

Ten Targets about SDG 4: ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the universality of the 17 objectives of the 2030 Agenda, concerning the whole planet, developed and developing countries. Within the 2030 Agenda, the Objective 4 has the priority of providing “quality, equitable and inclusive education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”, starting with the achievement of universal literacy. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to ensure, everywhere on the planet and for as many children as possible, equitable and generalized access to quality education aimed at the cultural training of the individual and full awareness of his or her rights. All cultures and civilizations have equal dignity and mutual knowledge therefore respect must contribute to the harmonious and sustainable development of the world. The openness of different cultures to dialogue will gradually obtain the feeling of a common belonging to an only world. From this point of view, acknowledging the challenges and potential that the current model of globalized development brings with it, educating for global citizenship can determine a possible response to the complexity of the current situation and create the conditions for quality education by facilitating the achievement of many of the goals set by Objective No. 4 in Agenda 2030.

Keywords

Objectives agenda 2030, Ten targets SDG 4, Quality education, Sustainable development, Global citizenship education.

Ten Targets about SDG 4: recent past, present and future

At the end of the work of the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015 entitled “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”, a post-2015 development agenda was adopted¹.

Agenda 2030 is an action plan for the people, the planet and the prosperity of all. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. Agenda 2030 is the result of more than two years of public consultation and contacts with civil societies around the world, coordinated and elaborated by the open-ended working group on sustainable development objectives of the general assembly and the United Nations (*ibidem*).

The objectives and targets of the Agenda are universal, not only because they concern the whole world, but also because they express the great value of solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable human beings. This Agenda has, therefore, an unprecedented scope: it is accepted by all countries and applies to all, because it wants to consider the capacities and different levels of development of each of them, while respecting national policies and priorities. In the economy of this work, Goal No.4 is of primary importance, for providing “a quality, equitable and inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities for all” (*ibidem*), starting with the solemn commitment to achieving universal literacy. With the aim of these objectives and goals, an extremely ambitious and transforming vision is outlined, which provides for a world free from poverty, hunger, disease and need, where all life can prosper. It also provides for a world free from fear and violence. A world with universal literacy (*ibidem*). A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being is assured. A world where the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation can be assured, and where food is sufficient, safe, accessible and nutritious. A world where human habitats are safe, resilient and sustainable, and where there is universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy. Agenda 2030 provides for a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and equal opportunities that enable the full realization of human potential and contribute to shared prosperity. A world that invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and every girl enjoys full gender equality and in which all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met. By setting the 17 goals, a world is

¹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, available at: <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html>>.

predicted in which each country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world where patterns of consumption and production and the use of all natural resources – from air to land, rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable. One in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as a favorable environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger. One in which the development and application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient. One where humanity lives in harmony with nature and where wildlife and other living species are protected. Specifically, the fourth objective of Agenda 2030 addresses the issue of quality education and is divided into 10 objectives with a view to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Quality education is the basis for improving people's lives and achieving sustainable development. Important achievements have been made in increasing access to education at all levels and in increasing enrolment levels in schools, especially for women and girls. The basic level of literacy has improved significantly, but efforts need to be redoubled to achieve even better results towards the achievement of the objectives for universal education. For example, equality between girls and boys in primary education has been achieved worldwide, but few countries have achieved this at all levels of education. For example, focusing on facts and figures, we can observe that in 2015, when the 2030 agenda was set, data on realities in different contexts presented an urgent need to hypothesize a collective action plan since:

- enrolment in primary schools in developing countries has reached 91%, but 57 million children are still excluded;
- more than half of the children not enrolled in school live in sub-Saharan Africa;
- it is estimated that 50% of children who are of primary school age but do not attend school live in conflict-affected areas;
- in the world, 103 million young people do not have basic reading and writing skills, of which more than 60% are women. In this regard, an action plan on Objective 4 of Agenda 2030 "*Quality education*" designed with a view to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, was planned by structuring different goals to be achieved:
 - Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
 - 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes;

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- 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education;
- 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university;
- 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship;
- 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations;
- 4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy;
- 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development
 - and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development;
- 4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all;
- 4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries;
- 4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States (*ibidem*). In order to achieve such a high and ambitious objective, it is necessary, first of all, to ensure fair and generalized access to education that reaches people from primary school onwards and accompanies them at all subsequent stages of secondary school, first and second level, university studies or technical and vocational training; it is also necessary for education to be of high quality and not limited to the care of education alone, but aimed at the cultural training of the individual, thus contributing to the acquisition by each person of full awareness of his or her rights. This great

opportunity must, of course, be guaranteed to all people without no distinction of sex or age or disability, and even less of race or ethnicity; in particular, no discrimination should be made against migrants; all of them should have equal learning opportunities that enable them to acquire the tools and knowledge necessary to participate fully in social life. To achieve such an extraordinary objective, it is also necessary to know and respect the diversity of customs, traditions and religions of individuals and populations of origin, in the knowledge that all cultures and civilizations have equal dignity, can and must contribute to the harmonious and sustainable development of the world; this will open up the various cultures to dialogue and, through it, will allow greater tolerance and greater mutual respect so as to gradually realize the idea of a common belonging to a world of all.

The world and its challenges

Measuring human beings according to their formation makes reference to a project which studies the subject in the anthropological, ethical and linguistic context that shapes his/her awareness. If we reflect on the education today, we may observe how important issues concerning the complex of social, political, scientific and economic processes of contemporaneity, which are featured by complexity and globalization (Morin 2001; Bauman 2001). It is now clear that the current model of development has as its main aim the production of extreme consumption and adheres to the logic of the markets and the neoliberal model based on individualism, precariousness and competitiveness. This logic, at the moment, does not seem to be interested in the cost/benefit ratio for the community and could soon bring suffering to the resources of the planet and our ecosystem. This model of globalized development, unjust and unsustainable, as well as encouraging a process of concentration of capital is generating a disproportionate increase in poverty, social exclusion and the increase in forced migration. The development model supported by the richest countries on the planet contributes to widening the gap with the impoverishment and dependence of the poorest countries and the distribution of power, resources and well-being becomes increasingly unequal over time. Poverty and social exclusion increase with a widening gap between developed and developing countries and between privileged and marginalized people and both begin to emerge also in countries with economies in transition and in industrialized countries. The world is experiencing historical processes that are profoundly and rapidly transforming our habitat and, in addition, low standards of living, disease, forced migration and human rights violations, gender discrimination and exploitation of weak social groups, prejudice, conflict, insecurity and growing individualism persist. As claimed by Da Silva *et al.*, it is therefore necessary to consider the risks and critical points that globaliza-

tion entails at a social, economic and environmental level, since the negative effects cannot be attributed only to the political decisions of governments, multinational companies or, more generally, to human behavior that has always been the same over the centuries; in fact, every citizen produces effects on the territory through his or her behavior (Grion *et al* 2018). In this historical moment everything is globalized, starting from the logic of the market and communication, and the cultural figure that unites all men is consumption; so, we all belong in some way to the same culture of capitalism. In fact, we are all dependent consumers since we consume anything, good or bad, feeding with our needs the logic of the market and our own dissatisfaction. In a social scenario of this kind, planning and implementing a quality education oriented towards autonomy of thought is also a difficult task because the advent of globalization has brought with it serious risks for participatory politics, economies and local cultures. The present, characterized by the frenetic movement of people and goods, by the fluidity of relations and by the use of social networks, has also created new opportunities; the current complexity, in fact, can generate new spaces for democratic debate where alternative proposals can be put forward and new forms of sharing of experiences or hypotheses for a common action can be favoured. At the crossroads between the opportunities for change and the questions that some of the great trends of our contemporary world ask us, we find the many challenges that the generations of today and tomorrow must be able and able to face. We cannot forget from the past, in fact, that it is with the choices made in the present that the foundations are laid for what will become the humanity of tomorrow and we can continue to guarantee a value and a future to life. The reality before our eyes in this uncertain present is complex and populated by people in crisis in a process of transformation of civilization, the world, its laws and values, but at the same time it is also a reality inhabited by free individuals who feel like citizens of the world and who aspire to fully and integrally exercise their rights of citizenship (Fabbri 2014). And in this regard, as Morin recalls: "The objective of complexity is, on the one hand, to unite (contextualize, globalize) and, on the other, to take up the challenge of uncertainty" (Morin 1994).

Global Citizenship Education, a possible response to the complexity of promoting quality education

Globalization implies many concepts, but it also highlights the enormous potential of global processes in terms of participation, solidarity and joint action. In the field of education, Global Citizenship Education can be a possible response to the challenges posed by the complexity of the situation, since it aspires to integrate a coherent vision with education in human rights, sustainable development, peace, interculturality and gender, observing the close link between all these areas and the growing interde-

pendence between human beings on a planet threatened by its sustainability. Global Citizenship Education invites students and future generations to imagine a common world with better living conditions for all, creating connections between local and global perspectives and creating critical issues on how to realize this vision starting from the closest context of life or even from the analysis of the relational climate present in a class group. Transformative learning enables people to shape the shared vision of a world that is fairer and more sustainable for all. From a transformative point of view, it is therefore crucial to have a clear understanding of the type of future to be oriented towards. Global citizenship education has the potential to implement new methods that give more space to the understanding of social movements and non-formal learning processes since it can focus its activities on values, themes and approaches that are not central to formal learning and give more attention and voice to all people, including those marginalized. As also supported by Da Silva *et al.*, with regard to these considerations, some of the elements that characterize global citizenship education lend themselves particularly well to representing it as a resource from which to draw in order to respond in an educational key to the challenges posed by complexity and to promote quality education:

- to facilitate the understanding of the interdependence of the problems that afflict the planet so that the local level can have a global impact and vice versa. For example, educating about responsibility and the awareness that every personal action cannot be alien to the destiny of others, makes one responsible for the destiny of humanity and the planet and integrates the local and global dimension (planet citizens/neighbourhood citizens);
- facilitate mutual recognition by generating a complex vision of identities and developing in children and young students a cosmopolitan/planetary citizenship and an end to the distinctions between groups and outgroups still today often dictated by prejudices and stereotypes;
- to conceive the school as a place of democracy, of dialogue, of construction of a global and democratic citizenship involving the whole school and neighbourhood community;
- to educate to emotions as a fundamental component of cognitive development and learning for coexistence (Grionet *al*, 2018). The challenge of globalization accepted by the paradigm of complexity that photographs the current reality can find in the potential that education for global citizenship expresses a quality education for the achievement of many of the goals assumed by the Agenda 2030, because it contains the purpose of equipping a “complex thought”, that is, capable of conceiving the complexity of the human condition (from the individual micro-dimension to the planetary macro-dimension of humanity) (Bellusci 2018). The educational aim that the global citizenship education proposes conceives a common belonging that is built from an interweaving of de-

pendencies as the only adequate condition to guarantee and improve the quality of life of peoples and persons. One of the most important challenges of our times is to go beyond the idea of national citizenship and this requires a reflection on the nature of national identities and their relationships within a “community of destiny”², which in the complexity of the present, can only be planetary.

It is necessary to ensure a culture that allows us to understand the human condition in the present and to help us to live, it is also a way of thinking and of helping us to think in an open and free way (Morin 1993). Global Citizenship Education, therefore, in this complex reality can be configured as a powerful agent of change and empowerment of the individual, promoting awareness and critical spirit. In today’s society, which now gathers in a single interconnected planetary world the ancient and modern cultures and the postmodern ones of the knowledge economy, education is no longer assured either by the processes of socialization (informal education), or by the only school (formal education): we are witnessing a growing demand, and not always explicit, for widespread and advanced education of populations (formal and non-formal education) that is activating at international level theories, strategies, methodologies and professionals able to implement quality educational responses within the most diverse human, personal and collective experiences (Orefice, 2010)³. In these terms, Global Citizenship Education can be considered as a process of individual and collective growth that can allow transformation and self-transformation into an active perspective and can determine a possible response to the complexity of the current situation, creating the conditions for quality education by facilitating the participation of children and young students in school activities and their achievement of many of the goals set by Objective No. 4 in Agenda 2030.

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² Angeli M., 2018, *Siamo una comunità di destino. Parla Mauro Ceruti*, available at: <<https://ytali.com/2018/04/24/siamo-una-comunita-di-destino-parla-mauro-ceruti/>>.

³ Cfr. Orefice P., *Pedagogia scientifica. Un approccio complesso al cambiamento formativo*, Roma, Editori Riuniti University Press.

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