
[Key actors and learning initiatives](#)

BRIEF 2

[Education and development](#)

[International cooperation in education](#)

“The SDGs are our collective plan for the future of the world’s people and its planet. There is no other plan. And there’s no spare planet.” David Nabarro, Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda.

Two years after Member States of the United Nations agreed upon the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comprising the 17 global goals is underway. Education, as a key component of this universal agenda, was enshrined in the SDG 4 aiming to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The international consensus on the importance of not only giving access to learning opportunities, but also to quality education, translated into a series of [SDG targets](#), as well as in the Education 2030 [Framework for Action](#).

There are no doubts about the contribution of education to the realization of all other 16 SDGs. As Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Chair of the Global Education Monitoring Report Advisory Board [puts it](#), “education is the most important Sustainable Development Goal – without education we are not going to achieve any objective: peaceful societies, jobs, ending poverty, solving health problems.” However, fulfilling the education commitments set two years ago requires not only mobilising all countries and partners involved, but also coordinating the tasks of implementing, financing, and monitoring the SDG 4 and its targets.

Measuring progress appears to be crucial within the new architecture of global education, and several initiatives have emerged to streamline monitoring mechanisms at the national, regional, and international levels. The purpose is to promote accountability among all actors involved, and to facilitate the exchange of good practices across levels – including countries, partners, donors, and citizens. Consequently, the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee plays a central role as a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism that seeks to integrate the efforts from Member States and partners in order to achieve SDG 4 and its targets.

A number of actors have joined the stage of global initiatives promoting learning since the discussion around the SDGs started. [The Learning Metrics Task Force \(LMTF\)](#), convened by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics and the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at the Brookings Institution, pioneered the task of building consensus on the importance of learning *in addition* to access to education. As part of its role, the LMTF helped to develop a series of recommendations in order to address the challenge of measuring learning outcomes. After its official sunset in 2016, the LMTF was followed by new initiatives such as the [Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning \(GAML\)](#), and the [Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4 – Education 2030 \(TCG\)](#). Both initiatives, led by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), follow the mandate of the Education 2030 Framework for Action to streamline solid assessment mechanisms in order to improve learning. While the GAML is focusing on the development of international standards and tools to measure learning outcomes, the TCG convenes different stakeholders – such as Member States, multilateral agencies, and civil society groups – to lead the development and implementation of the indicators used to monitor the Education 2030 targets. These initiatives are sustaining the momentum around learning emerged after the endorsement of the SDGs two years ago, by bringing together multiple partners and by coordinating the development of assessment mechanisms at a national, regional, and global level. So far, for 2017 [there is a list of 32 indicators for countries to monitor SDG 4, including the 11 global indicators and the 18 thematic indicators](#).

A third initiative supporting the development of learning assessment systems at a national level is [Assessment for Learning \(A4L\)](#), a platform started within the LMTF and launched in 2017 by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The aim of this platform is to provide financial and technical assistance to national and regional assessment networks in Africa and Asia-Pacific, focusing on improving learning outcomes by strengthening capacity-building. Further, the [Global Education Monitoring Report \(GEMR\)](#) will keep its role of monitoring and reporting on education and more specifically, on the progress made on the SDG 4. [The 2017/8 Report](#) focuses on accountability in education, looking at what works in terms of policies and practices to provide education more effectively, efficiently, and equitably keeping in mind as well the achievement of SDG 4 and its targets.

Other key actors promoting this shift towards access *plus* learning have highlighted the importance of coordinating efforts towards a more effective action to promote learning. Echoing this trend, the World Bank dedicated its latest [World Development Report](#) to education and has joined many initiatives as a key partner, including GAML, TCG, [UN Global Education First Initiative](#), and the GEMR, as well as organizations such as the GPE, the [Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators \(IAG-EII\)](#), and the [International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity](#), among others.

In spite of the momentum built around the global goals for education, some challenges remain with regards to the implementation, financing and measurement of the progress made on its targets. According to the [Global Campaign for Education](#), “a combination of reduced aid to education, and insufficient domestic resources in developing countries, has left 263 million children and youth out of school, and 758 million adults unable to read or write”. Moreover, governments and donors have to bear the costs of implementing large-scale assessments, which could eventually lead countries to [choose cost-effective, but poor quality methods or measurement tools](#). Hence, the multi-stakeholder initiatives emerged in these last two years have real implications for the progress on the SDG 4 and its targets, through the technical and financial assistance they aim to provide to countries to improve their current learning assessment systems.

