

7 • Spanning citizenship spaces through transnational coalitions: the Global Campaign for Education

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Introduction

Globalization [...] has introduced a new space and framework for acting: politics is no longer subject to the same boundaries as before, and is no longer tied solely to state actors and institutions, the result being that additional players, new roles, new resources, unfamiliar rules and new contradictions and conflicts appear on the scene. In the old game, each playing piece made one move only. This is no longer true of the new nameless game for power and domination. (Beck 2005: 3–4)

In recent years, as Ulrich Beck's words indicate, a number of changes related to globalization and governance have challenged our assumptions about where power resides, and how and where civil society organizations (CSOs) can best engage to bring about significant policy changes. This chapter explores citizens' responses to these altered patterns of power and governance, highlighting the implications for citizens' changing perceptions of themselves and their identities. The case of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a civil society coalition that came together in 1999 to mobilize people across the world in a campaign for the right to quality, free education for all, demonstrates the potential for building global citizenship along two dimensions: a vertical dimension, in which people perceive global duty holders and are making claims against them, and a horizontal dimension, in which people are developing a sense of solidarity with others, locally, nationally and internationally.²

There are numerous challenges in building and sustaining inclusive and democratic coalitions which span multiple sites, spaces and identities of citizenship. Drawing upon the evidence from research in the UK, India and Nigeria, this chapter explores how these tensions may be negotiated in practice. When advocacy movements are able to mobilize effectively and across spaces, we argue, new – more multidimensional – identities and understandings of citizenship may emerge than are found in any single action space alone.³

Before focusing upon the case study findings, the first section of this chapter provides a brief overview of the changing governance landscape of education policies, which has given rise to the need for integrated advocacy movements, aiming to bring about mutually reinforcing changes at all levels of governance. This sets the context for considering how citizens have been mobilizing to express their citizenship and claim their rights in light of the changing global landscape, exploring how such mobilization across levels and spaces contributes to a changing sense of citizenship among those involved.

Who governs education? Power across boundaries

Though the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) declared the universal right to education in 1948, the responsibility for ensuring the right has often been considered that of national and local governments. National governments sign international treaties, and they also often define education policies, implement programmes, provide finance and set standards that determine the reality of education at the local level.

Farther down the governance chain, educational rights are the responsibilities of state and local governments as well. It is at these levels, depending upon the legal frameworks and practices in different contexts, that local funds are allocated, teachers hired and fired, and mechanisms for citizen involvement such as parent–teacher councils established. It is also at the local level that ordinary citizens directly experience the consequences of educational decisions. As one experienced education activist told us, ‘in many places, education is the last outpost of the state’.⁴

While education has often been thought of as the responsibility of states, education scholars increasingly argue that national education systems have been conditioned or affected by the international institutional context. Beyond the UNDHR, the right to education has been enshrined in multiple constitutions and charters, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Examining this trend, McNeely and Cha argue that with ‘an increasingly integrated global system, individual nation-states within the system became subject to world-level ideological prescriptions and structural properties and influences’. In the field of education, this consolidation of the system gave rise to a variety of international organizations through which ‘the principles, norms, rules and procedures of the wider system are enshrined [...] and they have

become the carriers of the culture of the world polity' (1994: 2). Indeed, a bewildering array of international agencies – including UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank and UNICEF – are mandated in formal international architectures to gather, monitor and support how the various rights to education are being realized, to exchange information, and to set global standards. It has only been relatively recently that these intergovernmental agencies have come together in a more coordinated way, joined increasingly frequently by non-governmental agencies.

The late 1980s was a turning point when four major international organizations – UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme – began to work together towards hosting the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in 1990 in Jomtien. The WCEFA 'harnessed together a relatively uncoordinated group of education specialists across these agencies in an effort to expose the deterioration of worldwide access to education in the poorest of developing countries' (Mundy and Murphy 2001: 98). It reaffirmed the importance of education as a priority for development, with the goals of universal access to primary education by the year 2000 and the reduction of adult illiteracy, particularly female illiteracy, by half. Following Jomtien, an interagency Education for All (EFA) commission was established 'charged with formulating a decade of EFA activities and overseeing the realisation of central WCEFA goals' (ibid.: 99).

At this stage the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was relatively limited, focusing primarily on their contributions as providers of educational services, rather than as global advocates for the achievement of rights to education. There were 'no clear structures for NGO participation in post-Jomtien activities and there was no NGO representative on the EFA Inter-Agency Steering Committee until 1997' (ibid.: 101). On the other hand, the growing coordination of international agencies, and the development of international structures of deliberation, provided a political opportunity for many NGOs that were looking for a new role in global governance debates, based more firmly on advocacy. These new international opportunities led to the establishment of the GCE in 1999.

Once established, however, the GCE had to contend with the complex structures through which the right to education was mediated. Many poor countries rely on international aid to finance education. While the Dakar Framework for Action on EFA, signed by 160 countries in 2000, pledged that no countries seriously committed to education for all would be thwarted in their achievement of that goal by a lack of resources,