

Rambla, Xavier; Langthaler, Margarita

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The SDGs and inclusive education for all: From special education to addressing social inequalities

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The SDGs and inclusive education for all.

From special education to addressing social inequalities.

Xavier Rambla, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ESP)

Margarita Langthaler, Austrian Foundation for Development Research (ÖFSE)

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Austrian Foundation for Development Research – ÖFSE
A Austria, 1090 Vienna, Sensengasse 3, T +43 1 3174010, F -150
E office@oefse.at, I www.oefse.at, www.centrum3.at

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List of Abbreviations

EFA	Education for All
EFA-GMR	Education for All Global Monitoring Report
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Abstract

This briefing paper draws on the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals and the previous statements regarding inclusive education so as to propose guidelines for international aid in the area of education. Basically, both concepts stand for a wide-ranging view of education in the frame of correlative challenges and objectives. A key point is that crucial opportunities emerge from positive synergies between initiatives addressing social inequalities and catering to special needs. Four guidelines are suggested for both international donors and governments interested in ensuring inclusive, lifelong, quality education for all. The paper illustrates these general guidelines with a few observations regarding two middle-income countries as Albania and Moldova, and two low-income countries such as Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. In all of them, children and youth suffer from powerful deprivations derived from social inequalities associated to the socio-economic status of parents, gender, ethnicity and ability. In these four countries the available sources also report on shortcomings in institutional capacity that have to be urgently addressed.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goals, Inclusive Education, Education for All, Albania, Moldova, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia*

1. Executive summary

This briefing paper draws on the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the previous statements regarding inclusive education so as to propose guidelines for international aid in the area of education.

Basically, both concepts stand for a wide-ranging view of education in the frame of correlative challenges and objectives. A key point is that crucial opportunities emerge from positive synergies between initiatives addressing social inequalities and catering to special needs.

Four guidelines are suggested for both international donors and governments interested in ensuring inclusive, lifelong, quality education for all. Firstly, the relevant programmes should aim at producing positive outcomes throughout the life course of people. Pre-primary, primary as well as lower- and upper-secondary education are particular areas of concern. Secondly, teachers' professional development should be actively fostered. The shortage of professionals threatens to hinder development in many countries, but this shortcoming has to be tackled both in terms of training enough teachers and equipping them with the necessary skills and the appropriate conditions for their in-service professional development. Thirdly, education policy should be connected to other public policies. Any vision defining education as a silo has to be dramatically reviewed. Finally, authorities should follow a comprehensive approach to financing for educational development.

The paper illustrates these general guidelines with a few observations regarding two middle-income countries as Albania and Moldova, and two low-income countries such as Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. In all of them, children and youth suffer from powerful deprivations derived from social inequalities associated to the socio-economic status of parents, gender, ethnicity and ability. In these four countries the available sources also report on shortcomings in institutional capacity that have to be urgently addressed.

2. Introduction

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) declares that, by 2030, the world ought to "ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning". This statement entails notorious ambitions in terms of concept, demography and planning. The previous notion of Education for All was conditioned by the focus of the Millennium Development Goal 2 on achieving universal primary education. However, SDG-4 entails commitments with students' diversity, quality learning and education along the life course. Since primary-school age children are not the only priority, completion and transition between school levels are taken into account in a more explicit way. In addition, it requires aligning school education with other policy areas such as early childhood care and education, schemes for students with special education needs, vocational education and training, adult education, career guidance and others.

In this briefing paper we want to highlight that all these objectives eventually express the growing concern of policy-makers and civil society organisations with social inequalities. For decades, research has convincingly shown that the potential of education to render equal opportunities to everybody is severely hampered worldwide. In fact, an array of mechanisms reproduce disadvantages between generations. Since many institutional and economic bottlenecks constrain the capacity of educational policies in middle- and low-income countries, international donors must also be aware of the many consequences of these inequalities.

The following two sections outline a conceptual discussion of education in the frame of both the Sustainable Development Goals approved by the international community in 2015 and the longer strand of statements and debates regarding special and inclusive education. The third section focuses on the political implications of these concepts. Mostly, they inspire a number of guidelines for those international donors and governments who want to contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive education. The fourth section looks at a few practical implications for education policy-making in Albania, Moldova, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia.

3. Education and the Sustainable Development Goals

International aid for development pays an increasing attention to education since the 1980s. In fact, between the inception of the United Nations and that date the main donors had believed that state building would bring about the expansion of schooling. However, although many countries underwent democratic reforms after the Second World War, and most colonies became independent in the following decades, statistical data and scholarly evidence showed that the amount of available school places did not increase at the rhythm that had been expected. For this reason, the endeavour to overcome this lag led donors to adopt an array of international, multi-stakeholder strategic planning schemes by 1990.

At that time, the Education for All (EFA) movement was launched by UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank in Jomtien (Thailand). Despite disappointing results, ten years later in Dakar (Senegal) EFA was re-authorized on the grounds of official and public statistical indicators and benchmarks that had to be achieved by 2015. Moreover, the EFA goals were related to the broader Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with benchmarks scheduled for the same year. This time donors and governments followed suit and significant progress really took place, but the actual advancement was eventually restricted to enrolment in primary education. Thus, improvement notwithstanding, crucial indicators once again scored below the target by 2015. Nevertheless, then a series of international conferences adopted a single list of Sustainable Development Goals including education as the fourth SDG.

Since Dakar two consortia have been set up in order to coordinate international aid for educational development. On the one hand, the Education for All Global Monitoring Report produces regular assessments and outlines policy frameworks that might contribute to meet the goals. This unit is based in the premises of UNESCO Paris, but is widely supported by all the other stakeholders involved in the EFA initiative. On the other hand, the Global Partnership for Education aims at fostering progress in these goals in low-income and middle-income countries. Based in Washington, it is supported by the World Bank as well as the other partners in the global educational initiatives. In this vein, the European Union conveys its aid through this institution. Bilateral, official development assistance directly delivered by a donor government to a beneficiary country is thus framed within this broader scheme, but it has not been fully substituted by these multi-party agreements.

Box 1 reproduces the terms of the SDG-4. The front statement retrieves the image of inclusive education that will be discussed in the next section. It is also remarkable that the targets make explicit reference to all the levels of instruction, thus discouraging any possible interpretation that might underestimate the role of either pre-primary or vocational education. This careful wording also takes stock of both school-based and extra-school activity by mentioning “effective learning environments for all”. Thus, not only the role of “care” is acknowledged but also the development of numeracy and literacy as well as the relevant skills for employment.

A rich concept of learning takes important nuances into consideration too. Besides academic basics and skills, the values associated with global citizenship and cultural diversity are mentioned. This is particularly important because it highlights that inequalities ought to be overcome in all these dimensions for everybody regardless of any type of social category. Furthermore, this commitment to overcome inequality must be enacted by means of economic redistribution via scholarships but also by recognising the particularities of some children due to gender disparities, disabilities, the status of indigenous peoples and vulnerable situations.

Finally, Box 1 endorses a closer link of aid with the training and professional development of qualified teachers throughout the world. In spite of the reductive reading of teachers' role as a leverage for enrolment in the MDGs, this is no longer the case to the extent that they are an explicit target on their own.

Box 1: Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4)

<p>Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning</p>
<p>Goal 4 Targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes • By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education • By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university • 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 • 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 • By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy • 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 • Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all • 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 programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries • 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

Source: UNDESA 2016

Education is also interlinked with the other Sustainable Development Goals in both directions. That is, education contributes to almost all of them and these other dimensions produce positive externalities for education (Vladimirova/Le Blanc 2015). Certainly, UN documents have mentioned a whole set of intertwined relationships, but three of them are clearly outstanding.

Firstly, sustainable progress in SDG-4 eventually needs a minimum of decent social conditions regarding at least poverty (SDG-1), hunger (SDG-2), health (SDG-3), gender equality (SDG-5), work (SDG-8) and economic equality (SDG-10). Substantial shortcomings in any of these areas probably curtail the potential of children's and adults' education in many ways. Worse, cumulative and interactive deprivation in some of these areas is likely to produce even greater damage.

Secondly, education creates the awareness and the specialised skills that underpin the sustainable management of natural resources. Thus, it is reasonable to design programmes that trigger positive connections between SDG-4 and the sustainable management of water and sanitation (SDG-6) and energy (SDG-7) as well as preventing climate change (SDG-13) and preserving ecosystem variation (SDG-15). Conversely, development programmes have to tackle the possible perverse effects of significant shortcomings in these goals for the social conditions of education through poverty, hunger, disease, unemployment and other factors.

Finally, an expansion of education systems and stronger school quality are altogether necessary to create and stretch the skills that are supportive of a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (SDG-17). Similarly, weak educational conditions threaten to disrupt the implementation of this partnership.

4. The wide concept of inclusive education

Both outside and inside the official discourse of the United Nations, the "inclusive" features of education have also been conceived and promoted by experts in special education and eventually inclusive education. In the end, this label defines a strand of scholarship and advocacy that insists on the need to build institutional capacities to cater to students with disabilities and students who experience any type of vulnerable situation. Their point is that these capacities are not only helpful for these students but for the whole of education systems.

At the same time as multi-party strategic plans for multidimensional development were designed in the late 1980s, the Convention of the Rights of the Child became a milestone in the road towards inclusive education. That Convention not only conveyed the right to education but also required that education enhanced the child's abilities and was respectful of cultural diversity, peace and the environment (United Nations 1989). A few years later, the Salamanca Statement highlighted the straightforward connection between these requirements and the capacity of educational institutions. In order to integrate special education programmes in mainstream schools, that statement vindicated that initial and in-service teacher training, and external support to teachers were attentive to the wide diversity of students' characteristics and needs (WCSND 1994).

In 2008, the UNESCO International Conference of Education, periodically convened by the International Bureau of Education, argued for a new understanding of inclusive education. Many documents were produced for that event. Most of these contributions claimed that action aiming to prevent inequalities and to curb social divides should be seen as a key component of the concept (International Bureau of Education 2008). In coherence, the next

year UNESCO (2009) issued a handbook of policy guidelines making an array of recommendations on how to implement this wide notion of inclusive education along the whole cycle of educational policy-making.

Simultaneously, some academic discussion of inclusive education has been undertaken in the pages of the International Journal of Inclusive Education and other academic publications. The main theme of this scholarship focuses on the need to link school effectiveness and social justice. The school effectiveness movement claims that school improvement can overcome the constraints of students' socio-economic background if teachers are able to implement the appropriate modes of performance-based management, team work, student-centred pedagogies and evidence-based innovation. Linking this point with inclusive education, some authors propose methods to strengthen the learning of students with special education needs that eventually benefit the institutional performance of schools as institutions committed to everybody's effective learning (Booth/Ainscow 2002). But scholars have engaged in the debate drawing on many other perspectives. Remarkably, some authors argue that inclusive education should be aware of power asymmetries in order to tackle inequalities. These publications also stage some initial reflections on the need to make teacher education more relevant for inclusive education (Polat 2011).

In brief, compared to the previous definitions of Education for All, both the Sustainable Development Goals and inclusive education stand for a broader understanding of the core mandate of governments, international organisations and donors who are interested in education. The main official documents openly remind of the multiple dimensions of education, the connections between this one and the other SDGs, the need to counteract inequalities and recognise diversity, and the importance of building institutional capacity to cater to students with special needs at the same time as the general educational goals are pursued.

5. The political level – Inclusive education and the SDGs

Educational authorities could certainly avail of key synergies between SDGs and inclusive education. However, the underlying tenets of these two concepts not only invite them to relate schooling with a wider set of issues but also adumbrate new instruments to align educational development with the endeavour to curb social inequalities. In fact, the web of connections between the SDGs and the ultimate consequences of the Convention on the Rights of the Child opens the way for further initiatives aimed at tackling the growing gap between the wealthiest and the worst-off. Although this divide is exacerbating throughout the world – and some research evidence indicates that the political space for action is narrow (UNDP 2013), the point is that the reverberations of educational development settle some ground for building consensus on the political agenda of equality and social justice. Box 2 sketches out four likely catalysts of inclusive, lifelong, quality education for all that may become appealing to many political actors from a broad ideological spectrum.

Box 2: Some catalysts of inclusive, lifelong, quality education for all

- Pursuing positive outcomes along the life course
- Fostering teachers' professional development
- Connecting education policy to other public policies
- Following a comprehensive approach to financing for educational development

5.1. Pursuing positive outcomes along the life course

The SDGs and inclusive education share a common interest in stretching the benefits of education along the life course of people. Actually, the SDG-4 re-words the article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of Child when it includes early child, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education. Besides, the Convention entails commitment to smoothing educational transitions since it requires to "take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates" (United Nations 1989: art 28, 1e).

Therefore, although the core international aid to educational development is conveyed by the Global Partnership for Education, it is reasonable that bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies also launch initiatives in the field of further education. These initiatives have to do with providing vocational education and training as well as career information and carer guidance services. For instance, the United Nations and the European Union are working in this area (Hansen 2006, Zelloth 2009).

5.2. Fostering teachers' professional development

International agencies have repeatedly warned of the worrying shortage of teachers in low-income countries, which is also dramatic in many emergencies. In essence, ill-equipped buildings, lack of pedagogic materials, weak professional skills and need of continuous training are huge constraints. Moreover, if the requirements of Convention on the Rights of the Child are to be met, not only the amount of teachers but also their training are at stake (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2006, 2015).

Currently, a number of initiatives are advancing quite telling proposals in this vein. Thus, some evidence reports that a relevant knowledge base, autonomy in decision-making and peer networks are crucial components of teachers' professionalism and job satisfaction in middle- and high-income countries (OECD 2016b). Moreover, the very diversity of the teaching force is crucial too, not least because it seldom comprises professionals who either have a direct experience of poverty, come from ethnic minorities, or have any kind of disability (Lewis 2013).

5.3. Connecting education policy to other public policies

The potential of the SDGs to figure out the linkages between the dimensions of sustainable development also suggests that education policies should avail of these connections. This is crucial if the cultural diversity of children is to be respected, particularly in the areas more severely stricken by environmental risks. In fact, the very SDGs endorse a wide-ranging review of school curricula in order to strengthen education for global citizenship by exploring the relationships between academic disciplines and between academic knowledge and broader social and environmental issues.

There is also a need to link education and particularly vocational training to social and economic programmes, if education is suppose to contribute to occupation and economic growth.

Some development programmes are already using this cross-sectoral perspective. Conditional cash transfers are a well-known illustration. These schemes were generally targeted to mothers and conditioned to the effective school attendance and the regular vaccination of children. This mode of expanding social protection proved to yield further complementary benefits for education and health, and thus to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (World Bank 2016). Although the controversies on their limited effects on distribution and the underlying bias in recognising women's rights should not be overlooked, large sectors of experts and activists agree that these schemes identified the

potential benefits of coordinated action in the areas of social protection, health and education. Similarly, the UN Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme links urban development with education by framing people's concern with the state of the schools in their neighbourhood within a wider view of the city (UN Habitat 2016).

5.4. Following a comprehensive approach to financing for educational development

Article 4 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child establishes that “with regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources” (United Nations 1989). This principle clearly reminds decision-makers of the importance of educational spending. Certainly, the public resources devoted to education are tightly coupled with demographic trends, but the notion of rights compels them to think beyond the number of students. Educational spending also has to distribute resources so that every student is supported by an equal and sufficient amount of them. If necessary, it has to be carefully tailored to cultural diversity.

In fact, the actors of international educational development are also aware of this important guideline. The Global Campaign of Education has written about spending as a “taxing business” that should rely on a fair tax system to increase education budgets, turn natural resources into a lasting resource of national wealth, spend resources more equitably, and make ordinary citizens part of budgeting and monitoring (Global Campaign for Education 2013). The UN also proposes to think of the necessary resources for social rights from the perspective of “financing for development”, which basically looks for synergies between fiscal policies, finance and transparency (IATFFD 2016).

6. The practical level – Challenges of implementation in developing countries

Any agency, donor, government or civil society organisation who is working in a given country is normally familiar with the former reflections. The discussion of a general outline may be helpful because educational policy-making eventually responds to decisions made at the global, national and sub-national levels. As a rule, these agents also become aware of the more practical challenges that arise when taking action on the field. In this section we want to argue that attention to the conceptual proximity of SDG-4 and inclusive education is helpful in spelling out significant clues for this practical work.

Thus, lifelong outcomes, teachers' professionalism, cross-sectoral connections and financing map out a grid of political implications. While the view of outcomes along the life course stretches the core debates regarding EFA and the MDGs between 2000 and 2015, the other implications retrieve some issues that were secondary at that time. As a consequence, it is much easier to find out literature on the first one in any country.

In this section we will review the available sources focusing on Albania, Moldova, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. Albania and Moldova are middle-income countries, but Burkina Faso and Ethiopia are lower-income countries. Recent research recommends to think of these two types of countries when diagnosing the factors of, and planning action for, human development. During the second half of the twentieth century the emergence of a middle-income club has discredited the dichotomy of countries into developed and developing ones.

"In 2000, the "developed" group has advanced in terms of the levels of all three indicators relative to 1960 while the low income, low health and low education group has scarcely improved; while average education and health levels are slightly higher, income levels are actually substantially lower. We also see the emergence of a third, middle group with income and education levels clustered around a point between those of the two extreme groups but with average life expectancy that is only less than 10% below that of the high level club" (Vollmer et al. 2013: 3f.)

Although enough documents are not available to write a literature review of educational development in these four countries, this section attempts to point out a few reflections drawing on the available research. By looking at the main statistical indicators and reading a few pieces of relevant albeit scarce evidence, it illustrates the implications of the former guidelines regarding lifelong education, cross-sector synergies and teacher training. Unfortunately, financing cannot be discussed in more concrete terms due to lack of empirical references.

Table 1 summarises some key indicators of educational development in these four countries. The Human Development Index measures the average income, school enrolment, literacy and life expectancy. The Multidimensional Poverty Index captures important deprivations of these resources. Then, school life expectancy and the percentage of children who are not enrolled in schools are proxies of participation in the school system. Literacy looks at the adult population.

The table clearly distinguishes the two middle-income from the two low-income countries. Not only the general indexes but also the educational indicators record much higher scores in the former two ones. The data also warn of the risk of regression despite the middle-income status. Strikingly, in Moldova school life expectancy is declining and the percentages of out-of-school children are increasing. Obviously, this point has crucial practical implications for any reflection on the priorities of educational development.

Both the table and some literature report on the distribution of education between different social categories. Remarkably, the previous observation that these inequalities disrupted the EFA goals and the MDGs can be extended to SDGs. Education is a telling illustration.

The wealth and the socio-economic status of parents is a powerful social divide everywhere. Children coming from the better-off families have an advantage. A further point is that in many low-income countries even the educational opportunities of the better-off are narrower than in middle- and high-income countries (EFA-GMR 2016).

Although we lack a data base of standard data we can compare across the world, the literature also reports on the learning of students at school. The evaluations of the EFA goals realised that school-based learning was extremely weak in many low- and middle-income countries (EFA-GMR 2009). Since Albania and Moldova have participated in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, some figures can be mentioned that basically confirm this point. Thus, in 2009 the PISA score of the students whose mother had at most completed education at ISCED1 level ranged between 358 and 364 in language, mathematics and science tests in Albania, between 358 and 357 in Moldova, and between 441 and 443 in the OECD (OECD 2016a). Some analogous examinations have been piloted in Ethiopia: roughly, their conclusion notices that many students only achieve very low levels of learning despite attending a school (Rolleston/James/Aurino 2014). Thus, wealth and socio-economic status impinge on academic performance.

Gender disparities are quite specific. In middle-income countries women participate in the school system in quite similar proportion as men, although some of their choices in further

education are often quite different. However, in many low-income countries women are not enrolled in the same proportion as men. Table 1 provides evidence of this gap to the extent that the Gender Parity Index yields below-1 scores in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. Notably, the gap is exacerbated regarding literacy, since the adult population is not significantly divided regarding this dimension in Albania and Moldova, but it clearly is in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia.

The divide between people living in urban and rural areas is significant in most middle- and low-income countries. This inequality is recorded in the four countries (EFA-GMR 2016). In all of them ethnic discrimination damages the educational potential of many children too. Actually, the Roma population is an extremely discriminated group in the Balkans. Some nomadic groups also suffer from this discrimination in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia (EFA-GMR 2016).

Although it is hard to compile data on students with disabilities in any country, some publications report on this factor of discrimination in the four countries (Lewis 2010, Save-the-Children 2012). Particularly, a study commissioned by UNICEF recently found out that in Burkina Faso it is some private organisations rather than the public sector who cater to a few students with disabilities. But these services are nevertheless staffed with many untrained teachers in an unregulated institutional context. Moreover, the bulk of these institutions are located in urban areas, and rural population is simply not covered (Niada et al. 2013).

Table 1: Outlook of educational development in Albania, Moldova, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia

	Albania	Moldova	Burkina Faso	Ethiopia
Human Development Index (2014) ¹	0,733	0,693	0,402	0,442
Multidimensional Poverty Index (2008-12) ¹	0,050	0,040	0,535	0,237
School life expectancy, primary and secondary, both sexes (years, 2005) ²	10,21	10,08	4,48	6,93
School life expectancy, primary and secondary, both sexes (years, 2013) ²	12,01	9,84	7,54	7,54
School life expectancy, primary and secondary, both sexes (Gender Parity Index, 2013) ²	0,95	1,01	0,94	0,92
Out-of-school rate for children of primary school age, both sexes (% , 2004-05) ²	8,9	6,6	54,0	38,8
Out-of-school rate for children of primary school age, both sexes (% , 2012-13) ²	4,1	9,4	33,4	20,3
Out-of-school rate for children of primary school age, female (% , 2012-13) ²	4,7	9,4	36,3	22,5
Out-of-school rate for children of secondary school age, both sexes (% , 2001-05) ²	5,8	6,2	80,6	49,1
Out-of-school rate for children of secondary school age, both sexes (% , 2012-13) ²	4,4	14,3	46,9	40,1
Out-of-school rate for children of secondary school age, female (% , 2012-13) ²	5,6	14,8	48,3	41,7
Adult Literacy Rate, both sexes (% 15 and over, 2005-13) ³	97	99	29	39
Adult Literacy Rate, female (% 15 and over, 2005-13) ³	96	99	22	29

¹ UNDP Human Development Report Data <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>

² UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Center <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

³ EFA Global Monitoring Report Data <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/statistics>

Drawing on the two patterns of connection between the dimensions of human development (Vollmer et al. 2013), it is plausible to make two different claims. Firstly, in middle-income countries the average population has progressed but the most vulnerable sectors have remained excluded. In addition, this progress may be so unstable that enrolment leads to later early drop-out. In these countries, the impact of school expansion policies strongly depends on the success of other interventions addressed to tackle inequalities. Secondly, cumulative causality is likely to constrain education as well as income and health in low-income countries. Thus, despite recent signs of improvement many children are still out of school probably because they not only suffer from educational but also economic and health drivers of deprivation. Educational development has to be carefully aligned with cross-sectoral anti-poverty policies in these countries.

With specific regard to inclusive education, available literature suggest for all four countries that inclusive education is generally conceived of as special needs education (and most often only as education for children with disabilities) with little sensitivity for equity issues in a broader sense. Poverty and social equalities are hardly taken into account.

The available sources do not capture the quality of teacher training neither in Albania and Moldova. A few pieces of evidence inform of substantial problems in both countries, when teacher training seems not to develop some basic professional skills, particularly regarding the education of students with disabilities (Save-the-Children 2012). In Moldova, a poignant finding is that better-off parents pay a complementary fee for schooling. As a consequence, teachers seem more attentive to fee-paying students than to the other ones (UNICEF 2008: 38).

Both Burkina Faso and Ethiopia will have to train many teachers in the near future in order to be on track of SDG-4. Some initiatives attempt to upgrade teachers' qualifications too. Interestingly, at the same time as an aggressive policy to expand teacher training colleges is underway, the Ethiopian education system is experimenting with Alternative Basic Schools and mobile schools which cater to pastoralist communities (Niada et al. 2013, Nordstrum 2013, UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2015).

Thus, although the shortage is not so severe, in middle-income countries teachers are not always trained properly, and schools often operate with a sub-par capacity. These shortcomings threaten to reproduce deeply-ingrained segregative practices like the traditional exclusion of Roma people from mainstream schools in Central and Eastern Europe or the segregation of disabled children in special boarding schools. In low-income countries, any decision to increase school enrolment entails deeper consequences than building schools. Often, the teaching force has to be created at the same time.

Finally, a few notes confirm that education plays a role in cross-sector programmes in the four countries, although data is largely missing on that issue. For instance, education and other areas are very relevant to account for the situation of the Roma in Albania (O'Higgins 2013). The UNDP also expects to link education and employment policies when creating Career Advisory Centres in Moldova (UNDP 2015). The importance of urban reform to improve school sanitation has also been recognised in Sub-Saharan countries such as Burkina Faso (PNUD 2013). In Ethiopia, the UNDP has also linked education and training with economic and environmental policies in experiments with harnessing diversity for sustainable development (UNDP 2012).

7. Conclusions

Generally speaking, in this briefing paper we argue that the Sustainable Development Goals and inclusive education stand for an encompassing view of educational development. Whereas the EFA goals and the MDGs assumed that enrolment was a worthwhile benchmark on its own, these other perspectives vindicate closer attention to the synergies between the levels and the types of education. A set of political and practical implications follows, not least concerning lifelong education and learning, teachers' professional development, connections between education and other policy areas, and financing for educational development.

In sum, this policy brief attempts to remind readers of the contributions of these two wide notions. For sure, SDG-4 and inclusive education broaden up the scope of priorities, as the former sections have argued. In addition, it is reasonable to notice that this expansion of the relevant themes does not only affect technical discussions but also the legitimation of educational development. The more it is relevant for people's real multifarious experience, the higher it will be positioned in the political agenda.

This broad understanding of educational development also reminds academics and practitioners of the specific challenges of middle- and low- income countries. Although middle-income countries have overcome some of the deepest manifestations of poverty, they are still exposed to setbacks and professional shortages that damage their educational potential. To cater for the educational needs of minority and discriminated groups in a vision of inclusive education will require specific policy efforts in order to disrupt deeply rooted segregative traditions. In low-income countries, cumulative causality intermingles educational with economic and health-related deprivation so much that cross-sectoral synergies are necessary for progress. Massive expansion of school enrolment at all levels is still to be achieved in these countries. Consequently, the provision of a properly trained teaching force in adequate numbers proves to be among the main challenges.

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Authors

Margarita Langthaler has been a researcher at the Austrian Foundation for Development Research (ÖFSE) since 2003. Her current work focuses on education policies and strategies in development cooperation as well as on vocational education and skills development.

Xavier Rambla is Associate Professor of sociology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ESP). His current research interests are international educational policy borrowing and transfer as well as lifelong learning policies. Previously, he has led research projects on Education for All in Latin America, as well as on education and anti-poverty policies in the Southern Cone. He has also collaborated in projects on education and social cohesion in Europe, and critical co-educational action-research in several regions in Spain.