



*“Intersection between education and the Sustainable Development Goals”*

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*“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”*

**Malala Yousafzai** - I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban

## **1. Executive Summary**

Education has always been a part of the humanity's history, either being promoted within the individual's household by its own family or the formal education provided in schools. This essay will deal with education as a fundamental right guaranteed by international law and which must be assured by every State in a free and universal manner.

Initially, it is essential to understand the importance of strengthening education worldwide, considering it has only recently been conquered as a right and that it is not yet being promoted in an egalitarian and effective way, especially in developing countries. Therefore, this work will begin with a historical analysis of the development of education, passing through the movements that have led to a public and accessible education, its increasing use by the States as a form of social control, up until its affirmation as an International Human Right.

In tracing the historical process that has culminated in the establishment of the Right to Education, this essay will essentially deal with the new multidisciplinary and democratic perspective of education brought by the Sustainable Development Agenda. In doing so, I sought to emphasize the intersections of education with other Human Rights, as well as showing how promoting education can help in achieving other Sustainable Development Goals by forming a youth committed to this ideal.

Lastly, this essay will explore what is the role of the International Lawyer in promoting the Right to Education, considering the important leadership role it has on the International Law scenario. In this regard, the International Lawyer's Community must always be engaged in

promoting the Right to Education and every other Sustainable Development Goal in an effective, inclusive and accessible way.

## **2. The questions presented**

This essay will address the following questions:

- a. How does poverty affect education (and vice versa)?
- b. How can the Right to Education contribute to achieving other Sustainable Development Goals?
- c. What is the role of the International Lawyer in promoting the Right to Education and the other Sustainable Development Goals?

## **3. Statement of the facts**

Education has always been present in human history; however, it hasn't always been a right, much less accessible to all. In order to understand the importance of strengthening the Right to Education nowadays, especially with the aim of promoting all others Sustainable Development Goals in a global scale, it is necessary to analyze the historical processes that led to its establishment by International Law.

In Ancient Greece and Rome, education was mainly provided within the family scope, therefore, it varied according to the social class the individual belonged to. The State would promote religious, moral and civic education only to the extent where it would serve its own purposes, in a way to form citizens fully committed to the State and its traditions. In addition to that, education was provided in an excluding manner, in the terms of the limited conception of citizenship from the time, where, for example, women had no rights whatsoever, and therefore, had no access to education.

In the Middle Age, the Catholic Church had a monopoly on education, which was promoted exclusively to the clergy, excluding almost the entire population from accessing education. Moreover, education was based solely on religious dogmas.

The Modern Age was marked by the break with the absolutist monarchies and the birth of the conception of human rights with the bourgeois revolutions and the establishment of liberal states. This period was also the embryo of the concept of public education, which can be exemplified with the paradigmatic Act for the Relief of the Poor, from England in 1601, that established the obligation for local authorities to promote the apprenticeship of poor children.

Here, the relationship between education and freedom becomes evident. In authoritarian regimes, the lack of education of the general population served the purpose of maintaining the power and social structure of that State; once individual freedoms and rights began counteracting the government's power, education is naturally conceived as elementary for the formation of this new free society.

Despite the advances concerning education that took place in this period, it's important to highlight that there still wasn't a Right to Education in the way we conceive it today. Worldwide, public education was being implemented sparsely and timidly and there were still many philosophers that, worried by the political and social consequences of increasing the instruction level of the general population, held that the access to schooling should be limited to wealthier children and the poor who demonstrated exceptional skills<sup>1</sup>.

Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that the first national education systems were implemented in Europe and in the United States. However, the educational policy of these systems was shaped to meet the new needs brought by the social and economic changes of the Industrial Revolution, instead of seeking to universalize the Right to Education.

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<sup>1</sup> See EBY, Frederick (1961). *The Development of Modern Education*. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc.

In this sense, only primary school was promoted as free and mandatory, whereas secondary school, considered as preparatory for University, was still limited to the economic elite. Consequently, the education provided to the proletariat was not meant to equal them to the bourgeoisie and to reduce social inequality, mostly, it was restricted to a technical-professional qualification focused on forming industrial workers.

The growing control of education by the State gained even bigger importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the rise of totalitarian regimes throughout Europe, notoriously the fascist dictatorship in Italy and the Nazi government in Germany. Both regimes used their national education system to implement their ideologies in the country's youth in order to ensure their loyalty and submission to the State.

In fascist Italy, the government increased the duration of primary school and financed both public and private schools, but did so only to control the content of what was taught to the Italian youth. All text books had to be State approved and subjects as history and literature were taught to promote exacerbated nationalism, through tales of ancient Italian heroes and conveying the message of the necessary sacrifice of the citizens for their motherland.<sup>2</sup>

The Nazis also used their education system to disseminate their ideologies to the German youth. In this sense, biology classes, for example, became primarily a study of the Nazi's theory of the superiority of the Arian race, to the extent that Hitler himself stated that *"no boy or girl must leave school without having attained a clear insight into the meaning of racial purity and the importance of maintaining the racial blood unadulterated"*.<sup>3</sup>

With the end of World War II and the recognition of the horrors of the War and the Holocaust by the international community, the United Nations Organization was founded in

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<sup>2</sup> See NEHRT, Jennifer L. (2015). *The Model of Masculinity: Youth, Gender, and Education in Fascist Italy, 1922-1939. Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current*. Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com.br/&httpsredir=1&article=1064&context=honors201019> [Accessed May 12, 2019]

<sup>3</sup> See WILLIAMS. David G (2015). *The Hitler Youth, Gristle for the Reich's Mil*. E-book: Lulu Press, Inc.

1945 by 51 countries, mainly to promote peace amongst nations and Human Rights. The UN's most important document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was approved by the General Assembly in 1948, in which finally the Right to Education was established as a fundamental Human Right<sup>4</sup>, to be promoted by the States as free and compulsory at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.

Since the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the access to education and the indices of children not enrolled in school or of illiteracy had shown improvements, however, many advances were still necessary to fully realize this right.

Recognizing the need to strengthen the Right to Education, amongst other Human Rights from the Universal Declaration that were not being fully respected, as an important measure to fight poverty worldwide, the UN's General Assembly, in its 55<sup>th</sup> session, held in 2000, approved unanimously the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In this declaration, States collectively assumed the responsibility to achieve eight goals until 2015, named Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in which the goal 2 was to achieve universal primary education.

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, held in 2012, was the moment at which the international community recognized that the MDGs were not enough and that the fight against poverty and for Sustainable Development was far from over. As a consequence, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, held in 2015, the 193 UN Member States adopted the Agenda 2030, a Sustainable Development agenda which included 17 new goals, named the Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>4</sup> Article 26, UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

The goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals is quality education, and its targets go far beyond the mere promotion of formal and technical education, from which it can be concluded that the Right to Education has gained a new broader and multidisciplinary perspective. In this sense, matters such as environmental and human rights education, gender equality and accessibility for people with disabilities began to compose this new democratic conception of education.

#### **4. The argument**

Starting from the historical construction and evolution of the Right to Education here presented, this essay will now address the following questions:

##### **How does poverty affect education (and vice versa)?**

First, it is necessary to determine what the concept of poverty here adopted is. Commonly, poverty is taken simply as low income; however, this essay adopts poverty in its multidisciplinary approach, in which it is recognized mainly that poverty is the deprivation of the individual's many capacities, not only its low income<sup>5</sup>. Education is undoubtedly an essential capacity for the full development of an individual and, therefore, the impacts of poverty and social inequality in education (and vice versa) cannot be ignored.

So much is that the UN's Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), in order to analyze the advances made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals worldwide, especially goal 1 – to end poverty in all its forms – developed the 2018 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)<sup>6</sup> to measure acute

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<sup>5</sup> See SEN. Amartya (2001). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> See ALKIRE. Sabin. JAHAN. Selim (2018). *The New Global MPI 2018: Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals Occasional paper*. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018\\_mpi\\_jahan\\_alkire.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_mpi_jahan_alkire.pdf) [Accessed May 26, 2019]

multidimensional deprivations, in which education was taken as one of the three dimensions of poverty.

Once these initial considerations are put, it is important to highlight the undeniable difficulty many people still face today in accessing education, especially in developing countries. Just to illustrate, the out of school rate in primary age is 17% higher in low-income countries compared to high-income countries, and this variation becomes even more significant in the upper secondary age, where the difference is of 53%<sup>7</sup>.

As a result, children from countries of low and lower-middle income represent 80% of the 617 million children and adolescents who are not learning enough to meet minimum proficiency levels, even though in terms of global population, these children represent only 60% of the school-aged population<sup>8</sup>. Given the data presented, it is impossible not to question why such a considerable part of the global population of children still has so many difficulties in accessing their right to education.

From the economic point of view, when state policy seeks only economic growth unrelated to the reduction of social inequalities, any progress or improvement will only reach the richest part of the population. A State's economic policy should seek to invest in public policies such as education, health and housing, in order to allow its entire population to equally grow and access their fundamental rights, and only then that Sustainable Development will be effectively implemented.

Besides that, investments in education can have a direct influence on the country's economic growth, considering that a better qualified population earns more money, produces more knowledge and can help in the development of new markets, besides having an overall better life quality. It has already been shown, for example, that every dollar invested in

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<sup>7/ 8</sup> Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Fact Sheet n° 48 (February 2018). Available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs48-one-five-children-adolescents-youth-out-school-2018-en.pdf> [Accessed May 26, 2019]



additional year of schooling in low-income countries generates earnings and health benefits of ten dollars<sup>9</sup>, and that each additional year of schooling may increase the country's gross domestic product by 0.37%<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, the international community must increasingly contribute to the implementation and financing of quality public education, especially in developing countries, in order to allow equal growth and opportunities for the most vulnerable populations worldwide.

### **How can the Right to Education contribute to achieving other Sustainable Development Goals?**

As stated above, education is essential in fighting poverty and social inequality, but in order to achieve sustainable development in a broader way, it should not be restricted to a purely formal and technical education. Schools should empower kids with information about their rights, health and the environment, to educate not only students, but citizens compromised with sustainable development.

This question does not intend to analyze in an exhaustive way any influence that education may have in all the Sustainable Development Goals, only to highlight its importance in relation to some issues of extreme social relevance.

For a start, education can be an extremely effective weapon in the fight against gender-based violence. This has been recognized by the Declaration on the Elimination of violence against Women, in its article 4, subheading “j”, which determines States must *adopt all appropriate measures, especially in the field of education, to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women and to eliminate prejudices, customary practices and*

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<sup>9</sup> Source: International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (2016). *The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world report*. Available at: [https://report.educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Learning\\_Generation\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://report.educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Learning_Generation_Full_Report.pdf) [Accessed May 26, 2019]

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO (2011). *Education Counts: Toward the Millennium Development Goals report*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000190214> [Accessed May 26, 2019]

*all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes and on stereotyped roles for men and women*<sup>11</sup>.

Firstly, education can help women to have access to skilled jobs rather than informal and poorly paid jobs; in this sense, women with secondary education may expect to make almost twice as much, and women with tertiary education almost three times as much as women with no education<sup>12</sup>.

In addition, sexual education provided in schools may help young girls to identify sexual abuse and to seek help and report it; The school's performance in this regard is of extreme importance, considering that 15 million female teenagers aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime and amongst them, 9 in 10 report being victimized by someone close or known to them<sup>13</sup>, proving sexual education cannot be entrusted solely to the family environment.

Besides that, woman with access to education and, therefore, to the job market and to information about their health, have a better chance of becoming independent and of making their own choices about their lives and their bodies. In this particular, it should be noted that by each additional year of secondary education, women have their chances of being married before the age of 18 reduced by at least 5%<sup>14</sup>, and women with post-primary education are five times more likely to be educated on the topic of HIV and AIDS<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, UN, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> Source: World Bank, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, the Global Partnership for Education, and the Malala Fund (2018). *Missed opportunities: the high cost of not educating girls report*. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/missed-opportunities-high-cost-not-educating-girls> [Accessed May 26, 2019]

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF (2017). *A familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*. Available at: [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/EVAC-Booklet-FINAL-10\\_31\\_17-high-res.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/EVAC-Booklet-FINAL-10_31_17-high-res.pdf) [accessed May 26, 2019]

<sup>14</sup> Source: World Bank (2017). *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report*. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530891498511398503/pdf/116829-WP-P151842-PUBLIC-EICM-Global-Conference-Edition-June-27.pdf> [accessed May 26, 2019]

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF (2000). *The "education vaccine" against HIV*. Available at: [https://www.tc.columbia.edu/cice/pdf/25676\\_3\\_1\\_Vandemoortele\\_Delamonica.pdf](https://www.tc.columbia.edu/cice/pdf/25676_3_1_Vandemoortele_Delamonica.pdf) [Accessed May 26, 2019]

Education also plays an important role on reducing prejudice and inequalities faced by people with disabilities worldwide. The Right to Education for the people with disabilities and the obligation for the States to promote it is ensured by the article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>16</sup>.

In this matter, it is important to note that the out of school index for children with disabilities in low and lower-middle income countries is still very high: around 40% of children with disabilities are out of school at primary level and 55% at lower secondary level<sup>17</sup>. This means that more accessibility in education could result on greater chances for children with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society, in addition to educating all other children to give up on their prejudices and to respect the individualities and special needs of every child.

Lastly, education in schools should also aim at transmitting awareness and a sense of responsibility on matters such as environmental preservation and responsible consumption. Basic concepts such as recycling or knowledge on issues such as global warming or pollution may be may be essential to assure that the future generations will be more responsible, conscientious and caring with the environment.

That being said, relevance of formal and technical education remains undisputed, however, it is of the utmost importance that schools are also a safe and empowering place for every child to become aware of their rights and duties as citizens committed to Sustainable Development, by promoting equality and respect for diversity and enhancing the importance of the environment.

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<sup>16</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Source: UNICEF (2016). *Towards Inclusive Education: the impact of disability on school attendance in developing countries*. Available at: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IWP3%20-%20Towards%20Inclusive%20Education.pdf> [Accessed May 26, 2019]

## **What is the role of the International Lawyer in promoting the Right to Education and the other Sustainable Development Goals?**

In addition to the role of upholding the Right to Education in cases where it is disrespected, the International Lawyer has an important role as an educator himself. As part of the limited group of people who have full knowledge of International Law, especially on the laws who deal with Human Rights and extremely relevant issues such as Sustainable Development, the International Lawyer has the opportunity to make this knowledge more accessible to those who need it most and yet are the ones who have least access to this kind of information.

Therefore, in addition to acting in a repressive manner in relation to the violation of rights, it is essential that the International Lawyer's community should engage with preventive activities, making sure people are aware of their own rights and know when they have to seek professional assistance to ensure them.

In this sense, when writing informative texts with accessible language and content, practicing advocacy to ensure effective public policies or legislation on Human Rights or by involving the general population in the process of realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, the International Lawyer understands and fulfills its primary leadership role in making Human Rights and Sustainable Development more accessible and effective.

### **5. Conclusion**

The Right to Education as it is currently conceived is a social and humanitarian important achievement in view of the historical process of exclusion and control that preceded it. Nowadays, education requires a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach, in order to fully and effectively realize the Sustainable Development Agenda.

Poverty negatively affects the access to education and equal opportunities, whereas education has a direct impact not only in economic growth, but also in reducing significantly social inequalities. Therefore, investments in education, especially in developing countries, should be seen as an absolute priority to enable Sustainable Development.

In addition to that, education is essential in ending gender-based violence and discrimination, considering its positive effects in relation to improving women incomes, reducing child marriage and enabling sexual education and thus, empowering girls to identify and report sexual abuse. Education is also elementary to fully integrate people with disabilities in the society and also to raise awareness to future generations on environmental preservation and responsible consumption.

Lastly, the International Lawyer, besides advocating for the Right to Education, has role himself as an educator, with the function of making information and knowledge on Human Rights more accessible to the general population. By doing so, the International Lawyer assumes its leadership position in making the Sustainable Development Agenda more effective.