

Article for all EI affiliates
To be published in their own magazine or
To be submitted by the union to national newspapers

To be signed by EI President and GS and by President and GS of unions concerned

Global Action Week from the teachers' union perspective

“Every Child Needs a Teacher”. This is the message being carried forward this year by civil society organisations and teachers unions alike, joining hands with the Global Campaign for Education. “Every Child Needs a Teacher” is a global appeal for action being addressed to governments and international agencies. The importance of this appeal cannot be understated because of the crisis in the education sector worldwide, a phenomenon which is increasingly a cause for concern among parents and teachers alike. The current crisis is one which manifests itself in various forms but with one common denominator: the children of today and tomorrow who have no guarantee of receiving the quality education to which they are fundamentally entitled.

Governments and intergovernmental agencies constantly emphasise the crucial role played by teachers in providing quality education. Education International notes that there is no lack of resolutions and commitments on paper. But, do national governments and the international community really live up to these statements, promises and policies? We dare say that this is not the case. We note that many governments still do not give the much needed priority to education and educators. Good intentions are all too often overruled by cheap solutions and cost-cutting measures. Such is the case at all levels of education.

It starts with early childhood education, the crucial stage prior to primary school. At this level, we are witness to a wave of ever increasing privatisation. Central and Eastern Europe, where parents were used to well organised, publicly funded early childhood education, faces a tremendous fall in the enrolment rate, simply because parents can no longer afford to pay the fees.

In primary schools we note rising enrolment rates, a great achievement, which Education International welcomes wholeheartedly. But where are the teachers to meet the increasing demand? Thousands of well-trained teachers in Kenya are not being employed, despite overcrowded classes. In Malawi, teachers who die of AIDS are not being replaced, leading to double shifts and an average class size in rural areas of over 100. Such developments in turn lead to increasing privatisation of the education sector. This runs counter to achieving a social cohesion in the country.

At secondary school level it is extremely hard to recruit qualified teachers for core subjects such as mathematics and science. This is a worldwide phenomenon. In most countries the salaries in the education sector simply can not compete with the private sector to attract enough teachers for these subjects. This represents a major threat to the transition from education to the labour market.

Regarding higher education, we see that developing countries are subject to the so-called brain-drain, losing their most qualified teachers in droves. This process is one which is

fuelled by the poaching practices of certain developed nations which tend to treat education as just another business sector.

One particular issue applies to all levels of education: the reduction of pre-service training. In Tanzania training for primary school teachers was reduced from two years to one. This is also the case in Kenya and numerous other countries. The education system in West Africa is increasingly the domain of 'para-teachers', with pre-service training of only a few months or even weeks. This is a direct attack on the quality education which all aspire and are entitled to.

'Every Child Needs a Teacher': this slogan covers the basics. But our demand goes one step further. Education International demands that all teachers should get the qualifications they need to provide *quality* education. What is more they should not be asked to work in classrooms with more than 40 pupils. Children should sit in classrooms rather than under trees; they should have the books they need. These are the very basic conditions needed to constitute a truly learning environment.

From April 24 to 30 Education International and its partners in the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) organise the Global Action Week on EFA. During that week, tens of thousands of concerned parents, students, activists and teachers will demand that governments and international agencies seize the opportunity to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals by investing in teachers. This is our chance to guarantee that every child in the world is guaranteed a well qualified teacher from early childhood all the way to higher education. "Every child needs a teacher".

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