

HLPF 2022 Highlights: Wednesday, 6 July 2022

HLPF 2022 delegates considered the progress, or lack thereof, on SDG 4 (Quality Education), as well as local level action on the SDGs and equitable access to vaccines and resources during the second day of the eight-day event.

SDG 4 and Interlinkages with Other SDGs - Quality Education

Diego Pary Rodríguez, ECOSOC Vice President, Bolivia, chaired this session and highlighted that it would feed into the Transforming Education Summit taking place in September 2022. Noting significant discrepancies in economic development, technology access, and national planning priorities between different countries, Leonardo Garnier, UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser for the Transforming Education Summit, emphasized that we need to ignite a movement to transform education into a true human right for all.

Haoyi Chen, UNDESA, presented the highlights of the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the SDGs, focusing on SDG 4.

Joy-Marie King, Antigua and Barbuda, reported on her country's actions to enhance the quality of education, including the provision of school meals, uniforms, behavior management programmes and psychosocial support. Natia Tsikaradze, Georgia, called for reimagining the education system for today's world.

Moderator Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, opened the discussion stressing the need to reopen schools, renew the world's commitment to education, and invest in education, recovery and resilience.

Highlighting education as a critical accelerator of sustainable development, Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, UNICEF, emphasized the need to, *inter alia*: reach every child and keep them in school; scale up learning assessments at national and regional levels; and support children's physical and emotional well-being.

Susan Hopgood, President, Education International, called for a "new deal" for teachers and students, which includes ensuring decent working conditions, labor rights, and decent pay for teachers; and involving teachers in policy decisions through social dialogue.

Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director, International Tropical Timber Organization, stressed that education at tertiary and vocational levels need to be fit for purpose, and highlighted the value of education in reaching a common understanding on the important role of tropical forests to sustainable development.

Noting that children in poverty are often marginalized in education, Victoria Huallpa Mamani, Member, ATD Fourth World, El Alto, Bolivia, called for schools to value the knowledge that children have learned from their families.

Madeleine Zuniga, Vice President, Foro Educativo, Peru, echoed the need to consider marginalized groups, including girls, street children, and Indigenous Peoples in education, and emphasized the importance of robust tax systems and combatting corruption to fund education.

David Moinina Sengeh, Minister of Basic Education, Sierra Leone, stressed the importance of equitable access to inclusive education for achieving all SDGs and shared his country's 22% budgetary allocation to education.

Li Andersson, Minister for Education, Finland, echoed the importance of viewing education as an investment rather than expenditure and stressed the essential role of teachers and a lifelong approach to up- and reskilling. She shared the experience of Finland with free school meals as a driver for equality and its commitment to replicate this practice globally by 2030.

Sahondrarimalala Marie Michelle, Minister of Education, Madagascar, shared her country's experience with financial and administrative decentralization and stakeholder engagement while building back after pandemic and 2022 cyclones. She also pointed to recent legislative reform to improve equitable access to education.

Delegates stressed the importance of education for achieving equality and hence the need to: ensure access to quality education for all; invest in teachers; bridge the digital divide and harness the potential of e-learning; lower the cost of higher education; and better equip youth entering the job market. They looked forward to the Transforming Education Summit as an opportunity to foster progress towards SDG 4.

Others shared actions related to the promotion of: nuclear science and technology; teacher training for early childhood development; inclusive education, particularly for minority communities; digital and green education programmes; and education as a public good. Delegates also highlighted the importance of: hardwiring gender equity throughout education systems and curricula; youth engagement in education policy planning; closing the public-private education gap; and addressing education as a human right.

José Mauricio Pineda, *ad interim* Minister of Education, El Salvador, highlighted that his country has recently increased its investment in education from 3.2% to 5.2% and, noting school closures due to rains, urged industrialized countries to tackle climate change.

Ishikane Kimihiro, Permanent Representative of Japan to the UN and Chair of the Group of Friends for Education, Japan, highlighted the need to recover from the learning losses caused by COVID-19 and stressed the importance of education for sustainable development (ESD) at all levels of education.

In their subsequent interventions, delegates highlighted: increased digitalization of education due to school closures; the value of municipal-level partnerships for ESD; shifting emphasis

from memory-oriented education to research skills and creativity; the impacts of war on equitable and safe education in Ukraine; and the work of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. They also noted the need for innovative financing for education such as public-private partnerships and development bonds, and the provision of adequate training for users of digital technology.

Delegates further shared progress towards Goal 4 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with some concerned that setbacks would be hard to overcome due to digital divides that mostly hit low income students and learners with disabilities. They stressed the need to invest in teachers, remove barriers to education, and engage stakeholders, including children, when developing policy solutions.

Acting at Local Level

Lydia Capolicchio, Swedish journalist, moderated the event. Ville Taajamaa, Editor in Chief for Espoo Voluntary Local Review (VLR) 2020, described the VLR as a monitoring and management tool used to signal commitment to both global and regional cooperation on the SDGs.

Mustafa Uzbaş, Deputy Mayor of Konya Metropolitan Municipality, Türkiye, noted that VLRS and sub-national reviews should become pillars in achieving the SDGs, pointing to challenges in low-income housing provision.

Rose Keffas, Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs, Nigeria, noted the country's work with sub-national governments, including the operation of a conditional grant scheme to address education, health, and water management, among others.

Emphasizing the harms that COVID-19 has inflicted on older people, Bruce Frankel, Pass It On Network, urged local authorities to reflect on what they are doing to recognize and involve older people.

Peter Danielsson, Mayor of Helsingborg, Sweden, highlighted collaboration with the private sector to accelerate the transition to a climate-neutral production in the logistics sector by 2030. He challenged local authorities to “dare to be holistic; form broad partnerships and do it quickly.”

Ashok Kumar Byanju, Mayor of Dhulikhel, Nepal, highlighted his city's completion of a VLR, mentioning health, safe and clean water, literacy, and micro-enterprises among key priority areas.

In the subsequent discussion, delegates engaged in an interactive online poll to answer the questions on the relationship between national and local governments in achieving the SDGs; citizen awareness of SDGs; and the role of stakeholders in implementing the SDGs.

African Countries, LDCs and LLDCs: Ensuring Equal Access to Vaccines and Resources in the Poorest Countries

Session moderator Rabab Fatima, Co-Chair of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) fifth Preparatory Committee meeting, Bangladesh, underlined the need for adequate financing, access to technology and comprehensive capacity for LDCs, landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and African countries. She also drew attention to the Doha Programme of Action for the LDCs (2022-2031), and the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs.

Taffere Tesfachew, Acting Managing Director of the UN Technology Bank for LDCs, underlined the need to meet SDG 9.c on increasing access to information and communication technologies in LDCs by 2020, and for international organizations to facilitate cooperation towards LDC's digital revolution.

Farid Fezoua, Global Director for Health and Education, International Finance Corporation, pointed to a partnership with Institut Pasteur de Dakar in Senegal to expand vaccine production in West Africa, and to Rwanda's partnership with BioNTech for an mRNA vaccine facility.

Preeti Sinha, Executive Secretary of the UN Capital Development Fund, drew attention to the Fund's bridge facility,

which provides LDCs with loan access, its de-risking facility, and its pathway to capital markets.

Underscoring development as a human right, Mihir Kanade, Member for the Asia-Pacific region of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development, said the “vaccine nationalism” of many developed countries contravenes the legal duty of international cooperation.

Underlining vaccine access as a human right, Ugoji Adanma Eze, CEO, Engr. Aja Eze Foundation, called for better vaccine cooperation and financing, in which LDCs should not be left behind.

Fatimé Zara Haroun, Super Banats, Chad, shared a harrowing story of child rape, underscoring that “a raped girl bears the scars all her life.” She called for stronger legal frameworks and financial commitments to prevent violence towards women and girls and enable them to enjoy their rights to healthcare and education.

Pamela Molina, Executive Director, World Federation of Deaf, said many people with disabilities including deaf women and girls are not able to access COVID-19 health care such as vaccinations due to poor consideration of their needs, calling for persons with disabilities to be included in priority groups to receive vaccinations.

Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda, Minister of Health, Malawi, emphasized the need to take stock of how the Doha Programme of Action is responding to LDCs' needs in the face of multiple new crises.

Delegates from LDCs and LLDCs reported that because of structural vulnerabilities they were the most hit by COVID-19 and the subsequent financial recession and disruption of the supply chains. They highlighted low vaccination levels and called for: addressing financial gaps and providing sustainable debt; ensuring transition to renewable energy and economic transformation; South-South and triangular cooperation; transfer of technology; building national capacities, including on production of COVID-19 vaccines and diagnostic centers; and better data management systems. Countries also stressed the importance of the Doha Programme of Action and reported on strengthened Africa-EU cooperation.

Delegates further considered, among other issues: the importance of sign language interpreters at all UN meetings; the need for international resolve to declare COVID-19 vaccines as global public goods; the notion that vaccine nationalism is a violation of human rights; the Technology Makers Lab's support for innovation in Africa; and the protectionism created by international trade rules.

In the Corridors

On education day at HLPF, the divides in national priorities were obvious: while some are fighting for just the basics of getting all children to school, others shared their thoughts about how best to future-proof their streamlined education systems. Alluding to the launch of the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the SDGs on Thursday, 7 July 2022, one speaker shared that while rich countries typically spend over USD 8000 per student per year, the poorest countries struggle to spend even USD 50 per student per year. Many noted that it is clear that we “are leaving many behind,” and the pandemic has only exacerbated the situation.

In addition to education, local level action and equitable access to vaccines and resources, HLPF participants were also contemplating the status of two other documents. In parallel to the HLPF discussions, the Independent Group of Scientists are in New York preparing the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report and will conclude their meeting with a Member State briefing on 7 July. Finally, the silence procedure was broken for the 138-paragraph draft Ministerial Declaration, which means at least one Member State objected to the text and negotiations will continue.