

Education and Human Rights for Sustainable Human Development

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The 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development defines development as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process aiming to improve the well-being of populations and individuals, in the present and the future. Development is considered both a 'process' and a 'level of attainment' encompassing various elements that constitute well-being. From this premise, it can be asserted that one element that can serve as a driver of development is **education**. However, it is alleged that the international community and governments rarely recognise and invest in the full potential and transformative power of education as a catalyst for human development (UNESCO 2014).

Sustainable human development and a quality and inclusive education are both human rights. This means that humans are inalienably entitled to them. Conversely, not everyone is actually able to exercise and benefit from them. Worldwide, there are population groups that tend to suffer more from discrimination, prejudice and violations based on their race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, economic or physical condition. They in turn become excluded from mainstream society and are more vulnerable to poverty and discriminatory acts.

This situation concerns development, because discrimination-based exclusion can produce inequalities. A society with discrimination-based inequalities cannot be considered developed, since its population does not have equal and fair opportunities to broaden its choices or enjoy a long, healthy life and decent standards of living. Today, the factor that most challenges the sustainability of development is **vulnerability**—i.e. individuals not being equipped with enough resilience and resources to overcome inequalities and discrimination.

The more vulnerable certain groups of a population are, the higher the chance of development being hindered. Vulnerability can compromise the levels of development already achieved, especially in places where poverty is an everyday reality. Against this reality, how can these groups be empowered to deal with vulnerability and become both active agents in and benefactors of sustainable human development? Education is a fundamental right for ensuring sustainability in human development for present and future generations, because its impacts are long-term and it can benefit other variables that are crucial for development. However, there are several external factors (institutional and/or environmental) that could hinder that potential—such as repressive governments, human rights violations and climate change.

The report that formed the basis for integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the post-2015 development agenda affirms that economic stability, sustained economic growth, the promotion of social equity, the protection of the environment, the enhancement of gender equality, women's empowerment, equal employment for all, and the protection, survival and development of children to their full potential can be achieved mainly, though not exclusively, through **education**

(UNGA 2014, paragraph 11). UNESCO (2014) also sheds light on each of the 17 SDGs and the role and benefits of education towards their achievement.

The SDGs rely on education as a means towards their achievement. The main elements that comprise these means are skills training, transferring knowledge and raising awareness among individuals, institutions and regional and national governments, hence empowering and equipping them to act as the central active agents for sustainable human development. Education is both a means and an end, having a domino effect of triggering the intertwining realisation and enjoyment of other human rights, which is a crucial and differential factor for sustainable human development. Nevertheless, inequalities and discrimination challenge the realisation and enjoyment of human rights, education and development included.

If the realisation and enjoyment of human rights is crucial to human development, then those same inequalities and discrimination that hinder human rights also hinder human development. If a quality and inclusive education is a crucial human right for the realisation of all human rights, then education is also a fundamental key to human development. Education is thus key to sustainable human development, provided that development needs (as a process) and allows for (as an environment) the realisation of human rights.

Education must be both inclusive and non-discriminatory to avoid the exclusion of some groups from mainstream society—ideally one that tolerates diversity. Discriminatory acts exercised, directly or indirectly, against some groups within educational systems can lead to negative socio-economic effects in the labour market and society—for example, a poor and weak labour force, underemployment, unemployment, labour and wage injustices, less competition in and diversification of markets, intensification of violence, crime and insecurity etc.

Education implies the development of human aptitudes, capabilities, capacities, competencies, knowledge and skills, thus enabling a person to think, process and act, making humans the main driver of development. If development is defined as a human-centred process and environment, then education is its engine, pumping the fuel of knowledge, information and skills into people, so they can be active agents throughout the process and benefit from its environment. Without a quality and inclusive education, sustainable human development is impossible. It is, therefore, vital that education be given the prominent position it deserves in overall sustainable human development strategies worldwide.

References:

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