

## Improving education aid

A new coalition links AEU members more directly to the global campaign for education.

By **Leslie Hunt**

### Briefly

- The AEU is part of a new coalition to advocate for more, and more effective, education aid for developing countries.
- The coalition increases Australia's involvement in the powerful, theme-driven Global Campaign for Education.
- This year's theme is Education for Women and Girls.

**T**en million more children are attending school each year around the globe and adult literacy rates have been increasing since the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990, when representatives from 155 countries pledged to place education on the development agenda.

But there are still challenges. UNESCO estimates that some 875 million people are illiterate. One out of every five children aged between six and 11 years in developing countries – about 133 million – is not in school. Sixty per cent of them are girls.

The renewed commitment of the Education for All campaign is to achieve quality education for all by 2015, with particular emphasis on girls' schooling.



The goal is a rallying point for governments, organisations and individuals to make coordinated efforts to raise the quality of life for hundreds of millions of impoverished people, wherever they may be in the world.

In Australia the first step is awareness. Australians need to be aware of the plights of less fortunate people before they can become motivated to do something about it.

And what can they do? They can make

others aware, they can contribute to and support organisations that raise money and spend it on worthy projects and programs, and they can lobby the government to encourage it to use its overseas aid in the most effective ways. Teachers have an important role to play across this spectrum of activities.

With this in mind, the Australian Coalition for Education and Development (ACED) was formed in January and held its first meeting at



William and Alishia with  
Bufumira Primary students,  
outside the dormitory built  
by ActionAid.

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the AEU office in Melbourne to agree on a policy position and advocacy focus to guide its efforts for 2011.

The coalition is made up of the AEU, ActionAid Australia (previously Austcare), Live and Learn Environmental Education, ChildFund Australia, the Australian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, Adult Learning Australia and Results Australia.

“The Global Campaign for Education

has been kicking goals in education advocacy for over 10 years, but, despite having member coalitions in over 100 countries, Australia has not been represented – until now,” says coalition coordinator Jon Edwards, of ActionAid Australia. “This is an exciting development for the aid sector in Australia. The Australian government regards education aid as the flagship of its aid efforts, but there has been no collective advocacy body to input to government policy and raise awareness in our community regarding education and development.”

The AEU is committed to the Global Campaign for Education, says federal president Angelo Gavrielatos. “The achievement of the millennium development goals, and in particular primary education for all children by 2015, remains a massive area of commitment for us. It’s a commitment we will continue to campaign for, not only nationally but also internationally with all our friends around the world and through our global union federation, Education International.”

## Annual theme

The Global Campaign for Education, which has its head office in Johannesburg, South Africa, sets a theme for its activities each year.

Last year it was 1Goal: Education for All, in conjunction with the soccer World Cup. Amid the sporting fervour, people were urged to sign an online petition reminding national leaders that the Millennium Declaration, signed 11 years ago by 180 countries, included a pledge to support and fund universal primary education.

In Australia, ActionAid teamed up with the AEU, Football Australia and AusAID, among others, to run

## Young Ambassadors in Uganda

Within a few hours of arriving in Uganda in October last year, Alishia Tomlinson and William Oxley were “seeing the world through different eyes”.

The two students from Goulburn High School, in rural NSW, had won a nationwide competition to select Australian representatives for the Young Ambassadors program which ActionAid ran as part of the 1Goal campaign.

“Nothing could have prepared us for what we would see and experience in Uganda, but we kept our minds open and took in everything we could,” says William.

“The first thing we did was get lost in a huge market in Kampala, the Ugandan capital. Then over the next 10 days, our itinerary was jam packed with meeting government officials, members of the teachers’ union and various other organisations, teachers, principals and school children. We heard about the obstacles to gaining a quality education in Uganda and met some of the strong people who are breaking those obstacles down.

“The obstacles for teachers include very low pay, non-payment of wages due to payroll errors and inefficiencies, large class sizes – sometimes in the hundreds – lack of school materials, poor infrastructure and shifting decisions by government.”

One of the places Alishia, 17, and William, 16, visited was Bufumira Primary School in the Kalangala district, made up of islands in Lake Victoria. Many families survive by following fish migrations around the lake and can’t afford the cost of getting their children

to school each day. To help remedy the situation, ActionAid funded the building of a boarders’ dormitory at Bufumira. The government has since followed the lead and built a dormitory at a school on another of the district’s islands.

“The principal at Bufumira told us that students were his life and he lived to teach,” says Alishia.

“And each child had their own story,” says William. “Some were orphans, some were HIV positive, some got maybe one meal a day. But they had incredible energy and hope, and their smiles could light up the darkest room.”

Alishia and William created a video blog ([www.actionaid.org.au/1goal-young-ambassadors-blog](http://www.actionaid.org.au/1goal-young-ambassadors-blog)) so the rest of their school and community could share in their experiences, and they are raising money to install water tanks and a kitchen at Bufumira. They are also actively promoting Global Action Week in Goulburn.

“These two students have opened the eyes of the Goulburn community and they are advocating for human rights and social change on a national and international level,” says Goulburn High teacher Dennis Carroll, who accompanied them to Uganda. “I’m enormously proud of them.” ●

**“The principal at Bufumira told us that students were his life and he lived to teach”**

the 1Goal campaign. “We got a lot of signatures,” says Edwards. “We also rolled out engagement materials to the education community to encourage students and teachers to make human connections here in Australia and in the developing world.”

This year’s theme is Education for Women and Girls. Education International (EI) estimates that a quarter of the women in the world are unable to read or write.

“Women and girls [in developing countries] face particular obstacles that hinder them in getting an education,” says EI, a founding member of the Global Campaign for Education. “They are vulnerable to violence on the way to school and in and around schools, early pregnancy, early marriage, poor health, HIV infection, and gender discrimination at schools and in the wider community.”

The importance of the theme is a “no-brainer”, says Darcel Russell, the AEU’s deputy federal secretary and ACED representative. “A range of evidence shows that educating women and girls is possibly the most effective strategic development intervention that governments can make,” she says. “If mothers are educated, their kids are better fed, better educated, better immunised and so on.”

### Boomerang aid

ACED will be lobbying the government, not only to get it to increase the proportion of GDP that goes to education aid, but also in regard to how it is spent.

“Most of AusAID’s education budget goes to scholarships for individuals from overseas to attend Australian education institutions,” says Russell. “While that’s a worthy practice, the money would be



## Action-packed activities

Taking part in Global Action Week is a great way for students to learn about the importance of education, the dire need for it in many countries and how they can help in meeting that need.

The week, part of the Global Campaign for Education, has a different theme each year. This year's theme is 'It's a right! Make it a right! Education for women and girls now!'

Officially, Global Action Week was May 2-8, but the Australian Coalition for Education and Development has extended registration until June 17 ([www.aced.org.au](http://www.aced.org.au)). Classes receive a resources pack including leaflets, posters, photo resources, lesson plans matched to the syllabus and suggested classroom activities.

This is only the second year Global Action Week has been promoted in Australia, but it has become a major activity in many other countries. More than 10 million students took part last year.

"We're sure it will spread rapidly in Australian schools," says ActionAid's Penny Tourta-Alegounarias, who is coordinating the week, funded by the AEU. AEU women's officers are also heavily involved in spreading the word and sending out information.

One aspect this year is The Big Story, a chance for girls and women to explain how an education has affected their lives, or the personal impact of being denied an education. Males can also contribute stories which are centred on the experiences of women and girls. A YouTube channel has been set up for teachers and students to share their stories.

Schools have three easy options:

1. Register to show solidarity with others around the world. Display the link to The Big Story on your school website and organise an assembly for sharing stories. You can register the number of participants in the global total.
2. Conduct a classroom activity from the options on the ACED website.
3. Upload your story to the YouTube channel.

better spent if it was targeted at building up whole education systems in the countries concerned. That way it would benefit many individuals rather than just a few."

The broader issue is to discourage the many forms of 'boomerang aid', where aid money is tied to Australian educators, contractors and other operators rather being spent in the economies of overseas countries, as most people would expect.

"For AEU members, our involvement in the new coalition is about creating the impetus to get involved in the interna-

tional campaign," says Russell. "We in developed countries have a responsibility to work in partnership with teacher unions and their members in developing countries to build and grow unions, because strong unions lead to better teachers and make governments accountable.

"As teachers and unionists, we are committed to social justice. AEU members are rightfully proud of our work in international education development." ●

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## Resources

- [www.aced.org.au](http://www.aced.org.au)
- [www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)
- [www.aeufederal.org.au](http://www.aeufederal.org.au)
- [www.actionaid.org.au](http://www.actionaid.org.au)