

# SDG4 – QUALITY EDUCATION

CONCISE GUIDES TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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CONCISE GUIDES TO THE UN SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS VOLUME 4

# SDG4 – QUALITY EDUCATION

Inclusivity, Equity and  
Lifelong Learning For All

BY

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
CAPE	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination
CSEC	Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate
DESD	Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EESD	Environmental Education for Sustainable Development
EFA	Education for All
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
GAP	Global Action Programme
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GSAT	Grade 6 Achievement Test
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
IAEG-SDG	Inter-agency Expert Group – Sustainable Development Goals
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOEYC	Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture
NEEAPSD	National Environmental Education Action Plan for Sustainable Development
NEEC	National Environmental Education Committee
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NRCA	Natural Resources Conservation Authority
NSC	National Standards Curriculum
ODI	Overseas Development Institute

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PATHE	Programme for Advancement in Health and Education
PIOJ	Planning Institute of Jamaica
ROSE	Reform of Secondary Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNSC	United Nations Statistical Commission
UWI	The University of the West Indies
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WEF	World Education Forum
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Sustainable development has been popularly defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, a conceptualisation emanating from the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The concept centralises four main pillars – social inclusion, environmental stewardship, economic prosperity and good governance (Sachs, 2015) – and concretises the possibilities for the harmonious co-existence of these pillars in order to ensure sustainable lifestyles for present and future generations. Another conceptualisation of sustainable development categorises the ‘interdependent and mutually reinforcing’ pillars according to the ‘3Ps’ – people, planet and prosperity (UNESCO, 2016, p. 4). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report succinctly articulates that ‘sustainable development is an organising principle for global development that supports the well-being

of both people and planet’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 3). While the concept itself has been contested and variously defined with emphasis on different imperatives, it is undoubtedly a critical developmental paradigm for the global community given the various social, environmental and economic challenges facing the world today.

In the year 2000, over 160 Heads of Government adopted the United Nations (UN) Millennium Declaration, a global partnership to reduce extreme poverty. This was viewed as a critical moral challenge and imperative to improve the life conditions of the most vulnerable groups on our planet Earth, and resulted in the adoption of the Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), each with specific quantitative targets and indicators. The MDGs sought to address the economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainable development outlining goals focussed on poverty and hunger (MDG One), education (MDG Two), gender equality (MDG Three), health issues such as child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS and other diseases (MDGs Four, Five and Six) and environmental sustainability (MDG Seven). Millennium Development Goal Eight focussed on a global partnership for development.

As a follow-up to the MDGs and as an outcome of three years of work by the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly over the period 2012–2015, in 2015, the global community adopted the post-2015 sustainable development agenda as outlined in *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, stating in the Preamble that ‘This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity’ (UN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda, therefore, sought to stand on the main pillars of sustainable development – social inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic development. Importantly, the 2030 Agenda comprises 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets which are meant to drive action up to 2030 in

various areas of critical importance for ‘people, planet and prosperity’. Among the aims of the SDGs are the ending of poverty and hunger, protection of human rights, promotion of gender equality, building of peaceful, just and inclusive societies and conservation of the planet’s resources.

These SDGs were established to help all countries achieve sustainability in development for their citizens and should result in an increase in equality among citizens. The achievement of the 169 targets by each country is no easy feat given the complexities embedded in people and planet and the disparities that exist between countries in the North and those in the South. Disparities exist in relation to economic power, productivity, standard of living and technological development, to name a few. In the Global North, countries possess more wealth and are therefore seen as superior in the decision-making process. As a result of their wealth, they are usually more focussed on global issues that seek to threaten their power and influence in relation to people, planet and prosperity. Countries in the Global South are more focussed on immediate localised needs regarding literacy and reduction of poverty and a search for the means of acquiring economic empowerment for citizens. It therefore means that, though both sets of countries believe that attaining these targets is important, the implementation of policies and practices to support their achievement will be based on the resources available. It is likely then that, although countries in the Global South have signed on to these agreements, they may be unable to achieve them because of lack of resources. In other words, these ideals set by countries in the North are likely to be more achievable by countries in the North rather than countries in the South. This creates a cycle of dilemma for countries in the Global South, even though they may possess the intellectual power, will and skills to achieve the

goals. It is therefore no secret that these power dynamics influence policies and practices in education.

Paradoxically, if the targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved, education must be the tool for eradicating the hegemonic influence of countries in the Global North. It therefore means that countries in the Global South must begin to define sustainable development for themselves, given their resources and develop their own strategic approach to achieving the 169 targets while using the lessons from countries in the Global North. This is achievable as there is a reduction in the knowledge divide between citizens of the North and South. The South, with fewer resources, has produced well-educated and competent individuals who are capable of leading and undertaking necessary changes to positively influence sustainable development (Guttal, 2016).

## 1.2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL FOUR

SDG Four aims to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. The emphasis under this goal is ‘universal coverage of quality education from pre-school through at least secondary education, and then on to more advanced skills training’ (Sachs, 2015, p. 487). The ambition of the goal is to build a world that facilitates a realisation of the full potential of each child in order that he/she can contribute to building a just, tolerant and inclusive world. A vision of an inclusive quality education will focus on the idea of education for all, particularly those groups who are considered to be vulnerable. Particular focus is on equal access to all and a life-wide and lifelong education. It therefore means that those who lead education in various countries must give attention to all forms of education, including both formal

and non-formal means. The *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*, adopted in May 2015 at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea, made the following statement:

*The renewed education agenda encapsulated in Goal 4 is comprehensive, holistic, ambitious, aspirational and universal, and inspired by a vision of education that transforms the lives of individuals, communities and societies, leaving no one behind. This 2030 Agenda attends to the unfinished business of the Education for All (EFA) goals and the education-related MDGs, while effectively addressing current and future global and national education challenges. It is rights-based and inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development, based on the principles of human rights and dignity, social justice, peace, inclusion and protection, as well as cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity and shared responsibility and accountability. (Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, p. 24)*

The Declaration also outlines several critical aspects to the commitments under SDG Four, including issues of access, equity and inclusion (with particular attention to gender equality) quality education and lifelong learning. Additionally, among the strategic approaches to achieving SDG Four, the Declaration focuses on mechanisms such as policies, partnerships, financial resources, equitable, inclusive and quality education systems and monitoring and review of progress. Further to all that falls under SDG Four, it is important to note that in addition to education being the focus of its own goal, education underpins all of the other SDGs and education targets are also included in a number of the other SDGs.

### 1.3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL FOUR AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Education, particularly the inclusive and quality education that is at the core of SDG Four, is critical to all of the other SDGs and sustainable development in general (Buckler & Creech, 2014). Education can open up employment opportunities for persons, breaking them out of cycles of unemployment and poverty; it can reduce societal inequalities and provide the knowledge and skills needed to live sustainable lifestyles. McKeown (2002, p. 12) writes:

*An educated citizenry is vital to implementing informed and sustainable development. In fact, a national sustainability plans can be enhanced or*

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#### **Table 1. Sustainable Development Goal Four Targets.**

Seven Outcome Targets

- 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
- 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.

**Table 1. (Continued)**

- 
- 4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
- 4.7 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.

Three Means of Implementation.

- 4a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.
- 4b 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.
- 4c 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.
- 

*limited by the level of education attained by the nation's citizens. Nations with high illiteracy rates and unskilled workforces have fewer development options.*

Thus, education can enable sustainable development. The UNESCO GEM Report also highlights two primary ways in which education supports sustainable development. Firstly,

‘education can facilitate changes in values, world views and behaviour at the level of the individual, the community and society as a whole’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 11). Secondly, ‘education can facilitate reflective or critical learning, knowledge and skills acquisition and greater agency to address complex sustainability issues, for example, how to create a sustainable school or a carbon-neutral city’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 11).

#### 1.4. SDG FOUR TARGETS

The targets of SDG Four are detailed in [Table 1](#) and comprise seven outcomes under the goal alongside three mechanisms for implementing the goal.