SciencePG
Science Publishing Group

Responsibility in Institutions of Higher Education: Education for Sustainable Development

Carlos Ignacio Gonzalez Arruti, Anisse Jacinta Musalem Enriquez

Department of Justice and Law, University of Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico

Email address:

CarlosGonzalezArruti@cutonala.udg.mx (C. I. G. Arruti), anisse@cutonala.udg.mx (A. J. M. Enriquez)

Abstract: The paper presented here is part of an interdisciplinary project called "Educational Management," the purpose of which is to analyze the management and accountability policies applied in Public Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). Education for Sustainable Development has a privileged place since the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations (UN), as it is listed as one of the goals pursued by these objectives. The approach to sustainable education was established at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and continued at the World Education Forum in 2000. The 4th Sustainable Development Goal seeks to promote learning opportunities and ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education. This goal is a commitment to educational innovation and university social responsibility as it is a protagonist in the formation of students and the creation of learning spaces. Likewise, IHEs must generate a culture and expansion of knowledge, scientific-technological innovation and be a model for society. Furthermore, they must contribute to the Agenda for Sustainable Development, the final document of which, entitled "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," promotes the end of poverty, fights against inequality and injustice, and addresses climate change so that no one is left behind by 2030.

Keywords: Educational Management, Accountability Policies in IHE, Challenge of Sustainable Education,
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

Education for Sustainable Development is a praiseworthy role the UN has taken on so education and sustainability can begin to be a reality. The term "sustainable development" was first coined in the Brundtland Report, published in 1987 [1], and the concept proposes the rational use of a region's natural resources, without impoverishing them, so that future generations can also use them; in other words, not mortgaging the future of the Earth with our practices which are mainly economic.

"Sustainable development" was later adopted in Principle 3 of the Rio Declaration [2], describing it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This formalized an approach in which environmental, economic and social aspects are made compatible from a perspective of intergenerational solidarity.

Training in social responsibility at universities has become more important in recent years and has even begun to be part of the curriculum of certain degree programs. In this way, the three main functions of a university (teaching, research and innovation) are called upon to have a significant impact on culture. To this end, the university must be a center that generates public and open debate on sustainable development and that incorporates competencies in sustainability, responsibility and social commitment.

2. The United Nations AND the Challenge of Sustainable Education

2.1. World Conference on Education for All (EFA): Jomtien, Thailand, 1990

One of the priority goals that has defined the work of the

United Nations has been the interest and efforts to achieve sustainable and quality education for all human beings. The importance of establishing free and compulsory primary education was highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989[1] [3]. A year later, in Jomtien, Thailand, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) took place, a major milestone in international dialogue on education for human development. This conference gave significant impetus to the promotion of universal primary education and the eradication of illiteracy in the world.

Two key documents emerged as a result of this meeting. The first was the World Declaration on Education for All [4], a declaration of good principles with ten articles that proclaim and promote the effectiveness of cooperation in achieving sustainable universal education. The second consisted of a concrete plan of action to be followed by governments, outlining guidelines, objectives and resources to be invested in improving basic learning needs at the global level.

Three fundamental aspects were highlighted in this conference: the limitation of educational opportunities; basic education conceived simply as literacy; and the risk of exclusion from education for certain marginalized groups, such as women, girls, people with disabilities, and others. For this reason, it sought to eliminate barriers and obstacles to women's participation and encouraged the elimination of sexist stereotypes in education.

2.2. World Education Forum: Dakar, Senegal, 2000

Subsequently, in 2000, the World Education Forum was held in Dakar, Senegal [5], where the participating countries presented their achievements and progress with respect to the goals set in Jomtien. They also established recommendations for future activities to promote education in their territories. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its capacity as organizer, was responsible for mobilizing governments to consolidate their new action plans up to 2015.

This meeting produced the most extensive evaluation of education ever undertaken, resulting in the adoption of the Dakar Framework for Action, a collective commitment to action aimed at concrete solutions to educational shortcomings.

The World Education Forum revealed that, while concrete achievements had been made, many countries found it difficult both to define the content of education in their territories and to evaluate their achievements and results. Other issues relevant to achieving the EFA goals that were addressed were the threat of HIV/AIDS, poverty, civil strife, hunger, lack of health and even education for girls. In other words, education on a global scale was no longer just talked about, but the areas where immediate help was needed were identified.

2.3. The Millennium Summit: New York, United States, 2000

In the year 2000, several important issues were discussed at the United Nations headquarters, among them, the fight against extreme poverty. The main outcome of the summit was the signing of the Millennium Declaration[2] [6]. With this Declaration, countries made a global commitment to reducing extreme poverty, establishing eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that would make it possible to achieve this goal by 2015. In this sense, the MDGs represent basic needs and fundamental rights that no human being should be without [7].

Of the eight Goals that were set, the second was dedicated to education, with the aim of achieving universal primary education by 2015. Together with this goal, indicators for monitoring progress were established: the net enrollment rate in primary education; the percentage of students starting first grade and reaching the fifth grade; and the literacy rate of people aged 15 to 24. These challenges could not be fully met by 2015, certain goals were not met, and many aspects remained unresolved.

2.4. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014): Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, was important in strengthening sustainable development. At the end of that year, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) [8], and appointed UNESCO as the lead agency for promoting the Decade and charged it with developing a Plan in which the role of education as a key driver for promoting sustainable development would be highlighted. The top priority of the Decade was to integrate the principles and values of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning in order to bring about behavioral changes that would ensure the integrity of the environment and the viability of the planet.

The International Implementation Scheme encourages and urges States to include measures to implement the Decade in their agendas and raise awareness in public opinion to bring about active participation in civil society. Education is considered one of the foundations of society, a tool without which neither the development of peoples nor the sustainability of the planet is possible. The Decade also emphasizes four fundamental means of achieving education for sustainable development: 1) improving access to quality basic education; 2) increasing citizens' awareness; 3) providing more information on the current situation; and 4) reorienting existing training.

Many international organizations related to the world of culture joined this UNESCO initiative, endorsing actions and research that promote education. In this way, it became clear

---

[1] Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990.

[2] Adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

that the goal of sustainable education was not a task for the UN and governments alone but for all sectors of society.

2.5. Agenda 2030: New York, USA, 2015

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly assessed the achievement of the MDGs [9]. Its conclusions were clear: although significant progress had been made on the proposed targets, the fact remained that hunger and poverty were still a reality for millions of human beings.

The expected results were also not achieved in the specific area of education. The EFA monitoring report published by UNESCO in 2015 [10], on the results of the Dakar Plan of Action showed the progress made during those 15 years in an exhaustive manner and emphasized the goals and objectives that are yet to be met. It is true that the number of children and adolescents leaving school was reduced between 2000 and 2015, and 34 million boys and girls were enrolled. Progress was also made in terms of gender parity in primary education. However, as pointed out in the report itself, progress was modest, there were still children who remained out of school and many of them did not even finish primary school.

In addition to these data, there was an increase in inequality in access to education, with the poor being the most disadvantaged. With these facts in view, and with the aim of joining forces, the Heads of State of 150 countries met at the Sustainable Development Summit 2015 to approve the 2030 Agenda [11], also called the Post-2015 agenda, since it came into being born with the aim of being the successor to the Millennium Agenda.

The fundamental objective was to reach the goals that were not met with the MDGs. This new agenda has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be met by 2030, consisting of 169 targets and approximately 300 indicators for them all. The development of the 2030 Agenda took more than two years, with the participation of civil society in its formulation. These goals are the result of what is surely the most inclusive consultation process in the history of the UN. In fact, one of the changes that this agenda represents with respect to the Millennium Agenda is that it was developed by the UN in collaboration not only with governments, but civil society, the private sector and political leaders also participated in shaping it.

Although this new agenda is universal and involves a commitment by the entire international community, it is not applied globally, since each country faces specific challenges in the achievement of true sustainable development in its own territory. Each one will set its own targets at the national level, in accordance with the SDGs established by the UN. Although these goals are not legally binding, all countries must assume responsibility for them and strive to follow up and meet them.

The goals of Agenda 2030 are: eradicate poverty and achieve food security; ensure health and well-being and quality education; achieve gender equality; ensure access to water, adequate sanitation and energy; promote economic growth and decent work for all human beings; responsible consumption; reduce inequalities worldwide; take urgent action against climate change; promote peace and facilitate access to justice.

It should be noted that, as the EFA monitoring report makes clear, both the MDGs and EFA itself did not have accountability mechanisms due to the resistance of certain governments that did not feel legally committed. However, the 2030 Agenda has reopened this debate and has joined forces to make it easier for States to have accountability. To this end, a specific platform was created to review and monitor the implementation of the SDGs and to promote and facilitate the exchange of information: the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, coordinated by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)[3].

Now, regarding education, Goal 4 of the SDGs states that its objective is to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. To achieve this, it is necessary to:

1) Substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially the least developed countries and small island developing states.
2) Ensure equal access for all men and women to quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university education.
3) Substantially increase the number of young people and adults who have the necessary skills, particularly technical and professional skills, to access employment, decent work and entrepreneurship.
4) Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access for vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations, to all levels of education and vocational training.
5) Ensure that all students acquire the theoretical knowledge and practical skills they need to promote sustainable development, through education for sustainable development and the adoption of sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development, among other means.

3. The Role of the University in Agenda 2030

Higher education was never explicitly involved in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as either a development goal in its own right or as a potential agent to address other development goals. The focus was on primary

---

[3] The establishment of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was mandated in 2012 by the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The Future We Want". The format and organizational aspects of the Forum are outlined in General Assembly resolution 67/290.

education and particularly access (not educational outcomes). Progressively, the MDGs and international development became a discipline of study by interested students and researchers. Universities produced research, data and analysis of the MDGs experience. It could be said that universities followed the MDGs from the outside, from an observer vantage point, in most cases [12].

According to the United Nations, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

Universities are the primary institutions for the dissemination of knowledge, through teaching, and for the generation of new knowledge, through research. These aspects make universities essential players in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals [13].

Agenda 2030 invites all actors, both public and private, to work together to solve the social, environmental and economic problems that threaten and endanger the sustainability of the planet. We are entering a new era in which not only governments and international organizations have to undergo a transformation towards a more just and equitable society, but all of society must be committed, and universities play a fundamental role in this.

With a leading role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, universities have been drivers of innovation, development and social welfare.

The SDG Agenda covers a wide range of social, economic and environmental challenges, and the roles, expertise and preparation particular to universities are key to overcoming and meeting these challenges. The key milestones for universities are:

1) Providing the knowledge and solutions that underpin the implementation of the SDGs: Universities drive technological and social progress through research, discovery, creation and adoption of knowledge. Universities attract and nurture talent and creativity and are key players in regional and national innovation systems. These roles are fundamental in helping the global community understand the challenges and opportunities of the SDGs and the way they interact; developing and implementing solutions; developing and evaluating policy options and pathways for transformation; and following up on the progress being made.

2) Creating SDG implementers: Universities build people with professional and personal skills and capacities. They have access to a significant number of young people and influence global development through students and alumni.

3) Mainstreaming SDG principles through governance, management and culture: By implementing SDG principles in their governance and management structure and philosophy, universities will directly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs within these broad spheres.

4) Provide cross-sectoral leadership in implementation: Universities are an essential part of society and must be neutral. Therefore, universities have the capacity and responsibility to guide, dialogue and lead the local, national and even international response.

In this context, Universities can organise, synergise and coordinate lobbying and advocacy activities to influence and shape public policy, particularly with regards to the SDGs. At the same time, governments and other key players should ensure that universities are central in discussions on Sustainable Development Goals. Universities have the capacity and capability to map, track and systematically document efforts to link research to policy and practice. They can establish meaningful frameworks and metrics for identifying, measuring and reporting on the right indicators in a valid way. Evaluating the impact of these efforts enables demonstration of commitment and progress, which are critical for learning and improvement, promoting transparency and sustaining partnerships [14].

4. Conclusions

The United Nations, with greater or lesser success, has not ceased in its struggle to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development for the entire planet. Concern for the state of education in the world has also been an issue of vital importance to the UN. With the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 [15], a long journey began towards making education for everyone a reality. The 2030 Agenda thus becomes a commitment to inclusive, equitable and quality education, promoting equal and lifelong learning opportunities for all people.

In order to obtain the sustainable development that is desired, we must be aware that changes must take place, in both lifestyles and development, as well as in knowledge and ways of thinking. These changes will only be possible through education that promotes responsibility and social awareness in everyone, and training that enables each person to make decisions that promote quality of life and sustainability.

The 2030 Agenda is a framework document in which governments, civil society, institutions, companies and universities must strive to achieve the progress needed to achieve a sustainable and developed world.

In this sense, the university is configured as a fundamental actor in making the well-being of all human beings and sustainable development a reality. Accordingly, every educational institution must implement actions that lead to this end. Therefore, educating and raising awareness of social responsibility and commitment is a primary duty of the university.

Higher Education must address the challenges of the 2030 Agenda and extend the values of sustainability to all its students and to society in general. But this will only be possible if the university is able to reflect on its responsibility in society.

References

[1] Brundtland Report, UNGA Resolution A/42/427 of 4 August 1987, New York.

[2] Report of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, A/Conf.151/26, 12 August 1992.

[3] UN (1993), Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, New York.

[4] UNESCO (1990), *World Declaration on Education for All*, New York.

[5] UNESCO (2000), Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All. Meeting *our Collective Commitments*, Paris.

[6] UN (2000), *United Nations Millenium Declaration,* New York.

[7] Villamil Jiménez, L. C., & Romero Prada, J. R. (2011). The millennium development goals (MDGs) of the United Nations: where are we and where are we going. Source of inspiration for prioritizing work from the academy. *Revista Lasallista de Investigación*, 8 (1), 126 - 135.

[8] UNESCO (2014), *Shaping the Future We WantUN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) Final Report,* Paris.

[9] UN (2015), The Millennium Development Goals Report, New York.

[10] UNESCO (2015), *Unpacking Sustainable Development Goal 4 Education 2030, Education Section*, Paris.

[11] UN (2015), *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,* New York.

[12] UN (2022), Universities: Getting ready for the SDGs, www.un.org/en/academic-impact/universities-getting-ready-sdgs.

[13] Diamadopoulus, Evan (2021), *What is the role of universities in fulfilling the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?* www.eurecapro.eu/what-is-the-role-of-universities-in-fulfilling-the-united-nations-sustainable-development-goals.

[14] El-Jardali, F., Ataya, N. & Fadlallah, R. *Changing roles of universities in the era of SDGs: rising up to the global challenge through institutionalising partnerships with governments and communities*. Health Res Policy Sys 16, 38 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-018-0318-9.

[15] UN (1945), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, New York.

Biography

Carlos Ignacio Gonzalez Arruti. Law Degree from Universidad Panamericana, Master and Doctor in International Public Law from the University of Navarra and Member of the National System of Researchers, Candidate Level. Professor of Theory of Political and Governmental Structures and International Human Rights Law at the University of Guadalajara. His main lines of research are: International Law and Environmental Law. Author of El Derecho internacional y el principio de precaución en el ámbito de la diversidad biológica: una especial atención a los Organismos Vivos Modificados (2016), Mexico City, Jurídicas UNAM. He is a Member of the Academic Body "Educational Management and Policies for Equity and Inclusion".

Anisse Jacinta Musalem Enriquez. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in International Commerce from the University of Guadalajara and a Master's Degree in Administration of Educational Institutions from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey. She is a professor at the University of Guadalajara. She is co-author of: "Internacionalizacion Universitaria. Retos actuales" (2019), Universidad de Guadalajara, and "Mujeres directivas en universidades: los retos institucionales ante la perspectiva de la interseccionalidad del género, las profesiones y las particularidades regionales" (2019), Revista Iberoamericana para la investigación y el Desarrollo Educativo. She is a Member of the Academic Body "Educational Management and Policies for Equity and Inclusion".