



**ONE  
BILLION  
VOICES**  
FOR EDUCATION

## **One Billion Voices: How Africa Can Lead On Education In A Post COVID-19 World**



GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR

**EDUCATION**

[www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The Global Campaign for Education (GCE)** is the largest civil society organisation movement working to promote the human right to education. It wants to see free, inclusive, quality public education and lifelong learning for all, particularly for children, youth, women and those who are marginalised.

**Education is a human right. Education is crucial for equipping citizens with knowledge and tools to engage and contribute to their communities and to break cycles of violence and poverty, end exclusion and transform societies.**

GCE know that the **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of equitable and inclusive education for all**, cannot be achieved without adequate and sustainable financing for education.

**GCE advocates for education for all. This requires a dramatic increase in domestic and international financing.** This report is designed as an advocacy tool to achieve that goal.

**Methodology.** This is a desk top review of education financing in Africa, including emerging issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It analyses government policy documents, national budgets, budget speeches, citizen budgets plus documents on debt servicing, domestic revenue and taxation. The report looked at the following 35 African countries.

Angola	Chad	Kenya	Mozambique	South Sudan
Benin	Democratic Republic of Congo	Lesotho	Niger	Swaziland
Burkina Faso	Ethiopia	Liberia	Nigeria	Tanzania
Burundi	Ghana	Malawi	Rwanda	The Gambia
Cape Verde	Guinea-Bissau	Madagascar	Senegal	Togo
Cameroon	Guinea Conakry	Mali	Sierra Leone	Uganda
Central African Republic		Mauritania	Sudan	Zambia
				Zimbabwe

The report uses the 4S Framework<sup>1</sup> referring to the **Share, Size, Sensitivity and Scrutiny** of budget allocation. Data Collection was supported by **Africa Network Coalition for Education for All** by working directly with national coalitions. Coalition Coordinators were trained how to use a Salesforce based data collection tool. The accuracy and the credibility of the GPE data was highly dependent on the transparency of the governments in sharing their spend on education. Incomplete data, inaccuracies, armed conflict and emergencies and several other factors, all created limitations for the data.

<sup>1</sup> Archer, D (2<sup>nd</sup> May 2018) [The 4 s Framework for Domestic Financing in the Arab Region: Presentation Notes for Acea Conference, Beirut.](#)

An analysis of COVID-19 implications on education was carried out to identify the impact of the pandemic on financing of education. The percentages of budget allocation to education from national budgets was calculated, as was the percentage of the national budget that was spent on debt servicing. The data were examined to determine what percentage of their national budget countries were spending on education.

**Government spending on education should be measured by two main indicators or benchmarks: 6% of GDP or 20% of national budgets should be spent on education.<sup>2</sup>**

### What is stopping education financing?

Most African countries are in **debt crisis**, meaning they are heavily indebted.<sup>3</sup> An African Union study on the economic impact of COVID-19 showed that the continent could lose up to \$500 billion and that countries may be forced to borrow heavily to survive after the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Africa needs at least \$100 billion to immediately resource a health and social safety net, and another \$100 billion for economic stimulus. GCE joins experts in calling for debt cancellation.<sup>5</sup> Reducing domestic debt is key to making governments' budgets sustainable and increasing allocations education.

### What needs to happen to Fund Education?

- **Domestic Resource Mobilisation** Developing adequate capacity to collect taxes strengthens institutions and state capability
- **Domestic Taxation** should be a major source of education financing, but it is suffocated by illicit financial flows and other forms of tax avoidance
- **Holding governments to account** GCE joined the **Global Partnership for Education Replenishment Campaign**, calling for better education financing and replenishment. In 2018, donors put in \$2.3bn and developing countries pledged \$30 bn. A review of the projected budgets compared to the GPE pledges made in 2018 showed a mixed picture. Some countries adhered to their pledges while others continued to make ambitious pledges while lowering projections or approved budgets. In preparation for the next GPE Education Summit in July 2021, GCE will support national coalitions to look for evidence that pledges made by developing countries during the 2018 replenishment campaign were fulfilled.

**Sustainable financing for education is and always will be domestic.**

Tax revenue is the only sustainable and reliable source of financing of public services including education. The size of the tax base determines the size of the national budget and that influences the size of the education budget.

If not, **national coalitions must hold their governments accountable.**

<sup>2</sup> Archer, D. (22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020) [Domestic Resource Mobilisation for Education: What Should the Global Partnership for Education Do in Its New Strategy](#). NORRAG.

<sup>3</sup> Jubilee Debt Campaign (2020) [Debt Data Portal](#)

<sup>4</sup> Ighobor, K (15<sup>th</sup> April 2020) [AU Study: COVID-19 Could Cost Africa \\$500 Billion, Damage Tourism and Aviation Sectors](#). Africa Renewal.

<sup>5</sup> Vera Songwe, 'Drop Debt , Save Lives : Global South Debt and Covid-19 " Our Leaders Have Two Choices , You Either Pay Obligations to the Bondholders or You Buy Medicine, Food, and Fuel for the Population "' , July, 2020.

## Findings and Observations

Some coalitions had difficulties collecting and collating data from their countries due to different country-specific challenges. Access to expenditure tracking seemed a major challenge to most coalitions. This meant there were discrepancies in the data uploaded on the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system (MEL), and in some cases, there were discrepancies in the data provided by the different Ministries of Finance or partners. **Generally, the pledge percentages for education budgets were higher than the actual percentages in the enacted budgets for the various countries.**

When comparing data in the MEL System, online sources and GPE Replenishment pledges, there were disparities in the figures for the national budget and the education budget depending on the source of data. It was also observed that percentage allocation for education was lower than the projected percentage of 20% indicated in GPE Replenishment pledges in the majority of cases.

When looking at national and education budgets including debt servicing and domestic revenue, there is a relationship between debt servicing and education budget allocation. Countries that are spending large sums of money repaying external debts are allocating less money to the education budget. Countries spending more money on debt servicing and less on education are: Uganda, Eswatini, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Angola, Cameroon, Tanzania, Nigeria, Benin and South Sudan.

**10 out of the 35**

**countries were spending a greater percentage of their national budgets on debt servicing than on education.**

**Only 11% of countries are spending over 20% of their national budgets on education**

In terms of the share and size of education budget, whilst national budgets have been increasing over the years, the size of the budget allocation for education has remained small. Only four countries out of the 35 are spending over 20% of their national budgets on education: Kenya, Lesotho, Ethiopia and Cape Verde. **The data revealed a decrease in the percentage of national budget allocation for education for 60% of countries between 2017 and**

**2020.** For example, Malawi allocated 22.3% of its national budget to education in 2018 and 25% in 2019 but experienced a decrease in 2020. Similarly, Burundi allocated 20.7% in 2017 and 21.1% in 2018 but in 2020 is down to 17.6%. Nigeria allocated 20% of its National Budget to Education in 2017 but since 2018, the budget allocation to education has dropped drastically to 5% in 2019 and 2020. The countries spending less than 10% of their National Budget on Education include: Uganda, Togo, Mauritania, Angola, Cameroon, Somalia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Central Africa and Guinea Conakry.

When examining national projected budgets for 2021, it was observed that while some countries registered an increase in their GDP and national budgets, most countries experienced a decline due to the impact of COVID 19 pandemic.

**34% of countries allocated**

**less than 10% of their national budgets on education**

## Trends in multilateral and bilateral aid

Education has been falling as a priority for international donors, including Official Development Assistance (ODA) bilateral and multilateral donors and philanthropic organisations. For many years, aid to education has reduced. The share of education in official aid was close to 15% in the early 2000s and now stands at just over 10%.<sup>6</sup> In addition to that, financing intended to reach the poorest and most marginalised has been insufficient. Donor governments should be investing ODA in funding for global education as there are many countries that will not be able to generate the funding necessary to get every child in school.

**It is recommended that donor governments spend 0.7% of GDP on aid and invest 15% of their aid in education.**

## The Impact of COVID-19 on education

The outbreak of COVID-19, school closures and lockdowns have compounded the plight of **those who were already marginalised, such as the girl-child, children with disabilities and children who have suffered sexual abuse and domestic violence.**

The world has been hit hard by the coronavirus. Low- and middle-income countries, struggling to achieve universal health coverage, are particularly hard hit by the unprecedented challenge for health care systems.<sup>7</sup> Education budgets are not adjusting proportionately to the challenges brought about by COVID-19, especially in

poorer countries. They have declined in 65% of low- and lower-middle-income countries compared to only 33% of high- and upper-middle-income countries.<sup>8</sup>

**According to GPE's COVID-19 response, more than 1.1 billion children and youth worldwide have been put out of school because of the pandemic.** These nationwide closures are impacting over 60% of the world's student population.

To keep the world's children learning, countries have been implementing remote education programmes. **Unfortunately, many of the world's children, especially those in poorer households, do not have internet access, personal computers, TVs or even radio at home, amplifying the effects of existing learning inequalities.** Many face the risk of never returning to school, undoing years of progress made in education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen unprecedented financial pledges and commitments from the global community, much of which is supplied in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA). UNESCO estimates that global aid is likely to decline by up to US\$2 billion from 2018 to 2022 as a result of recession caused by COVID-19, entailing a 12% drop in international support for education.

This means that **without new measures, aid to education would only reach 2018 levels in 2024. This poses a serious threat to the recovery of education from the disruption caused by the pandemic.**

<sup>6</sup> Global Education Monitoring and Report Team (Feb. 2021) [Inclusion and Education](#). 2020b. UNESCO, Paris, France

<sup>7</sup> 'The COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis and the Impact on Health Systems \_ Curbing the Pandemic and Improving Health Outcomes in Low and Middle Income Countries \_ International Cooperation and Development'.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank (Feb 2021) [Press release: Two-Thirds of Poorer Countries Are Cutting Education Budgets Due to COVID-19](#)

## Recommendations

### More than a billion people's education affected by COVID-19

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 1.5 billion learners had their education stopped or interrupted. The world faces a tipping point where a seismic reversal in education progress has begun. Not only must these rollbacks be stopped, but more and better financing for education must be secured and secured now. It is due to this context and to secure more and better financing that GCE launched a new campaign, [One Billion Voices for Education](#) in January 2021.

Reversing the decline in access to education requires action from every individual country impacted, from donor countries and international bodies and from civil society. This report focusses on 35 African countries, countries that have a unique opportunity to be global leaders in prioritising education and ensuring that COVID-19 does not mean an end to education for so many. The most marginalised in every society have been hard hit by the pandemic and they will be hard hit by the loss of funding for education, we cannot leave a generation behind.

The **35 National State Governments** examined in this report must:

1. **Deliver on the commitments** they have made to provide free quality education for all and deliver on pledges made towards that goal at all international, regional and national forums, notably the **Global Partnership for Education Financing Summits**.
2. **Maintain and increase education budgets**, to get learners affected by COVID-19 back into school. Specifically states must:
  - a. Deliver on commitments made to domestic financing within the Incheon 2030 Framework to Action, to protect the progress being made towards the achievement of SDG4, by **allocating at least 4% to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) to education and/or allocating at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education;**
  - b. Improve monitoring and financial planning
  - c. Involve the Global Campaign coalitions in the drawing up of education budgets
3. **Prioritise education within COVID-19 response and recovery plans** including:
  - a. Innovative strategies to reach out to all learners that does not deepen inequalities
  - b. Working in close partnership with civil society, develop curriculum recovery strategies, including providing necessary support to educators to facilitate catch up for all learners
  - c. Establish crisis and post-crisis response mechanisms
  - d. Ministries of Finance and Education should appoint a government focal point to collaborate with GCE coalition coordinators.
4. **Increase their tax base in order to enable an increase in domestic resources for education.** States must also examine new tax sources and **work towards a minimum tax-to-GDP ratio of 20%**. The IMF suggest most countries could increase their tax to GDP ratios by 5% in the medium term (3 to 5 years), and GCE believe all countries should develop ambitious strategies to do this using **fair, progressive taxes**.

### **Countries that provide aid must**

5. Fulfil all commitments related to official development assistance (ODA) including the commitments by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries.
6. Improving aid effectiveness by increasing their contributions to the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait.

### **International community**

7. We call for urgent debt cancellation for the least developed countries and a new global commitment or compact from creditors and debtors to require full transparency in agreeing future loans

### **Education Community**

8. The global education community must come together to provide sustained tracking of education pledges and to hold governments to account for their pledges
9. The development and launch of a new **Education Financing Observatory** should be prioritised
10. Advocacy opportunities such as the **Africa Finance Ministers Conference** and the **26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)** will be key decision making opportunities and civil society needs to ensure that our leaders don't miss these opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Many countries are not on track to achieve SDG4. The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented negative impact on education budgets as most government efforts are focused on fighting the pandemic at the expense of other public services such as education. With schools still closed in many countries, the money that would normally go towards providing education is being channelled to health services.

Most African countries are too heavily indebted. GCE joins worldwide experts in calling for debt cancellation instead of debt relief because servicing external debts takes away domestic revenue that would otherwise go towards financing public services including education. A quick analysis of budget projections for 2021 shows African economies are predicted to shrink, implying that education budgets, which were already insufficient, may decrease even further.

**It's not too late to ensure education for all, but urgent action is required now.**