How business leadership can advance Goal 4 on Quality Education

Achieving inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all will require substantial effort. Despite considerable gains in education enrolment over the past 15 years, worldwide, the adjusted net enrollment rate in 2015 was 89 percent for primary education and 65 percent for secondary education. About 263 million children and youth were out of school, including 61 million children of primary school age. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia account for over 70 per cent of the global out-of-school population.

Although it is the responsibility of Governments to provide free education at the primary and secondary levels, business can play an important role in supporting families and Governments and can provide opportunities for further training and education to workers. Business has a responsibility to provide living wages and decent working conditions to their employees so that employees can fulfil their role as caregivers by sending children to school without having to seek supplementary income. Critically, business should and ensure that there is zero child labour across its operations and supply chain – a key barrier to education for children worldwide. Business is uniquely placed to ensure skills-development for working adults and can take proactive steps to support education at all levels.

Leading companies go further in these activities and drive good practices in support of education throughout end-to-end operations. Business can lead by facilitating access to vocational training and life-long learning opportunities to employees across their own operations and their supply chain. Not only does leading business ensure that all employees throughout end-to-end operations earn a living wage that allows them to support the education of dependents, but it encourage suppliers to do the same. Business can lead with the implementation of programmes to support access to higher education and access to free, equitable, and inclusive primary and secondary education. They can innovate for education through research, development, and deployment of products and services that will improve educational access and learning outcomes.

Business leadership in advancing Goal 4 can boost profitability, employee retention, and quality of work. Having a skilled and well-educated labour force to draw from is an advantage for any business as it can bolster innovation and growth. A business can also set itself apart and attract the best talent by making its workplace conducive to skills-development and learning.

Action on Goal 4 can positively impact many other Goals. Education empowers citizens and allows them to take better decisions and stronger action across multiple disciplines to improve the situation of people and planet. For example, evidence shows there is a strong link between education and health. People with higher levels of education have better health outcomes due to, among other things, more considered lifestyle choices. A business leader will be careful to make its efforts inclusive so that action on Goal 4 does not exacerbate existing inequalities.
Business Actions in Support of Goal 4

### Targets of Goal 4

1. **4.1** Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
2. **4.2** Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
3. **4.3** Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
4. **4.5** Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable
5. **4.4** Increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
6. **4.6** Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
7. **4.7** Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

### Business Actions

1. **Access to Education**
   - Ensure that all employees across the business and supply chain have access to vocational training and life-long learning opportunities
2. **Inclusive Education**
   - Ensure that all employees across the business and supply chain earn a wage that allows them to support the education of dependents and that there is zero child labour
3. **Quality Education**
   - Implement programmes to support higher education and access to free, equitable, and inclusive primary and secondary education
4. **Research, development, and deployment**
   - Research, develop, and deploy products and services that improve educational access and learning outcomes
Do your actions satisfy the Leadership Qualities?

**Intentional**
- Is your company committed to supporting the achievement of Goal 4? Have you developed a holistic strategy that reflects this commitment, covering end-to-end operations and the wider community?
- Are you committed to learn from your actions and do you have processes in place to improve them accordingly?
- Is your strategy supported by the highest levels of management, including the Board of Directors?

**Ambitious**
- Do your actions achieve long-term outcomes that greatly exceed those resulting from current industry practice?
- Are your actions aligned with what is needed to achieve Goal 4?

**Consistent**
- Is support for Goal 4 embedded across all organizational functions?
- Are staff and board incentives aligned with achieving Goal 4?

**Collaborative**
- Do you proactively look for opportunities to partner with Governments, UN agencies, suppliers, civil society organizations, industry peers and other stakeholders to inform how to advance Goal 4?

**Accountable**
- Do you publicly express your commitment to advance Goal 4?
- Do you identify, monitor, and report on impacts, including potentially adverse impacts?
- Do you mitigate risks associated with your action?
- Do you remediate negative impacts associated with this action?
- Do you engage stakeholders in a meaningful way?

**Actions to further Goal 4**
- Must be an integral part of a company’s strategy, with top-level commitment that motivates employees across the organization to support education in underserved areas.

**Ambition on Goal 4**
- Requires companies to continually aim for better learning outcomes. Action with the most impact takes place across the workplace, marketplace, and wider community, focusing particularly on disadvantaged regions and groups. Action should support the overarching Goal of free, accessible, and quality primary and secondary education.

**Consistency requires businesses to ensure that support for quality, equitable, and inclusive education is embedded across all organizational functions. This is especially important for businesses that have a large share of end-to-end operations in areas with poor education outcomes.**

**Collaboration on Goal 4**
- Means companies will partner with, and engage, Governments, civil society, industry peers, schools, universities and other educational institutions to understand how all can work together to support quality, equitable and inclusive education.

**Accountability entails monitoring and reporting on business impacts on educational and learning outcomes, ensuring that actions do not contribute to existing inequalities, managing risks of negative impacts, and meaningfully engaging educational institutions. Governments, students, and others to understand areas of need.**
The Global Goals are inherently interconnected. Action taken toward one Goal can support or hinder the achievement of others. Identifying and addressing these interconnections will help business to build holistic and systemic solutions that amplify progress and minimize negative impacts. To help build a greater understanding, we have illustrated some of the ways in which the Goals connect. These are not exhaustive, and we encourage business to consider how they apply in their own operations.

Maximise likelihood of positive impact on:

Evidence shows that higher levels of education have a profound effect on improving health outcomes (Goal 3). Providing quality education also opens the door to future job opportunities which can help reduce inequalities (Goal 5 and 10), alleviate poverty (Goal 1), drive economic growth (Goal 8), allow individuals to access basic amenities such as nutrition and sanitation (Goal 2 and 6), and contribute to building a more peaceful society (Goal 16).

Minimise risk of negative impact on:

Business action to further education should manage risks of exacerbating existing inequalities (Goals 5 and 10). Inclusiveness is one of the most challenging aspect of supporting education but should be at the forefront of any effort.
BUSINESS ACTION 1
Ensure that all employees across the business and supply chain have access to vocational training and life-long learning opportunities

Quality education includes the provision of life-long learning opportunities and vocational schemes. Companies are uniquely positioned to further life-long learning, which can result in stronger growth, innovation and increased welfare. Leading companies will make particular efforts to extend these opportunities to vulnerable groups, including women, ethnic minorities, members of the LGBT community, and economically disadvantaged communities, across its operations and multiple tiers of its supply chain.

Example practice

• A coffee company partners with a local university to provide employees with the opportunity to attend courses free of cost or at a highly subsidised rate

• An company offers its employees the chance to go on a sabbatical to a local school where they assist with teaching. This helps employees enhance their community engagement skills

• A company offers training workshops to women and men to enhance their skills and to educate both sides against subconscious biases that could affect women’s promotion and access to life-long learning opportunities

• A global food producer trains women smallholder farmers in its supply chain in sustainable agricultural practices to enhance their capacities to adapt to and cope with climate change.

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Accountability: leadership means that a company understands areas of need, formulates targets around these areas, and monitors and reports on educational outcomes of employees across its end-to-end operations

Interconnectedness: training the work force throughout end-to-end operations can contribute to Goal 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure and Goal 12 on sustainable production and consumption
BUSINESS ACTION 2
Ensure that all employees across the business and supply chain earn a wage that allows them to support the education of dependents and that there is zero child labour

Businesses should ensure that their inputs are ethically sourced. Leading companies can adopt policies and practices to ensure that all companies across its supply chain pay a living wage and offer good working conditions, so that employees do not have to rely on supplementary income from child labour and can support the education of dependents. These could include strict supplier standards and capacity building efforts for suppliers to meet these, advanced monitoring schemes, and implementing best practice for remedial action.

Example practice

• A clothing company implements programmes to build suppliers’ capacity to pay a living wage and promotes the use of digital payments to ensure that progress can be properly tracked and evaluated

• An electronics company helps suppliers implement policies, such as paying a decent wage and providing access to quality healthcare, to ensure that all employees are provided with the means to support the education and well-being of dependents, and do not rely on children for additional income

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Collaboration: leading action requires working with a wide variety of stakeholders, including supply chain members, industry peers, governments, schools, and educational institutions to understand areas of need and how collaboration can improve wages and educational outcomes

Interconnectedness: action to support the education of dependents and the provision of a wage which allows children to go to school instead of providing supplementary income, can help in empowerment and poverty alleviation (Goal 1)
BUSINESS ACTION 3
Implement programmes to support higher education and access to free, equitable, and inclusive primary and secondary education, focusing particularly on disadvantaged groups

Companies can leverage their finances, technological capabilities, expertise and, in particular, their convening power to support education at all levels with targeted programmes. Leading companies seek to implement programmes that address gaps by supporting education in impoverished areas and targeting disadvantaged groups. Convening the right stakeholders and, especially, working alongside national and local Governments is key to understanding needs and ensuring legitimacy and success of action.

Example practice

- A consultancy sets up teacher training programmes to enhance the capacity of teachers in economically disadvantaged localities, to improve the quality of education in the area.
- A global pharmaceuticals company funds educational projects around the world and provides assistive technology to local schools in an emerging economy to ensure that specially abled children are able to successfully complete their studies.
- A global IT company invests in engineering schools in developing countries, hires and trains local employees, and establishes educational schemes for women students to ensure that they can thrive in the workplace.

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

**Collaboration:** leading companies implement programmes in close partnerships with governments, which retain the primary responsibility for providing free quality education for all, and also involve other key stakeholders in local communities.

**Accountability:** companies that implement programmes to support education, especially for disadvantaged groups, must meaningfully engage with all affected stakeholders and carefully manage risks of negative impacts and provide access to redress.

**Interconnectedness:** action to support education can help to alleviate poverty (Goal 1). Risks of excluding marginalised groups and thereby increasing inequalities (Goal 10) should be managed.
BUSINESS ACTION 4
Research, develop and deploy products and services that improve educational access and learning outcomes

Companies are well placed to deliver product and service innovation to improve access to education and learning outcomes. They can target access, quality, and inclusiveness of education. Business can play a role in the development and deployment of improved methods and materials, including digital tools and services, tailored for populations with typically poor educational outcomes in developing countries. These could include services that are accessible through mobile phone and internet where this is available, but also the provision of easy-to-use, tailored teaching materials, and teacher training solutions.

Example practice

- An IT company develops and distributes mobile-based applications to bring education to remote communities who would have otherwise had no access to such services
- A private sector education company develops an open-source web-tool and massive open online courses that provide free education for all
- A publisher develops a line of educational material whose content is tailored to the needs of marginalised communities and is published in the local language. It distributes the content to the concerned areas.
- A financial institution develops an innovative financing product, such as a social impact bond, to support teacher training and other programmes that enhance learning outcomes

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Accountability: new products and services to support education, especially for disadvantaged groups, must respond to areas of need identified through meaningful engagement with all affected stakeholders. In deployment, companies should carefully manage risks of negative impacts.

Interconnectedness: action to support education can help to alleviate poverty (Goal 1). Risks of excluding marginalised groups and thereby increasing inequalities (Goal 10) should be managed.
Investing in Education: Lessons from the Business Community

SDG Compass

UN Global Compact Industry Matrix

Global Opportunity Explorer

Navigating the SDGs: a business guide to engaging with the UN Global Goals

SDG Reporting - An Analysis of the Goals and Targets

International Council on Mining and Minerals Catchment-based water management guide

Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, Goal 4