

# How should, could higher education be better involved in education-related MDGs?

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If it were up to me, I would have entitled my presentation: How must, can higher education be better involved in education-related Millennium development goals, the MDGs in short?

But since the issue remains quite hypothetical for now, for the purpose of our discussion and reflection, I have used should and could.

Let's start with some definitions and first of all let me remind you of the two MDGs I am referring to as education-related.

- The first one is, quite obviously, the MDG 2: "Achieve universal primary education –ensure that children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling".
- The second one is less obvious at least when reading it without its subtitle, it is MDG 3: "Promote gender equality and empower women" – and subtitle: "Eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education".

If the third goal through its subtitle is explicitly linked to the higher education sector, one can argue that the link is unclear in the second. But articulating more clearly how they are linked is the overall purpose of my presentation, and we will come back to it later.

The second definition relates to higher education at a time when the sector is growing exponentially in size and has diversified tremendously, expanding and/or adapting its missions to better serve its local, regional and often global environment. In my presentation, the term higher education covers the whole sector including all types of higher education institutions and research. Even though individuals from the higher education sector

are involved in MDGs, as consultants or because they are part of an association working in the field, the higher education sector in its singularity and entirety is not. And this involvement of the higher education sector is, in my opinion, a key way forward to meeting the MDGs that is not covered by individual participation.

Now why do we, at the IAU, think that higher education – to get back to my original title – should and could be better involved in education-related MDGs, even the one uniquely covering primary education? Let me outline just some of the most important reasons, I am sure you can think of others.

- Initial and ongoing teacher training – or at least the training of teacher trainers – is often the responsibility of higher education;
- Faculties of education are conducting research and providing expertise support on pedagogy, curriculum, learning outcomes, evaluation and assessment, educational planning and management, etc.;
- Other faculties are conducting research in topics, such as neurology, sociology, demography, that have direct and indirect consequences on all education levels and can equally address specific basic education issues;
- Higher education institutions are the best place to undertake multidisciplinary research that is often the stimulus of innovation nowadays;
- Achieving MDGs impacts higher education, starting with growing numbers of secondary school graduates and women reaching higher education;
- Quality higher education relies on quality education at prior levels of education;
- Higher education is the threshold where future decision-makers and policy-makers generally receive training and are exposed to principles; being made aware of values underlining MDGs will inherently impact on the content and form of future decisions;
- Higher education institutions more than ever have been called to act upon their social responsibility;

- Education should not be developed sector by sector but analyzed as a whole. It does not mean that a country should not focus more on the most important part of education that is basic education than another but that it should get a general picture of the system to organize its development in the best possible way.

These are then the reasons why higher education should and could bring in its support to the attainment of the education-related MDGs, including the one that do not relate directly to higher education, and why higher education is as linked to MDG 2 as to MDG 3.

Quite logically, the International Association of Universities (IAU), being an international association representing more than 600 higher education institutions from 130 countries, including countries concerned by the MDGs in direct and immediate ways, has always been interested in the relationship between the higher education sector and these education-related goals. IAU has often proclaimed that education needs to be viewed in a holistic manner – as an inter-connected system. Accordingly, the IAU has managed two projects related to the topic:

- a pilot on “Higher education and research to meet Education for All (EFA) goals”, (the provision of primary education and gender equality in education - MDG2 and 3 - are the 2 areas where the MDGs overlap with the EFA agenda) a feasibility study that focused more specifically on inter-university projects in the matter with the following findings:
  - Higher education has a major role to play in EFA;
  - There are many possible areas of research which could be developed in relation to EFA and its implementation;
  - There is a need for more dissemination of research results; good practices, etc...
  - The research agenda should be set in dialogue with all the stakeholders;
  - Donors should be mobilized around existing and identified research gaps;
  - Ways should be developed to better disseminate, inform and mobilize;
  - EFA should be made more understandable in the academic research community;

and recommendations made to and accepted by the IAU:

- Develop a database, website or portal, bringing together existing material on the intersection of EFA and HE as well as links to other websites of organizations, particularly UNESCO, that are contributing to this effort. Information/links will include material on teacher education and development, use of ICTS in teacher training, status and conditions of service, HIV& AIDS education etc. Ensure that such an information resource addresses the conceptual/jargon gap that may exist between UN EFA programme terminology and actors within the higher education and research community engaged in related activities on the ground.
- In order to raise awareness and contribute to collaboration in this issue area, collect and disseminate good practice examples, including those that link education and economic development.
- Turn the participants to the Maputo Experts Seminar into a reference group so that IAU, in its follow-up efforts can benefit from continued input and steering towards the next stages. The reference group can also act as a relay to and a catalyst for building a wider community.
- Create a consortium of organizations and institutions, worldwide and with regional nodes to take on 2 to 3 major initiatives in 'niche' research areas linked to the EFA goals where knowledge gaps exist, for example on the effectiveness and impact of various teacher training approaches.
- IAU act as a global convener to facilitate an on-going discussion and provide an opportunity for dialogue between a broader network of organizations and various actors, including policy makers, by organizing an international conference on the intersection between HE and research and EFA. Such a conference would bring together ministry representatives, HEIs, research organizations, associations as well as teachers' organizations, students, school principals etc. Such a multi-stakeholder group could articulate a vision for this intersection.

These recommendations served as the basis for the development of the project currently under way entitled "Stengthening linkages for improved education: Higher education and research working for EFA and MDGs" on which the activities and outcomes described in my presentation are built.

And the first outcome is the confirmation of the participation and work of the higher education sector on subjects related to the two education-related MDGs.

Here are some examples:

MDG 2: Universal Primary Education - Countries: Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda

Initiator: Institute for Educational Development, Aga Khan University, Pakistan

### **Professional Development Centres**

The institute's overall mandate is to build institutional capacity in education in developing countries. It conducts research, delivers pre- and in-service teacher training and teacher educators, training for educational administrators and has developed Professional Development Centres (PDC) as part of its outreach services.

Setting up these Centres across Pakistan and in Eastern Africa, this initiative contributes to the professionalism of teachers and integrates practice, theory and research. Each Centre is unique focusing on the local context and development needs while providing active links to a network of teachers and schools.

<http://www.aku.edu/ied/outreach/pdc.shtml>

MDG 2: Universal Primary Education – Country: Bhutan

Partners: St. Francis Xavier University, Canada; College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan

### **Leadership for Quality Basic Education**

In response to a shortage in teachers and school administrators, caused by a rapid increase of students, the Ministry of Education in Bhutan worked with St. Francis Xavier University (STFX) to strengthen school leadership for quality basic education. The project's two goals were to: (1) build capacity of Bhutanese headmasters by offering them a graduate degree in Educational Leadership at St. Francis Xavier University; (2) develop and implement modules and other materials for an Education Leadership degree at the College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan and to 'nationalise' the contents of the RUB graduate education programme. This component was carried in close collaboration between STFX and RUB faculty through ongoing team visits.

[http://oraweb.aucc.ca/pls/cupid/show\\_project\\_e?project\\_no\\_in=18/S61268-411/G](http://oraweb.aucc.ca/pls/cupid/show_project_e?project_no_in=18/S61268-411/G)

MDG 3: Gender Parity and Women Empowerment - Country: Costa Rica

Initiator: Centre for Research in Women's Studies, Universidad de Costa Rica

**Research in Women's Studies**

This Centre has collaborated with universities worldwide on research projects to strengthen its capacities to better train professionals in public policy and administration, health-care, law, media, and social work regarding gender issues and to design cost-effective programmes. Training is also provided to higher education personnel to develop inclusive and non-sexist curriculum. It has developed a graduate program on gender and intra-family violence and produced resource materials, positioning the Centre to further develop culturally sensitive Spanish training models and materials that can be applied throughout Latin America.

<http://www.ucr.ac.cr/>

MDG 3: Gender Parity and Women Empowerment – Country: Zimbabwe

Initiator: Women's University of Africa

**Women's University**

Inaugurated in 2002, the Women's University of Africa has a dual mission: (1) to address gender parity in accessing higher education; (2) to promote gender equality by contributing to the critical mass of female graduates who will go on to fulfil leadership, social, political and economic roles.

This University was developed in partnership with the University of Zimbabwe and the University of Swaziland. It offers undergraduate programmes in the fields of agriculture, education, gender studies management, psychology and reproductive health and houses a farm to develop its animal sciences programme.

<http://www.womensuniversityinafrica.org/>

MDG 3: Gender Parity and Women Empowerment – Countries: Kenya, South Africa

Partners: Dept of Education Foundations and Policy Studies, University of London, UK; Catholic University of East Africa, Kenya; University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa; University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

#### **Gender, Education and Global Poverty Initiatives**

This 3-year initiative aims to examine which activities work best to advance gender equality in and through schooling in contexts of poverty. It focuses in particular on exploring implementation strategies, interpretations by various stakeholders, constraints and possible solutions. Case studies focus on Kenya and South Africa, engaging several stakeholders (national and provincial government bodies, rural primary schools, and NGOs.). This initiative is built upon an earlier project, Gender, Education and Development: Beyond Access which had brought on board communication and media experts.

<http://ioewebsserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=16965>

These projects are just a few examples from the research we have undertaken to identify what was being done by whom and where. They will be included in a database that is currently being developed by IAU on which HEIs will be able to document their activities in the field. The database will be fully searchable (by country; region; MDG; keywords; name of expert, all fields, etc.) by all interested persons.

These projects provide concrete proof that the higher education sector is involved in activities aimed at reaching the education-related MDGs. Yet, their visibility is almost equal to zero at the level of higher education institutions, at the level of other stakeholders and actors in the area, and at the international level.

- Who knows which higher education institutions have developed a project on the assessment of Sub-Saharan numeracy and literacy, a quite important project now that the quality of basic education is placed high on international organizations' agendas? (Let me remind you: University of Liverpool, UK, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, Malawi Institute of Education and University of Zambia).

- How does one can take into account and analyze the results of prior research and possibly make substantial savings (which is all the more important in a context of a global economic crisis) while the activities of the higher education sector in the field are invisible?
- Who knows whether the higher education sector could do even more since quite little is known about existing or ongoing activities?
- What can be expected from a sector which by being quite frequently overlooked in the debate and reflection about MDGs and related events and plans, might not totally understand the potential for its involvement and thus quite logically, not as involved as it could be?

Yet, we at IAU think that meeting the double objective of raising awareness of the higher education sector on its possible contribution to education-related MDGs on the one hand, demonstrating concretely to other stakeholders that the higher education sector on the other hand can actually provide useful and invaluable input in education-related MDGs to attain MDGs primary goal, that is to say: the reduction of poverty everywhere.

So let's have a look at which departments within a HE institution could help. It is clear from the examples provided earlier that the higher education contribution is and should not be limited to teacher training, as it is often the case.

- Faculties of education and teacher training institutes for the obvious reason that if teachers are not well and adequately trained and if the training programmes are not adapted to the specificities of each country, they cannot teach in ways best appropriated locally;
- Schools of medicine with, for example, neurobiology research associated to pedagogy, can definitely enhance achievement at school;
- Engineering schools can be solicited in the development of ICT-based products that fit the needs of basic school children, help teachers in their work especially in countries where the teacher-student ratio is high, or for the improvement of the learning environment which is so important for good training results;

- All Faculties of Social Sciences could also be engaged: psychology; linguistics; sociology; demography, etc. research are known to be of importance to pedagogical research and consequently can also help in meeting MDGs.

I will end this non-exhaustive listing by adding that pluri- or multi-disciplinary research, which can and is easily done at the higher education level, could and should be used more. The answer to these goals is not simple and unique but multiple and variable implying quite often the intervention of different sectors of expertise according to the needs and the social-economic and cultural profile of the country where the initiative is implemented.

But after this examination into which faculties can have a say in the topic, let's examine HEIs' missions. And to all of you, it will clearly appear that:

- the first mission of HEIs: teaching and learning is directly linked to: Initial and ongoing teacher training; Teacher educator training; Training of educational administrators and MoE staff; Student development; etc
- the second mission of HEIs: research is also directly linked to: teaching; teaching resources; student learning; early childhood development; gender and equity; educational quality; etc
- the third mission of HEIs: community service is again directly linked to: Distance learning programmes; Non-formal education; Adult education; Hygiene and health education; Awareness raising campaigns; Special education programmes; etc.

And that all these examples are directly or indirectly linked to the attainment of the objectives of universal primary education and gender equality.

So what has to be done next? What are the ways forward?

At the international level, meetings have been held on the topic and some people have already argued and advocated for a better inclusion of the higher education sector in education-related MDGs. Apparently, with no great success until now, at least internationally.

Are we completely wrong in advocating for more HEI intervention in education-related MDGs?

I do not think so, for all the reasons enumerated above. But also to mobilize the higher education community by showcasing what they are already doing. The ways forward could be, as developed in the IAU project, the promotion of a two-pronged activity combining:

1. Information tools to improve and increase information sharing and raise awareness through:
  - a. better information for HEIs on education-related MDGs;
  - b. more visibility for research done at the higher education level as it pertains to the implementation of education-related MDGs;
  - c. the promotion of a better inclusion of the higher education sector in education-related MDGs policies and implementation programmes.
  
2. Capacity building activities to enhance the contribution of the higher education sector to the education-related MDGs by:
  - a. providing a forum for sharing of best practices in education;
  - b. promoting and facilitating inter-sectoral and multi stakeholder dialogue;
  - c. providing collaborative tools for academic and administrative staff to better serve education-related MDGs;
  - d. fostering increased North-South-South cooperation in the matter.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that partnerships between the higher education sector and other sectors have not been developed at all, because at the national level, several countries have indeed developed tools to better involve all stakeholders in the development of policies and activities for the attainment of the education-related MDGs locally. My point is only that the potential for doing more is tremendous.

Education-related MDGs – Country: Botswana

Initiator: Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, Botswana

**Advisory Committee on Education**

This initiative addressed the communication gap between the Ministry of Education and the University of Botswana by implementing a simple mechanism by which to exchange information and views on matters of common interest. An informal Advisory Committee on Education, composed of senior university and MOE personnel, was setup to meet on an occasional basis, chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Education. Being advisory in nature, it encouraged open and frank discussion. Today, the committee meets on a regular basis and issues tables to encompass EFA goals and MDGs.

This type of initiative should be the rule rather than the exception at all levels: national; regional; international; for development agencies and other associations working in the field of education.

Allow me to end by saying that even if I've deliberately restricted the scope of this paper to education-related MDGs, I would advocate, if I had the time, that the higher education sector could and should be better involved in the activities for the attainment of all MDGs.

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