

Post-2015 Global Thematic Consultation on Education: What Role and Voice of the South in the E-Discussions?

NORRAG, 30th April 2013

Introduction

The Post-2015 Global Thematic Consultation on Education had a whole series of e-consultative processes attached to them. These ran, in total, for just less than three months, 10th December 2012 to 3rd March 2013: (1) Equitable Access to Education (10-24 Dec, 2012); (2) Quality of Learning (8-21 Jan, 2013); (3) Global Citizenship, Skills and Jobs (23 Jan- 6 Feb); (4) Governance and Financing of Education (10 Feb- 03 Mar). The e-consultation organisers, UNESCO and UNICEF, produced summary reports which gave us an overview of the main messages. According to these organizers, there were some 550 comments.

This short NORRAG review will provide an alternative summary of these e-consultations. It will not repeat the overall official summaries of e-discussions, but will focus on trying to tease out – to the extent possible – the role of the south and the voice of the south in these consultations.

It will re-examine all the comment submissions that were made under the four themes (access, quality, skills, finance), keeping the following questions in mind:

- What has been the role of the South in these e-discussions? Has it been possible to identify who has participated?
- What has been the voice of the South in these? How has the South reacted to the four themes of the e- discussion?

Who were involved in the e-discussions?

Those posting comments largely fell into two categories: individuals and civil society organisations (CSOs). However, there were also posts from inter-agency and inter-governmental organisations. A large proportion of contributions were anonymous; for example, about one-third of all substantive contributions to the access e-discussion were anonymous. As a result, of course, the comments lose their context and therefore, it could be argued, much of their value. When CSOs were contributing, sometimes it was not clear if they were putting forward their own views, or their organisational views. In the analysis below, it was assumed that if an individual had explicitly identified their organisational affiliation, their comments were in line with their organisational view point. The moderators, on the most part, stuck to posing questions or to doing summaries of discussion. Sometimes comments appeared to come from a moderator, but were anonymous.

The official summaries of these e-discussions provided a general summary of all the comments, regardless of who or where they were from. These official summaries appear to have over-played the amount of substantive comments and contributions. There were many instances of comments having no or little key message, or where the moderator simply posed a question or asked for further comment (without making a substantive point); for example, in the access e-discussion about 27% of all contributions were of this nature. Such un-substantive comments have been

excluded from this re-analysis. There were also cases where the same comments were posted multiple times; these have also been excluded from the below. The re-analysis that follows focuses on the substantive comments received from individuals of the Global South, as well as from Organisations (the vast majority being CSOs) that operate in the Global South.

THE ROLE OF THE SOUTH IN THESE E-DISCUSSIONS

What has been the role of the South in these e-discussions? Has it been possible to identify who has participated?

- According to the official summary reports of the education e-discussions, there were 539 responses. On closer inspection about 15% of these were not substantive responses; they were either duplicate posts, moderator questions trying to encourage responses, or off topic.
- Of the approximately 450 substantive responses
 - Almost 45% were made anonymously; we have no way of telling if they came from the South, the North, the East or the West, or if they were from an individual, an NGO or a President.
 - About 1 in 5 substantive responses came from individuals in the South, and a further 1 in 5 from organisations (the bulk of which were international NGOs).

Table 1: Contributors to the education e-discussions

	Total contributions according to moderators	#	Total substantive contributions according to NORRAG	#	% substantive contributions out of total contributions	Breakdown of substantive contributions (%)				
						From moderator	Anon contribution	Indiv. from North	Indiv. from South	Identified organisations, INGOs
Access	175		130 (i)		73%	8%	32%	7%	30%	23%
Quality	171		141 (ii)		82%	2%	48%	2%	28%	21%
Skills	135		124 (iii)		92%	15%	55%	6%	11%	13%
Finance	58		56 (iv)		97%	11%	39%	13%	11%	27%
	539		451		84%	8%	44%	6%	22%	20%

- (i) Of these, about 10 were from the moderators. In all about 120 different people made these 130 contributions (some people made multiple contributions).
- (ii) Of these, 3 were from the moderators. The 141 substantive comments came from about 134 different sources. The unsubstantive comments were made up of 19 from individuals (repeat posts etc) and 11 from moderators (posing questions etc).
- (iii) Of these, 18 were from the moderators.

Access e-discussion

- Almost all the organizations identified were international NGOs (INGOs), including, for example: Save the Children, Oxfam, RESULTS UK, Right to Play, AbleChildAfrica, Sightsavers.
- 30% of those who made substantive comments were individuals from the South. Among this group who indicated their gender, 30% were female and 70% male. 25% were from South America, 1/3 Asia, 1/3 from SSA, 2 from North Africa, and none from Middle East.

Quality of learning e-discussion

- Of the approximately 30 organisations that made comments and identified themselves, about 6 were southern-based NGOs, several were inter-agency or UN (eg. UNESCO, INEE), but the majority were INGOs (Basic Education Coalition, RESULTS Educational Fund, World Vision, International Movement ATD Fourth World, Sightsavers etc).
- Almost half of those who made substantive comments were individuals from the South. ¼ were from Asia, ½ from SSA, 1/10 from Middle East, and none from North Africa.

Global Citizenship, Jobs and Skills e-discussion

- Of the approximately 16 organisations that made comments and identified themselves, about 3 were southern-based NGOs, several were inter-agency or UN (eg. UNESCO), but the majority were INGOs (Basic Education Coalition, Sightsavers etc).
- Only 11% of those that made substantive comments were individuals from the South.

Governance and financing e-discussion

- About half of the organisations contributing to this e-discussion were inter-agency committees/networks (e.g. INEE) or the likes of the UNESCO GMR and the ILO. The CSOs were mostly international and included, for example, RESULTS and Sightsavers.
- Only 11% of those that made substantive comments were individuals from the South.

THE VOICE OF THE SOUTH IN THESE E-DISCUSSIONS

Below, we focus on southern respondents versus organizations (and exclude anonymous respondents)

Access e-discussion

For the e-discussion on access, online discussants tended to focus their contributions on what they considered to be the key challenges in ensuring equitable access to education for all, as well as key recommendations for improving equitable access in the post-2015. This e-discussion was moderated by the Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report, the Director of the International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), as well as a Senior Education Advisor at UNICEF.

With regard to challenges, individuals from the Global South identified the lack of policy implementation and the issue of violence as being important, while CSOs did not mention these aspects. Both CSOs and individuals cited the links between quality and equitable access, the links between wider inequalities (e.g in income) and educational inequalities, and the issue of discrimination.

With regard to recommendations, individuals from the Global South identified the need to strengthen policies, invest more in public education and train more teachers. Both CSOs and individuals from the Global South flagged up the need for special targeting.

Table 2: Access e-discussion: Top five responses (in order of most frequently cited)

Southern individuals	Organisations
Challenges in ensuring equitable access to education for all	
1. Lack of implementation of policies, including because of corruption	1. Discrimination against marginalized groups
2. Violence and conflict	2. Wider inequalities (e.g. poverty) contribute to educational inequalities
3. Lack of learning in school discourages enrolment and retention	3. Lack of learning in school discourages enrolment and retention
4. Discrimination against marginalized groups	4. Lack of school infrastructure
5. Wider inequalities (e.g. poverty) contribute to educational inequalities - Parental poverty, lack of awareness and illiteracy	5. Costs of education
Recommendations for improving equitable access in the post-2015 framework	
1. Special targeting of marginalized groups	1. Special targeting of marginalized groups
2. Special focus on girls education / gender issues	2. Special focus on girls education / gender issues
3. Improve and strengthen policies	3. Better disaggregated data and information
4. Increase public investment	4. Investment in non-formal education
5. Train more teachers (and better)	5. Stronger role for young people, parents and community members in school management

For **Southern individuals**, the top five most cited challenges regarding ensuring equitable access for all included:

- **Lack of implementation of agreed policies, including because of corruption.** Corruption was mentioned several times as a disabler, as this comment from Pakistan illustrates: ‘schools are often not opened on a needs basis but according to favoritism of local personalities... many villages having no school and many other villages having two or three schools out of which one is functional and [with] remaining school building lying vacant or used for other purposes’.
- **Violence and conflict.** This covers both organized crime (e.g as in the case of Honduras), but also extremism (as in Pakistan). ‘The raising extremism and terrorism at times makes it impossible for educational institutions to complete its academic session properly. Female education is at stake due to religious extremist groups and old traditions’ (Pakistan).
- **Lack of learning in school discourages enrolment and retention.** Lack of learning and inequalities of learning mean that schools does not retain students that turn up. In Cambodia, ‘every child and their dog is enrolled in primary school. The challenge is providing them with an education that keeps them showing up to class... Parents are told that they must send their children to school every day so that they can learn and have a better future, so they do, even though they could use the help doing chores at home or selling things at the market. What happens? They don't learn to read, they don't learn to do math, and they still move on to the next grade whether they've learned anything or not.

The reasons for this could fill a tome, but the effect is simple: parents stop sending their children to school' (Cambodia).

- **Discrimination against marginalized groups, including indigenous groups, the disabled.**
- **Wider inequalities (e.g. poverty) contribute to educational inequalities.** Individuals mentioned, for example, parental poverty, lack of awareness and illiteracy. This has all sorts of ramifications, including for example over-age enrolment and early drop-out; both of which impede equitable access.

The top five most cited recommendations from **Southern individuals** included:

- **The need for special targeting of marginalized groups** – for example women/girls, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, including via more social protection initiatives (e.g. conditional cash transfers) and activities (scholarships, loans) to support access, retention (school feeding programs) and transition in school.
- **The need for a special focus on girls education / gender issues** – e.g. female washrooms, sanitation, gender-sensitive training for teachers.
- **The need to improve and strengthen policies.** 'To reduce inequalities we need to implement a policy of positive discrimination' (Peru).
- **The need to increase public investment** - both directly (e.g. expanding school infrastructure) to public education system and via NGOs who can be better placed to reach the marginalized.
- **The need to train more teachers, and to train existing teachers better.**

For **Organisations**, the top five most cited challenges regarding ensuring equitable access for all included:

- **Discrimination against marginalized groups.** Discrimination and cultural practices/beliefs, including based on gender, disability inhibit equitable access, as these three comments illustrate:
 - 'Families that live in a context of poverty often experience discrimination through the diverse reactions of teachers, school officials and other parents due to their lack of economic resources' (International Movement ATD Fourth World).
 - 'Gender-based discrimination, social control over girls' sexuality and sexual abuse lead to high drop out of girls from formal education systems' (Sexual Rights Initiative)
 - 'Negative attitudes, based on fear of difference in society and associated crude stereotyping, create serious barriers for the successful inclusion of many marginalized children' (Sightsavers)
- **Wider inequalities (e.g. poverty) contribute to educational inequalities.** Therefore, these need to be dealt with in order for equitable access to be achieved.
- **Lack of learning in school discourages enrolment and retention.** The lack of learning taking place in school was seen to have direct implications for achieving equitable access.
 - 'It is important to consider what there should be more equitable access to. It cannot simply be equal access to 'school'. 'Equal access to education' must mean equal access to learning'. There is "a risk that low levels of learning will... hinder the prospects of increasing access" (Save the Children)

- ‘The questions of equity and quality are organically linked’ (Oxfam)
- ‘Being able to enroll in education does not guarantee equity, as differences in the quality of the education one is having access to will lead to further inequalities’ (The European Youth Forum)
- **Lack of school infrastructure.** This may lead to over-crowding and or double-shift schools, which may have implications for equitable access. But for some children it means that the distance they have to travel to school, because of the unavailability of educational institutions in remote areas, has access implications.
- **The costs of education.** Both the direct and indirect costs of schooling.

The top five most cited recommendations from **Organisations** included:

- **The need for special targeting of marginalized groups,** including via targeted interventions (e.g. school feeding) their mention in policy documents
 - ‘Interventions need to engage directly with and for marginalised groups, and work both at a systems level and at the school level. All of this requires political will to create an enabling legislative environment and fair and effective governance arrangements’ (Sight Savers).
- **More focus on girls education,** sexual and reproductive health and rights to promote equitable access to education.
- **Better disaggregated data and information.**
- **Investment in non-formal education.** Access to education should not only focus on access to formal education but also encompasses ‘other forms of learning opportunities, including through Non Formal Education... training schemes, apprenticeships, recognition of volunteering experiences and non-academic qualifications’ (The European Youth Forum).
- **Stronger role for young people, parents and community members in school management.**

Quality of learning e-discussion

With regard to challenges, individuals from the Global South and CSOs identified quite a similar range of issues.

With regard to recommendations, individuals from the Global South identified curriculum reform, and the need for better monitoring, accountability and good governance. Both the southern individuals and CSOs identified teacher training, investing more in schools and investing more in pre-school as important to improve learning outcomes. CSOs flagged up the need to measure learning outcomes.

Table 3: Quality e-discussion: Top five responses (in order of most frequently cited)

Southern individuals	Organisations
Challenges to improving the quality of learning	
Poverty	Poverty
Poor quality of teachers	Discrimination
Lack of investment in education	Lack of teacher training

Corruption	Lack of policy implementation
Lack of teacher motivation	Corruption
Recommendations for improving the quality of learning	
Teacher training	Teacher training
Invest in more schools	Measurement of learning to improve the quality of learning
Curriculum reforms	Learning environment
Better monitoring, accountability, good governance	Invest more in schools
Invest more in pre-school to help lay foundation for later learning.	Invest more in pre-school to help lay foundation for later learning.

For **Southern individuals**, the top five most cited challenges regarding improving the quality of learning included:

- **Poverty** – leading to drop out, inability to purchase school materials, books, food etc
 - ‘All government schools ask for meals to be paid for by parents. Many are not able to afford and their children are not served meals at school but how are these children to concentrate in class on an empty stomach.’ (Uganda)
- **Poor quality of teachers, insufficient teacher training mechanisms**
- **Lack of investment in education, inadequate facilities at schools**
- **The issues of corrupt practices**
 - ‘You have a situation where individuals are teaching because they are related to Mr. A or Mr. B, or else a member of party A, not because they are qualified. Lecturers are awarding scores for cash and sex’ (Nigeria)
 - ‘There is need for service providers to be held accountable so they deliver a quality service. The funds may be limited but they can have a significant impact if not swindled by corrupt service providers’ (Uganda)
- **Teacher motivation**

For **Southern individuals**, the top five most cited recommendations regarding improving the quality of learning included:

- **Teacher training** – initial and continuing
- **New schools, infrastructure support** like additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, text books
- **Curriculum reforms, including teaching in national languages**
- **Better monitoring, accountability, good governance**
 - ‘If education is free, let it be free not corrupt; the amount of resources allocated for education, 100% should go for education’ (Nigeria)
- **Pre-school can help to improve learning outcomes**
 - ‘How then do we allow our children between age 1-5years to roam the street and start schooling later after age 5. No wonder such children, mostly in public schools in Nigeria today have very poor learning outcomes’ (Nigeria)

For **Organisations**, the top five most cited challenges regarding improving the quality of learning included:

- **Poverty**- that prevents regular school attendance, and associated poor housing which is not conducive to work at home
- **Discrimination** that results in violence against these children
- **Inadequate training of teachers**
- **Lack of implementation of policies**
 - ‘One of the main challenges to quality of learning is political climate and competing political agendas... this may mean the rapid turnover of staff in Ministries of Education thus impeding effective implementation of a particular initiative. Staff take time to become familiar with a new role and rapid turnover at a leadership level may mean new initiatives are introduced rapidly without giving time for existing initiatives to become effective’ (Hope Global)
- **Corruption** – which may mean professional development funds do not reach intended targets or only a favoured few receive training

For **Organisations**, the top five most cited recommendations regarding improving the quality of learning included:

- **Teacher training** – initial and continuing
- **The measurement of learning will improve the quality of learning**
 - Commit to standards for learning and skills acquisition that are important to achieve national education priorities.
 - However, this recommendation come with the warning that ‘the measurement of learning will improve the quality of learning only if it stimulates the improvement of the quality of education. Measuring learning by itself will not improve learning. A learning goal/indicator must be coupled with guidance or sub-indicators on how to improve/measure the quality of education’. (RESULTS)
 - Also that: ‘a focus on learning outcomes is a “reductionist approach” to education. The school is also a place to “develop creativity, artistic expression... critical capacities, autonomy... solidarity and community” and critical thinking’ (Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education)
- **Learning environment**
- **Invest in more schools**, and use resources more effectively
- **Pre-school education** to prepare children for subsequent overall school learning
 - ‘There is a need to bring early childhood care and education for children under six years of age and secondary education under the ambit of right to education.’ (Right to Education)

Global Citizenship, Jobs and Skills e-discussion

With regard to challenges, individuals from the Global South and Organisations identified lack of training of teachers as well as lack of equipment in formal schools as being challenges. Individuals from the Global South tended to also focus on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) challenges.

With regard to recommendations, individuals from the Global South and Organisations both identified the need to promote inclusive education, curricula reform and the importance of

learning foundational skills as being a high priority in order for education for global citizenship, jobs and skills to be promoted.

Table 4: Global citizenship, jobs and skills e-discussion: Top responses (in order of most frequently cited)

Southern individuals	Organisations
Challenges related to education for global citizenship, jobs and skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of equipment in formal schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of training for teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to engaging industry as significant players in TVET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of equipment in formal schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational education seen as a second choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of training for teachers 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak Quality Assurance of the TVET System 	
Recommendations for improving education for global citizenship, jobs and skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve quality and learning outcomes of formal education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different teaching approach and content in formal education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different teaching approach and content in formal education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need to have acquired basic foundational skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More support for NFE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology and ICT skills development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology and ICT skills development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More support for NFE

For **Southern individuals**, the top five most cited challenges related to education for global citizenship, jobs and skills:

- **Lack of equipment in formal schools**
- **Hard to engaging industry as significant players in TVET**
- **Vocational education seen as a second choice to academic education.**
- **Lack of training for teachers**
- **Weak Quality Assurance of the TVET System**

For **Southern individuals**, the top five most cited recommendations regarding improving education for global citizenship, jobs and skills:

- **Improve quality and learning outcomes of formal education**
- **Inclusive Education**
- **Different teaching approach and content in formal education**
 - “Equipping students with the 21st skills required to be successful global citizens by providing a sound curriculum that encourages thinking rather than memorizing”
- **More support for NFE**
- **Technology and ICT skills development**

For **organisations**, the top three¹ most cited challenges related to education for global citizenship, jobs and skills:

- **Lack of training for teachers**
 - teacher training colleges are not preparing teachers with skills, knowledge and attitude needed to prepare our children to global citizenship
 - lack of skills of educational specialists in vocational guidance of children/young people especially those without parental care
- **Lack of equipment in formal schools**
 - Catching up with the global trend in education requires well equipped schools , classrooms with required amenities in adequate number
- **Lack of access to technology**

For **organisations**, the top five most cited recommendations regarding improving education for global citizenship, jobs and skills:

- **Inclusive education**
 - integration of marginalized populations, including children with disabilities populations.
- **Different teaching approach and content in formal education**
 - “Teaching content should include topics related to daily life, such as health education or the environment, and promote more local knowledge” (Aide et Action)
 - “our curriculum especially from the primary and secondary must accommodate each culture in a good light” (Tomorrow Africa)
- **Students need to have acquired basic foundational skills**
 - “by the time students leave school, they have met standards for learning and skills acquisition that prepare them to be responsible, productive members of society” (Basic Education Coalition)
 - “Equipping all citizens with basic skills (e.g. reading, mathematics and science) is the prerequisite for removing obstacles to active participation in society” (European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning)
- **Technology and ICT skills development**
 - Developing of the socio-labor competence of children and youth through development of their ICT skills and implementation of ICT tools into vocational guidance
Technology can be used to improve global citizenship, increase access to information about jobs and support skills development
 - “Social networking and mobile devices have the potential to improve access to information and facilitate communication that helps to promote democracy, provide labour market information and support skills development.” (Sightsavers)
- **More support for NFE**

¹ There were not enough responses to group more than three issues.

Governance and financing e-discussion

Table 5: Governance and financing e-discussion: Top issues raised (in order of most frequently cited)

Southern individuals	Organisations
Not enough responses from identified individuals in the South to be able to comment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low donor priority • Lack of political will at national level • Lack of targeting resources towards to most vulnerable young people, particularly girls • Not enough role for citizens, parents, teachers, CSOs • Donor governments need to be held more accountable • Education data and information systems make identifying target groups, as well as accountability difficult.

From organizations, key challenges in governance and financing education were identified as:

- Level of political will at national and international levels. “One of the main obstacles has been the lack of political will of States to allocate adequate resources in a timely manner to the establishment of appropriate educational policies” (Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education - CLADE)
- Lack of targeting resources towards to most vulnerable young people, particularly girls
- Not enough transparency
- Not sufficient enough roles for CSOs
- Ineffective mechanisms to hold donors to account.

Recommendations included:

- A greater role for citizens, parents, teachers, CSOs (including teacher organizations) in promoting better governance and accountability. E.g. budget tracking (public expenditure tracking surveys, social accountability monitoring and citizen report cards were mentioned).
- More accountability of donor governments and multilateral agencies for how they support developing countries.
- More investment in high quality data and education information systems. “One can only target spending at the poorest and most marginalized if you know who they are, how many of them there are, where they are located, and how this changes over time. This requires investment in high quality data and the development of nationally owned Education Management Information Systems” (Sightsavers)
- Improved targeting of resources

Concluding Comment: What is the legitimacy of these e-discussions within the debates?

In terms of legitimacy, the e-discussions cannot claim to be more than illustrative views of a range of *some* opinion. The aggregate summaries presented of the e-discussions disguise a lot of the noise (and sometimes randomness) of the comments made. Even when we try to pick apart where respondents are from and who said what, this is also of limited legitimacy; even if we can say that 1 in 5 of substantive responses are from individuals in the South – just by the fact that they had to give responses online indicates that it is unlikely such individuals would be in any way part of marginalised groups, or in fact from the poor.

In terms of impact, such e-consultations which are then summarized by the moderators may not be a very influential modality, regardless of whether the comments are made by people from the North or the South.

On reflection, those interested in gathering opinions should start by questioning the utility and limitations of conducting such e-discussions; and, if the decision is taken to proceed, ensure that basic data is collected from those responding. Perhaps this lesson has already been learned: when one visits the www.worldwewant2015.org website now it is necessary to register and provide your name, organisation and current country location as a minimum set of background data on yourself. It would have been useful if this had been collected from the 500+ responses for the education e-consultation.

Those interested in contributing to future e-discussions, should take this piece of advice from someone that has read over 500 responses: follow the moderator's guidelines, answer the question being asked and, above all, keep brief and to the point!