Implementation of Sustainable Goal of Quality Education: Issues & Challenges

Dr. Rohtash

Assistant Professor, SJK College of Education, Kalanour, Rohtak

ABSTRACT

The millennium Agenda-2030 for Sustainable Development is universal, holistic and indivisible, with a special imperative to leave no one behind. The achievement of SDG 4 – ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. While education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is most clearly formulated as a stand- alone goal (SDG4), it also has reciprocal linkages across the 2030 Agenda. There are a number of education-related targets and indicators in other SDGs, including health and well-being, gender equality, decent work, responsible consumption and growth and climate change mitigation. Progress has been made towards achieving SDG4, and there are new knowledge horizons and opportunities for strengthened solidarity and partnerships around the provision of quality education and lifelong learning for all. Yet the context is also changing with new technologies and skill demands. Many barriers to education access and educational outcomes remain in place and challenges to the monitoring of progress remain. The present paper seeks to discuss all these issues.

Key words: Sustainable development, SDG4, quality education etc.

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universal, holistic and indivisible, with a special imperative to leave no one behind. Education and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 4 i.e. ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It plays a central role in building sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies. Much progress was made under the Millennium Development Goals toward universal primary school enrollment; SDG 4 now aims to raise the bar and make education a catalyst for broader change towards sustainable development.

Education is a basic right and elementary to human dignity. SDG 4 also has reciprocal linkages across the 2030 Agenda. Access to quality education is an avenue for social mobility and reducing inequalities. Education will help youth prepare for employment in the high-skill jobs of the fourth industrial revolution also works as foundation for peaceful societies and effective institutions.

Education is essential for sustainable development, but investments in education that are not accompanied by concurrent progress in other aspects of human wellbeing will fall short of enabling all people to realize their full potential in life. Good child health and nutrition are essential for securing learning outcomes – not only in terms of increased class attendance, but also for improving educational achievements. Similarly, ending poverty, thereby reducing pressures to put children to work, may be essential to universal school enrolment. Such considerations may be especially relevant for vulnerable groups that tend to suffer from multiple deprivations and are therefore critical to realizing the overall objective of 'leaving no one behind'.

While education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is most explicitly formulated as a stand-alone goal (SDG4), there are also a number of education-related targets and/or indicators in other sustainable development goals. These include health and well-being, gender equality, decent work, responsible consumption and growth and climate change mitigation

Status and trends
Progress has been made to close the gaps in completion of primary and lower secondary school. Data from 2013-2017 indicate that globally primary school completion is 85 per cent for primary school and 73 per cent for lower secondary school.[2] Despite considerable **progress** on education access and participation over the past years, 262 million children and youth of age 6 to 17 were still out of school in 2017 and more than half of children and adolescents are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics. In 2017, two out of every three children globally participated in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age. Such learning is linked to fostering children's readiness for school and their future learning experience.

In 2015, an estimated 617 million—more than 50 per cent—of children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age worldwide were not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. Of these, about two-thirds are attending school but are not learning in the classroom or drop out of school. In 72 countries with recent data, around 7 in 10 children aged 3 and 4 were developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social emotional development and learning. Globally, there has been little progress in the percentage of primary school teachers who are trained– stagnating at about 85 per cent since 2015

Successes and Challenges
It is a critical moment to take note of how to accelerate progress towards SDG 4, and to assert the significance of education to the rest of the 2030 Agenda. Progress has been made and there are new knowledge horizons and opportunities for strengthened solidarity and partnerships around the provision of quality education and lifelong learning for all. But the context is also changing with new technologies and skill demands, as well as economic shocks and environmental degradation.

Stakeholders highlight the importance of implementing a gendered approach to education for accelerating progress towards SDG 4 through financial and logistical support for women and girls, employment of female teachers, the inclusion of reproductive and sexual rights education in curricula, and increased encouragement of girls and women to study sciences, engineering, and technology. There are also efforts to ensure that all girls and women can attend schools and learning facilities by ensuring that safe, gender separated, and accessible sanitation facilities (e.g. school toilets) are usable, including measures for safe and dignified menstrual hygiene management. Education also has a responsibility to ensure that new technologies do not exacerbate divides, including gender divides, by including digital skills in the curriculum early on.

As we know, education provides the means to transmit knowledge, values and skills across generation, enabling societies to set the foundation for thriving in the future. Despite a number of actions undertaken at all levels, public awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs appear to remain still relatively modest, especially at the grassroots and community level. Awareness and communications strategies sometimes suffer from the lack of sustainable and sufficient institutional and financial resources. There is a need to step up awareness- raising activities in the next phase of implementation.

Especially in a rapidly changing world with technological shifts, global integration and climate pressures; educational needs are being called into question in terms of how learning systems match with constantly changing demands. The ways in which learning prepares individuals for decent work (Target 4.4), as well as for life interdependent, and interconnected world (Target 4.7) is increasingly important. Significant action is needed as today's skills will not match the jobs of tomorrow and newly acquired skills may quickly become obsolete. Efforts are being taken to revolutionize educational and learning systems to respond to the technology revolution.

Progress toward universal completion of primary and secondary school was significant after 2000, but in recent years progress has delayed. The proportion of out of school children has been flat since 2008 with 9 per cent missing primary school, 16 percent missing lower secondary school, and 36 per cent missing upper secondary school – whether because of delayed entry, dropping out or missing school all together.[3]

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests 15-year-old students from around the world in reading, math and science. There are vast variations in the learning that is achieved across countries including across OECD countries where 20 per cent of students do not attain baseline levels of proficiency in reading. The most successful countries based on test scores have high and universal expectations of students; a strong focus on good teaching; resources targeted at struggling students and schools; and commitments to long-term and coherent strategies for education.

Teacher training and ensuring that teachers have access to teaching resources is also of critical importance in improving the quality of -learning. More comprehensive and reliable data is also needed to inform policies and monitor improvements in educational systems to deliver inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all.

There have been wide-ranging advancements in the development and measurement of SDG 4 and its 10 targets covering 11 global and 32 thematic indicators. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics continues to lead the development of clearly defined, valid, and internationally comparable data with broad geographical coverage.

These include incomplete methodological development; limited data availability in many countries and regions and on various sources of information including on the nature of interlinkages between education and other goals; and insufficient funding both for countries to implement the SDG4 indicator framework, as well as for global international agencies and regional organizations to develop indicators. Efforts to improve monitoring of and reporting on inequalities in education are being made through the WIDE (World Inequality Database on Education) platform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All SDGs are interdependent and can only be achieved if implemented together. Since education is not only an integral part of, but also a key enabler for sustainable development, it needs to be included in national development plans and strategies to achieving all SDGs. Broad consultation indicates the following actions that are necessary in different contexts to achieve SDG 4 targets.

Strategic context specific and culturally sensitive legislation and policies are required in order to make education and training systems more equitable and inclusive "leaving no-one behind". This requires that all children and youth have access to quality early childhood development, care and education. It also requires enhanced access to post-secondary education, including technical and vocational education, further and tertiary education, including university, accessible to all.

Particular attention should be given to those in helpless situations, persons with disabilities, native peoples, those in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, the poor, women and girls, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons, whether as a result of conflict or natural disasters.

Teaching is a profession and teachers, school leaders, educators and trainers all play a vital role in the collective responsibility to prepare future generations. Accordingly, greater support and resources are needed for relevant initial and continuous professional development, efficient and effective policies, appropriate recruitment and deployment processes, decent working conditions, and opportunities for sharing promising practices, professional autonomy and career pathways for teachers.

Highlighting that literacy is still a major challenge, greater efforts are needed to eradicate illiteracy through formal and non-formal education including to digital literacy.

Education affects the aspirations, beliefs and attitudes of migrants, refugees and displaced persons and their sense of belonging in host communities. Investing in the inclusion of migrants and displaced persons in education systems also helps host communities to understand and fight stereotypes and discrimination and promote cohesive societies.

Social, political, environmental and economic changes, as well as technological innovations, have profound implications for education and training systems. Accordingly, commitments are needed to support lifelong learning opportunities for all to ensure necessary competencies for personal development, as well as sustainable development, with attention to climate change, adaptation and mitigation. Additionally, education institutions must provide children, youth and adult learners with the competences to be active citizens in democratic and sustainable societies. This includes efforts to promote education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, democracy and human rights, gender equality etc.

There is a need for more efficient and equitable resource allocation and improved accountability in expenditure including through legislation. Funding should prioritize resources to improve the quality of education and social outcomes in an equitable and inclusive way according to needs and priorities of countries.

Progress towards SDG 4 calls for the meaningful involvement of youth, students, teachers, school and post-secondary institution leaders, and their representative organizations, as well as communities, parents, civil society and academia at all stages, from planning to monitoring progress in ensuring the right to quality education for all.

Education is a public good and public responsibility, a fundamental human right and an important basis for ensuring personal fulfillment and for the realization of other rights essential for peace and sustainable development. Governments have the primary responsibility to deliver on the right to education and a central role as custodians of efficient equitable and effective management and financing of public education accessible to all.

The concept of ICT enabled education could be used to make the education feasible and accessible for people living in remote areas and in the field of correspondence /distance/open education mode at various levels of education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From above discussion it could be easily concluded that the vital goal of sustainable development i.e. quality and inclusive education for the whole world is the need of the hour which should be catered by mutual need based and realistic plans and then their timely implementation. Although the goal is very far till now but with the advent of new technologies and ICT enabled education system, the barriers for education of deprived and marginalized could be mitigated. ICT at various levels of education is working as boon and its results in the field of education are tremendous as suggested by various studies on use of ICT in education.

Also the provision of open education at school level should be strengthened and improvised to meet the need of quality school education for drop out and socially, economically deprived students. Efforts are also be made to take a step ahead towards sustainable society through sustainable life styles, democracy and equality etc. For this goal the involvement of youth, teachers, community leaders, eminent scholar and industrialist and political parties of the nation is much required.

Annex 1: SDG 4 targets

SDG 4	Targets under SDG 4	
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	4.1	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 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, nonviolent, 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

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