

XXXIII UNIVERSITAT D'ESTIU D'ANDORRA  
DEL 29 D'AGOST A L'1 DE SETEMBRE DEL 2016

Sessió del 30 d'agost del 2016

**RETHINKING AND REDESIGNING  
EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN LIGHT  
OF SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE**

Aaron Benavot

Expert en sociologia comparativa  
Director Global Education Monitoring Report, Unesco

Experto en sociología comparativa  
Director Global Education Monitoring Report, Unesco

Expert en sociologie comparative  
Directeur Global Education Monitoring Report, Unesco

**Per citar aquest article / Para citar este artículo / Pour citer cet article :**

BENAVOT, Aaron. « Les financements innovants, nouvelles armes pour la lutte contre l'extrême pauvreté » [en línia], a: Universitat d'Estiu d'Andorra (33a : 29 d'agost - 1 set., 2016 : Andorra la Vella). *Transformar el nostre món, l'agenda 2030 per al desenvolupament sostenible = Transformar nuestro mundo, la agenda 2030 para el desarrollo sostenible = Transformer notre monde, l'agenda 2030 pour le développement durable*. Andorra: Govern d'Andorra. Ministeri d'Educació i Ensenyament Superior. Universitat d'Estiu d'Andorra, 2018, p. 48-66 (978-99920-0-856-0) <<http://www.universitatestiu.ad/UEA2016>>

## Background

The global expansion of primary and secondary education accelerated after 1950, especially in the Global South (World Bank 2018: 58-59). Increasing access to schooling even outstripped population growth rates. And yet, significant gaps in access to both levels of schooling remained, especially among children from poor, marginalized and vulnerable households (UNESCO 2017). In fact, 263 million children and adolescents worldwide were not enrolled or registered in school in 2016 (UIS 2018). National efforts, in some cases with the assistance of external partners, continue to be the preeminent force behind the universalization of schooling. That said, the influence of global education policies has increased, augmenting and further legitimating country-led progress.

A major development in international education policy has been the shift from an almost exclusive emphasis on universal access to formal education to a focus on quality provision, learning outcomes and education equity (King and Palmer 2015). The substance of this shift, while gaining momentum, has been contested in part. For example, when the international education community<sup>1</sup> convened the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (March 1990), delegates agreed that “[t]he focus of basic education must [...] be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment [...] in organized programmes and completion of certification requirements. [...] It is [...] necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition [...] and improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement.” (Final Declaration, Article 4).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a key message of the Conference was that “the ultimate goal is to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults.”

Nevertheless, consensus on learning-related issues proved elusive. Participants debated over what knowledge and skills learners should be expected to acquire and how these might be measured. Discussions ensued over whether there should be a minimum common level (or floor) of learning that must be

---

1 The reference i presentatives from government (ministries of education), civil society, international organizations, donor agencies and the private sector.

2 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000975/097551e.pdf>, p. 45

achieved by all learners, and the value of testing learner performance and achievement. Some participants “*cautioned against too utilitarian an approach to defining ‘an acceptable level of learning’.*” For example, the Commonwealth Secretariat stated that “*the point about learning is that it is a process of growth, and not a product to be acquired: learning is a journey, not a destination.*” (Final Report of WCEFA, p. 14).<sup>3</sup> In the end, there was broad agreement that learning should be “relevant” and that it should meet the needs of the individual and his or her community.

Pointed discussions over quality education and learning continued when the international education community convened the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, Senegal in May 2000. Among the six Education for All (EFA) goals adopted at the WEF, one (EFA Goal 6) stated that “*improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.*” The value of good-quality education was made clear: “*Quality is at the heart of education, and what takes place in classrooms and other learning environments is fundamentally important to the future well-being of children, young people and adults. A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living*” (para. 42).<sup>4</sup> In practice, monitoring the provision of good-quality education was not straightforward. Most monitoring efforts revolved around collecting data on four *enabling* conditions — teachers, textbooks and other instructional materials, teaching and learning processes, and education governance— which were assumed to improve the quality of education and increase learning levels (UNESCO 2015). Global efforts at monitoring learning were limited to learning metrics developed in international and regional learning assessments. A global portrayal of student proficiency in key foundational skills has not, until recently, been feasible.

While quality education and learning issues were being integrated —albeit unevenly and problematically— in certain international policy circles, they gained little traction in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by UN Member States in September 2000. The MDGs concentrated

---

3 Ibid., p. 14.

4 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>

on a far more limited education agenda: universal completion of primary education and gender parity in education. But as discussions of post-2015 global policy priorities in education began in earnest, it became clear that the more comprehensive EFA agenda would become the basis for articulating a new set of time-bound targets in education (See Global Education Meeting in Muscat Oman in May 2014).<sup>5</sup>

## **The establishment of the Sustainable Development Agenda**

At the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2015, 193 Member States adopted a new global development agenda, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.<sup>6</sup> At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 4 on education. The SDGs established development priorities to 2030 and succeeded both the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All (EFA) goals, both of which expired in 2015.

The member state-led process to create consensus on a post-2015 development agenda spanned over three years, and involved two separate streams —one was an official process involving intergovernmental deliberations and the other a more consultative process, involving diverse stakeholders and the public. In 2012, the UN launched the Sustainable Development Solutions Network to mobilize knowledge and help design and implement the post-2015 agenda, building on lessons learned from the MDGs and Earth summits. A 2012 report concluded that the MDG framework should be retained but reorganized into s development; (3) environmental sustainability, and (4) peace and security.<sup>7</sup>

In January 2013, UN Member States established the intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG), with 70 Member States sharing its 30 seats, whose task was to propose SDGs and accompanying targets. In addition, a high-level panel published a series of recommendations on the vision and contours of the

---

5 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002281/228122E.pdf>

6 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

7 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/843taskteam.pdf>

SDG agenda in mid-2013.<sup>8</sup> The SDGs were to be designed using principles of good governance: accountability, transparency and open participation in decision-making (Sachs, 2015). After 13 sessions, the OWG produced a document in July 2014 that put forward 17 goals with 169 targets.<sup>9</sup>

Concurrently, during the first half of 2013, the UN conducted a series of ‘global conversations’ that engaged almost 2 million people in 88 countries. They included 11 thematic consultations including one on education, activities at a national level and door-to-door surveys. The UN also launched the My World survey, asking people which of the 17 development goals mattered to them the most. Between July and December 2014, more than 7 million people responded online, by ballot or via text messages (UN, 2014). My World voters overwhelmingly chose ‘a good education’ and ‘better healthcare’ as top priorities. People chose education as the number one priority regardless of their gender, age, wealth or education level.

The two processes merged with the publication of the Secretary-General’s synthesis report in December 2014.<sup>10</sup> This resulted in additional rounds of official negotiations during the first half of 2015, during which the formulation of the SDGs and targets was refined and eventually finalized. In September, they were adopted by the General Assembly in a special session. The success of the SDG framework fundamentally relies on national policies, plans and efforts. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encouraged member states to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels.”<sup>11</sup> Over 60 countries have already submitted voluntary national reviews of SDG progress.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the 169 SDG targets are being monitored using global indicators, developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators and formally adopted by UN Member States in July 2017.

---

8 [https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/files/HLP\\_P2015\\_Report.pdf](https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/files/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf)

9 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf>

10 [http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG\\_Synthesis\\_Report\\_Road\\_to\\_Dignity\\_by\\_2030.pdf](http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG_Synthesis_Report_Road_to_Dignity_by_2030.pdf)

11 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>. Paragraph 79.

12 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

## Education within the sustainable development agenda

The 2030 Agenda has united global development goals in one integrated framework, including the global goal of education (SDG 4), which succeeded the MDG and EFA priorities for education. At the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea, in May 2015, representatives of the international education community signed the Incheon Declaration, embracing the proposed SDG 4 as the single universal education goal, which commits countries to ‘[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.’ SDG 4 and its 10 targets (**Box 1**) constitute a framework in which quality education and lifelong learning are thought to contribute to the creation of more just, inclusive and sustainable societies (see below). Following a long and extensive consultative process, the global education community met again in Paris in November 2015, and adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which provides guidance and concrete ideas for implementing SDG 4 and its targets.<sup>13</sup>

### **SDG 4: The education goal and targets**

**Goal 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- **Target 4.1:** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- **Target 4.2:** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
- **Target 4.3:** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- **Target 4.4:** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship

---

<sup>13</sup> [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en\\_2.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf)

- **Target 4.5:** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- **Target 4.6:** By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
- **Target 4.7:** By 2030, ensure that 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
- **Target 4.a:** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
- **Target 4.b:** By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries
- **Target 4.c:** By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Education targets and priorities within the sustainable development agenda are rooted in key principles undergirding international instruments and agreements (**Box 2**). These principles state that education is both a fundamental human right and an enabling right (enabling other human rights); that it is a public good and a shared societal endeavor, which implies an inclusive process of public policy formulation and implementation; and that gender equality is inextricably linked to the right to education for all (UNESCO, 2015). These principles draw upon a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity, justice and shared responsibility.

**Box 2: Historical international agreements that affirm the right to education**

- Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1960)
- Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- UN General Assembly Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergency Situations (2010)

*Source:* UNESCO (2015).

## **Education is interlinked with other Sustainable Development Goals**

The 17 SDGs and 169 targets are conceived as a universal, indivisible and interlinked agenda. Many of the goals (apart from SDG 4) contain targets that highlight the value of learning, training, educating or at the very least raising awareness of core sustainable development issues. Education in the broad sense has long been recognized as a critical factor in addressing environmental and sustainability issues and ensuring human well-being.

There is strong evidence of the importance of education and learning in supporting social change, as well as the role of education as a cross-cutting means of advancing other development goals on the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO 2016). Increased educational attainment helps transform lives by reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, advancing technology and increasing social cohesion (UNESCO, 2013, 2014). It can also enable individuals to better cope with, and reduce their vulnerability to the dangers associated with climate change.

Education is associated with increased environmental awareness, concern and, in some contexts, action. For example, across the 57 countries participating in the 2006 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, students who scored higher in environmental science reported higher awareness of complex environmental issues. The more years of schooling, the more a person's concern for environmental protection increases, according to results from several World Values Surveys.<sup>14</sup> Educated citizens with greater environmental awareness and concern are more likely to get involved in political action to protect the environment. Education also gives citizens the skills needed to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. Farmers in low-income countries are especially vulnerable to climate change. A survey in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, South Africa and Zambia showed that farmers with more education were more likely to build resilience through adaptation.

The links go both ways. Children living in poverty are more likely to have less education and less access to basic services. Access to clean water and improved sanitation is especially important for girls' education. It influences their and their parents' education decisions and generates health gains, time savings and privacy. Sustainable consumption and production patterns, such as improvements to the physical environment, green government regulations and changes in consumer demand for greener products and services, increase interest in education for sustainable development. Tackling climate change is essential for overall progress on the SDGs and SDG 13 aims to promote urgent action to combat the impact of climate change.

Unfortunately, the reciprocal ties and synergies between education and many SDGs have yet to become the focus of sustained research. In fact, the evidence based on constraints and challenges to synergies between SDGs tends to be limited in most countries (UNESCO 2016). This knowledge gap needs serious attention: not only to determine the links between development sectors, but also to identify possible unintended adverse effects between them.

---

14 <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/programmeforinternationalstudentassessmentpisa/pisa2006results.htm> and <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>

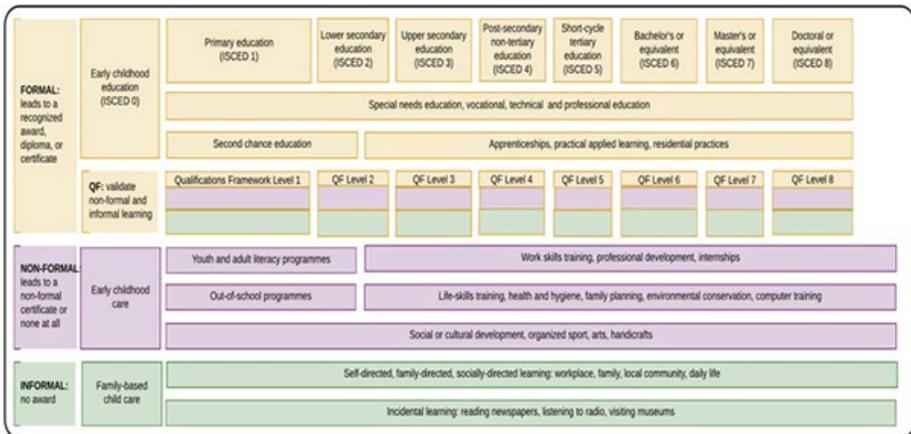
## The centrality of a lifelong learning perspective

A central focus of SDG 4 is ‘lifelong learning opportunities for all’. Lifelong learning comprises all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies, within personal, civic, social and employment-related perspectives (UIL, 2015). Lifelong learning has often been more narrowly associated with adult education, especially literacy programs that help adults compensate for poor-quality schooling (UNESCO, 2000).

The post-2015 development agenda conceives of lifelong learning as a process, that begins at birth and carries through all stages of life (**Figure 1**). This approach to education incorporates multiple and flexible learning pathways, entry and re-entry points at different ages, and strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, including formal accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education.

Lifelong learning is more than a description of education opportunities that run from cradle to retirement and beyond; it is an organizing principle, intended to improve people’s quality of life.

Figure 1



Source: UNESCO 2016, p. 8

## What kind of education do we need?

If education is to be a driver of transformative social, economic and environmental change, as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is an urgent need to rethink the goals and purposes of education systems. Going to school has always been seen as something that helps us acquire knowledge and skills for work; something that helps us earn a decent wage, that provides for ourselves and our families. But if education systems are designed with only economic purposes in mind then we are doing ourselves, our communities and our planet a disservice.

As we know, it is often the most-educated nations that are coughing out the most carbon emissions and harming the environment. It is also no secret that many school systems in the world are exacerbating social and economic inequalities, rather than reducing them. Too many education systems preserve only one or two dominant languages in schools, rather than recognizing and integrating cultural and linguistic diversity into classroom life. In doing so, they dampen the aspirations of ethnic or linguistic minorities, and inadvertently destroy traditional or indigenous knowledge systems. Textbook content can reinforce stereotypes and aggravate ethnic tensions, resulting in intolerance, discrimination and political grievances. Combined with the knowledge that environmental degradation continues unabated, largely due to individual and collective (in)actions, these examples show how education can undermine our collective vision for a more sustainable future. Clearly this is a moment for rethinking its purposes, contents and design.

The need for those who create and reform education systems to reconsider their designs is explored in the 2016 GEM Report, *Education for people and planet*. The Report explains that, with persistent inequalities, protracted conflict and natural disasters ever-present in our daily lives, the need for education systems to use their potential to influence attitudes, values, skills and behavior has never been so strong. Indeed, without a turnaround in the way we think about education and learning, the Report shows that achieving the new 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development will be impossible.

## **We must consider what we are learning**

With the global population reaching 9.7 billion by 2050, for instance, crop yields need to increase by 70% to keep up. Farmers need non-formal education to help them do this, just as they need new tools and knowledge to fight the effects of climate change. Initial analyses of farmer field schools have shown them contributing to increased crop yields by up to 12%. Education planners must acknowledge this important link, and look harder at ways to expand relevant education and training outside of school and into communities and for vulnerable populations.

Similarly, to create global citizens dedicated to finding solutions to environmental problems, learners need to have greater connection with nature, educators need to be prepared to teach about climate change and the environment, and teaching and learning materials should match those aims. Currently only around a third of official curricula frameworks around the world have a single reference to climate change and environmental sustainability, which could be quickly resolved.

Education planners and universities also need to urgently invest in green skills and relevant research for sustainable growth. The International Energy Agency, for instance, estimates that governments need to increase energy research and development by up to fivefold annually to achieve a quick transition to low-carbon intensity. Ministries of finance should not be reducing their invest doing, but increasing them, and fast.

## **We must analyze the way that learning is taking place**

The *right* type of education, which encourages equality, democratic values, conflict resolution, collaboration and innovative thinking, also requires us to look harder at not just what, but the way that lessons and classroom encounters are planned and taught. Are they focused on teachers supplying packaged knowledge or do they encourage constructive interactions between teachers and students? Do they invite learners to air and debate different views, or do they enforce a singular dominant view? Are teachers trained in asking probing questions, even in conflict affected contexts?

The skills, values and behavior conducive to sustainable lifestyles, international understanding and global citizenship are most effectively acquired in educational settings where learners actively participate in their learning, when they are given opportunities to consider the challenges facing their communities and possible solutions.

## **It is never too late to learn**

A lot of attention is spent on ensuring that the current young generation is well educated, mastering relevant knowledge and skills to help us fix pressing global issues *in the future*. The importance of ensuring that today's youth acquire at least 12 years of good-quality education goes without saying. But we need to think more broadly: climate change cannot wait another fifteen or twenty years for today's youngsters to graduate into adulthood and become decision makers. Crowded, overburdened and polluted cities cannot wait decades for effective solutions. If we want to address pressing environmental and societal problems, we need to start thinking about how to design an arch of learning and education as lifelong pursuits: beginning in infancy, continuing through childhood and adolescence, and particularly throughout our adult lives.

To broaden our thinking of education in this way is no easy task. Indeed there is a gulf between the common belief of how educated adults are and the reality. But let us be clear: while education systems have significantly expanded worldwide, millions have been left behind. Millions never gained access to school in the first place; millions of others began school but did not finish it. Evidence accumulates that a significant portion of those who attend school received a poor-quality education of limited value. Based on conventional statistics, 758 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women, are thought to lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. A recent global survey found that two thirds of adults are not financially literate.<sup>15</sup> And a further 263 million children and youths are out of school today, many of whom will add to tomorrow's pool of adult illiterates if more is not done — and soon.

We should not be fooled into thinking poor literacy skills is a problem confined to developing countries. Even in the Global North, pockets of low literacy

---

15 <http://gflec.org/initiatives/sp-global-finlit-survey/>

abound. The OECD estimated that 15% of adults in the 40 developed countries did not achieve a basic proficiency level in literacy. The International Telecommunication Union estimated that over half the adults in the EU have poor information and communication technology (ICT) skills and are unable to do basic arithmetic in a spreadsheet. A third cannot add an attachment to an email.

Given these staggering figures, it is shocking how few opportunities are in place to support learning among adults. In low-income countries, where adult illiteracy rates are the highest, the 2016 GEM Report shows that only 6% have ever taken part in a literacy program. In total, fewer than one in six countries spend more than 0.3% of their GDP on adult education. Although the case for helping adults to learn is strong, the issue consistently falls low on country priority lists worldwide.

## **And we cannot forget where learning should be happening**

Apart from formal education, and above and beyond basic literacy programs, learning should happen in many arenas. Most of us spend most of our waking hours in the workplace, for instance. Larger companies should encourage many forms of learning among their employees, especially in relation to environmental issues and social responsibility. Yet, in practice, few companies have green track records, even if it is something their staff would welcome. A 2008 survey by the Economist Intelligence survey of global executives showed that 40% thought it important for their companies to align sustainability with their overall business. In addition, governments should find ways to help small and medium-sized enterprises address the changing education and training needs of their employees.

Likewise, while community efforts to engage residents in new ways to keep the environment clean certainly exist, they are still the exception rather than the rule. Learning about new sustainable ways of living is important for us all. Listening to different points of view helps challenge our beliefs and values, as we consider new solutions to problems we might not have been aware of sitting isolated at home. Coming up with solutions in collaboration also helps motivate us to carry them through.

One way of mobilizing change in communities can happen through campaigns, whether run by NGOs like Avaaz, or Change.org, or by governments. These activities help people learn about the importance of taking up green practices, appropriate to different contexts. National sustainable consumption and production initiatives have been launched in the United Kingdom, for instance, for this purpose. Take one initiative in many countries including Nigeria, the U.R. Tanzania and Uganda for instance, Lighting Africa, which campaigned for households to use safer energy in the form of alternatives to kerosene lamps. It had huge success, reaching 35 million people and helping households reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 700,000 tonnes, the equivalent of getting 147,000 cars off the road.

## **If in doubt, remember why we are learning**

The reasons for reviewing the way we think about education and learning are all around us. Perhaps one of the most convincing arguments can be found in the effects that education can have on life and death choices. The spread of education transforms societies by changing marriage and family preferences, social norms and cultural practices. This is central to the demographic transition of lower fertility and mortality levels that facilitate investment in children's health, nutrition and education. EFA policies implemented to 2015 accelerated fertility decline. For instance, Nigeria's universal primary education policy was estimated to have reduced early fertility by 0.26 births per year of increase in female attainment. Non-formal education programs can help women plan childbirth too, as has been shown to work in countries as diverse as Pakistan and Australia.

The links between education and health might be self-evident. Think, however, about the agricultural sector, which is in urgent need of being rejuvenated. Not only is this sector the most directly affected by climate change and environmental degradation, but, according to various sources, the productivity of existing crop and pasture land needs to increase by 70% to 100% to feed our growing population in 2050. All this while many governments are halting their investment policies in agricultural research, even though investment is more than justified: the FAO estimates the returns to public spending on agricultural R&D in Uganda at more than 12%.

Agricultural extension programs, if designed well, can both highlight the value of indigenous practices and inform farmers about new technologies and practices. In doing so, they help improve crop yields, increase food security and reduce vulnerability to poverty. A study of farmer field schools, which currently reach over 12 million farmers in some 90 countries, showed that they increased yields by 12% and farmers' net income by 19% at the same time. To look at a country example, in Uganda, the likelihood that a family will adopt drought-resistant crop varieties increases when the father has basic education.

A second warning sign can be seen in the growing inequalities challenging liberalism and causing political upheavals worldwide. One culprit for the fact that prosperity is not benefitting everyone is that countries, and especially developing countries, are not ensuring that young men and women are equipped with relevant skills for work, leaving unemployment, working poverty, and sluggish economies in their wake. By 2020, the world will have no fewer than 40 million too few workers with tertiary education relative to demand. In countries like Sierra Leone, Uganda, Malawi and Mozambique, for instance, less than 5% of their students have attained tertiary education. Aligning skills with labor market needs is becoming critical.

An important third test case can be found in the majority of sprawling urban masses, as seen in Mumbai or Karachi swallowing up vast expanses of land and attracting huge swathes of people from rural areas. In these areas, if growth is singularly focused on creating knowledge-based urban economies, it will inevitably end up damaging or polluting our planet, and leaving masses of people behind. If education and city planners partnered together, on the other hand, it would reduce numbers of insecure informal employment and working poverty, and foster more inclusive economies. Likewise, education planners could answer the needs of urban planners and train well-prepared teachers who could serve in poor neighborhoods and reduce discriminatory attitudes toward particular urban student populations. In these ways, progress in social inclusion can be made.

## **Conclusion: It is time to align education to meet sustainability challenges**

Today's education systems are not delivering their full potential as drivers for sustainable development. Universal access for all children and youths has yet to be realized, far too many leave school early or graduate without basic skills for decent work and critical knowledge and values to enhance personal and community well-being. Education, training and lifelong learning opportunities for adults remain nominal due to lack of funding and support. Unless we rethink the purposes and contents of our education systems our vision of sustainable development and a healthy planet will be squandered. As the 2016 GEM Report amply demonstrates, education can transform lives and communities and contribute to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The question is whether this potential will come to fruition and whether we are willing to urgently rethink and (re)design the education we need and want.

## References

- King, Kenneth and Palmer, Robert (2014). *Post-2015 and the Global Governance of Education and Training*. Working Paper #7. Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training. Norrag. Geneva: Switzerland.
- Sachs, Jeffrey (2015). *The Age of Sustainable Development*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2015). *Conceptions and realities of lifelong learning*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. (Background paper for *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016*).
- UNESCO (2000). *World Education Report 2000: The Right to Education – Towards Education for All Throughout Life*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2013). *Education Transforms Lives*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2014). *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4: Teaching and Learning – Achieving Quality for All*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2015). *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015: Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2016). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016: Education for people and Planet: Creating sustainable futures for all*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2017). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/18: Accountability in Education: Meeting our Commitments*. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations (2014). *We the Peoples: Celebrating 7 Million Voices*. New York: United Nations/Overseas Development Institute/Ipsos Mori.
- World Bank (2018). *Learning: to Realize Education's Promise*. 2018 World Development Report. Washington DC: World Bank.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018). *One in Five Children, Adolescents and Youth is Out of School*. Fact Sheet No. 48. February. Montreal: UNESCO.