

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7: Fostering Global Citizenship

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The interconnected environmental, economic, social and political challenges facing humanity call for education that cultivates a sense of belonging to common humanity and responsibility to take action to address these challenges. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an inter-governmental commitment and “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs (United Nations, 2015). Education is articulated as a stand-alone goal (SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) with 7 outcome targets and 3 means of implementation (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sustainable Development Goal 4

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
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
4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
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
4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the 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
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
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
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

The principles underlying SDG 4 are deeply rooted in the intrinsic—as opposed to instrumental—value of education and a humanistic vision of education which UNESCO has championed since its inception. First of all, education is a fundamental human right. The state bears a duty to ensure universal access to inclusive and equitable quality education. Secondly, education is a public good and a shared societal endeavour (UNESCO, 2015). Not only the governments but also civil society, teachers and educators, the private sector, communities, families, youth and children all have important roles in realizing the right to quality education.

Education for all is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development. In addition to literacy and numeracy, education for today and tomorrow should equip learners with higher order thinking skills (such as critical thinking skills) and social and emotional skills to engage constructively with the uncertain and rapidly changing world. It is not sufficient if education is merely adaptive to the changing societal needs; education needs to be transformative (UNESCO, 2015). Value-based and action-oriented education—including education for sustainable development (ESD), global citizenship education (GCED), peace and human rights education, environmental education, development education, global learning, intercultural education and education for international understanding and others—is now encapsulated in SDG 4 Target 7 (SDG 4.7).

Promoting peace and sustainable development through education is one of UNESCO's core missions and is now enshrined in SDG 4.7 as one of the goals which nations around the globe aspire to achieve. There is a need to ensure education systems help build peaceful and sustainable societies. This includes ensuring that education systems help develop knowledge and skills necessary to foster mutual understanding, respect and care among all people and for the planet we share, and to engage responsibly and creatively with the changing world. This is critical not only to achieve SDG 4.7 but also to support the implementation of all 17 SDGs. Education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) is not restricted to SDG4. Education is specifically mentioned in targets of the five goals listed below, but also linked to virtually all of the other SDGs in one way or another:

Health and Well-being

Target 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes

Gender Equality

Target 5.6: Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education

Decent Work and Economic Growth

Target 8.6: By 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

Responsible Consumption & Production

Target 12.8: By 2030 ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature

Climate Change Mitigation

Target 13.3: Improve education, awareness raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning

Awareness and knowledge *about* sustainable development is not sufficient to foster competences required for shaping more peaceful and sustainable societies. There is an increasing consensus on the critical importance of social and emotional skills (sometimes referred to as “soft skills”), in addition to cognitive skills (including both the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy and higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking). Education for the 21st century should cultivate intelligence that integrates reason and emotion.

It is vital to give a central place to strengthening education’s contribution to the fulfilment of human rights, peace and responsible citizenship from local to global levels. One of the pathways to foster the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges is to integrate the principles and values of sustainable development at the heart of the curriculum of core subjects, rather than inserting new thematic content into the already overburdened curriculum.

The Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) is an integral part of UNESCO, and its specialist institute on education for peace, sustainable development and global citizenship. It calls for a fundamental rethinking of schooling (UNESCO MGIEP, 2017a) and proposes a strategy to integrate education for sustainable development in the textbooks of core subjects (UNESCO MGIEP 2017b). Calls to gear up schools for the 21st century are ubiquitous today. Dominant international educational discourse hails the potential of 'the youth dividend' and digital technology for enhancing growth. Some Asian education systems are held up as models for an innovation-led utopian future. But across much of Asia, neither the reality of schooling nor the patterns of development with which it is associated give cause for blithe optimism. A humanistic vision of education needs to be strongly restated and defended in an era when educational debate worldwide has come to be framed by a narrowly economic and instrumentalist agenda. UNESCO MGIEP (2017a) argues forcefully that conceptions of the fundamental purposes of schooling need to be reconfigured, if the ideals to which the global community has subscribed are actually to be realized.

References:

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