The Right to Education and SDG 4: Lessons from the Field and Next Steps for Civil Society Monitoring

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1 Introduction

To fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), governments have committed to work toward specific targets using agreed-upon monitoring indicators and processes. A core principle of SDG 4 is that ‘education is a fundamental human right and an enabling right’ (UNESCO, 2016d, p. 2). SDG 4 reiterates governments’ commitments to uphold and respect the right to education, as codified in international law. This codification and associated rights-based approaches to achieving SDG 4 help civil society organisations (CSOs) hold governments accountable for their obligations. More than three years into the SDG period, it is time to revisit the extent to which rights-based approaches inform CSO-led SDG 4 monitoring. Monitoring undertaken by civil society and citizens at large can make a valuable contribution toward creating a bottom-up push for SDG 4 implementation. This chapter seeks to understand the emerging civil society practices used to monitor SDG 4 implementation by drawing on rights-based approaches, to evaluate such approaches in CSO-led SDG monitoring, and to identify possible best practices. Findings can support CSOs and national monitoring bodies to integrate rights-based approaches in SDG 4 monitoring.

Implementation of the SDGs has been slow, partly as a result of the design of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs’ low level of obligation and weak enforcement mechanisms allowed member states to agree to the framework and resulted in the agenda’s universal endorsement, but credible follow-up, review, and monitoring mechanisms are critical to ensuring the SDGs’ long-term impact. Civil society can undertake policy monitoring by identifying areas in which current policies fall short of SDG 4 commitments. CSOs can also participate in SDG 4 review processes, initiate their own reviews, and generate evidence on implementation. CSOs’ evidence can be used for to enforce formal accountability and redress mechanisms through existing state and international channels, to support the filing of complaints, and to provide information for human rights

reviews. This chapter explores how civil society is undertaking these functions early in SDG 4 implementation.

The SDGs constitute a new development regime built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for SDG 4 on the Education for All (EFA) movement (Tikly, 2017). In turn, the SDGs affect, and are affected by, other closely aligned regimes, including aid, trade, security, and human rights. International regimes encompass a range of ‘implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge’ (Krasner, 1982, p. 186; Tikly, 2017). Each of these regimes, consequently, provide for additional accountability structures, needs, and entry points for SDG monitoring. This proliferation of spaces where aspects of the SDGs are monitored, combined with weak accountability for their implementation, creates challenges for nonstate actors seeking to monitor and support their implementation.

We first situate current efforts and past experiences using rights-based approaches to monitor national commitments to achieve international benchmarks. We also present methods to monitor SDG 4 fulfilment, drawing on diverse experiences from civil society. We specifically discuss the Right to Education Index (RTEI) and related advocacy strategies as a potential resource to enhance monitoring and inform implementation. Drawing on civil society engagement, we highlight advocacy implications and data gaps in existing SDG 4 monitoring tools and practices. To do so, we drew on evidence from operations reported by 26 individuals surveyed from diverse CSOs working worldwide, with four follow-up, in-depth interviews. We also conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of CSO-published reports and online content related to rights-based approaches and SDG 4 monitoring. We conclude that national-level advocacy in collaboration with international networks and partnerships, building on strategies such as those implemented by CSOs surveyed here, are key to rights-based approaches to SDG 4 monitoring.

2 Background to Rights-Based Approaches

This research supports integrating human rights in SDG implementation and national policy development (OHCHR, 2017a). The OHCHR defines a human rights-based approach as a conceptual framework that is based on international human rights standards and directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development (OHCHR,

2006). Tangible human rights-based approaches in development have been defined as:

- Assessment and analysis to identify human rights claims and duty-bearers' obligations as well as the immediate, underlying, and structural causes of the nonrealisation of rights.
- Assessment of the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights and of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations and to develop strategies to build these capacities.
- Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and processes guided by human rights standards and principles through recommendations from international human rights bodies and mechanisms (adapted from UNICEF, 2003, pp. 91–93).

We focus here on the last aspect described above, emphasising rights-based monitoring of SDG 4 achievement, with additional definitions identified in CSOs' programming discussed in more depth below.

2.1 *Official Mechanisms for SDG Monitoring and Potential CSO Spaces within Them*

The SDGs, despite their wide endorsement, are a political declaration and not legally binding. Instead, the SDGs exert influence indirectly to determine global planning benchmarks, provide standards for performance evaluation by member states, and identify broad norms that determine what 'ought to be done' and how (Fukuda-Parr, 2014, p. 120). Regular monitoring, reporting, and tracking national performance forms a critical component framing how SDGs exert influence. The SDG outcome document, Agenda 2030 (UNGA, 2015b), provides guiding principles¹ for the review process, describes an overarching accountability architecture, reiterates that the process must be state-led, and stresses its voluntary nature. The next section details how CSOs can officially engage in rights-based SDG monitoring to establish the background for CSO-led reporting operations detailed in our findings below.

2.2 *Official SDG Monitoring: Structures for CSO Engagement*

Official SDG accountability mechanisms have two main tracks: quantitative indicators to track progress, and qualitative follow-up and review processes at national, regional, and global levels to measure, track, and support progress.

2.2.1 Quantitative Indicators

The targets and indicators under SDG 4 have been thoroughly debated. There is some ongoing refinement; for instance, four potential additional indicators

are under consideration to be included by 2020 (IAEG-SDGs, 2017). CSOs are also engaged in developing alternative indicators and rights-based monitoring tools and reports (e.g., Action for Sustainable Development [Action4SD], 2016; Right to Education Initiative [RTE], 2015). Conversely, some educational researchers and civil society members are calling for fewer indicators (e.g., Anderson, 2015). Disagreement on indicators and their measurement methodology affects CSOs' ability to effectively monitor national progress, particularly when they are not aware of or involved in these debates, negotiations, or decisions.

Many countries are experiencing challenges satisfying current data collection needs for SDG indicators. For example, the 2017 Asia-Pacific SDG progress report identified that only 25% of the global SDG indicators have available data (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [ESCAP], 2018). In response, ongoing efforts aim to strengthen national data systems, providing advocacy opportunities for national education data to be openly available, transparent, and collected regularly for effective social accountability (High-level Group, 2017; UIS, 2017a). The absence of official SDG monitoring data makes it difficult for CSOs to develop shadow reports, reports that parallel official governmental reports about SDG fulfilment, or to conduct social audits of relevant data.

2.2.2 Qualitative Reviews

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the apex body for SDG monitoring, is a global convening space for governments, inter-governmental organisations with SDG mandates, and CSOs working on SDGs to discuss progress and present findings. Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports, the formal space for national monitoring, and reports by UN regional commissions, UN bodies, civil society, and the private sector are submitted to the HLPF. All Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (UN, 2014a), including the new Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (UN, 2017), submit reports on the SDGs, including SDG 4, to the HLPF to draw attention to implementation.² Every year, the HLPF focusses special attention on a couple of the goals. In 2019, for the first time, SDG 4 will be among those reviewed by the HLPF.

UN regional commissions also undertake regional monitoring and reviews that feed into the global process. CSO networks and coordination mechanisms are emerging to shadow these spaces (e.g., Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism, 2017; SDG Watch Europe, 2016). However, the extent to which education is reflected in regional mechanisms varies. CSOs working on education have not been actively engaged in many of these processes and instead focus on thematic processes (UIS, 2018b). The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has a Thematic Working Group on

Education 2030+ co-chaired by UNESCO and UNICEF and including other UN agencies to support regional implementation of the Education 2030 Agenda and other targets impacting education (UNAPRCM, 2016).

A consistent civil society demand has been to strengthen civil society participation in regional coordination mechanisms, mirroring the HLPF Coordination Mechanism for the SDGs globally, to ensure greater transparency in the process of reviewing progress and ensuring accountability (UN, 2018d). Regional SDG reviews and peer review mechanisms undertaken by the regional commissions, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, may offer an opportunity to strengthen accountability. OECD country assessments, peer reviews, and peer learning mechanisms may also strengthen SDG mutual accountability in OECD countries (OECD, 2018b). The current follow-up and review architecture unfortunately fails to provide concrete modalities for independent civil society monitoring, data collection, and reporting that may aid social accountability. Submission of shadow reports to the VNRs or as part of regional review is not currently in place but may assist in making the process more rights-based.

Human rights organisations and advocates call for stronger SDG accountability mechanisms through explicit connections between human rights and SDG monitoring (Center for Economic and Social Rights [CESR], 2015; Donald, 2016; McGrath & Nolan, 2017). Another civil society request has been the inclusion of alternative, non-official sources of statistics as sources of evidence for SDG monitoring (Tap Network, 2017). Such inclusion could strengthen accountability by providing complementary evidence to official statistics. However, there has been little interest from governments in the inclusion of alternative data sources as data sources for measuring progress on the SDGs.

UNESCO is the lead agency for the implementation of SDG 4. The Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) outlines a multistakeholder mechanism for global coordination with the SDG 4 Education 2030 Steering Committee. Regionally and nationally, engagement frameworks and mechanisms include regional progress reviews and national government-led, system-wide approaches that build on existing national structures. The official role of SDG 4 monitoring is held by the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) (UNESCO, 2017b). Although this mechanism provides opportunities for CSOs' participation and provision of inputs, CSOs do not formally submit reports, and there are no formal mechanisms for CSO engagement on the GEMR with the national government within country. Comprehensive peer review mechanisms at the regional level may allow for more rigorous analysis but are not currently in place.

Finally, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has created monitoring tools for SDG 4 through the SDG Index and Dashboards. The

SDG Index indicators include expected years of schooling, literacy rates, net primary school enrolment, population with tertiary education, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores, and population with upper secondary and post-secondary nontertiary education (Sachs et al., 2016, p. 29). These indices are, however, not rooted in official SDG indicators and are voluntary.

2.3 *SDG Monitoring Mechanisms*

SDG implementation creates additional monitoring challenges that go beyond the space provided by the SDG follow-up and review architecture. SDG targets are aligned with human rights law (Winkler & Williams, 2017), opening avenues for rights-based monitoring through submissions of shadow reports highlighting the status of education, individual (OHCHR, 2017b), and collective complaints (OHCHR, 2017c); complaints to the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education; and engagement with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. UNESCO also has a confidential complaints procedure to receive complaints about the right to education (UNESCO, 2010). Regional African, European, and Inter-American human rights frameworks (RTE, 2017) also provide additional reporting avenues that could be used to highlight overall progress toward SDG 4 implementation. At the same time, some CSOs have requested that recommendations issued by UN human rights mechanisms, including the UPR and special procedures and conclusions of human rights treaty bodies, could further inform HLPF reviews.

A rights-based approach, according to UNICEF, is explicitly grounded in guidance provided by treaty bodies, including UN General Comments and concluding observations about education (UNICEF, 2007). Rights-based monitoring includes quantitative data. However, there has been a shift in recent years toward a greater focus on qualitative data involving input from more stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, school administrators, as well as official national data collection bodies. While the specific targets and indicators are embedded in existing human rights commitments, the overwhelming reliance on quantitative indicators for monitoring raises intriguing questions about the extent of compatibility between official SDG monitoring and rights-based monitoring.

In sum, SDG monitoring processes provide for clear entry points for participation of civil society. CSOs have begun to use some, but not all, of these monitoring mechanisms. In the next section, we present our analysis of civil-society-led SDG 4 monitoring in the early stages of implementation.

3 Methodology

Based on human rights research approaches (e.g., Coomans, Grünfeld, & Kamminga, 2010; McClintock, 2013), this section presents a qualitative meta-analysis of rights-based approaches in organisational documents and secondary sources, survey and interview data from practitioners working on the right to education, and a case of one CSO-led rights-based monitoring tool, the RTEI.

3.1 *Data Sources*

Data was gathered in 2017 in a survey of the wider community of practice affiliated with the right to education³ (n=27), complemented by a qualitative meta-analysis of organisational reports through a search for organisations that defined rights-based approaches, had a rights-based monitoring example, or had an SDG 4 monitoring example on their website or in public reports. We identified ten large CSOs and networks that published information about rights-based SDG 4 monitoring on their websites. The survey was not representative and convenience sampling resulted in potential selection bias. By including a qualitative meta-analysis of available organisational reports and online content, we hoped to minimise selection and response bias. The meta-analysis is also limited, however, due to the lack of publicly available reports and a succinct searchable database of practitioners' work.

This chapter particularly draws on the experience of the RTEI, a CSO-led education monitoring tool managed by RESULTS Educational Fund, presenting it as a case study. RTEI seeks to monitor the right to education based on the international right to education framework, a non-exhaustive list of human rights laws and agreements.⁴ This case was selected because it highlights CSOs' practices, research, and action in advocating for the full satisfaction of the right to education. We focussed on identified indicators and advocacy strategies proposed in the RTEI project that used or reflected a rights-based approach to SDG 4 monitoring as defined in the literature above and through the meta-analysis. Data was drawn from reports from two organisations participating in RTEI and conducting SDG 4 monitoring domestically. This case is included as an additional resource in surveying the field of rights-based approaches, without suggesting it is necessarily a 'best practice', which remains to be proven. Rather, RTEI is a useful example of a rights-based SDG 4 monitoring tool with which we have had personal experience developing.

4 Surveying the Field: Rights-Based Approach to SDG Monitoring

Data we collected defined rights-based approaches in monitoring SDG 4 as an overarching principle in organisational programming. We identified three themes in human rights-based advocacy and monitoring definitions: (i) holding the state accountable, (ii) addressing marginalisation, and (iii) raising awareness about the right to education. These themes add to the definition of rights-based approaches identified from UNICEF above.

For CSOs that participate in rights-based advocacy and SDG monitoring, holding the state accountable includes:

- Identifying rights-holders and duty-bearers;
- Identifying the state's responsibility to guarantee and deliver the right to education;
- Using commitments made by the state to its citizens as key leverage points; and
- Promoting an environment in which rights-holders can claim their rights and duty-bearers can meet their obligations.

Interestingly, respondents frequently cited their work in addressing marginalisation, whether ethnic, gender based, dis/ability based, or based on some other group identity, as an example of their rights-based approach. Addressing marginalisation is both a component of rights-based programming and advocacy, but we focus specifically on elements related to advocacy here. Rights-based advocacy and monitoring activities that address marginalisation reported by respondents include:

- Focussing on marginalised, disadvantaged, and excluded groups;
- Identifying disparities to address underlying causes of poverty;
- Ensuring that all marginalised groups, particularly persons with disabilities and their families, are central to advocacy;
- Prioritising people living in poverty; and
- Focussing on women and girls' access to education.

It is not clear from the data, however, the extent to which marginalised peoples are involved in advocacy, or if advocacy is more focussed on addressing marginalisation without inclusion.

Finally, survey respondents and meta-analysis data identified participatory awareness raising activities as key to rights-based advocacy and monitoring. For instance, a rights-based awareness raising approach includes:

- Sensitising society and decision-makers on why the right to education should be implemented fully and uniformly by the state;
- Building CSOs' capacity to influence decision-making processes;

- Empowering rights-holders to claim their rights and work toward social transformation through action-oriented educational activities; and
- Focussing on the barriers impeding rights-holders' access to education or benefitting from a quality education equally.

Local ownership and participation are essential in rights-based approaches, recognising citizens as key actors in their own development and not as passive recipients.

4.1 *Civil Society Initiatives toward SDG 4 Monitoring*

Twenty-two of 27 survey respondents participated in SDG monitoring activities in some way. Twenty-three reported using rights-based approaches, as defined above. Specific SDG 4 work focussed mostly on early childhood development (Target 4.2, 59%), primary and secondary education (Target 4.1, 52%), and equity, especially gender equality in education (Target 4.5, 44%). CSOs were active in creating enabling conditions for official SDG monitoring to take place. The most frequently reported types of engagement included advocating with governments or intergovernmental bodies for rights-based SDG reviews, advocating for the inclusion of marginalised communities in SDG monitoring, and working with official data or monitoring systems (59%).

4.1.1 *Monitoring Strategies*

Strategies in SDG 4 monitoring emphasised contributing (individually or organisationally) to regional or global CSO reports (44%), informally tracking progress toward SDG 4 but not engaging in formal reporting (41%), participating in CSO-led monitoring (37%), and participating in government-led monitoring (37%). In contrast, no respondent took part in a formal VNR process, but these processes do not occur annually in all countries and only about half of UN member states would have conducted theirs at the time of the research. These strategies signify that, although CSOs may be engaging with stakeholders in other sectors to contribute to the development of broad CSO reports, SDG 4 monitoring is still in its infancy, focussing on informal tracking and collective CSO contributions rather than formal reporting mechanisms. This is also partly structural as there are no clear and consistent processes for VNRs at the national level. In contrast, some other sectors (e.g., SDG 16) are moving toward regular reports on SDG implementation. Seven respondents did report engaging in official regional or global monitoring or follow-up and review processes by UNESCO, the UN Regional Commissions, or the UN, but did not specify the type of formal review.

Interestingly, 44% of respondents reported engaging with learning assessments for SDG 4 monitoring, signifying the importance of the testing

architecture. SDG 4 is the first international framework to include learning outcome indicators and global testing as integral parts of monitoring achievement internationally. Processes are underway to refine and coordinate existing international assessments and strengthen governments' capacities to undertake national assessments. CSOs participated in these processes through advising on national learning assessments and international assessment development groups such as UNESCO's Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML). For more information on GAML, see Chapter 12 by Clara Fontdevila. In addition, the People's Action for Learning Network, a South-South collaboration across organisations in nine countries, has conducted nationwide, household-based learning assessments that collectively assess over one million children annually. The focus on learning assessments could accelerate test-based accountability, a controversial feature of the 'global educational reform movement' (You, 2017; Sahlberg, 2010; Smith, 2017) and narrow the Education 2030 Agenda to a focus on literacy and numeracy, steering countries away from a holistic, rights-based vision of education (UN, 1989). Due to the emphasis on testing in SDG 4 implementation, CSOs may find more avenues to engage in national, regional, and international learning assessment monitoring or may distance their advocacy from standardised assessments that could hide discrimination or inequality.

4.1.2 Beyond SDG 4

For activities that encompassed other SDGs beyond SDG 4, respondents described work on implementation and planning, using rights-based approaches through avenues similar to those described above. Specific strategies reported included using letters to the media, drawing on international law, including views of people with disabilities in reporting and activities, increasing citizens' awareness of the SDGs, and building international, regional, and national networks with other CSOs to persuade policymakers of SDG relevance. Survey respondents also described how they contributed to other SDG-related activities, such as implementation and planning. The most common CSO role reported was creating citizens' awareness about the SDG agenda (56%), followed by participating in sector planning for SDG implementation (33%), and advocating with the UN to strengthen coordination related to the SDGs between states (33%). In interviews, one civil society representative described how education and training were used in SDG monitoring, as a tool to raise public awareness about the SDGs and governmental obligations in schools, particularly focussing on inclusive education. Another respondent emphasised that SDG monitoring was enhanced by training when organisations worked with government officials on SDG 4 implementation planning.

Given the recency of SDG implementation, it is not surprising that respondents in 2017 were still identifying where and how they would contribute to monitoring. Those that have produced monitoring materials share them with civil society (59%) most frequently, followed by local media (33%), and the governmental education ministry (30%). Examples were provided, such as media and organisational reports focussing on national issues related to SDG implementation. Supranational engagement reportedly occurred infrequently with UNESCO or GPE (26%) and through formal regional reviews (11%). Engagement with formal accountability spaces created under the new SDG architecture is still weak. One respondent also mentioned contributing to UIS monitoring, although not in a formal report. In an interview, one respondent described drafting a national shadow report that monitors the implementation of the new national strategic plan in line with SDG 4. Civil society representatives can contribute to formal monitoring as well as conducting their own monitoring to offset formal systems that may not be using a rights-based approach.

4.1.3 Working with Networks

The Education and Academia Stakeholder Group coordinates inputs and contributions from the education and academic communities, especially on SDG 4. Several CSOs working on SDG 4 implementation and monitoring likewise work through other major groups that generate SDG reports. Regional education networks affiliated with the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) also track SDG 4 progress and support CSOs. *Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación* (Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education) (CLADE) uses the *Observatorio Regional de Educación Inclusiva* (Regional Observatory of Inclusive Education) to monitor SDG 4. The observatory gathers information, documentation, and opinions on education systems through the lenses of inclusion and nondiscrimination. Documents include normative frames, national curriculum, education policy, and opinions from the education community such as teachers, students, and parents. CLADE has participated in regional planning and construction of monitoring mechanisms (UNESCO, 2017a) and plans to submit a 'E2030 Monitoring Report' on Latin America in the 2017 HLPF.

Several national networks affiliated with GCE have produced national SDG reports. The Campaign for Popular Education's (CAMPE) report (Ahmed et al., 2016) is a quantitative study contributed to by CSOs, governments, and academics, looking especially at SDG 4 progress in Bangladesh related to literacy, skills development, and lifelong learning initiatives, and their interactions with socioeconomic indicators (Nath & Chowdhury, 2016). In addition, GCE

member networks in countries such as Nepal (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2017), Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2016), the Netherlands, Peru, and Denmark participated in researching and drafting national CSO shadow reports and engaging with formal national VNR processes. Another coalition, *Foro SocioEducativo* (*Foro*) promotes citizen monitoring of the execution of education policies by the Ministry of Education in the Dominican Republic. *Foro* promotes education monitoring through the *Guía para la Veeduría Social de las Políticas Educativas* (Guide for Social Oversight of Educational Policies) (Orti, Maldonado, & Solano, 2015). Their report introduces monitoring in the Dominican Republic's political and legal context and provides guidance and tools for citizen monitoring.

Further regional collaboration is evident in the emphasis of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) on the role of civil society in national, regional, and international dialogues about development goals; creating networks between organisations; and contributing to intergovernmental policy design related to the SDGs (Khan, 2016). Specifically, ASPBAE calls on CSOs to monitor goal satisfaction by working with government officials and policymakers, learners, and teachers, and other civil society groups. This monitoring is the responsibility of the government but supported by CSOs who advocate for government attention to at-risk populations and provide oversight to identify gaps in existing governmental monitoring plans. Other initiatives such as the ACT Alliance provide examples of CSO network-building by seeking to increase 'civil society engagement and coalition' (ACT Alliance, 2016, p. 6) around SDG indicators that are integral to their campaigns, although not focussed on education.

Wider coalition-building around the SDGs is underway, frequently with monitoring at its heart. For example, Action4SD is a global civil society platform to monitor progress toward sustainable development through working groups. Their Working Group on Monitoring and Accountability helps share citizen-generated reports on the progress on the SDGs at national and regional levels (Action4SD, 2017).

Another type of civil society engagement, citizen-generated evidence and use, provides opportunities to amplify citizen voices and influence implementation. This, however, remains an underused approach despite efforts by organisations like Civicus and their Datashift project to coordinate engagement among the various producers of citizen-generated data (Civicus, 2017). Absence of clear spaces for inclusion of unofficial data sources in formal mechanisms of SDG monitoring is a critical lost opportunity.

Challenges to SDG 4 monitoring identified in survey responses include the state's lack of commitment to monitoring (37%), weak information and data

systems for reporting (37%), lack of awareness among policymakers about the right to education in the SDGs (26%), and a lack of clarity about reporting discrimination (36%). Data availability and validity are perennial challenges in monitoring, whether coordinated by CSOs or the state. To overcome data availability issues, especially related to the right to education, monitoring tools can draw on indicators and indices such as RTEI, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) index, RTE, and others that aggregate relevant data.

4.2 *Right to Education Index (RTEI) Case Study*

Here we explore RTEI as one case of a rights-based CSO-developed data collection and indicator identification tool. RTEI seeks to monitor the right to education based on the international right to education framework, a non-exhaustive list of human rights laws and agreements. It was developed through a participatory process with civil society partners in the Global South and North. It includes data collected biennially and was not originally developed for the SDGs. The RTEI framework emphasises a more robust analysis than the SDSN's tool and SDG Index, but does not include all SDG 4 targets. Some SDG 4 indicators are not reflected in international human rights law, such as early childhood education, and are thus not part of RTEI. RTEI has two advocacy purposes related to SDG 4 monitoring: (i) mapping the data collected against SDG indicators and (ii) supporting national civil society campaigns that may aim to monitor SDG 4. RTEI is CSO-led and flexible, allowing national CSO interpretation and direction of advocacy. It collects qualitative data on right-to-education indicators through a questionnaire (RESULTS Educational Fund, 2016) that can further support specific campaigns, such as SDG 4 monitoring, and is often lacking in official review processes.

4.2.1 Accountability through Indicators

The data collected in RTEI in 2016 were assembled by national CSO-led research teams in 15 countries.⁵ SDG 4 indicators were used in this analysis to construct an SDG 4 rights-based monitoring tool and identify baselines of SDG 4 satisfaction for longitudinal study and further analysis (see Table 17.1). The data from the RTEI indicators listed in Table 17.1 are analysed briefly below to understand CSO-led projects that used RTEI in their rights-based approaches.⁶ RTEI includes indicators for SDG Target 4.1, which focusses on free and equitable education, such as the percent of traditional-age learners in primary and secondary schools (removing overage learners), the net enrolment and completion rates for primary and secondary school, and the legal protection of free and compulsory education. However, national passing score data was

unavailable due to too many missing responses. These data limitations highlight challenges in using solely quantitative methods to monitor SDG 4 implementation because data may be unavailable, biased, or incomparable across countries. In 2016, national assessment data were only available in six of the countries presented. In addition, the diversity of national assessments in RTEI countries highlights the challenge in this metric to adequately monitor the ‘proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex’ (UN, 2018c). Using national assessments that vary widely, RTEI creates indicators that clearly represent the national context but are weak in international comparison. However, enrolment and completion rates recorded in RTEI are particularly relevant in national Target 4.1 monitoring.

Using RTEI data as a lever for Target 4.1 monitoring and accountability can influence national assessment paradigms and efforts to increase enrolment and completion rates. This example can also show comparisons between countries (see Figure 17.1).

Figure 17.1 presents how the 15 countries in RTEI in 2016 performed on indicators related to SDG Target 4.1, which aims to ensure that ‘all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes’ (see Table 1.1 in Chapter 1). Canada has the highest score because it has the highest reported passing rate on national assessments, the lowest out-of-school rates and overage learner rates, and the highest enrolment rates, in addition to laws protecting free and compulsory education. The subindex could inform national advocates and

FIGURE 17.1 4.1 Free and equitable RTEI scores

policymakers seeking to identify where gaps in policy exist. This aggregated score represents one example of how RTEI micro-indices and overall scores can show comparative accountability across select SDG 4 indicators. After calculating SDG 4 subindex scores and comparing outcomes nationally, CSOs can direct advocacy toward increasing government monitoring and transparency. Scores can also provide background and overarching examples in national and international CSO-led reports, including shadow reports. As one CSO-led tool for SDG 4 accountability, RTEI has potential but its influence and accountability depend on national CSOs engaging in formal SDG monitoring processes.

4.2.2 RTEI in Advocacy

One example of an RTEI-associated project, which was conducted in 2017 and focussed on rights-based approaches to SDG 4 monitoring, was the Teacher Creativity Center (TCC) in Palestine. TCC used RTEI to focus broadly on raising awareness of SDG 4 amongst policymakers and citizens. TCC's activities conducted public outreach and engaged citizens in the generation and use of education data, such as quality, equity, financing, and system reform. They included workshops with national stakeholders, data training sessions, meetings with policymakers, and additional data collection with trained citizens and CSOs. In addition, they met with partners and stakeholders to discuss plans to reach SDG 4. TCC also undertook shadow reporting, with the hopes of submitting to UNESCO, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and local media. TCC intends to engage with formal and national monitoring mechanisms both at national and international levels. Their project, described in organisational documentation, adds data collection strategies to the rights-based monitoring strategies identified in our survey and meta-analysis. Using RTEI, and developing further data collection to supplement the indicators monitored, represents an innovative CSO-led quantitative strategy.

RTEI is one tool among many that can be used for a variety of advocacy purposes. TCC survey respondents also reported plans to use RTEI for research on the right to education and tangentially, health, to identify indicators for monitoring national plans, and using country reports and results for national advocacy.

5 Conclusions

Effective monitoring and follow-up are critical for the SDG agenda's success. This chapter suggests that effective rights-based monitoring approaches are based on three prerequisites: (i) international and national governmental

accountability; (ii) civil society-led accountability, especially related to marginalisation; and (iii) capacity development and human rights education. Each of these present strategies and challenges for civil society engagement with the SDGs.

5.1 *International and National Accountability*

Monitoring of SDG 4 must rely on a balance of qualitative with quantitative measures. Overall, international accountability mechanisms are state-focussed, with CSOs contributing shadow reports and conducting parallel monitoring to ensure successful implementation.

CSOs have multiple avenues for SDG monitoring but are only beginning to become familiar with the new formal SDG monitoring, follow-up, and review architecture. Stronger mechanisms for state accountability, more organic mechanisms for peer-learning, and connections between the various accountability spaces could support greater civil society engagement. National accountability mechanisms to be submitted to international monitoring bodies should draw on CSO and coalition experiences and provide space for the participation of marginalised communities in processes of SDG monitoring.

Data must inform advocacy efforts nationally and engage with the overarching international SDG monitoring architecture described above. With the SDGs progressively becoming the dominant framework for global development discourse, the evidence generated by CSOs to monitor progress on the SDGs could be used for multiple other purposes. For instance, with increasing emphasis on learning assessments in SDG 4 implementation, CSOs can both promote larger quality learning indicators beyond assessments and monitor implementation of assessments that may have deleterious or discriminatory effects. One finding from the data collected and the RTEI case study is that organisations can develop their own core lists of SDG indicators that draw upon SDG 4, the Education 2030 FFA, human rights law, and regional or national policy frameworks and supplement them with qualitative data to address specific reporting needs.

5.2 *Civil Society-Led Accountability*

CSOs represented in this study highlighted how citizen participation, focus on addressing marginalisation, strengthening national advocacy, supporting coalition building, and supplementing official monitoring with alternative perspectives were critical to make SDG 4 monitoring rights-based. Citizens' participation, especially with marginalised communities, such as persons with disabilities and women and girls, was particularly emphasised in rights-based approaches. The focus on equity in rights-based approaches to SDG 4

monitoring can be strengthened to better identify discrimination within countries that impede fulfilment of the goals. Despite the SDG agenda's inclusion of Target 4.5 with a specific focus on equity, CSOs currently have difficulty identifying data about discrimination. This was evident in RTEI and in survey responses. When data are available, CSOs are unsure where to report discrimination in official SDG 4 monitoring mechanisms.

While working on official reporting, CSOs can engage with accountability institutions, such as statistics and education ministries, to strengthen data collection and emphasise specific avenues for government attention that may be relevant in strengthening respect for human rights and fulfilling SDG 4. Given that survey respondents highlighted the lack of official understanding of the relationship between the right to education and SDG 4, referencing specific national obligations to international law can clarify this relationship and advance rights-based monitoring and implementation. These efforts are already underway as interviewees and the RTEI case study presented awareness-raising with state officials and other stakeholders as key to early stages of SDG 4 monitoring.

5.3 *Capacity Development*

Data availability is a critical problem for both the state and CSOs undertaking monitoring. CSOs can work to strengthen data systems and generate their own reports and evidence, either through national-level questionnaires like RTEI's or local- and school-based data collection. The state is ultimately responsible for collecting the requisite data to monitor SDG 4 implementation and may reject alternative data sources. The most frequent type of monitoring reported in this chapter related to official data monitoring systems, and the largest challenge was weak information systems that complicated reporting. Survey respondents and interviewees identified working with national accountability institutions directly as one example of rights-based SDG 4 monitoring. At the same time, respondents felt that both CSOs and state officials lacked adequate understanding of the SDG framework and aspects of monitoring. Consequently, to increase the likelihood that SDG monitoring and implementation are successful, stronger investment in capacity building for both state and civil society is warranted.

Although only mentioned briefly in survey responses, CSOs can engage in SDG monitoring by identifying additional indicators to supplement international benchmarks and localise national advocacy. Focussing on assessments, CSOs can use national assessments and disaggregated data to identify equity and discrimination concerns across regions, marginalised groups, and income levels, among other factors. TCC's development of further data collection

TABLE 17.1 Comparison of SDG 4 indicators with RTEI indicators

SDG Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.	
SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Percentage of children/young people (i) in grades 2/3; (ii) at the end of primary; and (iii) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (a) reading and (b) mathematics	4.3.3: What percent of students received a passing score on the national assessment/exam? a. Overall primary b. Reading primary c. Math primary d. Overall secondary e. Reading secondary f. Math secondary
Administration of a nationally representative learning assessment (i) in grades 2/3 (ii) at the end of primary and (iii) at the end of lower secondary	
Gross intake ratio to the last grade (primary, lower secondary)	3.3.2: What is the net enrolment rate aa. For primary schools? (Overall) ba. For secondary schools? (Overall)
Completion rate (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary)	3.3.3aa: What is the school completion rate? aa. Overall primary ba. Overall secondary
Out-of-school rate (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary)	One minus the net enrolment rate (measured in 3.3.2)
Percentage of children over-age for grade (primary, lower secondary)	Not available
Number of years of (i) free and (ii) compulsory primary and secondary education guaranteed in legal frameworks	3.1.1: Do national laws provide for free and compulsory education?
SDG Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university.	
SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex	Unavailable

(cont.)

TABLE 17.1 Comparison of SDG 4 indicators with RTEI indicators (*cont.*)

Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education	3.3.1ca What is the gross enrolment rate for technical and vocational training? (Overall) 3.3.1da What is the gross enrolment rate for tertiary schools?
Participation rate in technical-vocational education programmes (15- to 24-years old)	Unavailable

SDG Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated	3.3.2: What is the net enrolment rate for primary schools? – For females divided by the rate for males – In rural areas divided by the rate in urban areas – For people with lower income divided by higher income, or – For people with disabilities divided by the overall rate. 3.3.2: What is the net enrolment rate for secondary schools? – For females divided by the rate for males – In rural areas divided by the rate in urban areas – For people with lower income divided by higher income, or – For people with disabilities divided by the overall rate.

(*cont.*)

TABLE 17.1 Comparison of SDG 4 indicators with RTEI indicators (*cont.*)

Percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction	5.2.3: What percent of students are not taught in their mother tongue?
Extent to which explicit formula-based policies reallocate education resources to disadvantaged populations	Unavailable
Education expenditure per student by level of education and source of funding	1.5.1: What is the current public expenditure per pupil as a percentage of GDP per capita?
Percentage of total aid to education allocated to low income countries	Unavailable

SDG Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex	4.3.4: What is the literacy rate ab. For male youth? ac. For female youth? bb. For male adults? bc. For female adults?
Youth/adult literacy rate	4.3.4: What is the literacy rate? aa. Youth Overall? ba. Adult Overall?
Participation rate of youth/adults in literacy programmes	3.1.6 Is basic education publicly provided for adults who have not completed primary education?

(*cont.*)

TABLE 17.1 Comparison of SDG 4 indicators with RTEI indicators (*cont.*)

SDG Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education, and (d) student assessment	<p>4.1.1: Do national laws or policies direct education towards the following aims? And</p> <p>4.1.2: Does the national curriculum direct education towards the following aims? And</p> <p>4.3.1 Do national assessments or exams attempt to evaluate pupils progress towards the following aims?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms– The development of respect for the child’s parents, cultural identity, language, and values, as well as respect for the values of the child’s country and other civilisations– The development of the child’s responsibilities in a free society, including understanding, peace, tolerance, equality, and friendship among all persons and groups– The development of respect for the natural environment <p>4.1.5b Does national curriculum include the following topic? Human rights</p> <p>4.3.2b Do national assessments or exams evaluate pupil’s understanding of the following topic? Human Rights</p>

(*cont.*)

TABLE 17.1 Comparison of SDG 4 indicators with RTEI indicators (*cont.*)

Percentage of students by age group (or education level) showing adequate understanding of issues relating to global citizenship and sustainability	Unavailable
Percentage of 15-year-old students showing proficiency in knowledge of environmental science and geoscience	Unavailable
Percentage of schools that provide life skills-based HIV and sexuality education	Unavailable
Extent to which the framework on the World Programme on Human Rights Education is implemented nationally	Unavailable

SDG Target 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.

SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)	2.2.4: What is the percentage of schools with potable water? a. For primary schools? b. For secondary schools?
Percentage of students experiencing bullying, corporal punishment, harassment, violence, sexual discrimination, and abuse	5.1.2: Are reasonable accommodation measures available for children with disabilities in mainstream schools?
Number of attacks on students, personnel, and institutions	4.2.4: Does corporal punishment occur in practice?
	Unavailable

(*cont.*)

TABLE 17.1 Comparison of SDG 4 indicators with RTEI indicators (*cont.*)

SDG Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states.

SDG indicators	RTEI indicator
Percentage of teachers qualified according to national standards by education level and type of institution	2.3.1 What is the percentage of teachers that are appropriately trained
Pupil/qualified teacher ratio by education level	2.3.2 What is the minimum standard pupil-trained teacher ratio? b. Primary school d. Secondary school
Percentage of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organised teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country	Unavailable
Pupil/trained teacher ratio by education level	Unavailable
Average teacher salary relative to other professions requiring a comparable level of education qualification	2.3.4: What is the mean teacher salary relative to the national mean salary?
Teacher attrition rate by education level	Unavailable
Percentage of teachers who received in-service training in the last 12 months by type of training	Unavailable

SOURCES: UN (2015B); RESULTS EDUCATIONAL FUND (2016)

strategies and its training of citizens and policymakers to collect rigorous data for SDG monitoring presents one potential path for CSO monitoring. However, primary data collection and coordination for SDG monitoring remains the

responsibility of the state, and CSOs may not be equipped to rigorously collect or analyse nationwide assessment data without national infrastructure and statistics. Although school- and local-based monitoring can often provide valuable insights, national ministries and organising bodies must bring data to one place, rather than require CSOs to collect and analyse primary data themselves.

Organisational and practitioners' experiences show how CSOs can contribute to SDG accountability by using rights-based approaches that policymakers may overlook. This includes informal monitoring with communities most directly affected by SDG 4 implementation and creating networks of organisations and policymakers to enhance national capacity to monitor SDG 4. As SDG 4 monitoring develops, CSOs can continue and enhance monitoring mechanisms by presenting rights-based approaches and highlighting what mechanisms have the most impact on national actors. Given the role that CSOs have played in shaping the SDG agenda, they also have a critical role in ensuring that governments are held to account for its implementation.

Notes

- 1 These include universality, transparency, equity, participation, and action-orientation (Together 2030, 2016).
- 2 The annual reports submitted by Major Groups and Other Stakeholders do not constitute comprehensive monitoring reports.
- 3 This included the online RTEI community, the Right to Education Project's community, the Global Campaign for Education community, the Global Partnership for Education community, and the Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights email lists. All surveys were conducted via email and Survey Monkey and analysed using Microsoft Excel for frequencies. Qualitative questions were analysed using a content analysis of repeated themes. Staff from 12 different national organisations in 10 countries, one regional organisation, and two global organisations completed the survey. Twelve respondents skipped the organisational demographic questions. Of survey respondents, four participants provided further follow-up in interviews.
- 4 The tool was developed in consultation with civil society organisations from 2013 to 2015, piloted in five countries, and completed the first round of data collection in 2016. It includes indicators monitoring governance, availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability to the right to education (Tomaševski, 2006).
- 5 In 2016, CSO participants in RTEI were from Australia, Canada, Chile, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Nigeria, Palestine, the Philippines, South Korea, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zimbabwe. RTEI CSO partners identified data from national governmental sources,

prioritising most recent data. When national data was unavailable, organisations identified international governmental data, then national research organisation data, and finally news reports and other sources.

- 6 Due to the small sample in RTEI 2016, only 15 countries' data were analysed by imputation when fewer than three countries were missing data. This was done by calculating a given indicator's mean values for only the region and income group to which the country with missing data belongs, then replacing the missing values with the smallest value between those two means.