**Universal Free Quality Education can’t wait**

**Education International (EI) welcomes the proposed goal on quality education and lifelong learning. The targets are, however, limited in scope and narrowly focused on measurable learning outcomes. Education International is alarmed by the narrow approach and modest aspirations in this regard and calls for a renewed commitment to universal free quality education.**

Education International advocates a broad understanding of quality education, as one that enables children and young people to achieve their potential as human beings and contribute positively to society. In its post-2015 advocacy, EI has called for the completion of a full cycle of continuous, free quality education from early childhood through to upper secondary, as well as equitable access to post-secondary education and lifelong learning. The Panel’s report gives rise to five major concerns, set out below, that must be addressed for a new framework to be truly ambitious.

First, it is alarming that the Panel chooses to remain silent on the issues of provision and financing of education. Ensuring education for all is the responsibility of the government. Being a public good and a basic right, education must be publicly financed, and the long-term goal should be sustainable education financing sourced from domestic revenue. Tuition fees and the indirect costs of education still form the single greatest barrier to equitable access to quality education; thus a renewed commitment to free education is urgently needed. By 2030, no child should be excluded from quality education because of cost. The right to education cannot be achieved unless there is political will and commitment to ensure sufficient funding and resources for education, through a global benchmark of at least 6 % of GDP and 10 % of ODA directed to the achievement of quality education for all.

Second, although we welcome the Panel’s commitment to equity and the disaggregation of data for all targets, EI is concerned that neither human rights nor equity are integrated in a systematic way within the proposed framework. A commitment to equity requires measures designed to ensure that the most marginalised children and young people have access to an education of the same quality as the least marginalised, and this has to be reflected in the targets and indicators of a new framework.

Third, the proposed education goal aims to “provide quality education and lifelong learning” but none of the targets encompass quality. Quality education must not only be defined by narrow “measurable learning outcomes”; quality education covers all elements of the education process, including broad-based curricula, formative assessment, adequate teaching and learning materials, and reasonable class sizes. Every student has the right to be taught by a qualified and well-supported teacher, and to learn in safe schools with adequate infrastructure, facilities and resources.

The report recognises the role and importance of teachers in its narrative, but this recognition is not reflected in the goal and targets. The global shortage of adequately trained teachers requires urgent policy attention and measures; approximately two million additional trained teachers are needed to ensure the achievement of universal primary education by 2015, and this number increases substantially if the number of teachers needed for early childhood and secondary education are included. Teaching has to be recognised as a high-status profession, with qualifications, training, standards and conditions of service set accordingly.

Ensuring that all children can read, write and count must not result in narrow policy decisions that prioritise restricted goals for education. While literacy and numeracy are necessary and part of the broader set of competences that a quality education offers, they are far from sufficient. Quality education provides people with the knowledge, abilities, skills and creativity needed to solve problems locally and globally, and actively contributes to the sustainable and democratic development of societies. Thus, a new development framework must go beyond literacy and numeracy, especially since the evidence overwhelmingly shows that education is fundamental for achieving other development goals, such as those related to health and gender.

Fourth, EI welcomes the inclusion of increased access to pre-primary and vocational education as well as universal access to lower-secondary education in the targets. The inclusion of these stages of education signals an ambition to go beyond the current MDG framework, which focuses on universal primary education. However, the targets have to go beyond expanding access and focus on the completion of these stages of education. Moreover, the exclusion of early years early childhood education, upper secondary as well as post-secondary education is worrying. A lifelong learning approach requires a balanced development of all education sectors from early childhood education through to higher education, including vocational education and training.

Finally, the report raises questions about how truly universal and equitable the proposed framework is. Despite expressing an ambition to establish minimum standards for *every citizen*, (such as “no child should go hungry or be unable to read, write or do simple sums”), the Panel also describes the new set of goals as mere “tools of communication and inspiration”, and cautions against setting utopian goals. EI regrets the implicit double standard of the panel’s approach, in which the goals and targets appear more relevant to low-income countries rather than of universal relevance and applicability.

For example, “decent work for all” is viewed as one of the goals considered unrealistic in the coming 15 years, so-called “good jobs” are, therefore, proposed as “a middle ground for some developing countries”. Proposing a different set of rights for the workers of the global south is both discriminatory and unconscionable. The panel’s approach also shows a limited understanding of the concept of decent work; decent work, including social protection and social dialogue, is an integral part of a rights-based development agenda, and should be considered a means for advancing social progress, equitable growth and sustainable development.

In conclusion, Education International is concerned about the discrepancy between the broader approach to education set out in the report’s narrative and the targets meant to guide the implementation of the proposed goals’ framework. Despite acknowledging that “education is about far more than basic literacy and numeracy”, the Panel has chosen to limit the targets to measurable learning outcomes, and in the case of primary education, to reading, writing and counting performance. In addition to ignoring the broader purpose and role of education, as well as large parts of the curriculum, the target lacks ambition and reinforces the existing disparities between countries. The global community must aspire to achieve more in the next fifteen years; the post-2015 framework must be truly universal, equitable and aspirational.