

# COORDINATED ACTION TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS?



Two boys on the way to school in Burundi.  
GPE/ UNICEF Burundi

Education transformation comes about when stakeholders in a system change how they interact with one another, purposefully aligning their actions to arrive at dramatically improved outcomes. Toward this goal, the **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)** supports partner countries in getting the most out of policy dialogue and coordination. This brief is part of a companion series to the [Principles toward Effective Local Education Groups](#), although the contents can apply to any mechanism or platform where stakeholders gather to coordinate their actions around national education policy.

**Civil society organizations (CSOs) are not one body, but a constellation of nonstate, nonprofit and voluntary entities created by citizens in the social sphere that are separate from the state and the market. In the education sector, CSOs represent a wide spectrum of constituency interests and focus areas. They work in close cooperation with ministries of education at national and decentralized levels; in coordination with foundations, nonprofits and the private sector; and through organized coalitions and constituency networks. As such, CSOs play several important roles: key allies in local service delivery; advocates for the right to education of underserved groups and communities, representing the interests of those groups in policy discussions; and a critical counterpoint to government policy.**

### WHAT DO YOU AS CSO GAIN THROUGH COORDINATED ACTION?

#### Enhanced opportunities for CSO organization and representation

The organization and representation of CSOs advancing education for underserved and vulnerable population groups is a challenge. Depending on the political climate, CSOs are often underrepresented in policy dialogue. Nor are they always represented in member-based organizations such as national coalitions. Such gaps mean that CSOs defending the interests of marginalized children, youth, women, displaced and disabled persons can have the lowest levels of representation in decision making and dialogue processes.

Through your efforts to mobilize and organize the participation of CSOs in formal sector dialogue mechanisms, you are better recognized as a body of key stakeholders and duty bearers, enabling you to

- ▶ Lobby for changes to national and local legislation to allow for the representation of vulnerable groups through democratic, independent, membership-based coalitions of CSOs;
- ▶ Identify opportunities for strengthening CSOs' leadership, policy dialogue and organizational capacities in the advancement of learners' interests, and in the collective resolution of problems, including through access to financial resources and training; and
- ▶ Identify potential partners to strengthen CSO's engagement and impacts in advocacy, lobbying and service delivery in hard-to-reach areas, including through social accountability projects.

### **Better understanding of, and opportunities to influence, the policy and governance landscape**

You can identify influential actors, institutional bodies and potential partners at different levels of decision making, as well as opportunities for working on governance issues with public, private sector, CSO and foundation partners in your area of specialization in order to bring increased impact and visibility.

Your participation in sector dialogue mechanisms enables you to

- ▶ More easily navigate the policy environment and identify where you can represent your constituencies in different types of dialogue;
- ▶ Cultivate relationships and build mutual trust with decision makers, organizations and networks working across a range of focus areas who may become supporters or advocates for your cause; and
- ▶ Identify potential partners for joint advocacy efforts, coalition building and innovative governance activities. This may comprise online platforms and technology-based tools for establishing feedback mechanisms between authorities and citizens in decision making processes, and raising funding for campaign initiatives.

*“One of the best ways to achieve efficient delivery of services is through partnerships at all levels. When we set out to establish this NGO consortium, our goal was to reach the farthest and most remote areas quickly with quality learning opportunities. We have seen that this can be done, and we intend to use these methods in the future.”*

[Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, Minister of Education, Sierra Leone](#)

### **Raised awareness of your vision for reaching all learners and capacities as delivery partners**

You can spotlight your member organizations to the education community and increase partners' understanding of how different CSOs work with local networks and alliances to reach learners in underserved and vulnerable communities, including girls and women, refugees and displaced populations in disaster and conflict situations.

As participants in policy dialogue, you are also better positioned to

- ▶ Promote greater awareness of CSO evidence in support of policy alternatives and delivery solutions for meeting immediate and emerging challenges;
- ▶ Increase attention to specific learner groups in policies and strategy development, and in budgeting and planning processes; and
- ▶ Lobby powerful partners to increase their financing for inclusion-, gender- and equity-focused programming that is insufficiently addressed by government.

### **Increased opportunities to hold the government and its partners to account**

Your participation in sector monitoring mechanisms opens access to government and partner reporting, evaluations and performance and monitoring data, generating greater transparency and opportunities to

- ▶ Question partners on their track record in reaching the most vulnerable population groups and improving education outcomes;

- ▶ Track/monitor domestic expenditure to education and engage in advocacy toward increasing equitable domestic financing to education;
- ▶ Share evidence that can inform the broader education community about conditions on the ground, raising awareness of challenges and successes beyond the national level; and
- ▶ Contribute to education sector reporting and analysis and to the quality of the evidence base.

*“Now we have parents and local communities actively fighting for their children’s—for all children’s—right to quality education. And we see that same perception spread from the public to the politicians and power holders. You cannot overestimate the importance of this shift in mentality and the potential that follows when able to mobilize the local communities in the fight for change.”*

Jacques Tshimbalanga, National Coordinator, Congolese education coalition

## WHY DO CSOs MATTER IN TRANSFORMING EDUCATION?

### You play a critical role in protecting the right to education for all girls and boys

- ▶ You amplify citizens’ voices with valuable information and arguments for shaping education policies in favor of the most marginalized children, including the multiplier benefits of investing in girls’ education.
- ▶ Your advocacy and awareness-raising pushes education laws, policies and plans toward closer alignment with human rights principles of equity, gender equality, inclusion and universality.
- ▶ Your lobbying for more equitable, gender-responsive financial allocations is crucial to increasing overall education financing.

### Your proximity to education stakeholders contributes to more efficient education systems

- ▶ You strengthen decision making and inform analysis by filling in gaps in evidence and data on the groups that you represent.
- ▶ You use your experiential and applied knowledge to work with decision makers and partners in generating more efficient services and delivery.

## CABO VERDE

**CSOs have been central in pushing the policy environment toward more rights-based policy design and service delivery.** Cabo Verde’s success in opening up access to education at the preschool, primary and secondary levels, and in increasing the adult literacy rate reflects not only government commitment over many decades but also the role of nonstate actors in mobilizing their networks for inclusive and equity-based change. Measures to subsidize tuition fees for students with physical or learning disabilities, for example, are a response to the combined efforts of the Federation of Associations of People with Disabilities, teacher organizations and the CSO Coalition.

The role that CSOs play in the local education group has brought benefits to their advocacy mission and to how they operate and partner with government. Created in 2014, the group offers organizations the opportunity to strengthen their presence in the policy sphere, and evidence shows adjustments to education policies triggered by their lobbying. The Ministry of Education has been increasingly keen to work with the Coalition to co-produce and deliver education services in underserved areas. CSOs are now engaged in a variety of partnership arrangements underpinning the government’s drive for inclusive education, one example being a government-supported school established by the Association of Visually Impaired Students. Across these areas, the annual state budget now embeds a minimum level of funding for vetted CSOs to act as implementation partners.

# LIBERIA

The CSO coalition **Educate HER** is contributing a more efficient and effective administration of the **National Policy on Girls' Education**. The government adopted the policy in 2006 in recognition of cultural, social, family and community barriers and attitudes toward girls' attendance, retention and completion of schooling.

Insufficiently sustained mobilization and successive crises (Ebola and COVID-19) have signaled that the policy has not been implemented effectively. To address this gap, three women's rights organizations ([Helping Our People Excel, or HOPE](#); [CAREFOUND Liberia](#); and [Paramount Young Women Initiative, or PAYOWI](#)) formed the Educate HER coalition to provide a platform for citizens to engage with decision makers in joint actions for girls' education, and to empower CSOs in implementing the policy.

A key priority for the Educate HER [advocacy campaigns](#) is to increase awareness of ongoing challenges, such as traditional customs and religious practices, which prevent girls from attending school. Through support from the Educate HER, school administrators, education officers and traditional, religious and female leaders have come together and sought to identify joint approaches for supporting locally implemented girls' education policies. Coming out of the discussions, County Action Plans have been validated. In addition, Educate HER seeks to promote the availability of disaggregated [data on girls' education](#) for evidence-based programming. The Educate HER website serves as a [public online database](#) featuring trends in girls' enrollment and retention, and for identifying stakeholders that can be mobilized.

- ▶ Your insights through community consultations bring valuable information, creative strategies and wider networks to support multilevel monitoring.

## You play a key role in strengthening dialogue and coordination mechanisms

- ▶ You support a less fragmented education community by aligning interests across the nonstate actors.
- ▶ You build trust, mutual understanding and shared norms between civil society, government and other stakeholders by generating points of convergence and nurturing a culture of cooperation.

*"CSOs bring the vital human touch and human hand necessary for the co-construction of inclusive education, knowledge and policy frameworks."*

[UNESCO](#)

- ▶ You mobilize social capital, solidarity and social legitimacy across your members' networks and constituency groups as part of the coordination effort.

## ADDITIONAL READINGS:

- ▶ [Progress Report January 1–June 30, 2022: Education Out Loud](#). GPE-EOL. October 2022.
- ▶ [How can civil society actors help implement GPE 2025? Examples from Kenya and Nepal](#). GPE. May 12, 2022.
- ▶ [Gender-responsive advocacy: How civil society is changing the landscape for girls' education](#). GPE. March 25, 2022.
- ▶ [Analysis of International Civil Society Organizations' Engagement around Non-state Actors in Education](#). UNESCO-GEM. 2021.
- ▶ [Enhancing the Role of Civil Society Organizations in Public Education Sector Monitoring and Accountability](#). Simon, Kobia David. 2021.

Also see the "Civil society" page on GPE's ["Partners Portal"](#) to better understand GPE's and civil society's roles and responsibilities in the partnership.

## OTHER BRIEFS IN THE SAME SERIES:

Ministries of education  
Teacher organizations  
Development partners

Civil society organizations  
Humanitarian actors  
Private foundations

