



SDG 4: The connection between cultural rights and the right to education

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The Agenda 2030 represents a change of paradigm in the realization of rights. The consideration of **development as a reality that goes beyond the material dimension** of the human being is necessary to develop a human rights perspective.

We can observe this change of paradigm in the SDG 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. The consideration of the human being from a holistic perspective implies considering education not only as a tool for economic development, but for the development of the human being in every aspect. Specifically in the field of education, it is relevant that the Agenda does not exclusively focus on a quantitative perspective of this right, but also on a qualitative perspective. When referring to the right to education, previous development plans focused on the quantitative perspective (% of enrolment, % of alphabetization...).

In 2015, coordinated by UNESCO, a group of World Leaders signed the document Education 2030. Education 2030 is a structured pathway to realize the SDG 4. Education 2030 consists of the Incheon Declaration and the Framework for Action.

The preamble of Education 2030 – Incheon Declaration reaffirms that the vision and political view of the SDG 4 reflect the interrelation between the right to education and other human rights. The indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelation of all human rights, indeed is a reality as it was already established in article 5 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The document you are reading aims to show the relevance of the interaction of the right to education and cultural rights to achieve the SDG 4 and how this interaction is framed in Education 2030.

The SDG4, a change of paradigm:

The SDG4 aims to “*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*”.

We can observe three substantial differences between the way education is conceived in the Sustainable Development Goals and in the preceding Millennium Development Goals.

- a) The SDG 4 does not focus exclusively on childhood, but education as a lifelong learning process.
- b) The SDG 4 does not focus exclusively on quantitative targets such as enrollment or alphabetization, but on qualitative variables such as quality or inclusiveness.
- c) Because of the previous points, we can affirm that the SDG 4 is conceived truly from a human rights perspective.

As stated by the Education 2030 – Incheon Declaration: The SDG 4 “*is inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability*”. This new holistic perspective is not exclusively of the SDGs, and is in line with other UN initiatives such as the work of many different Special Rapporteurs or UNESCO’ initiative “Reimagining our futures together”.

The SDG 4 is based on the idea of inclusion, cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity. The link between cultural rights and the right to education is critical to deepening on this qualitative dimension of the right to education. In the section “Vision, rationale and principles”, the Framework of Action of Education 2030 mentions that “*Education facilitates intercultural dialogue and fosters respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, which are vital for achieving social cohesion and justice*”.

The SDG4 – Education 2030 Framework for Action states that the SDG 4 focuses on “*All people, irrespective of sex, age, race, colour, ethnicity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or birth, as well as persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, and children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations*”. In this regard, the same document emphasizes that the barriers to achieving the SDG 4 are not exclusively social or economic, but also cultural. Because of that, it requires that “*Relevant and realistic intermediate benchmarks and stepping stones should be set at the national level. This must include changes as appropriate in education content, approaches, structures and funding strategies to address the situation of excluded children, youth and adults.*” Indeed, in order for SDG 4 to reach all people, including vulnerable cultural minorities, it is essential to bear in mind a cultural perspective.

Three Targets of the SDG 4 require taking into account the cultural dimension of the right to education:

The SDG 4 is made up of 10 targets whose aim is to better focus the efforts to achieve the goal. Among these 10 targets, there are three in which the link between the right to education and cultural rights is essential. Here is what you have to know about these three targets in relation with cultural rights:

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

In the Framework of Action - Education 2030, we can observe how quality education is related to *“relevant learning outcomes”, “including subject knowledge and cognitive and non-cognitive skills that enable children to develop to their full potential”*. A cultural approach to this notion of quality requires the flexibility to properly consider the cultural perspective and challenges of all students. One of the relevant findings from the UNESCO International Seminar on Evolving the Right to Education was that taking a cultural rights approach to education *“enables children to know who they are, know the rules of the community that surrounds them and give them the tools to critically think about their culture.”*(UNESCO, 7-8 December 2022).

Education 2030 points out that to achieve a quality perspective that bears in mind cultural rights we need to rethink the systems for *“managing teachers, governance, accountability mechanisms and strong public financial management leading to relevant learning outcomes”*.

The document points out some strategies to achieve this target. Some of them are crucial to properly consider the cultural approach to the right to education:

- *“Define standards and review curricula to ensure quality and relevance to the context, including skills, competencies, values, culture, knowledge.”*
- *“Strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions, school leadership and governance through greater involvement of communities, including young people and parents, in the management of schools.”*

- *“Provide alternative modes of learning and education for children and adolescents who are not in school at both the primary and secondary levels, and put in place equivalency and bridging programs, recognized and accredited by the state, to ensure flexible learning in both formal and non-formal settings”.*

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

In the Framework of Action Education 2030, we can observe that the scope of inclusive education is wider and that not only considers economic vulnerability. *“To achieve inclusive education, policies should aim to transform education systems so they can better respond to learners’ diversity and needs. This is key in fulfilling the right to education with equality, and it is related not only to access, but also to participation and achievement of all students”.* This point is extremely relevant; it realizes that vulnerabilities go beyond economic and social barriers. In this regard, bearing in mind cultural rights is essential to properly tackle the vulnerabilities of many children belonging to non-mainstream cultural groups.

Some of the strategies suggested to achieve this goal are also relevant to understand the interconnection between cultural rights and the right to education:

- *“Identify the barriers that keep vulnerable children and youth out of quality education programmes and take affirmative actions to eliminate those barriers”.*

- *“Ensure that education policies and sector plans and their budgeting guarantee the principles of non-discrimination and equality in and through education, and develop and implement targeted urgent strategies for vulnerable and excluded groups. Develop indicators to measure progress towards equality”.*

- *“Ensure government review of education sector plans, budgets, curricula and textbooks, along with teacher training and supervision, so that they are free of gender stereotypes and promote equality, non-discrimination and human rights and foster intercultural education”.*

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The last target that is relevant to better understand the interconnection between cultural rights and the right to education is target 4.7, which refers to the “*appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development*”. According to Education 2030, “*The content of such education must be relevant, with a focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges can be acquired through education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, which includes peace and human rights education as well as intercultural education and education for international understanding*”. In an increasing plural whole, with a people with different cosmovisions living together, certain flexibility should be envisaged so that all cultural perspectives are considered and so that people belonging to non-mainstream cultural groups can receive relevant knowledge that allows them to build their identity.

Some of the strategies suggested to achieve this goal are also relevant to understand the interconnection between cultural rights and the right to education:

- *“Promote participatory programmes for learners and educators related to ESD and GCED to engage in their communities and society”.*
- *“Ensure that education acknowledges the key role that culture plays in achieving sustainability, taking into account local conditions and culture as well as building awareness of cultural expressions and heritage, and their diversity, while emphasizing the importance of respect for human rights”.*

Conclusions:

The Spanish philosopher Gregorio Luri warns that when education aims to create citizens of the world without roots, instead of preparing active citizens inserted in a community, it fails (LURI, 2008). The SDG 4 aims at the right to an education that enables children to become future citizens that make the world a better place. Without a link between cultural rights and the right to education, future rootless children will be incapable of connecting with their immediate surrounding and transforming them.

The SDG 4 and Education 2030 gives us a pathway with enough consensual clues to start building an education that bears in mind the cultural dimension. It is true that some governments suspicious of cultural homogeneity are unhappy with these agreements. Nevertheless, we know what to do; we know how to do it. What are we waiting for?

Bibliography:

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