



Managing Educational Inequality and its Effects on Economic Development

by Bolu Ayankoji
Old Dominion University Graduate Program in International Studies

Introduction

Inequity in education is a prominent issue worldwide, essential to resolve if the world's poor are to be lifted from poverty, if economic development is to accelerate around the world. Ensuring full access to education is crucial to solving other problems like human development, promotion of human rights, national economic emergence, and international migration.

Education is most easily described in terms of access to schooling, retention, and learning, all plagued by great disparities. But factors such as students' well-being, social origins, cultural backgrounds, language, work location, and gender also contribute to these disparities. Despite considerable progress, *263 million children* and youth aged 6-17 were still out of school in 2020, and over half did not meet minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics (UN, 2022).

Their exclusion and these disparities persist not out of necessity, but largely due to inadequate policies. If local and national government were better equipped to deal with these needs, if the international community was better equipped to support them, most of these problems could be resolved quickly. But the solutions must address difficult issues of the suppression of girls and women, child employment, the learning environment, teacher capacities, quality of education, and distance technology, all of which exacerbates inequality.



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Blog

Despite global promises and progress, some *263 million children* and young people are out of school, indicating that the global goals of quality education for all by 2030 is “seriously off track”, in the words of UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (UN News 2023a). Solving the problem will not be easy or cheap. According to a recent study by UNESCO, without *USD 97 billion in extra annual funding*, a range of countries will fail to meet their 2030 national education targets’ (UN News, 2023b). The largest financing gap is in sub-Saharan Africa: *USD 70 billion per year*. The region has the furthest distance to travel, with 20 per cent of primary school age children and almost 60 per cent of upper secondary school age youth not in school. Costs include the need to *triple* the number of pre-primary teachers in low-

income countries and double them in lower-middle income countries by 2030. The number of primary school teachers needs to increase by *nearly 50 per cent* in low-income countries.



The Covid-19 pandemic caused unprecedented school closures, affecting over 1.5 billion children and youth worldwide. This has led to significant learning losses and increased dropout rates, particularly for vulnerable students, especially girls and women. The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequities as well as impacted students and teachers' mental health and well-being.

The unanimous pledge by the 193 Member States of the UN General Assembly that 'no one will be left behind' is fundamental to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), 'Education Commitments', agreed by all to be achieved by the year 2030. This is a global commitment for all nations, peoples, and segments of society, committing to reach the furthest behind first. SDG 4 supports early childhood education, tertiary education, skills training, and vocational education, including supporting policies. It also is a catalyst for recovery and rebuilding post-conflict countries. (UN, 2022).

Before the pandemic, the world already was failing to deliver on its SDG 4 Education Commitments by 2030. Globally, only one out of every six countries it expected to meet SDG 4, with universal access to quality education by 2030. As that year approaches, the generation that will need to complete secondary education by the deadline is entering elementary schools across the globe. Some of the challenges of educational development has been connected to the need for alignment of education and sustainable development policy is crucial to building a more sustainable and equitable future, but linkages are weak in many countries.

At ODUMUNC, the General Assembly Second Committee must respond to the growing challenges of quality education through increased coordination, cooperating and spending to ensure SDG 4 objectives on education are met.

History and background

For several decades cohort trends in socioeconomic inequality in education has been a focus of empirical research. Research has explored the relationship between educational attainment and various socioeconomic indicators, which links parental education levels, family income to educational inequality and attainment (Pfeffer, 2018, p.1034-35). Similarly, Oppedisano and Turati backed this up by explaining that access to education has been unequal in different society and across groups of people which often



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attributed to the family background, gender differences, and inequality in school disfavoring the poor (2015, p.19).

Education has been one of the most important means of having an improved standard of living in a modern world. Modern economies heavily rely on education for people's livelihoods, with recent cohorts in high-income countries pursuing higher education. Education benefits include higher earnings, secure employment, better health, life satisfaction, reduced criminal behavior, and greater civic participation. However, unequal education can lead to unequal outcomes and low social mobility across generations. Understanding the nature and determinants of educational inequality is crucial for understanding the distribution of economic opportunity in society and addressing economic inequality (Blanden, Doepke and Stuhler 2022, p. 4).

The SDG 4 has its root in the world summit on sustainable development (WSSD) adopted the Johannesburg plan of implementation (JPOI), it reaffirmed the Millennium Development Goal 2 and Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All which aims to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015 and the JPOI emphasized the integration of sustainable development into formal and informal education opportunities (UN 2023).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on quality education SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The 2030 agenda aims to promote sustainable development by ensuring all learners acquire knowledge and skills, including education, human rights, gender equality, and peace. It emphasizes quality education for all, including girls and boys, addressing children in extreme poverty, rural areas, and vulnerable situations. The agenda calls for increased investments and international cooperation to ensure free, equitable, inclusive, and quality early childhood, primary, and secondary education and to achieving literacy and numeracy skills for all children, youth, and adults by 2030.

The United Nations sets up specialized agency called United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science and culture. In a bid to continue its many paths to ensure a sustainable future, UNESCO setup the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN Decade of ESD) to mobilize educational resources stated in the Agenda 21, the 1992 Earth Summit's official document with various paths to sustainability, including sustainable agriculture, forestry, research, technology transfer, finance, and production.

Education alone is insufficient for achieving a sustainable future, but learning for sustainable development is essential for achieving this goal. The utilization of monitoring instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of ESD towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been limited. (Buckler and Creech 2014, p.32). Entrenched inequality in education worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic, has deepened learning crisis where 147 million children missed over half of in person instruction, and 24 million learners from pre-school to university level have higher tendency to never return to school (UN, 2023).

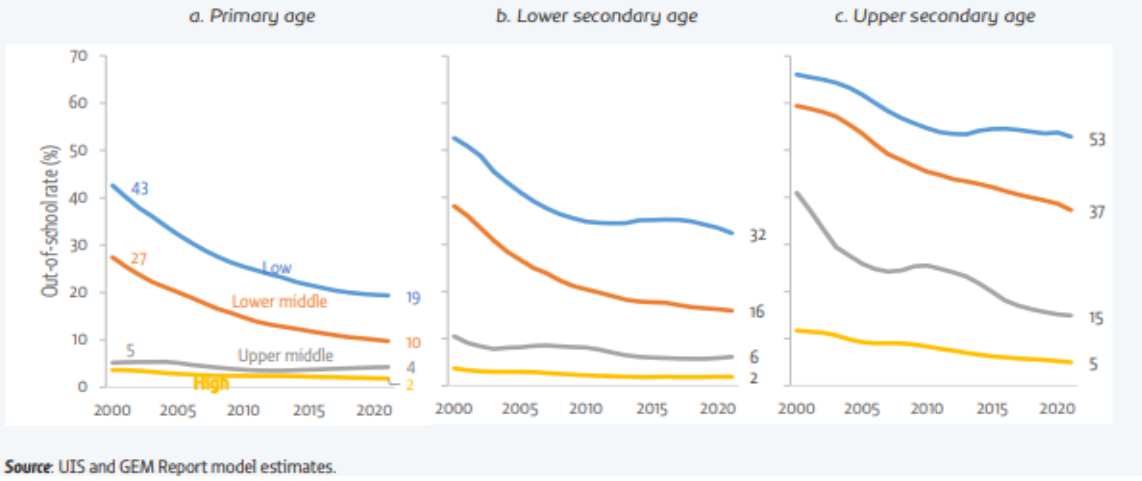


Overall, one of the persistent concerns in all areas socioeconomic groups and background are mostly affected by children and young people, and education is usually one of the pedestals of climbing into a different wealth group. The essential economic role of education implies that unequal education can be a driver of unequal outcomes between different groups in society. Educational inequality is at the root of low social mobility across generations, and economic performance of countries. We see that education have a long-term impact on the economy of a country and the world at large. The UN sets up these agencies to help mitigate these economic failures through equal and accessible education for groups.

Current Issues

At the heart of the UN sustainable development goal is “education for all” a basic human right. Several international organizations, NGOs state and nonstate actors, private sectors such as the UNESCO and other agencies are involved in promoting world peace and security through education and create awareness and participation in ESD at various levels and contexts. However, most education systems have been disrupted by several ongoing issues around the world due to unequal access to education and vulnerable population who leave school at an early age due to poverty, gender, disability, family catastrophes, language, war and conflict have been the most affected, thereby, increasing the level of educational inequalities. Some children lack education rights. Girls in the poorest 20 percent world-wide are over three times more likely to be out of school than boys (Bokova, 2012).

Out-of-school rate, by country income group, 2000–2021



Source: UIS and GEM Report model estimates.

Low- and middle-income regions have the highest out-of-school population with children and youth deprived of education which impacts them from lifting themselves out of poverty. Majority of these groups are in sub-Saharan African, while others include Northern Africa and Western Asia, Central and Southern Asia, and Oceania. Around 263 mn children and youth worldwide are deprived of education due to social, economic, and cultural factors. This includes 67 million children of primary school age (6 to 11 years), 57 mn adolescents of lower secondary school age (12 to 14 years) and 121 mn youth of upper secondary school (15 to 17 years). Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest out-of-school population. Only 70 percent of African countries guarantee compulsory education for 9 years or more (UNESCO 2022, p.3).

Additionally, 771 million young people and adults lack basic literacy skills, two-thirds being girls and women (UNESCO, 2023). As a result, girls continue to make up the majority of out-of-school children, and women still represent two thirds of the adult population who lack basic literacy and numeracy skill.



This basic right to education has become to humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan since the Taliban took power in 2021, girls and women's have been restricted access to education, jobs and open places. The extreme misogyny and femicide restricts women and ban education for girls beyond sixth grade this extends to prohibiting girls and women from attending school and university education and can only receive care from female doctors (Lederer, 2023).



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Lack of qualified teachers a major part of the problem. The world will need approximately 6.9 mn more primary and secondary teachers to provide every child with primary and secondary education and reach the SDG 4 education target for 2030. Globally, average, primary school pupil-teacher ratios are 42 to 1, but in countries like Central Africa, Chad, Ethiopia and Malawi, it can exceed 60. Secondary levels have smaller ratios, possibly due to low enrollment rates (UNESCO, 2016, p. 3). This causes overcrowded classrooms mostly, especially in regions lacking basic amenities such as infrastructure electricity, drinking water and basic sanitation facilities.

Assess to education became a major problem for Ukrainians after the country was invaded by Russia on 24 February 2022. The country's education locations have been damaged or made unusable. In Ukraine, 3,467 educational institutions have suffered from bombing and shelling, with 335 destroyed. This has not only led to displacement. There is need to prioritize effective teacher and suitable technology and ensuring that students are engaged to align with continuous human interaction and ensure education for all is now more prominent (Schrader-King,2021).



The absence of a comprehensive and regular financing of education in education ministry expenditure of countries contribute to the failure of not reaching the Education for All initiative (EFA) target in 2015. 70 percent of countries allocate less than 4 percent of their GDP to education (UNESCO, 2016).

Role of the United Nations

With secondary school completion, the global poverty rate may be cut in half, according to UNESCO an agency setup to eradicating poverty worldwide. The UNs role through UNESCO, which sets up a path to actualizing that no one is left behind. The ESD path focuses on all learning processes outside the classroom, benefiting all society by promoting sustainability in all aspects of life. The *Education for All* (EFA) framework emphasizes the importance of quality education and learning for a sustainable future.

The DESD aims to promote ESD by influencing governments to revise curricula, prioritize teacher training, and focus on retraining educators (Mulà and Tilbury, 2009). UNESCO also collaborates with UNHCR and Regional Refugee Education Technical Hub for Ukraine to evaluate refugees' inclusion in policy and data systems in refugee host countries (UNESCO, 2023).

Education continues to be a priority for agencies like the UNESCO an agency under the UN to address education issue, and other agencies are involved in promoting world peace and security through education



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and create awareness and participation in ESD at various levels and contexts. The DESD aims to promote ESD by influencing governments to revise curricula, prioritize teacher training, and focus on retraining educators (Mulà and Tilbury, 2009). However, current systems do not adequately address this need as globally, in 2020, over 14 percent of teachers are still not qualified according to national norms, with little improvement since 2015 (UN 2023).

Landmark UN Resolution

In a bid to eradicate all forms of poverty through education and build upon the unfinished business of Millennium Development Goals achievement of providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted resolutions in the Seventy-Sixth session on 17 December 2021 and several others that would be explored below. UNGA resolution 74/223 of 19 December 2019 and recalls resolution 72/222 of 20 December 2017, recalling resolution 70/209 of 22 December 2015 and resolution 69/211 of 19 December 2014 and recalls other previous resolutions on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, emphasizes Education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on education (UNGA, 2022).

Country and Bloc Positions

China: The Chinese President Xi Jinping has over and over again emphasized education's role in breaking the inter-generational poverty and emphasizing fair access to quality education for children in impoverished areas. China has been actively working with the UN and UNESCO to advance girls' and women's education. China supports UN projects advancing digital education, equal opportunity and inclusive education for all (China 2021).

Chinese diplomats can be supportive of traditional liberal goals. For example, China urged Afghanistan to reform its radical policies which exclude women from education and public life and adopt a more resolute attitude in combating terrorism (AP News, 2023b). But Chinese officials tend to limit themselves to promoting such goals, ultimately leaving implementation to each country. With an eye on its own vulnerability to foreign criticism, China seeks to strengthen all countries' national sovereignty and freedom from international pressure.

Although China shows keen interest in advancing education development and economic objective, however, it has a reputation for pushing its own interests first, such as using foreign aid to secure strategic natural resource access in the beneficiary country. China's aid to African education, for example, is often suspected of benefitting China more than investment priorities in Africa. Some aid also can indirectly benefit Chinese investments, such as teaching Chinese to Africans through scholarships and Confucius Institutes. This cultural and diplomatic strategy is an essential part of China's economic development strategy. At the UN General Assembly, China can be expected to support general goals, but leave itself freedom to advance its own national interests.

European Union (EU): The 27 Member States of the EU and its 10 Candidate Members are the world's leading donors of foreign education assistance. They strongly support initiatives to achieve all the SDGs as rapidly as possible, including SDG 4 on education. EU countries do not believe assistance should be



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free and unconditional. Many use their foreign assistance to promote equal treatment of girls and women, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, and other disadvantaged groups. This insistence can cause tension with recipient governments.

The EU framework encourages EU countries to exchange best practices and learn from each other and make lifelong learning and mobility a reality. The Charter for Fundamental Rights, Article 14, talks about the importance of education and emphasize everyone has the right to education, including free compulsory education and to establish educational institutions with democratic principles and parental guidance. Parents must ensure their children's education aligns with their religious, philosophical, and pedagogical convictions (EUFRA, 2007). This principle implies that every child can attend an establishment offering free education but does not require all establishments (including private schools) to be free of charge or exclude certain forms of education that may be paid for. The Charter requires all EU Member States to respect free compulsory education.

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): The dominant bloc in the UN General Assembly, the NAM has 120 Member States, 17 Observer Countries and 10 Observer organizations. They strongly align with the UN in prioritizing education to meet job market demands. The NAM is committed to the development of its member's economies and strongly supports their national sovereignty on all development and humanitarian issues. The NAM insists that its members must be free to design and implement their own policies. The NAM welcome foreign assistance, but deeply resists any effort to make aid conditional on donor country policies and accountability.

The NAM focuses on promoting effective participation of youth, women, and girls in society, providing adequate support for disabled individuals, and ensuring quality education for girls. To conform to worldwide standards, curriculum changes are now being made. The NAM also places a strong emphasis on the infrastructure that supports economic development and innovation, such as the transportation infrastructure, safety regulations, and technology infrastructure.

NAM has been a helping hand for many countries and has provided much-needed support and a voice for its member state. It is necessary to motivate its members towards securing more funding to create educational development to avoid more conflict.

Russia: Strong support for NAM countries and their development is a foundational element of Russian foreign policy. While Russia spends little on foreign aid, and especially little on humanitarian goals, it is a reliable advocate for emerging countries. Russia insists foreign colonial countries have a special responsibility assist their former colonies, and should offer non-string-attached financing, enabling recipient countries to achieve their own goals. Above all, Russia strives to ensure that no UN standards or goals can be used to affect Russia's domestic freedom of action.

United States: Support for initiatives to support global educational goals is a consistent part of American foreign policy. Working through its Agency for International Development (USAID) and a vast web of private non-governmental organizations, the United States support education development everywhere. This assistance remained stable under President Trump and has increased somewhat under President Biden.

While the US is highly supportive, it also requires careful oversight over how money originating in the US is spent. It often supports recipient country initiatives, but requires extensive accounting to ensure



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there is no waste, fraud or abuse. The US Congress leads oversight to ensure money is not misused, using annual appropriations to strengthen their control. US aid officials live in constant fear they will be associated with misuse or waste American of any amount of taxpayer money, even for innocent reasons, since this would quickly end any American official's career.

Money is approved by the US Congress annually and must be spent within that fiscal year. As a result, it often is impossible to spend US aid funding within the narrow periods it is made available. In the General Assembly, the US supports general targets and goals like the SDGs, but it resists measures that would require loosening its authority over the use of its aid.

Some Proposals for Action

Meeting SDG targets is the easiest and most effective way to assume minimal global equational goals. How to do it, in a way that all UN Member States will find acceptable? One way to think of this, is how to pay, and who controls?

The overwhelming issue is funding better access to education. At the heart of any proposal is a funding problem. With a target of spending USD 97 billion in extra annual funding to achieve basic goals, every proposal has to deal with this shared problem; how to find the money, and how to assure it used effectively? With typical donor governments burdened by problems like funding their own economic recovery from the Covid recession and supporting Ukraine's struggle against Russia, where is additional money to come from?

A secondary issue, just as continuous, is who controls the way the money is spent? Donor governments want the spending to follow their rules and achieve their goals. Recipient governments want to maintain their sovereign control over policies that affect their people and territory.

There are many paths the General Assembly can take. All involve problems of funding (where is the money to come from?) and control (who determines how it gets spent, donors or recipients?). Some of actions—by no means all—that could be considered by the General Assembly include:

Inclusive policies to reach the most marginalized: Inequalities in learning and other child development outcomes emerge before primary schooling. Children develop their ability to learn and communicate at the age of 4 or 5. When children are negatively affected by their learning experience in academics, creativity and intellectually, they are likely to foster negative connections to the external environment, sense of self identity and affect their later behavior and academic performance. And as children continuously receive negative school messages and interaction it may hinder children's academic success, graduation, and economic success. Migrant children experience this discrimination due to information's other students receive from media and other platforms, as well as teachers' attitude towards interaction with migrant children affects their success in school (Adair, 2015). None of this comes cheaply. Identifying funding and assuring proper oversight will be crucial.

Funding schools: The General Assembly can establish minimum funding goals for national financing of primary (elementary) and secondary (middle and high schools) education. More funding is necessary to employ more teachers, to train them better, and to pay them more so they do not leave teaching for more lucrative careers.



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Such goals, which might be a percentage of every country's total wealth or Gross National Product (GDP), or an amount of money to be spent on a per-student basis. How to ensure countries follow these guidelines? Donor countries may hesitate to support such targets. The United States, for example, reduced its spending on foreign assistance for education in 2019-20. (Browne, 2013, p.10). Continuous-decrease in school spending can negatively impact the day-to-day learning experiences of students therefore Education budgets need to be protected and increased. The UN can mandate countries to have a special budget focused on education.

Building educational systems: Greater cooperation with major UN agencies is one way to. Help assure that recipients of educational aid money use it to best effect. UN agencies like the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, can be given greater responsibility to ensure educational quality and standards are being upheld, ensuring sufficiently and equitably financed schools and more accountability for donor funding (Walker, et al, 2019).

Historically, UN Member States have been happy to work through these agencies, using them to implement their aid programmes, while keeping their own control over the flow of money. They have not been willing to allow UN agencies to set their own goals independently. Similarly, host country governments usually welcome more assistance, but greatly prefer it enters their own national budgets, with no strings attached (donor government standards and spending rules, for example).

Increase equality in education system: Rather than a single global plan for minimum goals, the General Assembly might set no specific targets. Instead, it could identify general areas to be targeted, such as establishing minimum standards for supporting teachers, performance of primary and secondary schools, or enhancing education of girls, minorities, and other at-risk groups. It would be left to each Member State to identify needs and develop a national education plan. This will be welcomed by countries relying on foreign assistance, principally members of the NAM, since it restores their sovereign authority. And it will be questioned by donor governments, worried loss of oversight could mean sensitive goals such as educating girls and minorities will be lost. Reconciling these two rival views will be a major problem for the General Assembly to overcome.

Targeting the hardest to reach: Education initiatives can prioritize reaching vulnerable populations, including people in emergencies, crises, minority groups, displaced individuals, and those with disabilities. They could address challenges faced by different groups especially girls, and women, and bridge the digital divide by increasing affirmative action to ensure that more funds are used to help marginalized or underprivileged children who are disadvantaged in ways that have a track record of success.

This will win widespread support among the Member States, but how sincere will their support be? Many countries agree on such universal goals, but might not actually do much to assist excluded groups. Governments who get their support from dominant majority ethnic groups, for example, are unlikely to switch funding to projects benefitting minorities. Making that happen is where UN agencies can get active, providing oversight and measuring achievements, and donor governments can target funding where they want it to go most.



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