

Oslo Education Week: Leaving no one behind in education: 16 June 2016

Key messages for the Education Commission

The rich discussions throughout the day are summarized in 3 messages for the Education Commission:

1. Counting the invisible - the need for better data for inclusion
2. Political will required to move beyond rhetoric to action for leaving no one behind
3. Financing for leaving no one behind needs to focus on raising domestic financing progressively.

The overarching message was that: The Education Commission should genuinely put equity at the very core of its analysis and recommendations.

1. Counting the invisible

To ensure no one is left behind, the Education Commission should advocate for disaggregated data on who is excluded. It is vital to take steps to count those who are currently invisible in statistics – for example children living on the streets or institutions, refugees and internally displaced people, nomadic populations, those living in illegal settlements or different language or ethnic groups.

It is encouraging that greater efforts are being made to support the collection of disaggregated data. One important example is in relation to including people with disabilities in household data such as UNICEF MICS, as well as in census data. There is a need for questions developed by the Washington Group aimed at identifying disability to be used systematically in surveys and administrative (including EMIS) data. Experience from surveys in which these questions have been used shows that this is possible to do without difficulty, and in ways that is not too time-consuming.

Data on the invisible are needed to inform progress in both access and learning, recognizing that the invisible are still more likely to be out of school, and also to ensure that once in school they have the opportunity to learn.

2. Political will: from rhetoric to action to leave no one behind

Data on its own is not enough – it needs to be used by those at local (including by teachers in schools), national as well as global levels. This requires broad stakeholder engagement in the use of data and evidence to inform policies, to change practices and to channel resource to where it is needed most. This means moving from tokenistic involvement to meaningful participation of civil society, including the teacher profession – it is vital to include those who know the children and their specific needs and therefore hold the key to make policies a reality. To achieve this, the Education Commission should come up with a strong recommendation for governments to legislate for institutionalised social dialogue with teacher organisations, ensuring their full participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education policy. The Commission should also support data and evidence being made available and accessible to all.

As part of this, there is a need to collect data on learning not only for national and global accountability through summative assessment systems, but also to strengthen in-school formative assessment in conjunction with support to teachers to ensure data are used to improve the quality of education in the classroom.

Girls' education provides a stark example of the need to move from rhetoric to action. Over the past 15 years, progress has been made in improving the availability of gender-disaggregated data but this has yet to shift policies and financing needed to tackle gender-based violence and other barriers that hold back girls' access and learning. A key reason for this lack of progress is identified to be associated with weak political will – as such, the Education Commission needs to pay attention to strengthening political will for excluded groups, including marginalized girls.

More generally, there was agreement that policies that have worked for the 90% of the world's children in school will not work for the last 10%. At the same time, implementing strategies that improve learning for the most marginalized – such as poor, rural girls – will improve learning for all. As such, there was consensus that we won't find the ways to inclusive systems unless we analyse everything through the lens of equity.

3. Financing to leave no one behind

The Education Commission should put equity at the core of budget decisions, and avoid 'fads' in financing. Philanthropy and aid have an important role to play, but will not fill the financing gap. Rather that sustainable financing of education will need to come from domestic resources. To achieve this, there is a need to raise domestic resource base through progressive taxes. Aid donors can play a role in supporting countries in achieving this. Donor countries also have a responsibility to create more transparency in the international financial system by removing legal loopholes that allows tax avoidance.

A related issue raised relates to the aspects of the education system that public resources (both domestic and aid) should focus on. Given the majority of children from poor households are in government schools, and some do not make it beyond primary school, public funds aimed at leaving no one behind needs to focus on these schools if they are to improve learning for the most disadvantaged.

Another current 'fad' is results-based financing. This can help to shift the focus from inputs to outputs, and ensure attention is paid to effective implementation. For GPE, for example, 30% of the grant is depending on achievements within equity, learning and efficiency. There was a fear, however, that those who don't achieve results are exactly those who will need more financing; and that results' indicators may be set externally. As such, failure to achieve results should not automatically mean that funding is cut, but rather reasons for the failures are identified, and strategies and implementation are adjusted accordingly. The importance of defining the right results and indicators, and that these need to be owned locally, was stressed: financing incentives that are not owned locally and by the government will not be sustainable.

A related point is that donors and other external partners need to engage with the education sector for the long haul: given education is on on-going process, it requires long-term, predictable, core support. As much external support for the education sector as possible should be aligned with one education sector plan, with developing country in the driving seat for devising the plans and identifying national priorities based on an evidence-base of local needs and through broad stakeholder consultation. These plans need to identify disadvantaged groups, and set targets for their progress in access and learning at different levels of the education system.

For further information on the programme, see here:

https://www.utdanningsforbundet.no/PageFiles/292936/program_executive%20summaries.pdf