

Partnerships for Education:

Building the foundations of a green, prosperous and equitable global economy

PARTNERSHIPS FOR EDUCATION: BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF A GREEN, PROSPEROUS AND EQUITABLE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Executive Summary

There is a growing focus across the world on education and the challenges it faces; the gaps between what is needed and what is provided are affecting individuals and society. Not only do millions of children in low-income countries not attend school, but among those who do there are issues of high drop-out rates, lack of progress, and gender disparity. Even where skills are gained, they are often out of step with the needs of the labour market, leaving youngsters prepared neither for further education nor for work.

Education paves the way for development by improving a country's human capital and thereby contributing to enduring prosperity and economic growth. To achieve "the future we want", we have to give everyone the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, behaviours and values needed to create a just and equitable global society within the limits of our planet's resources. Worsening resource stress, biodiversity loss and pollution, together with growing populations and urbanisation mean that the need for equality of access to good education is urgent and growing.

Despite governments' best efforts to provide access to affordable, relevant education, increasing financial, resource and capacity constraints coupled with rising populations make it impossible for the public sector acting alone to meet demand. Only with a concerted approach leveraging the power and resources of all sectors – government, business and civil society – can we hope to tackle the global problem of education provision.

Business as a partner in education

Corporate partners have a direct interest in a quality education system and may bring to education initiatives much more than simply funding. Their level of involvement depends on both the wider context and their specific drivers for participation. These include social investment through a philanthropic approach; skills building to educate potential staff; and education provision as part of core business - providing schools, learning materials or ICT platforms.

Making partnerships happen

A multi-stakeholder or cross-sector partnership for education can be defined as the joint commitment, mobilisation and combination of resources and competencies by any combination of public, business, academic and civil society partners to expand and enhance education, while sharing both risk and reward.

To be effective, partnerships must be well-designed and well-run according to key partnering principles, and partners must have the right skills and be willing to commit to sharing resources, risks and rewards towards a common objective.

Reaching scale

While there are large numbers of successful partnerships around the world, the impact they are having is extremely modest relative to the scale of the challenge being faced in the majority of countries. If we are to see the necessary step change in the quality of education worldwide that will ensure both our economic and environmental futures, we will need to hugely scale up the volume and quality of multi-sector partnerships through a much more systematic approach.

Each sector has a part to play in facilitating the scale-up of education partnerships:

Government is responsible for ensuring the education of its citizens. It is the regulator and primary provider of education in all countries. Government could:

- Consider the needs of business when setting policy and curricula to ensure the system produces the education and skills that companies – and hence the economy – need to prosper.
- Help new initiatives align with government focus by disseminating clear education needs and development plans.

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- Pro-actively seek opportunities to work with the private sector on specific programmes and encourage engagement.
 - Ensure a favourable enabling environment for private sector or hybrid provision of low-cost education.
 - Provide a simple access point with which companies can engage, to assist in facilitating and scaling up partnerships.

Business is a prime beneficiary of education, and has an intrinsic interest to ensure the quality of education provision. It also has the resources of many kinds, not just financial, to make a real difference. Business could:

- Fully appreciate that business prosperity relies on skilled, educated staff and consumers, and hence there is a key business imperative for supporting education.
- Analyse their spheres of influence to understand how they may be able to influence and support education with a positive long term effect on their companies.
- Actively seek opportunities with education authorities, NGOs and schools to support existing initiatives or develop new partnerships.
- Ensure that wherever it does engage with education, its activities are coordinated with other education initiatives and, where possible, work with education authorities to ensure that interventions are appropriate, effective and sustainable.

NGOs and civil society, in many countries, are significantly involved both in policy development and in implementation of education provision. NGOs could:

- Seek to understand the potential of the private sector to support education provision beyond just financial contributions.
- Actively seek opportunities to partner directly with companies, education authorities and other NGOs in a coordinated approach to creating new initiatives.
- Ensure that standards of education, accessibility and equity are upheld within partnership initiatives.

Development agencies provide significant support and funding to the delivery of education – both through government financial support and through supporting programmes directly. Development agencies could:

- Understand and appreciate the potential of partnerships to leverage new resources and deliver education in innovative, sustainable ways.
- Implement specific ‘innovation funds’ to support such partnerships and non-state provision of education.
- Influence governments to create an enabling environment that supports cross-sector collaborative approaches.
- Actively support the development of country-level Education Partnership Action Hubs to drive the development of new partnerships.

The key to achieving the scale of action required is a systematic approach engaging all sectors of society: to help them understand the importance of quality education for their own prosperity, while ensuring they appreciate the resources and competencies that they might bring together to create innovative, sustainable initiatives.