

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee

Contribution to the Futures of Education

July 2020



*Abstract*

*The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, in its mandated role of “custodian” of the current education agenda of the United Nations, is pleased to respond to the request of the International Commission on the Futures of Education to provide a brief analytical contribution to the drafting of the report “Learning to Become. The Futures of Education”.*

*The Steering Committee welcomes the determination of the International Commission to position education as key to meaningful and sustainable living for the rest of the century and therefore considers a strong inclusion (equity, equality) and justice (human rights) underpinning as essential.*

*As the Steering Committee is a multi-stakeholder UN constituency, the role and potential of the multilateral system received a strong focus in this contribution. The vision on the “global education architecture” was framed through the lens of international/multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation, in close connection with the fundamental humanitarian mission of the United Nations in past, present and future.*

*In such vision, the future(s) are not approached as abstract or mechanistic “foresight”, but rather as lively “perspective(s)”, emerging from a continuous dialogue with history and with present challenges and junctures, not least anticipated shifts in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.*

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## Executive summary

### 1. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the long-standing functional deficiencies and profound inequalities in our societies. On the other hand, it was also a catalyst for educational institutions worldwide to come up with innovative solutions in a relatively short period. This brief momentum of awareness should be seized in preparing our societies for a better and sustainable future.

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee reinforces its call on the international community to renew its commitment to the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and make it the conduit of all policies. This implies increased attention to inclusion, equality and equity, as well as relevance and quality in education, alongside a thorough reflection on how to put international solidarity and multilateralism back on track.

In the immediate context safeguarding the Right to Education calls for an urgent response.

In a medium and long-term perspective, re-thinking of educational innovation and the particular role of ICT herein in terms of inclusion and quality, remains of continuous relevance, with human dignity and fostering a culture of trust as overarching principles.

The UN mandated multilateral and multi-stakeholder Global Education Meetings, convened by UNESCO and prepared by the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, could provide stronger political traction for shaping resilient, future-proof and adequately funded education.

### 2. Future(s)?

How to define the Right to Education in a future-proof way?

Our futures contain all we hope to transmit to future generations, but also that what (we) will change – be it renewed or transformed. How to make confident use of promising new developments and opportunities to the benefit of education for now but also in mid-term and long-term perspective? We should look at what we consistently aspire for education from the past, today and in the future, and how this vision can empower future generations to take active responsibility for the advancement and development of society at all levels.

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, as an international political, multi-stakeholder forum, suggests endeavouring in the re-actualisation of the vision of the UN to the world of today and tomorrow from the angle of the Right to Education.

### 3. Making the futures of education more concrete

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee reiterates its previous core messages on equity, equality and inclusion, as well as on relevance and quality of education. For its achievement, it points at framework conditions for good governance (stakeholder involvement in co-creation of policies and accountability mechanisms, funding and investment in education, lifelong learning perspective, gender mainstreaming...).

This strategy must be oriented by a multifaceted view on the mission of education and a humanistic approach to learning. This encompasses the recalibration of learning for the post-2030 period with a pivotal role for SDG4.7 (education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, (gender) equality, culture of peace and non-violence, democratic citizenship in a global context, appreciation of cultural diversity ...) and the triangular relation between education, culture and science.

#### 4. Educational cooperation in the future: innovative pathways for multilateralism, international solidarity and engagement of stakeholder organisations

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee calls for innovative pathways to re-vitalise multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation and international solidarity in education, and points at framework conditions to reach this goal in a coherent way, starting from a shared vision and the political determination as well as financial commitment of all nations to realise it. In doing so, the holistic approach to the Right of Education remains the guiding principle for multilateralism in education today and in future. Against this backdrop, 10 actionable recommendations are suggested to make multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation in education work.

##### With regard to the overarching vision

- i. A broad - *humanistic* - vision on education, encompassing all missions of education (personal development and fulfilment, employment, democratic participation, advancement of the knowledge base of society) with room for interplay of education, research and science, culture and creativity;
- ii. A broad – *social* – vision on education under a consistent lifelong learning perspective, and with no trade-offs between efficiency/quality, on the one hand, and equity/equality/ inclusion, on the other, and addressing psycho-emotional wellbeing and development of learners in a perspective of community building;
- iii. *Connection of the educational agenda to the advancement of the global community as a whole* (balance between social, economic and ecological pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and leaving room for inter-sectoral action and the interconnection between sustainable development and respect for human rights and the core values of the UN: peace and non-violence, human rights and justice, development and wellbeing;

##### With regard to the perspective

- iv. *Long-term* perspective of policy-making, investment and planning, geared at sustainability instead of quick wins, and beyond exclusive focus on output data, large-scale learning assessments and other standardised tests; in contrast - widening the attention to the embedding processes and framework conditions, and moreover, trusting the judgment of experts and professionals as well as that of learners, and notably youth that hold the promise of the futurity of our society;
- v. *Continuity* in perspective (“The future is now”). Follow-up of advancement should focus on the progressive reduction of inequalities over time at the local, national, regional and global level, and links with international human rights mechanisms should be strengthened;
- vi. Perspective of a *changing world*. Realisation that the world of today and tomorrow is different from that at the time of the founding of the UN in 1945. Anticipation on geopolitical trends, including prospects on evolution of equality/equity in the light of data-driven and “borderless” economies and education provision;

##### With regard to commitments and responsibilities in the multilateral system and the “global education architecture”

- vii. Political and financial commitment and responsibility of *all national Governments* of the world to *multilateral and multi-stakeholder* cooperation/solidarity in education, coupled with trust in scientific and professional expertise and knowledge-sharing;
- viii. Reinforcing UNESCO as *multilateral agency dedicated to education*, adequately funded and equipped to perform a clear coordinating mandate in the global education architecture, in

dialogue with other UN agencies, as well as in complementarity with other international and regional organisations, and with delineated responsibilities for its decision-making bodies, in which all nations participate in the steering/dialogue – membership at the level of the UN should automatically entail membership of its main agencies (such as UNESCO) as well;

- ix. *Clear procedures* for coherent collaboration and division of labour between the national, regional and global level with meaningful involvement of representative organisations of stakeholders (partners in education) and civil society, while acknowledging the value of their on-the-field experience for designing and implementing local, national and international policies;
- x. Provision of *leadership*, both at national and international level, by Governments, while maintaining dialogue with NGOs, and notably with representative organisations of partners in education and civil society, to ensure that education policies and practices lead to inclusion, meet quality standards and are aligned with other sectoral policies geared at social inclusion. Governments should also create conditions enabling NGOs to monitor fulfilment of governmental commitments in national and international context and stand up for those excluded from education.

## Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and notably the Education 2030 Framework for Action include a vision on the empowerment of future generations to assume active responsibility for the advancement and development of society at all levels from the perspective of the Right to Education. Thinking of 2050, efforts should be diversified and strengthened in this sense.

## Introduction

### A targeted contribution...

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, in its mandated role of “custodian” of the current education agenda of the United Nations, is pleased to respond to the request of the International Commission on the Futures of Education to provide a brief analytical contribution to the drafting of the report “*Learning to Become. The Futures of Education*”.

The Steering Committee welcomes the determination of the International Commission to position education as key to meaningful and sustainable living for the rest of the century and therefore considers a strong inclusion (equity, equality) and justice (human rights) underpinning as essential.

In a concern of delivering a contribution that is genuinely helpful for the International Commission’s drafting work, advice was sought from UNESCO’s Futures of Education Team in confining the specific role of the Steering Committee in the consultation process.

The Steering Committee has followed the suggestion to take the critical assessment of international cooperation in education as overarching perspective and therefore:

- Refrained from duplicating the *thematical/topical* work of the Commission’s experts but rather approached the factors that shape the educational environment now and in the future under the political and multi-stakeholder perspective of global cooperation and interaction.
- Avoided overlaps with the *parallel* processes of (1) national reactions to the consultation on the Futures of Education and (2) discussions between members of the International Commission themselves.

Nonetheless the contribution of the Steering Committee should be read in dialogue with the [Visioning and Framing the Futures of Education](#) document, as intermediate synthesis of the discussions of the first meeting of the International Commission on the Futures of Education in its preparation of the final report “*Learning to Become. The Futures of Education*”. This important milestone is indeed due to guide all contributions to further work on the Futures of Education.

As further canvas to their own reflection the Steering Committee has moreover made good use of the International Commission’s Joint Statement and statements of individual Commission members in response to the COVID-19 crisis on [Protecting and Transforming education for shared futures and common humanity](#) (May 2020) and of the most recent publication of the International Commission [Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action](#) (June 2020).

### ... shaped by the experience in multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation

As the Steering Committee is a multi-stakeholder UN constituency, the role and potential of the multilateral system received strong focus in this contribution. The vision on the “global education architecture” was framed through the lens of international/multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation, in close connection with the fundamental humanitarian mission of the United Nations in the past, present and future.

In such vision the future(s) are not approached as abstract or mechanistic “foresight”, but rather as lively “perspective(s)”, emerging from a continuous dialogue with history and with present challenges and junctures, not least anticipated shifts in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

## 1. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic

### The immediate perspective

A short momentum for action...

The Futures of Education work started before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in itself is the perfect illustration of the inherent unpredictability of the future. In-depth understanding and interpretation of the current situation remains key to realistically address challenges for now and for the future.

Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to assume that COVID-19 could become the largest world-encompassing human tragedy after World War II. Apart from grievance over the human losses, we can expect that the social divide and inequalities – most painfully visible in the areas of health-care, education, social protection and general living conditions in our communities under confinement - will even exacerbate in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the ensuing period of economic recession.

From a global perspective, the International Commission on the Futures of Education should however, remain critical to the current narrative of the COVID-19 crisis as an “unprecedented” moment that announces a new epoch in world history. As historians of epidemics will point out eloquently, the current situation is by no means “exceptional”. Like with all pandemics, the most vulnerable groups in our society suffer the most, not only from the disease itself, but also from the confinement/quarantine measures. Throughout the centuries, major epidemics have always been followed by economic crisis and often accompanied by social unrest and upheavals, as well as public narratives of guilt and penance. The almost disproportional media coverage for COVID-19 – to the detriment of attention for other humanitarian tragedies – undoubtedly also contains a flavour of self-centredness of regions that dwelled in the false presupposition that the advancement of their medical systems could prevent them from being hit by pandemics. The description of the fight against the Coronavirus in terms of a “war” by politicians, has been interpreted by several observers as a disgrace to those populations that are living under the threat of a “real” war, i.e. coping with a violent conflict or other humanitarian tragedy and therefore not even in the luxury position to protect themselves against this virus.... The huge media attention to COVID-19 as well as the policy answers of confinement - imposed not only on COVID-19 patients but often also on the entire population - shows sharp contrast with the relative indifference to other more virulent recent regional epidemics like Ebola and SARS, let alone the recurrent cholera outbreaks, of which the spreading is typically more local<sup>1</sup>.

As societies tend to take their normal course very quickly once the pandemic is over, busy as they are with other challenges, it is to be expected that momentum of the COVID-19 crisis to adapt our policies, will also be very brief. In this context, it can be of merit to couple the analytical reflection on the Futures of Education with actionable recommendations on how education can shape the future on the canvas of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis is based on a recent interview (28.04.2020) with historian and President of the Royal Belgian Society of Oriental Studies, Christian Cannuyer, who made the link between the history of pandemics in Europe to the current humanitarian situation in the Middle East: <https://www.notele.be/it217-media78892-l-entretien-du-jour-l-historien-christian-cannuyer.html>



... for critical questioning of current policies...

Several areas of policy-making that came into the spotlight during the COVID-19 confinement period call for revisiting. We already mentioned the exacerbating of the social divide, but there are other examples that may also inform recalibration of education for the future.

[Hierarchies and trade-offs in society, economics and in political decision making.](#)

What is a “vital sector” in a context of confinement of the population? Should we not re-orient study offer and professional guidance based on the current experience? How long can social life, economy, human rights, including right to education and work, psycho-emotional wellbeing, human dignity<sup>2</sup>... remain “between parentheses” for sanitary reasons? How to justify that in the design of exit strategies from the lock-down, the Right to Education, that is in theory even guaranteed in times of violent conflict, does not automatically prevail in the current crisis? What is the (economic?) rationale behind the fact that in many countries university students can gather freely in indoor shopping malls and cafés but are not allowed to enter their campuses?

[Confinement, social divide, deep inequalities and human rights<sup>3</sup>.](#)

How to prevent a sanitary crisis from turning into a crisis in democracy, human rights and rule of law? Apart from the confinement exacerbating social inequalities there is the upsurge of biometrical surveillance, as a particular form of artificial intelligence, that might become *instituted* and start to serve less noble aspirations than just safeguarding the population’s wellbeing. In the long run this could hamper the empowerment of citizens to take responsibility for their own health (and life in the wider sense) and that of others<sup>4</sup>. How to prevent autocratic regimes, in the name of sanitary lock-down, impose undue restrictions on civil society in their democratic expressions and pro-people actions<sup>5</sup>, target political opponents or discriminate against specific (ethnic, cultural, religious...) minorities<sup>6</sup>?

[Security, “evidence” and monitoring](#)

The COVID-19 crisis has confronted us with the futility of the attempt to achieve absolute oversight and control over all aspects of human life and to prevent catastrophes by clinging to monitoring procedures that select the correct (output) data. Even experienced scientists had to admit that confronted with an unknown virus, they were entering uncharted territory, causing their advice to

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<sup>2</sup> And even the rituals bringing the community together at the major stages in the lifecycle (birth, marriage, passing away...). Seen from a humanistic perspective to education this is not a detail, since, as was so sharply observed in Chinese Confucian tradition but also in other world cultures, rituals are the gateway to (individual and collective) humanity. Fingarette, H. (1972), *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. Long Grove (Ill): Waveland Press, summarises this insight as “human community as holy rite”.

<sup>3</sup> *Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Dimensions to Covid-19 Response*, 19.03.2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/19/human-rights-dimensions-covid-19-response>

<sup>4</sup> Hence the strong insistence of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her [TV address to the nation of 18.03.2020](#) that the confinement measures have to remain *exceptional and temporary* and her explicit reference in this regard to her own youth experience of living under a totalitarian regime. Also historian and futurologist Yuval Noah Harari (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) in his contribution [The world after Coronavirus](#) in the *Financial Times* of 20.03.2020 observes: “Asking people to choose between privacy and health is, in fact, the very root of the problem. Because this is a false choice. We can and should enjoy both privacy and health. We can choose to protect our health and stop the coronavirus epidemic not by instituting totalitarian surveillance regimes, but rather by empowering citizens. In recent weeks, some of the most successful efforts to contain the coronavirus epidemic were orchestrated by South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. While these countries have made some use of tracking applications, they have relied far more on extensive testing, on honest reporting, and on the willing co-operation of a well-informed public”.

<sup>5</sup> UN OHCHR, [States responses to Covid 19 threat should not halt freedoms of assembly and association, report of UN expert Clément Voule](#), 14.04.2020.

<sup>6</sup> As was mentioned at the launching of the [Group of Friends on Solidarity and Inclusion with Global Citizenship Education](#), launched at UNESCO on 26.05.2020.



evolve according to what further research and experience revealed. Strangely enough, public opinion continued to display a preference for trusting incomplete, and therefore unreliable, data and figures, rather than having no figures at all<sup>7</sup>.

#### Relation with nature and the planet

The pandemic has made visible the risks associated with current forms of production, human consumption and its consequences on climate change and the environment. We cannot nonetheless rely on a romantic view of nature as “paradise lost” that can simply be restored by living in harmony with all planetary life. Humanity can destroy the planet but is also the only species that can take action to save it. This is an important typically human responsibility that goes “beyond the human”. Nonetheless and to a certain degree, we will have to accept the inherent unpredictability of natural disaster, as experienced in the cruelty of an epidemic for which, despite the enormous advancement of science and technology, there is no immediate cure other than the human strength of mutual support in adversity. For this reason, it is necessary to build a new “normality” based on the transformation of our ways of inhabiting the world, of relating among peoples, with cultures and in a responsible relationship with nature.

#### In summary

A thoughtful synthesis on how to re-orient our post-COVID policies in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was given by the UNCTAD Director of globalisation and development strategies, who points at policies that “*promote equality at home and internationalism across the globe. In our interdependent world, these measures will, however, prove insufficient without a multilateral system that promotes and protects the wellbeing of all people above short-term financial gains and the needs of itinerant international firms*”<sup>8</sup>.

This programmatic advice is of high relevance for education as well.

#### Right to Education under attack?

*“The right to education is real and undiminished also in times of emergency, even if the ways in which this right is ensured may require adaptation. We cannot allow our fundamental values to be left at the wayside, as we have seen with attempts to sidetrack democracy, including such essential values as academic freedom and institutional autonomy”*<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> A literary evocation of this “control crisis” was given by the Dutch poet and novelist Ilya Leonard Pfeijffer, who wrote from his quarantine address in the Italian city of Genova: “*Finally the graphs are doing what we wanted. We have given up everything for it, our job and leisure, the contacts with our parents and friends and we have given up our fundamental rights, our democracy and our future with only this one goal in mind: to regain control of the graphs. [...]. We can question all figures, but that was the case before and the unreliable figures of today are undeniably lower than the unreliable figures of before. We told ourselves that we made sacrifices to save lives. We said to beat the virus. But that was not what it was all about. It was about control. Since we have put God off duty and ripped his creation out of his hands, we have become the masters of our destiny. Life was makeable and we even control death to our will. Suffering was obsolete and happiness was available on order. We tamed the capriciousness of chance, eliminated risks and strived for total control over everything. One silly, microscopic virus shattered our illusion of control. That explained our panic and our outrageous reaction. We tried to regain control by putting everything we could think of under draconian control. We had to show that we were in charge*” (*De Standaard*, 26.04.2020).

<sup>8</sup> KOZUL-WRIGHT, R. & BARBOSA, N. (2020): “This Crisis Will Change the World – for Better or Worse”, *Tribune*, 23.03.2020. <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/03/coronavirus-will-change-the-world-for-better-or-worse>

<sup>9</sup> *Making the right to education real in times of crisis*, statement by Matjaž Gruben on the COE website: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/making-the-right-to-education-real-in-times-of-crisis>

This recent statement of Matjaž Gruben, Director of Democratic Participation of the Council of Europe, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, is a strong reminder that without respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law, we cannot (re-)build societies in a sustainable way.

This insight should also guide our re-thinking of hierarchies and priorities in education, that notably with regard to the currently heavily debated transmission of (civic) values, require a solid framework to relate to. In such a framework human dignity and human rights should be more than empty phrases, mindful of the old wisdom, as reiterated by Martin Luther King, that “the arch of the moral universe is long, but it bends to justice”.

The current sanitary crisis also emphasised the value of education and why it should always be protected. Schools must be safe places. It is therefore highly significant that amidst the COVID-19 crisis the General Assembly proclaimed 9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, adopting a resolution that reaffirms the right to education for all and the importance of ensuring safe, enabling learning environments in humanitarian emergencies<sup>10</sup>.

Suspension of the Right to Education should not be treated lightly, especially not for those learners that are most vulnerable. When schools and other educational institutions re-open, not all learners will return - especially girls in many regions - and for the millions that were out of school before COVID-19 struck, enrolment and learning will become an even more distant goal to reach. It is therefore imperative to step up efforts to (re-)enrol them, while providing adequate support targeted at their specific needs.

The mapping of the groups that now, more than ever, are at risk of dropping out from learning will be an extra encouragement to refrain from one-size-fits-all solutions. We should rather think of differentiated strategies for the distinct levels and strands of education and training (schools but also ECCE, TVET, higher and adult education...) and for different profiles of learners, with mainstream attention to gender and lifelong learning. In these trying times where learning throughout the life cycle becomes a priority, the coherence in approach remains indispensable for facilitating smooth transition between the different cycles of the system.

It remains therefore deplorable that education was not always treated as an absolute priority in the national exit strategies from the COVID-19 lockdown. This should incite political concern, especially in anticipation of the expected cuts in the public budget, where trade-off may also not play to the advantage of the education sector either.

In defence of the domestic budget for education as well as of international aid to education, the global education community cannot remain silent. The UN mandated multilateral and multi-stakeholder Global Education Meetings, convened by UNESCO and prepared by the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, could provide stronger political traction in defending the public education budgets as framework condition for safeguarding the Right to Education.

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<sup>10</sup> [Resolution A/74/L.66 of 12.05.2020](#) initiated by Qatar, supported by Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and Uruguay.

## Medium and long-term perspective

### Innovation and re-thinking the role of ICT in terms of inclusion and quality in education

In a certain sense COVID-19 has also become a catalyst for educational institutions worldwide to come up with innovative solutions in a relatively short period of time<sup>11</sup>.

From the viewpoint of innovation in education – of which distance education is one, but not the only option - the COVID-19 crisis could indeed be a turning point, especially if the international expertise gained, i.a. through the UNESCO-led [Global Education Coalition in response to COVID-19](#) could be firmly rooted in the period to come.

The struggle of education systems worldwide in guaranteeing education provision to students under confinement via on-line modes forces us to correct assumptions as if technology can seamlessly replace teaching staff (or other vital functions of our society). Interaction with teachers and peers of flesh and blood remains indispensable, in particular for the most vulnerable learners, and notably for the youngest, for which long time spent on screens is not an ideal situation.

The digital gap widens inequalities in access to knowledge, especially for girls and women who typically need more encouragement to choose STEM study programmes, let alone for careers related to Artificial Intelligence<sup>12</sup>. There is moreover, the dependency on private provision that, if not well regulated and planned, can lead to accelerated commoditisation of learning and threaten the privacy of learners. Moreover, appropriate governance and regulation will be needed to ensure that the private development of ICT-based learning does not undermine public services, autonomy in determining educational content and methods, increase inequality and degrade the status of education professionals. ICT-based learning should be directed solely in the interest of furthering education.

The UNESCO *acquis* on Open Educational Resources<sup>13</sup> and the recent launching on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 of the [Dynamic Coalition for Open Educational Resources](#), certainly provides a useful compass for designing policies geared at international cooperation in safeguarding accessibility of online content and educational ICT tools. We should consistently strive for the creation of universally accessible ICT platforms that do not exclude or discriminate against marginalised publics of learners.

On the other hand, it should equally be underscored that distance teaching offers innovative approaches for reaching out to new publics of learners at lower costs than conventional education, that often remains inaccessible for certain disadvantaged groups. Such solutions should therefore be further explored and developed after the COVID-19 crisis as part of inclusion policies. The potential of online learning reaches, however, further than the cost-effectiveness only. Through structured interaction between local learning communities and partner institutions, it can put learners in connection with a global, or at least wider, education community, helping them to practice intercultural communication and eventually enhancing multi-faceted, critical understanding. In addressing not only the academic performance of learners but also their non-cognitive development, ICT can become a genuine tool for transformation.

<sup>11</sup> World Economic Forum 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/3-ways-coronavirus-is-reshaping-education-and-what-changes-might-be-here-to-stay>

<sup>12</sup> [I'd blush if I could: closing gender divides in digital skills through education](#) (UNESCO, EQUALS Skills Coalition 2019).

<sup>13</sup> defined as “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions”: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/oeer>

Attention should not only go to the entirely online provision but also to different forms of blended and hybrid learning, where the support for learners is developed throughout the different modes of contact, be it online or face-to-face during school attendance days.

New modes of delivery require, however, adequate quality assurance that looks both at the content of education as well as at the effect on knowledge, skills and attitudes of learners and moreover takes a holistic approach encompassing the whole range of stakeholders to education. The [UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Delivery of Cross-Border Higher Education](#) (2005), although focussing on (online) higher education, provides an interesting quality assurance model that can easily be expanded to other levels of education and training. Notably these Guidelines provide a pragmatic line to take for all actors involved, public and private, both at the delivery as well as the receiving end of the education process.

Finally and in the wider reflection on innovation – connected to but also beyond ICT - inspiration can certainly be taken from the (virtual) Comparative & International Education Society 2020 Conference that was set up around the theme “Beyond the Human”. A panel of four members of the Futures of Education International Commission: Arjun Appadurai, Karen Mundy, António Nóvoa and Fernando M. Reimers, with Sobhi Tawil and Noah W. Sobe (UNESCO) as moderators, entered into debate on reimagining knowledge and learning, on the canvas of the current COVID-19 crisis<sup>14</sup>.

### Human dignity and fostering a culture of trust as compass for the future

Human dignity should remain the basic principle for recalibrating (educational) policy and practice. Human beings are more than biological mechanisms that have to be protected from a hostile virus that can distort or destroy them. Human beings are “people” in the first place, members of social-cultural communities of which the members empower themselves and others through continuous meaningful interaction and communication. Consequently, the closing and re-opening of schools, universities and other educational institutions should not be treated as a health issue only. The perspective of several intellectual disciplines, not least pedagogical expertise, is equally important. Assessing the consequences of the interruption of learning (and the suspension of normal social life) is, moreover, not only a question of making up for the time lost in the acquisition of the academic curriculum, let alone that the solution lies in the urgent set-up of large scale learning assessments. Especially for the most vulnerable learners, the disconnection from the school community risks to be a more detrimental factor for their further learning pathway and professional prospects, as well as for their integral social-emotional and physical development, than the temporary slow-down in the acquisition of schoolish knowledge. The post-COVID “catching up” should be geared in the first place at participation and inclusion in the school life and school community, as places where children and youngsters, as well as teachers, parents and families learn and practice to live together.

*In this respect the pivotal role of SDG4.7 as hallmark for the achievement of SDG4 and even the sustainable development agenda as a whole, cannot be enough underscored.*

Moreover and in the light of what was mentioned above, education should aspire at building a culture of trust – trust in teachers and learners and other partners in education, but also trust in the general public, i.e. in well-informed citizens that are capable of shaping their own future and that of the community, provided that they have transparent access to knowledge and information.

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<sup>14</sup> Full audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVhyKMPiZqM>

For unofficial transcripts of the debate: <https://cies2020.org/keynotes/futures-of-education-unesco-initiative-to-reimagine-knowledge-and-learning/>

*The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the long-standing functional deficiencies and profound inequalities in our societies. On the other hand it was also a catalyst for educational institutions worldwide to come up with innovative solutions in a relative short period of time. This brief momentum of awareness should be seized in preparing our societies for a better and sustainable future. The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee reinforces its call on international community to renew its commitment to the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and make it the conduit of all policies. This implies increased attention to inclusion, equality and equity, as well as relevance and quality in education, alongside a thorough reflection on how to put international solidarity and multilateralism back on track.*

*In the immediate context safeguarding the Right to Education calls for an urgent response.*

*In a medium and long-term perspective, re-thinking of educational innovation and the particular role of ICT herein in terms of inclusion and quality, remains of continuous relevance, with human dignity and fostering a culture of trust as overarching principles.*

*The UN mandated multilateral and multi-stakeholder Global Education Meetings, convened by UNESCO and prepared by the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, could provide stronger political traction for shaping resilient, future-proof and adequately funded education.*

## 2. Future(s)?

### Future(s) in a vision of continuity and renewal

Is future to be understood merely as what comes after the present and therefore unknown by definition? Or is future to be understood as “perspective” and therefore embedded in what we value from the past and present and wish to be transmitted to future generations?

How do we envisage the connection between past, present and future? In a linear way, as Westerners do automatically without questioning their underlying (philosophical) assumptions? Or more cyclical, as is common in most cultures of the world and stressing the dynamic interplay *between continuity and renewal*?

The future(s) as “perspective” require a nuanced view on what is happening now and in history. In contrast with an uninterested “foresight study”, this vision will be inspired by the intellectual attitude of an “engaged spectator”, as defined by the political scientist and philosopher Raymond Aron – detached from ideologies (in the sense of unfalsifiable “theories of everything”) and their common places, but still driven by *care* for society and humanity. Education requires moreover hope – surmounting fear for uncertainty that has always been inherent to the future – as well basic trust in humanity, since educators, while standing in a teaching tradition and anchored in the here and now, directly reach out to future generations that we hope will change, be renewed and transform. These are the “new ones” – to paraphrase Hannah Arendt – that hold the promise to the world that its futurity is guaranteed by the virtue of the beginning that each child represents.

Approaching the future as meaningful perspective, but also as legacy, moreover prevents us from stepping into the dangerous trap of escapism in post- or trans-humanism and/or the paralysing expectation of an apocalyptic end of the world.

## Re-enacting the initial human rights-based inspiration of the founding of the United Nations: the Right to Education

One of the reasons why *The Treasure Within* (1996), the predecessor of the upcoming Futures of Education report is still worth reading in 2020 is its successful bridging of the initial inspiration of the founding of the UN in 1945 to education for the next generations.

As put forward by the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee's [Statement of Support. Accountability and the Right to Education](#) (March 2018), education has been formally recognised as a human right since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This has been reaffirmed in various global human rights treaties, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981). The right to education has long been recognised as encompassing not only access to educational provision, but also the obligation to eliminate discrimination at all levels of the educational system, to set minimum standards and to improve quality. In addition, education is necessary for the fulfilment of any other civil, political, economic or social right. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) further strengthens and broadens the concept of the right to education, in particular through the obligation to consider in its implementation the Convention's three core principles: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; and the right to life, survival and development of the child to the maximum extent. The Steering Committee has moreover underlined *"that this international normative framework is not an empty declaration of intent: these provisions are legally binding, which implies that States have clear obligations to respect, ensure and implement the right to education. It is furthermore a powerful tool to progress towards SDG4 and a cornerstone of the Education 2030 Agenda, which has adopted a right-based approach"*.

### How to define the Right to Education in a future-proof way?

*Our futures contain all we hope to transmit to future generations, but also that what (we) will change – be it renewed or transformed. How to make confident use of promising new developments and opportunities to the benefit of education for now but also in mid-term and long-term perspectives? We should look at what we consistently aspire for education from the past, today and in the future and how this vision can empower future generations to take active responsibility for the advancement and development of society at all levels.*

*The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, as international political, multi-stakeholder forum, suggests endeavouring in the re-actualisation of the vision of the UN to the world of today and tomorrow from the angle of the Right to Education.*

## 3. Making the Futures of Education more concrete

### A holistic approach to the Right to Education...

The world has profoundly changed since 1945 and the narrative around the Right to Education has evolved towards an insistence on the quality and relevance of education to which all should be granted equitable access.

From the time of its establishment in 2016 the subsequent messages of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee have been consistently anchored in a vision of leaving no-one behind and



connecting the meaning and relevance of learning to responsibility for the local and global community and the planet.

Hence the pivotal role of SDG4.7, where education for sustainable development and education for citizenship in the global context are intertwined, as expressed in the commitment of the international community at the Global Education Meeting in December 2018 of “*strengthening education for global citizenship and for sustainable development to promote values of respect for life, dignity and cultural diversity and contribute to social cohesion, democracy, peace and social justice, and to improving the accountability of education as public good*”<sup>15</sup>.

A particular illustrative example was the GEM 2018 based [Contribution from the Steering Committee to the High Level Political Forum 2019](#) convened by ECOSOC/UN on the evaluation of SDG4. The Steering Committee called for the necessity to scale up the efforts to achieve equity and inclusion in education beyond the typical confines of educational policy and planning, as could be summarized in five “beyond messages”, notably:

- Beyond *averages*: reflects primary policy focus on equity/inclusion and the need for disaggregated/contextualised data to better monitor inequalities in education;
- Beyond *access*; and
- Beyond *basics* (foundation skills): relates to the new focus of SDG4 on the relevance of learning, including for citizenship in an interconnected world;
- Beyond *schooling*: reflects the lifelong (and life-wide) focus of SDG4 that looks at education and training in the lifecycle and across multiple learning spaces beyond the formal sector;
- Beyond *education*: reflects the need to go beyond the education “silo” and ensure greater synergies between education interventions and those of other development sectors.

... requires policies that provide the framework conditions to let the multiple missions of education flourish

If a multi-faceted approach to the mission of education<sup>16</sup> and attention to all the different strands of education and training is to guide our vision on quality education for now and the future, what are the framework conditions for public policies to deliver on equitable access to quality education in a lifelong learning perspective?

The SDG Education 2020 Steering Committee would like to point at four indispensable modalities to underpin future-proof education policies.

- i. [Structured involvement of stakeholder organisations in co-creation of policies and in designing accountability mechanisms](#)

Under the influence of international organisations, such as the World Bank and the OECD, the discourse on educational governance, also in the context of SDG4 - Education 2030 has increasingly

<sup>15</sup> [Global Education Meeting 2018 - Brussels Declaration](#), 5 December 2018.

<sup>16</sup> As e.g. summarized in the *Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6, of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research as: “preparation for sustainable employment; preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies; personal development; the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base”.*



been borrowing the economic human capital jargon, rather than utilising the conceptual framework and typical vocabulary stemming from a rights-based approach to inclusive education<sup>17</sup>.

Although both perspectives are not necessarily incompatible and accountability remains a key concept for solid educational policies, ill-designed accountability models may cause more problems than they solve<sup>18</sup>. Smith and Benavot (2019) examined two key characteristics of prevailing accountability systems that have become the cornerstone of contemporary education policies: reliance on external monitoring; and focus on outcomes and results, while the main stakeholders are typically absent from the discussion. Many accountability reforms in education do not achieve the intended impact, as the framework condition for strengthening accountability in education is not fulfilled, i.e. providing different actors with an opportunity to articulate and represent their views as the accountability process unfolds. Such an approach is referred to as *structured democratic voice* and is a critical condition to help overcome shortcomings in dominant accountability approaches and to achieve strengthened accountability<sup>19</sup>.

In this context of co-creation of policies in all its stages - from design to implementation and evaluation - the role of (representative organisations of) *primary stakeholders* (teachers, school leaders, education institutions, students, parents, families) in particular cannot be underestimated and should be spelled out more in detail, touching issues like student action, academic freedom, as well as professional and institutional autonomy.

Along the same lines the [Outcome Statement](#) of the 9<sup>th</sup> Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030, Hammamet (Tunisia), 2019<sup>20</sup> makes a strong case for the empowerment of stakeholders – and notably their *representative organisations* (including the potential for student organisations to push the education agenda forward).

## ii. Funding of (public) education as sustainable investment in the future

The above-mentioned Hammamet Statement also held a strong plea for adequate public funding/investment in education. Funding should moreover be targeted to those that risk to be left behind in the first place – “there is no inclusion when millions lack education”<sup>21</sup>.

Similar messages have been expressed at several occasions by the Steering Committee and notably in its Statement [For a Sustainable Future – Invest in Education](#), on World Education Day January 24<sup>th</sup> 2020, that “*positions education as humanity’s greatest renewable resource – one that must be protected and nurtured to open minds, promote shared values, foster a culture of peace and invent our common future on the basis of human rights, dignity and respect for diversity*”. This observation is to be coupled with considerations on well-designed accountability and data collection with focus on *sustainable* investments in e.g. professional training and decent working conditions for teachers, school leaders and other educational (support) staff, quality school infrastructure etc., rather than on measurable short-term outputs only at the expense of a more holistic approach to schooling. As

<sup>17</sup> Wulff, A. (2019): “[The ideological battle over SDG 4](#)”. *Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2019 - www.2030spotlight.org*

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO (2017): [Accountability in Education: Meeting our Commitments. 2017-18 Global Education Monitoring Report](#). Paris: UNESCO

<sup>19</sup> Smith, W.C. & Benavot, A. (2019): “Improving accountability in education: the importance of structured democratic voice”. *Asia Pacific Education Review 20/2*: 193-205.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO (2020), [Educating for an Inclusive and sustainable future. Outcome Statement of the 9<sup>th</sup> Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030, Hammamet, Tunisia, 2019](#)

<sup>21</sup> “*Target financing to those left behind: There is no inclusion while millions lack access to education. Once legal instruments are in place to address access barriers such as child labour, child marriage and teenage pregnancy, governments need a twin-track approach that allocates general funding to foster an inclusive learning environment for all learners, as well as targeted funding to follow the furthest behind as early as possible. Upon access to school, early interventions can considerably reduce the potential impact of disability on progression and learning*” (GEM Report 2020, Recommendation 2).

pointed out earlier, there is also a link to the position of public education in times where education has to compete with other policy domains for public budget, a situation that can be aggravated in a context of economic distress, violent conflict and even in case of an ageing population. From this angle it is not unreasonable to expect that this challenge will remain relevant in the coming decades, as is the inter-sectoral dialogue on more efficient and equitable taxation.

The conclusions of the Committee at its meetings of April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 and June 4<sup>th</sup> 2020 could serve as a good basis in this respect and will hopefully escalate to the political level.

A plea for funding remains, however, meaningless if not well-framed in a comprehensive vision on what future we want for education, and under which modalities and with which public and private partners to achieve it, and finally, what we understand precisely by public responsibility in education. Public responsibility (and accountability) is by no means confined to public actors only. It is a commitment for all involved in the public good of education, regardless of their legal status, public or private.

### iii. Re-calibrating knowledge and skills in a post-2030 agenda in a humanistic approach to learning - culture, art and imagination

The comprehensive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encompasses a wide variety of areas and topics. Nonetheless, the perspective of culture is largely absent<sup>22</sup>. This observation also applies to the valorisation of art education and the scientific methodologies of the humanities, that try to *understand* the expressions of human life, in addressing sustainable development<sup>23</sup>. Also here lies a role for UNESCO as the “intellectual agency” in the UN system and moreover dedicated to culture as well. All the above makes a strong case for the consequent humanistic approach to learning as advocated in the context of the Futures of Education, and notably in the recent UNESCO publication on the [Humanistic Futures of Learning: Perspectives of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks](#) (2020). Also the [Visioning and Framing the Futures of Education](#) document identifies culture as horizontal theme, with focus on cultural heritage. A genuinely vivacious cultural perspective should, in contrast, go beyond tradition (without renewal) only, and immediately be coupled with the reflection on the competences needed today and in future<sup>24</sup>. In this aspiration, we should not stop at “knowledge” (and skills), recalling the words of Albert Einstein: “Imagination is more important than knowledge”.

Inspiration can also be found with Amartya Sen, who in his writings often touches the mission of education, as well as the intrinsic relation between education, development and human rights (freedom). Having spent much of his career in the West but nonetheless firmly rooted in the Indian tradition and the pedagogical insights of Rabindranath Thakur (Tagore) - who explicitly propagated an intercultural mindset - Sen describes the roots of his educational attitudes as follows:

*“... I soon moved to Santiniketan, and it was mainly in Tagore’s school that my educational attitudes were formed. This was a co-educational school, with many progressive features. The emphasis was on*

<sup>22</sup> Albeit in the best case assimilated to the mere social aspects connected to culture, e.g. (cultural) diversity, intercultural understanding, gender...

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the distinction between the methodologies of “explaining” of the natural sciences and “understanding” by the human sciences was initially coined by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and influenced later authors that advocated the necessity of “hermeneutical” methods to explore human expressions of life. In his initial plea for the project of the Futures of Education, Portuguese Ambassador and International Commission member António Nóvoa pointed at the difficult position of art and the humanities in contrast with the nowadays more “prestigious” STEM/natural sciences/technology disciplines. This is not only a question of study choice or employability. It also relates to the openness to create space for an wider outlook to the world beyond the purely quantifiable.

<sup>24</sup> A good practice in this context are the subsequent recommendations since 2004 of the European Union that listed “cultural awareness and expression” as one of the 8 key competences for lifelong learning. Link to Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C\\_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2018%3A189%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2018%3A189%3ATOC)

*fostering curiosity rather than competitive excellence, and any kind of interest in examination performance and grades was severely discouraged. ("She is quite a serious thinker," I remember one of my teachers telling me about a fellow student, "even though her grades are very good.") Since I was, I have to confess, a reasonably good student, I had to do my best to efface that stigma"<sup>25</sup>.*

This warning against over-focussing of academic performance to the detriment of curiosity is certainly to take at heart when attempting to mitigate the so-called "learning crisis" and in recalibrating knowledge and skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At the same time, education also needs to be grounded in economic realities and the needs of learners and wider society. Appropriate and well-regulated links to the labour market needs can shape a life-long learning approach, which can foster both the humanistic and cultural development of societies as well as their prospect of economic development and employment. Such consideration should bear in mind not only immediate labour market needs but future skills needs for sustainable and socially just economic development.

For such broad definition of a "humanistic" approach to education, encompassing the world of economy and the perspective of a just society, again the theories of Amartya Sen can further guide the reflection. Human development goes much further than the human capital approach, and notably in understanding and acknowledging that education enhances freedom<sup>26</sup>.

#### iv. The triangular relation between education, culture and science: scientific literacy

Given the interconnection of teaching, learning and research, most prominently in higher education, but also permeating other levels of education, it is important to define the future of education in dialogue with science, which is also a core mission of UNESCO.

The COVID-19 crisis has certainly demonstrated how important expert knowledge is for a well-informed policy response to the pandemic.

It was, however, also a lesson in framing education for scientific literacy for the future. Learners should be equipped, not only with knowledge of "facts" deriving from science, but also be encouraged to adopt a critical scientific attitude, which pre-supposes a familiarity with scientific methodology, i.e. on how science advances and scientists proceed in their research. A scientific "truth" can only be brought forward, as long as it remains falsifiable (not only verifiable, as was demonstrated by Karl Popper) awaiting further research findings. This insight proved also very relevant in dealing with the new and previously unknown virus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic and where the advice to the population of virologists, and of the WHO itself, followed an incremental pathway. A critical scientific approach requires trust in science(s) – in plural! - as an important guide, but science's answers remain open to further questioning and dialogue with peers, and also, at least to a certain extent, with the general public.

Moreover, learners should be familiarised with a variety of sound scientific methodologies, depending on the discipline, be it natural sciences, social sciences or humanities. In this context, no concessions should be made in granting a key role in any school curriculum to history teaching, in view of enabling learning lessons from the past to better understanding the present and prepare for the future.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1998/sen/biographical/>

<sup>26</sup> "First, education has an instrumental role in facilitating people's capacity to participate in decision-making processes at various levels. Therefore it also plays a social role, since literacy is essential to foster public debate and dialogue. Sen also refers to its empowering and distributive role. Education can redress injustice by facilitating the ability of disadvantaged, marginalized and excluded groups to participate in social and political arrangements. Thus education has redistributive effects between social groups, households and within families. Finally, education has transformative potential because people are able to use the benefits of education to help others, as well as themselves" (Summary of Amartya Sen's contribution to the 2003 Commonwealth Conference on Basic Education, by Rajapakse, N. (2016): "Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Education: Enhancing Social Justice". *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal* [online], vol. XIV-n°1. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/lisa/8913>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.8913>).

Methodologies borrowed from history science in analysing the trustworthiness of information sources, can be easily applied in teaching of e.g. media literacy and in empowering learners to become critical citizens with stronger resilience against populism, unfalsifiable political propaganda and “fake news”.

*The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee reiterates its previous core messages on equity, equality and inclusion, as well as on relevance and quality of education. For the achievement, it points at framework conditions for good governance (stakeholder involvement in co-creation of policies and accountability mechanisms, funding and investment in education, lifelong learning perspective, gender mainstreaming...).*

*This strategy must be oriented by a multifaceted view on the mission of education and a humanistic approach to learning. This encompasses the recalibration of learning for the post-2030 period in which SDG4.7 (education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, culture of peace and non-violence, democratic citizenship in a global context, appreciation of cultural diversity ...) and the triangular relation between education, culture and science play a pivotal role.*

#### 4. Educational cooperation in the future: Innovative pathways for multilateralism, international solidarity and engagement of stakeholder organisations

The challenges to multilateralism have been painfully visible in the scattered national reactions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially international organisations have been merely perceived as geared primarily towards optimisation of exchange, rather than providing the solidity of a nation state in protecting its citizens. Fortunately some recalibration has taken place at global as well as at regional level, but these dangerous trends, which jeopardize international solidarity, persist and should be countered urgently. The current erosion of multilateral decision-making is not a new phenomenon though. Ian Bremmer (2012)<sup>27</sup> introduced useful concepts to describe the situation, such as “G-Zero world” and “geopolitical recession” that refer to a breakdown in traditional global leadership and the inability of other nations to fill the void. In the “G-Zero”, no country or group of countries has the political and economic leverage to drive an international agenda or provide global public goods.

Moreover, if we take 2050 as a horizon, this phenomenon could be exacerbated by demographic as well as geo-political shifts. The traditionally “wealthy” regions will be at the apex of their ageing problem and their population will have shrunk. What is the future of public education in these countries when it has to compete with public spending for (medical) care for instance? In contrast, it is expected that by 2050 one child out of three will be born on the African continent. Will this lead to new migration streams and consequently shifts in the “global culture”? Will the geopolitical superpowers of today still be the same in 2050 and will the distinction between the global North and South, of which the meaningfulness is already questioned nowadays, have become obsolete by 2050? Will the gender mainstreaming of policies still be as urgent as today or may we hope that we will have made significant progress by 2050 and even earlier? What will be the challenges for peace-keeping and leaving no-one behind? Will there be a shift in priorities?

How to anticipate to the growing importance of lifelong learning, given the (hopefully) growing life expectancy of the world population? How to prepare our basic education for this new reality, where skills may become outdated but people should not have an expiration date?

<sup>27</sup> Bremmer, I. (2012): *Every Nation for itself. Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*. s.l.: Portfolio.

Against this backdrop, the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee suggests 10 actionable recommendations to fulfil the framework conditions to make multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation in education work.

### With regard to the overarching vision

- i. A broad - *humanistic* - vision on education, encompassing all missions of education (personal development and fulfilment, employment, democratic participation, advancement of the knowledge base of society) with room for interplay of education, research and science, culture and creativity;
- ii. A broad – *social* – vision on education under a consistent lifelong learning perspective, and with no trade-offs between efficiency/quality, on the one hand, and equity/inclusion, on the other, and addressing psycho-emotional wellbeing and development of learners in a perspective of community building;
- iii. *Connection of the educational agenda to the advancement of the global community as a whole* (balance between social, economic and ecological pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) and leaving room for inter-sectoral action and the interconnection between sustainable development and respect for human rights and the core values of the UN: peace and non-violence, human rights and justice, development and wellbeing;

### With regard to the perspective

- iv. *Long-term* perspective of policy-making, investment and planning, geared at sustainability instead of quick wins, and beyond exclusive focus on output data, large-scale learning assessments and other standardised tests; in contrast - widening the attention to the embedding processes and framework conditions, and moreover, trusting the judgment of experts and professionals, as well as that of learners, and notably youth that holds the promise of the futurity of our society;
- v. *Continuity* in perspective (“The future is now”). Follow-up of advancement should focus on the progressive reduction of inequalities over time at the local, national, regional and global level, and links with international human rights mechanisms should be strengthened;
- vi. Perspective of a *changing world*. Realisation that the world of today and tomorrow is different from that at the time of the founding of the UN in 1945. Anticipation on geopolitical trends, including prospects on evolution of equality/equity in the light of data-driven and “borderless” economies and education provision;

### With regard to commitments and responsibilities in the multilateral system and the “global education architecture”

- vii. Political and financial commitment and responsibility of *all national Governments* of the world to *multilateral and multi-stakeholder* cooperation/solidarity in education, coupled with openness to scientific expertise and knowledge-sharing;
- viii. Reinforcing UNESCO as *multilateral agency dedicated to education*, adequately funded and equipped to perform a clear coordinating mandate in the global education architecture, in dialogue with other UN agencies, as well as in complementarity with other international and regional organisations, and with delineated responsibilities for its decision-making bodies, in which all nations participate in the steering/dialogue – membership at the level of the UN should automatically entail membership of its main agencies (such as UNESCO) as well;
- ix. *Clear procedures* for coherent collaboration and division of labour between the national, regional and global level and with meaningful involvement of representative organisations of stakeholders (partners in education) and civil society, while acknowledging the value of their

on-the-field experience for designing and implementing local, national and international policies;

- x. Provision of *leadership*, both at national and international level, by Governments, while maintaining dialogue with NGOs, and notably with representative organisations of partners in education and civil society, to ensure that education policies and practices lead to inclusion, meet quality standards and are aligned with other sectoral policies geared at social inclusion. Government should also create conditions enabling NGOs to monitor fulfilment of governmental national and international commitments and stand up for those excluded from education<sup>28</sup>.

*The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee calls for innovative pathways to re-vitalise multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation and international solidarity in education, and points at framework conditions to reach this goal in a coherent way, starting from political determination as well as financial commitment of all nations. In doing so, the holistic approach to the Right of Education remains the guiding principle for multilateralism in education today and in future. Against this backdrop these 10 actionable recommendations are suggested to make multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation in education work.*

## Conclusion

Education is played in the present but is always oriented towards the future, it is prospective and – in a certain sense – “utopian”. How to educate from the present including the medium and long-term perspective? The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and notably the Education 2030 Framework for Action include a vision on the empowerment of future generations to assume active responsibility for the advancement and development of society at all levels from the perspective of the Right to Education.

Thinking of 2050, efforts should be diversified and strengthened in this sense.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020*, recommendation 6.



This contribution was prepared for endorsement by the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee by an ad-hoc working group on the Futures of Education, chaired by Belgium and consisting of delegates from Argentina, China, Japan, Norway, United Arab Emirates, Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, Collective Consultation of Non-Governmental Organisations, Education Above All, Education International, Global Campaign for Education, Global Partnership for Education, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation and World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP).

General guidance was given by Kazuhiro Yoshida (Japan), Co-chair of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee.

#### Penholder and editing coordination:

Marie-Anne Persoons - Belgium

#### Contributors:

Kazuhiro Yoshida and Miki Sugimura - Japan

Grethe Sofie Bratlie and Joakim Bakke – Norway

Mahra Hilal Al Mutaiwie - United Arab Emirates

Refat Sabbah (GCE) and Mercedes Mayol Lassalle (OMEP) – CCNGO

Leena al-Derham - EAA

Dennis Sinyolo – EI

Yuri Belfali – OECD

Ethel Agnes Pascua Valenzuela – SEAMEO

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee is the global multi-stakeholder consultation and coordination mechanism for education in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Its primary objective is to harmonize and strengthen support to countries and their partners for the realization of the global education goal and targets. The Steering Committee is composed of members representing a majority from countries, the World Education Forum 2015 convening agencies (UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, ILO, the World Bank), the Global Partnership for Education, the OECD, regional organizations, teacher organizations, civil society networks, the private sector, foundations and youth organizations.

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee Secretariat  
UNESCO  
7, place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris France



[education2030@unesco.org](mailto:education2030@unesco.org)



[www.SDG4education2030.org](http://www.SDG4education2030.org)



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