The New Era of Global Education Governance

By Katharina E. Höne

There is no alternative to working together and using collective power to create a better world.
Commission on Global Governance

We call for strong global and regional collaboration, cooperation, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the education agenda.
Incheon Declaration, paragraph 13

This brief focuses on global education governance. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this is an important topic for both normative and empirical reasons. On the empirical side, we can observe how the effects of globalization are felt in the education sector: education policies have implications beyond state borders and actors in the education sector operate across domestic boundaries. Normatively, we can observe how we have now reached an era of global education norms, enshrined in SDG 4 for example, that are unique in their breadth and depth and require global action for their implementation.

It is important to stress from the outset that global governance is not the same as world government. Rather, it describes a set of agreed-upon norms, goals, and rules that are supported by formal and informal institutions and mechanisms of assessment and implementation. Global governance of education has only recently become part of scholarly and practitioner interest. This brief seeks to shed light on the current state of global education governance and implications for education diplomacy.

Key Points

- We already live in a world of global education governance. Education diplomacy is the process that contributes to the global governance structure and reforms and refines it.
- Evidence of global education governance can be found in the development of a global framework of norms and goals. SDG 4 offers the broadest and most detailed framework to date.

- A global assessment and monitoring framework for the new global education goal, SDG 4, results from processes such as the Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators.
- Further support for the argument that global education governance is a development to be reckoned with can be found in the development and refinement of legal instruments and regulations and the deepening of new forms of public-private partnerships.
- Calls for devoting greater financial resources to education, especially in a development context, have been made, but firm commitments and the institutional context are still developing.

Education Diplomacy and Global Governance

It is useful to start with a note of clarification regarding global governance and education diplomacy. The term “global governance” has been around for almost two decades. The seminal definition of the Commission on Global Governance issued in the report Our Global Neighbourhood is worth repeating here:

Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest.
The commission’s definition was prompted by two developments. On the one hand, the end of the Cold War had sparked an unparalleled enthusiasm and opportunities for international cooperation. On the other hand, globalization, driven by market liberalization, was becoming a force that demanded recognition and responses from decision-makers. Hence, global governance was at once a normative aspiration and an emerging reality of international relations.

The process of negotiating the SDGs is the best current example of this process. In fact, the SDGs are important for two reasons. SDG 4 sets global aims for education in the 2030 development agenda. At the same time, SDG 17 calls for better global governance structures by focusing on “strengthen[ing] the means of implementation and revitaliz[ing] the global partnership for sustainable development.” In the remainder of this brief, five key aspects of global education governance will be highlighted in more detail: common norms and aims, global assessment and monitoring, legal instruments and regulations, questions of financing, and new forms of cooperation.

**Common Norms and Aims**

Global governance is, first and foremost, about norms. Without agreed-upon norms, global governance is neither functional nor thinkable. The story of a global set of education norms and aims starts, in effect, with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The right to education is enshrined in article 26.

Again, it is important to stress that global governance is very different from world government. Keeping the above definition in mind, we can, in brief, describe global governance as the management of common affairs through cooperation based on formal institutions, regimes, and informal arrangements. While global governance has not been regularly applied to education, there is a growing tendency to frame global education initiatives and processes in this way. The 2014 NORRAG working paper by Kenneth King and Robert Palmer is one attempt to give this discussion greater prominence.

It is also important to clarify the relation between global education governance and education diplomacy. Drawing on scholarly work in the area of health diplomacy, we can think of the relationship between governance and diplomacy in the following way. Diplomacy is about the articulation and negotiation of interests, and governance structures evolve where these interests converge sufficiently. The role of diplomacy is to find these points of agreement and flesh out the details of a governance structure that can either continue on an informal basis or be institutionalized. Hence, education diplomacy has the crucial role of bringing about the global education governance structure and working on its evolution based on negotiations between various interests.
Principle 7 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) reaffirms this right by stating that every child is “entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages.” The Convention on the Rights of the Child, entered into force in 1990, makes this a legal obligation in article 28.7

While these declarations and the convention firmly place the right of all children to primary education on the global agenda, a further evolution of this norm has occurred that deepened and broadened it into several global aims. Two processes are important to acknowledge and understand in this regard: the Education For All (EFA) movement and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs.

The birthplace of the EFA movement is the 1990 Jomtien conference, which set the aim of “[u]niversal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as ‘basic’) by the year 2000.” The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) identified six education goals, which cover access, equity, and quality of education.

The same year also saw the adoption of the MDGs, calling for universal primary education, by the General Assembly of the United Nations. While this is not the place for a detailed comparison, it is worth noting that the 2000 EFA goals are broader and provide a more holistic vision for education than MDG 2. Yet, MDG 2 was able to galvanize unprecedented support from development actors that led to considerable progress toward what the Universal Declaration on Human Rights had set in motion in its article 26 more than half a century earlier.8

The SDGs have been adopted as the global successor to the MDGs. Building on the lessons learned from MDG 2, SDG 4 calls for “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.” SDG 4 and its targets are indicative of a further broadening of the global commitment to encompass all stages of education, including lifelong learning, and to ensure free and equal access. In many ways, SDG 4 is even broader than the six EFA goals.

This process is contributing to the global governance of education by moving the discussion on norms and goals toward an agenda that also includes issues of assessment, regulation, financing, and new forms of cooperation. In fact, the inclusion of these questions on the global agenda is important for working toward the new, more ambitious goals. The remainder of this brief will give an overview of current developments in these areas in order to illustrate the global education governance structure in the making.

Global Assessment and Monitoring

Finding appropriate ways of assessment is important as the world moves from a focus on enrollment rates (MDG 2) to a focus on education in terms of “access plus quality” (SDG 4). It is currently suggested that assessment should take place at sub-national, national, regional, and global levels, and, in parallel, on a thematic basis. Most important for global education governance, consultations and negotiations on the global assessment framework for the SDGs, including SDG 4, are currently underway with the Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG SDGs). The IAEG SDGs presented their conclusions on a global indicator framework in March 2016. In parallel, UNESCO’s Education for All Global Monitoring Report will continue in the form of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report and be used as one of the mechanisms to measure progress toward SDG 4.9

Legal Instruments and Regulations

A number of legal instruments already exist that establish global and regional rules on education. Their focus rests on standard setting and facilitating international cooperation on education. UNESCO, for example, lists 19 such conventions and recommendations adopted under its auspices. Among them are regional frameworks on the recognition of qualifications in higher education, recommendations on the status of teachers, and recommendations for technical and vocational training. Further, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which seeks market liberalization and includes commitments to market access, does include provisions on education. It is noteworthy, however, that education is one of the sectors with the fewest commitments under GATS. Yet, trade in education services is estimated to be incredibly valuable and, therefore, future negotiations toward further market liberalization are very likely.10

Questions of Financing

With a comprehensive and ambitious global aim, as encompassed in SDG 4, questions of financing need to be raised. So far, the global debate has seen a number of appeals to increase financing for education. It is estimated that “[t]he total annual financing gap between available domestic resources and the amount necessary to reach the new education targets [in low- and lower middle-income countries] is projected to average US$39 billion between 2015 and 2030.” Building on these figures, the Incheon Declaration includes a call for countries to commit 15-20% of their total public expenditure to education (paragraph 14). It also reaffirms the need for developed countries to reach the target of devoting...
New Forms of Cooperation

Global education governance also goes hand-in-hand with new forms of cooperation. Public-private partnerships are an integral part of global governance in many sectors. The call for fostering these kinds of partnerships in the area of education is often made in the context of financing and innovative delivery. Generally, the assumption is that resource and financing gaps can be filled while ensuring a more efficient allocation of resources and encouraging innovation.\(^1\) The outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, for example, highlights the private sector as an important partner for sustainable development.\(^1\) The Sustainable Development Goal Fund (SDGF) is an example of the emergence and further development of such partnerships.

Conclusion

This brief explored the concept of global education governance, understood as the management of common education affairs across state borders. It discussed elements of global governance in the form of norms and aims, assessment and monitoring frameworks, legal instruments and regulations, global financing needs, and new forms of cooperation. Global education structures and processes are not yet routinely analyzed in terms of global governance. However, with the SDG process and the broad and ambitious focus of Goal 4, global education governance becomes more important. Fleshing out the details through education diplomacy will be crucial in 2016 to arrive at these new frameworks for global education governance.

Notes:

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