

Multistakeholderism in global education governance: Losses for democracy, profits for business



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Introduction

In the context of multiple crises and the democratic deficit in the international arena, multistakeholderism has emerged as an alternative form of global governance, in particular as a way to address current challenges to democracies. Growing research, however, shows that it has not lived up to its promise.

This report contributes to the growing global concern about the risks to the right to education represented by the rapid increase in private actors in public education policy. It examines some of the unresolved questions about the democratic implications of multistakeholderism in the education sector by analysing three recent education initiatives. It analyses the extent to which they incorporate multistakeholder principles and practices, and explores how they either reinforce or add further complexity to the global rise of the privatisation of education.

The term 'multistakeholderism' has been used in various contexts, but generally refers to a governance model in which multiple stakeholders – such as governments, businesses, civil society organisations (CSOs), and individuals – are involved in decision-making processes related to a particular issue or policy. It implies an institutional arrangement that could replace the central roles and responsibilities of nation-states in global governance, as manifested in multilateralism. It remains unclear how it will comply with or enhance global democracy or equity in participation, despite its assumption that involving different groups in setting a policy agenda will lead to better decisions that take into account the needs and interests of everyone involved (Gleckman, 2018).

Although education has been less dominated by multistakeholderism than other sectors, we consider it crucial

to study three forms of the education global governance architecture. We refer to these as hybrid initiatives, given their relevance in influencing the education policy agenda at the global and national levels; and that, taken together, they make it possible to analyse the current picture of multistakeholder arrangements in education, illustrating their shortcomings and democratic deficits. The three cases are: (1) SDG-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC); (2) Global Partnership for Education (GPE); and (3) Global Education Forum (GEF). The report builds on the findings of previous research, especially those presented in *The Great Takeover* (Manahan and Kumar, 2021), and points to other multistakeholder initiatives and issues in this sector, as well as further research areas to be explored.

The report focuses in particular on the multiple connections to the privatisation of education. In recent decades, the growing participation of private actors in making education policy has challenged traditional understandings of who should be involved in setting educational agendas and making decisions about schooling and education (Verger et al., 2016). At the global and local levels, various globally mobile actors, such as edu-businesses, non-profit organisations, and individual policy entrepreneurs, have been active in shaping education policy (McKenzie and Aikens, 2021). The role played by international organisations with diverse mandates in shaping education policy has become a relevant expression of its privatisation (Ball, 2012; Croso and Magalhães, 2016; Silva and Oliveira, 2022; Verger, Fontdevila, and Zancajo, 2016; Adrião, 2018). In the transnational policy-making context, several actors and spaces are emerging in the negotiations regarding education policy.

Multistakeholderism is one such phenomenon, which is not in isolation from the rise of the participation of private actors in education, nor is it outside the framework of neoliberalism as an economic and political ideology that emphasises individual responsibility and competition, and downplays the role of government in providing public goods and services, such as education (Harvey, 2011). This ideological shift has contributed to an environment in which companies and other private actors, including individuals, are increasingly seen as more legitimate players in setting educational agendas.

This report is organised in four sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents a brief history of

the seminal moments and evolution of multistakeholderism, and an overview of its role in the education sector. The third section offers an in-depth analysis of the three cases, in order to illustrate the problematic issues that multistakeholderism presents. Part four concludes and outlines issues for further research.

The report is based on documentary analysis and the researchers' involvement in multistakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which is seen as a form of praxis (Freire, 1984, 2005). The analysis was also subjected to independent academic appraisal through ongoing critical discussion to avoid the risk of bias.

Brief history of multistakeholderism and its impact on international decision-making in the education sector

The term 'stakeholder' has been used in various contexts, but generally refers to an individual or group who has a vested interest in an issue or policy. In the context of global governance, the term is used to refer to groups or individuals who are affected by, or have an impact on, international or national decision-making.

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was a seminal moment in the history of multistakeholderism. Also known as the 'Rio Summit' or the 'Earth Summit', the conference was a landmark event in global environmental politics. It was attended by representatives of over 150 governments, as well as delegates from major intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and non-government organisations (NGOs). The conference adopted Agenda 21, a blueprint for sustainable development, which included a commitment to engage 'major groups and other stakeholders' – including women, youth, indigenous peoples, NGOs, and business – in the implementation of sustainable development.

The Rio Summit was also significant for recognising the importance of 'stakeholders' in global governance. Prior to the summit, stakeholders were largely excluded from formal decision-making processes at the international level. However, at the Rio Summit, government delegates committed to involving stakeholders in future negotiations on environmental and development issues. This commitment was reaffirmed at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), also known as 'Rio+10'.

In 2010, the World Economic Forum (WEF) launched the Global Redesign Initiative, which called for a new global governance and presented a strong theoretical argument in support of multistakeholder groups (MSGs). Its three co-chairs stated that '[t]he time has come for a new stakeholder paradigm of international governance analogous to that embodied in the stakeholder theory of corporate governance on which the World Economic Forum itself was founded'. The WEF has been at the forefront of promoting what its founder, Klaus Schwab, described as 'stakeholder capitalism', with increasing engagement and dominance of corporate sector and mega-philanthropies in Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs), thus facilitating the privatisation of global governance. The WEF has furthermore asserted that a multistakeholder world implies volunteerism and that multistakeholder decision-making should take priority over the authority of the nation-state.

This argument was given further credence in 2015 when the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included Target 17.16, which calls for enhanced global partnership for sustainable development through multistakeholder alliances. In fact, most of the MSIs justify their existence as being a means to achieve the SDGs, while at the same time tending to limit the agenda by cherry-picking specific targets on which to focus. The 2015 Paris Climate Accords also incorporated multistakeholderism as a cornerstone of their implementation, further consolidating this form of governance within the United Nations (UN) system.

More recently, in 2021, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres launched the report 'Our Common Agenda', in which he calls for 'a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations' (United Nations, 2021, p. 4) by increasingly activating multistakeholder partnerships, consultations and concrete action. These partnerships are seen as key to mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support the achievement of SDGs in all countries, especially in the Global South.

Gleckman (2018) spells out some contentious issues of multistakeholderism, which we use as framework to analyse our three cases. He highlights, for example, that the selection of participants can lead to conflicts of interest and exclude those who are most affected by decisions but have no say in making them. He discusses the role of secretariats and executive directors in global governance, along with their controversial role as potential gatekeepers, responsible for selecting who will participate in decision-making processes, with the attendant risks of being undemocratic and unaccountable, with too much power vested in their hands. While in multilateral arrangements secretariats receive their authority from an intergovernmental body, under multistakeholderism they can join an MSG with no such meaningful supervision. Secretariats have gained greater autonomy as independent actors in global governance and can hold a similarly comfortable seat at the table with any government, acting as an inter-governmental supervisor (Gleckman, 2018).

Multistakeholderism in the education sector

Education is enshrined as a universal human right in many conventions, constitutions, and charters, starting with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 and followed by many others, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to name but a few. Its legal content has been detailed in numerous UN General Comments, in particular numbers 11 and 13, clearly affirming the role of the states as guarantors of the right in respecting, protecting and realising the right to education. Education is described in General Comment 11 as the quintessential example of the indivisibility of rights, namely a social, economic, cultural, political, and civil right.

Notwithstanding the affirmation and legal status of education as a right, it is increasingly presented as a

The asymmetrical power between different stakeholders is perhaps the most problematic aspect. Transnational corporations (TNCs) or CSOs may have more influence than democratically elected governments, while unelected officials can wield considerable power. This can lead to decisions that do not reflect citizens' wishes or interests. Another concern is the debate on the conditions, under multistakeholder arrangements, that elevate the chosen participants to new roles without a clear democratic selection process or rationale. This has led to concerns about who should be considered a stakeholder and what boundaries should be drawn around each category.

Researchers and activists alike have raised questions about the potential impact of these issues on international obligations, responsibilities, and liabilities. They argue that it could create a situation where states are no longer held accountable for their actions and that this could have damaging consequences for global stability and security.

Finally, as Manahan and Kumar (2021) note, there are efforts to build epistemic communities through self-referential networks and ecologies of MSIs: 'Epistemic community refers to a network of diverse academic, political and professional experts who are unified by a shared set of normative and principled beliefs and common policy enterprise, which means that they help policymakers define the problems they face, identifying various (policy) solutions' (Manahan and Kumar, 2021, p. 14)

development goal that responds in particular to poverty alleviation, economic growth, employability, and the enhancement of human capital, establishing a clear trend of reducing and subjugating the right to education to the economy. This trend has since served to challenge the content and purpose of education understood as a right, geared to fostering the full potential of all human beings and the promotion of peace, rights, and justice.

As described by Kumar and Manahan (2021), the late 1980s was a turning point for global education policy and governance, when four major international organisations – UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – hosted the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in Jomtien, Thailand. An interagency Education for All (EFA) commission was then established, charged with formulating a decade of EFA activities and overseeing

the realisation of central WCEFA goals. EFA also mobilised bilateral aid agencies such as the then UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) among many others that supported education and development programmes in the global South.

From the 1990s, reforms in the global context, including education, were guided by market reforms and economic logic emanating from the Washington Consensus. The Jomtien Conference and Framework for Action was followed by the Dakar Conference and Framework for Action (2000), the narrower Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000) and then the Incheon Declaration and SDGs (2015), including SDG4, with a focus on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all. There was a gradual broadening of the education agenda and narrative from Jomtien (1990) to Dakar (2000) and then Incheon (2015), except for the two education goals within the MDGs, also approved in 2000 by the UN, and which narrowed down the goals approved at Dakar to Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Gender Parity.

From one forum to the next, the active participation and engagement of civil society actors and teachers' unions, including in the global education governance mechanisms described below, were critical to ensuring the approval of narratives and goals more aligned to the human rights framework. Throughout the negotiation and approval processes of the Frameworks for Action, in particular the Dakar (2000) and Education 2030 Frameworks for Action (2015), where civil society had more institutionalised spaces for participation, the terrain has always been disputed, often within the framing of reductionist perspectives of education and of measurable learning outcomes. The debate regarding free public education, a key principle of the right to education, and of the role of the state as guarantor of rights – as well as including commitments on tax justice and improved international cooperation – have also been crucial negotiating issues in these frameworks. Despite the advances made in the approval of the SDGs, in particular SDG4 and the more detailed 2030 Framework for Action, '[t]hese goals have remained far-from-achieved precisely because of the neo-liberal policies, and continued patriarchal and colonialist frameworks, which have further accentuated society's inequalities and have had disastrous impacts' (Manahan and Kumar, 2021, p. 61).

In relation to global governance mechanisms and structures presented by these different forums, while the Jomtien Conference put in place the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, an interagency body to guide and monitor its follow-up actions, the Dakar Conference inaugurated a more plural Steering Committee, whose governance became increasingly elaborate. All the secretariats have been hosted at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris. While the first commission was of an interagency nature, the Steering Committee (whose name changed from the EFA Steering Committee to Post 2015 Steering Committee, to SDG4/Education 2030 Steering Committee) had a predominance of member states and multilateral agencies, and included CSOs, teachers' unions, and more recently students and youth as well as the private sector and foundations.

It was in the last reform of the Steering Committee in 2021 that the High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) was inaugurated, and formally defined as a multistakeholder space. This reform produced a more complex and layered global education governance system, which articulates several different bodies within a broader architecture.

In this sense, different education mechanisms and MSIs came together under what is now known as the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM), which was endorsed and inaugurated at the 2021 Global Education Meeting's Ministerial segment, to promote 'stronger collective action and joint accountability to achieve SDG4'. This cooperation mechanism presents itself as an 'ecosystem consisting of all global education actors that participate in the Global Education Meeting and have agreed to work cooperatively in support of SDG 4'. The idea of an ecosystem is relevant for our discussion because it acknowledges and legitimises a broader set of actors in global governance, some of which are relatively new, having been established in a wave of new actors following the approval of SDG4. The GCM comprises:

- **The High-Level Steering Committee:** This is the main governance body of the GCM and is the most plural in nature, with a prevalence of country representatives from all UN regions, as well as IGOs, CSOs, the teaching profession, banks and funds, foundations and the private sector, youth and students, development cooperation agencies and multilateral organisations.

- **The Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO-Education 2030):** A long-standing UNESCO mechanism for dialogue and partnership with NGOs that began in 1984 with a focus on literacy and which later expanded to a broader EFA and later Education 2030/ SDG4 agenda.
- **The SDG 4 Youth and Student network:** This took shape in 2021 with the aim of including youth in the global governance and in participating in decision-making on global education policies.
- **The Multilateral Education Platform:** This was first convened in 2019, bringing together not only multilateral organisations, but also other organisations working at the global level. Its first meeting included heads of UNESCO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the World Bank and the European Commission, as well as the GPE, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Education Commission (EC) and the UN Special Envoy for Global Education. Two elements are relevant to our discussion: the first is that UNESCO, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Bank and the GPE are already represented in the HLSC; and the second is that there is still a conceptual blurring regarding the nature of these initiatives, given that although this is supposedly a multilateral platform, other non-multilateral bodies such as the ECW and the Education Commission are also included, as well as the individual participation of the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, who in turn chairs both ECW and the EC. In all these structures there is a prevalence of global North actors.
- **The Global Education Forum (GEF):** This was also established in 2019 at the behest of Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, at the first meeting of the Multilateral Education Platform. The Forum was to be composed of 'international institutions and development ministers or agencies providing aid to education' to 'assess progress and key bottlenecks and help deliver support for reform and additional finance'. Its webpage, which hosted in that of the Education Commission, states that it brings together 'high-level leaders from key donor countries and multilateral institutions supporting SDG4' aiming to 'improve international collaboration and advocate for increased and more effective investment in global education'. It was first convened during the 2019 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and is co-chaired by Graça Machel

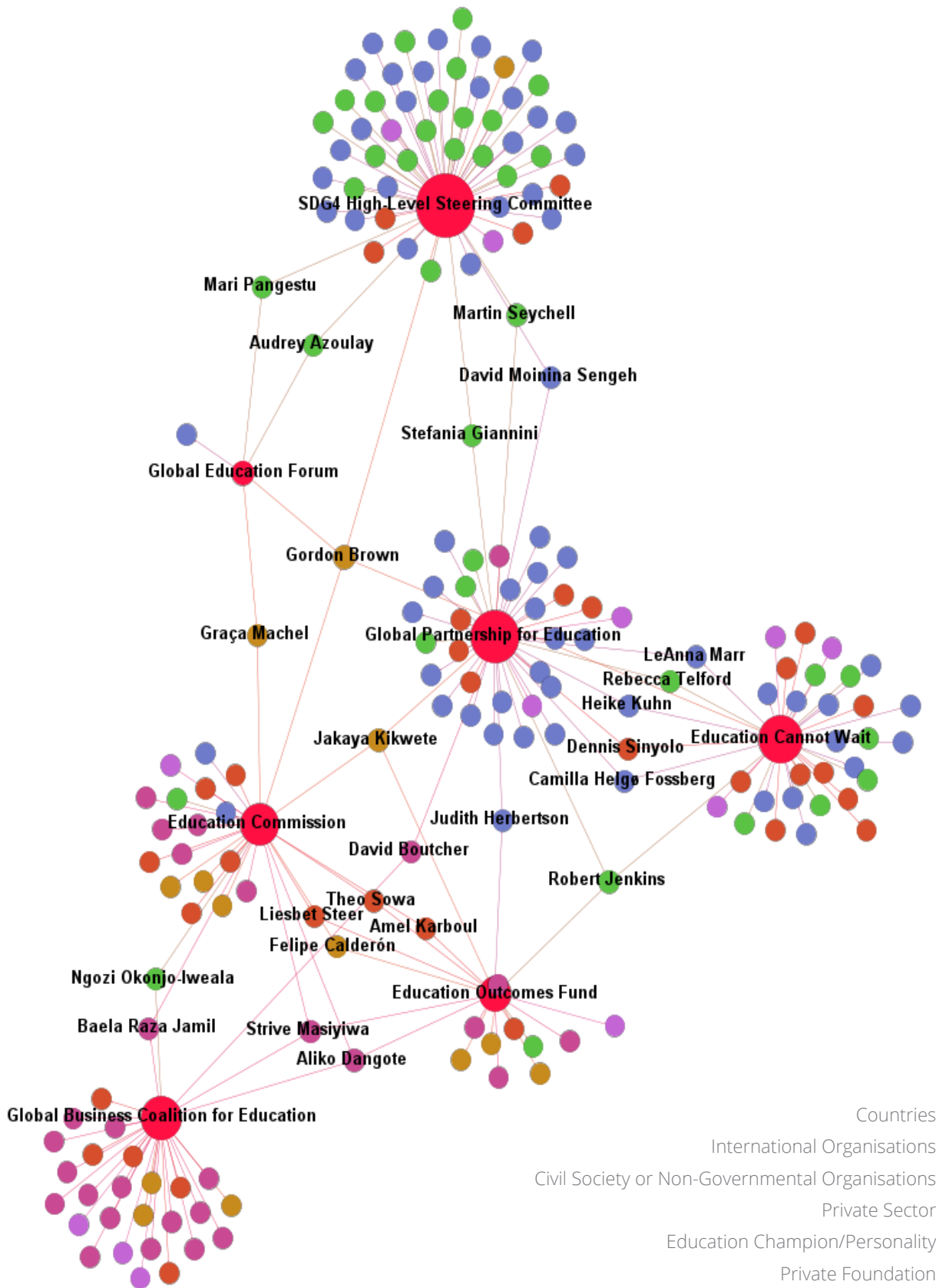
(former Minister of Education of Mozambique and Education Commissioner); Tharman Shanmurgatnam (former Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore), Audrey Azoulay (UNESCO Director General), Mari Pangestu (World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnership) and Gordon Brown (UN Special Envoy for Global Education and Education Commission Chair). The same organisations also participate in the Multilateral Education Platform, which is made up principally by donor agencies and global North actors, including high-level representatives acting in their personal capacity.

Apart from these structures, which are related to the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism, others also play an active role in the education global governance context. Two of these are older, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which we examine in greater detail below. It was inaugurated under another name in 2002, as well as the Global Education Initiative of the World Economic Forum, in 2003. Both are multistakeholder initiatives as defined earlier. Other global education governance structures took shape after the SDGs were approved in 2015, and, in most cases, included to a greater or lesser extent the involvement of the UN Special Envoy for Global Education. Among these are the Global Education Forum (GEF) (2019), the Education Commission (2015), the Education Cannot Wait Fund (ECW) (2016), the Save our Future Campaign (2020) and the Education Outcome Fund (2018). These mechanisms are not uniform; many are based on individual personalities and there is a strong representation of private-sector actors. One other mechanism was set up in March 2020, the Global Education Coalition, convened by UNESCO in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and made up mainly by private actors from tech companies.

Figure 1 sets out the of key structures and spaces in the global education architecture. It shows the type of constituency that each initiative represents and those who are involved in more than one. It is interesting to note the predominance of countries and international organisations, with some participation of CSOs in both the Steering Committee and the GPE, while there is a strong engagement with the private sector, private foundations and individual personalities in the Global Business Coalition for Education, the Education Outcomes Fund and the Education Commission, all led by the UN Special Envoy for Global Education.

FIGURE 1

Board members of the HLSC, GPE, Forum, ECW, EOF and EC



Source: The authors, based on information published on the respective organisational websites



Case studies

Our choice of cases is based on the scenario described in the previous section, given that the HLSC is the apex body of the GCM, with the longest trajectory in the education global governance architecture. Although it recently defined itself as a multistakeholder space, and presents some of the problems identified by Gleckman (2018), it co-exists with multilateral principles, especially in relation to having member states equally assigned from all UN regions. The GPE was chosen as a second case study because of its role and influence in global education financing and policy-making, with an extensive trajectory

and a governance structure that has also undergone several reforms over the years, with significant presence of member states organised through a North–South divide of ‘donor countries’ and ‘country partners’. Finally, the GEF was selected to explore this more recent initiative, whose mandate that overlaps with the other two structures, and which, despite having a less elaborate and more transparent governance structure, is one of the five key components of the GCM, with strong influence in the global education agenda.

1. The SDG4/E2030 High-Level Steering Committee

The SDG4/Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee defines itself as a multistakeholder mechanism. It evolved from its predecessor, cited in the Dakar Framework for Action (2000),² with the aim of providing ‘strategic direction to the EFA partnership, monitor progress, and advise on how to scale up efforts in order to meet the six EFA goals’. Until 2016, it was referred to as the EFA Steering Committee and was a key actor in the negotiations and approval of SDG4. In 2016, it was renamed SDG4-Education 2030 Steering Committee, to act as a ‘key structure for coordinating the support to global education efforts within the wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 1). Finally, in 2021, it was re-launched as the SDG4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee, with a hierarchical two-level structure of a ‘Leadership Group’ at the ministerial or head of agency level, and a ‘Sherpa Group’.

The HLSC members engage with the wider United Nations SDG structure at the global and regional levels. Its Leadership Group is composed of 28 members of whom 18 represent the six global regions, with two countries and one intergovernmental regional organisation per region. The other 10 members include CSOs, the teaching profession, banks and funds (the World Bank and the GPE), foundations and the private sector, youth and students, the development cooperation or donor constituency and multilateral organisations (UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO Inter-Agency Secretariat, n.d.). Most of these constituencies have established selection mechanisms to nominate their respective representatives in the Committee. In its different iterations over time, member state representation in the Steering Committee increased from one to two countries per region, plus an IGO per region, to ensure the predominance of states, in acknowledgement of the

state's role as a duty bearer for protecting, respecting, and fulfilling the right to education.

The HLSC meets yearly and has two supporting structures, the Inter-Agency Secretariat hosted by UNESCO, and the Sherpa Group, which brings to the HLSC meetings the results of consultation with their respective constituencies and provides feedback following the meetings. UNESCO'S Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report team also provide data to the HLSC (UNESCO Inter-Agency Secretariat, n.d.).

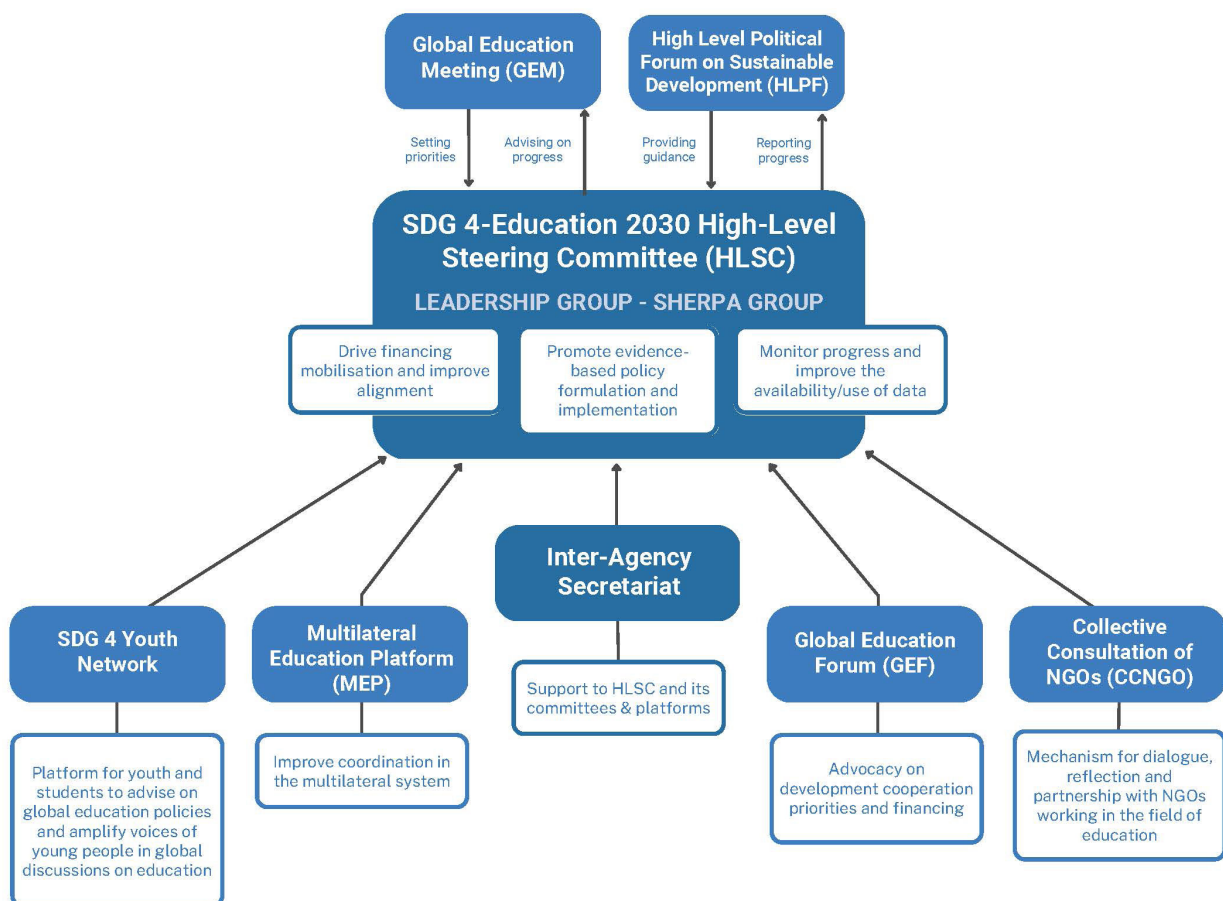
At the global level, the HLSC provides inputs for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda through UN processes, including the High-Level Political Forum. As the apex body for global coordination and monitoring of SDG 4, the HLSC

is also responsible for the follow-up of the Transforming Education Summit (TES), convened in September 2022 by the UN Secretary-General, including contributing to the education dimension of the Summit of the Future, which is planned for 2024. The HLSC interacts with regional organisations, SDG 4 coordination groups, and other partners, seeking a more harmonised support for implementation, monitoring and review of Education 2030.

An analysis of HLSC members (Table 1) shows that member states represent the majority of participants, followed by multilateral organisations/banks/funds, civil society and the teaching profession, youth and student movements; private foundations/ private sector (which share a seat); and the UN Special Envoy for Global Education.

FIGURE 2

Global Education Cooperation Mechanism



Source: UNESCO Inter-Agency Secretariat, n.d.

TABLE 1

Composition of HLSC

Type of constituency	Number/%
Member states and inter-governmental regional organisations	18/28 (64.3%)
Multilateral organisations/Banks/Funds	4/28 (14.3%)
Civil Society and teaching profession	2/28 (7.1%)
Development cooperation representative	1/28 (3.6%)
Private foundations	1/28 (3.6%)
Youth and student organisation	1/28 (3.6%)
Education Special Envoy	1/28 (3.6%)

Source: The authors, based on information published on the HLSC website (HLSC, 2022)

The Steering Committee, in its previous and current iterations, has been the most significant space for the global education debate, setting the agenda and making decisions. Its governance structure is dominated by states, equally distributed among all UN regions, and meaningful engagement by CSOs and the teaching profession. Multilateral organisations, together with the World Bank and the GPE, have major participation and influence in decision-making, and have consolidated their influence at the global, regional, and national levels. As stated in the introduction, these agencies were responsible for initiating the EFA conferences, and have since continued to have a strong presence and marked influence. CSOs and the teaching profession, although in small number, have historically played an influential role. During a period that coincided with SDG4 negotiations, they co-chaired the Steering Committee.

The outcome of the SDG4 negotiations reflects their contribution and includes some of their key demands, including the affirmation of education as a fundamental human right, reference to 12 years of free education progressively extended to non-compulsory stages, a commitment to strengthening public education systems, a broader conception of quality education, a commitment to minimum state investment and reference to tax justice as a core component for ensuring increased financing for education.

Although SDG4 has been formally approved, there continue to be significant disagreements about the breadth and depth of the education agenda, with some actors, in particular the multilateral organisations, the World

Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) pushing for a narrower agenda and an emphasis on measurable learning outcomes. There are also debates about the approaches to financing education. In this regard, CSOs and the teaching profession have especially promoted increased and improved international cooperation, the establishment of internationally agreed minimum levels of state investment and an emphasis on tax justice. Other actors, with the leadership of the Special Envoy for Global Education, have pushed for the approval of the International Financing Facility for Education (IFFed), one of the central proposals made by the Education Commission, chaired by the Special Envoy. Although IFFed was resisted stance by CSOs, the teaching profession and other actors because of its emphasis on loans being offered by the development banks, it was officially launched in September 2022, during the UN Transforming Education Summit (TES).

Transforming Education Summit

The TES is a key initiative of 'Our Common Agenda' launched by UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, in September 2021. The Summit took place during the 77th session of the UNGA and was convened by Guterres with a view to raising the focus on education in the global political agenda.

The five Thematic Action Tracks mirrored the policy priorities of the HLSC, namely: (1) Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; (2) Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession; (3) Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development; (4) Digital learning and

transformation; and (5) Financing of education. These five tracks also reflect the five priorities presented by the Global Education Forum, showing the extent to which the latter influences the global education agenda. The final TES Vision Statement framed education in broad terms, as a fundamental human right that promotes the advancement of social, economic, political and cultural development.

When analysing the HLSC through Gleckman's lens (Gleckman, 2018), although there is a prevalence of regionally balanced member states as well as meaningful participation of civil society actors, certain non-state actors in the agenda-setting process, including the Multilateral Education Platform and the Global Education Forum, are also influential.

2. The Global Partnership for Education

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is a multistakeholder partnership created in 2002 by the World Bank initially under the name of the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative, a 'partnership between donor and developing countries to accelerate progress towards the

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education' (World Bank, 2005, p. 2). Its idea stems from the Dakar Framework for Action, which called for a global initiative to improve and coordinate education financing globally (Box 1).

BOX 1

Dakar Framework for Action on International Financial Cooperation

CLAUSE 10

Political will and stronger national leadership are needed for the effective and successful implementation of national plans in each of the countries concerned. However, political will must be underpinned by resources. The international community acknowledges that many countries currently lack the resources to achieve education for all within an acceptable timeframe. New financial resources, preferably in the form of grants and concessional assistance, must therefore be mobilized by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, including the World Bank and regional development banks, and the private sector. We affirm that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources.

CLAUSE 11

The international community will deliver on this collective commitment by launching with immediate effect a global initiative aimed at developing the strategies and mobilizing the resources needed to provide effective support to national efforts. Options to be considered under this initiative will include:

- 1 increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education;
- 2 ensuring greater predictability in the flow of external assistance;
- 3 facilitating more effective donor co-ordination;
- 4 strengthening sector-wide approaches;
- 5 providing earlier, more extensive and broader debt relief and/or debt cancellation for poverty reduction, with a strong commitment to basic education; and
- 6 undertaking more effective and regular monitoring of progress towards EFA goals and targets, including periodic assessments.

Although it was envisaged that UNESCO would play a convening role for this financing mechanism, it was the World Bank that took the lead and reframed it as a ‘fast track initiative’, taking the education MDG of UPE as reference, rather than the more holistic Dakar Framework for Action. The World Bank thus further consolidated itself as a major actor in setting the agenda for education financing at both global and national levels.

This multistakeholder partnership acquired a new guise in 2011 to respond to various criticisms of its governance, such as weak democratic management and prescribed and ideologically driven educational policy advice, among others.³

In terms of policy orientation, the GPE continued to be more responsive to the narrower MDG perspective of education, pushing back, for example, on any allusion to adult education and literacy. During the process of approving the SDGs, the GPE pledged to align its work to the implementation of the full SDG4 agenda – although this has yet to happen. This marks an important difference between the GPE and the HLSC, which continues to support the full SDG4 agenda and is more responsive to the views of its members.

Currently, the GPE brings together 79 countries from the global South and more than 20 donor agencies. The GPE considers itself to be the ‘world’s largest multistakeholder partnership for education, and the largest fund dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries’ (Global Partnership for Education, 2022a, p. 7).

Of the 66 countries that received financial support from GPE in 2021, 41 are on the African continent, with the

remaining 25 spread across Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Oceania (Silva and Oliveira, 2022). It provides grants to governments for the education sector, as well as to CSOs for advocacy and social accountability, and knowledge and innovation.

The GPE is hosted at the World Bank’s Washington headquarters (Global Partnership for Education 2019a) and has two satellite offices in Europe, one in Belgium and another in Paris. However, because GPE operates at both the global and country levels there are local education groups at the national level where partners coordinate their activities (Global Partnership for Education, 2019a). At the country level, the World Bank has a prominent role within the GPE and takes precedence as the Grant Agent along with UNICEF, while UNESCO acts mainly as the GPE coordination agency.

At the global level, the governance mechanisms include the board of directors, three committees (Executive Committee, Finance and Risk Committee, and Performance, Impact and Learning Committee) and the Secretariat. The board currently has six seats for the developing country constituency, six for the donor constituency, three for the multilateral agencies and regional banks, three for CSOs, including one for the teaching profession, and two for the private-sector and private foundations constituency (see Table 2). Its composition follows a North-South divide, with seats dedicated to donor countries and so-called developing country partners and with CSO seats similarly divided.

TABLE 2

Composition of GPE

Type of constituency	Number/%
Member States (12 donor countries and 12 developing countries)	24 (60%)
Civil Society and Teaching Profession	6 (15%)
Multilateral Organisations and Regional Banks	6 (15%)
Private Sector and Private Foundations	4 (10%)

Among the organisations on the board of directors in 2022 (Table 3), some are interconnected, even if they represent different constituencies. This is because the same person can be engaged with different MSIs. For instance, the representative of the private-sector constituency is the Global Business Coalition for Education that was founded in 2012 as an initiative of the NGO Theirworld. These two organisations have the same goal – ending the global education crisis and unleashing the potential of the next generation – and the Theirworld chair is also the executive chair and executive director of the Global Business Coalition for Education (Sarah Brown). The two

organisations are also connected to the UN Special Envoy for Global Education (Gordon Brown).

In this way, shared goals can reach different audiences and represent different constituencies, sometimes without changing the key actors involved.⁴ Manahan and Kumar (2021, p. 17) claim that the Special Envoy ‘is the go-to expert in several MSIs [...] The movement of the likes of Gordon Brown from one MSI to the next has created webs or ecologies of MSIs with similar sets of actors—individuals and organisations—that spout similar narratives and solutions’. These ecologies and actors are present in the GPE and in the other two MSIs we examine.⁵

TABLE 3

Composition of the GPE Board in 2023

	Constituency	Group Composition	Group Representative
Country Partners	Africa 1	Angola, Eritrea, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia (Federal, Puntland, Somaliland), Tanzania (Mainland, Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe and Somalia
	Africa 2	Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia	Togo and Chad
	Africa 3	Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, South Sudan	Sierra Leone and Nigeria
	Asia and Pacific	Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Maldives, Marshall Islands, FS Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Timor Leste, Vanuatu, Vietnam	Nepal and Maldives
	Eastern Europe, Middle East, Central Asia	Afghanistan, Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Sudan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Yemen	Tajikistan and Uzbekistan
	Latin America and the Caribbean	Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines	St Lucia and Honduras

Donor Countries	Donor 1	Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland	Switzerland (plus vacant seat)
	Donor 2	Denmark, Estonia, Sweden	Denmark and Sweden
	Donor 3	Canada, United Kingdom (UK)	Canada, UK
	Donor 4	Finland, Ireland, Norway, United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Norway and UAE
	Donor 5	European Commission, Germany, Italy, Spain	European Commission and Germany
	Donor 6	Australia, Japan, Korea, United States (USA)	Australia and USA
CSOs	CSO 1	Northern/Developed Countries	Oxfam Ibis and Plan International
	CSO 2	Partner countries	ANCEFA and ACEA
	CSO 3	Teaching Profession	Education International
Private Sector		Private Sector	Global Business Coalition for Education (2 seats for the Coalition)
Private Foundations		Private Foundations	Firelight (and vacant)
Multi-lateral Agencies	Multilateral Agency 1	UNESCO/WFP	UNESCO/WFP
	Multilateral Agency 2	UNICEF/UNHCR	UNICEF/UNHCR
	Multilateral Agency 3	Multilateral and Regional Banks	World Bank and Islamic Development Bank

The analysis of the GPE funding also shows that private-sector support is more related to the discourse that favours financial contributions from the corporate sector, given that private-sector actors ‘do not actively spearhead new initiatives, have not made notable impacts on GPE practices, and have not committed much in a way of funding’ (Menashy, 2019, p. 106; Silva and Oliveira, 2021). The GPE funding from 2011 to 2020 came mainly from Europe (74.58%) followed by North America (14.46%), with the UK providing more funds (18.79%) in this period of time (Silva and Oliveira, 2021).

Another relevant issue is that language barriers lead to a linguistic hierarchy, dominated by English (Menashy, 2019). This is also relevant in the application process for GPE funding, which may not even be in one of the countries’ official languages (Silva and Oliveira, 2022). This factor, in our view, undermines GPE’s strategy of promoting

country ownership, mutual accountability, and transparency across the partnership.

The GPE states that it funds capacity development, planning, monitoring and implementation, and that this is aligned with national priorities and leadership (Global Partnership for Education, 2022b, p. 15). In reality, however, the leadership of recipient country partners is questionable, and there is a need for much more research into national-level dynamics, including the actors and processes pursued.

Research has shown that the GPE’s strategy of evidence-based policy places the locus of authority outside the GPE and can lead to depoliticisation (Knutsson and Lindberg, 2020; Silva and Oliveira, 2022). One example is the development process of the education sector plans (ESPs) submitted by governments to obtain GPE funding. These ESPs are strongly influenced by donors and by the

consultants who are hired to support their elaboration or evaluation (Menashy, 2017, 2019; Menashy and Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Silva and Oliveira, 2020, 2022).

The individual and institutional external authors of the ESPs usually are anonymous, giving the impression that the national actors in command, at the centre of policy-making (Silva and Oliveira, 2022). These depoliticisation strategies also reflect the illusion that policy-making is a technical issue and 'the liberal idea that it is possible to establish a consensual order among diverse actors founded on reason and rational deliberation' (Knutsson and Lindberg, 2019, p. 434). This approach tends to ensure that in the policy arena 'deciding what works becomes a democratic political activity, not simply a technical search for some elusive truth' (Klees et al., 2020, p. 51).

Several challenges Gleckman (2018) identified regarding multistakeholder processes can be observed in the context of the GPE, most notably:

- A Although government representation prevails in GPE's board, donor countries have are over-represented compared to the country partners (recipient governments), given that the latter represent many more countries than do donor countries on the board. As Table 4 illustrates, while the 42 African countries have six representatives on the GPE board, the 15 Western European countries (situated within the donor groups) have eight representatives. In other words, Africa has 25% representation for nearly 39% of countries while Western Europe has a third of the seats for 14% of countries. There are also divisions among European countries, divided into Eastern European countries (which are in the country partners group) and Western European countries (which are in the donor groups).
- B The GPE encompasses only so-called lower-income countries, excluding many nations that could benefit either from financial support or have a collaborative role in the Partnership. The Latin America and Caribbean group, for example, despite representing one of the world's most unequal regions, includes a total of only 11 countries, mostly from Central America and the Caribbean. Again, this speaks to power relations and the political economy of global education financing.
- C The GPE governance structure is designed on a North-South basis, both in relation to how governments are defined and represented (donor and country partners), and to how CSOs are divided, with CSO1 representing Northern actors and CSO2 Southern actors. This

geopolitical representation mirrors asymmetrical power relations among countries and actors and has consequences that go beyond the GPE, given that these same patterns are often replicated in other arenas of policy debate and decision-making.

- D GPE's secretariat has grown in number and in power in relation to its board of directors and has gained more decision-making autonomy over the years. Its staff is predominantly from the global North and the World Bank continues to play a very influential role in the GPE, not only as lead of its predecessor (the Fast Track Initiative) but as the GPE's headquarters. Despite its consolidated organisational structure, the GPE still has no independent legal status, for which it relies on the World Bank. In addition, as stated earlier, the World Bank and UNICEF are in most cases the Grant Agents of partner countries, leveraging further influence at national level.

Although the private sector has only one seat on the GPE's board of directors, and as Menashy (2019) notes, has not made appreciable impacts on GPE practices, it would be important to analyse the role of businesses that belong to the Global Business Coalition for Education (Private Sector's GPE Board Representative), in national-level dynamics and educational policy.

The unfolding of a predominantly Northern and donor-led dynamic in the GPE has resulted in a narrower and more instrumental education agenda than that of the SDG 4/ Education 2030. For example, the GPE's mission statement is focused only on children, while SDG4 takes on a life-long learning perspective, encompassing early childhood up to adult literacy and higher education.

It is also worth noting that when the GPE Private Sector Engagement Strategy was being developed in 2019, some GPE actors sought to approve the proposal to fund for-profit private education. During this debate, the then UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Education, Koumbou Boly Barry, and her two predecessors, Vernor Muñoz and Kishore Singh, all wrote to the GPE board highlighting the regressive nature of this proposal, underlining that promoting profit in and through education with GPE international cooperation resources would contradict the concept of education as a fundamental human right. The proposal was ultimately rejected, and the board of directors at that time, including the private-sector representative, agreed that the GPE should be supporting the strengthening of public education systems.

3. The Global Education Forum

The Global Education Forum (GEF) was established at the UNGA in September 2019, as result of an agreement taken at the first meeting of the Multilateral Education Platform earlier that year, at the suggestion of the UN Special Envoy on Global Education, crystallised in that meeting's Outcome Statement (Paris, 2019). The latter affirmed that the GEF would be composed of 'international institutions and development ministers or agencies providing aid to education' to 'assess progress and key bottlenecks and help deliver support for reform and additional finance'. Its webpage, however, states that it brings together 'high-level leaders from key donor countries and multilateral institutions supporting SDG4'. Either way, the GEF was envisaged as a space for global North leadership, be it from donor countries or international institutions.

The GEF is co-chaired by Graça Machel (former Minister of Education in Mozambique and Education Commissioner), Tharman Shanmurgatnam (former Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore), Audrey Azoulay (UNESCO Director General), Mari Pangestu (World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnership) and Gordon Brown (UN Special Envoy for Global Education and Education Commission Chair) (Education Commission, n.d.). According to a 2019 article by UNESCO's Education Assistant Director General, the GEF is an 'initiative of the Special Envoy, Mr Gordon Brown [...] charged with attracting more high-level political support for education and corresponding funding increases', which UNESCO agreed to co-chair, on the understanding that 'it can effectively complement the system in terms of advocacy and financial resources'.⁶

The GEF's main goals are to:

- Develop a clear message on the urgency of the global education emergency.
- Strengthen coordination of bilateral and multilateral international support to ensure predictable, sustainable, and coherent financing and achieve economies of scale and scope, and greater efficiency and impact.
- Work with leaders from selected countries, at their request, to mobilise international support for their national objectives and plans.

In September 2020, the GEF provided a platform for donors to discuss the Save Our Future White Paper, produced by the Save our Future Campaign, spearheaded by the Education Commission with the engagement of

the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Education Above All, Save the Children (SCF), UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), the GPE, the Education Outcomes Fund (EOF) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW), also chaired by the chair of the Education Commission.

The White Paper was supported by the GEF membership in September 2020 and, according to its website, was the basis of the Outcome Declaration of the Global Education Meeting in October that year, which in turn informed the HLSC priority policy recommendations and the five Action Tracks of the TES, held at the UN headquarters in New York in 2021, thus influencing the highest-level education policy forum. These priorities are also presented on the GEF's webpage, coinciding with those of HLSC and TES. It says: 'these efforts called on international donors to act urgently to support programs in four priority policy areas: (1) the education workforce; (2) school health and nutrition; (3) digital learning; and (4) foundational learning'.

In terms of its governance structure, although originally intended to bring together international institutions and development ministers or agencies funding education, the GEF subsequently became a platform that convenes high-level leaders (as pointed out on the Education Commission's website), rather than a set of institutional representation or development ministers as initially anticipated in the Paris Outcome Document. The rationale that informs the selection of participants, and the participants themselves, is unclear and there are only five co-chairs, in contrast to the other MSIs in terms of the number of members and institutions that participate. Although the GEF members are not present, some can be identified in the authorship of the GEF's Action Memos, developed before the TES on the four above-mentioned topics in 2021, namely:

- Authors and collaborators of the Action Memo on Digital Learning Solutions for All: UNICEF, Education Commission, EdTech Hub, Alliance for Affordable Internet, Dubai Cares, Education Alliance, ITU, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank.
- Authors and collaborators of the Action Memo on Foundational Learning: World Bank, Research Triangle Institute (RTI), RISE, USAID, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Education Commission, UK Foreign,

- Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Pratham, UNESCO, UNICEF and Uwezo.
- Authors and collaborators of the Action Memo on Teachers and Vaccinations as part of School Operations: UNESCO, UNICEF the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Authors and collaborators of the Action Memo on School Health and Nutrition: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, BRAC, Global Affairs Canada, Dubai Cares, the Education Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland, UNICEF, and United States Department of Agriculture.

TABLE 4

Composition of the Global Education Forum

Type of constituency	Number
Member States from global North (USA, FCDO-UK, Finland, Canada)	4
Member States from the global South	0
Multilateral Organisations/Banks/Funds (UNICEF, WB, UNESCO, WHO, WFP)	5
Civil Society (Uwezo, Pratham, BRAC)	3
Development Cooperation representative	0
Private Foundations/ Private Sector, Think Tanks (Gates, Dubai Cares, RTI, RISE, Education Commission, EdTech Hub, Alliance for Affordable Internet, mEducation)	8
Youth and Student organisation	0
Teaching Profession organisation	0
Academia (London School, ITU)	2
Personalities (5 co-chairs)	5

Source: The authors, based on information published on the GEF website

The Global Education Forum is one of several other initiatives and mechanisms set up by the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, establishing an ecosystem of related proposals and overlapping actors. As stated earlier, most of these came about after the approval of the SDGs in 2015.

A key initiative is the Education Commission, established in 2015 as the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, with a time-bound mandate of presenting investment and financing opportunities for SDG4 to the UN Secretary-General. Once that mandate ended, it was expanded to its current form, with the aim of putting into practice some of the main ideas presented in the Commission's concluding report – 'The Learning Generation' (2016).

The Education Commission is now permanent, and although often referred to as another multistakeholder formation, it is rather a space that brings together individual high-level education leaders, mostly from the private

sector. It has 26 Commissioners, chaired by Gordon Brown, which include former heads of state and ministers, Nobel laureates, leaders in education, business, economics, finance, development, security and an international celebrity from the music industry. It is made up of individual personalities rather than organisations, most of whom have multiple roles, such as that of former ministers and former or current private-sector CEOs.

Apart from the GEF, the Education Commission also envisaged, set up and now hosts the **International Financing Facility for Education (IFFed)**, one of the 2016 Learning Generation Report's recommendations, which became the Commission's central priority and endeavour. Starting in 2016, and after six years of debate, IFFed was formally launched at the TES in September 2022. According to the Commission's website, it will start with a three-year growth model, in one to two geographic regions, with the ambition of 'unlocking \$10 billion in new education financing over the next 5 years'. IFFed's original design was completed

with several bilateral donors and four multilateral development banks (MDBs) – the Asian Development Bank (ADB), African Development Bank (AfDB), Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) – and the World Bank (WB). It seeks to complement existing funds for education, in particular the GPE and Education Cannot Wait, presented below. As a lending structure, it was strongly opposed by education human rights CSO networks and organisations, which argued that it diverted attention and resources from much-needed improvement in international education cooperation and in setting up global tax justice mechanisms, thus competing with existing financial cooperation instruments, such as the GPE.

Another initiative developed and launched in 2018 by the Education Commission, and which is currently hosted at UNICEF, is the **Education Outcomes Fund (EOF)**,

which sets out to ‘improve learning and employment outcomes by tying funding to measurable results [...] bringing together governments, donors, implementing partners, and investors to achieve concrete targets for learning, skill development, and employment [...] thus scaling up results-based financing in education’. Like the Education Commission, rather than stakeholder organisations its governance comprises individual personalities, mostly from the private sector, and many sit on both initiatives, as can be seen in Table 6. As with IFFed, education human rights CSO networks and organisations opposed the EOF, both because it diverted political momentum from international cooperation and tax justice mechanisms, but also because it commodified students as profit-making units for investors and distorted the priority of educational curricula and the overall direction of education systems to ensure readily measurable learning outcomes.

TABLE 5

Leadership of the Education Commission and of the Education Outcomes Fund (including steering and executive committees)

Education Commission		Education Outcomes Fund	
Gordon Brown (Chair)	UN Special Envoy for Global Education, former Prime Minister, UK	Aicha Bah Diallo	Former Minister of Education of Guinea; former UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education
Felipe Calderón	Former President of Mexico	Felipe Calderón	Former President of Mexico
Amel Karboul	CEO, Education Outcomes Fund; former Minister of Tourism, Tunisia	Amel Karbou (CEO)	Commissioner on the Education Commission; former Minister of Tourism, Tunisia
Aliko Dangote	CEO, Dangote Group	Aliko Dangote	CEO, Dangote Group; chairman, Aliko Dangote Foundation
Liesbet Steer	Director, Education Commission	Liesbet Steer	Director, Education Commission
Anant Agarwal	CEO, edX	Jakaya Kikwete	Former President of Tanzania
Theo Sowa	CEO, African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)	Theo Sowa	CEO, African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)
Kristin Clemet	Managing Director, Civita; former Minister of Education and former Minister of Labour and Government Administration, Norway	Kimberly Gire	Founder, Global Women Leaders
Julia Gillard	Chair, Wellcome Trust; former Prime Minister, Australia	Phyllis Costanza	Co-Founder and President of OutcomesX
Jakaya Kikwete	Board Chair, GPE; former President, Tanzania	Vikas Pota	Former CEO and Chairman, Varkey Foundation
Anthony Lake	Former Executive Director, UNICEF	Catherine Russell	Executive Director, UNICEF

Baela Raza Jamil	CEO, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA)	Ronald Cohen	Chair, Global Steering Group for Impact Investment; former Chairman, Apax Partners
Yuriko Koike	Governor of Tokyo; former Minister of Defence, Japan	Strive Masiyiwa	Founder and Executive Chairman, Econet Group
Ju-Ho Lee	Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, South Korea	Michael Barber	Vice Chair, Founder and Chairman, Delivery Associates; former Advisor to former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair
Graça Machel	Founder, Graça Machel Trust	George K. Werner	Former Minister of Education in Liberia
Jack Ma	Co-founder and former Executive Chairman, Alibaba Group	Dolika Banda	Former CEO, the African Risk Capacity Insurance Company Limited
Strive Masiyiwa	Executive Chairman and Founder, Econet Wireless	Robert Jenkins	Chief, Education and Associate Director, Programme Division, UNICEF
Teopista Birungi Mayanja	Board of Trustees Chairperson and Founder, Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU)	Judith Herbertson	Head of the Girls' Education Department, FCDO, UK
Patricio Meller	President, Fundación Chile		
Shakira Mebarak	International Artist; founder, Fundación Pies Descalzos		
Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala	Director-General, World Trade Organization (WTO)		
Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi	Former Minister of State for Tolerance, United Arab Emirates		
Kailash Satyarthi	Founder, Bachpan Bachao Andolan		
Amartya Sen	Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy, Harvard University		
Lawrence Summers	71 st Secretary of the Treasury for former President Clinton; former Director of the National Economic Council for President Obama		
Helle Thorning-Schmidt	Former CEO, Save the Children International; former Prime Minister, Denmark		
Jim Kim	Vice Chairman, Global Infrastructure Partners; former President, World Bank Group		

Source: The authors, based on information published on the Education Commission and Education Outcomes Fund websites

Two earlier initiatives were spearheaded by the UN Special Envoy on Global Education. In January 2015, at the WEF in Davos, the Gordon Brown called for the establishment of a global emergency education fund, which took shape as the **Education Cannot Wait Fund**, focused on education in emergencies and protracted crises. This is one of the two main global education funds, alongside the GPE. Gordon

Brown is its chair and its governing body comprises 13 donor countries, four private foundations/ organisations, eight multilateral organisations, four international NGOs and only two developing country partners (see Table 7). There is no teaching profession or global South CSO representation in the ECW.

TABLE 6

ECW constituencies

Type of constituency	Number/%
Member States (Donor Countries)	13 (42%)
Member States (Developing Countries)	2 (6%)
Civil Society (International)	4 (13%)
Multilateral Organisations and Regional Banks	8 (26%)
Private Sector and Private Foundations	4 (13%)

Earlier, in 2012, the global charity Theirworld (chaired by Sarah Brown) established the **Global Business Coalition for Education (GBCE)**. Its website describes it as a movement to end the education crisis. Justin Van Fleet is its Executive Director and was previously the director of

the Education Commission and Chief of Staff of the UN Special Envoy for Global Education. Like the Education Commission and the EOF, its governance is made up of individual personalities, mostly from the business sector, as shown in Table 8.

TABLE 7

Composition of the GBCE Boards

Advisory Board		Executive Board	
Jamira Burley	Director of Social Impact Projects, Adidas North America	Lisa Belzberg	Founder and President Emeritus, PENCIL
Alex Cho	President of Personal Systems, HP	David Boutcher	Partner, Reed Smith LLP
Aliko Dangote	Chairman and CEO, Dangote Group	Sarah Brown	Executive Chair, Global Business Coalition for Education, Chair of Theirworld; CEO, Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown
John Fallon	Former CEO, Pearsn LLC	Edward Estrada	Principal, Estrada Legal Consulting
Tariq Fancy	Founder and CEO, The Rumie Initiative	Joyce Malombe	Programme Director International Children's Education, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
Rosalind Hudnell	Former President, Intel Foundation		
Maysa Jalbout	Non-resident Fellow, Brookings Center for Universal Education		
George Kell	Chairman, Arabesque		

Wendy Kopp	Teach for All, CEO and Co-Founder
Tracy Lovatt	CEO, Batten & Co
Strive Masiyiwa	Chairman and Founder, Econet Wireless Group
Kwasi Mitchell	Principal, Diversity & Inclusion Lead, Deloitte
Hiro Mizuno	UN Special Envoy on Innovative Finance and Sustainable Investments
Nduka Obaigbena	Founder, This Day
Olusegun Obasanjo	Former President, Nigeria
Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala	Director General, World Trade Organization (WTO)
Laurene Powell Jobs	Founder and Chair, Emerson Collective
Baela Raza Jamil	Chief Executive Officer, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi
Mark Reading	Head of Foundation, Atlassian
Thérèse Rein	Former CEO, Ingeus
Stuart Roden	Non-Executive Chairman of the Investment Committee, Marylebone Partners LLP
Carlos Slim	Chairman and CEO, Grupo Carso
Ratan Tata	Executive Chairman, Sir Ratan Tata Trust; former Chairman, Tata Group
John Tedstrom	Former President and CEO, GBC Health
Kim Wright-Violich	President, Echidna Giving

Source: The authors, based on information published on the Global Business Coalition for Education website

FIGURE 3

Timeline of education-related initiatives launched and led by the UN Special Envoy in Global Education

Global Business Coalition	ECW	EC	EOF	GEF	SFC	IFFed
2012	2015	2016	2018	2019	2021	2022

Unlike the other two MSIs discussed in this report, this primarily involves private-sector organisations and foundations, followed by high-level individual leaders, multilateral organisations and government representatives from the global North. The criteria for participation are unclear. Although there is scarce information about this MSI, its policy priorities were picked up by the HLSC and the TES,

indicating a significant level of influence in setting the global education agenda. There is also an overlap of the same actors' representation in the GEF, the Multilateral Education Platform, and the HLSC – all of which are part of the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism – affording them the opportunity to influence the agenda through multiple and interconnected channels.



Conclusions and closing remarks

This report has discussed education multistakeholderism in the context of the broader global education governance landscape.

- 1 While some global education hybrid formations are clearly MSIs, such as the HLSC and the GPE, many of the more recent initiatives that mushroomed after the approval of the SDGs in 2015 cannot rigorously be defined as such. Initiatives such as the EC, EOF and IFFed all have high-level individual personalities at the core of their governance structure, even if these come from different backgrounds or even hold multiple roles. Overall, they do not have representative roles and do not act on behalf of a stakeholder group, but rather in their individual capacity. Clearly, there is a need to reflect more deeply on how such individuals are shaping the education policy landscape, as a key aspect of recent education global governance structures.
- 2 The multiple post-2015 global education initiatives can act as Trojan horses within MSIs, such as the GPE and the HLSC, where different individuals in their personal or institutional capacity have multiple entry points into global education policy, enabling them to exert influence. This ecosystem also promotes the fragmentation of coordination efforts and introduces a lack of transparency into how the global education policy agenda is set.
- 3 As Mary Ann Manahan and Madhuresh Kumar (2021, p. 16) also note, ‘another critical component of the epistemic community is the revolving door that allows key people, so-called experts within this community, to move seamlessly from one MSI to the next’. Similarly, this report illustrates this in the example of the former UK prime minister Gordon Brown, appointed by Ban Ki-Moon in July 2012 as the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, ‘reshaping the role of the UN institutions from a leading role to a strategic partner’. As cited earlier, this revolving-door phenomenon ‘has created webs or ecologies of MSIs with similar sets of actors—individuals and organisations—that spout similar narratives and solutions’ (Manahan and Kumar, 2021, p. 17).
- 4 The proliferation of post-2015 global education initiatives was specifically to respond to crises: a learning crisis, an education crisis, or the COVID-19 crisis that led to an ‘education reform by way of catastrophe’. The catastrophe discourse finds stakeholders more willing to accept drastic interventions, because desperate times require desperate measures (Fontdevila et al., 2017). This both leads to the greater involvement of supra-national actors in domestic politics and undermines the authority of nation-states and democratic decision-making.

- 5 The global North in terms of state and non-state actors, as well as multilateral UN institutions, predominate in setting the global education policy agenda. A relative exception is the HLSC, which while presenting some of the shortfalls Gleckman (2018) highlights in relation to multistakeholder spaces, ensures a better balance of states from different regions, state predominance in its governance structure and a more meaningful participation of civil society actors, the teaching profession and, more recently, youth and students. It is no surprise that this has been the space where broader and more humanist perspectives of education, framed as a fundamental human right, have taken more root. This is not to say there are no tensions. On the contrary, within the HLSC there are struggles between a measurable learning outcomes agenda, for example, versus a broader understanding of quality and inclusive education, geared to social, environmental, economic, political and cultural advancement.
- 6 Although the GPE is comprised mainly of state representation and provides space for the participation of CSOs and the teaching profession, also reflects MSI shortcomings identified by Gleckman (2018). We highlight three: (a) a North–South geopolitical division in its governance structures for states and CSO representatives alike, with power relations that influence the education landscape beyond GPE debates and deliberations and consolidate hierarchical relations along economic and historic lines. On this, Gleckman (2018) pointed out that ‘[p]articular regional groupings, like North and South, are fundamentally unhelpful from a democratic perspective’; (b) an over-representation of donor countries compared to country partners, affecting power relations within and beyond the GPE. Donor countries in the GPE are mainly Western European and Commonwealth countries, as well as Japan, Korea and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Gleckman (2018) suggested that ‘[d]onor established multistakeholder bodies can displace intergovernmental leadership in setting internationally shared policy priorities and programs’; and (c) although the Board and its Committees are well established, the GPE Secretariat has increasingly greater autonomy and actively engages in policy development at the global and national levels, including greater power to approve grants up to a certain threshold. This relates to another feature pointed out by Gleckman (2018), namely that ‘[s]ecretariats have gained greater autonomy as independent actors in global governance and can hold an equivalently comfortable seat at the table with any government, acting formally as an intergovernmental supervisor’. Furthermore, the GPE Secretariat is still hosted by the World Bank, giving the latter disproportionate power.
- 7 The Global Education Forum was intended to be composed of ‘international institutions and development ministers or agencies providing aid to education’ (Paris Outcome Statement, 2019). Yet there appear to be no development ministers in the GEF according to the limited publicly available information. What can be gleaned from the documents available online is that the GEF has five individual co-chairs, including the UN Special Envoy, and articulates some of the initiatives he leads, such as the EOF and ECW, as well as multilateral banks (World Bank and the ADB), international NGOs (SCF International), Foundations (Education Above All), UN specialised agencies (UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP) and the GPE. With regard to this, which is basically led by the global North, it was not possible to find governance information, including goals, vision/mission purpose, mechanism for selecting participants, decision-making procedures, etc. Notwithstanding the opaque structure, membership and governance, the GEF (and other post-2015 global education initiatives) greatly influence global education policy.
- 8 The presence of private-sector actors is especially predominant in the post-2015 global education initiatives we have described. While the HLSC and the GPE both have one seat for the private sector and another for private foundations, the private sector predominates in the more recent initiatives this report describes. There are three other important aspects in relation to corporate engagement in education MSIs and global education governance more broadly: first, the revolving-door phenomenon and the dynamics presented by the ecosystem of global initiatives described above, which allows actors outside MSIs to exert great influence on them. Second, the role and influence at the national level of private-sector and corporate actors from and through all the structures presented in this report has not been systematically studied and needs to be better understood. Lastly, the influence of private-sector actors through their relationship with the many multilateral agencies that have a seat in education MSIs has not been adequately studied, and requires more detailed attention.
- 9 It is important to gain greater conceptual clarity regarding the specific nature and identity of the different

education initiatives related to global education governance. Although most or all of the initiatives outlined in this report could loosely be understood as MSIs, most do not define themselves as such. For example, while bodies such as the Education Commission, Education Outcome Fund and Global Business Coalition for Education are sometimes classified as MSIs, their nature is altogether different, with boards made up of individuals rather than stakeholders. Yet individuals acting in their personal capacity in MSIs can influence global education policy and funding priorities without representing any stakeholder constituency. Interestingly, the GBCE identifies itself as an NGO and the Education Outcome Fund is seeking to become a foundation. There is also other conceptual blurring. The Multilateral Education Platform, for example, is comprised not only of multilateral agencies but also several other non-multilateral global education initiatives. The term 'multilateral' seems to be used interchangeably with 'global', which is misleading, since multilateralism has very specific characteristics, including the centrality of the nation-state, equality among all states under international law – irrespective of their size – and the recognition of the individual citizen as the core unit of democracies (Gleckman, 2018).

- 10 There is a need for further research on:
 - Understanding the power dynamics and concrete *influence of private and corporate actors in education policy-making at the national level*, as well as of secretariats of global organisations and multilateral agencies. In this sense, case country-level studies

could be used to examine the operationalisation of education MSIs' decisions and funding, particularly how private actors, the corporate sector, philanthropic organisations, and individuals influence policy on the ground.

- The *role of individual personalities in educational policy* merits far more attention. Many of the more recent global education initiatives include individual so-called 'champions'. This phenomenon needs to be better understood in terms of its consequences for democratic governance, given its atomisation of policy-making and concentration of power. A social network analysis of the people that participate in education MSIs and other global education initiatives in their personal capacity would thus establish their role in the global education policy-making landscape.
- Further unpack the power dynamics of the 'revolving door', including the way in which there are so many global education initiatives with very similar actors, creating an ecosystem where some belong to multiple spaces and exercise greater influence.
- Track and examine, including from a historical perspective, the depolicisation of education underway in MSIs and other global education initiatives, the motivation of those who promote (or have promoted) it, and its consequences for the right to education, as a right in itself and as an enabling right.

Acronyms

ADB	Arab Development Bank
AfDB	African Development Bank
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK, see FCDO)
EC	Education Commission
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EFA	Education for All
EOF	Education Outcome Fund
EOL	Education Out Loud
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)
GCM	Global Education Cooperation Mechanism
GBCE	Global Business Coalition for Education
GEF	Global Education Forum
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HLSC	SDG-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFFed	International Financing Facility for Education
IGO	Intergovernmental organisation
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MSG	Multistakeholder group
MSI	Multi-Stakeholder Initiative
NGO	Non-government organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFC	Save our Future Campaign
TES	Transforming Education Summit
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WEF	World Economic Forum
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

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Endnotes

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- 2 '19. UNESCO will continue its mandated role in co-ordinating EFA partners and maintaining their collaborative momentum. In line with this, UNESCO's Director-General will convene annually a high-level, small and flexible group. It will serve as a lever for political commitment and technical and financial resource mobilization. Informed by a monitoring report from the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE), the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) and, in particular, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and inputs from Regional and Subregional EFA Forums, it will also be an opportunity to hold the global community to account for commitments made in Dakar. It will be composed of highest-level leaders from governments and civil society of developing and developed countries, and from development agencies' (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).
- 3 For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see, for example, Menashy (2019).
- 4 For more information see <https://theirworld.org/about/> and <https://gbc-education.org/about-us/leadership/>
- 5 For more examples of Gordon Brown's involvement in MSIs such as ECW see Menashy (2019).
- 6 <https://www.sdg4education2030.org/bringing-international-education-community-together>



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