

Pioneer Country Initiative

The Education Commission

The [International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity](#) (the Education Commission) is a major global initiative co-convened by the Prime Minister of Norway, the Presidents of Malawi, Indonesia, and Chile, and the Director-General of UNESCO. Chaired by UN Special Envoy for Global Education and former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, the Commission's members include former heads of state, Nobel Laureates, and leaders from education, business, economics, development, health, and security. The Commission is working to develop a compelling investment case for securing every child's right to a quality education – the civil rights struggle of our generation. In September 2016, the Commission presented its [Learning Generation](#) report to the UN Secretary-General calling for the largest expansion of educational opportunity in history as the pathway to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.”

Pioneer Country Initiative

The [Pioneer Country Initiative](#) was launched in November 2016 to help turn the Commission's report recommendations into action. The initiative seeks to inspire leadership in countries to become education champions, learn from successful country-led experiences and go further in implementing education reforms, increasing domestic investment in education, and enhancing delivery.

Under the leadership of Commissioner and former President of Tanzania HE Jakaya Kikwete, the Commission has led high-level delegation visits to meet with heads of state and government across Africa to share the Commission's recommendations, learn from the countries' own experiences, and discuss how further reforms and investment can transform learning results for children and youth. Fourteen countries in Africa, representing low- and middle-income countries and a cross-section of regional and linguistic zones, were selected for the initial wave of visits: Botswana, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Uganda. The Commission is considering expanding to Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean to ensure this is a global initiative, capturing learning and perspectives from across the world.

The initiative promotes a *delivery approach* to help countries achieve faster progress on delivering their education reforms and sector plans, and show that increasing learning outcomes and skills for children and young people is possible. The approach is inspired by the successful application of a similar approach in Tanzania and other countries and offers a way of working that can transform the way government delivers education. The Commission will support a first wave of “pioneer countries” to go through the process and demonstrate that a delivery approach can generate real improvements and results.

To date, demand for the initiative has been high because it responds to an urgent issue: the shared and common challenge of how to improve implementation and performance in education and service delivery.

The delivery approach attempts to achieve rapid results at scale by overcoming barriers to effective implementation, usually focused on government services such as health and education. This results-based approach can help countries achieve faster progress on existing and new plans by putting the focus on delivery, prioritization, and accountability. Key factors for success include: political commitment at the highest level, engagement of a wide variety of stakeholders through a lab-type approach, a strong accountability framework, and a delivery structure and units to drive improvements in implementation. The delivery approach is built around pillars: prioritization, discipline of execution and accountability.

Delivery labs are an important feature. The purpose of the labs is to analyze the current situation and root causes of issues, develop solutions and ideas, and produce a detailed and prioritized implementation plan to achieve results. The labs bring together players from all levels of the education system and include public and private actors. Other sectors are also invited. By bringing together participants from various agencies in a delivery system they can overcome structural barriers (working in silos, disparate agendas, and competition for funding) which prevent all parts of government and stakeholders from working effectively and collaboratively to address a problem. The labs are an intense process with 50 – 100 participants for four to six continuous weeks. Labs can create a powerful link between planning and implementation: participants feel ownership of the plan because they have painstakingly developed it, vigorously debated it, thought collectively and seriously about priorities and trade-offs, and deeply understand it. Where strong sector plans already exist, the delivery lab will strive to clarify implementation and monitoring responsibilities for execution of the plan.

The Commission is playing a catalytic role to kick start the Pioneer County Initiative in five ways. First, the Commission conducts high-level visits to inspire commitment at the top level of government to invest more in education and accelerate education reform and performance; most of the governments visited by the Commission are already very engaged in prioritizing education. Second, the Commission aims to catalyze greater use of delivery approaches through training and the sharing of good practice. Third, the Commission seeks to mobilize wider institutional support and financing for delivery approaches among governments and local and international partners. Fourth, the Commission plans to produce evidence of what works and promote a network of Education Champions. Finally, the Commission aims to help build a stronger and more comprehensive financing response from the international community, including through its support of the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Education Cannot Wait Fund (ECW), and its proposal to set up an [International Finance Facility for Education \(IFFEd\)](#).

Next Steps to move forward at country level

The Commission hosted a workshop in Nairobi in May 2017 to share recommendations of the Learning Generation and introduce country delegations to the delivery and lab approach. This was a milestone event, bringing together delegations of government and civil society representatives from 12 African countries to learn about the delivery approach and participate in a lab simulation.

This initial group of countries are at different stages in their political cycles or readiness. The Commission is taking a phased approach to supporting Pioneer Countries to take forward the delivery approach and labs, working intensively with those that are more ready and supporting the preparedness of other countries, including by encouraging them to join the lab process of initial countries. This includes working closely with donor partners to embed the approach in existing sector planning processes (such as the education sector planning supported by the GPE and its implementing partners) and to develop a sound institutional basis for future work. The delivery approach will be country-driven and can be customized to the country context. The Commission will engage around four main strands:

- 1) **Supporting a first wave of countries to move forward to the labs** with two to three countries on track by the UN General Assembly in September 2017. The Commission will offer support to continue to build political buy-in for the approach, technical advice to help countries prepare to embark on a lab, seed financing and support to help mobilize in-country finance for the labs. The lab duration and number of participants can be flexible based on the country context.
- 2) **Support a second wave of interested countries to become lab ready.** This will include identifying practical opportunities for countries to learn from the lab experience of the initial countries.
- 3) **Outreach to international players,** including development partners, philanthropists, civil society and the private sector. This will cover building support to promote a delivery approach, mobilizing financing for a wave of demonstrator labs, and helping grow the evidence base. The Commission will engage with development partners and other actors at both headquarters, regional and country level to nurture an institutional base for the future of the initiative.
- 4) **Building a learning network of Learning Generation Champions:** Workshop participants will be the pioneers of this initiative. The Commission will support a network for countries to learn from each other and from good practice and innovations in education. The network has the potential to extend as countries go through the labs, learnings are shared and several other countries join in with their own experiences.