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# **Education and International Geneva**

Perspectives from the field

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A research project funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), as part of a larger project with NORRAG/Geneva Graduate Institute

*January 2023 - Version 1*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We want to thank the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SEFRI) for giving us the means to conduct this research on a little-explored topic, that of the view of field actors on international cooperation in education.

We would also like to thank the representatives of the organizations who agreed to give their time and take a critical look at their institution while proposing avenues for improvement.

Finally, we would like to thank the Swiss Network for Education & International Cooperation (RECI) and eduCoop for allowing us to use these results to explore possible improvements in the activities of International Geneva.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

“In the field of development and its sub-sector of aid and international solidarity, no actor, institutional and/or individual, seems today to be able to escape questioning the effectiveness and efficiency of its actions” (Naëlou, Hofmann & Kojoué, 2020).

The city of Geneva hosts 38 international organizations, approximately 750 NGOs, and almost 180 member state missions to the UN Office in Geneva, in addition to many business and financial institutions. In this context, is the so-called International Geneva (IG) a key player in international cooperation, specifically in the education sector? This question was at the heart of research conducted jointly by teams from the University of Geneva and NORRAG/Geneva Graduate Institute in 2021 and 2022. We analyzed its potential influence through the eyes of the organizations that represent International Geneva at the level of the central headquarters and of the national antennas.

This report focuses on the national offices in the Global South, intending to get insights from the field. Indeed, analyzing the influence of an entity such as IG only makes sense if we look at the effects of the entity’s action on the ground.

In the framework of this research, we analyzed how the institutions representing International Geneva (IG) at the national level perceived this entity’s role on the ground.

***To what extent is IG influential in the education sector? And in what specific area? How does IG work with its national offices in the education sector? To what extent does IG take advantage of intersectorality?***

To answer these questions, we first reviewed the literature, which gave us some initial answers on the potential IG’s influence at the national level. We understand through this literature review that given the complexity of the influence of international entities like IG, it is difficult for the organizations’ representatives in the national contexts to detect the specific added value of IG’s actions on the ground, beyond the discursive, even normative level. The literature also highlights the weak capacity for making decisions at the national level: the orientations come above all from international headquarters, with little consideration of the problems that arise on the ground. Finally, according to the literature review, coordination issues are recurrent in international cooperation actions in education, especially in a context of intersectorality: the organizations act mainly according to their own interests, including in terms of sectoral priorities.

Secondly, we conducted interviews with representatives of IG institutions based at the national level to see if the field survey confirms the conclusions of the literature review, but also how the actors at the national level envisage addressing these challenges.

The choice of Dakar for the field survey is related to the fact that it is itself a hub attracting international organizations for West Africa/the Sahel region. Also, we have research experience in this context, which makes it easier to connect with specific actors in the field.

It should be noted that, as is often the case for qualitative research in the field of education policy, including questions on international cooperation, it takes work to find people who volunteer to answer questions in an interview setting. In addition, to select the interviewees, we used the "[Genève internationale](#)" website to identify institutions based in Dakar that work directly or indirectly (mainly through intersectorality) in the education sector. This reduced the number of opportunities, as we primarily approached the education officers of these institutions. However, even a small number of actors (seven in total) was sufficient to understand the issues related to the influence of international Geneva, especially since we have a good representation of different types of organizations (multilateral and NGOs).

In addition, to avoid jeopardizing the representatives of the organizations with whom we spoke, we chose to anonymize the interviews, as we announced to the Ethics Commission of the University of Geneva. This allowed our interlocutors to speak freely, often with a critical eye on their organization and international cooperation in general within the framework of IG. Also, we consider that some of the comments are sensitive because they touch on aspects of the functioning of organizations.

The report is composed of three parts: the first is devoted to the nuanced power of international entities on education systems, particularly in the countries of the Global South; the second to the question of ownership; the third to the issue of coordinating actions, specifically in a context of intersectorality.

## **PART I - INFLUENCE TO BE DETERMINED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR**

### **Literature review**

We begin from the idea that it is difficult for an international entity, however “powerful” it may be, to have an impact – what is more, a positive one – on national education systems. The latter’s actions are subject to dynamics that disrupt the objectives – relevant or not – initially set by the international entity. This part of the literature review answers the question: Can a significant global entity (in terms of the number of organizations) such as International Geneva (IG) influence actions on the ground? Can it be a vector of (positive) change? Finally, is there added value in IG’s specific actions? The literature already addresses some of these issues at a macro level – in particular at the level of organizational headquarters – and in terms of the complexity of their influence (internal divergences, divergences between organizations in a context of intersectorality, etc.); however, we will focus on the issues at the national level.

The primary trend in the scientific literature on the influence of international entities and international organizations in general, especially in sociology, is to adopt a critical approach that has as its main focus the analysis of the relationships of hegemony between different actors and levels of governance. This is notably the case for studies of large institutions such as the World Bank or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These organizations are seen as hyper-powerful entities that, by imposing their standards, leave little room for maneuvering, especially at national levels. Their influence on national education policies is said to be so powerful that their choices have direct effects at the local level. Mundy, Green, Lingard and Verger's (2016) *The Handbook of Global Education Policy* and Klees, Samoff and Stromquist's (2012) *The World Bank and Education: Critiques and Alternatives* illustrate this approach well: "These policies have been adopted uncritically and alternative policies have been ignored, which leads to our focus here. The World Bank is the major architect in formulating a global education policy and has been so for decades" (p. 209). This type of analysis may be relevant to understanding the IG’s influence: this entity brings together various major international organizations that are, themselves, involved in multiple sectors and, therefore, potentially powerful. These studies, which indeed represent points of reference in the analysis of global educational policies, have as their object the study of unbalanced power relations and the omnipotence of neoliberal ideology. However, they do not sufficiently consider the complexity of the processes linked to the specific national contexts in which international entities intervene.

It is crucial to consider theoretical elements that allow for a more detailed analysis of this type of influence because, as Lange (2003) points out, it is a matter of

putting the process of imposing international standards into perspective. Van Zanten (2004) and Yang (2010) insist on the need to see education policies as more than just implementing guidelines from an all-powerful force. In this context, there are several possible impediments to the influence of international entities: the heterogeneity of the interests involved (States, international organizations, etc.), the complexity of actors' strategies, the meandering of public decision-making, the reinterpretations during concrete implementation, the feedback effects, and the regular readjustments at local levels. All of these make any linear or causal reasoning impossible. In this regard, Yang (2010) brings in the concept of hybridization: "When global trends are encountered in the local context, some form of hybridization results from a combination of elements to make up the final program package for policy transfer" (p. 233). Different processes thus unfold when there are exogenous and endogenous elements in educational policies. While we do not question a certain homogenization of educational policies, we would like to qualify the powerful effects of the influence of transnational forces.

Moreover, in the face of this complexity, the general organization of international aid sometimes leads to "doing worse" (Doligez, 2020). Let us take the example of research conducted in Mali and Senegal on the influence of the World Bank to illustrate this point. The policies that led to the precariousness of teachers in the 1980s and 1990s, supposedly to rationalize the costs of education systems in crisis, ultimately led to teachers going on strike for months at a time, which meant that school programs could not be implemented. The adverse effects on student learning and teacher motivation came at a considerable cost to education systems. They thus did not allow for the rationalization initially desired by the World Bank (Lauwerier, 2013).

Adding to this complexity is the fact that, increasingly, international organizations are not acting alone in national education systems. International cooperation in education includes multiple actors who wish to play a role. From this point of view, national actors, including ministries of education, must consider various interests that can thwart the action of an international entity whose influence becomes difficult to perceive. To take the example of the World Bank, this organization, however powerful it may be, acts alongside other actors of international cooperation whose financial involvement in West Africa's national policy is significant. Multilateral organizations like UNICEF or bilateral organizations may hold more weight than the World Bank in terms of their impacts on, for instance, teacher policy in Mali or Senegal, notably through teacher training – although in the collective imagination, including that of researchers, the World Bank is the most powerful organization in most countries of the Global South (Lauwerier, 2013). In a context of multiple organizations and intersectoriality such as IG, it is essential to note that "the number and fluctuation of protagonists intervening in the name of development at different scales in the same country or region

complicate the deciphering of the specific effects of the interventions of each" (Naëlou, Hofmann & Kojoué, 2020). We will see below whether partnership frameworks allow for better visibility of the on-the-ground effects of the actions of multiple international organizations.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the difficulty for research capturing international entities' influence is rooted mainly in methodological issues. Few research findings are generated by on-the-ground investigation; even though they consider national contexts, many studies analyzing the influence of international entities refer only to institutional documents produced by the institutions themselves. Such studies emphasize, in particular, the potential impact of these documents: "It is my belief that the World Bank's texts represent such dominant discourse because they contribute to shaping people's lives. A few seemingly trivial words from the World Bank can convince politicians to adopt policies with far-reaching consequences" (Nordtveit, 2012, p. 21). Beyond the fact that there may be contradictions and evolutions in the organizations' discourse – and therefore, from this point of view, conclusions that are difficult to draw – the analysis of an international entity's influence should consider not only reports but also how the organization conducts itself on the ground. How are these texts translated into practice? The analysis of education policy is only relevant when conducted at different scales; otherwise, it fails to highlight the strategies of actors who implement this policy and, in our case, the potential role played by the IG organizations' representatives in national contexts..

By way of synthesis, we understand through this literature review that given the complexity of the influence of international entities like IG, it will be difficult for the organizations' representatives in the national contexts to detect the specific added value of IG's actions on the ground, beyond the discursive, even normative level. In light of these observations, how does IG ensure that its action on the ground is effective and that it exerts a fundamental influence (beyond the discourse), constitutive of added value, on the beneficiaries of its actions?

### **Insights from the field**

In this section, we want to show that, despite the discourses indicating a strong influence of International Geneva (IG), this influence is somewhat limited on the ground.

Indeed, when we look at the official websites promoting IG, especially the one dedicated to it, or the websites of the city of Geneva and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), we understand, through the deployment of a growing marketing strategy, that this place has a specific role to play in the field

of international cooperation, even if the educational sector is not explicitly highlighted:

*{International Geneva} is a recognized center of expertise in the following areas:*

- *Peace, security, disarmament*
- *Humanitarian action and law, human rights, migration*
- *Work, economy, trade, science, telecommunications*
- *The health*
- *Environment and sustainable development. (SDC, 2022)*

On another site, we see “it is here {...} that responses to environmental challenges are developed; and that the fight against AIDS is organized. Victims of abuse, torture and violence find forums to be heard and to seek justice” (Genève internationale, 2022).

We, therefore, asked our interviewees what IG meant to them to understand whether the vision of this entity on the ground is similar to that of institutions based in Switzerland and Geneva.

Although representing the institutions of IG, we found that the actors in the field did not necessarily know the name of “International Geneva,” nor did they explicitly understand its meaning. One interviewee, who was very familiar with Geneva and its organizations, had never even heard of this term:

*It wasn't referring to anything very specific. When you contacted me, I obviously Googled a little bit and saw the general information. But no, I wasn't sure... [International Geneva] didn't refer to anything specific to me. I wasn't really aware of the structures, the objectives, or the working methods. (E6)*

Even for those familiar with this entity, it remained abstract in practice:

*The concept of International Geneva has a slightly theoretical side because it is an international place full of diversity. In fact, International Geneva is made up of many extremely different things. So it remains... it's a bit conceptual, actually. (E1)*

Still, for those who have an idea of what “International Geneva” can mean, they recognize that this name is more evident for Geneva-based representatives than for those in the field:

*People wouldn't really know what it was. I think there is a real awareness, including in all the humanitarian organizations, of the importance of Geneva in terms of action or regulation. In fact, I would say of international action. (...) Then, among the humanitarian actors themselves, it depends from one organization to another. There can be a mixture between International Geneva and the UN in the field... That is to say, whether it comes from New York or Geneva, in the end, we don't really know. (E1)*



From this point of view, we could sometimes see the confusion between IG and Switzerland, particularly through the SDC:

*They are rather discreet. However, in any case, as far as I know, they already do a lot, and it is in their interest to improve Geneva's visibility in cooperation programs. (E2)*

*I would mention the SDC itself, which holds an increasingly important place within our organization as... I don't know if the SDC supports us at the central level, at the level of our own financing. I don't know if it's the SDC or a ministry... I'm not very familiar with it. (E3)*

Moreover, it emerged that Bern could carry more weight in international cooperation in the field of education than Geneva:

*At the educational level, [the institution] works essentially in three main areas of action: (1) protection, (2) education, and (3) participation. Concerning education, in the action plan framework, there is an important emphasis on the aspect of education for sustainable development. These are elements that are in line with the objectives of sustainable development, as well as the strategic documents of the SDC. (E5)*

There is also the issue of distinguishing between the IG organizations, whose main headquarters are in Geneva, and the decentralized centers of these organizations. We understand that Geneva is thus not so central in reality:

*We work mainly with the International Training Center. So they are in... if I'm not mistaken, they are in Torino. We don't work much directly with the ILO [International Labour Organization], and we work more with their training center on training related to education, technical and vocational training, and the link with the labor market. (E3)*

*As far as we are concerned, in the region, we have interactions with the regional institutions and the countries we cover, and regional institutions that cover the region—potentially those that cover the region, but that are decentralized, like, for example, some donors like Education Cannot Wait and so on, that don't have a regional presence but that cover the region. In this case, we can have direct interactions within the region. However, otherwise, for the institutions based in Geneva and that are themselves decentralized with regional presences, we are in contact with the regional level rather than with the Geneva level. (E6)*

Moreover, IG was not considered an international place par excellence for concrete, fundamental issues. For the United Nations, in particular, New York was perceived by our interlocutors as having more weight: "Even in humanitarian matters, there are many things that depend on the United Nations Security Council. So it is not the political place of the United Nations" (E1).

Beyond IG as such, our interviews did not reveal a clear understanding of the role of this entity in the specific sector of education: "Personally, it is true that I do not particularly associate Geneva with education. I'm looking for it, but..." (E3).

Finally, some interlocutors assumed the role of marketing/communication in their positioning on IG without any identifiable substance:

*Well, at the time, I knew that Geneva was a more strategic choice because it was a "showcase" for us. I repeat the word, the expression that has been circulated, and therefore the ease of exchanges and proximity with other international organizations. That was really what motivated the choice of Geneva.* (E4)

Nevertheless, despite the vagueness of the concept of "International Geneva," especially for the education sector, many of our interlocutors emphasized the critical role played in the humanitarian field:

*International Geneva exists for two reasons for me. It exists around the fact that... there are UN headquarters and that there is the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross]. This is what created International Geneva in the first place. So a whole bunch of fascinating dynamics is based on this. The Humanitarian Lab... the Innovation Lab... I think it has created a dynamic around the humanitarian sector, which is extremely interesting.* (E1)

*This humanitarian community is... it is felt quite strongly. I have often spoken about this with colleagues from international NGOs: the idea of having someone in Geneva, that's how we say it: "You have to have someone in Geneva". It's quite strong, and it means that there is a humanitarian tropism in Geneva that is important, so it's difficult sometimes to say exactly how the concept is seen and experienced by everyone. However, I think there is a real reality to this humanitarian community in Geneva.* (E1)

More specifically, in the field of education, some interviewees noted (although the questions may have led them to this conclusion) that IG has an increasing influence on the issue of education in emergencies: "That said, we must qualify [the low weight of International Geneva] a little bit, because the networks like INEE, the network for education in emergencies if I'm not talking nonsense, are based in Geneva" (E2).

For organizations particularly involved in this issue, the influence of IG was major, as evidenced by the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies:

*If we take the newly created Global Hub for Education in Emergencies... which was created in Geneva, we can now establish contact according to the area of interest, such as when they have events that concern the region, etc. However,*

*for example, the focal point for us as [the institution] in the Global Hub is the person at the headquarters level. (E6)*

Furthermore, our interlocutors recognized advocacy as a potential means of influence in the field of education:

*It is not a very strong operational center. In fact, International Geneva has become a rather strong center for humanitarian debate. Besides, the big NGOs that are present in Geneva are not the operational sections, except for Doctors Without Borders, but that case is a bit special. The others are representative offices, so we are there for all the debates, advocacy, and that kind of thing. So, that really exists for me. (E1)*

*At this level, it is sincerely on the level of advocacy. For instance, in working to ensure that the Senegalese school, at least the quality, is there and to sound the alarm on the risk of privatization of the Senegalese public school, this is the level where I really see the challenges and particular expectations. (E5)*

*Geneva really has added value because of its location, not only between the different organizations but also because most of the donors, country missions, and so on are there. (E6)*

This advocacy can focus on increasing funding for education. Again, the issue of education in emergencies emerged in the interviews:

*Well, education, particularly in emergencies—and humanitarian funding—has increased in recent years, but it remains largely underfunded compared to other sectors. So, that is transparent. Beyond that, I think that the issue of forced displacement in general in all funding... so we are talking about intersectorality... and when we see the numbers of the campaigns, whether for WHO or health in general, and the percentage that is taken into account for forced displacement situations, it is really minimal. This is also the case in many other sectors. So, from my small vantage point and my position, I would say that, on the one hand, education in emergencies is relevant to the humanitarian response in general. On the other hand, situations of forced displacement are relevant to the more general response and the more general design of programs, whether humanitarian or generally developmental. (E6)*

Within the framework of this advocacy, one respondent saw IG as a place where funds could be catalyzed for education systems in the Global South:

*Geneva must also be able to finance projects. Today, if Geneva commits itself to work strategically on lifting the bottlenecks to truly free education, at least in the first ten years, we must also be able to feel it on the ground. This is because free education is not equivalent to the little crumbs children pay as school fees; on the contrary, it is more than that. (E4)*

These debates are all the more favorable when this place is conceived as a neutral and stable zone:

*It's a real place for debate. (...) I think that it provides a real opening to an international debate around humanitarian issues, which is still very important. When you work in this field, you have the possibility to influence. (...) It is still a place where a certain number of debates occur and where it remains a sphere of neutrality that makes debate possible, including at a political level...very, very political, and at a fairly high level. So, I think this creates International Geneva: this humanitarian anchoring and then a space for debate. (E1)*

*Geneva should not suffer from its notoriety as the capital of a stable country, recognized as a financial center, which also reflects... the character of trust that the partners already have. We will no longer look for aspects of trust and credibility in Geneva. (E4)*

In addition to neutrality and stability, an accessible, "local" aspect was also identified:

*The added value is really to have the possibility of confronting several extremely varied actors and then exchanging with them in the same place. You can't get that anywhere else, even in New York... New York is a very different place; it's a very political place. Geneva is smaller, and that makes it easier, too. There's a local side to it, which facilitates this connection. In my previous job, I arrived to set up a kind of representational function with the United Nations and other NGOs. Well, it's not easy, but I managed to do it on my own... we managed to contact people and create links. Geneva is also made for that, and I find it an enormous added value in terms of... Well, so that the different actors can learn from each other and eventually improve. (E1)*

*If this working group were in Vienna or New York, I don't think it would make much difference to our analysis. At the same time, I think that the proximity that we have here in Geneva has made it easier for us to get involved in these groups. (E1)*

Thus, from the point of view of advocacy, it is a matter of mobilizing influential actors in the field who will then relay messages during their stay in Geneva: "In Geneva, what we used to do was to work with, for example, the ambassadors of African countries who were there. Also with the African Union" (E7). Lobbying strategies are then put in place to orient the discourse of influential actors in the field:

*What we do is that, with the African organizations that are well represented in International Geneva, for example, the embassies and even the African Union, we also try to participate... that is to say, to propose capacity building on the issues that have been dealt with. We also try to synthesize them to make proposals... to tell them, "Here, this question could be addressed as such; this*

*question is also one that comes up, and yet it is not well treated in International Geneva. (E7)*

Finally, and not unrelated to advocacy, another role for IG, identified with the interviews, was that of academic research and training. Indeed, this place is renowned for its academic institutions, including the University of Geneva (60th in the world in the Shanghai Ranking) and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. International dimensions are present in these institutions, especially in the field of education. This has repercussions on the ground:

*We even received students from the University of Geneva who came to Senegal to study the current problem of education of talibé children and thus to accompany us and reinforce the work that we had to do. We also had academics who came to provide their input regarding the impact of the vocational training we provide. We think that all these elements allow us to have an external view of all the work being done in Senegal. (E5)*

The research process was said to be facilitated by the fact that academic and cooperation institutions were located in the same place: “We worked on an applied research project between students and an organization” (E1).

In addition to its value for research, International Geneva was recognized as a center for training in the field of international cooperation:

*We have a training program in humanitarian analysis. Again, it is a program that does not give... that doesn't give university credits. However, it has been developed with a certain number of United Nations agencies, so International Geneva finds its meaning there. In fact, we have organized the Humanitarian Analysis Program for several years. We organized it in Geneva and did others in the field. (E1)*

Moreover, studies at the academic institutions of IG, particularly at the University of Geneva, can lead to involvement in international cooperation. This was the case for one respondent, who held a position of responsibility in Dakar in an institution representing IG: “I am a Senegalese. By training, I am an economist. I spent a good part of my studies in Geneva, at the University of Geneva... I finished in 2019” (E7).

## **PART II - A COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TOP-DOWN APPROACH**

### **Literature review**

Having faced significant criticism, international cooperation is trying to evolve toward more inclusive practices of “Southization,” which will seriously consider the populations at the heart of its actions. Many relevant concepts have appeared over the last two decades: *integration, participation, involvement, capacity development, capacity building, appropriation, ownership, empowerment, autonomization, leadership, localization*, etc. This would end a pattern of North/South or West/Rest domination (Joxe, 2020). However, according to Naëlou, Hofmann, and Kojoué (2020), this transition towards (at least) the delegation of decisions is not simple:

More fundamentally, aid actors are faced with constrained choices between strategic orientations, either technocratic and quantitative, or concerted and qualitative. The first path is supposed to strengthen organizations by integrating them fully into the aid system, at the risk of a certain industrialization, and the second carries an objective of experimentation and renewal of practices that make it possible to distinguish the contributions of organizations, but carries a potential risk of marginalization within the aid market. (p. 28)

The literature reveals that, even if practices are evolving, power remains, implicitly or explicitly, in the hands of policymakers in the North. For example, a reading of sector policy documents or many other analytical or measurement tools promoted by donors and written by experts with the laudable aim of supporting governments highlights texts that are often long and complex and in which the finesse of the analysis sometimes seems to take precedence over its pragmatism necessary for implementation (Michel & Prigent, 2016). However, even if international cooperation organizations are often blamed for the failures of education systems in the countries of the Global South, more and more authors are emphasizing the responsibility of national actors. Following the period of independence, the cause of underdevelopment was attributed to recurrent colonialism. Today, we know that failures in various areas of development are primarily due to internal causes, and the State has a large share of responsibility for the current situation (Lauwerier, 2011).

Having said that, despite changes in the methodology of development assistance, many criticisms are leveled at international cooperation in education. A common criticism is that projects or programs are still too often thought of in a top-down way without setting up actual participatory processes at different levels (design, implementation, and evaluation), where such participatory processes would allow, among other things, project ownership at the national policy level – but also, and especially, at the level of beneficiaries. Indeed, very often, decisions in international cooperation projects are rarely made by States and/or with local



actors. This is all the more problematic because international cooperation rarely examines what happens in the system and classrooms, specifically by observing and exchanging with teachers about their practices, knowledge, and objectives (Prigent & Cros, 2018).

In a recent study (Lauwerier, 2019a), we examined the practices of international cooperation institutions in education with headquarters in Switzerland. In this context, we highlighted the contradictions between, on the one hand, actions that are explicitly linked to national and local priorities and based on the needs of the institutions' beneficiaries and, on the other hand, approaches that exclude the perspectives of the actors on the ground. Some representatives of these institutions noted that the projects or programs were designed according to a model specific to the cooperation structure, without any actual ownership by national and local actors: "We have developed a tool in one country that we will use in other countries. That is not my vision. [...] You cannot come in and then think that the system can integrate that" (Lauwerier, 2019b).

This leads us us to address another crucial issue related to ownership: the sustainability of activities beyond the intervention of international cooperation in education. Local actors must have sufficient ownership of a project or program in order to be able to implement it sustainably once the international cooperation withdraws. Indeed, Enée (2010) notes that massive aid from outside contributes to favoring a certain kind of assistance and, finally, produces perverse results in the long term: "There is never any guarantee that the actions will continue. [...] And when there is no permanent monitoring, quality decreases, especially in emergencies" (Lauwerier, 2019b).

In summary, according to the literature review, we can hypothesize that IG representatives in the field will highlight the weak capacity of national-based actors for making decisions: the orientations come above all from Geneva, with little consideration of the problems that arise on the ground, including from the organizations' national relays. Our question is to what extent International Geneva contributes to greater national ownership: 1) how the offices at the national level accompany this process; and 2) whether these offices have the means to influence the organizations' direction since they are more familiar with the challenges in the field.

### **Insights from the field**

As we noted in the literature review, for the influence of an international entity to be fruitful for the actors in the education system, the orientations must not be perceived as exogenous. They must be owned by the actors who will

operationalize them. We will therefore look at how International Geneva (IG) works with the actors in the field to understand how the guidelines are defined.

Although decried for years, international entities, like IG, still function according to a top-down process in the view of the actors we spoke to in Dakar. Indeed, we note that the directions came essentially from the headquarters; they were not expanded on (or not very much) with the actors in the field who knew the realities well:

*That is to say, all the international strategies are implemented in the field, particularly in countries such as Senegal, Guinea, Togo, and Madagascar (...) [The institution] has a strategic plan for... if I take the current one, it is for 2020 to 2025. These are the strategic priorities and orientations until 2029. So, when I talk about compliance and consistency, this means that all the strategic and operational choices we make here... we make sure that these projects are consistent with the three directions and the three strategic priorities, that is one. In principle, these projects also respect the nine principles we have defined over the five years and then the targets so that everything respects the targeting that has been done. (E4)*

*As we are a Swiss organization, we must also align ourselves with the orientations and, therefore, the directives of Swiss cooperation. This is why I said that one of the reference documents on which we work is the SDC's strategy document, which is useful for everything related to the educational dimension. (...) There are fundamentals and principles that, in any case, we have to work on. In any case, we are inspired by the orientation documents and reflections developed at the headquarters. (E5)*

*From our point of view, when we look at the macro level, and even when we look at the SDGs, for example, we can say that the objectives were set but without the means of being defined appropriately. This is a bit difficult because the contexts are not the same. There are realities on the ground that are not the same. (E7)*

Nevertheless, there are some positive experiences of a whole process of ownership in the actions at the field level:

*It is rarely a vertical relationship. That is to say, we are free to decide on our action plans and our projects, and we defend them. If headquarters ask questions, it's not to correct them, but normally, like any headquarters, the intent is to ensure the relevance of the orientations; the added value of the impact on the populations; and the efficiency, effectiveness, and conformity with the national policies. (E4)*

*There are, of course, exchanges with Geneva and {another headquarter in Europe}, essentially because these are the two areas where we have the headquarters, which give a bit of direction. (...) After Geneva and {another headquarter in Europe}, they give a global strategic vision and general*



*guidelines, and the regions translate them into regional strategies according to their specific context. (E6)*

Consultation with the field offices often occurs with entities other than International Geneva, like the European Union or the French Development Agency:

*There are consultations that the European Union organizes, and so it goes through a group of technical and financial partners in education. So, we get together, and then we discuss the priorities for the next planning, and so on. So, we are working seriously on that. The second case study that I know of is also a matter of French cooperation. The French cooperation, at any given moment, says, "You work in education in Senegal. What are your priorities, what are the challenges, and what are the difficulties?" (E4)*

The top-down approach is counterproductive, as many studies have already shown because if decisions mainly come from Geneva, there is no support from the populations concerned and, therefore no will to implement the orientations:

*One of the things that are a problem here in Africa... Generally, people tend to believe that all these decisions or proposals that come from above are dictated to them. (...) So, I think it's always important not only to start from the grassroots to understand the issues, but also to involve the local actors. (...) In my opinion, it is always fundamental for these objectives to start from the ground to understand and involve the local actors so that it does not appear as though the decisions come from the top. So, for me, it is fundamental that we have this approach, which must be integrated at the level of International Geneva. (E7)*

To respond to this challenge, one of the appropriate measures would be to establish a better representation of countries that have traditionally been set aside, even though they are primarily concerned with the IG orientations so that their voices are taken into consideration:

*We also felt African organizations were not represented well at this level. Nevertheless, many issues are dealt with, or let's say that should normally be at the center of everything that is done, including climate change... the effect of climate change, access to water... even some other related issues, like individual freedoms and everything. (E7)*

This is why some organizations have created local branches in the Global South and, in our case, Dakar:

*The objective is really to allow African organizations of different kinds to be at the heart of International Geneva without being physically there and also to be aware of the central issues that are dealt with. (...) So, we really try to contribute to what is done in International Geneva from our local antenna. (E7)*

Nevertheless, as the general IG orientations are disconnected from the realities of the field, it seems more relevant that operationalization is ultimately decided in Dakar. Conscious of this need, organizations tend to decentralize the process of conception and implementation of actions at the national level:

*So, the operation of [the institution] in the last few years has been decentralized considerably. (...) There are two roles, in fact, at the office level since [the institution] was decentralized: we have both a technical support role for the operations we cover, so technical support for the development and programming of education programs, and supervision of these same programs. (E6)*

*So, we are with the locals; we discuss these issues with them. These are the issues we will raise now so that they can serve as something solid at the level of International Geneva. Generally, there is always a gap between the theoretical questions treated at the level of International Geneva and what happens on the ground. That is one issue. Secondly, the local populations, to the extent that they feel involved in these issues, are more cooperative and participate better. Therefore, there is more fluidity between the exchanges and even the proposed measures at the level of International Geneva. For us, it is fundamental that there be this link between those at the top and those at the bottom, who are, in reality, the real actors. (E7)*

## **PART III - INTERSECTORALITY UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

### **Literature review**

In addition to the complexity of ownership in the actions of international cooperation in education (Part II), the overlapping political agendas of a multiplicity of actors can lead to contradictions and inconsistencies (Bray & Russell, 2013). Thus, we address the issue of coordinating actions on the ground in this part of the literature review.

The 2000 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness is explicit: “Donors commit to harmonize their activities. Harmonization should focus on [...] coordination of political engagement; and practical initiatives such as the establishment of joint donor offices.” (OECD, 2000). Indeed, coordinating aid would make it possible to act more effectively in favor of populations in need by joining human and financial forces rather than leaving each party to act alone. This would be all the more the case in the context of a proliferation of cooperation institutions and new financing mechanisms in the Global South (Lauwerier, 2021).

However, these intentions, relevant as they may be, have been in vain for decades of cooperation in the education sector. As far back as 1967, the British think tank ODI pointed out the lack of coordination among aid agencies, criticizing the anomalies resulting from conflicts of interest, different administrative procedures, and contradictory prescriptions for the social progress of recipient countries.

We wish to illustrate the challenge of coordinating international cooperation actions on the ground with two concrete examples. We refer, again, to the previously-mentioned research on the practices of NGOs based in Switzerland. These NGOs have clearly shown that coordinating actions on the ground remains challenging to address. Only 50% of respondents to a questionnaire mentioned that their actions in the field were coordinated with similar actions of other institutions: “There is a special atmosphere among the actors. We are somewhat competitors,” said an informant during an interview. In concrete terms, dozens of NGOs intervene in in-service training for teachers with their own programs and approaches without necessarily consulting one another on the possibility of joint actions. Moreover, “the big and small actors are not at the same level” since some institutions have a more privileged place than others in the decision-making process at the national level, and not all have access to the same level of information about the actions carried out in a given country (Lauwerier, 2021).

Another example is the action of French cooperation in the context of the G5 Sahel. The effects of a lack of coordination can be dramatic in such contexts of extreme adversity: schools are closed by the hundreds, leaving thousands of

children unable to attend. The COVID-19 crisis has amplified these challenges. Key people in the French cooperation system go so far as to say that “if we take this further, the problem of financial resources is not a problem. There are about 40-50 projects and dozens of actors, often lacking coordination and overlapping projects.” A report published in 2019 by the French Education Coalition network showed that the inventory of on-the-ground actions does not reveal any real overall coherence, which poses the risk of amplifying existing imbalances (Lauwerier, 2021).

It also seems interesting from the point of view of the coordination issue to draw a parallel between International Geneva (IG) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE): both entities bring together several international organizations. While the GPE is solely concerned with education, IG has the additional challenge of intersectorality. The GPE was created partly to address the coordination challenge, with the conviction that “by working better together, through collaboration and coordination, the aid regime will become more democratic and participatory.” However, the multilateral and bilateral cooperation institutions represented within the GPE continue to act independently and according to their own agendas, which limits this coordination effort (Menashy, 2018). The influence of countries from the North through bilateral cooperation remains strong. Furthermore, the GPE was initiated by the World Bank, and since its creation, a relationship of dependence has persisted between the two institutions. In particular, the Bank physically hosts the GPE, employs its staff, or serves as a supervisory entity in most recipient countries. Although external evaluations have identified this close relationship, the two organizations remain very close. Beyond the World Bank, donor countries from the North, particularly those providing significant aid, are widely perceived as having power within the GPE; they are the ones who sit on the Council with the most critical votes. Actors collaborate under the guise of equity in decision-making. However, those who have historically built up administrative positions, possess material resources, and speak the dominant languages are positioned differently from others within the partnership, giving them a more remarkable ability to influence the organization's direction. As such, they maintain their hierarchical positions by upholding structures that reproduce their dominant status, thus contradicting the principles underlying the GPE's mandate (Lauwerier, 2019c). In the case of IG, we can hypothesize that small International Geneva organizations, such as human-sized NGOs, may not have the same weight or power on the ground or in country-level negotiations with states as large structures like UNICEF, the World Health Organization, or the International Labour Organization.

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO), based in Geneva, published a report capitalizing on the experience of intersectorality in the field of health, with the initial hypothesis of the added value of going beyond the health sector:

“Without working beyond the health sector, we will simply be unable to address the complex challenges that we face in our efforts to improve health and well-being, and reduce inequalities and inequities” (WHO, 2018, p. vii). Nevertheless, the organization highlights the many challenges encountered in this experiment:

A lack of political will or commitment has been cited as a clear challenge. Other common challenges include a lack of resources and coordination; inability or failure to identify co-benefits and to act in win-win situations; poor communication and ambiguous use of language; and entrenched siloed thinking, where resources are restricted for use only within a specific sector or program. In a few cases, the health sector's own perceived superiority was mentioned as a barrier to collaboration with other sectors. In several cases, multisectoral and intersectoral approaches struggled to overcome conflicting interests between sectors, power imbalances and competition for resources, which made sustainability over time unachievable. A change of government or ministers was also found to present a challenge in terms of continuity and sustainability of policies and initiatives (p. xii).

IG will have to learn from this experience to limit the potential constraints to intersectorality and, in the first place, by addressing the issue of effective coordination.

Finally, we would like to highlight positive experiences in favor of better coordination. More and more consultation frameworks are being created on the ground, bringing together the Ministry of Education and significant cooperation institutions in any given country. In Mali, for example, the Education Cluster, jointly managed by the Ministry, Save the Children, and UNICEF, aims to develop capacity and coordination mechanisms to improve responses to humanitarian crises and to strengthen the capacity and readiness of humanitarian staff and government authorities for planning and to manage the quality of education programs in emergencies (Lauwerier, 2021).

To conclude this section, it should be noted that coordinating the actions of international organizations constitutes a real historical challenge for the concretization of the concept of “International Geneva,” especially in a context of intersectorality: the organizations act mainly according to their own interests, including in terms of sectoral priorities. It will be necessary to understand better how national relays of International Geneva promote coordination on the ground, including by pooling the actions of organizations from other sectors (health, labor, etc.). Do international organizations within IG act in a coordinated way on the ground? If so, are we observing positive effects on the ground, especially in the context of intersectorality?

## Insights from the field

Intersectorality is supposed to be one of the strongest features of International Geneva (IG). Therefore, we wanted to see if this was a reality among the IG organizations at the national level.

We begin this section by highlighting that the intersectoral perspective is considered essential in international cooperation in education:

*We consider this to be an important dimension: beyond basic education, we must ensure that children and young people can develop a culture of peace, a culture of... environmental management, and everything related to the preservation of the environment, including climate change, but also everything related to education for solidarity and tolerance. (E5)*

*Multidisciplinarity is very, very fundamental to what we do. So, yes, I think these are fundamentally linked things, especially if we want to have a considerable impact on the countries that are more or less concerned. We can't deal with environmental issues only with environmentalists... So, here we have to be as broad as possible. This is fundamental to what we do and, fortunately, occurs at the level of International Geneva. (E7)*

Intersectorality is even a process that is well entrenched in some organizations whose mandate is to work across sectors:

*[The institution] is also an organization that covers the different sectors of intervention for the protection of refugees, so it's cross-sectoral in nature. So yes, that's something that's a big part of our work. (E6)*

One respondent, however, was skeptical about the need for an intersectoral approach, indicating, "I don't know what intersectorality means. It also means a lack of specialization. I don't know what you'll do with that" (E3).

While noting the added value of this intersectorality, respondents emphasized that it was still far from being a reality in the field:

*This is something that we don't work enough on today, but undoubtedly, we need to work more on it in the years to come. To respond to emerging issues: I am talking about the problem of youth employment, for example. God knows how important it is in Africa now to give jobs to young people. To meet this challenge of youth employability, we must mobilize education and training, as well as the employment and labor sectors. (E2)*

The interviews highlighted the weak interaction between organizations. This was especially the case in the education sector:

*So it's true that we have approached these topics separately often, but probably for historical, institutional, personal reasons, or whatever.*

*Nevertheless, I think we will win and move toward a somewhat joint approach in supporting the ministry. (E2)*

Thus, this interaction was even more limited between organizations from different sectors within IG. This was explained by how intersectorality was structured within this entity:

*I think it's interesting, but it comes up against a systemic approach that is already extremely rigid and rooted, and that comes from the UN... That is to say, the UN has its own approach to intersectorality. As a result, it already takes much time for the different actors to fit into these frameworks. Thus, it is not easy. This does not mean that the idea is not good, but it does mean that there is a constraint (for instance, that an intersectoral approach is already put forward by the UN). The UN is a vector of a unique and powerful systemic approach. The objective is One Response. In other words, we are all aligned... and as a result, this creates a lot of constraints, even tensions. (E1)*

*In any case, as of very recently, I don't remember having a meeting where all these actors were around the table to discuss a topic. (E2)*

While noting the scarcity of intersectorality, some respondents highlighted some conclusive experiences of IG organizations based in Dakar:

*I have had meetings, for example, with the UNHCR education officer here in Dakar, and we may have meetings with UNICEF and WFP sometimes. (E2)*

*For example, we're setting up a joint project with the ILO here... since you're talking about the ILO... in the region to try to see how the national vocational training systems can be more inclusive of refugees. So that's one example. Recently, we have been working very closely with the WHO on immunization campaigns... to ensure that refugees are included in them. We also collaborate with UNICEF, especially in the area of washing, for example. We also work a lot with UNICEF on child protection documentation. (E6)*

*We have a lot of contact with the organizations represented at the International Geneva level. Generally speaking, these are the offices of the IOM, UNCTAD, etc. So, generally speaking, we collaborate a lot. In fact, last year, we had planned to hold a conference with the IOM office, which is located here. (E7)*

However, experiences of intersectorality in the field often extended beyond the framework of IG organizations. Specifically, we heard of an example of intersectoral activities (setting up school canteens) with the World Food Program, whose headquarters are based in Rome.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us recall the main lessons of this research. First, we found that the influence of International Geneva (IG) was perceived as limited at the field level. The concept can be blurred; for example, there is confusion between the SDC in Bern and the organizations based in Geneva. In particular, other international places are considered more important for education. Nevertheless, some specific domains can constitute the added value of IG. This was found to be the case for education in emergencies, advocacy, and especially the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or for academic activities in the international dimensions of education (research and training).

Second, when we looked at how international cooperation in education worked at the IG level, we found that this entity acts according to a top-down process, without listening to the field, while relaying some positive experiences. This results in actions that are disconnected from reality. Aware of this situation, the organizations are conceding more and more power to the local antennas, thus reducing the influence of Geneva on cooperative activities.

Finally, we dealt with intersectorality in international cooperation. Even if it is generally seen as an added value, its implementation is ineffective within IG at national levels. Despite a few conclusive but isolated initiatives, organizations within the same sector do not interact sufficiently.

From these research findings, several recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of cooperation in International Geneva if one considers the impact of the actions on the beneficiaries as more critical than the IG communication strategy. To concretize these recommendations, a systematic analysis of good practices could be envisaged in light of the few positive experiences related by the respondents in the framework of this research.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Areas of influence

- ▶ **Prioritize advocacy, especially for increased resources in favor of education in emergencies**
- ▶ **Enhance academic cooperation, especially in research and training**
- ▶ **Clarify and distinguish the added value of International Geneva compared to Switzerland in general\***

### Ownership

- ▶ **Decentralize decision-making on education policies to the regional/national level**
- ▶ **Listen to the voice of local actors for actions to be taken, especially in terms of advocacy**

### Coordination and intersectorality

- ▶ **Promote interactions between organizations, setting aside the personal interests of each**
- ▶ **Facilitate intersectorality through more flexible cooperation mechanisms, particularly at the level of the United Nations system**

\* Even if the actors in the field did not mention this, beyond clarifying the role of International Geneva vis-à-vis the SDC, why not strengthen existing entities such as the **Swiss Network for Education & International Cooperation (RECI)**? This network has the advantage of bringing together many organizations involved in the education sector and does a great deal of coordination work, particularly in terms of sharing experiences to improve practices on the ground.

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