

Chapter 6

An Inclusive Knowledge Society and a Lack of Progress in SDG Implementation

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ABSTRACT

There is a glaring gap between the declared UN Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of these goals in different parts of the world. Of the many missed goals, targets, and indicators, it is necessary to point out the lack of progress in SDG 4 (quality education). Lack of progress in quality education will affect not only the current unequal developments around the world but also future unequal developments. The digital divide is one such key indicator, although certainly not the only crucial one. The discussion in this chapter will be devoted to how to improve quality education, access to education, and the educational infrastructure to reduce inequalities in education, as well as the digital divide.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Agenda was adopted in a substantially different international context in 2015. World leaders and the UN certainly could not anticipate the subsequent international crises and conflicts and the rapid deterioration of climate change and the environment. They could not have anticipated a costly and chaotic energy transition, the pandemic, and recent

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wars. These negatively affected the possibility of reaching the proclaimed goals and targets by 2030.

The summit dedicated to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the autumn of 2023 was clear. The report by international experts pointed out that only 15% of the SDGs have been reached. There is a possibility that some declared goals are not only off target but that they will be even further off target in 2030 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023) . In other words, there needs to be more progress in certain key areas of international development. Hence, in some key areas of international development, global inequalities are deepening instead of diminishing.

These introductory points are not meant to suggest that the global development agenda in the form of the SDGs should be abandoned but that the international community, the national governments, and their regions should conceptually rethink the framework of development currently in place.

It would be tempting to claim that the international development agenda is stalled due to unpredicted major international disruptions, such as the pandemic and its slow recovery or the consequences of ongoing wars. This claim is undoubtedly correct, but this is not the whole narrative. Namely, the overall direction of international development was inadequate before major international crises, such as the emergence of pandemics. Many of the roots of unbalanced and inequitable development were in place even before the adoption of the SDGs and even before the previous Millennium Agenda was adopted.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with launching and implementing globally sustainable goals. It is laudable that the goals are rather ambitious, comprehensive, and far-fetched. What is more problematic is that the declared goals are separate from the necessary resources, tools, and instruments, especially with the clear division of responsibility for implementing such goals.

Methods and Structure of the Analysis

The method of the present analysis will be normative and conceptual. It will be based on the normative and critical evaluation of the proclaimed goals and empirical research evaluating the causes and consequences of the gap between the proclaimed goals and the inadequate implementation of the proclaimed goals in different parts of the world. The empirical method will be based on comparative research available from international reports, studies, and empirical data. In the final part of the

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