

## Swiss position on education for the post-2015 agenda

(13 September 2013)

Switzerland has opted for a strong reference to human rights to expose the need for one renewed/renovated standalone goal on education for the post-2015 agenda.

This approach is guided by the following two elements:

- i) Alignment with the principles of our general position since **education is a fundamental human right** enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26, 1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 28, 29, 1989) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art.13, 1966).
- ii) It is more pertinent **to have one single goal referring directly to a comprehensive set of education objectives** than a goal that refers only to single aspects that primarily serve the purpose of easy measurability.

### Realizing the right of all to quality and relevant basic education and learning

**Quality:** Education should respond to **basic learning needs, as stated** in the Jomtien Declaration (1990) and the Delors Report (1996): **Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be**. These four pillars of **education systems continue to be appropriate guiding principles for reform<sup>1</sup>, as well as for addressing** the current and coming challenges in the areas of citizenship, employment and sustainable social, cultural, economic, environmental and political development. A vision of learning based on the quality and the relevance of education to communities should be redefined. It should consider learning as an interactive and continuous process that is founded on values, takes institutions, learners, teachers and parents into consideration, and ensures access to relevant knowledge and skills.

**Equity:** *The right to fundamental education extends to all those who have not yet satisfied their "basic learning needs". Equity is the right of everyone to benefit from a quality education that is relevant for their needs, at all ages.* Yet, the proportion of people (**children, youth and adults** - especially girls), whose basic learning- and skills-development needs are not met is still high in most low and middle-income countries - even in those where enrolment rates are high – and/or conflict-affected countries<sup>2</sup>. This deficit constitutes non-respect for the right to education for all, a problem that cannot be tackled by means of access alone – an instrumental approach of development - but demands aspects of quality and relevance to be taken into account.

*“Education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.(...)”*  
(CESCR, 1999).

<sup>1</sup> S.Tawil, M. Cougoureux, 2013

<sup>2</sup> According to the annual EFA global monitoring report (GMR), in 2010, 61 million children were out of school. Half of these children were living in sub-Saharan African countries. It was also estimated that 57% of these children will never go to school. About 50% of them are living in fragile and emergency situations.

## **I. Education is an empowerment right**

Although the current two education-related MDGs have improved access to education, they have not come up to expectations regarding the **targets of quality and equity inherent to the right to education**.

Democracy and good governance (peace and security, sustainability, citizenship, economic growth, environment) require all human beings be empowered for active and autonomous participation, for well-informed decision-making and for the assumption for their responsibilities. **Equal access to relevant knowledge, information, and training/skills development is indispensable in this regard. It makes no sense to define education goals that are only measurable if they do not address the issues of quality and equity.**

## **II. Education is an enabling right**

Education is **both a fundamental right and an indispensable lever for realizing other human rights and ensuring sustainable human development**.

The right to education is an **effective lever** for asserting the right of expression and to information, the right to food, decent work, the highest attainable standard of health, as well as the right to participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. Education strengthens freedom and improves the opportunities available to young people, adults and communities; it permits the promotion of social mobility, scientific and technological development, the strengthening of social-cohesion safeguards, peace, health, and the environment, and enables people to act as active citizens and autonomous human beings. Education and learning are driving sources for research and innovation which play a crucial role in shaping solutions to global issues and challenges.

## **III. Education is a social, economic and cultural right (art. 13 ESCR)**

Education systems (formal and non-formal) should / has to ensure the right to access to relevant knowledge and skills. Children, young people and adults should be able to pursue their educational curriculum, ensure their transition from adolescence to adulthood and their integration into the social and professional life. The system should allow them to exercise their citizenship.

The general comment on article 13 defines four criteria for assessing the relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of an integrated education system (formal and non-formal): **Acceptability, Adaptability, Accessibility and Availability**. These four criteria - or capacities of the education system - could be used as a universal framework within which regional and national values and priorities could be defined and used to build a framework for action. These four criteria would respond in this regard to the need of a flexible framework.

## MAIN FOCUS:

Basic education and learning that empower people for lifelong learning, enable them to exercise a profession and be active citizens are still not accessible for everyone. It is the foundation of all further development and has to be given absolute priority. Therefore the main focus of the new agenda should be on:

- Basic learning goes beyond primary schooling. It should be available at every stage in a person's life and be provided by different (formal and non-formal) education facilities appropriate to the learner's context;
- Access to relevant knowledge and vocational and life-skills development for all throughout life and through a diversity of educational provisions, including "non-formal" that should be an integral part of the education system;
- Enhancing recognition, advocacy and promotion of the need for basic education in achieving other SDGs – which has been under-emphasized in the MDGs;
- Basic education and learning as a common minimum standard, and shared principles of quality in education established in partnership with and provided by both governmental and non-governmental actors (civil and private);
- The principle that quality basic education is a public good and should be compulsory and free of charge. The state's primary legal and financial responsibility should be emphasised. International organisations (IGOs), donor agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) should also play an important role and be accountable;
- Ensuring the individual's transition through all levels of education (formal and non-formal), from pre-primary education to primary education to secondary education and to vocational and technical training and/or higher education programmes (continuum).

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- ❖ A vision of education that integrates human rights and aims to tackle the main challenges, which are the lack of quality in basic education, the high rate of youth and adult illiteracy and/or the low relevance of skills development, is not easy to **translate in to action**. Based on a holistic vision of education, the post-2015 sustainable development agenda should underline and support the **need to continuously re-think education and propose new ways of how education can best** respond to fundamental individual needs and rights as well as to global issues. The different components of quality education such as pedagogical approach, curricula, language of instruction, teaching and learning processes, teaching material, teacher training and learning assessment must shift from the margins to the core of the international education agenda in order to foster relevant, effective and efficient learning for all.
- ❖ A **new balance** has to be found between **the economic-related dimensions of skills development** on the one hand and **the social and inclusive objectives of education** on the other. Emphasis on skills development for work solely is of limited relevance in contexts marked by weak economic development and does not fully advance social and individual development from the human rights, citizenship and sustainability perspectives. Indicators should encompass both social and economic dimensions. Identifying and defining **new and reliable methods for measuring progress towards achieving qualitative targets** are to be tackled in science and politics.

- ❖ A human rights framework entails **newly defined accountability** for many actors (states, teachers, recipients, donors, research, private providers, employers, labor unions, IGOs, CBOs, NGOs) with regard to both **respect for and implementation of the right to education and to the financing of quality basic education and relevant skills development**. The increasing role of non-governmental duty-bearers, the development of public-private partnerships, as well as private investment in education have to be better taken into account within the new agenda (**recognition, regulation and monitoring**).
- ❖ The contribution of all stakeholders (including communities, parents, civil society organisations, universities, the private sector, etc.) to define quality and relevant education and contribute to its delivery must be recognized and encouraged. NGOs and CBOs are very active in improving access to quality basic education for all. **New effective partnerships** with states and the private sector in policy design and implementation have still to be developed. Dialogue and collaboration between the private sector, the state, NGOs and CBOs must also be improved with regard to skills development for citizenship, employment and environmental protection.

#### **INTERNATIONAL DEBATE:**

Education as a fundamental right is one of the priorities of the main international reports. While Switzerland welcomes the emphasis on advocating lifelong learning and quality education as a standalone goal, at this stage it considers however the interpretation in the subgoals and indicators doesn't encompass the basic element of the right to education since it is focused only on formal education and limits the definition on quality to minimum learning standards and measurable learning outcomes.