

The background of the image is a low-angle shot of a modern building with a grid-like facade. In the foreground, several flags are flying on tall poles. The flags include the United States flag, the United Kingdom flag, the German flag, the French flag, and the Argentine flag. The sky is a clear, light blue.

EASG

Education & Academia Stakeholder Group

STATEMENT ON THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

2024

The Summit of the Future is a critical moment for global governance and the international community to collectively address the complex challenges facing our world. In a time marked by profound environmental, social, economic, and political shifts, the Summit represents an opportunity to build a renewed vision for global cooperation.

The Pact for the Future, which is expected to emerge from the Summit, aims to set the course for multilateral action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and uphold the principles of peace, justice, and human rights. However, as preparations for the Summit progress, it is critical to emphasize that achieving these aspirations requires placing education at the center of global discourse.

Education is the driving force behind societal transformation, equipping individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to address today's interconnected global challenges. It is therefore imperative that the Summit fully recognizes and prioritizes the transformative power of education, particularly Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), within its outcomes and action plans.

The current Pact for the Future has regrettably overlooked the integral role of education, training, and public awareness—encapsulated as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). ESD is not only a core element of quality education but also serves as a cross-cutting foundation in achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The United Nations General Assembly has consistently recognized ESD as a key enabler of the SDGs, emphasizing its importance in a series of resolutions and frameworks, notably in the context of achieving SDG 4 on Quality Education (UNGA Decisions 72/222, 74/223, 76/228, and 78/219). ESD fosters the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to address global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. It empowers individuals and societies to contribute effectively to sustainable development. ESD's role extends beyond education; it enhances capabilities, transforms mindsets, and promotes holistic approaches to address complex challenges across various SDGs.

At the midway point of the 2030 Agenda, the world is witnessing modest progress toward achieving the SDGs. In this context, the breakthroughs from the 2022 Transforming Education Summit must be further elevated to position the crucial role of quality education as a cross-cutting accelerator for all 17 SDGs. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4) equips learners of all ages with the knowledge, skills, and agency to tackle interconnected global challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable resource use, and increased inequality.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) can act as facilitators, bringing together various stakeholders by combining teaching, research, and community engagement to form collaborative partnerships. Participatory knowledge building, sharing and mobilization are at the core of the higher education mandate. UNESCO's 2022 World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) Roadmap also underscored the critical role of HEIs: to achieve their own targets for SDG 4, contribute to learning quality and inclusion throughout the education system, and serve as a bridge for achieving all SDGs through interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches (UNESCO, WHEC22 Roadmap p.6).

A Call for Greater Civil Society Engagement

In shaping the future, the active involvement of civil society, students, teachers, and educational stakeholders is essential. Civil society provides diverse perspectives and insights that reflect the needs of communities worldwide. Students and teachers, being at the forefront of the education experience, possess unique knowledge and lived realities that are crucial for shaping policies and practices for sustainable development.

To ensure policies are effective and inclusive, decision-making processes must actively involve these groups. Early engagement with civil society, especially those within the educational sector, can provide valuable input that aligns global initiatives with grassroots needs and aspirations. Higher education, positioned at the science-policy interface, is uniquely suited to support societal change with evidence-based recommendations and to model sustainable development in practice. However, this change is only possible through a participatory approach that leverages the strengths and insights of civil society and educational communities.

A Call for a Renewed Focus

In light of these considerations, we urge the participants of Summit of the Future to refocus on placing education at the heart of global discourse. ESD, as an integral part of quality education, deserves explicit recognition in the overarching framework of the Pact for the Future. A renewed emphasis on education will not only act as a means of SDG implementation but will also serve as a guiding priority that influences all themes of the Summit of the Future.

The transformative power of education must be harnessed to advance sustainable development, peace, and equity. By integrating the voices of civil society, students, teachers, and higher education institutions in policy development and implementation, we can collectively work towards a sustainable and just future for all.

References

- United Nations General Assembly Decisions: 72/222 (2017), 74/223 (2019), 76/228 (2021), 78/219 (2023).
- UNESCO (2022). World Higher Education Conference Roadmap.

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