



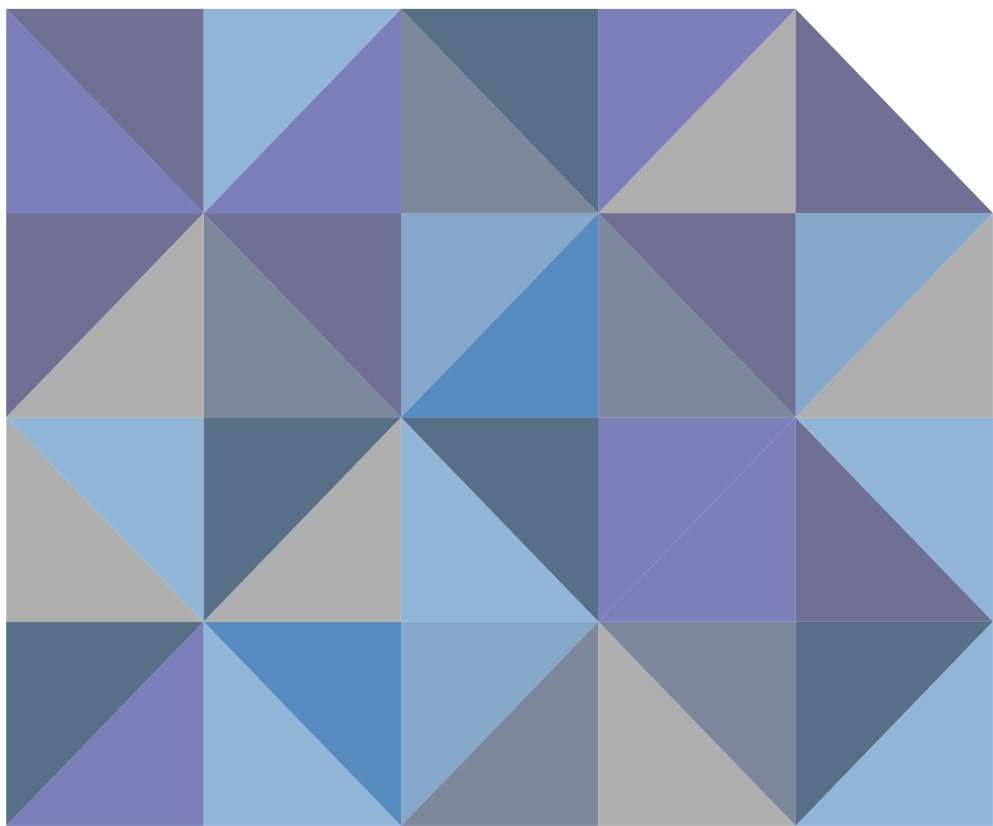
# WORKING PAPER

working paper **number 135**  
february, 2016

ISSN 1812-108x

## **Education through the lens of sustainable human development**

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*The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth is jointly supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Brazil.*

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Print ISSN: 1812-108X

# EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Gianna Alessandra Sanchez Moretti<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

If human development is defined as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process aiming to improve the well-being of populations and individuals, then the one element that can serve as the motor driving development is **education**. However, it is alleged that the international community and governments worldwide do not yet recognise the full potential and transformative power of education as a catalyst for human development, even if education is indeed considered a fundamental human right. Both education and development are human rights. Conversely, not everyone is actually enabled to exercise and benefit from these rights. There are some population groups that are considered to be minorities, vulnerable and/or excluded based on their race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, or economic or physical condition. This situation concerns development, because discrimination-based exclusion can produce inequalities. Discrimination-based inequalities challenge the meaning of true development, since population groups in a given country, whether developed or developing, do not have the chances on an equal basis to enlarge their choices or enjoy a long, healthy life and decent standards of living.

One of the main challenges of development today is actually securing achievements, especially in places where poverty is an everyday reality. More and more, education is being recognised as a fundamental element for securing sustainability in human development, precisely because its impacts are long-term, it can benefit other elements that contribute to development, and it has the potential to reduce inequalities.

Key words: sustainable human development; education; right to education; inequalities; discrimination.

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1. International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG).

## 1 INTRODUCTION

How should governments invest to achieve higher levels of development and remain there in a sustainable manner so as not to compromise achievements for future generations? In job creation? In the production of goods, services and capital? In social services? International debates have long agreed that development must benefit and focus on **humans**; it must go beyond the expansion of income and wealth, since income is not an end, but rather a means (UNDP 1990, 10). The motive behind this reasoning is that averages of per capita income, for example, conceal widespread human deprivation and inequalities (ibid., 12), and inequalities can decrease the capabilities of particular groups to cope with vulnerability (UNDP 2014, 1), thus impeding them from progress or even survival.

Today, the factor that challenges development and its actual sustainability the most is **vulnerability**. The higher the level of vulnerability of population groups in a given country, the higher the chances of development being hindered in that country (UNDP 2014, 1). So how can vulnerable groups be empowered to deal with vulnerability and become active agents and benefactors of sustainable human development? The answer is not simple, since governments, as well as other civil actors, carry out (or not) complex responsibilities and initiatives aiming to provide at least the essential necessities for their populations by way of various rights, freedoms, assistance, goods and services. Moreover, institutional and legal frameworks can contribute to the enhancement or the deterioration of people's capabilities to deal with vulnerability (ibid.). There is, however, an element that is a fundamental and differential factor that can have long-term effects, as well as the potential to create a domino effect; it is indeed essential for sustainable human development: **education**.

The 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development defines development as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process aiming to improve the well-being of populations and individuals, present and future. Here, development is considered both a 'process' and a 'level of attainment' encompassing various elements precious to life's well-being and enjoyment (UNGA 1986). Considering this definition, it can be asserted that one element that can serve as a driver of development is education; being understood here as both a learning process and a human right. However, it is alleged that the international community and governments do not yet recognise the actual full potential and transformative power of education as an actual catalyst for human development (UNESCO 2014), even if education is considered a fundamental human right and often expressed as a social priority.<sup>1</sup>

Sustainable human development and a quality and inclusive education are both human rights.<sup>2</sup> This means that humans are inalienably entitled to them. Conversely, not everyone is actually enabled to exercise and benefit from these rights. Worldwide, there are population groups that are considered minorities, vulnerable and/or excluded—i.e. they tend to suffer more from discrimination, inequalities, prejudice and violations based on their race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, or economic or physical condition. They in turn become excluded from mainstream society and are more vulnerable to poverty and discriminatory acts.

Why should this concern human development? This situation concerns development, because discrimination-based exclusion can produce inequalities. Discrimination-based inequalities challenge the meaning of true development, since population groups in a given country, whether developed or developing, do not have the chances on an equal basis to

enlarge their choices or enjoy a long, healthy life and decent standards of living; there are those who have and the have-nots (Chapman 1994). In general, inequalities, or the lack thereof, can be considered an indicator of a country's level of development. An inclusive, quality education has the potential to eradicate both discrimination and inequalities in a given society, as well as to intellectually emancipate an individual or groups of individuals.

This paper will focus on the pivotal role of education for sustainable human development by looking at some of the main benefits and the powerful potential of education as a catalyst in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **2 THE BENEFITS OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

The human right to education, as a social good, constitutes a solid foundation for sustainable human development; as an intricate process, it requires the engagement of the family, school and local community. Its implementation, protection and fulfilment lead to the creation of opportunities, freedom of choice, sustainable economic growth, improvement of health conditions, poverty reduction, the enhancement of social mobility and the prevention of autocratic rule (Coomans 2007, 185). All these elements contribute to the sustainability of development and its benefits for future generations.

One of the main goals of education—if not the main goal—is to achieve the full development and realisation of the human person. Education has the power to enable an individual to contribute to society as an independent and emancipated citizen, and thus a principal active agent of development. In other words, education is a means to risk prevention, as well as a tool that can help improve the human quality of life in a sustainable manner for present and future generations. Another important benefit of education is its potential to mitigate conflict. Education can mitigate conflict by altering societal contradictions working along the three primary aspects of conflict: structural, behavioural and attitudinal (Kotite 2012, 13).

All the benefits that a quality and inclusive education—i.e. on a non-discriminatory basis—may bring about within a society serve as evidence that education is a key right that unlocks the enjoyment of all other human rights (Coomans 2007, 186). Education can be thus considered a means and an end that has the domino effect of triggering and intertwining the realisation and enjoyment of other human rights, which is a crucial and differential factor for sustainable human development. An education indicator (literacy rates) is even a composite part of the Human Development Index (HDI).

A quality education becomes the concrete key that empowers individuals to fully develop their personalities and capabilities to participate in society through the acquisition of knowledge, values and skills. Furthermore, education as a right and process has the potential to be a solid tool in poverty reduction and sustainable development strategies worldwide.

However, advocacy and claims for human rights surge when an individual or group is prevented from enjoying any of their inalienable rights due to discrimination, marginalisation or vulnerability. Since human rights are universal/particular entitlements, their implementation can be measured by the degree to which it benefits and empowers those who thus far have been among the human rights 'have-nots', such as the black population during the former

South African apartheid regime and even during the period of transition to democracy (Chapman and van der Merwe 2008, 6), and populations worldwide that have been (or are still being) affected by the sinister effects of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism.

Inequalities and discrimination—whether direct or indirect, contemporary or historic—challenge the realisation and enjoyment of human rights. Human rights and human development reinforce each other by creating and reinforcing the environments where both can be realised and enjoyed. So if the realisation and enjoyment of human rights is crucial to human development (UNDP 2000, 2), then those same inequalities and discrimination that hinder human rights also hinder human development. If education is a powerful key to the realisation and enjoyment of all human rights, then education is also a fundamental key to human development.

From the premise that the concept of inequality ‘stupefies’ and the principle of equality ‘emancipates’ (Rancière 2002, 39), any kind of discrimination will stun humans and help maintain inequalities in a society, thus creating a vicious cycle and jeopardising opportunities for future generations. Education can break that cycle due to its potential to intellectually emancipate individuals and equip them with the right skills. On the other hand, by eradicating discrimination and prejudice, people can be emancipated and promote respect and equality, thus creating a virtuous cycle. On this note, education, therefore, has to tackle the inequalities and prejudices present in a given society and shape democratic citizenship respectful of diversity—for example, through a ‘global emancipatory education’ based on human rights (Guimarães-losif 2009, 83).

## 2.1 EDUCATION AT A GLANCE IN THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

For the purpose of this paper, all Human Development Reports (HDRs) from 1990 to 2014 were taken as a whole and reviewed to get an idea of how much and to what degree the international community considers education an element for human development. The linguistic text analysis of the HDRs was carried out by using AntConc 3.4.3, which is a text analysis tool developed by Dr. Laurence Anthony.<sup>3</sup> The method applied encompassed transferring all the reports into a text format file and then importing it into the tool to begin the text search.

The search that was carried out showed that the word ‘education-’ is mentioned 5,189 times in the HDRs from 1990 to 2014 combined, also including tables of contents, notes, references and annexes. Table 1 displays the number of times the word ‘education-’ is used in each of the reports, which are divided by year.

The numbers shown in Table 1 demonstrate that education is not a constant in the content of the reports; however, it is always present. It can be inferred that education is considered sometimes more, and at other times less, of a priority in the HDRs, since there are years when the word is mentioned significantly more than in other years—for example, in 2003 education was mentioned 514 times, while in 1999 it was mentioned only 70 times. This inconsistency could be because the HDRs are thematic and focus on a specific development theme for each publication; therefore, education is not always a principal element in the reports, since development is a complex process and level of attainment that depends on various factors and not only on education per se.

TABLE 1

**Number of times 'education-' is mentioned in the Human Development Reports (1990–2014) by year**

Year of report	Times the word 'education-' is mentioned in the report
1990	173
1991	251
1992	120
1993	134
1994	104
1995	165
1996	240
1997	157
1998	112
1999	70
2000	221
2001	291
2002	183
2003	514
2004	276
2005	310
2006	231
2007/8	162
2009	187
2010	441
2011	154
2012	Report n/a
2013	420
2014	273
<b>Total:</b>	<b>5,189</b>

Moreover, in a 2,004,680-word excerpt from all of the HDRs combined, the word 'education' appeared in 62<sup>nd</sup> place, being mentioned 3,004 times. Other relevant and substantive words that preceded education in the ranking are shown in Table 2.

It is explicit that education is regarded as a fundamental element of human development, *inter alia*. It is also evident that human development is the priority focus of the HDRs, as evidenced by the frequency of the words 'development' and 'human', the highest-ranking relevant and substantive words from the 2,004,680-word excerpt of all the HDRs combined.

Although education is considered important and is referred to with relatively constant frequency throughout the 1990–2014 period, there has been no single HDR that has had education as its main theme—i.e. that focuses on discussing how education can serve as a main driver and benefit human development. This suggests that there are other elements of human development that the international community and governments consider more important, and that education is just one of a number of other contributing elements. This also supports the allegation that the full potential of education has not yet been fully recognised as a fundamental driver of human development.

TABLE 2

**Relevant words mentioned in a 2,004,680-word excerpt from the Human Development Reports (1990–2014)**

Rank	Word	Number of times mentioned
8	development	15,289
10	human	13,668
14	countries	10,563
24	people	6,542
26	world	6,330
30	water	5,854
31	report	5,428
33	data	5,112
40	income	4,429
48	international	3,920
51	poverty	3,520
52	health	3,518
53	economic	3,435
54	global	3,419
55	HDI	3,262
58	national	3,188
59	rights	3,135
62	education	3,004

On this note, and for reflection purposes, what if education was taken out of that list of essential elements altogether? How could human development advance without education? How could the other elements that contribute to human development be empowered or given meaning without education?

Education implies the development of human aptitudes, capabilities, capacities, competencies, knowledge and skills, thus enabling a person to think, process and act, and thus making humans the main driver of development. If development is being defined more and more as a human-centred process and environment, then education is its motor, converting knowledge, information and skills into energy that turns humans into active agents throughout the process of development and benefactors of the environment it foments. Of course, there are also external factors—for example, institutional and/or environmental—that could hinder that potential, such as repressive governments, human rights violations and climate change. Examples are the South African apartheid regime that implemented an official separation of the education system in South Africa based on race with the passing of the Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953, and the devastating situation in which Haiti and its people were left after the earthquake in 2010.

## 2.2 EDUCATION FEEDS DEVELOPMENT: A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME EXAMPLES

The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) carried out an analysis focusing on the potential role of education in the realisation of the SDGs. The study uses evidence and country-specific examples of how education has benefited human development, as well as some predictions thereof. This analysis was carried out in



part due to the alleged lack of recognition in the past by the international community and governments of the powerful potential of education as a main driver of human development (UNESCO 2014). The lack of recognition of the importance of education as a human right and social good has manifested itself in various scenarios—for example, the privatisation of education, the lack of financial investment in education, and the low quality of education.

Especially since the 1980s, the privatisation of education has increased worldwide due to the application of structural adjustment programmes to public services and the neoliberal model of schooling that have made education a competitive market and less of a state social welfare function (UNGA 2014b, 6). In general, privatised education generates discrimination and inequalities for disadvantaged individuals by creating a system that favours those who can afford the fees, and thus discriminates against and excludes those who cannot (*ibid.*, 9). However, in some cases, affirmative action or waivers, low fees and scholarships are offered to students based on merit and/or economic need. Nevertheless, privatisation limits access to education for those who cannot afford it, and as a consequence, also generates inequalities and exclusion in terms of contributing to and participating in society, the economy and the labour market. Privatisation threatens the nature of education as a human right by making it no longer a public social good that should be of good quality, but a private acquisition instead.

Concerning funding, the latest research demonstrates that there is an estimated annual financial gap of USD22 million between 2015 and 2030 (UNESCO 2015a, 296) reflecting the annual difference between the estimated cost of achieving basic education (i.e. the Education for All Goals adopted in Dakar in 2000) and the estimated available domestic resources. Research estimates that “if education budgets stayed at their current levels as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), the gap would double to an annual average of USD52.5 billion” (*ibid.*, 297). The status quo of financing education has been facing challenges worldwide due to resource constraints, cuts and the global financial crisis (UNGA 2011b, 4). The international community constantly points to the insufficient funding for education by governments worldwide and reiterates the need to scale up budgets and provide enhanced resources to accelerate progress (*ibid.*, 3–4).

Closely linked to funding for education is the quality of education. Quality is another aspect that is constantly highlighted, since it depends directly on the availability and the use of financial resources. Financial barriers (UNGA 2011a, 15) and poor-quality education (UNESCO 2015b, 3) are linked to high levels of drop-out rates and the lack of skills acquisition. The lack of finance and quality in education translate into untrained staff, low salaries, high turnover, lack of material and damaging learning outcomes (*ibid.*, 17 and 38). It is estimated that “an average of 250 million children have not had the chance to learn the basics—even though 130 million of them have spent at least four years in school” (*ibid.*, 39).

Indeed, education is a fundamental human right, and many targets of the Education for All Goals have been accomplished; however, realities worldwide demonstrate the constant low level of overall engagement by governments. The critical challenges being posed by an increasingly globalised economy (UNGA 2013, 12) deal with the insufficient progress and persistent educational inequities among and within countries, which result in marginalisation and exclusion in education (*ibid.*, 7). This inhibits and challenges the realisation of equitable sustainable human development.

Based on this premise, the potential of education for development was affirmed loud and clear in the Incheon Declaration ‘Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all’ adopted by the global education community, which included government ministers from more than 100 countries, non-governmental organisations and youth groups, at the World Education Forum on 21 May 2015 in Incheon, South Korea. The Declaration, which will serve as the foundation for the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the SDGs, recognises education as a main driver of development and a fundamental key for the achievement of the post-2015 development agenda. It, therefore, proposes concrete steps and goals to execute that potential (UNESCO 2015c, 1–4).

A preliminary step that recognised this potential was the acknowledgement of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals that education is both an end and a means to achieving the global development agenda. The Report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (UNGA 2014a), which formed the basis for integrating the SDGs into the post-2015 development agenda, mentions the word ‘education’ 15 times. Although this may seem like a small number, the substantial aspect of it lays in the fact that education is being used in this proposal as a substantially active agent for sustainable (and inclusive) human development—i.e. it is being incorporated intersectorally with other fundamental areas of development, as well as deeply articulated intrinsically. For example, the report affirms that economic stability, sustained economic growth, the promotion of social equity, the protection of the environment, the enhancement of gender equality, women’s empowerment, equal employment for all and the protection, survival and development of children to their full potential can be achieved mainly, though not exclusively, through **education** (ibid., paragraph 11).

This report resulted in the zero draft of the outcome document that was submitted to the UN Summit in September 2015 (UN 2015), a historic moment when the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs were adopted. The outcome document reflects the SDGs and suggests some means of implementation as well as revisions of the goals themselves.

Education has its own SDG. Goal 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. This is a step forward towards sustainability in comparison with the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on education, MDG 3. The difference lies in the substantial and articulate content of the goal itself, as well as in its strategy. In other words, SDG 4 is a more comprehensive and holistic goal that is more conscious of long-term effects than MDG 3, which in a way reduced education to mere school enrolment rates.

Indeed, the right to education is vulnerable to being reduced to merely just access—i.e. school enrolment rates (Guimarães-Iosif 2009, 74)—or even literacy rates and gender parity. A reason behind this could be due to the actual wording of MDG 3—i.e. to “achieve universal primary education”. Furthermore, the actual target of the goal was to “ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling”. Another reference to education in the MDGs is found in MDG 4 on promoting gender equality and empowering women—i.e. through gender equality in education.

The MDG on education does not consider or make reference to the quality of education; at least it was not explicit in the UN Resolution that adopted the MDGs (UNGA 2000). In that Resolution, the word ‘education’ was mentioned only once. Although school enrolment, literacy rates and gender parity are important, other factors such as teacher training, curriculum content,

school performance, the principles of respect and tolerance for diversity, and the realities and conditions of the learning environments are more substantive and must be considered in the realisation of the right to education and the goals and targets related to it.

Other than just access, the right to education should be thought of as a holistic and proactive training process of quality for the development of the human potential, without discrimination, to contribute to sustainable human development. The proposal of the new SDG on education encompasses just that: it considers gender equality; quality; access; the different levels of education from early childhood care to lifelong learning; technical and vocational education; minorities; literacy rates; education for sustainable development; learning environments; scholarships and North–South and South–South cooperation; and the quality of teachers and training. This new formulation makes the goal and its strategy much more comprehensive.

Moreover, education thought of as a means and an end is also present within SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages; SDG 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; and SDG 13 on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

### 2.3 A REVIEW OF THE UNESCO STUDY ON HOW EDUCATION CONTRIBUTES TO SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO shed light on each SDG and the role and benefits of education towards their achievement. The 17 SDGs encompass poverty reduction (SDG 1); nutrition improvement (SDG 2); health gains (SDG 3); education (SDG 4); gender equality and empowerment (SDG 5); water and energy sustainability (SDGs 6 and 7); economic growth (SDGs 8 and 9); inequality reduction (SDG 10); urban development (SDG 11); environmental protection/resilience (SDGs 12, 13, 14 and 15); peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG 16); and the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17). Education has a vital role for the achievement of each of these goals.

For SDG 1 on poverty reduction, education can enable people in formal employment to earn decent and/or higher wages. It is estimated that one year of education is linked with a 10 per cent increase in wage earnings (UNESCO 2014, 1). Also, education can stimulate more opportunities even in the informal sector. For example, the more educated a person is, the more chances he or she will have to start a profitable business. Under this goal, education can also benefit the income of farmers and strengthen their capacity to interpret and respond to new information vital to their harvesting of crops and diversifying their sources of income, as well as preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Research shows that getting as far as secondary education has particularly strong effects, and children whose parents had some sort of formal education have more chance of finding employment and escaping poverty (*ibid.*).

Regarding the improvement of nutrition (SDG 2), education has the potential to lead parents to adopt good health and hygiene practices, ensure a varied, micro-nutrient-rich diet and help reduce obesity. It is widely accepted that poor nutrition affects the development of children's brains and their learning capacities. Educated parents, with at least secondary education, can contribute to the improvement of their children's nutrition and lifestyles. It is estimated that parents with secondary education can contribute to the diversification of the

family diet by 10 per cent more than when neither parent has any education (*ibid.*, 2). It is clear that under this goal, the right to food, education and development go hand in hand.

Education can also lead to health gains (SDG 3) and help save lives that would otherwise be lost due to ignorance of preventive measures. Educated people are better equipped to act on early signs of disease. Educated mothers are more likely to give birth with a skilled attendant, rather than alone, to vaccinate their children and to reduce mortality during birth (*ibid.*, 3–4). Education also has a role to play in containing diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. Those with more education are also better equipped to avoid risky behaviour and its consequences (*ibid.*).

It is obvious that education is a contributing factor to SDG 4 on education. However, the decisive factor relates to the quality and innovation implemented by governments in their education systems. Some differential elements to consider relate to the minimum age to begin education, the total years of schooling, the quality and inclusiveness of education, learning outcomes and curricula, second-learning chances and training opportunities (*ibid.*, 5). This goal is evidence that education is both a means to and an end of human development. Quality education as a goal implies and requires wise government investment and engagement.

Another crucial goal, gender equality (SDG 5), could not be reached without education. Education allows women to enter the labour force and demand fair wages, have a voice and be heard, be more respected and confident, and make more responsible choices with regards to marriage, pregnancy and family size (*ibid.*, 6). Empowering women, especially in developing countries, is crucial for achieving gender equality, and education is a way to help drive that forward. Moreover, gender parity within education is also a goal in itself and a contributing factor.

SDGs 6 and 7 deal with water and energy sustainability. Education can play a differential role in how people make use of these resources (*ibid.*, 7). Awareness, acquired through education, can change irresponsible use of these resources and unsustainable lifestyles of consumption. Humans are an important agent of climate change, since interaction and the modification of the environment and natural resources are inevitable for human survival and thriving. Education can cultivate awareness and environmentally friendly habits.

With regards to sustainable economic growth (SDGs 8 and 9), it is estimated that for each year of increased educational attainment of a country's population, the annual per capita GDP increases by about 2–2.5 per cent (*ibid.*, 8). Research shows that the earlier people start school, the higher the chances of increasing their region's level of development, which was true when comparing East Asia and the Pacific with sub-Saharan Africa (*ibid.*).

Some studies suggest that the quality of education is linked to economic growth—for example, low-quality education will most likely lead to a weak skills base for the economy. A downside, however, is the actual amount of time that it takes to measure and illustrate how education positively affects economic growth, since this would require monitoring students' learning outcomes and test scores over time (*ibid.*). Studies show that higher test scores in mathematics, science and reading can “relate the putative outputs of schooling to subsequent economic success” of a given country (Hanushek and Woessmann 2009, 6). This, however, is a controversial assertion, since a direct relationship between test scores and economic growth is not explicit or clearly measurable, because various factors can generate economic growth, and due to the length of time it actually takes to measure substantial educational progress. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to assert that a close relationship does indeed exist between educational achievement and GDP growth.

The explicit link can be identified in the relationship between higher cognitive skills of a workforce and higher annual growth in per capita GDP.

SDG 10 aims to reduce inequality. Not only can education contribute to reducing socio-economic inequalities by empowering individuals with knowledge and skills for the labour market, but it can also reduce inequalities within education itself. Inequalities in education are common, whether they exist in test scores, school performance and behaviour or among different groups of the population based on, for example, gender, colour, language, nationality, religious beliefs etc. The more equitably educational opportunities are distributed, the more that income inequalities—reflected by the Gini coefficient—can be reduced (UNESCO 2014, 9). Such was the case in France, Malaysia and Brazil, where income inequality dropped about 7 per cent over 20 years, when the amount of population with secondary education increased (*ibid.*).

Under SDG 10, education has the potential to reduce poverty and create a middle class. However, development, urbanism and the labour market can be detrimental and actually generate more inequalities if education is outpaced by these other issues. For example, if the demand for skills outpaces educational opportunities, then those without the skills demanded by the market will be left behind. It is crucial that educational opportunities are always available and *avant-garde* so as to reflect the demands of the economy and the market.

Related to urbanism and development, SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements more inclusive and sustainable. Education has a role to play in the achievement of this goal due to its potential to train individuals with the right skills and knowledge to actually build sustainable cities, as well as raise awareness on sustainability in relation to architecture, urbanism and the environment. It is important, however, not to concentrate well-educated populations in highly urban cities, because this can generate inequalities among different localities and bring development to some areas while leaving others behind to experience the 'brain drain' phenomenon. Since urbanism can create problems, education can also better equip individuals to react and find solutions to those problems that can threaten human livelihoods, living standards and the environment. Educated people can also gather to advocate for urban justice and rally against negligence from local authorities, which are also responsible for the sustainability and maintenance of a city (*ibid.*, 10).

Trends show that the world is becoming more and more urban, and that the urban population surpassed the rural population for the first time in 2007 (*ibid.*). Although urbanisation may bring about development, it also has the potential to create inequalities; education can help mitigate negative effects by raising awareness and supplying the right skills and knowledge.

On a rather similar note, education can help achieve SDGs 12, 13, 14 and 15 on environmental protection, due to its potential to raise awareness and provide skills. Individuals will be able to shift attitudes and adopt sustainable and conscious lifestyles, mainly through proactive education that instils values, knowledge and know-how. Climate change education can also instil these in the mindsets of future generations that will be the leaders of tomorrow, advocating for and adopting public policies and laws that can sustainably manage resources in addition to adopting sustainable behaviour and practices (*ibid.*, 11). The World Values Survey (2005–2008) from 47 countries indicates that the higher the educational level of a person, the more likely he or she will be to express concern for the environment (*ibid.*).

In some cases, however, prevention is not the main solution, although it is crucial for sustainability. Some regions of the world are suffering immediate climate change-driven

impacts that are directly detrimental to their livelihoods and, in some cases, their survival. For example, farmers in low-income countries are highly vulnerable to climate change, since its consequences can jeopardise their crops and income (ibid., 12). The right knowledge and skills in these scenarios could help save lives by equipping individuals with the know-how on how to react and adapt to the sinister and direct consequences of climate change. Education is key to resilience, since resilience can be understood as the ability of people to cope and adjust to adverse events (UNDP 2014, 1). Education, therefore, has to be of a proactive nature that instils in people awareness and skills.

With a more social outlook, SDG 16 aims to promote more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. This goal depends greatly on human rights, the rule of law and civic engagement. Education can strengthen participatory civic and political engagement, as well as prevent and reduce conflicts and political corruption (UNESCO 2014, 13–14) or even help find solutions to conflicts. Education is a way to instil values, tolerance and respect for diversity.

In regards to the relationship between citizens and governments, education is key to strengthening and maintaining mechanisms for claiming rights and holding governments accountable, which is crucial for more equitable and progressive development, especially in democratic societies. Education informs, and information allows individuals to grasp the meaning of their human rights, making them “aware that they exist and that governments have obligations with regard to their implementation” (UNICEF/UNESCO 2007, 42).

Education as a human right, and essential for the enjoyment of other human rights, can achieve its full purpose of emancipating and empowering individuals in societies that are more democratic. In democratic societies, more than in others, individuals can enjoy their human rights and education is a driver allows individuals to hold governments accountable in guaranteeing and protecting these rights.

History demonstrates that the volume of social rights demands and jurisprudence increased in Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Africa due to the democratic waves that these regions of the world experienced after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Langford 2008, 7). The absence of democracy has been linked to more human rights violations (Neumayer 2005, 926), and closely linked to the civil and political rights championed by the historic revolutions is the political system of democracy, which is considered the final form of human governments and history, itself understood as a simple and coherent process of evolution based on empirical evidence (Fukuyama 1995, 30).

The last proposed goal (SDG 17) aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. Although the UNESCO study does not delve deeply into the analysis of this goal’s link to education, it can be inferred, based on the analyses above, that education can empower and equip politicians acting in the international community with the knowledge and skills needed to make decisions and establish and implement cooperation mechanisms and agreements in the name of sustainable human development. Crucial to this, for example, is the strengthening of North–South and South–South cooperation for development. Politicians and decision-makers can also invest in quality education within and between their nations so as to empower their peoples to become active agents of sustainable human development.

At a glance, it may seem that 17 goals are far too many, keeping in mind that there were only eight MDGs, and countries did not achieve all of them, although worldwide progress has

been made on each. For example, between 1990 and 2010, the world halved extreme poverty, averted about 3.3 million deaths from malaria, saved 22 million lives from tuberculosis and 6.6 million lives from HIV, and improved gender parity, primary school enrolment and child and maternal health care (UNGA 2014c, 5).

However, the MDGs left the world with much unfinished work (*ibid.*). Debates question the necessity of having all these goals, since they present the risk that too many goals and targets can endanger the future of the sustainable human development agenda, making it hard to mobilise people to push the agenda forward (Dillon Soares and Guerreiro Osório 2015). Guerreiro Osório claims that if everything is important, then nothing is a priority. As seen above, education makes up part of the strategy on how to achieve these proposed goals; however, it is crucial not to mix goals with strategies, because goals, such as the SDGs, are about where we want to go and not about how to get there (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, it is evident that each of the SDGs relies on education as a means towards their achievement. The main elements that comprise these means are skills training, transferring knowledge and raising awareness among individuals, institutions and regional and national governments, hence empowering and equipping them to act as the central active agents for sustainable human development in each of the areas covered by the goals.

To recapitulate, development was analysed through the lens of education as both a means and an end to achieving sustainable human development. It was affirmed that inequalities and discrimination against vulnerable groups hinder the realisation of human rights, and hence development, due to the close relationship between these two. The role of education in the realisation of both was also upheld and demonstrated.

### **3 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

Education as a human right can emancipate and confront discrimination and inequalities, thus contributing to the sustainable human-centred development of a society. Education is not only an end, but also a means: the means for our world to have more chance of achieving sustainable development and long-lasting peace. It is thus that education—both as a means to and an end of human development and, therefore, as an essential component of human life—translates into a ‘human right’. Inclusive, quality education is a fundamental human right for the realisation of all human rights. Education, therefore, is a fundamental key right for sustainable human development, provided that development needs (as a process) and allows for (as an environment) the realisation of human rights and fosters an environment for their enjoyment.

It is important for education to be both inclusive and non-discriminatory, so as to avoid the exclusion of certain groups of the population from a mainstream society—ideally one that includes and respects diversity. Discriminatory acts and attitudes exercised, directly or indirectly, against vulnerable groups within educational systems can lead to negative socio-economic impacts in the labour market and society—for example, a poor and weak labour force, underemployment, unemployment, labour and wage injustices, less competition and diversification of markets, the intensification of violence, crime and insecurity etc.

Although education is given importance within the international community and by governments, its importance is not stressed or invested in enough in relation to its direct link to human development. This situation could be improved if the importance of education as a

human right and driver of development were recognised and assimilated—i.e. that the right to education is an essential, if not the most important, element for the realisation and enjoyment of all other human rights and for sustainable human development.

The previous analysis demonstrates that it is obvious that the role of education has evolved and is being recognised more and more. Although education has not yet been a main topic of the HDRs, an education indicator is part of the HDI. Nevertheless, education did have its own MDG, although it was reduced to a basic minimum standard—i.e. primary school enrolment. Since the first HDR in 1990 until today, education has been promoted as an essential driver of sustainable human development with the adoption of the SDGs (especially SDG 4), although the sector is still facing the pressing challenges of privatisation, the lack of financial support and low quality standards. Education is also being considered more and more as a main driver in reducing inequalities and empowering people. Education will continue to be essential for development, if not more in the years to come.

Without holistic, proactive and quality education, sustainable human development is impossible. One of the main challenges for development today is actually securing achievements. Education is a fundamental right for securing sustainability in human development, precisely because its impacts are long-term and because it can benefit other elements that contribute to development. It is, therefore, vital that good-quality and inclusive education receive the high priority it deserves in overall sustainable human development strategies worldwide.

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## NOTES

1. For example, the Global Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda conducted by UNESCO and UNICEF demonstrated that the majority (584,329) of more than 850,000 respondents from 194 countries chose 'good education' as the top priority for the post-2015 agenda (UNESCO/UNICEF 2013, 2).
2. Education was declared a human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Consequently, development was also declared a human right in the 1986 Declaration of the Right to Development.
3. AntConc can be downloaded free of charge from <[http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc\\_index.html](http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html)> Accessed 8 August 2015.





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