

Issue Brief SDG 4



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 (SDG 4) - ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL.

THE SDG 4 Targets

- **4.1** Free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education.
- **4.2** Quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education.
- **4.3** Equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education.
- **4.4** Increase the number of youth and adults for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- **4.5** Eliminate gender disparities in education, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- **4.6** Achieve literacy and numeracy
- **4.7** Knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.
- **4.A** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive.
- **4.B** Expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrollment 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** 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.

Environmental Dimension of SDG 8

With a world population of nearly 8 billion people and limited natural resources, individuals and societies need to learn to live together sustainably. They need to act responsibly based on the understanding that what is done today can have implications on the lives of people and the planet in future. Education has the potential to be a great equalizer in society, transforming individuals' life chances and national progress towards sustainable development.

Improving access to quality education at all levels and in all social contexts, is key to transforming society and helping people develop knowledge, skills, values and behaviours needed for sustainable development. Sustainable development issues, such as climate change and biodiversity, are increasingly included in teaching and learning across the curriculum and individuals are encouraged to be responsible actors who resolve challenges, respect cultural diversity and contribute to creating a more sustainable world.

Education's vital potential role to prevent environmental degradation and limit the causes and effects of climate change by improving knowledge, installing values, fostering beliefs and shifting attitudes is widely acknowledged. Yet, various studies indicate that the education sector is under-utilized as a resource to help mitigate and adapt to climate change and protect biodiversity and ecosystem resources. Curricula are not adequately integrating climate change. Furthermore, there is a strong need to improve public awareness through media and communication, as well as non-formal and informal education, in a lifelong learning perspective.

In order to address climate change and mitigate its impact, systemic changes are required in education. It is important to incorporate issues related to the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development in curricula, pedagogic approaches, learning materials

and teacher education. This includes coverage of issues such as energy generation from affordable and non-polluting sources, responsible consumption and production with respect to ecosystem conservation, peacebuilding and tolerance towards others. Education systems need to invest in learning by doing, problem solving and scaling up whole school approaches that help draw attention to the ties between environment, economy and culture.



UNEP has actively been working within the context of SDG 4 Quality Education, in particular Target 4.7 "Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles". Because the global indicator for Target 4.7 is a Tier III indicator, the SDG Progress Reports produced by the UN Statistics Division with inputs from custodian agencies do not include anything on Target 4.7. In this regard, the UNESCO GAP Report –which covers the five priority areas of the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (2015-2019)- is currently being used together with the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which focuses both on education for sustainable development and global citizenship education as a single item.

For UNEP, this work is being developed within the context of UNEA Resolution 2/3 on Environmental Education and the UN Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development.

Youth and Education Alliance: The Alliance has members from 800 Universities, mainly in developing countries, as well as partners in major youth organisations and is focusing on four workstreams to deliver Education for Sustainable Development:

- **Green Campus Network:** Supporting Universities in Kenya, Morocco, China and India to develop green campus networks and improve the sustainability outcomes of these institutions. It will also explore a “values” proposition to encourage sustainable behaviors of young people. This programme is scale-able to other countries should member states be interested.
- **Green Collar Jobs:** UNEP intends to build a stronger education component into the PAGE initiative to support students to be sign-posted with the skills for green jobs as well as supporting Universities to deliver applied learning within their curricula. This is at the first phase of designing the programme.
- **Advocacy:** Supporting Universities to advocate on issues on campus, community and in their countries around environmental issues.
- **Government support:** Regional offices are working with governments to review their environmental education curriculum. Both Ecuador and Lebanon are keen to explore how this could be taken forward.

Higher Education Sustainability Initiative:

UNEP has also been an active contributor to the HLPF through HESI, a UN multi-stakeholder platform which has been hosting a series of Education and Sustainability events during the HLPF in New York for the past several years. UNEP has now taken on the role of chair of HESI and in partnership with others, will be supporting a joint “one UN” vision for this area of work.



Gaps identified and key challenges

There is a strong shift towards sustainability on campuses and a bold and dynamic youth movement that is growing in influence. There is also a growing energy within the UN family on this issue with UNESCO, UNEP, DESA and Habitat enthusiastic to take this agenda forward.

Data and baseline: Today, one of the major challenges for Target 4.7 is the lack of available data. Another major challenge is that many countries don't have defined baselines at the country level for this Target, making it not possible to assess/report progress with different Ministries claiming ownership around this theme. UNESCO is attempting to address this in their new GAP 2030 strategy, but more needs to be done.

Investment: Education for sustainable development is an area that requires more resources across the UN family, to shift from education seen as a “nice-to-have” rather than a must have part of the programme.

Unfortunately, quality of education still has stark contrasts and differences at global, regional and national levels. Governments in all these levels need to realize of the need of quality education, especially in public schools. We need to move away from metric / percentages of children attending school and focus more on what kind of education are children receiving. Of course, the underlying issue at stake here is the need to provide teachers with appropriate training, materials and resources to be able to carry out their work.

Examples of policies and practices that are working

UNEP has traditionally worked through partnerships on this programme, including with the UN System, universities and governments. The following support has been given to countries including:

- **Morocco Green University and Kenya Green University network:** Supporting the creation of these two networks in these countries.
- **Ecuador:** Supporting Ecuador in reconsidering its environmental education curriculum, this will begin in 2019.
- **In discussion:** We are exploring supporting up to 5 governments under the PAGE initiative for the green job component of the programme and we are also exploring support to Lebanon and UAE on a major youth / education programme.

Key messages



- Without an informed and skilled workforce, the goals will be out of reach. We need to leapfrog to a cleaner economy, but we can't do that if we don't have applied learning across all courses that can drive that transition forward. Universities and technical colleges are on the frontline of the transition and we need to increase our investment in green skills so that young people can create a better future.
- Our failure to help youth is turning youth unemployment from a tragedy, to a crisis. Youth unemployment is a road block to the prospects of some 192 million young people across the world. In Tunisia, 40% of university graduates are unemployed, many of them women who have a far harder time of finding work than their male counterparts.
- The demand for Green Jobs across the world is rising. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has shown how 24 million jobs could be created from clean energy and a circular economy. A polling of students has found that most of young people take a 15% cut in salary to work for greener companies as they find it so important to find work with meaning.
- We need to put together a global action plan to fix this problem. Education needs to evolve by increasing the emphasis on Applied Learning so that students are leaving with the capability to move into these new green professions.
- We need a New Deal for Nature (and Youth). G20 have talked about a shared divestment in fossil fuel subsidies, need to move these funds of the past, into funds for the future and invest in green collar jobs. Seen what Sovereign Wealth Funds can do on the Amazon, now need a rapid scale of investment in this area.
- We need to lead and mobilize commitments to action: Lack of leadership in this space – a lot of talk, but not enough work to blueprint and think our way out of this crisis. We don't have all the answers, but we know the right questions that we need to start asking. Investing in Green Collar Jobs can deliver a “triple dividend” of addressing youth employment, advancing the Paris Agreement and achieving the SDGs, if we set our minds to it. 16-year old Swedish climate activist, Greta Thunberg has said, “what we do now with children, we can't undo in the future”. They will inherit the earth, we need to support their transition from “white” or “blue” collar jobs to a bright new shade of green.