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What are the key messages from the Report?

1. Despite strong progress in education, including fast advances in pre-primary enrolment rates and slow rises in adult literacy and gender parity, there are significant challenges to achieving our global education goal, SDG4.
2. Accountability helps know who is responsible for education’s problems, where those responsibilities are not met, and what to do about it.
3. The ambitious education outcomes in SDG 4, including whether children are learning or not, rely on multiple actors fulfilling shared responsibilities. Disproportionate blame on one actor, such as a teacher, can have serious negative side effects, widening inequality and damaging learning.
4. Accountability starts with governments, which are the primary duty bearers for the right to education. Independent institutions, such as ombudsmen and parliamentary committees, as well as audits, electoral cycles and transparent information about education systems can help hold them to account for SDG 4.
5. There are many actors helping provide education. Governments must protect equity and education quality across all these providers by strengthening regulations. At present these are sometimes inexistent, particularly as regards the private sector, letting negative practices set in.
6. Everyone has a role to play in improving education. We all – including parents and students – can help hold governments to account for education via protests and campaigns, and with the media’s help.

What are the Report's key recommendations?

1. Design accountability for schools and teachers that is supportive and formative and avoids punitive mechanisms, especially those based on narrow performance measures.
2. Develop credible and efficient regulations with associated sanctions for all education providers, public and private, that ensure non-discrimination and the quality of education.
3. Make the right to education justiciable, which is not the case in 45% of countries.
4. Be transparent about the strengths of weaknesses of education systems, opening policy processes to broad and meaningful consultation and publishing a regular education monitoring report.

What concrete steps can people/ministries/international Organisations take?

The Report contains evidence-based policy recommendations, which can be picked up by Ministries or by advocacy groups to help improve accountability for SDG 4. (see above)

Why was accountability chosen as the thematic topic?

There are today 264 million children and youth not going to school – progress can only be sustainable through common efforts. Without accountability, it is hard to know where the bottlenecks and challenges to progress lie, and find solutions to address them. Still at the start of the Sustainable Development Agenda, due to be realized in 2030, it is...
crucial to ensure countries have accountability systems correctly designed and implemented so that challenges can be addressed now, rather than when it’s too late.

**What is accountability?**

Accountability helps show who is responsible for what, and how problems can be fixed.

**Which is the best country in terms of accountability? Which is the worst?**

There is no best or worst country for accountability. Some mechanisms work in some contexts and some work in others. Some mechanisms might work in one country for one actor, while at the same time, some other actors in that country are being let off the hook.

What we do know is that accountability mechanisms based on punitive measures, such as imposing sanctions on teachers or schools for learning outcomes, can backfire. Korea uses such systems at the lower and upper secondary education level. Denmark has this system too. As does the USA. The UK fines parents who do not ensure their children turn up in school, which does not reduce truancy, and also impacts disproportionately on single mothers. Governments should treat teachers as professionals, including them in the development of accountability mechanisms such as how evaluations should be formulated, and codes of ethics developed.

Positive examples include providing transparent and easily understandable information about education systems, and progress and challenges faced in achieving education plans. This includes countries that carry out independent audits of their work, and governments that install independent and autonomous institutions, including ombudsmen, parliamentary committees and judiciaries. It includes countries that respect democratic voices, and allow for free press and free and fair elections to encourage scrutiny of education policies and plans that affect our common progress towards SDG 4.

**What does the report say about accountability in rich countries?**

Richer countries have more capacity to carry out accountability, but rich or poor, can also make mistakes if they do not take care with its design. The United States’ No Child Left Behind policy, for instance, which was high-stakes linked to student test scores, ended up widening inequalities, and seeing

**What does the report say about corruption?**

Regardless of design, if governments and other key stakeholders lack genuine commitment and appropriate information, resources and capacity, accountability systems are hard to implement.

Strong independent institutions can help deter, detect and investigate corruption. Audits, ombudsmen, parliamentary committees and a strong judiciary can help tackle corruption as long as they are independent and with authority. In the Philippines, an audit monitored textbook delivery points to reduce corruption and reduced textbook costs by almost two-thirds.

In some countries, CSOs have used budget tracking to assess whether resources are
allocated and spent in line with budgets and plans. The media can also help to investigate allegations of corruption, and to monitor the allocation of resources.

**Private Schools:**

**Are private actors working outside of the law in education?**

Government regulations for all education providers must protect equity and education quality. Where these regulations are inexistent, or enforced too slowly to keep up with the expansion of education providers, negative practices can slip through the net. This has been the case in countries such as Kenya, where ineffective regulations allowed private schools to function without

**What do you think about the Bridge Academy Schools?**

The case of BIAs is an example of a case of weak regulatory environments as is found in many countries with many other providers. BIA have been high profile in the media because they are the largest private providers of nursery and primary schools. They demonstrate that rapid expansion of private chains can be challenging for governments already stretched with regulating public education at all education levels.

In Kenya, regulations did not cover low-fees private schools. Consequently, BIA’s rapid expansion far outpaced the government’s ability to put in place and monitor appropriate regulations. After new regulations were established, unqualified teachers, unregistered schools, inadequate infrastructure and unauthorized curriculum were shown, and 10 schools ended up being closed by court ruling.

In Uganda, where guidelines for private schools were laid out in 2014, legal action against BIA was taken more quickly. In April 2016, the government ordered BIA to halt its rapid expansion after inspectorate reports in districts containing 74% of BIA schools led to a failing evaluation for the organization. Two months later, all academies were ordered closed for failing to meet minimum standards., which the court approved in November 2016.

**Testing**

**Where do countries punish teachers or schools for bad student tests?**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era in the United States, is perhaps the best example of performance-based accountability where positive or negative consequences are linked to publicly disseminated student test scores. Further examples are found in China, where school inspection reports are made public and used as a basis to sanction or reward schools and Denmark where school exams are included as part of the annual school quality report with mandatory publication on the school’s website. In higher education, the performance of professors can be linked to their research production. For example, in New Zealand to address concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of government spending, performance clauses were added to professor contracts.

**What does the Report say about the no child left behind policy in the USA?**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era in the United States is the most widely known and
documented national initiative in test-based accountability. It required all students to reach proficiency standards in mathematics and reading as set by the states by 2014.

NCLB had marginal positive effects on student achievement, partly because schools or educators gamed the system for fear of punishment.

One unintended result of NCLB was narrowing down the curriculum. For example, an analysis found that it accelerated performance gains but widened the achievement gap between black and white students. In response to accountability pressures, many schools reclassified low-performing students as students with disabilities or excluded them altogether. Elementary schools increased mathematics and language instruction by a combined 230 minutes per week under NCLB, on average, while decreasing time for social studies, science, art and music, physical education and recess.

These practices may have been more common in low-performing schools at greater risk of sanction. For example, 38% of principals in New York schools with high minority enrolment reported decreasing time devoted to social studies, compared with 17% of those in schools with low minority shares. About 90% of principals in Georgia and Pennsylvania reported giving teachers test preparation materials, such as practice tests, and almost all reported helping teachers identify content that was likely to be on the state test.

Are you saying that testing is bad? Is this a criticism of OECD’s PISA? / How can you be against data when you’re a monitoring report?

Learning assessments act as a crucial litmus test of the functioning of an education system, and as such, we believe they are vital.

But learning data should not be collected for data’s sake alone. Efforts to collect data must happen hand in hand with efforts to ensure it is the right data, and that capacity is sufficient to make the most of it to improve quality instruction. Teachers and school leaders need to be data-literate, and to have the onus placed on them to collect and use data recognized in their work plans. Learning data needs to be understandable by those who are supposed to use them including parents. Often the data is used to rank schools or institutions, but parents are unable to decipher their meaning.

Data needs to be disaggregated and placed in socio-economic context, as well as carried out over time in order to demonstrate real findings.

Test scores should not be associated with punitive sanctions for teachers or schools, who cannot be held individually responsible for learning, which are an outcome of an entire education system, and not one person.

If tests are not high-stakes, will they draw the same level of importance?

Tests will obviously sometimes be high-stakes for students, to indicate whether they pass on to the next education level, receive a diploma, gain access to a particular institution or job. But countries should be cautious about making them also high-stakes for teachers or schools, given that learning outcomes are often outside of their direct control.
**Teachers**

Surely we should punish teachers if they don’t turn up to class?

Our report does not say that punitive measures should never be used, but that they should not be used as a first resort. Teachers are often absent for reasons entirely out of their control, including a lack of roads, for example, conflict, lack of pay, illness or training. Data on teacher absenteeism does not distinguish between teachers that don’t bother coming to school and those that are taking training. This is yet another sign that we should not be too quick to jump to conclusions, and point fingers of blame. That said, of course, if it is discovered that there is no excuse for the absenteeism that the teacher should face consequences.

Are teacher unions useful for holding governments to account? Often they stand in the way of changing education policy.

Teachers’ unions are part of the broader civil society but also have a distinct voice and role. They can help hold governments accountable by supporting or resisting education reform and promoting dialogue on sensitive issues the government may hesitate to address. Formally including unions in policy-making increases accountability and teacher buy-in while improving union–government relations. Unfortunately, however, unions are not regularly consulted on reform. Of 70 unions in more than 50 countries, over 60% were never or rarely consulted on the development and selection of teaching materials.

**Other**

Without truancy laws, how will we make sure students come to school?

Truancy laws are only one way to ensure children turn up to school. The most effective mechanisms are whole-school approaches, involving school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents. Developing codes of conduct together can help address the root causes behind truancy, before jumping straight into punishments.

Are you saying school choice shouldn’t be offered? What if parents want to move their children to another school?

School choice is a policy designed to make schools work harder to attract parents. As such, it puts the power in the parents hands, and holds schools accountable for providing a safe and conducive learning environment. The logic of the policy is sound. But it must come hand in hand with transparent, easily understandable information on the choices available. And cost barriers to particular choices should be eased with conditional cash transfers, targeted to those most in need. The danger with the policy without these additional elements is that the supposed choice of schools is inexisten and the most marginalised children are left in the most marginalized schools.

How can citizens contribute to better accountability?

All of us have a role to play in improving the quality of education.

Citizens, supported by the media, play a vital role in holding all education actors to account, including teachers, schools, governments and private actors.
This can happen through civil action, including protests, such as we saw in South Africa with the #FeesMustFall campaign, where students manage to freeze the increase in price of higher education.

It can happen through campaigns with civil society organisations, which act as a watchdog, scrutinizing government actions. CSOs have been seen to help with budget tracking, for instance, showing where funding is not in line with education plans. They have produced research, including national learning assessments, to bring particular issues to the forefront of political discussions.

But parents also play a particular role as regards holding schools to account, taking part in school management committees, for example, or sitting on school boards.

Students have also been seen to monitor teachers’ attendance using mobile phones, for instance, in Uganda. They can sit on university boards, and contribute to the formulation of institutional policy as well.

**Has the media contributed to accountability? Is it an effective watchdog?**

The media can serve as a watchdog on the government, helping citizens evaluate its performance. It also serves as a channel for CSOs to disseminate their work and bring issues such as equity to the public agenda. International, national and local media have published results of citizen-led assessments to illustrate the challenge of ensuring basic skills for all children.

The media can increase pressure on education officials to act responsibly. In Uganda, the closer a school was to a newspaper, the more likely it received the funds it was promised.

Social media allows users to share information widely, free from editorializing, journalist filtering or, in some cases, government censorship.

Yet the media also needs to be independent, accountable, and able to provide relevant information and reflect diverse social views.

**What does the report say about girls?**

Girls in poor countries continue to face steep barriers to education. According to UIS data, 21% of girls of primary school age remain excluded from education in low-income countries, compared to 17% of boys. In total, more than 11 million girls of primary age are not in school in these countries, compared to almost 9 million boys. The good news is that the girls who do manage to start school tend to pursue their studies at the secondary level.

Our Gender Review, due out early next year, will draw out the key findings related to girls from the Report. This will include looking at how states and all those working in education are held to account for gender equality. It will show where different accountability mechanisms currently being used are working to achieve gender equality, and where they are working against it.
Why is it important that people can take their governments to court? Aren't there better ways to deal with problems with education?

The Right to Education is a fundamental backstop for education progress that holds governments to account for providing an equitable quality education. If this right is not justiciable, there is no way for citizens to address violations of it. There are multiple other ways of holding governments to account, which many countries use at the current time, but a strong judiciary backing up the right to education is a concrete way to

Finance

Is there a shortage of finance for education?

Even well designed accountability systems are meaningless if governments do not have appropriate resources, adequate capacity and a genuine commitment, to implement over the long term.

At the start of the Sustainable Development Agenda, the GEM Report calculated that there is an annual finance gap for achieving the education goal, SDG 4, of $39 billion and that aid donors would need to increase their contributions at least sixfold if the gap was to be fixed. Our latest estimates show that aid to education remains stagnant since this point, falling as a share of overall development aid, pushing SDG 4 out of reach.

Governments should spend at least 4% of GDP on education, or allocate 15% of total government expenditure and ensure its timely disbursement. In 2015, at least 34 countries, both rich and poor, did not reach either of these benchmarks.

What needs to happen to ensure finance isn’t a barrier to meeting SDG4?

Budgets should be publicly available with strong independent audits attached. Independent audits can uncover financial leakages: In the Philippines, an audit monitored textbook delivery points to reduce corruption and reduced textbook costs by almost two-thirds.

There is a stark lack of follow up mechanisms when donors do not meet their aid commitments. Citizens and the media should help keep up the pressure on donors to keep to their aid commitments of allocating 0.7% of GNI to aid with 10% of that going to education. Donors should be careful of results-based financing, which often shifts the risk to countries that are the least prepared to bear it, and, without an emphasis on equity, can tempt governments to help the easiest-to-reach first in order to be paid.

How much money from education is lost due to corruption?

Corruption is a multi-faced beast, which can take multiple forms, and, as such, is impossible to calculate without being simplistic. Our Report cites multiple examples of different examples of financial corruption, including salaries being filtered off for ghost teachers, or corruption during textbook procurement, but it is impossible to aggregate the overall effect of these multiple actions on education.
**Monitoring**

**What are the key recommendations?**

The recommendations focus on national capacity and global coordination for monitoring education.

At the **national** level, six steps would strengthen monitoring of education in the next 3 to 5 years.

1. Countries are not always aware of the extent of education **inequality**. Outside of information collected from schools, other evidence produced by national statistical agencies through household or labour force surveys can produce highly relevant information. Ministries of education should be more involved in the design of such surveys and the use of their results.

2. If they have not done so already, countries should establish a sample-based national **learning** assessment to monitor progress in a range of learning outcomes over time. They should also ensure these assessments monitor the skills of those who have left school early.

3. Assessing the **quality** of education cannot be reduced to learning outcomes. It should include looking at policies, curricula, textbooks and teacher education programmes, judging them against the way they address tolerance, human rights, and sustainability, for instance.

4. Schooling alone cannot deliver all the expected outcomes from improved education by 2030. We need to focus on **lifelong learning**, yet at present, the education opportunities of adults are barely being monitored at all.

5. Countries should be encouraged to engage in debates and exchange ideas on good practices of key **education policies**, for example how to address disadvantage in education. This could be best achieved within regional organizations engaged in education, as examples from Europe and Latin America suggest.

6. Finally, countries are encouraged to adopt a national education accounts approach to improve monitoring of education **spending** not only from governments and donors but also from households, which would help understand better whether the costs are shared fairly.

At the **global** level, the Report draws attention to the fact that countries have the chance to contribute to the discussion on SDG 4 indicators and should be supported to do so in an informed and meaningful way. Overall, the opportunities for a data revolution should not be limited to collecting more data using new technologies but should address the challenges of better coordination and more resources. The Report has three recommendations on how to improve the global coordination of monitoring education.

1. First, we need an international household **survey** programme, dedicated to education to cover many of the information gaps in the new agenda. Currently, few questions are dedicated to education in existing major cross-country multi-purpose surveys such as the DHS and the MICS. Potential donors need to discuss the cost-effectiveness of a new tool of this kind.
2. Second, we need a consistent approach to support the monitoring of learning outcomes. Countries need support to build their national assessment systems. A code of conduct among donors and a common pool of resources is needed that would help build countries’ capacity, and help them access shared resources.

3. Third, with the expanded scope of the Education 2030 agenda, many targets have not yet been measured on a global scale. Indicators, especially those related to learning outcomes, have not yet been fully developed. A research hub should be set up to focus on issues related to the global monitoring of education. Education could draw lessons from partnerships or networks in health or agriculture that have pooled research resources to the same effect.

**Are we making progress in getting more kids into schools? Why not?**

There are several reasons for a lack of progress in reducing global out of school numbers. They include:

- Rising demand for education from a growing school-age population in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Persistent widespread poverty.
- Impact of conflict in countries like Syria.
- The limitations of business-as-usual strategies to reach the most marginalized children.
- Education is not compulsory in many countries for youth between the ages of 15 and 17.

**Where does the data come from?**

The main source of information for the report remains the official government data. However, the report has the mandate to monitor a much wider range of data than these official data provide, which forces the report to look for other sources. Examples include the following:

- The need to ensure that we ‘leave no one behind’ means that the report has to use information on differences in education between the poor and the rich. Typically, governments do not provide such information ‘officially’ even though they authorize the collection of such data by their national statistical agencies.
- Data on learning outcomes are typically accepted by governments but since they have not been obliged in the past to report on relevant indicators they have not provided such data through ‘official’ sources.

**How do you make sure it’s right?**

The report uses high quality sources which it thoroughly documents. In addition, the Report team cross-checks with other sources to validate them. Nevertheless, it is always open to comments that identify inconsistencies or errors in its continuous effort to maintain high quality standards.
Where can I get more statistics?

The annex of the Report contains the statistical tables; a longer version of these tables is available online. In addition, the interactive World Inequality Database on Education can also be used via www.education-inequalities.org

How does your data differ from the data being drawn together by UIS? Why is it different? Whose data should we be following?

The report uses primarily data provided by the UIS. But it also uses additional data from other sources that help fulfil its mandate to monitor the entire SDG4 agenda. Contradictory data are not used; if there is a possibility that data could appear inconsistent, the report usually anticipates that and carefully explains what the source of the difference is.

How did you decide what data to use?

It depends on the indicator – it is a combination of relevance (i.e. how close an indicator is to the concept that is being monitored), availability (i.e. the more countries/regions are covered by existing data, the better) and quality (i.e. our assessment of the reliability of the source).

What year is most of your data from? Isn’t our own national data more reliable and recent?

UIS data is from the period 2013-2015. National data can sometimes be more recent but it is not guaranteed that they are comparable; the added value of the UIS is to compile national data and apply common definitions, which takes time. Household survey data is from the period 2008-2014. They are usually the most recently available data that countries have.

Are the indicators you’re using different from those used by UIS? Why?

On administrative data, in the vast majority of cases, we use the UIS indicators. Where we don’t, this is because of some new areas in the SDG agenda that UIS was not previously covering; for example, UNICEF has been collecting systematic data on water and sanitation in schools.

In the case of household survey data, there was no commonly agreed indicator definitions. UIS is now adopting a number of indicators advocated by the GEM Report team. The GEM Report is also popularizing definitions of survey-based indicators used by regional organizations, for example the European Union definitions on adult education participation, or other bodies, such as the IEA on digital literacy.

How does the data being used in this report differ from the data being used in previous GMRs?

It would not be right to say that they differ in any substantive way. What is new is the additional reporting of data and indicators in new areas, such as early childhood development, tertiary education attainment, scholarships awarded, or teacher salaries.
Which are the targets we know the least about and why?

Of the ten targets, we know least about target 4.4 on skills for work. This is because — with the exception of literacy and numeracy skills — there is neither consensus on what skills are relevant for work in different contexts nor any tools to measure these skills. The report breaks new ground to help monitor target 4.7 on global citizenship and sustainable development but a lot needs to be done both to introduce processes that assess whether national curricula prioritize relevant concepts and to agree on what are the relevant skills to be acquired. Finally, somewhat surprisingly, there is no mechanism to monitor the award of scholarships and the characteristics of their recipients, which is required for target 4.b.

What’s the main reason for there not being data to monitor each of the targets?

There are three reasons, in decreasing order of complexity:

- Countries have not yet agreed on the concept to be monitored: for example, what is a minimum level of proficiency for reading at the end of primary school?
- Countries (at least some) have agreed on the concept but there are no tools or methodology: for example, the teacher attrition rate is well defined but few countries have systems that track whether an individual moves out (or into) the teaching profession over time.
- Countries (at least some) have agreed on the concept, there are some tools but there are no resources (or interest) to apply them globally: for example, the European Union has a survey of adult education but no other part of the world has taken up this idea.

When will we have data on all of the targets?

Focusing on the 11 global indicators, currently not a single one is reported on a global scale. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators is promoting methodological work and the UIS is engaging on a number of initiatives to ensure progress is made on these fronts. For example, it has established the Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning to reach agreement on target 4.1 (learning outcomes in basic education) and the Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators to promote consensus on target 4.5 (equity). Inter-governmental organizations such as the International Telecommunication Unit need to expand the coverage of tools for target 4.4 (ICT skills) and non-governmental organizations such as the International Institute of Education need to be entrusted with responsibility to collect data on target 4.b (scholarships). In other cases, more fundamental work is needed, for example UNESCO needs to lead a process for target 4.7 (GCED/ESD in curricula) or target 4.a (trained teachers).

How does this Report’s findings fit into the official follow up and review mechanism of the SDGs?

In response to the SDG document (§90), the UN Secretary-General’s (UNSG) report Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (January 2016) proposes that there will be thematic reviews (in addition to global and national reviews) as part of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The HLPF considers inputs from other intergovernmental bodies and forums, relevant UN entities, regional processes, major groups and other stakeholders.
Intergovernmental forums will contribute to the work of the HLPF on any theme and alert it about emerging issues or gaps.

In the case of education, the UNSG report has the following two implications on expected thematic contributions to the HLPF process:

- First, it refers explicit to the World Education Forum (WEF) as one of these intergovernmental bodies (§46). The WEF, through the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, has in turn given its mandate to the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee (SDG-ED2030 SC) as the global coordination mechanism on SDG 4.

- Second, it refers to the inventory conducted by the United Nations system Technical Support Team, which recognizes the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) as the global reporting mechanism on SDG 4, a fact affirmed through the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

In brief, the mandate chain is the following: SDG document > UNSG ‘follow up an review’ report > World Education Forum / Incheon Declaration > Education 2030 Framework for Action > GEM Report.

**Do the policy recommendations in the GMR represent the official stance of the UN/of UNESCO?**

The Global Monitoring report is an independent report that is published by UNESCO. Our analysis and summaries assess UN agencies’ activities as much as NGOs and governments. As such the recommendations do not represent the official stance of the UN nor UNESCO but are the views of the Global Monitoring Report alone.