

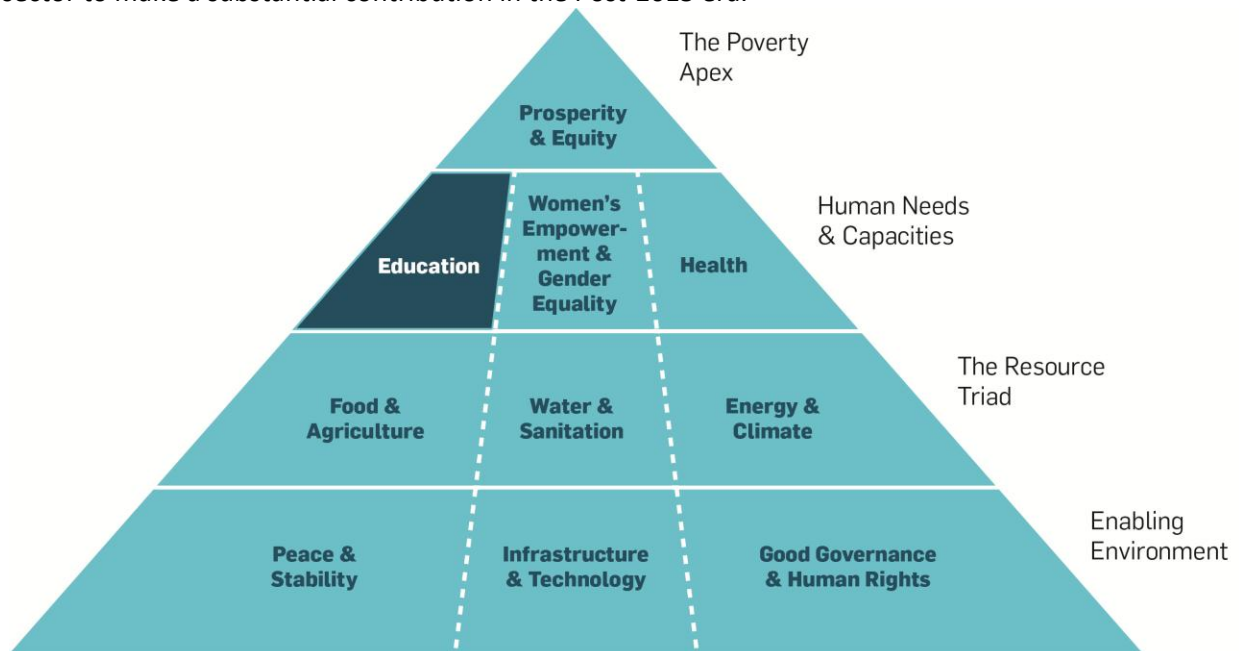
Post-2015 Agenda and Related Sustainable Development Goals Issue Focus: The Business Role in Better Education

Overview

As governments and policymakers work to develop the Post-2015 agenda, the international community is actively discussing the possible scope of potential sustainable development goals (SDGs). In surveys and dedicated consultations, businesses consistently singled out education as the first or second top priority for a the post-2015 world, and also one of the areas where they are best positioned to make a difference.

The United Nations Global Compact has been asked to bring private sector perspectives and action to this agenda, creating an historic opportunity to scale up and align business contributions to United Nations priorities. The overlap between public and private interest in sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear. The development of the Post-2015 agenda will require an unprecedented level of interplay between business, governments, civil societies and other key stakeholders. This public-private convergence and opportunity space is reflected in the Post-2015 Business Engagement Architecture, released at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in September 2013. The Architecture provides a resource and roadmap for how to work with the private sector in the new era.

Related to the Architecture, consultations conducted by the UN Global Compact with thousands of companies and stakeholders revealed that businesses committed to sustainability and ethics are energized by the prospect of a newly articulated set of world priorities—including clear goals and targets. From the input received, the UN Global Compact’s LEAD companies developed a series of recommended goals and priority areas (shown below) that they believe would also empower the private sector to make a substantial contribution in the Post-2015 era.



LEAD companies selected education as one of the ten main priority areas, suitable as a stand alone goal within a possible set of new SDGs. The goal and related targets are articulated as follows:

“Goal 4: Quality education for all, targets include:

- Every child completes primary education with basic literacy and numeracy, in schools with grade divisions, books, light, meals and sanitation.
- All secondary schools to facilitate computing skills, and a 50 per cent availability of digital facilities among primary schools without them.
- Increase the percentage of young adults with the skills needed for work.
- Achieve parity in enrollment and educational opportunities at primary, secondary and tertiary levels for girls and women.
- Curricula at primary level and at all levels above to include sustainable development concepts, with special emphasis on business schools.”

The purpose of this issue paper is to inform governments and policy makers of the responsible business community’s willingness to promote healthy lives regardless of where people live or their ability to pay, and to broadly involve the private sector in a campaign which is so much in their direct interest as well as of universal, global benefit.

Business Platforms for Action and Partnership

From the corporate perspective, learning does not occur only in educational institutions *per se*. It can and does take place in workplace and managerial levels, and is a key factor in improvement at the levels of the individual, the individual business and the society. Enterprises involved in global markets are often a conduit to advancement for their employees. Job training, employee opportunities for advanced education, apprenticeships for young people, and the full engagement of the capabilities of women are all areas where a real difference can be made.

Businesses are also motivated to coordinate with secondary and tertiary schools, so that graduates are prepared to fill job opportunities, with a business and social payoff in lower rates of unemployment and higher productivity.

Technology firms, for instance, are developing new software or educational systems that can be utilized over mobile phones for local and national school districts. On their own or in partnership with multilateral institutions, corporations are aiding teacher development through mentors and leadership development, including for groups facing significant barriers such as women. To build trust and brand quality in lower income neighborhoods, construction firms are contributing to improved schoolhouse infrastructure. Media and companies that sell games are developing curricula through associated non-profits, using their specific expertise.

The experiences of such companies are incorporated in a “Framework for Business Engagement in Education,” which makes the case that strong educational systems are good for business and good for society, and brings businesses together that want to contribute. The action plan was developed by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, and the UN Global Compact,.

College and university students hold the keys to the near-term future of the world, and will be making key decisions soon. As part of preparing for the future, sustainable development should be incorporated in curricula at all levels. An indication of how this could work in a critical arena of post-graduate schools is provided by a Global Compact initiative, launched and endorsed by the UN Secretary-General, on

Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). More than five hundred higher education business schools are working together on how to embed sustainability issues at the core of management and leadership education, providing a pool of ideas and thought leaders that can be tapped for future corporate sustainability.

Key Driver: Public Policy and Enabling Incentives

Public-private partnerships are common in areas such as health, agriculture and infrastructure. Governments can better enable them for education. Examples of areas where this can pay off include curriculum development, matching grants, providing expertise, and convening multi-sector meetings including business.

A programme working to strengthen partnerships in support of education and engage national and global leaders is the Global Education First Initiative. It advocates for the role of education in driving growth and development.

Governments should nurture not only national but also global citizenship value. A feeling of global solidarity is critical to ensuring that current and upcoming generations of learners gain the skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. Governments are encouraged to advocate for inclusion of Global citizenship values at all education levels (ie. from primary-level to higher-education and beyond). This will encourage global collaboration, interdisciplinary thinking, builds connections internationally, and reinforces peace and cooperation.

Accountability

In recent years, increasing numbers of companies are reinforcing sustainability efforts with public commitments in relation to accountability, responsibility, and transparency. To build trust and be considered a credible partner in the Post-2015 era, companies should be – and increasingly are – transparent about not only their social and environmental impacts, but as well how economic practices create or deplete value for society, and what they are doing to improve their performance.

At the same time, companies are being encouraged to publicly commit to longer-range sustainability objectives and goals including on education in order to better align their efforts and strategies in relation to the broad global sustainable development agenda. Participants of the UN Global Compact have made public commitments to the Global Compact's ten principles and are required to report annually on their sustainability efforts through a Communication on Progress (COP) report. Generally speaking, the UN Global Compact organizes its companies into three categories based on the level of COPs submitted. These levels – Learner, Active and Advanced – allow the UN Global Compact to encourage and challenge participants to use more sophisticated methodology and release more detailed COPs. Companies are increasingly rising to the challenge to report in a more advanced, detailed and transparent manner. This sort of accountability is crucial in instilling confidence in all stakeholders that companies are truly making meaningful progress towards global sustainability.

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