



Institute of Social Sciences

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INCLUSIVE QUALITY EDUCATION: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 17-18 June 2017

On the Occasion of the Bicentenary of Royal Rescript—1817, Travancore, Kerala

Venue: India International Centre, New Delhi

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

--Nelson Mandela

BACKGROUND

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 26 (1) and (2) adopted on 10th December 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) mandates that everyone has the right to education and that education shall be directed at the full development of the human personality leading to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Over six decades later, providing education for all continues to be a challenge for governments across the world. There are still 774 million adults – 64% of whom are women still lacking basic reading and writing skills. Fifty eight million children are still out of school globally and around 100 million children are unable to complete primary education.

Globally, only one-third of the countries have achieved the *Education for All*(EFA) goals with only half the countries attaining universal primary enrolment (UNESCO, Global Monitoring Report, 2015). Thirty eight percent of children leave primary school without learning to read, write and do simple arithmetic (UNICEF, *State of the World’s Children Report*, 2016).

While gender parity has increased considerably especially in primary education, close to a third of the countries show prevalence of gender disparity. A number of research studies have pointed that investing in female education has greater benefits than any other investments in the developing world and the positive relationship that exists between female literacy and societal welfare.

The central role of education in sustainable development has been clearly reaffirmed in the World Education Forum 2015. Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted at the Incheon Declaration at the Forum, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for “ensuring inclusive and

equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities”. The goal encapsulates that:

All girls and boys complete affordable and high quality early childhood development programs, and primary and secondary education to prepare them for the challenges of modern life and decent livelihoods. All youth and adults have access to continuous lifelong learning to acquire functional literacy, numeracy, and skills to a living through decent employment or self--employment (SDSN, (2014): An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development)

The World Economic Forum (WEF) states that by 2030, the world would need 470 million new jobs and that the key to economic growth lies in the talent, knowhow, skills and capabilities of its people-its human capital. Investing in this and innovating for education and employment is critical to both the public and private interest.

THE CONTEXT

Progress in basic education in the developing world has undoubtedly come a long way, propelled especially over the last quarter century, thanks to the push of the *Education for All* movement and the *Millennium Development Goals*. However the goal of inclusive education and learner quality still remains elusive.

This conference aims to deliberate principally around three underlying strategic areas of the 2030 Agenda namely, *good governance, cross-sectoral coordination and partnerships and alliance building*. These form, in a sense, lynch pins of the SDGs towards a transformative agenda, amply underlined in the Agenda. Scant little attention is given to these strategies when designing programmes and schemes for educational improvement and development.

Underpinning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the importance of good governance¹. While the MDGs catapulted rethinking of policies and development of innovative programmes, crucial missing factors were the lack of focus on good governance—sustainable institutional *mechanisms and processes* that needed to be developed for implementation of programmes and weak accountability on outcomes.

The transformative agenda of SDGs therefore rests on promoting transparent and democratic institutions and the development of institutional capacity for delivery of efficient and effective public services. That a broad consensus of decision-making exists that includes the priorities of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. Accountability of public resources and actions, and a systematic transparency in tracking of results are lynch pins of good governance.

While there is no dearth of inclusive educational policies, legislations, programmes and schemes in developing countries including India, the success in achieving the SDG4 targets and educational outcomes calls for effective *governance* in the implementation of the programmes.

¹Governance refers to structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. See www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/...education.../concept-of-governance/. See also UNDP, *Governance for Sustainable Development: Integrating Governance in the Post-2015 Development Framework*, March 2014

Another continuing and major drawback in the implementation of well-intentioned, even well budgeted policies in education, is the sectoral approach of working within silos. This disregards the basic understanding that there is a high degree of inter-relatedness across development sectors that impact upon children's holistic development and achievement of learner quality.

The SDG agenda also draws specific attention on inter-linkages and the integrated nature of the goals. This highlights the significance of *cross-sectoral coordination* that can ensure equity and quality in the delivery of services and for the achievement of outcomes.

As stated in the Incheon Declaration:

Achieving sustainable development is only truly possible through cross-sectoral efforts that begin with education – not any type of education, but one that addresses the inter-dependence of environment, economy and society, and helps bring about the fundamental change of mindsets needed to trigger action for sustainable development.

In the achievement of SDG4 targets, comprehensive interventions are required that combine early stimulation with nutrition for instance given that the right nutritional practices impact on cognitive development of children in the immediate and longer term. School quality to ensure retention of children, their quality of learning and school completion calls for coordination with health, water and sanitation services, promotion of hygiene practices, protection of children from physical and mental abuse and promotion of environmental awareness.

There is enough research that demonstrates the positive impact of coordinated, cross-sectoral services that produce marked and sustainable gains in young children's cognitive development and strengthening of their social and life skills. (UNICEF, *State of the World's Children Report (SWCR)*, 2016).

Education runs as a core theme across many of the other SDG goals such as poverty eradication, gender equality, elimination of gender based violence, rights of all vulnerable groups, and productive employment. The success of the SDG agenda and particularly SDG4, would therefore need to not only recognize but also pay due attention to cross-sectoral and inclusive approach in the governance of education.

The third tenet underlining the achievement of the SDG targets is *partnerships and alliance building*. The Incheon Declaration calls for multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize additional financial resources from multiple sources. Based on lessons from successful experiences globally, it encourages the promotion of effective public, public-private, government-civil society partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources.

Resourcing strategies, building on shared experiences and forming alliances consolidates both time and resources that are otherwise spent on reinventing wheels and rather than converging, expending resources in parallel programmes having similar goals.

The Conference hopes to bring together both scholars and practitioners, policy and decision makers to deliberate upon these strategies and their significance in working towards the transformative agenda of SDG4. It intends to provide an opportunity for sharing of best practices, lessons learnt, challenges faced and ways to overcome and to propose the way forward.

In the context of best practices in each of the three strategic areas mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the conference opens with reflections on the Kerala model of educational development in India, a close example of some of the best practices in these areas and an appropriate starting point. Kerala's success story is well known having the highest literacy rate in the country (94 per cent), a hundred per cent enrolment of children in primary and secondary education, gender equity, a favourable sex-ratio of 1084 (India Census 2011), and a high level of human capital development.²

The noted economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, who has written extensively on the 'Kerala model', attributes Kerala's success to the *consistency* with which school education expanded, based on *sustained* public policies, good governance and action. The social influence of public action, as Dreze and Sen explain, went beyond the state's initiative manifesting in a network of partnerships involving the public at large.

Public action in Kerala has been particularly important in orienting the priorities of the state in the direction of a strong commitment to the promotion of social opportunities (Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (1995), India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity, OUP, Delhi).

It is worthwhile remembering that the year 2017 also marks the bicentenary of the Royal Rescript of 1817 of Travancore (Kerala).³ Educational historians hailed this proclamation as 'the Magna Carta of Education' that took the entire responsibility of budgetary provision in the expansion of education and a revolutionary step in not only setting up vernacular schools at state expense in all villages but making attendance compulsory for children between the ages of 4 and 10.

The Conference provides an opportunity to commemorate the bicentenary of the Rescript as one of the earliest efforts in the state of Kerala, to take on the responsibility of mass education.

Lastly, the Conference weaves in an important component of SDG4 namely the impact of education in the development of human and social capital for sustainable development. Of the 10 targets of SDG4 nearly fifty percent are associated in one way or another with skills development including technical and vocational to promote not only sustainable development but also sustainable lifestyles; for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

²<http://www.education.kerala.gov.in>, 2010-11 data

³Rani Gouri Parvati Bayi (1815-29) queen of Travancore and a visionary ruler, issued a Royal Rescript in 1817 proclaimed that: *The State should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusing education, they might become better subjects and public servants and the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby.*³

It is therefore apt that the conference brings together best practices in skills development and to deliberate upon how schools can play a role in laying the foundations for skills development early in the lives of children. There exists a divide in the provision of technical and vocational educational between adolescents and youth from the formal streams of education and those who have been unable to complete formal education.

Most current programmes are geared towards young population from the formal streams of education. They are not designed to target the training of a majority of youth who remain outside the formal streams of education thus perpetuating “a vicious cycle of disadvantage”⁴. The Conference aims to draw attention specifically to this issue. As aptly explained in UNICEF’s SOWC:

Universal basic skills can make economic growth more inclusive. Disparities in access to quality education are among the most powerful determinants of income disparities because of the effect learning and skills have on productivity, wages and employment. Narrowing the skills gap would create the conditions for more equitable patterns of growth, while increasing the size of the economy and reducing poverty.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The 2030 agenda also calls upon member states, in accordance with their national specific contexts and priorities, to learn lessons from the past efforts, to build on existing initiatives and successful models and bring together ongoing efforts towards sustainable development. It recognizes and encourages the development of different visions and approaches within countries in order to address continuing inequalities.

This conference therefore aims to bring together success stories, best practices, ongoing efforts at national and regional levels and lessons learnt, that can guide the achievement of SDG4 targets.

More specifically, the conference aims to:

1. Deliberate upon the significance of strategic drivers of change and best practices in the achievement of the SDG4 targets with reference to:
 - a) Governance of public policies and programmes for equity and inclusiveness in educational development
 - b) Cross-sectoral coordination for equity and quality in education and learning
 - c) Multi-stakeholder partnerships and alliance building in the achievement of SDG4 targets
2. Discuss and present best practices in bridging the divide/gap in skills development towards inclusive development of both human and social capital
3. Commemorate the bicentenary of the Kerala Re-script
4. Develop a consensus on *Agenda for Action*
5. Identify a base for knowledge sourcing and networking on SDG4 in the region

⁴ UNICEF: State of the World’s Children 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2016/>

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Insights, best practices and lessons learnt consolidated in strengthening the achievement of SDG4 targets
2. Consensus on *Agenda for Action*

PARTICIPANTS

Academics and scholars, international experts, senior government officials from relevant ministries, social and political activists, international and national NGO representatives from all states of India and SAARC countries.

Post-Conference Follow-Up

Based on the outcomes from the Conference, the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi proposes to develop a follow-up plan along the below-mentioned lines:

1. Document the Conference deliberations, the key outcomes and agenda for action.
2. Develop a knowledge sourcing base for promoting and strengthening SDG4 in the region
3. Strengthen a regional network on SDG 4.

About the *Institute of Social Sciences*

The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) was founded in 1985 in New Delhi, as a non-profit centre for research and advocacy. It is dedicated to a systematic study of social issues from a trans-disciplinary perspective that confront India and the region. It seeks to contribute to scientific knowledge and scholarly research in sociological, economic, political and related disciplines and has undertaken considerable research and training especially in public policy and decentralized governance. It also seeks to strengthen grass-roots governance through action research, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation and advocacy.

ISS has done extensive work in the following areas: democracy, decentralization, urban studies, women's empowerment, human rights and federalism. It acts as a resource centre and clearing house of information, undertakes research, provides expert advice to government and other agencies, builds alliances and partnerships with academic centres, research institutions and national and international civil society organizations. It also has offices in Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Pondicherry, Bengaluru, Trivandrum, Amritsar and Patna.

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