

Theme of 2017 Global Education Monitoring Report:

Accountability in Education

Concept Note

(7 March 2016)

Background

With a new ambitious global education goal, tight budgets and a focus on ensuring the marginalized are not left behind, countries are under pressure to provide education more effectively, efficiently and equitably. Country efforts typically involve a similar set of approaches to improving the performance of their education systems -- for example, decentralization and the devolution of decision-making authority, enhancing choice and competition in provision, establishing indicators to track performance, and increasing citizen participation. Most of these approaches converge in emphasizing accountability as the fundamental rationale for embarking on education reforms to improve system performance.

Accountability as such is not new, and has been a part of the management and governance of institutions for several decades. Accountability exists when a) there is a relationship where an individual or body, and their performance of tasks or functions, are subject to another's oversight, direction or request; and b) the former provide information or justification to the latter for their actions, which can be the basis for sanctions or rewards. Why is more accountability considered desirable? The implicit assumption is that when people are held responsible by others for the effects of their actions, they are more prone to carefully consider their decisions before making them.

International concern with accountability in education reflects several factors. First, commentators and media highlight the underperformance of education systems in light of global challenges. Discontent focuses on inadequate access and availability, the unequitable distribution of educational opportunities, poor quality learning, increasing costs, limited quality assurance, abuses of power, financial mismanagement and corruption, and non-responsiveness to local needs. Second, there is growing evidence about the influence of good quality education on individual and collective well-being, which means that poor quality schools and weak outcomes squander opportunities for a better future. Third, education constitutes a – if not *the* – major budgetary expenditure in most countries; proper accounting of how these public funds are used and misused has become a high priority.

There are different types of accountability relationships in all education systems. They bring together diverse actors through networks of control, oversight, cooperation and reporting. Typically, these include: parliaments and their education committees, elected public officials, education and finance ministries, legislatures, inspectorates, standard-setting entities, audit

institutions, bilateral and multilateral agencies, civil society organizations, public and private providers of formal and non-formal education, teachers and educators, school principals, professional organizations, parents and local communities, and the learners themselves. All such actors are engaged and mutually accountable for the resources and/or services they *commit* to provide, the processes through which they provide resources and/or services, and the results stemming from them. Accountability relationships thus permeate much of the day-to-day activities of places of learning as well as the rules and procedures governing their existence.

The notion of accountability is also an integral part of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which is based on shared principles as well as national and international commitments to achieve the ambitious SDG agenda. All SDG goals and targets are expected to be backed by accessible and effective accountability mechanisms at global, regional, national and subnational levels. The new agenda calls for collaborative systems that collect and provide access to timely, comprehensive and forward-looking data that will be used to review progress on each SDG. It also calls for monitoring national progress in an open, inclusive and transparent manner and with participation by multiple stakeholders to strengthen mutual accountability.

With all of this in mind, the 2017 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report will explore the theme of accountability in education by addressing the following key questions in its thematic section:

- What are the foundations and the evolution of the concept of accountability in education, and what is at stake?
- What are the main forms of accountability? How have these forms shifted over time? What is the rationale behind this shift?
- What are the implications for accountability in education in a more globalized world?
- What are the implications of accountability systems for different actors, levels, and sectors in education? How do these vary in different countries?
- What are the implications of accountability frameworks for the public perception of education in a country? How do these vary by different forms of accountability?
- Which accountability frameworks are more or less effective, and how are they used or abused in different circumstances?
- What are political, economic and social factors that make different forms of accountability work or fail?
- What broad lessons can be learned from the ways and forms through which education has been monitored and audited?

Organization of the 2017 Global Education Monitoring Report

As with previous reports, the 2017 GEM Report will include both monitoring and thematic sections. The **monitoring section** will assess progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal on education (SDG4) and its 10 targets, as well as other related education targets in the

SDG agenda. The main aim of the 2017 GEM Report's monitoring section is to provide up-to-date, reliable and accurate information on the extent to which national governments and the international community are making progress in addressing their SDG commitments in education. The monitoring section will examine advances and challenges for each SDG4 target using internationally comparable indicators, both global and thematic. Throughout the section, the opportunities and challenges associated with achieving SDG4 will be highlighted, particularly related to policy.

The **thematic section** of the 2017 Report will focus on the rationale, effectiveness and the intended and unintended consequences of different accountability frameworks in education. It will do so by outlining the diverse array of approaches to accountability policies in education; by documenting broad trends and mapping country practices; and asking whether, and in what ways, policies and reforms based on accountability principles need to be reconsidered. It will look at the ways in which different approaches to accountability have impacted on the delivery or non-delivery of accessible, affordable and good quality education to all learners.

The thematic section will address specific issues as follows:

Defining accountability in education

Despite its popularity, or perhaps because of its ubiquity, accountability is often ill defined. The notion of accountability is conceived in different ways, not only in education but also in other fields. A useful approach to capturing key aspects of accountability is by raising the following questions: *Who is accountable? To whom is the account owed? What is being accounted for? What are the consequences of providing an account?*

The thematic section will elucidate conceptions of, and approaches to, accountability in education. It will suggest how the definition and operationalization of the term can be better clarified and made more relevant. It will also provide a historical perspective of the emergence of accountability in education.

Accountability will be acknowledged as a political concept, and not merely a technical or administrative one. Different political and political economy factors will be identified that underlie trends in accountability in education as well as the role of different actors in shaping those trends; these will be placed in a broader national or global context.

In addition to defining accountability in education, the 2017 GEM Report will highlight seven approaches to accountability in education: **financial, regulatory, professional, performance-based, market-oriented, participatory, and global and national accountability**. These topics are chosen to comprehensively explore accountability; none assumes priority, they sometimes overlap and are not mutually exclusive.

Financial accountability to ensure an adequate and equitable distribution and use of resources

Financial accountability relates to two obligations: that institutions report on how resources have been spent and that institutions act in accordance with the rule of law. In education, governments are accountable to their citizens and are responsible for ensuring that funds are allocated to the purposes for which they are committed, and are spent in a way that delivers education to all learners, in particular to those belonging to disadvantaged populations. Reliable and complete information on the sources and uses of financial resources is gathered to examine whether governments have efficiently spent funds according to the priority areas budgeted in their education plans.

Different diagnostic tools have been developed to track the flow of resources through various levels of government to determine how much of the originally allocated public resources – human, financial and in-kind – actually reach their intended beneficiaries. The GEM Report 2017 will review the latest evidence on the use of such diagnostic tools and the challenges faced, and identify criteria to select which tools would best help provide policy-makers with the information needed to improve accountability in education.

Corruption is the misuse and abuse of resources in education. It reflects a culture of non-accountability and can be found in both developed and developing countries. Among the many forms of corruption in education are bribery in teacher recruitment, payments to ‘ghost’ teachers, irregularities in teacher salary payments, illegal school fees, involuntary private tutoring, widespread shadow education, and overcharges for instructional materials. The GEM Report 2017 will provide fresh insights into the incidence of various forms of corruption and their cost to education systems. Successful approaches to reducing corruption and increasing transparency will be showcased. Discussion will focus on the effectiveness of a range of accountability practices that require community and parental involvement in budget preparation and monitoring, audits, and expenditure tracking. Another highlight will be whether different accountability policies incentivize corrupt practices that create inefficiencies for financial accountability.

By devolving financial and management decision-making to local government agencies, decentralized structures are thought to offer greater accountability and responsiveness to local problems. The GEM Report 2017 will describe the rationales for fiscal decentralization reforms in diverse contexts, and the main problems they were meant to address. It will compile evidence on the impact of such reforms, both on the management of resources -- infrastructure, material and human – and in terms of equitable access and learning.

Finally, the GEM Report 2017 will particularly focus on the financial accountability of tertiary institutions, given the accelerating shift from government-controlled to government-supervised tertiary systems in many regions. It will review how funding streams are currently measured, and the degree to which it is possible to determine how post-secondary institutions and universities spend their resources. It will also outline key elements and considerations of accountability systems based on tertiary education finance.

Regulatory accountability to ensure compliance with rules and regulations

As opposed to concentrating mostly on outcome measures in education, regulatory accountability focuses more on inputs and processes, with an emphasis on compliance with applicable laws and regulations. In many countries, school inspection has been used as a major instrument of regulatory accountability. Inspectorates of education hold schools and teachers accountable for a broad range of goals related to teaching and learning, organisation, management, and leadership in schools. Increasingly, inspectors are also being asked to take on the role of teacher mentors in order to provide in-service support alongside their evaluations. The GEM Report 2017 will show how inspection activities can drive school improvement and which types of approaches are more effective and cause the fewest unintended consequences.

In many countries, school self-evaluations complement school inspections systems. These evaluations incorporate multiple measures as well as the perspectives of various stakeholders such as parents and students. The role of school self-evaluation, and advantages and challenges in using them in accountability systems, will also be reviewed.

In tertiary education, regulatory accountability relies on third parties for effective implementation. The shift toward regulatory governance in higher education often involves a combination of actors, state agencies, higher education institutions, and independent supervisory agencies. Common regulatory tools include a combination of instruments rather than just one, such as accreditation mechanisms and other quality assurance frameworks. The GEM Report 2017 will review several distinctive higher education regulatory models for their particular strengths and weaknesses, and the appropriateness and efficacy of their instruments, including transnational and regional regulatory frameworks.

Expanding and strengthening professional accountability for educators

Educators in both formal and non-formal settings have a commitment to meet a range of learners' needs, from engaging them in meaningful and relevant learning experiences and supporting their social and personal development to being responsible for their care and physical safety. Educators are also accountable for their adherence to professional standards set forth in their unions and associations and also for the expected implementation of curricula and programmes. They are also in relationships of accountability with their peers, students, parents and community leaders.

The GEM Report 2017 will highlight the importance of increased professional accountability, under which educators would have more support, collaboration and training, leading to higher expectations. At the system level, mechanisms of professional accountability will focus on developing and enforcing rigorous professional standards, licensing and certification requirements, and evaluation systems that include peer review. At the school level, mentoring, peer observations, collaboration and student surveys will be considered as some aspects of professional accountability. The GEM Report 2017 will assess how professional

accountability policies have evolved at different education levels and in different countries, as well as the rationale behind these shifts. It will also discuss the intended and unintended consequences of such policies for beginning teachers, experienced teachers, mentor teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and tertiary-level institutions.

In addition to requiring professional standards, teaching is a profession in which practitioners make ethical decisions almost every day. The development and maintenance of a code of ethics for the teaching profession provides a means of identifying and communicating the core values that underpin professional pedagogical standards. The GEM Report 2017 will highlight failures of governance that result from little or no such accountability from teachers. It will provide new evidence on different kinds of governance failures in different contexts, such as teacher absenteeism or academic fraud, and their causes and consequences on learners and their academic achievement.

Many reforms in education underscore how effective leadership can facilitate systemic improvement in schools. In light of this, many countries have embarked on a formalized process of training education leaders, and integrating specialized knowledge and particular skills, including instructional leadership and management. Graduates of such training courses are then held to account for teacher effectiveness, teaching quality and student learning. The GEM Report 2017 will highlight systems to gather evidence on the effectiveness of school leadership and management practices and use this evidence to evaluate and support principals and headmasters.

The GEM Report 2017 will discuss mechanisms at the tertiary level to strengthen the professional accountability of academic staff and university leaders who must simultaneously satisfy the competing demands of several groups, including government officials, employers, alumni, teachers, students and their parents.

Accountability based on learning outcomes or performance

Standardised learning assessments have been used to measure and track student achievement for decades, but the prevalence and different purposes of these assessments have grown substantially in recent years. They have become the basis for holding teachers, school leaders, schools and/or entire systems accountable by assessing performance on specific metrics, published in regular reports. In some contexts, teachers and school leaders are rewarded or sanctioned based on assessment results. The GEM Report 2017 will provide a brief history on how and why learning outcomes or performance-based accountability has become so pervasive in so many countries around the world.

The GEM Report 2017 will then document countries that have adopted high-stakes testing as part of an accountability framework that holds individuals or institutions responsible for performance. It will describe variation in performance-based policies in and across world regions. It will also discuss the rationale of this shift towards high-stakes testing. Research will be synthesized on the influence of high-stakes testing for accountability on classroom instruction, notably through narrowing the curriculum, increased teaching to the test, and

shaping the test pool. It will also discuss evidence on the consequences of high-stakes testing for accountability on school policies and classroom practices, in particular on the behaviours of school leaders, teachers, parents and students.

Evaluating the impact of high-stakes testing for accountability on student achievement is not a simple task. The GEM Report 2017 will examine accumulated evidence on whether and how such policies impact student achievement for particular groups of students, or types of schools. A key objective of high-stakes testing for accountability systems is to reduce learning gaps and inequalities between students. Relevant evidence will be assessed to identify the conditions needed to improve the likelihood of more equitably distributed learning outcomes.

Concurrent with the rise in high-stakes testing for accountability is the increasing use of cross-national and national learning assessments for building and expanding accountability relationships. Cross-national assessments (such as PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS, SACMEQ and PASEC) and the growing prevalence of national assessments are usually described as ‘low-stakes’ since they are not directly linked with incentives for participants to perform well or with sanctions for those performing badly. The GEM Report 2017 will provide up-to-date evidence on the prevalence of these assessments around the world; efforts to link cross-national, regional and national assessments to calculate a globally comparable metric; and the extent to which cross-national assessments are being used to hold education actors or systems to account for their educational performance. The GEM Report 2017 will also highlight the extent to which these assessments are impacting policy-making and decisions on resource allocation, especially in relation to teaching and learning processes. Cases where such changes have occurred will be highlighted.

In the past decade, efforts to harness data and engage citizens in enhancing government accountability have multiplied. Drawing on the experiences of citizen-led household-based learning assessments such as ASER and UWEZO, the GEM Report 2017 will provide evidence on the impact and the use of these initiatives from civil society, and determine the circumstances in which they are more or less effective.

Finally, the GEM Report 2017 will examine contexts in which accountability relations are especially complex and contentious, such as in universities and other tertiary institutions. The development and widespread use of university rankings, worldwide and within countries, are among the most debated issues in accountability in higher education. The merits of these rankings will be discussed along with their limitations and alternative or complementary instruments.

Market accountability to expand parental choice in the selection of schools

Market accountability refers to the use of market principles to improve education systems. The goal is to increase options in the school market, through voucher and charter programmes, removing catchment areas, and encouraging private schools. Governments also use different public–private partnership arrangements to increase school choice. These are

expected to have dual effects: parents will have more choice and will actively participate in the schools they choose, and existing schools will improve due to increased competition.

The GEM Report 2017 will re-examine the long-standing debates and evidence on how increased school choice and competition affects the equity and quality of education systems. It will provide new evidence on global and national policies related to school choice, growth trends in private schooling, and emerging debates. Discussion will be framed around the roles, regulations and responsibilities of non-state providers.

The legislative, institutional and financial implications that arise from varied developments in government choice programmes and private involvement will be investigated. The GEM Report 2017 will also analyse the different types of government-led arrangements that involve the private sector in early childhood, basic education, non-formal, and higher education provision. It will provide new evidence on the growth in private schooling that has taken place in many developing countries with little government intervention or financial support, and explore whether private schools serve all levels of society, including the very poor. It will also highlight the emergence of corporate, profit-making chains in private school provision. The GEM Report 2017 will also give special attention to the extent of growth in the private tutoring (“shadow education”) sector in developed and developing countries.

At the tertiary level, market mechanisms for accountability take the form of grants and loans distributed directly to students. Cost-sharing between the government (or taxpayers) and the student (and their families) can take a number of forms including tuition (introducing tuition where it did not previously exist, raising tuition, creating a dual-track where some students pay tuition); fees (user fees for administrative services, ancillary or support services, or for specific academic programs); student loans (introduction of student loan schemes, increases in the effective cost recovery of loans); and notably, facilitating the private sector to accommodate surplus student demand. While tuition and fees alleviate a portion of governmental fiscal responsibilities, a pay-per-use system immediately raises concerns of equity: will all members of society have an equitable opportunity to access universities? The GEM Report 2017 will examine various cost-sharing models and student financial aid schemes with special attention to equitable access and affordability for the student.

Participatory accountability to give more voice to parents and local communities

Strengthening participatory, also called participative, accountability is considered an effective strategy for building equitable education systems and providing quality education. Participatory accountability emphasises the importance of participation by parents and the community in the education process. In participatory accountability, schools are accountable to families not through the mechanisms of choice, but through families having a voice and opportunities for dialogue on school governing bodies.

The past few years have witnessed the delegation of decision-making power from central government to the community and school levels in many countries. The objectives have been

to improve the accountability of service providers, increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of resource allocations, and improve performance. The GEM Report 2017 will show to what extent and for what purposes parents and members of the community are called to participate in school governance. It will assess the extent to which school-based management reforms have given a voice to the poor and marginalized. The consequences of school-based management reforms will be examined to explore whether or not they made a difference in reducing disparity. The GEM Report 2017 will also highlight lessons from various countries where school-based management reforms have worked.

Global and national accountability to monitor and hold countries to account in international and national education agendas

Monitoring plays a dual role in relation to accountability. First, it provides the information on an ongoing basis that government needs to determine focal areas for reaching its targets for realising the right to education. Second, it provides rights holders with the information they need to claim their rights and to hold government and its agents to account when obligations have not been fulfilled.

At the national level, two monitoring functions are critical for the proper reporting and oversight of education commitments and pledges. First, a sound education information system is required to collect and report data. Second, a national mechanism is necessary to review these data, measure progress, and hold governments and education systems accountable to their citizens. The GEM Report 2017 will identify successful national systems where such accountability mechanisms are in place, and the conditions that enabled their successful implementation.

At the global level, international agencies such as OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank have championed an accountability mechanism for education – and the Global Education Monitoring Report is itself a product of this shift towards greater accountability. The monitoring of internationally agreed education goals entails more than following, observing and tracking change over time. Monitoring is a tool to compare national commitments and policy effectiveness. In doing so, it holds countries to account for their commitments through the information and evidence it generates.

The GEM Report 2017 will highlight how discussion evolved in international education discourse agenda – from Jomtien to Dakar and Incheon, and from the MDGs to the SDGs – on the extent to which countries should be held to account. The GEM Report 2017 will shed light on the initial reasons for comparative monitoring exercises and how they have evolved over time. It will also identify what accountability mechanisms are needed to monitor the Education 2030 goals for various stakeholders at different levels of governance.

Finally, equity must be an essential component of any national and global accountability mechanisms. Disaggregation of data is essential to understand where and how to direct future programmatic efforts. The GEM Report 2017 will review the different ways in which equity can be measured. It will also make recommendations for future national and international

surveys to collect disaggregated data that will enable an equity-focused approach to accountability.