

Frequently Asked Questions on the Global Compact on Learning and Global Education

What is the learning crisis?

In addition to the 64 million primary school-age children who are out of school in low-income countries, there are countless others who go through five years of school or more without acquiring basic fundamental skills, such as reading, writing, math and critical thinking. This leads to high dropout rates and fewer children progressing onto secondary school. Meanwhile, those who do stay in school often do not learn the relevant skills needed to secure productive jobs and bright futures. Without a quality education, children and youth are less likely to be able to contribute to their communities and countries. All of this amounts to nothing short of a learning crisis.

It is urgent that we refocus the global education discourse from solely getting children into school to ensuring that they learn while there. Developing skills and acquiring knowledge are what help drive economic growth, foster innovation and reduce poverty.

Why is it important to focus on learning?

Getting children into school by itself is not enough. There are a number of competing educational priorities but the research is clear—access alone is not the answer. Evidence shows that learning—not necessarily years in school—is what drives many quality of life improvements in terms of income, health status and a nation's economic development. Furthermore, ensuring that every child is in school will not be achieved without paying attention to quality and in particular to what they are learning. A global breakthrough is needed to achieve the actual goal of education—that every girl and boy should make the transition to adulthood equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to live safe, healthy and productive lives.

Why is it particularly important to focus on girls living in poverty and conflict-affected young people?

Despite significant progress over the past two decades in ensuring that more girls have an opportunity to learn, girls and young women in many developing countries remain at a disadvantage. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, more than 54 million girls are not attending school and therefore missing out on critical learning opportunities. This is compounded by the fact that almost half of all children who are not in school live in countries affected by conflict. In addition, many poor girls who are in school are falling behind boys in learning achievements. The evidence shows that it is crucial to pay special attention to achieving not only equity in access to education, but also quality. Investing in girls' education is arguably the most effective way to break the cycle of poverty and improve the health and welfare of their families and communities. A recent report estimates that 65 low- and middle-income countries are losing approximately \$92 billion per year by failing to educate girls to the same standards as boys.

When there are so many development priorities in the world, how can we decide which is most important?

Education is central to all development priorities around the world, including improving individuals' ability to lead healthier, more productive lives. For developing nations, having an educated and skilled workforce is essential to economic growth and poverty reduction. An estimated 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries obtain basic reading skills in school. That is equivalent to a 12 percent reduction in world poverty. Meanwhile, well-educated people are needed to tackle some of the world's most challenging issues—everything from climate change, to food security, to youth unemployment, to instability in key regions. In fact, for every additional year increase in the average schooling of a country reduces its likelihood of engaging in a civil war by 3.6 percent.

I thought we have made a lot of progress on education? Isn't it the most successful Millennium Development Goal (MDG)?

Over the past decade, there has been remarkable progress in getting more children and youth into school, proving that mobilizing around a collective goal, such as the MDGs, has been an effective effort. The number of children not in primary school has fallen by 39 million since 1999. However, getting children into school is only the first step. There are still many challenges facing global education, particularly the quality of education and equity of access, leaving an unfinished agenda. With four years remaining to meet the MDGs and Education for All goals, the time is ripe for a renewal of international cooperation and re-doubling of efforts. It is important that we not lose momentum and build on past success to continue the charge forward to get all children and young people into school and ensure that they are learning.

How will the Global Compact on Learning align with the MDGs?

Two of the MDGs—ensuring all children complete a full course of primary school and decreasing gender disparities in education—are inherently part of the Global Compact on Learning. Getting all children into school will not be achieved without paying attention to improving the quality of learning. Actions that help to improve learning outcomes also advance attainment goals. Meanwhile, there is a direct relationship between low learning levels and high dropout rates. While the past focus of these goals has been on getting kids into school, the Compact extends and deepens the MDGs to make learning itself an explicit priority. The Global Compact returns to the original intent of the Education for All goals, which formed the basis of the MDGs, and focuses squarely on the quality of education from early childhood through adulthood.

The Global Compact on Learning will build on the past success of the MDGs by focusing on the quality of education so that more kids start school, stay in school and complete school with the requisite skills and knowledge needed to live healthy, productive lives.

How do we ensure that all children and youth have access to quality learning opportunities that build relevant skills and knowledge?

Recent data on education show that targeted attention to quality and equity are necessary to reach those most often left behind, including girls living in poverty and conflict-affected young people. Evidence points to a set of strategies that, combined with renewed global cooperation, could jumpstart education development so that all children and young people are prepared to lead safe, healthy and productive lives. These priorities include:

- Helping children get an early start on learning in life;
- Ensuring basic literacy and math skills are learned in the early years of school; and
- Giving youth educational opportunities after primary school to equip them with life and livelihood skills needed for a healthy and productive future.

What is the Global Compact on Learning?

The Global Compact on Learning is a broad framework under which interested parties —governments of developing countries, donors, the private sector, civil society and the research community—are brought together to embrace, support and enact a policy agenda that focuses on access to quality and relevant learning opportunities for all children and youth, including those who are out of school. The goal of the Global Compact on Learning is to bring together a community of actors to take targeted actions that will build on the success of more children attending school, ensure previous mistakes are not repeated, put learning for all at the center, mobilize the energy and innovation of new

participants and ultimately support the sacrifices and efforts of so many families around the world who are committed to their children's education.

What does it mean to support the Global Compact on Learning?

Signing onto the Global Compact on Learning means that you support a paradigm shift in the global education agenda to focus on quality learning opportunities and outcomes for all children and young people, even the most marginalized, and will implement, in your local context and sphere of influence, the policies that promote this for children and youth. The Center for Universal Education at Brookings has identified crucial actions—for governments of developing countries, donors, the private sector, civil society and the research community—that can and must be taken to address the learning crisis. For more information, please visit http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/0609_global_compact.

How will we know if this effort has succeeded?

We will know we are making progress and making a difference when we have aligned efforts of all the various stakeholders. All parties have a role to play in translating this Global Compact on Learning into action—from developing country governments and aid donors to grassroots organizations and corporations to communities, parents, and teachers around the world. We envision success as seeing the following occur:

- *National governments* are committed to action at the highest levels to align national education policies and services with improved learning for all and to give adequate attention to the three essential priorities of early childhood development, literacy and math in lower primary grades and relevant post-primary education.
- *International donors and organizations* are focusing on improving learning for all by investing in learning. They are working with governments of developing countries to build in-country measurement capacities and ensure a common set of metrics that captures learning data and regularly shares information with communities, teachers, civil society organizations and the public at large in an easily understandable format.
- *Companies and foundations* are investing in the three main priorities needed to improve learning for all, realizing that supporting education is not only important for business but the right thing to do. They better collaborate and coordinate with other education actors, serve as vocal champions in support of quality education and increase financial and human resources in support of the Global Compact on Learning.
- *Civil society* incorporates a strong focus on learning and gender equity within advocacy agendas that push to get children into school and ensure they are learning while there.

Most importantly, not only will the education Millennium Development Goals be met so that all children are enrolled in primary school by 2015, they will also be learning in school, mastering foundational skills and transitioning successfully to post-primary education and later to safe, dignified job opportunities.