

Aaron's presentation *introduced participants to the contribution the MDGs and EFA made to the SDGs, and explored issues about integration of adult learning in the SDG targets. He responded to points made during discussion following his presentation.*

This presentation is intended to explore the world outside of education, in terms of thinking about the broader development discourse that has emerged, and what this might portend for the work that different people at the seminar were engaged in, and how they may re-position themselves given the “earthquake that has occurred in terms of development discourse”. With reference to the discussions around the post-2015 development agenda that has been ongoing for 1.5-2yrs, both in the education and, more generally, in the development communities. The SDG agenda is the most open, consultative agenda that has ever been conceived. Unlike the MDGs, which involved a very small group of ‘experts’ who sat in a back room and articulated a series of goals, and measurable indicators, and was not part of a broad consultative process, the SDG process was open from the very beginning, driven by official representatives of UN member-states and not international agencies, and involved a whole series of different consultations including online. In 2014 the UN launched the MY World survey, asking people to vote on which development goals mattered to them the most. Of the more than 10 million respondents, overwhelming majorities chose ‘a good education’ and ‘better healthcare’ as top priorities from 16 options. This helped legitimate the notion that education should be treated as a stand-alone goal, and not integrated within a social protection sector such as social welfare or social services.

At the Global EFA Meeting that took place in Muscat, Oman in May 2014, the representatives of the international education community decided to do away with two separate but parallel courses (MDG and EFA) and to bring them together into one unified international policy framework. This decision to marry the development community with the education community was very explicit, even though some people may wax nostalgic for a separate education track like EFA. Thereafter, UNESCO and UNICEF representatives conveyed the emergent priorities of this education community to UN colleagues in New York. Such priorities, they argued, should be integrated in full, into the emergent post-2015 agenda discussed in New York, although this task was not easy. He then directed attention to the MDG agenda, wherein the perception of or approach to education and the education component of the MDGs were very narrowly defined, which was essentially, the completion of primary education (UPE), and gender parity with respect to primary and secondary education. Adults do not feature at all in the MDGs, so EFA was always contrasted with the MDGs precisely because EFA was a broader, more comprehensive agenda that included early childhood

care and education, primary/basic education, quality issues, adult literacy, life-skills, and gender parity and equality. In a sense, this created EFA as “primary”, because many of the issues from the EFA community became embedded in the post-2015 development discourse. Instead of having a narrowly construed educational goal, as the MDGs, there is now a very broad SDG goal that includes targets that were not part of the EFA agenda. This is evident by its emphasis on learning outcomes, higher education and the inclusion of TVET. It is also the first time that the UN talks openly about aims and contents of education. The international education community was thus successful in embedding a very broad agenda into the post-2015 development discourse. In this sense, EFA is included and has expanded in SDG 4.

One of the most revolutionary parts of SDG4 is target 4.7, which opens up questions around the contents of education and the aims and purposes of education, and not just for formal schooling, since 4.7 is defined in terms of all learners, not just those in school. Another first is that unlike the EFA goals, in which talk about quality was expressed in general terms that include learning outcomes, there is now reference to the contents of education, *what* people are learning and exposed to, the type of curricula programmes. This is a substantial change in the way in which quality is defined. In international discussions around quality issues, the focus previously had been on ‘inputs’: how much money do countries spend per pupil, do all pupils have textbooks, how many students there are per classroom. Increasingly quality is seen to be about learning, whether students have achieved minimal proficiency levels in skills and whether learners have been exposed to the themes of sustainable development and global citizenship. But apart from learning generically (which by default is literacy and numeracy), the discourse is changing, and for the first time issues around sustainable development, the contribution of culture or global citizenship, are engaged with. For example:

“All learners acquire the knowledge and skills (so the emphasis again is on outcomes) needed to promote sustainable development including among others through education for sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

While this is a “mouthful”, it does include many concepts with a historical discourse behind them, and is one of the few places in all the SDGs that culture is talked about. There was a UNESCO Recommendation passed in 1974 about the importance of a normative framework for promoting

values and principles of peace, non-violence and human rights. Later, issues around gender equality were added to the Recommendation. Even the people at UNESCO had not made the connection between goal 4.7 and these earlier Recommendations. UNESCO's current Executive Board has given authorisation for an international survey to monitor how countries are implementing the revised 1974 Recommendation (an international standard setting instrument), which now includes elements found in target 4.7. It is questionable whether this will be a sufficiently reliable basis for monitoring progress in 4.7 but it is a step forward since it identifies country efforts and knowledge gaps.

The reason for engaging with all this history is because the process of formulating the SDGs was a "very fragile brick castle". As a negotiated consensus emerged from the discussions over the SDGs (the 17 goals and 169 targets), it was increasingly felt that this structure should not be touched since it was such an elaborate construction. Member states agreed to pass it, buying into the notion that if one brick was taken out (or revised), the whole castle would collapse. This has provided a huge platform for an ambitious yet universal education agenda. The SDG agenda is considered universal since the previous agenda (EFA) had been oriented towards countries in the Global South but now the SDG targets are relevant for countries worldwide. It is no longer just a matter how the North can support education progress in the South but also how the North is getting organised to implement these targets. Many ministries of education in the North have still not understood this.

Another important aspect of the SDG agenda is that it is a holistic agenda and is meant to work against sectoral thinking. This aspect is critical in terms of implementation. Many emphasise integrated planning and multi-sectorial programmes and how synergies may be identified across goals. Many are looking for ways by which the targets can be built upon in order to prioritise those key inter-relationships that have impact across more than one goal rather than thinking narrowly about progressing forward with individual goals within a specific sector. In the GEM Report to be launched 6 September 2016, several chapters focus on the ways in which education has an impact on the other SDGs and how changes in other SDGs impact education. It is concerned with the reciprocal links between education (broadly construed as LLL/E) and other SDGs, how education is embedded and interrelated with the different SDGs. The problem is that while in certain areas of interlinkages the literature is quite rich, in others it is lacking. So if one wants to engage with the relationship between climate change mitigation and education (for example), we would be in a quandary; whereas if one were interested in the relationship between health or gender and education, an abundantly rich literature has accumulated over the years. The report intends to identify the knowledge gaps with regards to these inter-relationships.

Adults have a prominent place in the SDGs; if we disassemble some of the assumptions (whether explicit or implicit), transforming adults, their attitudes, behaviour and lifestyles are deeply embedded in the other SDGs, even if not as explicitly in SDG 4. Exploring what the role of adult learning and education would be in contributing to the other goals, if the assumptions are unpacked, would be a valuable exercise, since there is no existing analysis that carefully considered the implications of different SDGs on education, and specifically for the world of ALE. Making these explicit might help change the minds of decision-makers, particularly with regards to the prioritisation of funding. Part of the argument is that even if we engaged in very elaborate curricula reform for school students today, it would still take 30-40 years for them to become adults and affect change in their households and community. It is logical then, to consider what steps can be taken today, in the short term, to change the ways by which the kind of footprints we leave, as adults, could be transformative, so that we become much more conscious about the decisions we may make around things that matter. Clearly, if we reduced poverty and empowered women, these would impact climate change. If the agenda is meant to be transformative and there is a sense of urgency, then ALE should be prioritised, not just the education of school children. How the discourse may be changed is a challenge involving multiple elements but it is important.

The elaborate architecture of the SDGs includes 17 goals, 169 targets and a whole set of global and thematic indicators. Much of the ongoing discussions in the education community have largely focused on indicators. Here, the education sector has been “moving at lightning speed” relative to other sectors. In the months prior to the UN agreement on the SDG agenda (26th September 2015), the education sector (which already had a technical advisory group [TAG] that had been working on developing indicators for the education targets) proposed 43 thematic indicators. The UIS, UNICEF and UNESCO forwarded 12 of these to the UN Headquarters, out of which 11 were agreed to serve as global indicators for SDG 4, while one, the target 4.7, was given the green light. In other sectors, their submissions of proposed indicators was seen by the UN committee responsible for SDG indicators in a more problematic light. For these 11 global indicators, countries will have an obligation to collect and report data, and this will be part of the broad monitoring process. The initial global indicator for 4.7 was an OECD indicator about knowledge of 15 year olds about geo-science and environmental science, while the new indicator identifies the “*extent to which global citizenship education and education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in national education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment*”. While the goal talks about learners acquiring knowledge and skills in these areas, the global indicator focuses on country efforts to

transform the attitudes and the world-views of learners, since it may be many years before an instrument for measuring knowledge in these areas is devised.

The GEM Report had begun analyzing cross-national data on curricular frameworks and textbooks (through content analysis) to ascertain the extent to which many of the concepts noted in 4.7 (e.g., human rights, gender equality, peace, sustainability and others) are embedded within the authorised textbooks used by different countries alongside school-age learners and student assessment. A similar kind of global indicator has now been proposed in two targets that lie outside of SDG 4;. One is climate change mitigation (13.3) and the other is around sustainable consumption and production (12.8); they both have a very similar format in terms of mainstreaming relevant content in policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment. The data for such global indicators does not yet exist. Not only are the targets ambitious but so too are the proposed global indicators, given current availability of data. Thus interagency collaborations are needed to devise new forms of evidence that go beyond administrative data. Other aspects of the “data revolution” are the need for more timely information as well as disaggregated data (e.g. by gender, location, socio-economic status, disability status). If Ministries of Education cannot provide such data, various kinds of household or representative surveys are needed. Roy Carr Hill has produced evidence that many marginalised populations (perhaps as many as 500 million people) are not being sampled in existing household surveys, many of whom are adults; this markedly changes our view of who the adults are, how many live in poverty and what their learning needs are, particularly if we are trying to “make visible the invisible”.

Discussion

In response to points raised in discussion, Aaron agreed that, though adults are more prevalent in the targets, when targets are translated into indicators, adults begin to disappear and school measures often predominate. This is one way adults will go missing from the evidence-based discourse. Thus another important “battle” is the extent to which adults are present or absent in the proposed global indicators. The growth of very informal forms of adult learning activities, “kitchen adult education”, often spontaneous and unsponsored groups such as reading circles, family or local history groups, would also be missing - extensive in number but invisible, because they meet privately, unrecorded, with no indication of who was teaching, what monitoring of quality is available, what goals are set or how indicators of their success and achievements are agreed upon. Aaron agreed that these are all part of the SDG climate; there is a great deal going on in terms of

adult participation in learning activities that the UN indicators simply cannot pick up without research. The indicators are “not set in stone”, and it is likely that in a few years, various committees will be established to revisit them and assess what has been achieved or ignored, which groups have been excluded from an indicator or what kinds of innovative activities might have emerged in particular countries. The biggest challenge is to make visible the invisible education and learning activities, to find ways not only to recognise the value of those learning experiences but also to monitor the activities beyond the people who have participated in them. Interestingly, the word “monitoring” is not employed in the main SDG document for accountability since member-states preferred to refer to this as “follow-up and review”. Still countries will be held responsible in relation to each global indicator.

When it was queried whether other sectors realised their stake in education, Aaron observed that there were many leaders in other sectors who had a fairly narrow view of education. The GEM Report saw it as their objective to raise consciousness about what education could entail (beyond narrow definitions), and hoped to launch their report of learning outside of education sectors precisely to speak to people who might not have given much thought to the meaning of the terms ‘education’ or ‘learning’. The education sector has a lot going for it, as it is seen as critical for transforming ideas around the SDGs. Often education is only seen “as a driver for, an instrument of, or a means for” change, rather than considering the value of education in itself. Thus there are dangers of embedding education priorities in development discourse.

In terms of literacy, one of the biggest problems is that literacy figures have been based on subjective, indirect assessments either by adults themselves or on returns by heads of households rather than direct assessments. In many ways existing measures underestimate the extent to which many of the adults are changed, since it is based on more conventional ways of thinking about literacy. There are tensions between representatives of the institutional and the educational communities where the latter see literacy as a continuum rather than a single standard set of skills. We need to find ways that capture the importance of direct assessment, and not in dichotomous terms. There is an issue with literacy with regards to how it is to be measured or in developing indicators around it.

On the disappearance of gender from all but SDG5, this was another “battle”. Rather than having a separate target on gender (as in EFA), it should be included along with all other dimensions of inequality (whether language or location etc). It seems to have been understood that since there is a

separate goal for gender, they could allow it to disappear as a distinctive target in SDG 4. Also, members of the gender education community have argued that while there are instruments to measure gender parity in education, there is no explicit measure of gender equality, either because it is difficult to measure or because it has disappeared into the background. Efforts to devise instruments and adapt proposed scales that can capture multidimensional views of gender equality and education are being undertaken and may be included in the 2016 GEM Report.

In response to a call for wider aspects of adult education to be made more explicit, in which the focus should not be merely on the functionalist approach to education but also its relationship with knowledge, language and other activities such as dancing or cooking, indigenous traditional knowledge, community and identity, and especially the noted absence of an SDG on culture, Aaron acknowledged this absence. Although the education sector constitutes about two-thirds of UNESCO's budget and staff, the culture sector was uncertain whether or not they wanted to play the development card, and some of the key people did not see the value in contributing to the post-2015 development discourse. Therefore, they engaged in SDG discussions at a very late stage, and so could make very small changes as most things had already been agreed upon, but there are many people who felt let down ideologically.

In response to the suggestion that there is little possibility of the implementation of new visions of adult learning (LLL/E), since even after the CONFINTEA of 1997 very little materialized, Aaron suggested that where there is no evidence, cogent arguments cannot be put forward. Certain kinds of evidence are needed to allow us to draw clear conclusions with respect to the effect of ALE on some of these outcomes that have been prioritised but this is very complicated. The next GRALE report will provide some very important evidence that they have mobilised. But there is a lot of logical thinking that could be deduced from the text of the SDGs that speaks to the potential role of ALE, even though concrete 'evidence' is missing; and the textual analysis can go forward even in its absence. The SDG architecture will not go away anytime soon; there are many interested parties and many mechanisms that will reproduce it over time, thus its status is different.

In conclusion, the global indicators noted here have only just been proposed and would be ratified by the intergovernmental agency in July 2016 and by the UN in September. Given the enormity of the data challenges around ALE, he called for participants collectively to work to build information about provisions and the process, for example through an open resource platform like a Wikipedia for ALE, which people could contribute to; the existing compilations are wanting.

