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Advocating for the commitment of the G20 with the effective implementation of the Education 2030 Agenda

Perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean



Campana
Latinoamericana
por el Derecho
a la Educación



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Background

In the context of the G20 Leaders' Summit that will take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina (the first one to be held in South America), from November 30 to December 1st. 2018, the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE), in partnership with members in countries of the region that are part of the G20 - Argentinean Campaign for the Right to Education (CADE, by its Spanish acronym), National Campaign for the Right to Education of Brazil and Latin American and Caribbean Council of Popular Education (CEAAL, by its Spanish acronym) in Mexico, calls on these governments to reaffirm their commitment to ensure sustainable, fair and adequate public funding to strengthen free and inclusive public education systems. In doing so, they will enable the implementation of the 2030 Education Agenda at national and regional level, as well as the compliance with national education legislations in force that strengthen and reinforce these global commitments.

Within a regional context marked by trends such as the closing of spaces where civil society and governments can dialogue on public policies, growing repression and criminalization of social protest and human right advocates, particularly students and teachers, our first demand is to allow more social participation in the G20 debates and seats for civil society representatives in ministerial meetings of education and employment of the G20, as well as in the G20 Leaders' Summit to take place at the end of the year.

In the same way, we propose an increased coordination between regional mechanisms that follow up the 2030 Education Agenda promoted by the Regional Office of UNESCO for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO/OREALC, by its Spanish acronym) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) with the G20 debates, encouraging the participation of representative of regional Education 2030 Steering Committee at the G20 meetings.

Reinforcing our demands

In 2015, Heads of States in the region committed to the 2030 Education Agenda. It is time to set a credible and coherent roadmap towards the realization of public, free, quality, equitable, inclusive, and lifelong education for all!

A key requirement to promote social justice and sustainable development is to ensure the right to public, free, quality, equitable, inclusive, and lifelong education for all, without discrimination, giving priority to historically marginalized groups, such as girls and women, LGBTI, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, rural populations, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, among others.

This premise is considered by the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, which embrace education, inclusion and the overcoming of inequalities, particularly gender-based ones, as cross-cutting issues that are essential for the achievement of all SDGs. In other words, the spirit and content of the SDG Agenda pushes governments to commit to design and implement education policies and curricula that address and go way beyond measurable learning outcomes aimed at employability and access to labor market. Instead, it establishes the obligation to

promote an education geared at social justice, human rights, human dignity, citizenship, democracy, critical thinking, solidarity, collective concern, inclusion, equity and to rethink our societies towards transformation and elimination of inequalities, discriminations and violence, showing respect for and valuing the diversity of cultures and backgrounds of the people included in the education system.

We advocate that education has to be guaranteed by States as a fundamental human right and this involves the adequate investment of public funds where needed most, and in terms of access to people who have been historically marginalized from the education system. Additionally, this right has to be guaranteed throughout life, through fair public funding and adequate policies to ensure education access and retention of every person, in different educational stages and models, from early childhood care and education to secondary education and youth and adult education. Furthermore, it requires budget allocation and institutionalization, which are necessary to achieve inclusion and eliminate discriminations and inequalities in and through education. This can only be achieved through adequately financed and democratically administered free, public education systems and by recognizing and valuing students and teachers as key players in education policy-making and in setting curriculum guidelines, ensuring that they are relevant and meet their needs, background and perspectives. In this regard, another key issue to be considered is the need to value the teaching profession, ensuring better remuneration, initial and continuing quality training as well as adequate and decent working conditions.

Public funding for free and public education must be safeguarded and increased to guarantee the right to free and quality education!

In the Education 2030 Agenda, Member States committed to guarantee 12 years of free, compulsory public primary and secondary education by 2030. Likewise, they committed to invest at least 4% to 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education, or 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education. Some national legislations, for example, in Brazil, actually establish the government obligation to invest even higher percentages in education. At the same time, donor countries from international cooperation committed to provide 0.7% of GDP for Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2020 and between 15% and 20% of ODA to education. Member States must ensure enough and sustainable resources, at national level, to be able to fulfill the global financing commitments and national legislations and, thus, show progress in terms of these agreements, closing remaining gaps in access to education for all.

However, different countries have been implementing policies that reduce or freeze public investment in education and other social rights, arguing that the current economic crisis requires fiscal adjustment policies and public spending cuts to be able to balance public accounts and pay domestic and external debts incurred by governments. But the common feature of these measures are cuts on investment in policies that address, in particular, low-income sectors of the population, while keeping unfair tax systems.

According to ECLAC¹, unless countries of the region establish fair and equitable tax-fiscal systems to counter tax evasion and avoidance, there will not be enough public

¹ <http://privatizacion.campanaderechoeducacion.org/menos-igualdad-la-privatizacion-de-la-educacion-en-america-latina/>

funds to overcome inequalities and guarantee human rights. In this respect, we advocate for the elimination of harmful tax incentives and tax evasion and avoidance practices carried out by national and transnational companies, the increase of transparency in governments and large corporations, setting a new international fiscal architecture, as the starting point of the fight for free and quality public education.

In a debate on the impacts on human rights of fiscal adjustment policies, held on August 9, 2018, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, UN independent expert on external debt and human rights, Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, pointed out that the economy must serve the realization of human rights rather than hinder it, and that governments must not resort to budget cuts on social policies in the face of economic crises but protect and guarantee rights and the participation of historically marginalized groups. “Economic reforms cannot violate human rights or create regressive measures against principles of equality and non-discrimination,” he asserted at that time. Likewise, he underscored that excessive public spending is not the cause of the crisis, instead, this is prompted by factors such as unfair trade agreements, external debt, corruption and unfair tax systems that lead to insufficient tax collection.

Some days before the above-mentioned event, Bohoslavsky, together with other six experts and UN rapporteurs, released a statement² to draw the attention of the Brazilian government in the face of the negative impacts of budget cuts introduced in the country, affecting human rights such as education, health, social security, food and gender equality. Authorities also state that fiscal adjustment measures have been disproportionately affecting people already suffering from discrimination and vulnerable groups.

We advocate for public income as the main source of funding for education! Public funding for public and free education!

Although we recognize and value the importance of international cooperation funds to guarantee the right to education, at present, most of the burden of expenditure on education policies falls on public budgets. We advocate for actions and policies to guarantee fair, adequate and sustainable funding for the human right to education, through progressive tax reforms and measures aiming to achieve tax justice in countries, enabling a wider tax basis at national level and, thus, ensuring more resources to be invested in education and in the realization of the other rights.

Likewise, we would like to warn of risks and threats to the realization of the human right to equal and free education, posed by political decisions on financing for education that promote instruments of indebtedness such as loans for the implementation of education policies in low and middle income countries, or that promote students' indebtedness through “student loans” increasingly used as a way of encouraging access to tertiary education and with a negative long-term impact, as witnessed in countries such as United States of America³. We consider that state indebtedness to promote education policies perpetuates governments' dependence on funds supported by multilateral financial institutions and banks, at the expense of strengthening financial and education public systems. Furthermore, instead of

² <http://campanha.org.br/direito-a-educacao/especialistas-da-onu-pedem-que-o-brasil-coloque-o-direito-a-educacao-antes-da-austeridade/>

³ https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/06/06/internacional/1528282199_859406.html

providing financial support to education, these institutions, financial mechanisms and funds provided to the profit-seeking private sector have conditionalities' that impose "economicist" education agendas, promoting privatization and increasing public debt, instead of strengthening and supporting sustainability and sovereignty of developing countries.

Studies carried out by Clara Fontdevila and Mauro Moschetti, professors from Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona⁴, reveal that free education provision has not been achieved yet in our region, and, in many cases, it is under threat due to the weakening of public education systems, brought by growing processes of privatization. Most importantly, we must recall that free provision means that beneficiaries are not charged for expenses incurred in connection with the education process, either directly (school fees and enrolment fees, school textbooks, materials, transport, exam fees and additional pay to teachers, etc.) or indirectly (meals and clothing costs, as well as other elements that restrict school access and retention). According to Spotlight 2017 report (an independent assessment on the implementation of 2030 Agenda across the world)⁵, strengthened public education systems that are open to civil society participation, are needed to face education privatization trends and actions that impose a market logic on public education and pose a threat to free education. The importance of quality public education systems guaranteed by governments is also underscored in studies carried out by researcher Antoni Verger⁶ and in the report of the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to Education, Kishore Singh⁷.

Likewise, the resolution adopted during the 38th. period of sessions of the UN Human Rights Council, held from June 18 to July 6, 2018, calls on governments to increase and improve financing for education and to take "all the necessary measures, including enough budget allocations to guarantee accessible, inclusive, equitable and non-discriminatory education and to promote learning opportunities for all, paying special attention to marginalized children, seniors, persons with disabilities and all vulnerable and marginalized groups, including victims of humanitarian emergencies and conflicts⁸."

Education with gender equality must be guaranteed urgently!

Through goals 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7 of the Education 2030 Agenda, states committed to eliminate, by 2030, gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training; to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy; and to ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace

⁴ <http://privatizacion.campanaderechoeducacion.org/menos-igualdad-la-privatizacion-de-la-educacion-en-america-latina/>

⁵ <http://privatizacion.campanaderechoeducacion.org/realizar-la-agenda-2030-exige-implementar-politicas-sociales-decididas-de-manera-democratica-y-con-recursos-suficientes-para-su-realizacion/>

⁶ <http://privatizacion.campanaderechoeducacion.org/la-mejor-vacuna-contra-la-privatizacion-es-contrar-con-un-sector-publico-de-calidad/>

⁷ <http://privatizacion.campanaderechoeducacion.org/la-educacion-debe-ser-protegida-de-las-fuerzas-de-la-privatizacion-relator-sobre-el-derecho-a-la-educacion-de-onu/>

⁸ See resolution: <http://v2.campanaderechoeducacion.org/es/noticias/863-2018-07-19-15-35-44.html>

and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. Likewise, Sustainable Development Goal 5 is entirely devoted to the promotion of gender equality.

At the same time, these obligations are set in a regional and international context where progress on gender equality in education has reversed, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and where fundamentalist and conservative groups in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay have promoted advocacy actions, communication campaigns and legal actions against comprehensive sexual education and the incorporation of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in curricula and educational materials⁹.

“Escuela sin partido” [Non partisan school] in Brazil, intends to restrict the topics discussed in class, particularly historical, political and social issues, as well as the debate on gender equality and sexuality, arguing that they can be censored if students' families or other educators consider that they are controversial, political or ideological topics that indoctrinate students. The National Campaign for the Right to Education of Brazil and the Institute of Development and Human Rights (IDDH, by its Spanish acronym) promoted advocacy actions and allegations against this program resulting in a public statement by authorities of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights where they reported the negative impact of “Escuela sin Partido.”

The document states that the debate on gender and sexual diversity is essential to prevent gender stereotypes and homophobic actions among students, and without a definition of the term “indoctrinate” any pedagogical practice can be considered as “indoctrination” turning school into an extension of the domestic sphere instead of an educational institution that provides new perspectives. UN rapporteurs also underscore that the project threatens to hinder the “development of critical thinking among students, as well as their capacity to reflect, agree or disagree with what is discussed in class¹⁰.”

Likewise, according to international commitments subscribed by Member States guaranteeing gender equality in education and as reasserted in a letter¹¹ of support sent to the President of the Republic of Peru, by Koumbou Boly Barry, UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Education, and Ivana Radacic, President of the UN Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice, Member States must reject discriminatory campaigns such as the above-mentioned one, to avoid going backwards in the fight to end discrimination and achieve equality. Besides, they must take the necessary interim measures to guarantee equal rights for women and girls in every field, including education.

This means ensuring equality in and from education, through gender-sensitive plans, curricula and pedagogical practices, including comprehensive sexual education and policies to overcome gender-related violence in educational institutions. Likewise, it

⁹ For more information, we recommend reading a statement on education for gender equality and comprehensive sexual education in the region, disseminated by CLADE, CLADEM and REPEM, on March 8, 2018: <http://v2.campanaderechoeducacion.org/es/noticias/824-2018-03-08-15-57-59.html>

¹⁰ To learn more about the position of the UN authorities visit: <http://campanha.org.br/direitos-humanos/onu-se-manifesta-contra-o-escola-sem-partido-e-cita-mudancas-na-base-curricular/>

¹¹ Letter available here: <http://v2.campanaderechoeducacion.org/es/noticias/872-2018-08-23-16-19-14.html>

requires education systems that ensure access, completion, and school and professional certification of teenage parents, providing support to overcome the social and economic obstacles that prevent them from continuing their studies, even though income transfer policies and financial support for young people in vulnerable situations so that they can prioritize education over work.

Incentives and policies are required to ensure equal access of vulnerable populations, girls and women to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), considering that, currently, this is a predominantly male domain due to gender stereotypes and roles that prevail in our societies, particularly in the world of work and education, reinforcing prejudice and inequality.

CEDAW general recommendation N° 36 (2017) recognizes that girls and women are discriminated against during the schooling process in connection to access, retention, completion, treatment, learning outcomes as well as in career choices; and calls on states to enact and apply adequate laws, policies and procedures to fight and ban violence against girls and women in and around educational institutions. It also calls on implementing confidential and independent reporting mechanisms, conducting effective research and guaranteeing victims (girls and women) effective access to justice and remedies. In the same tenor, it proposes the design and application of compulsory curricula including comprehensive information on sexual and reproductive rights and health¹².

Similar challenges in pursuing common goals

Currently, the three G20 Member States of Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, Brazil and Mexico) face huge challenges in terms of financing public and free education, as well as guaranteeing this right for all, on equal terms. We are concerned by the fact that these countries, which are among the largest economies in the world, have not been able to make enough public investments on education which is a key area for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights, as well as the promotion of sustainable economic, social and environmental development in the region.

In this context, we call on the G20, as an international body, to:

- a) Reaffirm its commitment with the effective implementation of SDG4/Education 2030;
- b) Reaffirm its commitment with the promotion of gender equality in and through education;
- c) Reaffirm its commitment to increasingly value the teaching profession, including career plans, remuneration policies, and teacher training designed in coordination and dialogue with teachers and their unions;
- d) Promote the creation of an international and multilateral mechanism of governance on tax justice, based on a balanced system of rights and obligations, where progressive, equitable and transparent collection of funds is established in all countries, with

¹² Learn more and see the recommendation: <https://us4.campaign-archive.com/?u=024b243a8a1d77e91de568427&id=8e2124ec0e>

the purpose of securing financing for public policies to improve peoples' living standards and socio-economic equity, in harmony with the environment.

And, at national level, we urge G20 Member States in the region to:

- a) Commit to create mechanisms to prevent and fight against fiscal evasion and avoidance as well as to promote fair and equitable tax systems;
- b) Commit to abide by and prioritize national legislations in force, on financing for education, that ensure an adequate allocation and the intangibility of funds for the right to education and to strengthen public education systems; and, at the same time, commit to create national legislation addressing financing for education in countries where these legislative frameworks are absent or need to be renewed.
- c) Develop educational budgets that are sensitive to inclusion and equity, guaranteeing school access and retention, on equal terms for all, regardless of ethnicity, gender or social class;
- d) Implement and design education plans, if not already in place, with clear and credible goals, as well as annual budgets developed with the participation of key civil society players and the education community, in line with the commitments made in connection to the SDGs;
- e) Submit regular reports, in a transparent way, to inform citizens about education spending and provide information on the design and implementation of public budgets, in a clear and friendly way, allowing the participation of civil society in this debate and their understanding of the tax system and its impacts;
- f) Promote policies to guarantee free education and strengthened public education systems, confronting privatization trends in and through education and actions imposed by the market in public education.