

Policy Brief

Re-integrating Higher Education Scholarships for Sustainable Human Development

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Summary

Where is Higher Education (HE) in the global development agenda? What is the contribution of HE to development? What dimensions of development should HE address? This paper argues for broader conceptions of 'higher education' and 'development', since global pressures are pushing narrow, unsustainable and inequitable visions of HE to the fore.

Recommendations

HE can contribute decisively to 'moving the whole system', by integrating research, interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical engagement and teaching to focus on sustainable human development.

Dimensions of progress such as pro-poor development research and professionalism; contributions to governance, peace and democracy; promotion of intrinsic humanistic values and capabilities and advancement of epistemic and cognitive justice need to be explicitly acknowledged for HE to contribute effectively.

Background

- Higher education's (HE's) contribution to development has been neglected in recent decades, but there are opportunities for HE to play a more defined role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The current focus on basic education is too limited. Neglect of HE may lead to reduced prospects for endogenous and sustainable development.
- Debates about HE and development fail to differentiate narrow quantitative 'outcomes' from broader social, political or environmental progress. They reflect a current paradigm and politics of actually existing unsustainability, not transformation towards sustainable development.
- HE should integrate practices of research, education, and interdisciplinarity, and engage development programming to effect the societal transformation envisaged by the SDGs.

In order to be effective, HE's contribution to development should be clearly demarcated and acknowledged. Significant aid and development resources are allocated to HE, but its explicit relevance remains unclear.

HE's contribution can be understood in terms of five main dimensions: research; economic development and technological catch up; professional and technical education; deepening democracy; and promoting intrinsic humanistic values and capabilities. It can be evaluated in terms of five types of 'outcomes': earnings, productivity, technology transfer, capabilities and institutions.

However, most evaluations of HE fail to differentiate narrow quantitative 'outcomes' from broader social, political or environmental goals. An inclusive post-2015 agenda for HE takes into consideration fundamental demands to transform knowledge and knowledge relationships, with the overall goal of making 'sustainable human development' attainable. Practical demands for economic and technological advancement should be aligned with demands for equity and social justice, while respecting planetary boundaries. HE can re-imagine its contribution in a more holistic, integrated manner, aligning individual professional development with societal requirements

for transformation. Diverse publics can be engaged through curriculum and research addressing urgent sustainability problems. The relative neglect of HE can be redressed by revitalizing HE's public and common good mission for sustainable human development.

Policy implications

- The five broad dimensions and outcome types for HE must address one reality - that global development has exceeded critical planetary thresholds. New development pathways are needed which align ecologies, cultures, visions and values more effectively. Technical fixes are no longer appropriate. Instead, fundamental social transformation and deeper democratic citizen involvement are required.
- HE needs a more integrated model of practice, bringing together research, teaching, interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement with development through the lens of sustainable human development. There are barriers preventing the recognition and advancement of integrated scholarship for sustainable human development. These can be identified and removed.
- There is a clear fit between basic principles of human rights - freedoms of belief, inquiry, advocacy and association and those of academic freedom and critical professionalism underpinning higher education itself. A promising development that is likely to see significant future advancement is the convergence of human rights and environmental protection.
- More open and equitable access to knowledge, fairer distribution of educational opportunities, attention to cognitive justice and grounding in relevant local epistemologies are conditions required to fulfil the human rights and capabilities of persons to live healthy, knowledgeable, productive and dignified lives.
- The critical challenges to sustainability and cognitive justice associated with western epistemic dominance can be better met, if intersecting research-teaching, research-

engagement and disciplinary-interdisciplinary hierarchies are addressed at the same time.

- UNESCO's recent publication, '*Rethinking education – towards a global common good?*' suggests that 'common good' is a constructive theme. This paper supplements this view by arguing that a public goods approach is strongly compatible with democratization and human rights.

Further Reading

This policy brief is drawn from the DSAI Working Paper: 'A New Agenda for Higher Education and Development: Re-integrating scholarships for sustainable human development'. Available at: <http://www.dsairland.org/publications/a-new-agenda-for-higher-education-reintegrating-sc/>

