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Education in the New Development Agenda

Colleen Thouez

The connection between education and development is not new. When the notion of “human development” first emerged in 1998 in public policy circles (Sen, 1985), it emphasized that “people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing development, not economic growth alone” (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]). Enlarging people’s choices depends on building human capabilities, of which education is included as one of the three measurement indicators (UNDP, Human Development Index).¹

It is not surprising then that in the year 2000, when the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) were agreed upon by 189 countries as benchmarks for reducing poverty and multiple deprivations, education figured at the top of the list. The second of eight MDGs, Goal 2 reads: “Achieving Universal Primary Education” aiming to ensure: “children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” by 2015 (Millennium Development Goals, 2000). The focus at the turn of the Century was thus on primary education, gender parity, and access.²

¹ The human development index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, *being knowledgeable*, having a decent standard of living and being able to participate in the life of the community.

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

² According to the UN monitoring of the MDGs, important achievements were made at the start of the decade with, for example, enrolment in primary education in developing regions rising by 8% between 1999-2010 (to 90%), and gender gaps in youth literacy rates narrowing.

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml>

However, enrolment rates have declined considerably in the last years with high drop out rates being a major impediment to achieving universal primary education. This is considered to be due in part to the high number of children who live in conflict-affected areas. See the Millennium Development Goals Report (2014): http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/mdg_goals/mdg2/

Millennium Development Goals/Eight Goals for 2015

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Source: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview.html>

Fifteen years later, as the new Post-2015 Development Agenda takes shape in the form of *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) to be endorsed by the international community in September 2015, the perception held by policymakers and other vested stakeholders on the impact of education has shifted fundamentally.³ This shift is particularly apparent with respect to higher education.

From the existing negotiated draft, *Sustainable Development Goals Report of the Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly* (2014)⁴, the education benchmark for the international community (hereafter “SDG 4”) will read: “Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promoting Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All” by 2030 (Sustainable Development Report, 2014).

SDG 4 (and its related targets) thus extends to secondary and post-secondary education and introduces the principle of life-long learning in its very title. It also reflects other important shifts in how the international community perceives what is required on the path to “being

³ Jeffrey Sachs argues that establishing goals like the MDGs and now the SDGs help to mobilize public attention, create peer pressure, spur epistemic communities, and activate networks to carry the work forward (Sachs, 2015).

⁴ The Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly on the Sustainable Development Goals was created following the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), “Rio+20”. The Open Working Group released its Report on the Sustainable Development Goals last July 2014. While negotiations are still underway at the time of writing, these relate mainly to measurement issues (i.e. indicators). It is widely considered that the 17 proposed SDGs and 169 related targets in the Report will remain.

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knowledgeable.” These are: overcoming additional inequities in access to education outside those relating to poverty and to gender; emphasizing the impacts of learning, the importance of measurement, and the relationship with employment; and supporting components of greater internationalized education (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, paras. 4.1-4.7 [c]).

Each of these elements can be studied in more detail by looking at the related targets for SDG 4- each target qualifying how this Goal is intended to be achieved.

On overcoming inequities in access, back in 2000, the principle concern was ensuring that girls had similar access to educational opportunities as boys. Now, the targets to reach by 2030 take account people whose vulnerabilities (tied to physical attributes and social membership) may also pose obstacles to accessing education, including: persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.5). This point is reinforced with explicit reference to infrastructure, calling for building facilities that meet the needs of such groups of people, and that “provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all” (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.7 [a]).

With greater concern for the tangible results of learning interventions, SDG 4 also places a new emphasis on the impacts of learning. In 2000, the focus was on enrolment rates, whereas by 2015, we see concern expressed also for the quality of learning, i.e., “effective learning outcomes and environment” (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.1). The relationship between education and employment is also an area of focus such that a greater number of youth and adults have: “the relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship” (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.4).

Importantly, the proposed SDG also embraces targets fostering greater internationalized education. Implicitly then, a more globalized approach to education is deemed in the benefit of societies and an ambition on par with issues of access, quality, impact, and life-long commitment.

Internationalized education is evoked as pertains to: the essence of education today; efforts to promote global mobility of students; and international support for the training of educators (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, paras 4.7 – 4.7 [c]). It is stated that by 2030, “all learners acquire 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.”⁵ (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.7)

Mobility or migration is considered as one of the most important factors in advancing people’s wellbeing. Combined with opportunities to study abroad, it is not surprising that SDG 4 includes expanding opportunities for study abroad for developing countries (in particular for least developed countries, small island states and African countries) through an increase in the

⁵ Elements of this target are reflected in UNESCO’s Global citizenship education (GCED) programme. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/global-citizenship-education>

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number of scholarships by 2020 “to enroll in higher education, including vocational training, ICT, technical, engineering and scientific programs...” (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.7 [b])⁶.

And, SDG 4 foresees increasing “the supply of qualified teachers⁷, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries especially least developed countries and small island states.” (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2014, para. 4.7 (c))

There is a growing opportunity for the world of international educators to engage in a broader debate about how internationalizing education can support global development objectives. The international community’s “*prise de conscience*” for higher education and related issues of access, quality, impact, commitment and globalized nature--as reflected in the proposed new SDG 4 on education--is a good starting point to engage with policy-makers on how to reinforce these trends over the coming 15 years.

Sustainable Development Goals

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|---------|---|
| Goal 1 | End poverty in all its forms everywhere |
| Goal 2 | End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture |
| Goal 3 | Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages |
| Goal 4 | Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all |
| Goal 5 | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls |
| Goal 6 | Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all |
| Goal 7 | Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all |
| Goal 8 | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |
| Goal 9 | Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation |
| Goal 10 | Reduce inequality within and among countries |
| Goal 11 | Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable |
| Goal 12 | Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns |
| Goal 13 | Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts* |
| Goal 14 | Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development |
| Goal 15 | Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, |

⁶ The increase in scholarships is expressed as a percentage but the amount is not yet specified (it is still a subject of negotiation). And, it is interesting to note that this sentence ends with: “in developed countries and other developing countries”. In other words, that funding for such programs should also go to the developing world.

⁷ The increase in the number of qualified teachers is expressed as a percentage but the amount is not yet specified (it is still a subject of negotiation).

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Goal 16

and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

** Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change*

Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

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Of potential interest:

The United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI): a global initiative that aligns institutions of higher education with the United Nations in furthering the realization of the purposes and mandate of the Organization through activities and research in a shared culture of intellectual social responsibility.

**Remarks
by
Robert Bullock
Deputy Director
Rockefeller Institute of Government of SUNY
at the
United Nations
November 10, 2015**

Excellencies, members of the United Nations community, colleagues in higher education and specifically those affiliated with the UN Academic Impact, friends...

Five years ago, I had the great honor to speak at one of the first UN Academic Impact gatherings in Shanghai, China. In his keynote address for that conference's opening, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon underscored the power extant in the support of the UN by higher education, saying and I quote, "The United Nations understands the enormous impact of scholarship, innovation and ideas. We are trying to harness that great power to build a better world...a world where human ingenuity will make our homes, communities and consumption patterns socially and environmentally sustainable...a world where the 'unlearning' of intolerance will bridge barriers that still divide nations and peoples. Promoting and advancing these goals is the essence of the United Nations Academic Impact." (End Quote)

For those of us in the room involved with the then fledgling Academic Impact, this was a moment of recognition that a door had been opened. No longer was the work of the UN to be relegated to those whose profession it was to work toward the realization of the UN Charter, the Millennium Development Goals and, now, the Sustainable Development Goals. Through this invitation, extended five years ago, the work of the UN was no longer solely the responsibility of those traditionally defined as the UN community; it now belonged to us in higher education as well.

For institutions of higher learning, the notion of supporting global citizenship is essential to what we do and who we are. In an address delivered at Trinity College in Dublin Ireland in 2010, Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust spoke of the ennobled responsibilities which belong to the academy stating, and I quote, "Indeed, as other institutions falter in dispiriting succession, universities nurture the hopes of the world: in solving challenges that cross borders; in unlocking and harnessing new knowledge; in building cultural and political understanding; and in modeling environments that promote dialogue and debate." End quote.

In effect, through these remarks, President Faust effectively validated the road map envisioned with the creation of the UN Academic Impact.

Since then, the accomplishments undertaken by this global network of colleges and universities has been prodigious and, indeed, spans the disciplines, ensuring that the experiences of students are informed and enhanced by that accomplished by the UN. From the UN's perspective, the engagement of the academy additionally assures us that the work of the UN is informed by the extraordinary achievements of our students and faculty the world over.

For each of you who have committed your institutions, you probably remember that it was easy to take the inaugural pledge committing to the accomplishment of an action in support of the Academic

Impact's bedrock principles for freedom of inquiry; opinion and speech; educational opportunity for all; global citizenship; and sustainability and dialogue.

Yet, for the Academic Impact to be truly effective, these founding principles have to be more than words on paper or the transmission of an on-line signature, they must be informed through inquiry by both students and faculty and they must provide true insight into the human experience which relates to these principles, both positive and negative. In other words, as is integral to the realization of success in education, the abstract and theoretic must be made real.

Indeed, the potential of the UN Academic Impact cannot remain solely in the hands of those who commit to it for the institution. It must become organic within the institution.

What is our greatest challenge? In my mind, it is the commonly held perception either on our campuses or on in towns, villages and cities located around the world that the UN does not belong to all of us. Within each of our institutions of higher education globally, an invitation to join the Academic Impact would often be directed to those responsible for international relations or political science. Yet, each day in its deliberations, or its efforts on our behalf, the UN touches each one of us.

To the young anthropology or world studies student, consider the UN's efforts to preserve our now threatened world heritage sites and world religions...To those studying the control of outbreaks like Ebola and similarly devastating health crises and pandemics, consider the UN's work in public health...To those studying climate change, consider the very deliberations scheduled to begin in a month in Paris.

To our students of all backgrounds and interests, wherever you may be, know that the work of the UN belongs to all, regardless of your background and interest, and that it is our best hope for the future as a now truly global society.

There are many who understand the far reaching impact of the impact of the UN and have striven to ensure that none among their students were naive to the ubiquitous qualities of this global body that has no peers.

Five years ago here at the UN, I had the great honor to meet and spend considerable time with the late Michael Adams, then president of Fairleigh Dickenson University and the International Association of University Presidents. To Michael, the UN was everything and his dedication was to ensuring that each of Fairleigh Dickinson's students truly understood the importance of the UN in their lives. In Michael's words, often quoted by the Secretary General, Quote "The only path to peace is education and dialogue. Tanks don't work. That is why we (he said, referencing Fairleigh Dickinson) take our association with the UN so seriously." End Quote

When the UN Academic Impact was inaugurated five years ago, Fairleigh Dickinson's imprint on this fledgling organization was profound; from the university initially hosting the Academic Impact's website, to the creation of UN directed programming by the University, to Michael's unwavering presence globally at Academic Impact events.

I know from my conversations with Michael that the commitment to the Academic Impact was not relegated to the Office of the President but that it was, undoubtedly, communicated to and felt by every student on campus. That is what the Academic Impact needs to succeed, top down and bottom up commitment to the notion that global citizenship cannot be merely the purview of global governance practitioners. It has to belong to each and every one of us.

The UN cannot achieve the ennobling goals established for it in 1945 if it is known only by policy specialists. Its work has to be known and supported by an ever enlarging world community.

How can this be better done within the UN Academic Impact network? It can be done by breaking down bureaucratic barriers inherent in any bureaucracy no matter how well intended or well designed. Indeed, the greatest power of the Academic Impact resides not within the connection established between the Academic Impact office and our, now, more than 1,000 member institutions. Rather, it resides within the connection established between the member institutions themselves and the work that they then do in the name and the spirit of the UN. To those who have been to UN Academic Impact event's the world over and have established abiding contacts that have then grown into relationships, you understand the power inherent within this community.

I challenge each of us to make the power and vision of the UN, crafted so artfully and to such noble purpose 70 years ago, power and vision that are available to every student. To achieve this, let us encourage our fellow administrators, faculty and students in every discipline and at every level to, in the spirit of global citizenship, incorporate the lessons of the UN as a central pillar of our teachings. Let us instruct our students from the beginning of orientation to the moment of graduation on the importance of the relationship between the UN and their institutions. Let us engage student governments on political issues that know no borders, reminding them that the issues of governance in which they are engaged frequently have parallels that transcend nationalism and that those issues are the focus of the work of the UN every day.

Earlier this year, I had the great good fortune to serve on an Academic Impact jury responsible for adjudicating a competition of students and junior faculty from around the world, each committed to creating a project designed to help promote diversity and eradicate hatred globally. Created by UNHate and the Academic Impact and sponsored by the Italian clothing company Benetton, the program was designed to demonstrate the capability of youth and inherent in education. In June, here at the UN, we learned, first hand, of the extraordinary passion of these young students and professors, selected as the competition's winners, to create projects in many nations, each consistent with the UN's founding principles. On that day, listening to those students, I don't think there was one of us who didn't believe in the extraordinary potential that was realized by the marriage of UN and higher education through the Academic Impact five years ago.

I look forward to the day when our network of colleges and universities has grown five-fold, where every campus publication and website is proudly emblazoned with the Academic Impact logo, and where every student on every campus begins each academic exercise by asking what the UN is doing in his or her area of study.

In 1945, the UN Charter was created and its opening words were "We the People of the United Nations." Since that day, millions have come together to realize this organization's incomparable purpose. Five years ago, this community was enlarged as higher education was formally brought to the table. I thank the leadership of the UN, and particularly the Secretary General, for this fortuitous invitation and commit myself, along with my colleagues in the 64 campus State University of New York System and in the Academic Impact overall, to the total engagement of future generations of global citizens, now and for the future.

Thank you.

