



Global Education Forum

October 25, 2021

Meeting Summary

Background

The Global Education Forum (GEF) convened members on October 25, 2021. The meeting was held at a time when the global community is still facing the uncertain consequences of the global pandemic as some schools begin the process of reopening while others remain closed due to the pandemic. Some children will still not return to school even after schools reopen, further deepening existing inequalities between high-income and middle- and low-income countries. Prior to the pandemic, Learning Poverty was at 53% and was initially estimated to rise to 63%. Startling new data from the World Bank shows an actual rise to 70%. These learning losses could lead to as much as a 10% loss in life-time earnings for the generation of children in countries with longer school closures. Access to essential services such as school meals have not yet been restored everywhere, and as many as 350 million children continue to miss out on their main meal of the day. As part of COVID recovery plans, leaders must prioritize and protect education budgets given education's fundamental role in delivering the entire Sustainable Development Goal agenda and unlocking opportunities for the world's children and youth.

In this context, the role of the GEF is more important than ever to ensure a coordinated and aligned donor agenda for action on global education. The GEF continues to build on the [Save Our Future White Paper](#) and the recommendations of UNESCO's [Global Education Meeting Declaration](#). These efforts called on international donors to act urgently to support programs in four priority policy areas: (1) the education workforce; (2) school health and nutrition; (3) digital learning; and (4) foundational learning. GEF members will continue efforts to align donors around these broad policy areas as part of the newly endorsed Global Cooperation Mechanism (GCM).

Recommendations and Key Follow-up Actions

In advance of the GEF, several working papers were prepared, including concrete proposals for collective actions around the new education workforce topic and the ongoing topics of school health and nutrition, digital learning, and foundational learning.¹

¹ Detailed proposals can be found in the meeting background papers. Leading coordinating partners in the Forum on these issues include the European Commission and the Global Partnership for Education for the Education Workforce, the World Food Programme for School Health and Nutrition, the World Bank and USAID for Foundational Learning, and UNICEF for Digital Learning.

Key recommendations and follow-up actions highlighted by Forum participants during the discussions at the GEF meeting are summarized below.

EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Summary of Discussion

There was broad support for the proposals calling on GEF members to 1) Develop a set of principles to guide investment in the education workforce; 2) Advocate for prioritization of investment in teachers and the broader education workforce; 3) Track global investment in the education workforce; 4) Build evidence on high priority and under-researched issues to strengthen the education workforce; 5) Support data collection on the broader workforce and development of a global education workforce diagnostic to promote better design and planning of the workforce; and 6) Work with countries to test and scale innovative and evidence-based approaches to strengthening the education workforce.

Specific points made during the discussion include:

1. **There is an urgent need to harness the wider education workforce, such as school leaders, administrators, and community leaders to work together collaboratively in a team-based approach to teaching.** The pandemic has proved the critical role of teachers and the education workforce in achieving quality education, learning outcomes, health, and safety. Well-trained, motivated teachers can drive transformational change from early childhood to vocational and higher education.
2. **Teachers and the education workforce need support and training through continuing professional development and concentrated efforts to build capacity, particularly as digital learning becomes more standard.** Leveraging transformational and adaptive technologies requires new pathways to improve teacher quality. There is a need to support the development of infrastructure and promote evidence-based policy reforms for teacher training with infrastructure knowledge, work, and policy dialogues.
3. **It is critical to include refugee teachers, displaced teachers, and teachers from communities in education development plans, systems, and budgets.** Teachers operating in situations of displacement in refugee crisis are often refugees and displaced themselves. These teachers are frequently underpaid and excluded from National Education Development programs.
4. **Coordination of the education workforce must involve all stakeholders, not only donors and developing country governments, but also other authorities such as teachers' unions and scientists.**
5. **The education workforce should consider climate and gender issues.** Changes in tackling climate education won't happen without teachers and a significant behavior change is needed to create a newly educated generation to tackle climate change. In certain contexts, the education workforce should focus on female teachers to attract more girls to school.
6. **It is crucial to prioritize building evidence and implementing best practices.** Supporting quality teaching requires diagnostics, data, and evidence-based interventions on teachers and teaching quality, as well as by strengthening the ability of teacher organizations to participate in policy dialogue.

7. **Donors must try to adopt a more unified approach for additional investments in education, health, and social protection, especially in low- and middle-income countries.** The international community must invest in the education workforce and in crisis contexts should build on direct execution models (through organizations like UNICEF, ECW, Save the Children, and local organizations) so that funding is sustainable and not sensitive to changes in government.
8. **The education workforce could serve as the uniting priority throughout all the GEF work streams.** Digital learning, school health and nutrition, and foundational learning all need to consider the needs of the education workforce.
9. **GEF members should also consider how to build on existing work supporting the education workforce.** This includes tracking investments and collecting data in fragile and conflict settings. The recently launched Global Platform for Successful Teachers aims to help countries enhance their teacher policies to improve teaching and learning and could support the proposals.

Follow-up Actions

- Several GEF members expressed intentions to lead on various action and will continue to coordinate through the education workforce working group (co-led by the European Commission and the Global Partnership for Education) to progress the actions leading up to the next GEF meeting in April 2022.
- The Honorable Minister from Ghana outlined plans to set up a national education institute focused on training of teachers and other administrators to provide them with the requisite professional and leadership skills to deliver quality education to all students irrespective of their background. The April 2022 GEF meeting will provide an opportunity to further elaborate on how the bilateral development partners together with multilateral partners can work together to support Ghana in their plans.

SCHOOL HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Summary of Discussion

There was broad support for the proposals calling on GEF members to 1) Reach out to bring in new members of the School Meals Coalition; 2) Engage and provide support for the new Financing Task Force (launching in January 2022); and 3) Drive the discussion on school health and nutrition financing and collaborating for a session at the RewirEd Summit in December 2021.

Specific points made include:

- **School meals are essential as they promote school attendance and learning and create equal opportunities for boys and girls since for many children school meals are their only meal of the day.** While digitalization of learning has been helpful, in-person schooling is still essential for aspects like school meals.
- **The establishment of effective school meal programs represents a smart investment in future generations,** as they can be a true catalyst for change and facilitate the creation of

opportunities, especially for girls and women who have been hit the hardest by the effects of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic.

- **Strong emphasis on the continued need for a multisectoral approach.** This will require collaboration between the ministries of education, health, water, sanitation, and more. It will also require cooperation between public and private sectors.
- **GEF members offered support – both technical and political - for the Global Research Consortium on School Health and Nutrition and the Financing Task Force.** The task force will launch in January 2022 and will map, coordinate, and help mobilize funding of school-based health and nutrition services to support developing countries to accelerate and broaden their efforts, including by developing innovative approaches to funding school meals.

Follow-up Actions

- The [School Meals Coalition](#) will continue to develop and expand with the support of the GEF and donors and GEF members are invited to join and support these efforts.
- The Financing Task Force will launch in January 2022 and GEF members are invited to engage. The task force will map, coordinate, and help mobilize funding of school-based health and nutrition services to support developing countries to accelerate and broaden their efforts, including by developing innovative approaches to funding school meals.
- The public-private cross-sectoral school health and nutrition roundtable will take place during the RewirEd summit in December 2021.

DIGITAL LEARNING

Summary of Discussion

There was broad support for the proposals calling for GEF members to 1) Endorse and use as guide the Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education (to be launched at RewirEd in December 2021); 2) Support countries in developing and implementing plans for the expansion and financing of digital learning; and 3) Develop (and fund) a global long-term investment strategy adaptive to country needs by supporting key high-level dialogues including the upcoming RewirEd Summit and the public-private investor roundtable on digital connectivity for education, proposed by HE Minister Reem Al Hashimy at the April 2021 GEF meeting.

Specific points made include:

- **There must be the development of a global long-term investment strategy for connectivity and digital learning that is adaptive to countries.** This strategy can provide a basis for more effective donor coordination and potentially crowd in public, private, and community-based organizations and partners recognizing the scale but also the potential digital initiatives.
- **Brokering universal access to connectivity and digital learning will require working with actors outside of education.** Many are much better placed to tackle local and global challenges such as basic broadband infrastructure, enabling regulatory policies and incentives, and the safe and accessible use of emerging technologies. The success of these efforts will depend on new models of multi stakeholder collaboration between industry, investors, governments, development finance institutions, donors, international organizations, regions, local entities, civil sector, universities, and the private sector.

- **The education workforce strategy and digital learning strategies cannot be separated since digital learning still requires the human touch of teachers.** Teacher professional development must be considered when developing digital learning strategies.
- **The international community must prioritize connectivity in digital learning.** The work of the Broadband Commission's Working Group on Digital Learning has produced a report on how to leverage technology to ensure equitable quality education through hybrid learning, combination of traditional instruction and online learning (such as the Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education and the newly launched Giga initiative to connect every school to the internet.)
- **The stakes are particularly high with digital learning for refugees and marginalized populations.** Estimates in refugee communities put access to internet at about 50% less than in the general population and donors must prioritize the most marginalized in digital learning.

Follow-up Actions

- GEF members expressed interest in supporting the development of digital learning investment plans. Plans must lay out a roadmap for affordable digital expansion, possibly including plans to connect schools to the Internet, and must detail how each element will be funded.
- A high-level public-private investor roundtable will be hosted at the Expo during the RewirEd summit in December 2021. It aims to support the mobilization of resources for connectivity and digital learning.
- The Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education will be launched at RewirEd. GEF members expressed support for the declaration. The international community was called on to set standards and provide a better regulatory framework for quality digital learning.

FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

Summary of Discussion

There was broad support for the proposals calling on GEF members to 1) Support the Learning Data Compact and engage in efforts to improve knowledge among countries and GEF members to ensure that all countries, especially low-income countries, have at least one quality measure of learning by 2025, supporting coordinated efforts to strengthen national assessment systems and 2) Support the Accelerator Country portfolio.

Specific points made include:

- **Collecting learning data for reporting, policymaking, and supporting teacher training is crucial for foundational learning.** The biggest challenge may not be technical but instead may be the politics of getting the education systems to revolve around improvements at scale when the learning crisis is still vastly underestimated by stakeholders.
- **The economic benefits of investing in foundational skills are clear and donors have an urgent part to play.** GEF members should support and enhance coordinated multi-donor financing mechanisms (e.g. Education Cannot Wait, World Bank Foundational Learning Compact, Global Partnership for Education, and Education Outcomes Fund) and explore new financing solutions that can bring additional resources to the table (e.g. International Finance Facility for Education).

Follow-up Actions

- GEF members expressed support for the development of the Accelerator Country portfolio. Members interested in foundational skills and greater coordination across agencies are invited to join this effort.
- GEF members expressed support for the development of the Learning Data Compact.

The Global Cooperation Mechanism (GCM)

Members discussed the progress of the Global Cooperation Mechanism and highlighted three important observations:

- The proposed framework of the GCM does not attempt to centralize or replace existing diverse platforms.
- Instead, it aims to add value to the existing global regional and country level coordination mechanisms so that actors across the board cooperate more efficiently and more effectively in the service of better and faster progress toward SDG at the country level.
- The GCM will have a High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) for governance, with Sherpas leading ongoing technical work.

The GEF plays an important role in the GCM and will undergo a review before the next GEF meeting with GEF members to better clarify how its purpose and objectives can evolve to complement the GCM and the HLSC, how the GEF can strengthen relationships and players in the GCM system, and operationally, how the structure and participation of the GEF could evolve in view of its role.