

MODULE 2

Sustainable Development Goal No 4

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



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List of abbreviations

| | |
|-----------|--|
| ALE | Adult learning and education |
| BfA | Belem Framework for Action |
| CONFINTEA | International Conferences on Adult Education |
| EfA | Education for All |
| GCED | Global Citizenship Education |
| GEMR | Global Education Monitoring Report |
| HR | human rights |
| IAEG | Interagency and Expert Group |
| ICAE | International Council for Adult Education |
| ITU | International Telecommunications Union |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| NORRAG | Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| TVET | technical and vocational education and training |
| UIL | UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning |
| UIS | UNESCO Institute for Statistics |
| UN | United Nations |

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1. Introduction to SDGs

On September 25th, 2015 world leaders unanimously agreed on adopting an ambitious and more focused plan of action that takes over after the end of mandate of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This new agenda, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2017) incorporated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined as well as sub-operationalized with 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs attempt to make sustainable development a lived reality for everyone. This long-term strategic approach to addressing global challenges is an important factor of the SDGs.

They seek to realize the human rights of all peoples, to achieve gender equality, reduce poverty, and ensure a better quality of life for all. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies. Thus, current challenges are not typical only for some countries, but reflect common issues and thus require joint focused interdisciplinary actions that should mobilize all communities. Most governmental programmes and action plans have a rather short life span, and the sustainability of these programmes or action plans is often questionable by changes in the government and political agenda on all levels. In that regard the SDGs set targets for the long-term, aiming at the next 12 years. This has the potential to minimize the risk of failure during implementation.

1.1 Defining SDG 4

As per the United Nations, the definition of Goal 4 is to **ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**. This represents a global education agreement in terms of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015).

The ten targets of this SDG are:

- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes;
- 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;
- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university;
- 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;
- 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;
- By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy;
- 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;
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all;
- 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;
- 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.

Each target has its respective global indicators to be monitored throughout the remaining years until 2030. These have been developed by the Inter Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and can be found in United Nations Statistics Division (2017). For SDG 4, there are eleven In addition, the education community proposed an additional 32 thematic indicators to cover the broader scope of the education agenda that are listed in UNESCO (2015a), e.g. out-of-school rates and percentage of teachers qualified according to national standards by education level and type of institution. In total, 43 indicators constitute the SDG 4 monitoring framework, under custodian agencies such as the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UNICEF, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Goal number 4 of the SDG framework was derived from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹ and the Education for All (EfA). The Education for All framework was established in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, where delegates from 155 countries, as well as representatives from some 150 governmental and non-governmental organizations, engaged to assure education for all by 2000. The “expanded vision of basic education” implies basic education for all - children, youth and adults - in and out of the school system, and throughout life. However, the EfA targets were not achieved by the year 2000 – and in Dakar, at the World Forum on Education (in 2000), the goals were modified as follows and the deadline was extended until 2015:

Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Goal 2: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

¹ See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Goal 6: 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 (ICAE, 2015).

There is another global agenda, the one for adult education, developed by the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Belem, and set up into 5 areas called the Belem Framework for Action (BfA). The following table compares adult learning and education within the SDG 4 with the commitments of BfA:

Table 1: Adult learning and education within the SDG 4

| | SDG4 | CONFINTEA-BFA |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Literacy | 4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional literacy • Literacy as a continuum. • Calls for countries to redouble efforts to achieve 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy |
| TVET | 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university | Recognizes that most programs on ALE nowadays have a primary focus TVET, and calls for more integrated approaches to ALE to address development in all its aspects (economic, sustainable, community and personal) |
| Gral. provisions on ALE | 4.4 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university | Develops recommendations and strategies on policies towards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong Learning • Governance • Financing • Participation, inclusion and equity • Adult literacy • Quality • Monitoring and implementation |
| GCED, Education for HR and ESD | 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 | Adult learning and education cover a broad range of content including vocational matters, family literacy and family education, citizenship and many other areas... Also, the BFA recognizes that |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | 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 | the provision of non-formal education covers topics such as human rights, citizenship, democracy, women's empowerment, HIV prevention, health, environmental protection and sustainable development. |
|--|---|--|

(ICAE, 2015)

1.1.1 Significance of SDG 4

The interdependencies, trade-offs, and synergies among the seventeen goals, and their integration into the policy-decision process is recognized as critical for going forward toward sustainable development (Vladimirova and Le Blanc, 2015). In this context, education has a significant role as an enabler for many areas under the SDGs, e.g. growth, gender equality, and many others. On the other hand, progress or failure in other SDGs may affect education in many ways. All the reports and public discussions on the post-2015 education agenda agree that education is important, central to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and not restricted to SDG4. Education is also mentioned in the targets of another five goals (see Table 3), and linked to almost all of the other SDGs in one way or another (UNESCO, 2017b). Education contributes, according to the UNESCO (2017a), to building capacity to implement national SDG strategies, and influencing behaviour to prevent non-communicable diseases.

Goal number 4 of the SDG framework was derived from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EfA). Yet, as a global education agenda, SDG4 differs from both the education-related MDGs and from the EfA in the scope, geographical coverage, and policy focus (UNESCO, 2017b). The scope of Goal 4 commits to ensuring equal opportunity to accessing learning opportunities at all levels of education in a lifelong perspective. It includes basic education, post basic education & training, and a lifelong perspective. The geographical coverage involves a universal agenda for all countries regardless of income level and/or development status. The main policy focus is the access to quality basic education for all; more equitable access to post-basic education and training; and more relevance of learning for both work as well as citizenship in a global and interconnected world.

Goal 4 is specific about the kind of education that is needed: inclusive, equitable, and of good quality, and this education should be provided throughout life. To understand Goal 4 it is important to define each one of these main aspects, which can be found in the below table.

Table 2: Aspects of Goal 4 and its definitions

| Aspects | Definition | References |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Inclusive | Efforts that include especially vulnerable populations, as Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people, refugee children, and poor children in rural areas. | United Nations (2015) |
| Equality | A key feature of the agenda Education 2030 is gender equality, which pays particular attention to gender-based discrimination as well as to vulnerable groups and to ensuring that no one is left behind. No education target should be considered met unless it is met by all. | UNESCO (2015a) |
| | 'Equality' refers to sameness and equal opportunity. In contrast, 'equity' refer to issues of justice and posit that differential treatment may be required to achieve fairness and equal outcomes. In the education policy, this approach acknowledges the need for the differential allocation of resources and treatment to achieve equity and quality education for all. | Sayed, Ahmed, (2015) |
| Quality | Quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal, and social skills. | UNESCO (2015a) |
| | The framework for understanding education quality proposed in the 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report has been the standard reference over the past decade. It includes as the main dimensions for quality education: learner characteristics; context; enabling inputs; teaching and learning process, and outcomes. | UNESCO (2004) |
| | Quality education is related to time, place, situation, and context. The Incheon Declaration makes it clear that certain knowledge and skills promote sustainable development more than others. Not all education brings the same benefits to everyone. | Harber (2014) UNESCO (2015a) |
| 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) |
| | A process that begins at birth and carries throughout all the stages of life, incorporating multiple and flexible learning pathways in all ages. The education can be formal, non-formal, or informal. | UNESCO (2016a) |

Education as a main driver of development

It is necessary to recognise that the UN's SDGs are the combination of results and of aspirations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) embedded into a structure of a well-designed policy layer to incorporate each and all trends and issues, which directly

challenge the sustainability of global economies, social and natural environments. This very much interrelated policy-frame has channelled major aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and, in the scope of SDG4, the focus of the Education 2030 Framework for Action by positioning lifelong learning as a main driver of health, economic growth, employment, sustainable consumption and production, and environmental awareness.

The relevance of SDG4 was finally set and clearly explained in the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016) through a rather new and ambitious vision for education. More concretely, the articulated vision called for transforming lives through education, recognising the important role of education as a main driver of development and in achieving the other proposed SDGs.

Additionally, this vision referred to the commitment to “a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind” (Incheon Report, 2015, p. 7). This report document outlined the particular importance of SDG4 by referring to its being transformative and universal, paying strong attention to ‘unfinished business’ of the EfA agenda and the education-related MDGs, and calling attention to current global and national educational challenges.

Education as a public good and human right

We also have to underline that SDG4 was inspired by a shared responsibility and accountability to reaffirm that education is a public good and a fundamental human right. This other focus was well-reflected in the critical 2015 Incheon Report on Education dealing with the global realities of the sector. Since 2015, lifelong learning dimensions have been used to make the perspectives of access, equity and inclusion, as well as quality and learning outcomes be more understood and recognised. The Incheon Declaration and its introductory chapter provides a rather clear reference with explanations and insight to some key terms and their focuses regarding SDG 4. For example, in education, inclusion - together with equity - is a cornerstone of a transformative education agenda in order to fight back and to put down all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. Therefore, the committed UN member states have declared to turn attention to the most disadvantaged, especially to those with disabilities, so as to ensure that no one is left behind.

1.1.2 Advantages of SDG 4

Education is the key that will allow many other SDGs to be achieved. When people are able to get quality education they can break out from the cycle of poverty. Education therefore helps to reduce inequalities and to reach gender equality. It also empowers people

everywhere to live healthier and sustainable lives. Education is also crucial to fostering tolerance between people, and contributes to societies that are more peaceful. (United Nations, 2017).

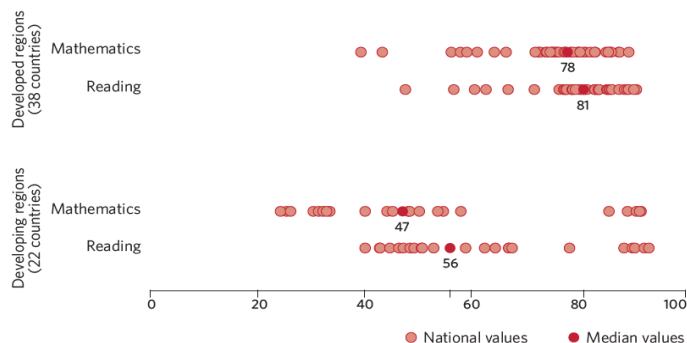
Goal 4 recognizes three underlying principles regarding the unfinished propositions for the education-related MDGs and EFA:

1. Education is a fundamental human right and an enabling right and all countries must ensure universal access to education, leaving no one behind.
2. Education is a public good, and so the role of the state is essential in setting and regulating standards and norms and must protect, respect, and fulfil the right to education. On the other hand, the right to quality education should also be provided by civil society, teachers, and educators, the private sector, communities, families, youth, and children.
3. Gender equality is inextricably linked to the right to education for all. Gender equality requires a rights-based approach that ensures that girls and boys, women and men, not only gain access to and complete education cycles, but are empowered equally in and through education.

Table 3: Keypoints that justify goal 4 and its targets

| Children are less likely to attend school if they live in rural areas, are poor, or have parents with little or no education | |
|--|---|
| <p>Proportion of out-of-school children of primary school age in selected countries by sex, location, household wealth, and education of the household head, 2008-2012 (%)</p> | <p>Despite progress, the world failed to meet the MDG of universal primary education by 2015. The latest year for which data are available, in 2013 (SDG Progress report 2016), showed 59 million children of primary school age and 65 million adolescents of lower secondary age were out of school. In this context, children are less likely to attend school if they are girls, live in rural areas, are poor or have parents with little or no education. This reveals an inequality in the access to education, the existence of vulnerable groups, and gender inequality.</p> |
| Fundamental skills provide a solid foundation for learning throughout life | |
| <p>Proportion of young people at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least minimum levels of proficiency in</p> | <p>The end of lower secondary school often coincides with the end of</p> |

reading and mathematics, selected countries in developing and developed regions, 2012 (%)

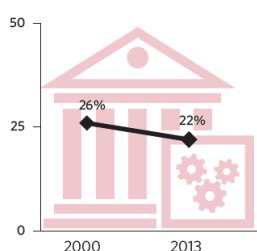


compulsory education. For this reason, at this stage the students should be able to master subject-related knowledge; possess fundamental skills, such as literacy and numeracy; possess personal and social skills, and to have a solid foundation for further learning throughout life. Data in developed regions show that, at least 75 percent of young people achieved at least minimum proficiency in reading and/or mathematics; the same was true for only 5 of the 22 countries with data in developing regions.

Learning opportunities of many types should extend throughout life



TVET enrolment at the upper secondary level **rose by nearly one-third** between 2000 and 2013



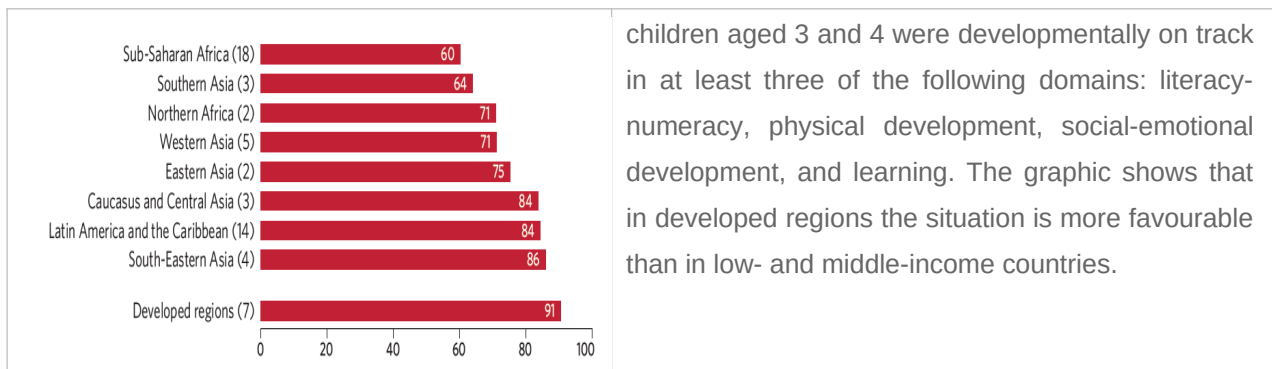
The share of TVET of all enrolments in secondary education **fell from 26 per cent to 22 per cent**

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship comprise two important premises “living together” and the “relationship with nature”. In this perspective, the equitable access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and access to higher education should be promoted. The data available for the period 2000-2013 shows that enrolments in TVET in upper secondary school rose by one-third, but the share of TVET in secondary education overall fell from 26 percent to 22 percent. Tertiary education has expanded rapidly over the same period, with enrolments doubling globally and increasing by 2.5 times in developing regions, and with almost equal numbers of men and women enrolled. However, worldwide in 2013, there were still 757 million adults unable to read and write, of whom two-thirds were women.

More than half of the children aged 3 and 4 are developmentally on track in physical, learning, and psychosocial well-being

Proportion of children aged 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development and learning, 2009-2015 (%)

All children have an inherent right to develop to their fullest potential, encompassing several aspects of a child's well-being: physical, social, emotional, and mental. For the period 2009-2015, in 54 of 58 countries with available data, at least half of the



(Source: Based on United Nations, 2016)

1.1.3 Interdependencies of SDG 4

The SDG framework is an extended and broadened set of goals compared to the framework of the MDGs. Hence, there are many and multidimensional influences between education and other global development issues in general, and the SDGs in particular.

Gender equality (**SDG 5** – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), i.e. equal access to education for girls and boys, as well as women and men at all levels and ages, is reflected in all ten targets of SDG 4. By granting more women access to education, a broad spectrum of life areas, including health, and family and community life, is positively influenced (**SDG 3**). It shows that higher levels of education for women tend to increase not only their knowledge of prevention of diseases, but also their self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities (UNESCO, 2009). Better education for women, but also for other members of the family, has multiple effects. For example: more educated young people tend to better plan and control their family size, also improving reproductive health of girls and young women, which – in turn – has multiple positive influences on future generations and the quality of their life.

The links between education and economic growth and jobs (**SDG 8** – decent work and economic growth) are many, and largely recognized. Joining literacy and basic education programs, people break from the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. The higher the education level, the more advanced production methods can be achieved – and thus more demand for highly educated people. The number of examples show links between investing in education and a positive effect on the export growth rate (Hinzen, Schmitt, 2015). Business interests to increase qualifications of their employees bring back the value of work-based learning; an important aspect of non-formal adult education and lifelong learning, promoted as a concept and approach by SDG4.




Studies reveal that increased participation in education programs among the least educationally qualified contributes to improved racial tolerance (**SDG 17** – peace, justice and strong institutions) – even when the courses taken are primarily for leisure purposes (Orlovic Lovren & Popovic, 2018; Feinstein et al, according to UIL, 2015).

By raising awareness on the need to save water (**SDG 6** – ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all) through education, a link between unsafe drinking water and diseases can be established (Vladimirova & Le Blanc, 2015). In addition, education helps reducing disaster risks by developing an understanding of threats and the need of preparedness of citizens, thus contributing to more sustainable and resilient communities (**SDG 11** – Sustainable Cities and Communities).

It is also among urging requirements nowadays to affect lifestyles and consumption (represented in **SDG 12** – Responsible Consumption and Production) by providing opportunities for people to make informed choices, e.g. choosing green energy options, socially responsible services, environmentally friendly materials, and so one. The expected role of education is obviously to provide the foundations for responsible behaviour in this field. It also requires efforts in providing education and awareness raising on the importance of biodiversity (**SDG 13** – Climate action – and **SDG 15** – Life on land) and impacts of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in order to decrease global demand for food, especially meat – as noted in globally accepted agreements, such as the Convention on Biodiversity (<https://www.cbd.int/>).

Despite the fact that scientific knowledge on issues regarding all the SDGs is increasingly growing, analysis of links that are being recognized between education and SDGs in the global policy documents in 2015, show that there are gaps in connecting education in particular to issues covered by SDGs 12-15 (Vladimirova & Le Blanc, 2015).

Table 4: Exemplary links between SDG 4 and other SDGs

| | |
|---|--|
|  | Health and Well-being - Target 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care 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 Action. Target 13.3: Improve education, awareness raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning

1.1.4 Challenges in the Implementation

There was serious analysis and criticism of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EfA), especially considering the education and lifelong learning goals – the ideological discourse, neo-colonial approach, lack of support and resources. Although some findings of the UN report that there are significant results, and great progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs, there is by far more evidence that the overall rate of progress is slowing across all human development groups and in many countries. This becomes apparent when looking at the MDGs' and EfA's framework targets that were adopted in 2000. The relationship between the two processes presented large challenges for the education of young people and adults. Whilst the EfA targets cover education across the life span, the MDGs picked just two – relating to universal primary education and gender equality in participation (principally in schools). When it comes to education, the achievements are made in certain areas (primary education enrolment), but a closer look reveals that this improvement is not universal – the children from the most marginalized groups are still excluded, and there are huge differences among the countries. Education performance in terms of access, enrolment and completion varies greatly across regions and economic status.

Also, international development partners and many governments focused overwhelmingly on the MDGs, at the expense of the goals affecting young people and adults – even though the evidence is overwhelming that children do better in school when their parents are educated. As a result, in 2011, there was no prospect that the targets affecting adults could be achieved. Indeed, the adult literacy target was farthest from achievement, with a reduction of only 12 percent (since 1990), against the target of 50 percent decrease in illiterate adults. Although some frame it as improved adult literacy, this is mostly due to the improvement of few countries, the first one being China. Recent UNESCO statistics report about 757 million adults who cannot read and write a simple sentence, meaning the overall number has increased. The question is – are there lessons learned for SDGs and do we read them (Popović, 2015)?

It is clear from the evidence of the last fifteen years that it is of vital importance that the overall educational goal adopted as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognises that education is a human right, that it covers education throughout the lifespan, and that it is articulated with a refreshed EfA agenda. The World Education Consultation meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in March 2013, recognised that in calling for “Equitable quality lifelong education and learning for all”. That agreement was achieved in part through the co-operation in advocacy of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and its regional partners, and the Global Campaign for Education and Education International. However, that was merely one step towards the adoption of the SDGs, and the relationship with future arrangements remain to be agreed. Hence, many organisations expect the SDGs to do better than the MDGs, the EfA and the BfA. The shortcomings of MDGs, in terms of data delays and lack of priorities, are important gaps to be considered and could be a challenge in the SDG implementation. Furthermore, each country faces specific challenges to implement the SDGs (Sarvajayakesavalu, 2015).

Additionally, SDG 4 faces the same challenges in implementation as all the goals. Some of them being:

- The first point is involving many different stakeholders operating at many different scales, from national governments, to transnational corporations, to local and international NGOs, and many more. In the Education sector, UNESCO (2017c) points out the necessity of strengthened and diversified multi-stakeholder partnerships, including e.g. with governments, civil society organizations, the UN and other bi/multi-lateral agencies, academia, youth organizations, the private sector and foundations. Civil society holds a particularly important role in its capacity for social mobilization, innovation, monitoring, and accountability. Aligning the interests for the common goal through participatory approaches takes time and needs to be coordinated well.
- The second challenge is to provide effective mutual accountability. “The principles of (i) country ownership, (ii) focus on results, (iii) transparency, and (iv) shared responsibility, apply to all partners at all levels, as well as to all stages of policy, planning and implementation cycles.” (UNESCO (2017b), p. 20). Hence, the UNESCO (2017b) sees accountability as part of the solution, but it needs to be designed with humility, considering the aspects and particularities of each part.
- Moreover, monitoring progress toward SDG 4 is critical to show what needs to be done, by when and by whom (UNESCO, 2016b). For this to happen in an effective way, the available indicators should be used, questioning their usefulness, reflecting

on the quality of sources, introducing new ways of looking at evidence and advocating for improvement.

- Additionally, there is a challenge ahead for national statistical systems to monitor progress toward SDG 4 and for education ministries to make effective use of the new information. At this point, integrating SDG 4 into National Education Planning could be viewed as another challenge for all countries (Neyestani-Hailu, 2017). Challenges cited by countries in integrating SDG 4 into sector plans included: a) funding the ambitious targets; b) teachers and education managers with weak capacity to respond to diverse learning needs; c) inadequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks to appraise the “qualitative” dimensions of education systems; and d) the need for more technical guidelines, advocacy, and communication about the education agenda and its integration into national policy formulation and implementation (ebd.).

With regard to monitoring and statistical data, there are figures available that illustrate why SDG 4 is important and why its targets are essential to the world's current situation (see table 2 for some examples). These data come from the report by the United Nations (2016)², which shows the progress toward the implementation of the SDGs. The report analyses selected indicators from the global indicator framework for which data is available. The inclusive and equitable quality education still has a big gap among countries and societies that is a challenge yet to be overcome. For example, surveys from 63 low- and middle-income countries taken between 2008 and 2012 show that children from the poorest 20 percent of households are more than four times as likely to be out of school versus their richest peers. Data from 38 countries in developed regions show that, in the majority of these countries, 75 percent or more young people had at least a minimum proficiency in reading and/or mathematics; the same was true for only 5 of the 22 developing countries with data. There are still a lot of gaps concerning available and comparable data for the respective indicators to enable more accountability and comparability.

As a result of the lessons of the EfA and the MDGs, countries should invest in and scale up innovative, evidence-based, and cost-effective approaches that permit all individuals to gain access to, participate in, and have a quality education throughout life with a special focus on vulnerable groups and poor performance indicators that are being identified in monitoring reports. In addition, indicative strategies specific to each target are described under the

² A framework for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). A Global follow-up and review are provided by the annual SDG Report, prepared by the Secretary-General in cooperation with the UN system, and based on the global indicator framework. Every year, the HLPF also carries out thematic progress reviews focusing on a set of SDGs, aiming to ensure that all are reviewed over a four-year cycle. Education is scheduled for review in 2019 (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>.)

targets. It should be noted that these strategies are quite generic and will require appropriate adaptation by governments to different countries, considering their contexts and priorities (UNESCO, 2015a).

The Incheon Declaration by the UNESCO (2015a) requests the production of an independent Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR)³, which was published as “Accountability in education: meeting our commitments - Global Education Monitoring Report, 2017/8” (UNESCO, 2017a). This report highlighted that there are large educational problems that call for solutions, in terms of the delivery of education services and the skills and competences that children, youth, and adults develop. International conventions and agreements among the countries, with respect to the content of education, committing themselves to inclusive education, to education for international understanding, are not working as expected. The countries are still making limited or no efforts to change their systems accordingly. This global imbalance calls for an urgent need for action in terms of education showing that SDG 4 and its targets are essential for achieving sustainable development and reaching the other goals. Education can help to overcome the pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges.

As the Incheon Declaration states, education should be adapted to each reality, considering the time, place, situation, and context. Implementing SDG4 will require regional, national, and global mechanisms to potentialise the role of education, so that rates increase dramatically and sustainable development guides the education system reform.

The challenges of delivering the extended ambitions of SDG 4 were fully recognized, with many critics continuing to emphasize that the targets are unrealistic and unlikely to be achieved. However, many stakeholders, particularly among civil society, emphasised the need to remain committed to this expanded universal vision that clearly focusses on leaving nobody behind. At the same time, there have been some significant developments at national, regional and global levels as actors consider how implementation will be managed in a way that is not only greater in scope but also universal (NORRAG, 2016).

To sum up, UNESCO (2015a) provided some recommendations for achieving SDG 4 on education and the education targets (included under other SDGs):

1. achieving effective and inclusive partnerships;
2. improving education policies and the way that they work together;
3. ensuring highly equitable, inclusive, and quality education systems for everyone;

³ Both, the declaration as well as the Report can be found in the supplementary reading part of the module.

4. mobilizing resources for adequate financing for education;
5. ensuring monitoring, follow-up, and review of all the targets.

UNESCO (2015b) proposes that we should rethink education and knowledge as global common goods, in order to reconcile the purpose and organization of education as a collective societal endeavour in this complex world. In terms of global future perspectives, efforts and investments in education are the way for making progress toward the achievement of all of the SDGs and should, therefore, be part of the strategies to achieve each of them. (UNESCO, 2017a). Education must find ways of responding to the constant change of the world, taking into account multiple worldviews and alternative knowledge systems, as well as new frontiers in science and technology; e.g. the advances in neurosciences and the developments in digital technology.

1. 2. Good practices

Despite the remaining challenges, there are some positive developments regarding the education SDG. For example, the decline in out-of-school rates and numbers over the past 15 years. This was accompanied by a reduction in gender disparity at the global level. Historically, girls and young women were more likely to be excluded from education. Also, the male and female out-of-school rates for the lower secondary- and upper secondary-age populations are now nearly identical, while the gender gap among primary-age children dropped from more than five percentage points in 2000 to less than two percentage points in 2015 (UNESCO 2017c).

Studies reveal that increased participation in education programs among the least educationally qualified, contributes to improved racial tolerance - even when the courses taken are primarily for leisure purposes (Orlovic Lovren & Popovic, 2018; Feinstein et al, according to UIL, 2010). This illustrates the influence of adult education programs not only based on literacy and working skills but more multidimensional.

1.3 Exercises

In this section, the module rolls out a proposed set of exercises that teachers can conduct among their students to eventually produce knowledge manifested in written articles, videos and the like of presentations that help disseminate ideas and solutions regarding SDG 4. Each exercise is presented with an example (in bold) accompanied by some material from which the lecturer can commence the exercise.

1.3.1 Exercises

EducationMakingSense: This exercise tackles teachers' and students' perceptions. For example: **as SDGs are finalized and in process of execution, how do you see yourself, as teacher, and your students, making sense of SDG4, especially after consolidating the MDG and the other agendas on education into one SDG for universal education?**

Sub-questions that you can pose include: To what extent is SDG 4 feasible?; Is there anything you would do differently in the future if you were given a seat on a global committee for education?; How much more realistic and advantageous is SDG 4 on education in comparison to the MDG and other agendas addressing the same goal?; How did the transition from MDGs to SDGs work out from your point of view?. [This exercise is in the PPT \(1.4 Exercises on SDG 4 -MDG 2 & EfA vs. SDGs, slide 19\)](#)

Education surroundings: Map SDG4 in relation to all other SDGs. You can use Venn diagrams and radar chart on this activity. Questions to be raised in this activity could be, for example: How strong is the link between SDG4 and SDG5 on Gender Equality? Or: How can SDG1 on eradicating poverty support successful completion of SDG4? Or: How does SDG4 foster decent work and economic development (SDG8)? The overarching question in this activity is: **How can an integrative approach be adopted to tackle SDG4 in tandem with other SDGs?**. [This exercise is in the PPT \(1.4 Exercises on SDG 3: Describing links with other SDGs, slide 20\)](#)

Data4Education: Gather and analyze global, regional, national and local data on SDG4. Begin for example with data from the UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform⁴, then go to other analytical platforms such as IISD SDG Knowledge Hub⁵. You can also inspect the website of the technical cooperation group of the UNESCO or the Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training (NORRAG)⁶. Another option to collect data on education is the Inter-Agency Group on Education Inequality Indicators (IAG-EII)⁷. Analysing the data under the following question is one example: **Are improving quality of education and increasing equity in education contradictory targets?** Also, students could gather data in their community (classroom/university/school/neighborhood/house) and analyze the trends in both a qualitative and quantitative manner to find out major narratives, frequencies, correlations and causalities, and see how well the data is situated in comparison to the local (if available) or

⁴ Data on SDG4 from the UN Knowledge Platform: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

⁵ Data on SDG4 from the IISD SDG Knowledge Hub: <http://sdg.iisd.org/sdgs/goal-4-quality-education/>

⁶ See here: <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/> and <https://resources.norrag.org/#search>

⁷ See here: <http://iag.uis.unesco.org/>

otherwise national data from the other platforms. Another purpose of this exercise is to see the extent to which the data collected can converge with the timeframe and expectations set by SDG4.

In case, however, you decide doing the comparison between your locally gathered data and institutional data, decide first on a baseline from the data collected from the other institutions and platforms since 2015. Thereafter you can compare this baseline with your local data in terms of rates of change, i.e. frequency of progress in the SDG targets according to the SDG indicators. Noteworthy: present the data in a visually appealing way.⁸ The baseline data from both venues (institutional and local) would be useful for a future monitoring and evaluation assignment you could do with the students to see how far there is progress or retraction.

In addition, the UNESCO has several different sub-organisations that provide data (see the above references), and provides information in its yearly Global Education Monitoring Reports⁹ (see also supplementary reading). [These exercises are in the PPT \(1.4 Exercises on SDG 4: Gather and analyse data on SDG 4, slide 21\)](#)

Localizing4Development: How can you localize SDG4 at your community (classroom/university/school/neighborhood/house) and at individual level? Localizing SDG4 comes with challenges. Thoughts to reflect on, for example, include:

What are the benefits of countries providing free education compared to countries with school fees in implementing SDG4? Discuss pros and cons of a centralized education system vs. a federal system? Picking specific countries/states as examples when comparing – and then setting them into context with your respective local system will help in providing an understanding for where changes can be lobbied for. Taken altogether, contextualizing the SDGs in its local context is an important assignment prior and along the road of implementing SDG4. [This exercise is in the PPT \(1.4 Exercises for SDG 4 – Gather and analyse data on SDG 4, slide 21\)](#)

Policy Briefs: In this activity, the teacher will **encourage writing policy briefs on any topic pertinent to education as identified by SDG4**. Students will follow a similar structure as stipulated in policy briefs by international organizations and national agencies (see example

⁸ Here some data as well as visualisation methods are available:

http://sdg4monitoring.uis.unesco.org/sdg_4_1_new.php

You can see example of data visualization for interlinkages (and the respective SDG per country) on this platform: <https://sdginterlinkages.iges.jp/visualisationtool.html>

⁹ The latest report can be found here:

<https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2017/accountability-education>

by the UNESCO¹⁰ or the Global Campaign for Education¹¹ or from the Commonwealth¹²). This will serve elevating the students' policy-related writing skills in addition to directing them towards formulating their own manuscript of briefs on education issues of their primary concern. They also develop grounded realization of the challenges of implementing SDG 4 at all levels, from the international all the way to the local level.

#InstaEducation: Drive your social media platforms in ways that promote education awareness in your community (classroom/university/school/neighborhood/house). For example: that can be through simple daily/weekly photo campaigns as well as conversations that bring the default behaviors of students that gravitate towards constantly viewing social media together with the purpose of the exercise; that is, bringing their awareness closer to what they can do to promote quality education for all in their community.

Edupreneurs: Finding stories and instilling a sense of belonging by bringing together those working on education quests can be motivating to those doing the work, inspiring to the community and the entire world. For example, you can **use vlogs, blogs, journals and fora** such as fairs and expos to promote this exercise on **promoting SDG4**. It will also allow those good ambassadors of education from the business community to network and widen their perspective with each other and the broader communities.

BreakingSilos: Taking its name from the silo-effect, this activity promotes **actively thinking and writing on SDG4 from the wide variety of sciences and arts** out there. As a lecturer, you could be interested or expert in literature, hence approaching SDG4 from a more philosophical perspective; another could be interested in addressing education issues in SDG4 from a managerial perspective. For example, a question you could pose is: Using a cost-benefit analysis, what benefits are there for implementing SDG4? Another example could be: If you are a natural scientist, what indicators might there be missing to better include sciences in informal education? This exercise intends to break through silos of each discipline and stimulate cross-disciplinary discussions on quality and life-long-learning education.

¹⁰ See <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002464/246475e.pdf>. Also the UNESCO report *Mainstreaming SDG4-Education 2030 in sector-wide policy and planning*, which can be found in the references, is helpful.

¹¹ See <https://www.globalcampaignforeducation.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GEM2016PolicyBrief.pdf>

¹² See <http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/documents/vacancies/terms-of-service/20CCEMSDG4StatusUpdateReportTOR12-09-2017.pdf>

1.3.2 Assessments

Below is an outline of several different questions related to the SDGs in general, and to SDG 4 in particular, that help assess your understanding of the topic and the interlinkages and challenges. These questions are also designed to act as questions for your students to discuss the topic further and/or prepare presentations on them.

Questions:

1. Define the SDGs and environment they derived from, i.e. what are the main advancements (positive or negative) compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All initiative?
2. Discuss four main difficulties you see in implementing the SDGs.
3. With regard to reporting and measuring outcome and impact, assess if the targets are well defined and what institutions have indicators available.
4. How does SDG 4 interlink with other SDGs? What are positive, what negative interrelations and how do they impact human well-being and inclusion?
5. Discuss the pros and cons of the term “sustainability”. Do you believe that sustainability is a new philosophy? Or is it actually a very old one well known to our ancestors?
6. List some examples of positive successes over the last two decades in promoting quality and equity education in Low and Middle Income Countries.
- 7.

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Additional Links:

- Global Education Monitoring Reports and other education-related reports: <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/allreports>
- Information on SDG data: <http://www.data4sdgs.org/sdg4>
- Learning Portal: <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/fr>
- Learning assessment: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/learning-assessment>
- Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Sustainable Development Goal 4: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/education>
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- World Education Forum 2015 Report: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002437/243724e.pdf>
- App „SDGs in action“: <https://sdgsinaction.com/> (teachers can use it with their classes or introduce students to it to find actions they want to support or to create an own action)
- eAtlas on SDG 4 by the UNESCO: <https://www.tellmaps.com/sdg4/#!/tellmap/-1210327701> (interactive data mapping options, good for exercises and visualization)
- United Nations Virtual Reality (UNVR): <http://unvr.sdgactioncampaign.org/vr-films/> (immersive storytelling to inspire viewers towards increased empathy, action and positive social change. The project is implemented by the UN SDG Action Campaign and includes films by UNDP, UNFPA, UN Foundation, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOCHA, UN Women, World Food Program)
- SD Talks - Eradicating Poverty Through Education: http://sdtalks.unssc.org/en/video/46-sd-talks-eradicating-poverty-through-education?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=sd_knowledge_highlights_19_september&utm_term=2018-09-19 (1 hour video by Dr. Achyuta Samanta, founder of the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, who talks about eradicating poverty through education and women's empowerment. The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences is one of the largest free residential institutes providing education, food, and accommodation to over 25,000 indigenous (tribal) children in India.).