Financing Education for All Children: An Ambitious Partnership, Not a New Fund

Response to the Sustainable Development Solutions Network’s Financing for Sustainable Development Paper

For comments: Karen Mundy
Chief Technical Officer
kmundy@globalpartnership.org
The Global Partnership for Education looks forward to a sustained and robust dialogue with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network throughout 2015. In this pivotal year, not only will the global community set out its vision for sustainable development, the Global Partnership for Education will also produce a new strategic plan that will continue to raise our ambition and improve the effectiveness of our work.

The Global Partnership for Education agrees with the SDSN that a pooled global "fund" for education is essential for scaling up the financing and performance improvements needed to support universal quality education, especially for the most vulnerable among us. The Global Partnership for Education is this fund. It is the only multilateral partnership focused on ensuring a basic quality education for children in 60 of the world's poorest countries. Since 2004, the Global Partnership has allocated more than US$4.1 billion to developing country partners and programs. US$2 billion of this amount has been approved just in the past three years - a significant scale up in funding through the GPE Fund.

We also welcome the SDSN's call for such a global facility to lock together knowledge, innovation, rigorous monitoring of results, increased advocacy and new sources of finance. This is the Global Partnership’s aim. Since 2011, when the Global Partnership was transformed from a multi-donor trust fund hosted by the World Bank into an independently governed partnership, it has assiduously deepened and expanded its platform, drawing on principles of partnership and mutual accountability to crowd in better performance within national learning systems. The Global Partnership is ready and able to live up to our shared ambition for a stronger, better-financed, global platform capable of ensuring that all children and youth, especially those living in the most vulnerable contexts, can reach their full potential through learning.

However, we question SDSN's analogy comparing the challenges facing education with those that have been tackled by vertical funds in health. While there is no doubt that the education sector has much to learn from the successes of GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance, and The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the essence of their success has been based on the delivery of globally standardized goods, namely vaccines and medicines. There is not, nor will there ever be, a vaccine for learning. The challenges facing the education sector are qualitatively different.

Most importantly, we at the Global Partnership do not support the SDSN's call for a new global vertical fund for education.¹ Creation of a new education fund will not diminish existing fragmentation, and it may very well distract precious attention from the primary challenges at hand. The architecture to address those challenges is in place. What the world requires is a recommitment of resources and intensive work where the need is greatest.

¹The Financing for Sustainable Development paper is contradictory on this issue. It proposes that the Global Partnership for Education be transformed into a Global Fund for Education (Page 10); and that the GPE become the equivalent of the GFATM (page 57). Yet on page 116, the paper states “One or more donor governments can take the initiative to launch a multilateral Global Fund for Education.”
Galvanizing global resources

Since 2011, the Global Partnership has substantially scaled up its funding. Between 2012 and 2014, the Partnership approved more than US$2 billion in funding for partner countries -- an amount similar to that approved for the entire 2004 to 2011 period.

In 2014, the Global Partnership’s annual disbursements exceeded half a billion dollars for the first time, representing a 50% increase in annual flows from previous years. Demand from developing country partners is increasing, and the Global Partnership for Education has proven that it has the ability to substantially scale up disbursements within a very short space of time.

Yet while international rhetoric and ambition for education has been high, the reality is that, over the past 50 years, international financing for education, particularly basic education, has never been more than modest. The Global Partnership strongly agrees with the SDSN that we must set our sights higher; the world must reverse the sharp decline in global aid to education. Some of the failure in education stems from a lack of clear goal setting and demonstration of innovative solutions. But a larger part derives from the very nature of the education challenge, which as we note above requires multiple types of investments over a significant period of eight to ten years to show results.

Because the bulk of financing for education will continue to come from domestic sources, international aid to education needs to play a catalytic rather than just a gap-filling role in most countries. That is, it must leverage domestic finance and domestic capacity to deliver services to a growing population of children and youth. As an example of such a catalytic approach, the Global Partnership requires governments to maintain or increase domestic financing for education in order to be eligible for our grants. During our last replenishment conference in June of 2014, 27 developing country partners pledged to commit an additional US$26 billion for education from their national budgets. The Global Partnership’s introduction of a new results-based funding model this year provides additional incentives for governments to focus on making concrete, externally validated gains in learning, equity and efficiency, and it includes strengthened requirements around evidence-based sector plans, data collection and proper monitoring of learning outcomes.

There is also a significant and urgent need for financial gap filling when countries face protracted conflict or humanitarian crises. Since 2009, the Global Partnership for Education has emerged as the largest funder of education in countries affected by conflict (more than 50% of GPE disbursements were to fragile or conflict-affected countries in 2014). But much more must be done to ensure good education for displaced populations. A rapid and coordinated funding response during emergencies will ensure that children’s learning is not interrupted. This is the one area that we feel most needs an innovative new global solution, and the Global Partnership is actively considering what needs to done.

An inclusive multi-stakeholder model – with expanded capacity for advocacy

The SDSN recommends that all global funds be built as multi-stakeholder partnerships. Already today, the Global Partnership is the largest multi-stakeholder partnership in...
education. At the global level, our board is made up of donor and developing country governments, multilaterals, civil society groups, teachers, and private sector and foundations – representing 78 countries around the world, thousands of organizations, the major multilateral development banks and education-related UN agencies. At the country level, the Global Partnership brings together ministries, donor agencies and civil society behind a shared set of goals and an agreed plan, thereby galvanizing the will and targeting resources needed to deliver.

In parallel, the Global Partnership has invested more than US$30 million since 2009 in more than 50 national civil society coalitions to better enable grassroots groups, teachers associations and other citizen-led organizations to participate in the national education policy dialogue and monitor progress.

The Global Partnership is now the world’s largest funder of education advocacy, but its focus is on national-level accountability mechanisms. It supports the SDSN’s call for stronger advocacy in education and agrees that more must be done to ensure that its current investments are matched by a stronger international effort.

A systems approach to the crisis in learning

Education needs a systems-based approach. Financing modalities must be matched with an operational platform that supports the development of the national systems capable of delivering education to hundreds of millions of learners – and to the tens of millions who are not yet in school. Over more than a decade, the Global Partnership has worked to enhance developing nations’ capacity to plan and deliver schooling to an ever-widening population of children and youth. The results of this approach – in terms of access, and especially for girls – are strongly positive for GPE developing country partners. However, in terms of learning, much more needs to be done.

Solving the learning crisis differs fundamentally from delivering a vaccine, which is a discrete intervention at a single point in time. Instead, success requires an effective system capable of fostering coordination across a wide range of actors – including parents, communities, teachers, the developers and producers of curriculum and materials – over an extended period of time.

A significant and growing body of research suggests the types of interventions that can have a catalytic impact within this wider systems approach. Pedagogical reforms that better match teaching to student learning levels early in the school cycle are among the most cost-effective places to invest when addressing improvements in learning outcomes and enhanced rates of participation. Additionally, early childhood education and targeted health-related interventions in school (for example, eyeglasses, deworming and school lunches) have been proven to have strong, and in some contexts, catalytic, impacts on both learning and inclusion.

Yet for any of these interventions to have effect, a well-planned, staffed and coordinated learning system has to be in place to receive learners over a minimum period of eight to ten years. For this reason, supporting the transformation of education systems, while slow and
difficult work, is the only solution to achieve the education Sustainable Development Goals.

The SDSN paper proposes that the global fund for education have special funding windows for different levels of education—a fund for early childhood, for secondary, etc. This would unnecessarily fragment and undercut the goals we are pursuing. Historically, such an approach has led to less than optimal investment in basic education, where returns on investment are highest. Experience suggests that targeted investments to promote innovation and problem solving in specific areas are best made in contexts where there is sound planning and a system-wide approach to implementing reform.

The SDSN paper also calls for a competitive system of grant allocation. Our experience, prior to our transformation from the Education For All-Fast Track Initiative into the Global Partnership for Education is instructive here. EFA-FTI used a competitive process for decisions on grant allocation. The net result was that EFA-FTI failed to reach children living in the direst circumstances, in particular those from countries affected by conflict and fragility, where capacity to develop strong proposals is more limited. The Global Partnership now marries needs-based allocations with a transitional fund to support planning in fragile countries. Since 2011, our new approach has allowed us to support 12 FCACs, including Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and South Sudan.

The launch of the Global Partnership’s results-based funding model promises to further enhance performance while supporting countries most in need. Our new funding model combines increased support for sector analyses to better “back-cast” towards equity, efficiency, access and learning goals, with a variable tranche of funding payable upon achievement of verifiable results. Put another way, the new funding model incentivizes developing country partners to enact changes and meet goals that will strengthen and sustain their education systems.

**A data revolution based on principles of mutual accountability**

We agree with the SDSN that a stronger goal and results focus – including accountability for financing and for learning outcomes – is an essential driver of change. The Global Partnership recognizes that it must work to strengthen global efforts to track and monitor both domestic and international finance and learning outcomes. With its partners, the Global Partnership is investing in the development of better partnership-based approaches to monitoring out-of-school children, leading an international effort to develop more rigorous responses to capturing learning outcomes and piloting new methods for tracking public and international spending. Having invested US$32 million to date in such initiatives, we are now committed to expanding our work in all of these areas. More importantly, at our recent Board meetings, GPE developing country partners indicated a strong and mounting appetite for better monitoring – both of financing and of improved results for learning.

The SDSN report rightly tackles the problem of developing clear evidence and data to support successful implementation. That’s why the Global Partnership has introduced the requirement for stronger data systems in its new funding model and is exploring innovative ways of supporting better national-level monitoring and evaluation. Our partnership approach to the data challenge will build opportunities for mutual accountability and collective problem solving.

---

globalpartnership.org  /GlobalPartnership  @GPforEducation
Conclusion

The Global Partnership for Education has gained important momentum, and registered significant results, since its transformation in 2011 to a truly global partnership now working in 60 developing countries. We welcome the SDSN’s suggestions for galvanizing new international resources, better cooperation, greater locking together of knowledge, innovation and a focus on results. This is an exciting year. The Global Partnership for Education looks forward to working with the SDSN to support our mutual ambition for a world in which all children and youth – including the most vulnerable – receive a complete and good quality education.

For comments: Karen Mundy, Chief Technical Officer, kmundy@globalpartnership.org

References: Financing for Sustainable Development: Implementing the SDGs through Effective Investment Strategies and Partnerships, Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

@GPforEducation