative education has become a common feature in contemporary education policy debates. From the EASG's perspective, the idea of transformative education unfolds from two different but interrelated disciplines: development studies, looking at ideas of justice and positive social change; and transformative learning theories, addressing questions around how and for what people learn (Perez Murcia & Muñoz, 2021). Concerning the first discipline, development economists have highlighted the intrinsic value of education for the satisfaction of all human rights and its role in bringing positive social change. Amartya Sen (1997), for example, has stressed the value of education for reducing poverty, and inequality and making societies fairer, and his work has contributed to broadening the ways in which education, as a human right, can be integrated into international policy frameworks. This has notably influenced the United Nations Human Development Programme's call for integrating a human rights-based approach to all social policies, including education (UNDP, 2000).

Concerning the second discipline, most contemporary debates on transformative education are inspired by Mezirow's (1991, 2004) transformative learning theory (see also Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020). Mezirow's notion that the initial stages of one's life is the time for formation, and further stages, for transformation has been inspiring the search for positive change in education systems worldwide. The overall ambition is to make them respond better to the multiple ways individuals learn and to address the barriers they face to effectively learn,

achieve educational outcomes and above all, contribute to the positive transformation of our societies. Briefly, the notion of transformative education is closely related to all the educational practices and education environments that need to be questioned and redesigned to reimagine the role of education in our societies. Thus the idea of transformation should depart from questions concerning what education is for, how people learn and how our education systems can contribute to all students to perform their potential to positively transform their lives as well as those of their families and communities. So, we need to look to different theoretical understandings of how to better conceptualize transformative education. Jack Mezirow and others subscribe to an understanding of 'transformative learning' that focuses on the type of learning that occurs when new information or insights clash with existing systems of knowledge, beliefs and values (the so-called 'disorienting dilemma'). In other words, the critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural and other assumptions inspires new learning and brings about qualitatively different changes.

These conceptual debates should be at the core of any education policy aiming to promote and fulfil everyone's right to education. These debates should underpin the way education practitioners understand the role of education in their respective societies and contest for positive transformation. It is related to for example calls for decolonising education systems through the decolonisation of curricula (see the example of Zimbabwe in Bhurekeni, 2020); the call for introducing alternative ways of teaching and learning to be fully aligned with democratic principles (see the example of Tanzania in Kalungwizi, Gjøtterud, and Krogh, 2019); the call for governments to address the multiple inequalities associated with the use of technology in education; and more recently with the GCE's call for decolonising education financing Global Action Week for Education GAWE 2023.

The significance of discussions around transformative education can be appreciated in different corners of the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean region, for example, the notion of transformative education has become central in the CSOs' efforts to contest conservative and authoritarian waves that tend to limit the scope of the right to education and restrict their political space for demonstration. In this sense the call for transformative education is also a call for strengthening democracy as the meaningful participation of the full diversity of students, teachers, parents, communities and civil society organisations in education policy improves the governance of education systems[2].

[2] See Modé, G and Giannecchini, L. (2022) The right to a transformative education in Latin America and the Caribbean region. CLADE. MIMEO.

The need for transformative education can be observed all across the world, not only in countries of the "global south." In the case of the United States of America (USA), for example, discussions around transformative education are vital to call for the government to adopt measures to make schools a safe place for all and effectively protect children, youth and adults' right to education. In fact, school-related violence and school safety remains a major nationwide concern. By the end of January 2023 authorities reported 24 school shootings in 2023 that resulted in injuries or deaths. Since 2018, over 160 shootings had been reported[3]. With political divides on how to best address this issue in some contexts[4], school safety remains a constant fear for students, teachers, and families across the nation. After multiple school shootings, the state of Michigan passed laws to improve school and community safety in April 2023)[5]. School-related violence and school safety have implications on student attendance and learning, as it is linked to student learning outcomes. Furthermore, a recent study by Alexander (2021) shows that students who have experienced school violence or school shootings often do not have support systems in their schools such as trauma counsellors, guidance counsellors, and crisis plans. Indeed, the study shows that only 16.9% of respondents indicated their schools have trauma or crisis plans that address issues related to school shootings[6].

But transformative education should be seein also in a broader sense and in conceptual framework. The point of transformative education is its depth – the aim to create deeper, more profound changes – this suggests we do not so much need a new concept but a critical review of the current ones and of the practices of rote learning, collecting and memorising information, skills development without reflection and its false neutrality. However, doing things at a deeper level cannot alone transform a superficial and boring education into a 'transformative' one. It cannot just be a matter of recognizing or indicating the level at which transformation starts. Education that is transformative must not only go into things more deeply, but also do things differently. The education crisis that we continue to face has revealed some unpleasant truths about popular educational paradigms and forced a critical review of the common discourse surrounding education (questioning, for example, the dominance of skills building, the emphasis on measurement and quantification, and outcome-based approaches). A

[3] See https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2023/01. Retrieved on June 09 2023.

[4] See https://giffords.org/lawcenter/resources/scorecard/?scorecard=CA for an annual gun law scorecard across the 50 states in the USA from Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. Retrieved on June 12 2023.

[5] See https://www.michigan.gov/mde/news-and-information/press-releases/2023/04/13/first-set-of-commonsense--gun-safety-bills-signed-into-law. Retrieved on June 12 2023.

[6] Peña, S. (2022). Challenges to secure the transformation of education systems: Examples from the United States of America. Global Campaign for Education-US. MIMEO.

transformative learning approach would require us to focus on the root of the problems facing education instead of only solving current issues, to look for the causes and structures behind inequalities instead of merely mitigating their consequences, and to develop critical autonomy and not only resiliencies. In other words, to ask the right questions instead of chasing answers to the wrong ones. (Popović, 2022).

2. Digital learning and transformation

Education technology has been used for several decades to expand access to education mainly but not only for people living in remote areas and those affected by emergencies (see Cant, 2020). With the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown of schools in most countries of the world, the use of technology to deliver lessons has become part of most learners' everyday life. Its use has helped to mitigate the impact of school closures and gives continuity to learning activities (United Nations, 2022). However, neither all countries nor all learners have the same capacity to successfully engage with online learning and in this sense the pandemic has further unveiled deep-rooted inequalities in education systems across the world (Murat and Bonacini, 2020; Azubuike, Adegboye and Quadri, 2021; Boly Barry, 2022). Those inequalities, which are often framed around the concept of 'digital divide', can be perceived within and across countries. The term digital divide comprises several interrelated dimensions of inequality: access to technological devices and the internet, digital skills, teacher skills, parental support to use technology, and adaptation and management of the learning environment (Coleman, 2021; Železný-Green & Metcalfe, 2022)[7]. This can be understood better with a case study of Pratham digital initiative in India, which provided free digital notepads to students from economically weaker segments of the society, to assist with their education (Dey, 2020). This is an example of the use of technology to improve the quality of education and to bridge the gap between urban and rural education. The initiative was initially due to the strong network of volunteers, teachers, and partners who came together for the nobility of the cause (Pratham Education Foundation, n.d.). However, technological infrastructure challenges need to be addressed at broader level as well to ensure that the students from the weaker section, do not face other issues such as poor or absent internet connectivity issues, hardware and software

[7] The term digital divide also encompasses questions about the distribution of power between countries and regions. While the lack of technological devices and skills to use technology dominate policy debates in countries of the Global South, the development of technology and its commercialization, as well as the perpetuation of colonial practices to make low-income economies dependent on the technology developed in wealthy economies, prevail in policy debates in the Global North.

issues, that need to be purchased and update periodically (Government of India, 2020; Dey 2020; Singh, 2019; Kaur 2018).

The case study goes on to underscore the point that multiple dimensions of the digital divide are interrelated and show up in all four dimensions of the right to education: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. To begin with *availability*, the closure of schools revealed further inequalities associated with the lack of digital infrastructure for sustainable, fair, and inclusive online learning. This dimension includes lack of electricity, electronic devices, internet connection, and qualified teachers to deliver online lessons and follow students' work (see NORRAG, 2022; Železný-Green & Metcalfe, 2022). *Accessibility* to those resources are also compromised and therefore, those who had been historically excluded from education have seen their learning opportunities further compromised. Girls and women are often excluded from the use of the limited technology available in families living in low-income and patriarchal societies (see Karalis, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021) and are often subject of online abuse (UNICEF, 2021). Similar gaps have also been identified to reach students with disabilities (International Disability and Development Consortium, 2020; Humanity & Inclusion, 2020; Singal, 2022), ethnic minority groups (Prehn, 2022) and people living in emergencies, notably those on the move, affected by conflict and climate change-related emergencies (see Shohel, 2022). As Kwani (2022) argues, all these multiple inequalities intersect, and therefore governments and policymakers must embrace an intersectional approach to effectively eliminate digital divides.

To illustrate, in the Asia-Pacific region, nearly 40% of the population was disconnected in 2021. According to the International Telecommunications Union, they are mostly girls and women and the elderly and are located in rural and remote communities. In Vietnam, learners with disabilities, particularly deaf learners, could not continue their education in non-formal learning centres, which had to close for some time because of the lack of devices and a stable Internet connection (VAEFA, 2022). In the Philippines, modest budget gains to support learners with disabilities and child workers were not maximised due to the failure to adjust given the new realities brought about by the pandemic[8]. Similar barriers in terms of access can be found in other regions of the world. In the Middle East and North Africa region, for example, girls and students with disabilities, as well as those living in rural areas and coming from low-

[8] Lae Santiago, R., and Raya, R. (2022) The multiple dimensions of the digital divide: Examples from the Asia Pacific Region. Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). MIMEO.

income families, often lacked access to electronic devices and internet connection to effectively engage with distance learning during the pandemic (EFSD, 2022)[9].

Concerning *acceptability* of education, online learning often fails to fulfil minimum standards of quality, associated, for example, to a lack of qualified teachers and training for teachers, parents and students (Železný-Green & Metcalfe, 2022). As Anand (2022) argues, the different skills individuals have to control and adapt to a digital world influence the quality of education and its inclusiveness. Teachers with limited digital skills tend to be more focused on the use of technology than implementing pedagogical strategies to meet the needs and abilities of students. Although education technology companies are supposed to support schools to overcome the 'pedagogical vacuum', there is little evidence that these companies offer solutions for hard-to reach children (Anand, 2022). Indeed, evidence for the Asia Pacific region reveals that curricula content, education pedagogy, and learning materials often fail to promote diversity, equality, inclusion, and gender equality and the curriculum tends to overlook gender inequalities and social injustices that affect the most disadvantaged members of society (see UNESCO, 2020). In Sri Lanka, evidence reveals that an excessive focus on academic skills often compromises the need to foster values of global citizenship amongst students (CED, 2022).

Lastly, concerning *adaptability* of education, online teaching has been rarely adapted to the specific needs of children with disabilities and consequently children who are deaf or hard of hearing can struggle to access the same educational content either by computer online lessons or radio (EASG 2022; Singal, 2022). Children from minority ethnic groups who do not communicate in the country's official language can be also excluded from the benefits of online teaching or TV/radio educational programmes (see Prehn, 2022).

Following this analysis, what is critical to highlight is that education systems not only need to be adaptable and resilient. They need to be profoundly transformed to address the challenges that different social groups face in their everyday lives to enjoy their right to education and to make technology not only available, but accessible and adaptable for all learners, including those with different disabilities. At the same time, education policies need to show more awareness that technology cannot replace teachers and the school environment. Although vital for teaching and learning, technology is only a tool that must serve the interest of all learners rather than the interest of multinational corporations. Technology is welcome but governments should regulate the role of business and technology corporations in education.

[9] Wahsh, R., and Sabbah, R. (2022). The digital divide in the Middle East and North Africa. ACEA. MIMEO.

As ASPBAE stresses, with the increased use of digital online learning platforms and technologies as tools for learning continuity, education technology corporations continue to proliferate. These companies have aggressively marketed their products and expanded their involvement and influence in education provision and even in decision-making, which will further push the commercialisation of education and exacerbate inequity (EI, 2020)[10].

Technology can be a driver of progress in education and its capacity to increase the outreach of education should be further explored. However, it can also create new barriers to access, make social or collective learning more challenging, widen existing social divides and create new ones. The problems of our world are not solely technological but pedagogical! Therefore, the challenges faced by the education sector cannot be solved mainly by digital tools, e-learning platforms and artificial intelligence. The right to education must not be replaced by the right to connectivity. Building effective strategies, policies and instruments, bridging the digital divide, increasing access, addressing online power relations and preventing the abuse of technology are all critical in establishing the transformative and emancipatory power of ALE. Effective digital pedagogies also require new models of teaching and learning in face-to-face, distance and blended formats. (UNESCO, 2022).

3. Education in emergencies and crises

The intersection of multiple emergencies and crises, including but not only protracted conflict and displacement, disaster, climate change, and health-related emergencies compromise the right to education of millions of people all across the world. It is estimated that all these crises have increased the number of crisis-impacted children in need of urgent quality education to 224 million[11], while millions of various groups of learners were left outside of the processes of formal and non-formal education. Although all countries can be affected by these crises, evidence suggests that countries in the Global South are often disproportionately affected. Asia Pacific, for example, is one of the regions most affected by climate change. It is currently experiencing increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, worsening flood disasters and droughts, and declining biological diversity (UNDP, 2019; Fetzek & McGinn, 2020). Evidence for Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan suggests that the marginalised and disadvantaged groups, notably women, girls, students with disabilities, and those with refugee background, had seen their right to education severely disrupted. To be more specific, it is estimated that

[10] Lae Santiago, R., and Raya, R. (2022) The multiple dimensions of the digital divide: Examples from the Asia Pacific Region. Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). MIMEO.
[11] Education Cannot Wait Issues (2023) New Global Estimates Https://www.education cannot wait.org/.

3.7 million children are out of school in Afghanistan, which means that about 42% of the school-age population, of which girls make up 60%, are currently seeing their right to education denied (ANEC, 2021). The Taliban took over the country in August 2021 and has from then on restricted freedom, reversing their earlier promise and prohibiting girls from continuing their education. Afghan women and girls will miss out on learning critical skills that could lead to employment opportunities and personal and financial independence (ASPBAE, 2022a).

The situation in Africa and Latin America is also concerning. In Malawi, for example, environment and environmental change related emergencies had been disrupting education for many years. In 2021 and 2022, cyclones Ana and Gombe, affected 228 schools, disrupting the education of 114,212 learners in 17 districts. More recently, cyclone Freddy displaced more than 500,000 people and over 100,000 homes were destroyed. The cyclone claimed 510 lives, while hundreds more remain missing. Among the fatalities, 113 were students (69 boys and 44 girls) and two teachers[12]. In Madagascar, floods and sea level rising affect education infrastructure and people's right to education. Over the past 35 years, more than 5 million children and youth have been affected by 46 natural disasters, including cyclones, droughts and floods[13]. To provide just one additional example of the negative impacts of emergencies on education, Peru is frequently hit by Cyclone Yaku. Recently, the cyclone has destroyed more than 600 educational premises and left 5,331 in precarious material conditions and at risk of collapsing[14].

Along with conflict, disaster, and climate change-related emergencies, the ongoing global pandemic and the subsequent closure of schools and universities all across the world have further affected people's right to education (see Karalis, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021). School and university attendance was temporarily suspended for over one billion learners (Onyema et al, 2020), and for many, the reopening of education infrastructure did not mean a return to the classroom (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022). As in the case of climate and conflict-related emergencies discussed above, girls and women, students with disabilities, people living in

[12] Global Campaign for Education (2023). Learning Brief. EiE Learning Community, Climate change-related emergencies impacts on education. Piri, D. (2023). Climate change impacts on education-the case of Malawi. Oxfam-Malawi.

[13] Global Campaign for Education (2023). Learning Brief. EiE Learning Community, Climate change-related emergencies impacts on education. Rakotoarivony, H. Climate change impacts on education-the case of Madagascar. Coalition Nationale Malgache pour l'Education pour Tous (CONAMEPT). MIMEO.

[14] Global Campaign for Education (2023). Learning Brief. EiE Learning Community, Climate change-related emergencies impacts on education. Yépez, D. (2023). Climate change impacts on education: the case of Peru. Peruvian Campaign for the Right to Education (PCRE) and World Vision-Peru.

remote areas, families with low income, as well as students with migratory or refugee backgrounds, are among the most severely affected by the pandemic.

The exclusion of the most marginalised members of the society indicates that the negative impacts of the pandemic on education are far from equally distributed (Murat and Bonacini, 2020). As has been also observed before the pandemic (World bank, 2018; OECD, 2019; Rogers & Sabarwal, 2020), those who have been largely excluded from the benefits of development and economic growth, and those who have been historically marginalised and discriminated against, such as girls and women in societies such as Afghanistan (Shayan, 2015; Arooje & Burridge, 2020), Kenya and Nigeria (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022), have been the most negatively affected by the pandemic. More broadly, these examples illustrate that multiple forms of disadvantage intersect. Gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socio-economic background, and place of residency, among other social markers and structures, influence the impact of crises on students' wellbeing (Tarricone, Mestan and Teo, 2021) and the distribution of educational opportunities and skills (Blundell et al, 2021). In spite of remarkable progress during the past decades, more than 770 million adults are still lacking basic literacy skills (three out of five of whom are women), most of them live in countries affected by poverty, wars and crises.

Beyond making education available, accessibility is a critical challenge for securing the right to education of those living in emergencies. Discrimination and exclusion dominate the narratives of displaced populations and school, universities and vocational institutes often fail to fight racism and racial discrimination within education systems (Block and Hirsch, 2017; Onsando & Billet, 2017). As Baak (2019) has shown in the case of South Sudanese heritage students in Australian schools, racism and exclusion are part of the everyday school experience of refugees. Racism is often systematic and shapes the relationships between 'peers', teachers, the school and the entire community. Similar experiences of discrimination against, racism and exclusion are often experienced by multiple migrant and refugee communities as the study of Cadenas (2018) shows in the case of Venezuelans in the United States. Closely related, students with migratory and refugee backgrounds often find themselves in a position in which due to the local communities' perception of them as either vulnerable victims or threats to the economic and cultural integrity of the so-called 'host' country, education obstructs rather than creates their opportunities for social mobility (see Lems, 2020). In short, the implication of these examples is that policymakers should adopt comprehensive policy frameworks that first of all recognise diversity as an element that enriches educational communities and

subsequently promote the inclusion of students with migratory backgrounds within education systems. This is certainly a prerequisite for countries to advance towards achieving SDG4.

To be more specific, embracing the multiple challenges that emergencies pose to secure quality education for all at all education levels requires both an in depth understanding of the multiple dimensions of refugees exclusion, including legal, financial and language barriers, as well as prejudice, racism and discrimination, and the adoption of comprehensive policy frameworks, such as the INEE Minimum Standards, Comprehensive School Safety Framework | GADRRRES, Safe Schools Declaration to address these problems and their impacts.

Among other critical aspects that directly influence the quality of education and students performance (Belot & James, 2011; Broton, Weaver & Mai, 2018), the policy frameworks should include school meals. In the countries of the MENA region, for example, the suspension of school meal programmes showed to be a significant barrier for children and youth's education. Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Somalia were founding members of the School Meals Coalition, an international initiative launched to scale up school meal programs, to bolster recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (EFSD, 2022). Although school meal programs were identified as highly effective interventions to support children and youth in all these contexts, the programmes were suspended[15]. During the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, the National School Feeding Program was also suspended, being the largest program with this focus in the world, which even gained international recognition as one of the strategies to fight hunger and promote family farming and green strategies in the world. Fortunately, the program has been reconstituted, although it still only guarantees less than $1 a day per student for food[16].

Overall, what can be argued is that long-term rooted humanitarian emergencies and the ongoing health pandemic[17] pose significant challenges for the countries to make progress towards SDG4 and to effectively protect and guarantee everyone's right to education. Emergencies often make face-to-face education temporarily unavailable for all types of learners and in some cases, as already stressed, those who belong to the most disadvantaged communities never go back to school/university/education facilities. As Baytiyeh (2018: 215) has pointed out in the analysis of school closures in the aftermath of climate change-related

[15] The evidence for the MENA region in this paragraph was provided by Rand Wahsh and Refat Sabbah, Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA).

[16] More info https://alimentacaoescolar.org.br/

[17] See No Education, No Protection: What school closures under COVID-19 mean for children and young people in crisis-affected contexts | INEE; and Supporting Integrated Child Protection and Education Programming in Humanitarian Action | INEE.

hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes and floods, 'the longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return'. Governments and policy makers need to show more awareness of the ways these dynamics affect progress towards SDG4 and the fulfilment of people's right to education and address comprehensive education policies that work for all, especially the most disadvantaged and excluded members of our societies.

4. Education Financing

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent financial crisis have not only made much more visible the profound structural inequalities that characterise our societies and our education systems. It has also stressed the need for them to be more adaptable and positively transformed to address current and future crises. Education systems cannot however be changed only through rhetoric and more holistic approaches. The whole financing structure has to be positively transformed to make progress towards SDG4 and to reach the most marginalised members of the society, including learners with disabilities from all aged-groups of society, notably adult and older people who are often left behind in education planning.

This section focuses on two of the major challenges faced by countries and regions to secure sustainable financing for education and therefore to advance towards achieving SDG4. They are the insufficient allocation of national resources for education and the payment of debt service. Concerning the first aspect, recent data produced by the Global Campaign for Education's Education Financing Observatory for Georgia, Honduras, Somalia and Tanzania reveals that none of these countries are investing the maximum of resources available to secure people's right to education and subsequently they are not on track to achieve the seven targets of SDG4 by 2030. For the period 2015-2021, any of these countries complied with the global investment benchmarks on education of at least 4 to 6% of the GDP and at least 15 to 20% of the total public investment. In the case of Honduras, the government budget allocation to the education sector has been consistently declining in the last seven years. It was 16% in 2016, 14% in 2019, and only reached 13% in 2020 (Acevedo, 2022). In the case of Georgia, the country has been investing less than 4% on education as a percentage of the GDP in four out of the seven years under analysis. In 2021 the figure was only 3.29% (see Janashia, 2022).

Further on, adult literacy and education have been absent in many initial education responses of countries and of the international community. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, nearly 60% of governments spent less than 4% of education budgets on adult literacy and education.

The situation in countries facing multiple crises is even more critical. In Somalia, a country that has been dealing with hunger, climate change and conflict-related crises, on average only 3.2% has been invested on education between 2015-2021. Concerning the 15 to 20% benchmark, the government has committed to invest at least 12% by 2019 and in real terms has only invested 4.7%. In 2016, less than 1% of the total social investment was allocated to education. The lack of planning and adequate financing has resulted in only 9% of children with disabilities and only 22% of children and youth from nomadic families, which represent 60% of the total population of the country, are enrolled in education (see Suaad, 2022).

The lack of investment has been partly ameliorated by the international community and in the period under analysis Somalia has been receiving a significant proportion of its education budget from either international aid or development cooperation. Sixty one percent of the total budget to the education sector in the period 2016-2020 came from international assistance which means that Somalia's children and youth education largely depends on international cooperation and humanitarian relief.

In Tanzania, the government budget allocation to the education sector has been consistently declining in the last seven years. It was 16% in 2017, 14% in 2019, and only 13,53% in 2021. At the same time, the share of foreign funding in education has been increasing in the same period. It was 1.8% in 2017, 2% in 2019 and reached 7.58% in 2021. Largely associated with patriarchal structures that limit women and girls' education, lack of funding and a gender-sensitive budget planning, their education remains a critical issue in the country. Although the policy to ban pregnant girls from schools was lifted in 2021, partly because of pressure from internal donors, there is still a gender gap in the distribution of financial resources for men and women's education. To illustrate, in 2021, 55% of the resources for higher education were invested in males education and only 45% in females education (see Mahangila, 2022).

The lack of investment in education and the subsequent negative implications for making progress towards SDG4 and for people to enjoy their right to education are by no means an exclusive feature of the four countries discussed above. Indeed, this is a common trend in low-and-middle income countries in the Asia Pacific Region, Latin America and the Caribbean, and also in wealthy economies such as the United States of America[18]. In Brazil, despite legislative advances in 2020 with the approval of the new Fund for the Maintenance and

[18] Global Campaign for Education: SDG4 Spotlight Report, December 2022.

Development of Basic Education and the Valuation of Education Professionals (Fundeb) with twice as much supplementation from the federal government to the fund as it was previously - quoted by the GEM Report 2022 as an example of civil society action in favour of policies to advance the right to education -, today there is a concern immense with the discussion of a new fiscal framework that should include expenditure on this fund within its funding cap, compressing all the complementary financing of basic education and the financing of higher education[19].

Now, concerning the payment of the debt service, there is evidence suggesting that they compromise the provision of social services and social rights. Empirical evidence suggests a negative correlation between debt servicing and public expenditure on social services: higher spending on debt negatively impacts spending on basic social services (Shiroya & Brown, 2019; ActionAid, 2020; Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2020; Khundadze, 2020; Khundadze and Alvarez, 2022). In the specific field of education, the payment of debt servicing is compromising the fulfilment of the right to education for all and notably for the most disadvantaged members of society in low-and-middle income countries. Shiroya & Brown's (2019) analysis of debt burden for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific for the period 2009-2017 suggest that regions with less capacity to pay debt tend to invest less in education[20]. In Mongolia, for example, its external debt increased from less than 50 percent of GDP in 1997 to 253 percent in 2019 and the payment of the debt service, which reached 15.8 as percentage of the gross national income, subsequently reduced investment in education and further compromising the achievement of SDG4 (Banzragch, 2021)[21]. In Zambia, debt servicing has been drastically affecting the provision of education in the last two decades (Milapo, 2021) has left school infrastructure in very precarious material conditions and community schools with no financial support for teachers and infrastructure. In the country, community schools provide education to 20% of children and youth and those schools are initiated, operated and financed mainly by low-income families and communities in places where there are no public schools nearby. Similarly, in countries such as Ghana and Kenya, debt servicing is seriously compromising spending for all social services, including

[19] See here https://media.campanha.org.br/acervo/documentos/PautasPoliticas_Fundeb_NovoArcaboucoFiscal_2023_05_18_final_ok.pdf

[20] When analysing the impact of debt on education financing, Shiroya and Browne (2019) suggest considering both the total volume of debt of a country and its economic capacity to meet its payment. The latter aspect can be measured, for example, by comparing the total amount of debt against the value of exports.

[21] See also World Bank (2022). International Debt Statistics. https://data.worldbank.org/ Retrieved on June 07 2023.

education (ActionAid, 2020). Their debt servicing ratio to revenue accounts for 59% and 36%, respectively. ActionAid and Jubilee Debt Campaign (2020) estimate that if their proportion of revenues being spent on debt servicing are reduced at 12%, for example through cancellation, rescheduling, or other debt alleviation mechanisms, Ghana is likely to have an extra $5 billion and Kenya an extra $4.4 billion available for spending on public services[22].

Similar trends can be observed in countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Africa. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, a region that is already heavily indebted, several countries have signed new loan agreements, which has put public investment in education at risk and further compromised the making of progress towards SDG4. According to the study Impacts of indebtedness on the realisation of the human right to education, published by CLADE in 2022, Argentina, Ecuador and Honduras are the three countries of the region with the greatest deterioration in the debt-education ratio in the last five years. In 2020, the region paid an estimated US$95 billion in debt service payments. In Argentina, Brazil, Jamaica and St. Lucia, public spending on debt exceeded the amount allocated to education, highlighting the need to negotiate debt cancellation[23]. Recent research for Honduras further illustrates the important role that debt alleviation mechanisms can play for increasing the resources available for financing education. About 358 million dollars were added to the national budget for education in the period 2016-2021 as the country's debt and debt service were alleviated by the Paris Club (see Acevedo, 2022).

Society will not recover if there is no investment at all levels of education, including literacy in a lifelong learning perspective. Equity must remain an important aspect of access to education. There is a need to strengthen the role of governments in establishing mechanisms and regulations and in allocating financial and human resources to support structures for lifelong learning and to regulate, incentivize, stimulate, coordinate and monitor education and lifelong learning as a public and common good within strengthened public education provision.

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[22] ActionAid (2020) estimates in 12% the threshold marking the maximum acceptable proportion of revenues being spent on debt servicing.

[23] The evidence for Latin America and the Caribbean in this paragraph was provided by Laura Giannecchini and Ana Raquel Fuentes (CLADE).

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