Success Story: The Abidjan Principles

ISSUE:
The last twenty years have witnessed a massive and unprecedented increase of private providers of social services – such as education, health, and water - worldwide, as well as an increase of private actors in other forms, such as through the financialisation of the funding of public services.

GI-ESCR works to ensure that the changes that are taking place do not exacerbate inequality, ensure inclusion of the most disadvantaged, and are done with respect of human rights standards. It also works to develop alternative solutions and narratives to the dominant market paradigms. The aim is to seek redress to the imbalances of power that often result from the privatisation of the delivery of public services.

ACTION:
GI-ESCR played a leading role in the development and adoption of the ‘Abidjan Principles on the Human rights Obligations of States to Provide Public Education and to Regulate Private Involvement in Education’ (Abidjan Principles). From the initial research and discussions, to establishing the Secretariat and Drafting Committee, GI-ESCR has worked with partners to catalyse the development process of the Abidjan Principles.

In many domestic, regional and international spaces, GI-ESCR monitors developments to advocate for the integration of human rights, and the Abidjan Principles, into key strategies and policies. Through a broadly consultative and inclusive approach, GI-ESCR seeks to use the Abidjan Principles as a tool to leverage a large mobilisation for public services, to develop strong rights-based counter-narratives and solutions, and to help individuals and communities to demand legal and political accountability.

RESULT:
In February 2019, the Abidjan Principles were adopted by over 50 eminent experts on the right to education, following a three-year consultative process with decision-makers, communities and practitioners.

This landmark text is quickly becoming one of the reference instruments on the right to education in the context of the growing privatisation and commercialisation of education worldwide and is increasingly considered as a potential game-changer for public services.

The Abidjan Principles have been endorsed by civil society organisations and have been recognised as a tool for States to ensure the realisation of the right to education by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education also endorsed the Abidjan Principles and in her June 2019 report she discusses how they can be used for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education.
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ACTIVITIES:

In collaboration with partners, GI-ESCR engages in activities around the globe, including South Africa (May 2019), Nepal (October 2019) and Thailand (October 2019). These workshops convened representatives from local governments, youth groups, teachers and civil society organisations. Several other similar workshops are planned with partners around the world, based on their demands.

In Washington, DC., with the support of GI-ESCR, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, a signatory and champion of the Abidjan Principles, attended meetings with Executive Directors at the World Bank Annual Meetings to call on States to use the Abidjan Principles in their assessment of education project funding.

In Paris, GI-ESCR staff discussed the Abidjan Principles as a tool to move the right to education from rhetoric into action at the international, and national levels during UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) strategic debate series, ‘Breaking Barriers in Education’.

At the global level, GI-ESCR, in collaboration with partners, actively engaged with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) during the development of the private sector engagement strategy (2019). The adopted policy refers to, and largely reflects the Abidjan Principles, prohibiting the use of funding for for-profit provision of core education services, with few exceptional circumstances. GI-ESCR continues to actively engage in the policy discussions around the exceptional circumstances, to ensure these are in line with the Abidjan Principles.

GI-ESCR is also working with a range of States, such as Ivory Coast and France, and international institutions, such as UNESCO and the Francophonie organisation, to develop tools and conduct advocacy towards policymakers. GI-ESCR is, additionally, developing a range of other tools, including a commentary, as well as simplified versions and briefs of the Abidjan Principles for various audiences and in different languages.

RESULTS:

A few months after adoption, there are already encouraging and important outcomes. The Abidjan Principles have been recognised by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)’s private sector engagement strategy (2019), which could influence the allocation of billions of dollars in development aid. Civil society organisations around the world are mobilised to use the Abidjan Principles through trainings and engagement with States. The right to education has come back to the core of policy debates in education, as seen for instance recently at a public debate at the UNESCO specialised education agency. Litigation using the Abidjan Principles is on-going in several countries, including a case already won in Uganda.

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