Capacity Building for the Right to Education: The Global Catholic Education Project[1]
Contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Enhancement of technical cooperation and capacity-building in the field of human rights
March 26, 2021

Background

The Human Rights Council will submit at its 47th session a report on technical cooperation and capacity-building efforts to protect the right to education, in particular for girls and children in disadvantaged situations. This note was prepared in response to the Invitation for inputs on Enhancement of technical cooperation and capacity-building in the field of human rights with a focus on the right to education (HRC resolution 45/32). In the Invitation, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights *"invites all stakeholders to provide information on technical cooperation and capacity-building efforts in the aforementioned areas to support States' efforts to promote and protect the right to education, at particularly on concrete examples of best practices in this regard"* with submissions limited to maximum five pages in English. In response to the Invitation, this note presents the Global Catholic Education Project, a volunteer-led effort aiming to connect Catholic education to the world, and the world to Catholic education. The Project has a strong capacity building component.

Context

Teachers, principals, and administrators in public education systems need capacity building to improve educational outcomes. So do teachers, principals, and administrators in Catholic networks of schools and universities, which are large in many countries. According to the Global Catholic Education Report 2021[2], 62 million children are enrolled in Catholic K12 (pre-primary, primary, and secondary) schools globally, with in addition more than 6 million students enrolled in Catholic higher education. A few findings from the Global Catholic Education Report 2021 are worth emphasizing to provide context:

- Over the last four decades, enrollment in Catholic schools has been growing especially rapidly on the African continent, which now accounts for 55.3% of all students in Catholic primary schools in the world. Globally, according to the World Bank classification of countries, seven in ten students in Catholic primary schools live in low and lower-middle income countries (40.9% in low income and 29.7% in lower-middle income countries). By contrast, Catholic higher education remains concentrated in upper-middle and high income countries, as is the case for other universities, but those institutions can play a role for capacity building in the global south.
- The Catholic Church is responding to the rising demand for education in the global south. In sub-Saharan Africa, 11.0% of all primary school students are in a Catholic school. In low income

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[1] Note drafted by Quentin Wodon. The author works for an international development agency, but this contribution was made purely on a personal basis as part of his volunteer work for the Global Catholic Education Project. The views expressed in this note should not in any way be attributed to the author's employer, its board of directors, or the countries they represent. The note also does not necessarily represent the views of OIEC, IFCU, OMAEC, and UMEC-WUCT, the four organizations co-sponsoring the Global Catholic Education Project.

[2] These estimates are for 2018. See Wodon, Q. 2021. *Global Catholic Education Report 2021: Education Pluralism, Learning Poverty, and the Right to Education.* Washington, DC: Global Catholic Education, OIEC, IFCU, OMAEC, and UMEC-WUCT.

countries, the proportion is 13.7%. The fact that Catholic primary schools serve proportionally more students in low income countries is good news for the mission of the Church to serve the poor. It also related to the emphasis placed by the Human Rights Council on technical cooperation and capacity-building efforts for girls and children in disadvantaged situations.

- Schooling is not enough however: we must also ensure that children are learning. In low- and middle-income countries, the World Bank estimated that 53% of all 10-year-olds (those in schools and those out of school) cannot understand an age-appropriate text. Efforts are needed in Catholic schools as well as in other schools to improve learning outcomes. This is essential for realizing the right to education, and requires technical cooperation and capacity-building efforts.

- The theme for the report is education pluralism, learning poverty, and the right to education. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that *"parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."* Catholic schools respond to parental aspirations for an education that combines academic excellence with an emphasis on values and faith in such a way that students from all faiths are welcomed in the schools.

- Catholic schools and universities aim to educate towards fraternal humanism. They are responding to Pope Francis' call for a Global Compact on Education, and seek to place their projects in a culture of dialogue and in the spirit of the education village. Yet today, their ability to continue to respond to the aspirations of students and parents is threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in countries where they do not get support from the state. In the United States, the pandemic has led to the largest reduction in enrollment in Catholic K12 schools in close to 50 years. Supporting Catholic education in times of crisis is essential to protect education pluralism. It also makes economic sense. Estimates for 38 countries suggest that Catholic schools and universities generate annual budget savings for these states of more than $100 billion (in purchasing power parity). The long-term cost of not supporting Catholic schools and universities when they need support may be larger than the cost of providing support.

Global Catholic Education Project

The Invitation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights notes that programs are being implemented by the United Nations, other international agencies, and other organizations in order to *"support States' efforts to promote and protect the right to education, ensuring the continuity of education for all, and addressing educational inequalities."* However, it seems fair to say that with the exception of a few donors, most of these efforts do not reach Catholic and other low cost nonprofit private schools. Those schools often do not benefit from the experience of the international community, and conversely the international community does not benefit from their particular experience.

The Global Catholic Education (GCE) Project aims to fill this gap. It brings global knowledge on education and integral human development to Catholic schools, universities, and other organizations by sharing evidence-based good practices emerging from international experience. It also brings to the attention of the international community the work of Catholic schools, universities, and other organizations promoting integral human development, including their approaches to educate the whole person towards fraternal humanism. The Project's website went live symbolically on Thanksgiving Day in November 2020, with a special emphasis on responding to the aspirations of the poor and vulnerable.

The GCE Project is led by a team of volunteers. The core partners for the Project are the four organizations that federate Catholic education globally: (1) The International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC in French) that federates national Catholic education associations and represents K12 Catholic schools with United Nations and other international agencies; (2) The International Federation of Catholic Universities (FIUC in French) that federates Catholic universities globally, providing various services and representing universities with United Nations and international agencies; (3) The World Organization of Former Students of Catholic Education (OMAEC in French) that federates national,

regional, and congregation-based associations of former students of Catholic education; and (3) The World Union of Catholic Teachers (UMEC in French) represents Catholic teachers globally and provides them with various services including training and networking opportunities. In addition to core partners, the GCE Project works with a growing list of additional partners for specific activities and studies.

The website is available in three languages to reach a global audience: English, French, and Spanish. The structure of the GCE website reflects the objectives of the Project. As shown in Figure 1, the GCE Project website focuses on six components: (1) contributing to building a strong community of Catholic educators and others interested in integral human development; (2) conducting research, including global reports, other publications, calls for papers, and videos; (3) providing guidance and sharing information on a wide range of topics; (4) providing other resources; (5) facilitating access to data on Catholic education and more broadly on integral human development; and (6) maintaining a blog with weekly posts. Each of these components is discussed in more details below.

Figure 1: Structure of the GCE Project Website as of March 2021
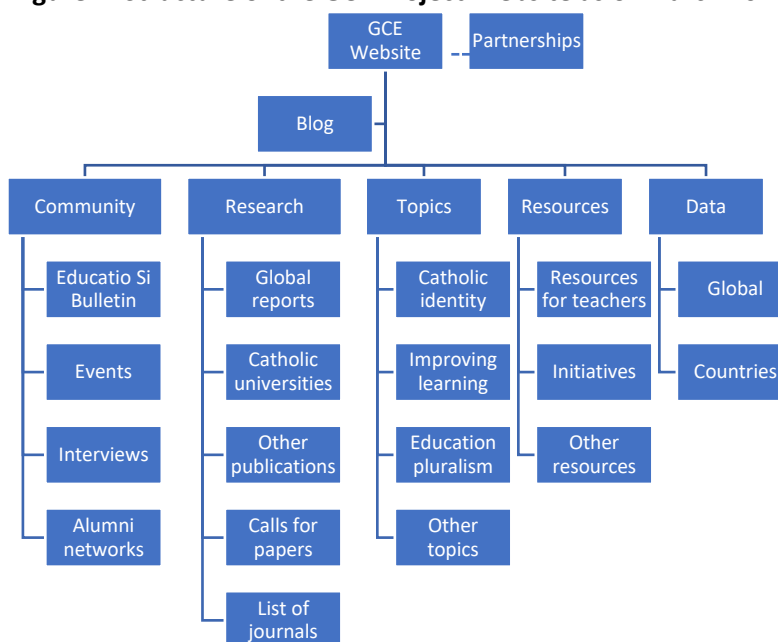
Source: Author.

Component #1: Community

A first priority is to build a sense of community and support among Catholic educators and others engaged in integral human development. To that end, four main activities are undertaken:

- Educatio Si Bulletin: The Educatio Si Bulletin is published on a quarterly basis with OIEC to share experiences and build a sense of community among Catholic educators globally. The Bulletin was launched after the OIEC World Congress held in New York in June 2019 on the theme 'Educatio Si', hence the choice of its name. Contributions of articles from teachers, school principals, and others are sought, not only to share good practices and success stories, but also to inspire through stories of commitment and preservation in the face of difficulties.
- Events: The website provides information on webinars organized by the Project's core partners. These webinars are typically open to all, with efforts to have an offering in several languages.
- Interviews: Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. Many interviews on the website focus on education, but others relate to broader work done by Catholic and other organizations, especially programs with children. One recent example is a series of interviews conducted with the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE).

- Alumni and other stakeholders: The website also provides resources for key constituencies for Catholic schools and universities, including alumni of Catholic education who are often an untapped resource (this is the focus of OMAEC, one of the four core partners of the Project).

Component #2: Research

A second priority is to conduct research that can be useful to Catholic schools and universities as well as the international community. To that end, the following activities are undertaken:
- Global reports: The Project team publishes the Global Catholic Education Report annually and is in the process of preparing another series of annual report on integral human development.
- Catholic universities: The website will provide analysis of Catholic universities and a global directory to facilitate college searches by prospective students and help them think about 1) whether to go to college; 2) potential factors for selecting a particular college; 3) data sources to compare colleges; and 4) whether to go to a Catholic college. The first volume of the global directory/analysis for the United States has been completed and other volumes are in process.
- Other publications: The Project also publishes occasional studies (including studies focusing on particular themes or countries) and a Knowledge Notes series akin to a working papers series.
- Calls for papers: The Project team occasionally coordinates special issues or symposia for academic journals, or manages edited volumes on specific topics. This provides opportunities for both practitioners and researchers to publish their work and thereby share insights with other members of the global Catholic education community as well as educators more generally.
- List of journals: This page provides information for researchers related to academic publishing, including a list of journals related to education and in particular Catholic education.

Component #3: Topics

A third priority is to provide guidance on good practice in selected areas and make available analysis on selected issues or topics. There are four main areas for which guidance is provided:
- Catholic identity: The Project does not endorse any particular view on what Catholic identity might or should entail, but as a service to readers, it provides links to resources including benchmarking tools[3] that suggest various approaches to strengthening Catholic identity.
- Improving learning: Some 260 million children of primary and secondary school age remain out of school, and many more children who are in schools are not learning enough to achieve basic literacy by age 10. This is referred to by the World Bank as learning poverty. The Project website features tools and analyses that can help Catholic (and other) schools and universities improve learning outcomes. For example, information is provided on the website on the World Bank's teacher observation tool and on recommendations from the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel for cost-effective approaches to improve learning in low and middle income countries.
- Education pluralism: A section of the website is dedicated to education pluralism, including laws and regulatory frameworks that can be useful for partnerships with governments.
- Other topics: Guidance on other topics will be progressively provided, as well as webpages on various topics. For example, the website includes a page on the International Day of Education.

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[3] Benchmarking typically involves (1) defining "standards" or factors leading to success based on a review of the literature; (2) designing tools to measure how well an education systems or individual schools are performing along those standards; and (3) providing assessments and, even more importantly, practical suggestions for improvement. The tools shared on the website tend to include these three components of benchmarking.

Component #4: Resources

A fourth priority is to provide various resources and links to interesting initiatives for Catholic and other educators. There are three main types of resources being provided:

- Resources for teachers: This area provides resources related to teaching, including with respect to: (1) Becoming a teacher; (2) Improving as a teacher and (3) Making videos available to teachers: In particular, in partnership with CREDO (Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization) and NCEA (National Catholic Educational Association in the US), the Project just launched a pilot YouTube channel for IHD Shorts, a series of short videos on Education, Economics, and Integral Human Development (IHD). Videos are in English, but if the pilot is successful, it will be expanded to videos in French and Spanish. The target audience includes high school students, undergraduate students, and adults interested in those topics.
- Initiatives: Links to various initiatives and centers are provided, among others for ACISE (education researchers network of IFCU); Catholic Higher Education Supporting Catholic Schools (CHESCS); International Research and Decision Making Center (CIRAD); Forum of Catholic NGOs; Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (G.R.A.C.E.); and the Vatican/Holy See.
- Other resources: Links are provided to various international organizations such as the Education Commission, the Global Partnership for Education, UNESCO (main website, Institute of Statistics; and Global Monitoring Report), UNICEF (main website and Innocenti Research Center), and the World Bank (main website and Education Global Practice). More resources from these organizations will be progressively featured so that Catholic educators can benefit from them.

Component #5: Data

A fifth priority is to make available useful data for Catholic schools and universities, as well as policy makers. This includes data on Catholic education, but also other types of data that are relevant.

- Global data: The website will aim in the near future to provide a data visualization tool for global and country data. For now, it provides data on Catholic education from the annual statistical yearbook of the Church and links to data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the World Bank, and a range of international student assessments (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS, PASEC, etc.).
- Country data: Country profiles on Catholic education are provided, based on data compiled for the annual Global Catholic Education Reports. When the data visualization tool will be operational, users will be able to visualize those as well as other data and conduct basic analysis.

Component #6: Blog

The GCE blog is a tool to share information on the activities conducted under the Project, as well as other information that may be useful to readers. The blog is however different from traditional blogs. To save time for readers, instead of full-length blog posts, short weekly "tidbits" (Tuesday information and dissemination bits) are published to alert readers of useful resources and provide links in case they want to dig deeper. Tidbits are provided in English, French, and Spanish. Some tidbits focus on Catholic education, but many others are on broader issues affecting education irrespective of faith.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, the Project is only five months old. Much more needs to be done, but the Project aims to serve as a platform for capacity building, research, and ideas about Catholic education. In addition, the hope is that while Catholic education can and should learn from international experience, the international community can also learn from Catholic education through the Project.