

Joint Statement of the Youth Delegates to the Second UNESCO Global Citizenship Education Forum

January 30, 2015

Honourable Chair,

We are the 29 youth delegates to the Second UNESCO Global Citizenship Education Forum. We hail from 13 countries. We are on the receiving end of education. Many of us represent youth from our respective countries or regions. Others represent non-governmental organisations active in increasing global citizenship among our peers. We are bold, share common concerns, and are glad to be given the opportunity to provide our vision on Global Citizenship Education. The following statement will address two issues. First, we provide recommendations on mainstreaming youth engagement in UNESCO processes and conferences. Second, we share our concerns and our visions on Global Citizenship Education.

Youth engagement

Youth engagement has gained increasing recognition within the structures of the United Nations. Article 3 of the Secretary-General's Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Agenda calls us 'torch bearers of the next Sustainable Development agenda'. Similarly, the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Youth, in article 8, emphasises the crucial role of incorporating youth in UN decision-making processes. Proposed UNESCO General Assembly Resolution 37 C/57 on Education for Sustainable Development likewise recommends UNESCO and its member states support youth in our roles as change agents for sustainable development. Specifically, in article 11.b, youth need to be equipped with the participatory skills needed to empower us as change agents in an increasingly volatile global environment and, speaking with the Technical Consultation on GCE in Korea (2013), 'realise [our] rights and obligations to promote a better world and future' (article 2.2.2). In particular, we recognise the need for youth involvement in the formation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Agenda, and acknowledge UNESCO's work in attempting to incorporate youth voices into the consultation and decision-making processes.

However, as daily recipients of education, we do feel that youth could have been more mainstreamed within the discussions and be given more opportunities to engage, to ask questions, and to have our voices heard. We would therefore highly appreciate if this Youth Statement would be used to inform the official Outcome Document to this Forum. We acknowledge UNESCO's enormous power to convene and engage young people as seen during the Aichi-Nagoya Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, while recognizing that this power is not always being put to use to the greatest possible extent. Hence, we call upon UNESCO to mainstream youth engagement in all activities pertaining to or relevant for young people. In particular, we recommend UNESCO to:

1. Structure and facilitate youth engagement in conferences through:
 - a. appointing a youth engagement facilitator responsible for mainstreaming youth engagement during the conference,

- b. providing youth participants with opportunities for preparation, in particular through
 - i. setting up a Youth Delegate Facebook page and distributing contact information of other youth delegates attending the conference,
 - ii. distributing preparatory documentation allowing us to get acquainted with the both the terminology and the wide variety of topics under discussion during the conference,
 - iii. facilitating an offline preparatory youth meeting prior to the conference, in which young people can get acquainted with each other, share experiences and ask clarification from our peers in order to foster our confident participation,
 - c. including at least one youth delegate in all expert panels, in particular the plenary sessions, to:
 - i. use our expertise on issues young people across the world are currently facing,
 - ii. highlight the perspective of the receivers of the policies under discussion in addition to those of their senders:
 - d. presenting and allowing young people to present best practices of youth engagement with regard to the topic under discussion during the conference,
 - e. facilitating the drafting of a Youth Statement and its presentation during the conference's final plenary session;
2. In particular, ensure to prevent a tokenistic approach to youth participation, specifically through
 - a. moving beyond the participation of those young people usually included in these and similar conferences to include young people who currently lack the opportunity to be present,
 - b. ensuring that the youth present are not only representative of the great diversity of young people worldwide, but also truly representing the young people from their local, national, or regional communities through consultations prior to the conference;
3. Mobilise National UNESCO Commissions to facilitate, consolidate and collectivise youth involvement in UNESCO planning and decision processes and their implementation at the local and national levels;
4. Engage youth in planning and operationalising the World Education Forum 2015, to be held between May 19th and 22nd in Incheon, Republic of Korea, particularly through
 - a. consulting a wide array of young people worldwide on issues of particular relevance to young people's lived realities while incorporating the outcomes of significant consultations processes such as the MYWorld Survey,
 - b. involving youth, in addition to the organisation of a youth-led side event or concurrent session, in the general WEF planning process,
 - c. mainstreaming youth in the World Education Forum as described under article 1.

Global Citizenship Education

We would like to underscore the significance Global Citizenship Education has and should have, in particular with regard to recent events in Paris and the extremely emotional reactions that followed around the world; as well as with regard to recent events in Northern Nigeria and the lack of a global response.

We appreciate the complicated nature of the process of finding agreed-upon definitions capturing the essence of Global Citizenship Education and agree that “in many ways, practice is farther ahead than conceptual clarity”. We therefore support the descriptive definition provided through the Technical Consultation, article 2.1.2, which states that global citizenship “refers more to a sense of belonging to the global community and common humanity, with its presumed members experiencing solidarity and collective identity among themselves and collective responsibility at the global level”. We therefore recommend target 5 of the Muscat Agreement, which appreciates that in 2030, all learners should be equipped with the skills needed for building peaceful societies, including through Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development.

We regard global citizenship as a set of overarching values and ideas that, similar to Education for Sustainable Development, promotes understanding through knowledge, toleration, and peace while not impeding the diverse particulars of civilisations, cultures, religions, and traditions. We strongly believe in the transformative power of education, especially Global Citizenship Education, while recognizing that it is only possible to tap into that power when we are aware of our own paradigms and its inevitable limitations.

In addition, we would particularly like to emphasise the following six issues.

1. Global Citizenship Education is to be conceived of as a transformative learning process relevant not only to children and youth. We are the future and we are glad we are given the opportunity to help shape it. This, however, does not mean that adults, as representatives of current normative systems, should not be addressed through informal and non-formal education. In this regard, media play a quintessential role. While promoting respect for the human rights of future generations, we emphasise the need to stand together, since without one another we will be ineffective. We therefore underscore the need for not only separate spaces for youth engagement, but for a true intergenerational approach to global citizenship and education, acknowledging that adults and young people can learn from each other to truly mainstream youth and shape the world together.
2. The intercultural component of Global Citizenship Education, the fourth key value underpinning sustainable development according to the International Implementation Scheme for the Decade of ESD, largely underscores the significance of cross-border intercultural understanding. We think, however, that it is equally, if not more, important to understand different cultures, classes, and religious affiliations within one's own localities. Increased migration has made understanding increasingly significant across the globe. We think Global Citizenship Education

should start with and be rooted in a local understanding and critical analysis of real-life issues, differences, and power relations.

3. Whereas youth have been recognized as “an important stakeholder of Global Citizenship Education” by article 2.2.8 of the 2013 Technical Consultation, their roles have been primarily restricted to non-formal and informal education processes. We recognise the need for and opportunity presented by non-formal and informal education to reach out to marginalised and excluded groups, particularly those children and youth who are not in school,
4. At the same time, as the GEFI YAG and the A World At School Global Youth Ambassadors, among others, have shown, youth internationally have both great motivation and great skills to contribute to the development of formal education. It must be noted that the promotion of Global Citizenship is one of the YAG’s three key objectives. In this context, we propose that, in addition to article 2.2.5 of the Technical Consultation, stipulating Global Citizenship Education as to be delivered “as an integral part of an existing subject … or as an independent subject area”, mainstreaming of GCE not only within the curriculum, but within the school environment be considered. Bridging the gap between practice and theory, this would enable schools to not only formally, but also informally transmit the values of peace, diversity, sustainability, and understanding while maintaining their own distinct identities.
5. Given the transformative nature of Global Citizenship Education, we underscore the crucial importance of experiential learning. Global Citizenship Education assumes learners to be active partakers in the education process. Global citizenship skills involve not only knowledge and understanding, but rather a proactive attitude. We recommend schools to regard students as active agents and facilitate their active engagement in the school environment and the learning process, fostering their self-confidence, stimulating their curiosity, and empowering them to become agents of change in their communities. In addition, we stress the potential of intercultural and international exchanges to fostering understanding rooted in lived realities.
6. We emphasise that Global Citizenship Education can only be effective when paired with real-life social and economic opportunities and change. Education must therefore be structurally accompanied by efforts to improve the lived realities of young people. Many young people lack not only the opportunities, but the basic information on how to access and engage in opportunities of improving their socio-economic situations. Staggering youth unemployment rates pose not only a threat to young people themselves; they endanger the very ends of global citizenship. Despite education’s great transformative power, the power of visions of solidarity and understanding wanes in the sight of increasing global inequality. We therefore deem it crucial that any approach to Global Citizenship Education takes into account the wider socio-economic contexts. We think Global Citizenship Education must provide both information and practical tools for engaging in sustainable economic activities, promoting decent work while fostering entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, we are thankful for having been honoured with attending this conference. We, the Youth Delegates to the Second UNESCO Global Citizenship Education Forum 2015, commit to applying the tools for Global Citizenship Education in our daily lives and in our work among our peers. We are calling upon UNESCO to utilize its soft power to do the same thing, to consider our recommendations on Global Citizenship Education, and to enhance the facilitation of youth engagement in future conferences. We are calling upon Member States to truly integrate Global Citizenship Education within their curricula. We will be happy to help you.

Thank you.