The 2030 global education agenda and the SDGs: Process, Policy and Prospects[1]

Yusuf Sayed and Rashid Ahmed with Rada Mogliacci

Abstract:

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for all (EFA) Goals have been replaced by a Sustainable Development Framework with a new set of arguably more ambitious goals and targets. The most recent report *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development* highlights this framework and outlines the education goals. The overarching goal that has been put forward for education is to *Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All.* The targets associated with this goal between them cover all educational levels from early childhood development and care to scholarships for Higher Education and crucially teachers and teacher supply. In this context, we discuss the continuities and discontinues in the new SDG quality agenda through an analysis of the policy debates and documents about the evolving framework paying particular attention to how quality is conceptualised ,how it is translated into targets and how teachers are located in the global education quality discourse and governance frameworks. The analysis will be rooted in a discussion of what this changed global education agenda means for teacher education, teaching, and teachers. The paper argues for the notion of education quality as a dynamic, process oriented social justice process

Yusuf Sayed is the Professor of International Education and Development Policy at the University of Sussex He is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Rhodes University, South Africa. . He was also the South African Research Chair in Teacher Education, and the Founding Director of the Centre for International Teacher Education (CITE), 2014-2017 at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), South Africa. Peviously Yusuf was Senior Policy Analyst at the EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, Team Leader for Education and Skills, the Department for International Development UK, and Head of Department of Comparative Education at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Yusuf is an education policy specialist with a career in international education and development research. He is presently engaged in several research projects on teachers and teacher education including the ESRC/DFID funded project *"Engaging teachers in peacebuilding in post conflict contexts: evaluating education interventions in Rwanda and South Africa* and several large-scale studies about teacher professionalism, teacher education and continuing professional development in South Africa and globally.

Chapter Outline
1. Introduction
2. The post-2015 education and development route map: Consultation and ownership of the process
3. The unfinished agenda: A reaction to the MDG and EFA Frameworks of 2000
4. A new development vision?
5. Education as the heart of the new agenda
6. Unpacking the overarching education goal in the 2030 SDG agenda
7. Unpacking the education targets in the 2030 SDG agenda
8. Teachers and the 2030 agenda
9. By way of conclusion

1. Introduction

---

[1] This is a revised verison of a paper by Yusuf Sayed and Rashid Ahmed: Sayed, Y. & Ahmed, R (2015) 'Education quality, and teaching and learning in the post-2015 education agenda'. *International Journal of Educational Development (IJED).* 40, Pp. 330-338.

A new global development framework encompassing new goals, targets and indicators including for education were adopted in September 2015 at the United Nation General Assembly meeting (UN 2015). This formally marked the ending of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for all Goals (EFA) adopted in 2000, which has cast its long shadow on research, policy and practice including how and for what aid monies were disbursed and what the academic and research agenda was. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed to in September 2015 set the scene for arguably a renewed and ambitious development framework in a global context of widening inequalities within and between countries, global economic crises, conflict, and climate change. It lays out a foundation for an ambitious plan to eradicate poverty, promote social and economic inclusion, tackle climate change, promote equity, and provide access to quality education encompassing both the Global North and the Global South.

Several texts in particular mark the shape of the global education and development relationship in general and the education agenda in particular. In this chapter, we provide an analysis of some of these documents by exploring the processes, participation and contents of these texts, examining how the education agenda has evolved, how quality is conceptualised and the location of teachers in the new agenda. Of these the texts listed below are the focus of this paper:
- UNESCO & UNICEF (2013) *Making Education A Priority In The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. The World We Want. (61 pages)
- UNESCO (2014c) *Position Paper on Education Post-2015*. ED-14/EFA/POST-2015/1. (12 pages) and UNESCO (2014a) *GEM Final Statement and The Muscat Agreement*, ED-14/EFA/ME/3. (4 pages)
- WEF (2015) Education 2030, *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*. (51 pages)
- UN (2015) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, sustainabledevelopment.un.org A/RES/70/1. (41 pages).

Taken together these documents raise some of the key issues to be addressed in the 2030 education agenda.

In undertaking this analysis of policy texts, we conceive of policy as referring to stated intentions and providing a normative framework for conception of what the global world and national states should aspire to and what is valued. Policy formation and implementation is therefore not a neutral process but is understood as the authoritative allocation of values. Rizvi (2006) argues that policies have real effects as they enable particular practices through seeking to secure legitimacy. In so doing they enable people at all levels to develop a shared understanding of the identified problems which policies are meant to 'solve.

Policies transcend national boundaries leading various authors such as Ball (2013), Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken (2012), Lingard and Rawolle (201), and Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor (2005) to talk about global education policy by which is meant polices which operate at the supra-national level and which shapes what nation states are able to do. Ball (2013: 114-115) describes this as a process of 'policy transfer, policy colonisation and policy convergence' whereby 'through the writing of policy, policy consultancy and recommendations, policy influence, the selling of management and improvement products, and the growth and spread of multinational service providers with standardised methods and contents' a global education discourse is constituted which reflects the neo-liberal hegemony in education. A globalised education policy discourse results in a 'rescaling of politics' whereby political authority is orientated 'outward toward supranational entities and inward toward subnational groups' (Lingard and Rawolle 2011: 490). The manifestation of this global education policy is described by Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken (2012: 3) as ideas and examples such as '[C]hild-centred pedagogies, school-based management, teachers' accountability…' p.3). which set the parameters for the global education agenda. In this paper, the 2030 SDGs generally, and the education goal and targets in particular, are conceptualised as elements of the Global Education Policy which seeks to create a convergence of ideas and practices about what is valued and desirable in education. This approach frames the analysis of the specific policy texts in relation to the 2030 agenda in this paper.

2. The post-2015 education and development route map: Consultation and ownership of the process

The post-2015 education and development discussion that led to the SDGs was an intense and wide ranging process. The debate that preceded the adoption of the SDGs was intense and marked by a flurry of policy texts, think pieces, blogs, opinion surveys, and galvanised by many interest groups with a stake in setting the agenda, including NGOs, civil society actors, consultancy firms, academics, and vested interest groups. Unlike the generation of MDGS and the EFA Goals in 2000, this process was by all account, far more extensive, far more inclusive, and far more transparent. It involved several multiple and interrelated processes, and four main processes are described.

The first involves the United Nations (UN) High Level Panel. This panel was initiated by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and consisted of 27 eminent persons whose task was to make recommendations for the development of the post-2015 agenda. At the 2010 MDG Summit, UN member states stipulated inclusive and open consultations that brought together representatives of civil, private and research organizations from all the regions. The Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda entailed dialogue with researchers from various disciplines, 5000 civil society organizations, and 250 chief executive officers of various corporations. Consultations took place during the Panel meetings in New York, London, Monrovia and Bali (HLP 2013). The panel produced a report entitled, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development* (2013).

The second set of consultations was led by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), chaired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), leading a 'global conversation' on post-2015 including about 100 national consultations and 11 global thematic consultations as well as online and targeted consultations. The overall global thematic consultation on education was co-led by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with support from the Government of Canada, the Government of Germany, and the Government of the Republic of Senegal. The UNDG as noted above released the report of its consultations entitled, *A Million Voices: The World We Want: A sustainable future with Dignity for All* (UNDG 2013).

The third set of consultations and which specifically focused on the education agenda in relation to the Education For All (EFA) goals were directly led by the UNESCO in consultation with its member states, UNESCO National Commissions and stakeholder groups. There were several conversations about the post-2015 education agenda and EFA, including the *UNESCO Position Paper on Education Post-2015* (UNESCO 2014c) and the *UNESCO Muscat Global Education Meeting (GEM) agreement* (UNESCO 2014a). The UNESCO consultations as well as the discussions under the umbrella of the UNDG resulted in the World Education Forum (WEF) held in South Korea in Incheon at which the near final set of education goals and targets were agreed as well as the Framework of Action (WEF 2015) which represents the education roadmap for the 2030 SDGs.

The fourth process includes the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, which started officially at the Rio + 20 conference in 2012 and released its *Outcomes Document* in July 2014 (UN 2014) (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html). The same group released a draft of the *Proposed Goals and Targets on Sustainable Development* (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4523zerodraft.pdf).[2]

Collectively these processes led to the final SDG report adopted by the UNGA in September 2015.

The table below summarises the consultation processes as represented in the official texts.

---

[2] This article does not analyse, as indicated, all the different processes and reports. However, it is important to note that the OWG Outcomes Document includes a target for teachers which is by '*2030 increase by x% the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially LDCs and SIDS*'.

Table One: Participation Process in developing the agenda

Report	Participation process as described in the report
High level panel	*"the United Nations, as directed by the Secretary-General in our terms of reference. This includes national and global thematic consultations under the aegis of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), regional consultations undertaken by the Regional Commissions, consultations with businesses around the world under the guidance of the UN Global Compact, and the views of the scientific and academic community as conveyed through the Sustainable Development Solutions Network."*
Education Thematic Consultations	*Global meeting of the thematic consultation;* *UN member states briefing;* *EFA regional meetings (Arab, Africa, Latin American Caribbean Region, Asia and Pacific Region);* *EFA Side meeting;* *Collective consultation of NGOs on EFA;* *Consultation with the private sector and donor agencies* *Thematic e-discussions moderated by education experts;* *On-going dialogue on education and a global outreach using social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, the World We Want 2015 platform'*
UNESCO Position Paper & UNESCO MUSCAT Gem Document	*Ministers, heads of delegations, leading officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and senior representatives of civil society and private sector organizations*
WEF (Incheon) Document plus Framework for Action	*1,600 participants from 160 countries, including over 120 Ministers, heads and members of delegations, heads of agencies and officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and representatives of civil society, the teaching profession, youth and the private sector*
SDG (Final Published Document)	"civil society and other stakeholders around the world, which paid particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable. This consultation included valuable work done by the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and by the United Nations, whose Secretary-General provided a synthesis report in December 2014"

As is clear, even for these, selected process there has been extensive engagement with the post 2015 development and education agenda. Across all the reports and public discussions on the post-2015 agenda there was agreement that education is important, that education should be core to any future development framework and that education quality is central to education change and transformation. They also argue, with different degrees of emphasis, for a more expansive view of education beyond providing basic literacy and numeracy including access to secondary, ECCE and higher education. While the formulations of goals in the various documents vary slightly[3], the overarching goal 'Equitable and Quality Lifelong Learning for All' which emerges from the UNESCO and UNICEF education thematic consultations has received wide consensus and captures the essence of the conversation (UNESCO & UNICEF 2013)[4]. The importance of education is underscored by the online My World survey, where the majority of people voted for a good education as one of the most important aspirations for a post-2015 future (My World 2013) .

While the consultations were wide ranging and extensive there are several aspects of the processes of participation in the development of the new global framework which warrant attention. First, it was not always clear how widespread these consultations really are. In their analysis of the consultation process thus far, King and Palmer (2013b) argue that it is largely driven by powerful Northern actors and represents the Northern voice. They question whether the global agenda is based on equal global participation. They point to the very limited interest expressed by many countries in the global South, including larger countries like China and Brazil. They suggest that even Southern consultations can

---

[3] The different degrees of emphasis across the goals and targets are discussed below

[4] For example, the High Level Panel Report formulates the overarching goal as '*Provide Quality Education And Lifelong Learning*' while the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development identified the overarching goal as '*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all*'.

often be Northern-led and that the primary interest group may be stakeholders connected to overseas financial aid.

Second, participation is not simply about greater involvement by the Global South, but also which Southern voices are heard. While there are certainly structural limitations to how extensive the consultations can be, it is crucial to foreground whether the global agenda is 'for' rather than 'with' the marginalised. Even the consultations from the Global South represent a particular 'privileged' constituency already well-resourced and connected to a global policy community. In this regard as well, all these processes relied on the extensive use of social media which enabled many more voices to be heard. The leveraging of social media as for example in the online voting reflected the widespread adoption of new technologies of consultations which were in their nascent stages in 2000. Yet, like other forms of consultations, they reflected divisions between those that were able to access them and those unable to do so as discussed later.

Third, participation is intimately connected to accountability. The symbolic power of global education discourse to mobilise constituencies for a future common agenda is unlikely to be realised if the uneven processes of participation also reflects a lack of ownership and accountability. Accountability for and ownership of the SDGs and the associated education agenda is a key concern of the new global framework. Groups not substantially involved in policymaking, who do not feel ownership of the defined goals, may comply formally to access donor funds or attempt to demonstrate the meeting of targets without investing efforts to transform all the education processes the goals imply. The uneven processes of participation above may be pointing to Northern led or particular privileged constituencies dominance. There is therefore unlikely in this scenario to be truly global ownership of the 2030 agenda and more importantly, the new education agenda may not accurately reflect the concerns of the most marginalised.

3. The unfinished agenda: A reaction to the MDG and EFA Frameworks of 2000

The adoption of the MDGs and the EFA goals in 2000 marked arguably a significant turning point in international education and development. It set a new regime of goals, target and indicators which galvanised political will and financial support for the attainment of agreed goals. Vandemoortele persuasively describes the strengths of the MDG framework as follows:

> Nevertheless, it can be argued that the impact of the MDGs has been positive. It has mostly been in terms of mobilizing stakeholders and informing the public about human development, broadly defined. Many acronyms see the light of day but not all stay around. The MDGs have been an exception.
> Their power stems from a combination of three factors: (i) the charm of simplicity; (ii) their integrated and synergetic nature; and (iii) their measurability. They express key outcomes for human well-being in health, education, nutrition, water and sanitation, and gender equality. By focusing on outcomes, they are intuitively easy to understand. Sectoral specialists and development practitioners, however, tend to focus on the complexity of human development. (Vandemoortele 2011, 7)

Vandermoorteles (2011) argument succeeds in capturing the impact of these frameworks. As a global discourse of progress the MDGS and the EFA goals 'provided strategic direction to educational planning and budgeting; are important to monitor progress; and have encouraged focused and sustained support from development partners' (UNESCO & UNICEF 2013, 7). Clearly to an extent, they succeed in driving forward development programmes and to a large extent stimulated development discourse to focus on poverty (Fukuda-Parr 2016). Crucially the setting of targets and goals reflected the emergence of a social compact between all actors, particularly international donors and financing agencies, national governments and civil society.

Notwithstanding their impact, there are several salient criticisms which point to inherent conceptual and practical limitations of this ambitious agenda. First, conceptually the agenda has a narrow conception of poverty focusing mainly on the reduction of poverty (Carant 2016; Fukuda-Parr 2016). Such an approach fails to see poverty in relation to inequality, as poverty as Tawney (1979) argues, is simply the unacceptable face of inequality. A more comprehensive and relational account would

account for the dynamics of inequality between and within countries and tackle poverty as part of a comprehensive approach to tackling and eroding inequality. In this respect the HLP panel also notes that the MDGs fail in 'reaching the very poorest and most excluded people' (HLP 2013, 5). In not foregrounding inequality, the agenda then focused mainly on countries in the Global South. As such it was perceived as an agenda that was not applicable to the countries in the Global North. Such an approach tended to also downplay the dynamics of dependency between the Global North and Global South.

Second, the 2000 MDG and EFA agenda whilst expansive was framed in a context when two dimensions of the global order, whilst present, were not sufficiently accommodated. In particular, the issue of the environment and countries and regions in conflict were remarkably absent. The HLP panel notes that 'They were silent on the devastating effects of conflict and violence on development.' It is partly these aspects which framed the new development vision (HLP 2013, 5).

Third, in education in particular the goals were ineffectively narrowed to a focus on primary education and physical access. Whilst it is argued that the education agenda has commitments to quality in earlier global documents, the vision was reduced with the MDGs. Moreover, at Dakar, no clear and measurable targets for quality were set. Whether the lack of targets in past agreements is a result of policy omission or default, the consequence has been that the driver of the global agenda and the consequent policy attention and aid funding has been targeted to increasing physical access. A narrow vision of education access (at the expense of quality and ignoring inequality) framed the agenda (Unterhalter 2014). A narrow vision, it is argued, led to an approach which did not deal with education in a holistic and comprehensive manner privileging easy to reach and monitor goals such as increasing enrolment to primary schooling.

Fourth, it is argued that the simultaneous existence of both the education MDGs and EFA goals, resulted in a dual education architecture with rival planning processes, rival organisational commitment and rival organisational processes. The result of this was increasing fragmentation, lack of coordination and undue parallel demands made on national government by international organisations. It can be argued that these two processes rather than magnify the focus on education, may have potentially diluted the education agenda.

On balance, there was progress but in education, as Education Thematic Consultations noted, the MDG and EFA agenda remained unfinished and constitute 'unfinished business'. But a critical appraisal of the MDG agenda needs to be balanced by the caution of Vandemoortele (2011) who notes that

> The fundamental purpose of the MDGs is not for each and every country to meet the global targets, which would be utopian. Their ultimate aim is to help align national priorities with the MDG agenda so as to foster human well-being. Therefore, the intended users are primarily politicians, parliamentarians, preachers, teachers and journalists. It cannot be emphasized enough that development practitioners and policy makers do not need the MDGs to carry out their work. The MDGs have little to do with defining the nuts and bolts of macroeconomic or sectoral policies or with designing technical interventions. (Vandemoortele 2011, 7)

He cautions against reading the agenda with dual idolatry of as 'literalism and ideology'. By literalism he means that all work begins and ends with the MDGs arguing that 'if all aspects of development were to be included, the MDGs would become overloaded and incomprehensible to their primary users. While the literalists believe in the perfectibility of the MDGs, the reality is that their success is due to their conciseness and measurability. This group refuses to accept that the MDGs can be used to make the case for their particular topic even if it is not mentioned specifically' (Vandemoortele 2011, 8). He further argues against an ideology reading by which he means 'that the MDGs specify outcomes without spelling out the process of achieving them. In this way, many have not only tried to misappropriate the global targets to gain support for their own development paradigm, they have also sanitized them by making the MDGs less offensive and more acceptable for the conventional view of development. The fact of the matter is that the MDGs were never meant to promote a certain development strategy. They focus on ends, not on means, on the destination and not on the journey. This distinction is important because all development is context-specific.' (Vandemoortele 2011, 8).

Notwithstanding this persuasive defence, the reality is that the development framework, like any global set of goals, does promote a particular normative ideology of development. In the case of the MDGs this framework arguably promoted a conservative and narrow approach to poverty reduction failing to tackle inequality. The potential for a social justice framework and an alternative development vision and development strategies argued by Vandermoortele (2011) to be possible did not materialise. To characterise them as an unfinished agenda would therefore not be inaccurate.

4. A new development vision?

The new development framework is rooted in an assessment of the previous MDG approach as well as an outcome of the consultations processes as noted above. At its core is the idea of sustainable development captured in the notion of the four Ps; People, Planet, Partnership and Peace (UN 2015). This notion succeeds in capturing a potentially broader development vision. At the heart of the SDGs is a focus on poverty and inequality. This is indeed a welcome break from the past as it situates a focus on tackling inequality as a core development priority. The SDG frameworks presents an expansive understanding of poverty that is linked to sustainable development and identifies it as a key global challenge:

> 'Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.' (UN 2015, 6)

Similarly, the HLP (HLP 2013) notes that it is important to commit to *'Sustainable development integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions in order to eradicate extreme poverty.'* In both these frameworks, both a commitment to eliminating poverty as well as a more comprehensive conceptualisation of poverty is present. Furthermore, the twin focus on eliminating poverty and reducing inequality provides a more sound conception of equity as noted above (Freistein and Mahlert 2016). However, whilst there is a strong commitment to eradicating poverty (Goal 1), a weaker commitment is made to inequality. The HLP goals do not have a specific goal on inequality and the SDG goal on inequality only mentions a reduction in inequality (goal 10) with no specification about eliminating or even halving inequality.

Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs focus on sustainable development and inequality is intended to outline a development approach which is far more applicable to the Global North and the Global South. As such it significantly commits all countries and not just those classified as poor. This allows for an agenda which is far more encompassing and applicable to all contexts. In both documents there is a strong focus on sustainable development as the overarching framework in which the development paradigm is expanded to understand the environment and its impact on living and vice versa. As such economic growth, it is argued, cannot be at the expense of the environment. Additionally, it recognises climate changes and its impact on humans as key features of the enhancing global context, a glaring absence in the previous MDGs.

As has been argued above, the table below reveals a far more extensive and ambitious development agenda. Of the two, the SDG agenda is more ambitious in scope than the goals articulated by the HLP in several areas. For example, the narrow focus on jobs and growth in the HLP is expanded as decent work and inclusive growth in the SDGs. The SDGs also bring into focus the need for peace which is not clear in the framing of the HLP goals. However, in spite of these differences both succeed in addressing some of the unfinished agenda from the past and a more holistic vision for the future.

5. Education as the heart of the new agenda

The documents being oriented towards education put the educational agenda in the centre of sustainable development. They all argue that education is closely tied to other aspects of the development agenda, such as inequalities, social well-being and sustainable society. Furthermore, some of the documents offer a far more comprehensive understanding of development by including the notion of a 'just' and 'inclusive' society. As the table below indicates, like the more extensive and ambitious development agenda, the expanded version of education sets the parameters for a far more expansive education agenda. A comprehensive and holistic vision of education is positioned as a key lever for the 2030 agenda. Through an analysis of the overarching education goals, the evaluation of

targets and teachers in the 2030, the sections that follow review both the extension of the previous education agenda, but also areas still requiring attention.

Table Two: Main/Overarching Development Goals

Education Thematic Consultations	Education as a developmental priority connected to addressing inequalities and expanding sustainable development and promoting health and nutrition. pp. 13 – 14
UNESCO Position Paper	Education, as a key lever for development, is understood as a way of achieving social well- being, sustainable development and good governance. P. 1
UNESCO MUSCAT Gem Document	Education at the centre of global development agenda since "it contributes to the reduction of inequalities and the eradication of poverty by bequeathing the conditions and generating the opportunities for just, inclusive and sustainable societies." P. 2
WEF (Incheon) Document plus Framework for Action	"Education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and essential for the success of all SDGs" p. 6

6. Unpacking the overarching education goal in the 2030 SDG agenda

While there is still debate about whether single or multiple goals are needed (UNESCO & UNICEF 2013), the advantage of a single overarching goal with an emphasis on quality is that it succeeds in framing the post-2015 education agenda as a 'quality' agenda. Unlike the previous EFA goals, which separated the access and quality agendas, a single goal suggests that there is only one united agenda. Furthermore, though quality was identified previously among the EFA goals, the absence of clear targets for quality in the EFA goals may have served to delegitimise the quality agenda. This 'quality turn' is of the most significant shifts in the new agenda. This section unpacks the notions of quality embedded within these documents and the extent to which the new education agenda succeeds in this 'quality turn'.

The formulation of the overarching goal to include the word *quality* for the post-2015 education framework is a significant achievement. It cements the quality turn and suggests that, in spite of the unfinished agenda, educational policy is not narrowly confined to physical access to schooling. It is both an acknowledgement of some of the adverse consequences of the MDG access agenda, but also an opportunity to hold all stakeholders accountable to the quality agenda. While some argue that quality has long been part of the global agenda dating back to Jomtien and Dakar (King and Palmer 2013a), the driver of the global agenda and the consequent policy attention and aid funding has been targeted to increasing physical access.. A single goal with quality at its heart affords an opportunity to correct the previous narrow focus of education reach.

Table Three below sets out the evolution of the overarching goals and the notion of quality remains central in these goals. The overarching goal specifies the notion of quality as 'equitable quality education' in the Position Paper on Education Post-2015 (UNESCO 2014c) and as 'equitable and inclusive quality education' in the Muscat GEM agreement (UNESCO 2014a), as well as in SDG Agenda (UN 2015). This is cemented by numerous references to equity in all the documents. The position paper explicitly acknowledges that 'A focus on equity is paramount and particular attention should be given to marginalised groups' (UNESCO 2014c, 3). Whether equity is positioned as a dimension of quality (Barrett et al. 2006; Sayed and Ahmed 2011) or outside a definition of quality, is less relevant at this point. What is crucial is that the inclusion of equity substantially expands the quality agenda and is consistent with broad conceptualisations of quality (cf. Tikly and Barrett 2009). The Muscat GEM agreement and SDG Agenda extend this even further with the reference to 'inclusive'. Both formulations are similar to the UNESCO and UNICEF education thematic consultations where the overarching goal is formulated as 'Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All' (UNESCO & UNICEF 2013).

The terms 'inclusive', 'equitable' and 'lifelong learning', are significant in that they suggest a potentially broad conceptualisation of quality. The reference to 'inclusive quality education' appears to be an

attempt to emphasise quality as social justice. However, the use of inclusive quality education is somewhat ambiguous and contested, reflecting both a narrow (disability) and broader (all forms of exclusion) focus. While the term 'inclusive' may be ambiguous, the numerous references to equity clearly cement* social justice as part of the education agenda. The conjoining of the words equity, inclusive and for all is a striking feature of the overarching goal. Clearly they are not all necessary as equitable education is also inclusive and education for all by definition implies equity and inclusion. The repetition of the ideas contained in the goals is intended to signify a strong focus on equity as a significant departure from the previous global agenda.

The notion of lifelong learning is intended to signal a focus on education at all levels expressing a holistic understanding of education systems signalling a sharp break with the narrow focus on primary education in the MDG agenda (cf. Regmi 2015). This shift is significant for indicates that secondary and higher education are as important as primary education. More importantly, it could also be understood as learning in multiple and diverse contexts, not necessarily restricted to secondary and tertiary education. For many countries in the Global South, the previous MDG agenda has inadvertently downplayed and marginalized the tertiary sector as well as created a context where many primary school leavers were unable to progress to secondary education. Moreover, secondary and post-secondary education is crucial to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for sustainable and inclusive equitable growth (2014a).

The notion of quality as articulated in the 2030 agenda is suggestive of on the one hand a focus on learning and specifically literacy and numeracy. Thus, education quality is positioned as an effort to improve learning and the experiences of students. On the hand by seeking to conjoin it with social justice, it positions education quality as a concept which if it is to be achieved must bridge inequities in society in respect of learning attainment. As such, a public education system cannot be characterised as possessing quality if it is not also equitable. This would discount systems of education quality such as elite private schools which may attain high levels of learning attainment of students but which exclude the majority. While this foregrounding of, and extension of the quality agenda is crucial, like the previous education agenda, it is the operationalisation and implementation of the agenda that will determine the extent to which this agenda is realised. The subsequent section reviews how the targets operationalise the education agenda.

Table Three: Evolution of overarching goals

	Overarching Education Goals
High level panel	Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning p. 36
Education Thematic Consultations	Equitable, Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All p. 39
UNESCO Position Paper	Ensure equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030 p. 4
UNESCO MUSCAT Gem Document	Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030 p. 3
WEF (Incheon) Document plus Framework for Action	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all p. 8
SDG (Final Published Document)	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all p. 18;

7. Unpacking the education targets in the 2030 SDG agenda

The education targets reflected much debate and argument in the operationalisation of an agenda which has quality at its heart and which sought to develop a comprehensive and holistic education framework (Sayed and Ahmed 2011). Notwithstanding the debate about the nature of the targets in different processes, they signal a commitment to four agreed priorities which have been somewhat

delegitimated in the previous agenda. First, the targets signal a strong commitment to ECCE in the form of guaranteeing learners access to pre-primary education.

Second, the agenda was expanded to include access to and completion of both primary and secondary education linked to education quality which was operationalised as 'measurable and recognizable learning outcomes'. The commitment to the completion of a full cycle of education marks a significant change in the agenda away from a narrow focus on primary education recognising that secondary education is crucial to developing cognitive and affective skills crucial to economic growth and tolerant societies.

Third, gender equality as a core education and development priority is captured in the targets. In Target 2 of the UNESCO Muscat GEM agreement and in targets 4.3 and 4.5, access to girls and women to all levels of education and the elimination of gender disparities in education is clearly expressed. The two targets of the SDG agenda relating to gender equity focus on two different aspects. Target 4.3 speaks to equal access (gender parity) whilst target 4.5 more expansively argues for the elimination of gender disparities as well as eliminating inequities faced by persons who are disabled, indigenous and in vulnerable situations (SDG UN 2014).

Notwithstanding a more extensive and comprehensive review of the targets, certain observations can still be gleaned. As argued above, consistent with the broader conceptualisation of quality in the texts, the targets represent an extension of the previous agenda. There is a greater educational reach, a recognition of multiple learning outcomes, a foregrounding of gender equality, a clear link to just, inclusive and sustainable societies and a recognition of the teachers in the success of the new agenda. While these are significant gains, several areas of concern remain. First, like the previous agenda, there is a concomitant narrowing of the quality agenda as well. Literacy and numeracy which are elevated at the expense of a more comprehensive focus on affective outcomes such as peace; consequently, reducing the more comprehensive quality vision (Schweisfurth, 2015). Second, in spite of the greater ambition certain contradictions and gaps remain. For example, a more substantive commitment to early years care and education is lacking in the specification of the target. Similarly, the more ambitious elimination of gender disparities also implies equal access to education. Further, whilst the agenda may seek to link education quality, equity and inclusion it fails to, in policy terms, explain the trades -offs and compromises which are likely to result. For example, focusing on the marginalised requires more targeted interventions and funding which may require reducing support for the wealthy (Sayed 2016). Finally, a significant concern, discussed below is the extent to which there is very little space for teachers in the final version of the agenda.

8. Teachers and the 2030 agenda

Teachers feature prominently in the new education agenda and the Mckinsey report (2007) goes as far as to state that a quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. Given then that some accord central importance to teachers to what extent do the goals and targets reflect this. The focus on quality in 2030 agenda rightly emphasis a concern with teachers, teaching and teacher education[5]. Moreover, the specification in HLP of a 'sufficient number' starts to indicate that learning outcomes are also associated with teacher-pupil ratios and provides an opportunity to unpack the target in this direction. It is also quite clear in all the texts that it is also the type of teaching and the learning environments that also matter. While terms like 'well trained', 'qualified' and 'motivated' can be contested and need to be operationalised, they all indicate it is both getting the teacher into the classroom as well as what the teacher does that matter. The strength of the ETC and UNESCO formulations as well as the extent to which they indicate that the context of teaching and learning is central. The UNESCO formulation in particular unpacks several factors like 'safety' and mother-tongue medium of instruction that influence learning outcomes. While these aspects do represent advance on the quality agenda several concerns remain.

Of particular concern in the discourse of teachers in the post-2015 agenda is that a vast and broad range of expectations and knowledge are then expected of teachers - life skills, citizenship and peace

---

[5] see Sayed and Ahmed 2015 for a more extensive discussion

education, moral and ethical education, child protection, human rights, skills for sustainable livelihoods, challenging gender inequalities, practising learner-centeredness (Barrett et al. 2015; Sinclair 2002; UNESCO-IIEP, 2006: 2,3) to name but a few. While these are important concerns, such an ambitious variety of responsibilities runs the real risk of overstating the potential of schools and their teachers to effect broad social transformations. In this context, it is sobering to note that, in a survey of ten countries, only 23% of teachers thought they had influence over policy and practice (UNESCO 2014b) Teacher agency, as envisaged in the post-2015 agenda, is not a realistic possibility nor is agency possible when faced with multiple and conflicting demands subject to narrow accountability measures. It is therefore necessary to balance teacher agency with appropriate training to equip teachers to fulfil new roles.

An important omission in the construction of the target is the lack of a robust focus on equity. The key issue is not that all learners should be taught by qualified, professionally trained, motivated, and well-supported teachers, but how to get such teachers in hard-to-reach areas. In South Africa for example, the inequities in education and the existence of two systems of education (Badat and Sayed 2014) can partly be attributed to the fact that good teachers working in an enabling learning environment are clustered in the wealthier school sector which, when added to the cultural capital of learners, creates a double privilege (Sayed and Ahmed 2015). To overcome inequities in South Africa would require positive discrimination in favour of learners in disadvantaged contexts through the distribution and payment of teachers. Moreover, it is not clear why, if equity and social justice are key goals underpinning the teacher targets, more attention is not paid to attracting the best candidates to teach from diverse and under-represented groups, including female teachers, as the initial goals in the position paper suggested.

The inclusion of teachers in the post-2015 agenda will also require increased and more strategic investments in education. It will also require rethinking the macroeconomic models that structure teacher salaries in low-income countries (ActionAid 2007). This is why the targets on aid in earlier discussions of the agenda are welcomed, although this becomes muted in the HLP report and the final SDG document. Furthermore, an important slippage is that the unit of the aid target shifts from groups to countries in that the UNESCO position paper states '… prioritizing groups most in need' while the Muscat GEM agreement states '… prioritizing countries most in need'. Similarly, in the SDG Agenda, the unit of aid target is * reduced to 'developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States' (UN 2015, 20). This slippage runs the risk of ignoring the fact that inequality is as much within as between countries; therefore aid must target both countries and groups most in need. Finally, no mention is made of better pay for teachers, a priority in many countries with the biggest education challenges (UNESCO 2014b).

Table Four: Evolution of teacher target

HLP	ETC	UNESCO	SDG
The quality of education in all countries depends on having a sufficient number of motived teachers, well trained and possessing strong subject-area knowledge.	Equitable lifelong education requires attention to enabling conditions – conducive learning environments with the proper and necessary infrastructure; the presence of sufficient numbers of trained and motivated teachers; and participatory governance structures that empower parents and local communities to be	a) recruiting and retaining well-trained and motivated teachers who use inclusive, gender-responsive, and participatory pedagogical approaches to ensure effective learning outcomes, b) providing content that is relevant to all learners and to the context in which they live, c) establishing learning environments that are safe, gender-responsive, inclusive and conducive to learning, and encompass mother tongue-based multilingual education, d) ensuring that learners reach sufficient levels of knowledge and competencies according to national standards at each level, e) strengthening capacities for learners to be	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

	effectively involved in school decision making	innovative and creative, and to assimilate change in their society and the workplace and over their lifespans, and f) strengthening the ways education contributes to peace, responsible citizenship, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue' (ibid.,: 8). T	
		Target 6: By 2030, all governments ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers.	

9. By way of conclusion

It has been argued that, partially in response to the previous agenda, the 2030 agenda represents a more expansive and ambitious agenda. However, as is clear from the preceding analysis, there are several aspects that warrant attention. First, whilst there is strong commitment to the SDG as evidenced in all countries in the UNGA agreeing to them, they are of course not legally binding. The key question is what are the incentives and leverage mechanisms to ensure that all countries do implement them. It is also crucial that, there needs to be global ownership rather than North led ownership. Second, while the final SDG document does include commitments to funding, it remains to be seen whether this will be realised in practice. Some of the changes made over time also raise concern about the extent to which lesser importance is accorded to funding to achieve the ambitious agenda. More importantly, funding must be considered within current macro-economic models of austerity that constrain a more ambitious education agenda. Third, much of the achievement of the goals depends on political will and capacity amongst donor and national government. When the dust has settled, national governments in developing countries in 2015 are no different and donor agendas remain the same. The success of the agenda then is inextricably linked to shifts in political will, capacity and current agendas. Fourth, what gets measured gets done could arguably sum up much of the debate about the education SDG framework (Schweisfurth 2015). This is evident in the fact the education goal (Goal 4) of the SDGs is to be measured by 11 global indicators. In addition, as agreed at the WEF, 44 thematic indicators are proposed for the education goal. In reality though, there are more than 44, as many includes multiple indicators. In this respect a key issue is the extent to which national governments have the data necessary for the various thematic and global indicators. Notwithstanding the data availability challenge, there is a real risk of confining the quality agenda to literacy and numeracy and what can be measured quantitatively. The risk is that this process in correctly trying to assess and monitor success, runs the risk of substantially reducing and even erasing an agenda that focuses on quality and equity. Finally, the acknowledgement of the importance of teachers in the new agenda must be matched by a substantive engagement of how and what is necessary for teachers and teaching to realise this agenda. The ambition of the education agenda is not aligned to the challenges and priorities of teachers and teacher education that mitigate against the success of the quality agenda. While normative international frameworks like the SDGs are effective in terms of their ability to create new policy discourses, which in turn open up space for actors to pursue their conflicting agendas in new ways, there is a real risk that the notion of education quality and the role of teachers in the new agenda may be so thinned out in practice, that a robust social justice orientated approach to education is not possible.

Questions for Discussion

- Discuss the main shifts is in the thinking underpinning the development framework from the MDGs to the SDGs
- What are the strengths and wekenesses of the education goals and targets in the SDG framework? To what extent do they address equity and quality?
- Discuss the proposition that the new SDG framework is too ambitious and unlikely to be achieved by 2030
- What are some of the challenges to ensuring a supply of well-trained, motivated teachers with strong subject-area knowledge?

Further Reading

- Jolly, R. (2010). The MDGs in Historical Perspective, *IDS Bulletin*, 41(1)
- The Lancet (2012) A manifesto for the world we want. Available at: http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)62092-3/fulltext
- UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012d) Review of the contributions of the MDG agenda to foster development: Lessons for the post-2015 UN development agenda, *Discussion note.* Available at: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/mdg_assessment.pdf
- Vandemoortele, J., (2012a) On irrational exuberance about MDG progress. Retrieved from: http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/On irrational exuberance about MDG progress.pdf
- Vandemoortele, J., and Delamonica, E., (2010) Taking the MDGs beyond 2015: hasten slowly. *IDS Bulletin*, 41, p.60–69.

References

ActionAid. 2007. 'Confronting the Contradictions The IMF, Wage Bill Caps and the Case for Teachers'. ActionAid. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/aaconf_contradictions_final2.pdf.

———. 2012. 'Righting the MDGs: Contexts and Opportunities for a Post-2015 Development Framework'. London: ActionAid.

Badat, S., and Y. Sayed. 2014. 'Post-1994 South African Education: The Challenge of Social Justice'. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 652 (March): 127–148. doi:10.1177/0002716213511188.

Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global education Inc.: New policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. Oxon: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (2013). *Education, justice and democracy: The struggle over ignorance and opportunity*. (A social state for 2015). London: Centre for Labour and Social Studies.

Barrett, Angeline M., R. K. Chawla-Duggan, J. Lowe, J. Nikel, and E. O. Ukpo. 2006. 'The Concept of Quality in Education - A Review of the "international" Literature on the Concept of Quality in Education'. *Bristol, EdQual* EdQual Working Paper no.2.

Barrett, Angeline M., Yusuf Sayed, Michele Schweisfurth, and Leon Tikly. 2015. 'Learning, Pedagogy and the Post-2015 Education and Development Agenda'. *International Journal of Educational Development* 40: 231–236.

Brookings. 2013. 'Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force'. UNESCO Institute for Statistics; Centre for Universal Education at Brookings.

Carant, Jane Briant. 2016. 'Unheard Voices: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Millennium Development Goals' Evolution into the Sustainable Development Goals'. *Third World Quarterly* 0 (0): 1–26. doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1166944.

Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group. 2012. 'Commonwealth Recommendations for the Post-2015 Development Framework for Education'. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Engelbrecht, P., and L. Green, eds. 2001. *Promoting Learner Development: Preventing and Working with Barriers to Learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Freistein, Katja, and Bettina Mahlert. 2016. 'The Potential for Tackling Inequality in the Sustainable Development Goals'. *Third World Quarterly* 37 (12): 2139–55. doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1166945.

Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko. 2016. 'From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: Shifts in Purpose, Concept, and Politics of Global Goal Setting for Development'. *Gender & Development* 24 (1): 43–52. doi:10.1080/13552074.2016.1145895.

GCE. 2014. 'Equitable, Inclusive & Free: A Collective Vision for Quality Education beyond 2015'. Global Campaign for Education.

HLP. 2013. 'A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. New York: UN.

King, Kenneth, and Robert Palmer. 2013a. 'Education and Skills Post-2015: What Evidence, Whose Perspectives?' NORRAG.

———. 2013b. 'Post-2015 Agendas: Northern Tsunami, Southern Ripple? The Case of Education and Skills'. *International Journal of Educational Development* 33 (5): 409–25. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2013.06.001.

Lingard, B. & Rawolle, S. (2011). New scalar politics: Implications for education policy. *Comparative Education*, *47*(4), 489-502.

Lingard, B., Rawolle, S. & Taylor, S. (2005). Globalizing policy sociology in education: working with Bourdieu. *Journal of Education Policy*, *20*(6), 759-777.

My World. 2013. 'MY World. The United Nations Global Survey for a Better World. Results Report'. UN.

Regmi, Kapil Dev. 2015. 'Can Lifelong Learning Be the Post-2015 Agenda for the Least Developed Countries?' *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 34 (5): 551–68. doi:10.1080/02601370.2015.1070209.

Save the Children. 2012. 'After the Millennium Development Goals: Setting Out the Options and Must Haves for a New Development Framework in 2015'. Save the Children.

Sayed, Yusuf, and Rashid Ahmed. 2011. 'Education Quality in Post-apartheid South African Policy: Balancing Equity, Diversity, Rights and Participation'. *Comparative Education* 47 (1): 103–18. doi:10.1080/03050068.2011.541680.

Sayed, Yusuf, and Crain Soudien. 2003. '(Re)Framing Education Exclusion and Inclusion Discourses'. *IDS Bulletin* 34 (1): 9–19. doi:10.1111/j.1759-5436.2003.tb00055.x.

Schweisfurth, Michele. 2015. 'Learner-Centred Pedagogy: Towards a Post-2015 Agenda for Teaching and Learning'. *International Journal of Educational Development* 40 (January): 259–66. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.10.011.

Sinclair, Margaret. 2002. 'Planning Education in and after Emergencies'. Paris: UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Tawney, R. H. 1979. *Equality*. 4. impr. London: Allen & Unwin.

Tikly, Leon P., and Angeline M. Barrett. 2009. 'Social Justice, Capabilities and the Quality of Education in Low Income Countries'. *EdQual, Bristol* Working paper series (September).

UN. 2014. 'Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals'. UN.

———. 2015. 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. A/RES/70/1. United Nations.

UNDG. 2013. 'A Million Voices: The World We Want. A Sustainable Future with Dignity for All'. UNDG.

UNESCO. N.D. 'Education: Inclusion in Education'. http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/inclusive-education/browse/4/.

———. 2014a. '2014 GEM Final Statement the Muscat Agreement'.

———. 2014b. 'EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4 - Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All.' Paris: UNESCO.

———. 2014c. 'Position Paper on Education Post-2015'. ED-14/EFA/POST-2015/1. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO & UNICEF. 2013. 'Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. Paris: UNESCO & UNICEF.

Unterhalter, Elaine. 2014. 'Measuring Education for the Millennium Development Goals: Reflections on Targets, Indicators, and a Post-2015 Framework'. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 15 (2–3): 176–87. doi:10.1080/19452829.2014.880673.

Verger, A., Novelli, M. & Altinyelken, H. K. (2012). *Global education policy and international development new agendas, issues and policies.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Vandemoortele, Jan. 2011. 'The MDG Story: Intention Denied'. *Development and Change* 42 (1): 1–21.

WEF. 2015. 'Education 2030, Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All'. ED-2016/WS/2.