

Inclusive Lifelong Education for Sustainable Development; the Successes and Challenges

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effectively to societal development. This paper reviews information from various researchers and establishes the nature of education provided globally, regionally and locally in connection to inclusive quality education and lifelong learning in relation to sustainable development so as to establish the major successes and challenges. It brings together a wide range of scientific expertise across the natural and social sciences in an accessible and concise manner. It is a unique paper designed primarily for negotiators, technical support teams and other actors engaged in defining a universal, integrated and transformational form of education for sustainable development. In particular it is a resource for technical review of the targets carried out in the education system in preparation for their adoption and translation at the national level. The results offer rigorous analysis of the proposed education goals and targets, collectively and individually, assessing whether they are backed up by scientific evidence, whether they address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated way, and whether they are sufficiently specific to be effectively implemented and monitored. Concrete recommendations have been put forward for consideration in refining the education goals and targets.

INTRODUCTION

For more than half a century the international community of nations has recognized education as a fundamental human right. In 2000, it agreed to the Millennium Development Goals, which acknowledged education as an indispensable means for people to realize their capabilities, and prioritized the completion of a primary school cycle.

Notwithstanding the centrality of education in treaties, covenants and agreements, the world is yet to recognize the full potential of education as a catalyst for development. While many national governments have increased their commitment to and support for education since 2000, its emphasis among donors and in many countries remains vulnerable to shifting conditions, financial and otherwise.

Abstract

Inclusive quality education and lifelong learning is a key lever of sustainable development. This is based on a vision of inclusive societies in which all citizens have equitable opportunities to access effective and relevant lifelong learning delivered through multiple formal, non-formal and informal settings. As such, inclusive quality education and lifelong learning is essential to the development of individuals their families, local and national communities to which they belong, and to the world at large. It is vital to note that individuals who lack certain forms of learning in life may not contribute

The international community needs to create a space to re-consider its commitments and obligations to the young and the marginalized in the world, whose voices are often muted. Working together it is imperative that all interested stakeholders recommit themselves to unlocking the transformative power of lifelong learning through education.

An important step can be seen in the outcome document of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (released in July 2014), which reiterates that education is not only an end in itself but also a means to achieving a broad global development agenda. This paper provides a succinct, evidence-based overview of the numerous ways in which education can advance the proposed sustainable development goals, their current success and challenges. It underscores the notion that sustainable development for all countries is only truly possible through comprehensive cross-sector efforts that begin with lifelong learning through education.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Ramos et al. (2015) defined sustainable development as a pattern of resource use that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In order to preserve the natural world, economic, social and environmental factors must be jointly considered and harmonized. Formal and informal learning, through raising awareness and influencing behavior, has a pivotal function if sustainable development is to be achieved. This role is especially pronounced in the realm of lifelong learning and education, because at this level students are being prepared to enter the labor market and emerge with skills to support green economies and as messengers of ideas.

Progressively, universities and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been incorporating sustainable development values and practices into their core activities of teaching and research, institutional management and operational systems. However, the debate thus far has focused primarily on the rationale and reasoning for why sustainable development needs broad adoption. The international discussion, however, has failed to specify the various actions that institutions can adopt.

With the stand-alone Goal 4 on education and its related targets, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development recognizes that education is essential

for the success of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education is also included in goals on health, growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and climate change.

United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) facilitated consultations of Member States and key stakeholders over the past two years on the future education agenda which culminated in the World Education Forum held in Incheon, Republic of Korea in May 2015. With the Incheon Declaration, the education community committed to Education 2030, which is encapsulated in SDG 4. The Incheon Declaration entrusts UNESCO to lead and coordinate Education 2030. “We know the power of education to eradicate poverty, transform lives and make breakthroughs on all the Sustainable Development Goals,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova in her opening address on that occasion. The Incheon Declaration is an historic commitment to transform lives through a new vision for education, building on the worldwide commitment to Education for All (EFA) initiated at Jomtien in 1990 and reiterated at Dakar in 2000, while effectively addressing current and future global and national education challenges.

Miles & Singal (2009) quoted Maruatona (2011) as saying education is the “greatest resource’ for achieving a just and ecological society.” Summers & Turner (2011) identifies lifelong learning through education, public awareness and training as part of the sustainable development agenda demonstrating an agreement that education was critical for promoting sustainable development and increasing the capacity of the people to address environmental and developmental issues.

The importance of education to the sustainability process was reiterated by Kohn & Meijers (2014) in their paper, and confirmed that education is the most effective means that society possess for confronting the challenges of the future, it is not the whole answer to every problem but education, in its broadest sense, must be a vital part of all efforts to imagine and create new relations among people and to foster greater respect for the needs of the environment.

One's experiences during the learning process and the impact of that learning on society have a direct

correlation with the underlining belief that defines the education programme experienced. Educational planners and developers have held varying views regarding what end education should serve. The important question is what is the educational goal that would facilitate a process of sustainable development? From a sustainable development perspective educators must articulate a vision in which, social development, ecological well being, and economic prosperity are addressed and which is founded on an ethic in which the common good or social justice underpins a respect for all learners.

In this regard Yasin & Rahman (2011) offer three points that are useful in helping us to outline the educational goals that would facilitate a process of sustainable development: to “encourage a more integrated view of how the world operates and how development does (or does not) occur; make students more critically aware of how their actions, individually and collectively will hinder or help the world to meet future challenges; and help to mobilize and empower people with the knowledge and skills to participate more actively, more democratically and more collectively in the development process.” Hence inclusive education is an indisputable platform for sustainable development.

According to Hodkinson (2010) education is the foundation for building a truly inclusive society, education for all remains one of the biggest development challenges, inclusive education for sustainable development requires exhaustive and pivotal community outreach for any meaningful and lasting individual and institutional performance, provision and contribution to service delivery. Various agencies across the globe bear the mantle of propagating and instilling the ideals and practices of inclusive education for sustainable development. Early and recent studies tend to lay emphasis on re-definition and decentralization of development programs for effective sustainability and efficiency of service delivery at grassroots or community. Challenges posed by conceptual and theoretical approaches to education for sustainable development are due to unparalleled plurality of perspectives and eccentric methodological variations often leading to obscured presentations among policy makers and practitioners.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In order to cover as much ground as possible, the paper selected several reports covering a wide range of primary topics. The paper looked at global reports; region-specific reports are not included. Reports by non-UN organizations (e.g. Organization of Economic Development -OECD) are not covered either. The sample offers a relatively balanced mix of perspectives, with some reports from organizations that tend to examine issues starting from a strong social tradition. These reports offer an additional advantage of covering different topics each year, which ensures that links between education and a number of SDGs are covered more thoroughly.

Through primary content analysis, there was a clear identification of all the ideas in the reports that referred to education and sustainable development. There was complementation of basic automated keyword search procedure with manual individual analysis of each occurrence to ensure relevance of messages and in-depth coverage. Later, an extraction was done of messages that contained analytical statements and conclusions, in verbatim form. There was no inclusion of region-specific examples and opinion quotes. Once the list of all the messages was compiled, each of them was connected to one or several of the seventeen thematic areas of sustainable development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The UNESCO undertakes worldwide activities focusing on advocacy, capacity building and training, channeled through a number of recommended standards and legally binding international Conventions covering the manifold dimensions of culture, principally those of 1954; 1970; 1972; 2001; 2003 and 2005” (European Commission, 2010). The stage was therefore set for countries to carry the mantle and implement the ideals and provisions of inclusive education for sustainable development in their policies and programs for national development. Education for sustainable development projects includes both formal and informal process from basic curricula, including the systemic application of advanced research results in and out of school system. It is taken that a more educated society also translates into higher rates of innovation, higher overall productivity, faster growth and progressive institutional change as ideals of Education for All. Education is therefore inextricably connected to national (and/or sustainable) development as

production of knowledge and human capacity reflect on how a nation's progress is pursued, attained and sustained. For instance, Kenya projects some of the best policies on paper, but negates on implementation results in which goals are hardly seen or felt at grassroots or community level (Blewitt, 2010).

The goals and ideals of international conventions are not adequately reflected in most nations' policies in regard to education. Recent assessments of the Kenyan situation for example, actually point to challenges as well as opportunities in the understanding and implementation of the goals of inclusive education for sustainable development. Gouthro (2007) identifies 'segregated' efforts borne out of contradictory and conflicting diverse approaches which fail to take advantage of a democratic dispensation with enough room and participation to contain the situation. Polasky et al. (2015) notices the presence of discriminatory practice hindering strong foundational legal and policy frameworks due to lack of judicial enforcement and national political will.

An earlier comparative study on the EFA goals' established that local impediments to success include the problem of over-standardization hindering substantial changes at grassroots or community level. Nations around the globe may be described as having no specific, well formulated, clear national development policy or framework as most of the country's commitments towards inclusive education for sustainable development are products of other policies, which do not have basis for inclusiveness and sustainability. The local meanings and understanding of concepts and approaches, from the goals of Education for All to the ideals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No. 4, are clouded by the lack of common grounds among experts and practitioners. The clarion call for experts in particular, is to heighten its laudable mandate by harmonizing and delivering knowledge and skills to experts, practitioners, policy makers, stakeholders and other relevant influencers aimed at the grassroots of community level (Chalkley, 2009).

Structural adjustment has been most traumatic for Kenya. The government has divested many of the public operations e.g., electricity and transportation. The cost of accessing health care and a good

education has risen. Many Government agencies are now Executive Agencies meaning among other things they must earn their keep. These former government agencies that got their yearly budget from the central budget no longer enjoy that benefit rather they must begin to develop new strategies to provide the public with efficient and cost effective service. This often means an increase or introduction of user fees for many social services. In the meantime the private sector struggles with liquidity and there are numerous accounts of businesses collapsing, others strategically choosing to scale back operations through restructuring, downsizing, layoffs and redundancies, leaving many without employment (Johnson, 2012).

The results of the structural adjustment programme are clear and include high unemployment and reduced standard of living for many, the exacerbation of poverty and inequality, a net outflow of wealth from the country, social unrest, increased incidents of crime and violence to name a few. The adverse macroeconomic environment and the attendant policies adopted to overcome the economic problems facing the country have put pressure on the taxpayer's ability to foot the bill for the delivery of various social services including education (Erten & Savage, 2012).

Within this context, there are a number of issues related to vulnerability and human insecurity in Kenya, for example. These issues include: poverty evidenced by dilapidated house, no sanitary convenience, inability to care for children, hunger, no job or steady income; violence and crime severely affecting community spirit and social relations due to fear, distrust, interpersonal conflicts, destruction of community infrastructure and political tribalism; inadequate housing/shelter, land tenure and social amenities impacted by low income of households and resulting in the absence of protection, access to services and amenities, privacy, access to jobs, income, recreation and socialization; inadequate food, nutrition and health resulting in low weight for age, anemia among young children, pregnant and lactating women, nutrition related chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiac diseases and stroke; environmental threats mainly related to water and air quality, the impact of improper waste disposal

and the impact of natural disasters and environmental accidents (Oprean et al., 2011).

On the positive side is the emergence of some important developments that provide a sound base for the participatory education programs. The first development is a process of decentralization, replacing the traditional centralized, bureaucratic decision-making and governance approach inherited from colonialism. Decentralization unlike centralization is based on the premise of inclusion. Participation and consensus building, legitimate instruments of democracy, are given greater relevance or importance in a context of decentralization. The notion of rulership 'with' the people rather than rulership 'of' the people gets prominence.

The other development is the resurgence in the type and number of civil society groups around neighborhood security, social services, human rights and justice, environmental protection, governance and free and fair elections, providing opportunity for the voice of the people to be heard in a clear organized manner. This emergence paves the way for a more cohesive society and again indicates a deepening of the democratic functioning of the society, leading to a healthy lifelong learning process (Obrusnikova & Dillon, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

The major benefit of inclusive lifelong learning and education is that people are empowered. People gain knowledge and awareness of their own social, economic political and environmental conditions; they gain a more integrated view of how the world operates and how development does (or does not) occur; they become more critically aware of how their actions, individually and collectively will hinder or help the region to meet future challenges; and help to mobilize and empower people with the knowledge and skills to participate more actively, more democratically and more collectively in the development process; they learn to take action and to construct their own futures through a process of analysis and action and gain control over the goals and processes of development within their region and ultimately the country. All these serve to build a solid base for development that is sustainable.

There is a need for an inclusive form of education that is compatible with concepts and practices seen in the regimes of global, regional and national conventions, policies and programs. They should recognize the general emphasis on constant changes and improvements in methods and contents for widening and deepening inclusive education for sustainable development as basis of any meaningful progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most nations that are lagging behind, including Kenya are hindered by inability to deliver service effectively and efficiently to the grassroots or community level and poor leadership. Sustainable development signifies the optimization and impact of development process at all levels in a continuous manner often captured in government consistent policies. This is the new path for development which would sustain human progress, not just in few years, but for the entire planet into a more distant future. However, failures or inconsistencies in government policies often led situations necessitating difficult ventures for inclusive education for sustainable development by different agencies (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). There is therefore need to harmonize all institutions and also ensure better leadership if sustainability is to be achieved.

Inadequate funding and infrastructure; lack of enough technical and vocational schools and centers; and failure of most institutions in turning out needed human resource base are issues that hinder lifelong learning through education. It is vital to note that nations like Kenya erroneously assesses educational development in terms of gross enrolment rates in schools ignoring the conceptual framework laid by global conventions and national policies on education. Education within this realm is held a vital element in combating poverty, gender parity, human rights abuse, environmental degradation, insecurity, and bad governance all of which are important components in attaining sustainable development.

Kenya's National Policy on Education (NPE) lacks strong inclusive footings for effective formulation in a democratic setting; this weakness requires urgent fixing through relentless advocacy for legal and policy framework, sound legislation, judicial enforcement, and gingered political will. Policy makers can employ innovative dialogue, activism and

direct advocacy to translate meanings and applications for strengthening the National Policy on Education in this regard.

There is a need to ensure full inclusion by advocating for the strategies of progressive development of inclusive education. With the arraignment of global, regional and local conventions, policies and programs in place, the way forward will prosper by

consolidatory advocacy among experts and practitioners at all levels. Overall, the way forward bears sense of purpose, charting of new paths, strengthening of policies, innovative dialogue, clear strategies and advocacy. There is need for innovative dialogue by continuously asking questions among experts and practitioners leading to improved sense of purpose, charting new paths, strengthening of existing policies, clear strategies and advocacy.

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