

Key Advocacy Messages

for Youth Education in Environments of Crisis and Fragility

General Comments

These key messages summarise the insights and preoccupations expressed during the INEE/RET Round Table of 15 October 2013 “Youth Education 2015 and Beyond - Setting Priorities”. Following the event, these messages were drafted and approved through a participatory review process (25 October to 24 November 2013) among representatives¹ of the following agencies: Aga Khan Foundation, the Education First Youth Advocacy Group, the Global Education Cluster, INEE (Secretariat, Adolescents and Youth Task Team and the Education and Fragility Working Group), the International Rescue Committee, UNESCO (IIEP and IBE), the Open Society Foundations (Education Support Programme), RET, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Swiss Network for Education and International Cooperation (RECI), UNHCR, UNICEF, the University of Sussex (Centre for International Education) and the Women’s Refugee Commission.

This Round Table has highlighted the inherent complexity of post-primary education². Whereas primary education seeks to provide a relatively uniform set of skills (reading and writing proficiency, basic mathematics, basic cognitive, social and emotional processes), post-primary education has to encompass a much greater range of factors.

Young people, as they take on a more active role in their communities, require an education, which is both broader in scope than that offered at primary level, and tailored to their specific situation (individual desires, adult expectations, cultural patterns, political and social situations, market dynamics, etc.).

For this reason, except for post-primary core skills, a uniform approach is not an option for youth education in fragile environments.

Plan

Adequately funded education sector plans must include young people’s needs, focusing on the positive role empowered youth play in helping their communities mitigate crisis and move towards development.

In contexts of crisis, well-educated young people are essential partners for stakeholders (civil society, government and private sector) striving to prevent and/or mitigate further displacement, violence and disasters, and to break cycles of social injustice, inequality and economic dependence. Unfortunately, primary education alone does not enable young people to fulfil their potential, nor does it equip them with the skills required to become essential partners in this process.

Empowered with post-primary skills, youth can provide solutions and actively contribute to rebuilding their countries and supporting development, peace and stability. Youth engagement is a mutually beneficial process between youth and society. It builds the capacity of young people, while simultaneously contributing to the social and civic contexts in which they are engaged.

A successful transition from primary to post-primary education depends on the quality of the basic skills acquired and on the learning outcomes achieved during the first years of education. In addition, learner and parent motivation to make the transition to secondary education (and beyond) depends on the availability of good quality and free educational opportunities. Furthermore, shortcomings in secondary education will impact enrolment and retention at the primary level, as well as the availability of qualified teachers to provide a quality education.

Therefore, education sector plans should not privilege one educational level over the other, but should be seen as an interdependent continuum.

¹ ILO (Youth Employment Programme) and Save the Children participated in the Round Table, but the representatives were not in the position to endorse the final key advocacy messages.

² Post-primary education is considered here to be all formal and non-formal adolescent and youth (12-25 years old approximately) education programmes (classic secondary, professional education, vocational training, tertiary, etc.). In other words, relevant and accredited education provided after primary level.

Prioritise

Diversified and holistic educational pathways must be provided in order to address the large array of needs, while simultaneously harnessing the potential of young people in all circumstances, including in crisis and fragile environments.

Youth are not passive members of society, or simply “future” citizens; in fact, they are often considered old enough to fend for themselves and provide for their families. This is all the more true in fragile contexts. Their needs in terms of education therefore go beyond basic skills and involve multiple sectors of society.

For education to be meaningful, a diversity of pathways must be offered to respond to and strengthen the different roles young people play, such as formal/non-formal approaches and academic/professional education. All of these should include crosscutting issues such as psychosocial support, conflict resolution, civic education, gender issues, etc.

The different approaches to post-primary education also have to take into account key actors (private sector, local authorities, families, etc.) and environmental characteristics (cultural and social patterns, market dynamics, etc.). Without such an integrated and holistic approach, educational efforts will fall short of meeting the needs of young people.

Each young person should be able to access an educational pathway that adequately responds to her/his context and individual potential.

Protect

Engaging youth in decision-making processes is an efficient way for them to develop the life skills necessary to confront the threats encountered in crisis and fragile environments.

Acquiring a respect for universal human rights, alongside life skills such as responsible citizenship, entrepreneurship, leadership, good health practices, etc. enables young people to make good decisions, and offers them an alternative to violence, harmful practices and despair. These skills thus provide young people in crisis and fragile environments with the capacities and resources to confront the threats they are exposed to.

These protective skills are rarely acquired in the classroom alone. Indeed, opportunities to take on meaningful responsibilities within the community, such as working with others and initiating projects, are how such skills are best developed. Genuine engagement of young people in decision-making processes (such as in processes of educational planning and community development) is the ideal pathway to acquire these skills.

Simply listening to youth is not enough. They must be equipped with the relevant resources, motivated to be engaged, and then given opportunities to actually influence decision-making at different levels. This will require a shift in the way adults approach these processes in order to support youth participation.

Youth engagement is mutually beneficial. It provides vulnerable young people with the protection skills they lack, and provides the community with additional resources and inputs to deal with and overcome crisis situations.