

THE DUBAI DECLARATION ON EDUCATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE



THE CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION ALLIANCE

THE ALLIANCE

In March 2017, a global Alliance on Climate Change and Education was launched at the Global Education and Skills Forum in Dubai. The purpose of the Alliance is to define the role of the education system in helping the world achieve inclusive development while combating climate change and other natural resources challenges.

The Alliance asks why climate change is important to these new education processes, what knowledge is important, and how we can effectively deliver knowledge and skills to learners and citizens to respond to the climate challenge. The Alliance also considers how education as a strategy can help to effectively manage the climate challenge.

The Alliance proposes to launch a 'Dubai Declaration on Education and Climate Change' to be adopted by key leaders in the education space at the upcoming Dubai meeting in March 2018.

INTRODUCTION TO DUBAI DECLARATION

The primary goal of education is to enable human flourishing and well-being through the development of an individual's intellect and talents. It does this by cultivating moral and intellectual virtues, which lead to good living and thriving communities. Climate change is a major threat to the well-being of both individuals and communities. Understanding its causes and effects, and the responses to it, is key to fulfilling the primary goal of education. Three key challenges for education and the educational system today are:

- How can education contribute to human flourishing and well-being in a world transformed by climate change and responses to it?
- How can education generate the knowledge and skills, and cultivate the moral and intellectual virtues needed to address the great global challenges we are facing, including climate change?
- How can the education system as a whole respond to the challenge of climate change?

This document provides a distillation of key principles and an action agenda for education to meet the challenge of climate change.

CONTEXT: THE DEFINING CHALLENGE OF THIS GENERATION

There has never been a more urgent time to steer the world onto a more sustainable and equal development path than right now. Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon famously observed that "we are the first generation that can put an end to poverty and we are the last generation that can put an end to climate change".

While these two objectives have traditionally been in tension, they are in fact deeply intertwined and mutually dependent. Failure to address climate change will put in jeopardy future development efforts and leave a depleted and degraded planet for our children and future generations. At the same time, how we address climate change cannot be divorced from goals such as ensuring universal education, access to energy and food and water security for all. And how we choose to develop in the next 15 years will be the determining





factor in our ability to avert a climate crisis: key sectors that drive development – including the educational sector – will need to be transformed, sometimes reinvented, to have a chance of curbing climate change.

For the first time in history, a set of ambitious international frameworks provide a roadmap for accelerated action by all to meet shared climate and sustainable development goals. In the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals the international community has come together to steer our societies on to a sustainable path to prosperity. Embedded in these international agreements are revolutions in the way we live, eat, get around, and prosper. As the 2016 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report highlights, education is vital for delivering on every one of the Sustainable Development Goals and achieving more sustainable, resilient, inclusive and just societiesⁱ.

Investments in education combine the highest social returns with some of the most effective and low-cost options to combat climate change. Recent research shows how universal education could significantly reduce future climate change-related deaths by improving awareness, risk reduction measures, and disaster preparation and responseⁱⁱ. And it can significantly reduce long-term threats from climate change, through its impact on fertility, technology, and innovation, and the promotion of more sustainable economic and lifestyle choices. Indeed, SDG 13 on climate action includes an explicit target to “Improve

education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning”.

While the right to education is almost universally recognized and is enshrined in a number of international conventions, today almost 70 million children across the world are prevented from going to school each day, and many among those who do go to school are not achieving a basic level of the skills necessary to thrive in life. Based on current trends, by 2030 only one in 10 young people in low-income countries will be on track to gain basic secondary-level skillsⁱⁱⁱ. The fundamental imperative to expand access to education and quality of education for all must remain at the heart of the education challenge and at the top of the development agenda.

Expanding access to education per se will not help solve the climate crisis unless the content of that education is adapted to encourage positive values and behaviours that underpin sustainable choices and lifestyles. It will require the education sector as a whole to embrace the imperative of climate action. That is why SDG 4 on ‘quality education’ includes a 2030 target to “ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles ... and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

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Our worlds are being fundamentally transformed by climate change and our responses to it, in ways that few – beyond a small group of highly specialized professionals – have been properly equipped to understand. Yet such knowledge and skills are key to surviving and thriving in a changing climate. Climate change raises profound new challenges and demands not only on the content of education, but also on the systems that underpin delivery of educational services.

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As shocks and stresses from climate change increase, educational systems themselves need to be resilient to climate shocks, as well as focusing in its curricula on helping build resilience and facilitate cooperation and peace. On a societal level, education is essential for maintaining cohesion and stability in the face of mass disruptions caused by climate change and environmental degradation, including conflict and migration resulting from heightened competition over scarce resources.

As of now, education systems around the world are unfit for equipping citizens to thrive and be responsible agents in a changing climate. Education at all levels and in all major forms only fractionally addresses the climate crisis. As this crisis intensifies, and finding and implementing solutions becomes increasingly urgent, our responsibility today is to radically revisit how climate education can be integrated into education reform. This Declaration sets out key principles and an action agenda to meet this challenge.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Education is the responsibility of all. If education is about providing the means for individuals to unlock the potential to thrive and lead lives that they have reason to value, it needs to reach beyond the institutions of formal education and involve all sectors of society. Beyond parental responsibility, it demands that societal obstacles to education be

overcome and that broader enabling conditions be secured, including: the elimination of extreme income poverty, women’s empowerment, a clean and safe environment, access to reproductive health services and basic healthcare. It also requires a longer view of education as a continuous, life-long process that will take place in multiple ways and be a pursuit of all ages.

2. Global interdependence and the imperative of planetary stewardship provide the critical context for education in the 21st century. The relentless increase in economic, social, and ecological interconnectedness – through trade, global finance, migration, and the diffusion of new technologies or social innovations – creates new opportunities for shared prosperity, but it also brings with it greater inter-connectedness of risks. Local changes can have global impacts and affect distant communities in ways that can’t be easily predicted. Climate change not only endangers nature, it also exacerbates many of the obstacles to education such as conflict and displacement. To address the global challenge of climate change and to act proactively for sustainable development, people need to develop transformative competencies, such as creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibilityiv.

3. Averting catastrophic climate change calls for improved climate literacy for all. Effectively responding to climate change requires all to act responsibly as free, informed and empowered agents. Increased climate literacyv should highlight the urgency of the climate challenge and shed light on the interrelations between climate factors and human development. It should also help counteract politically motivated climate-scepticism. Because climate change touches every area of our lives, climate literacy is not simply about understanding climate science. The knowledge and skills needed to manage the climate crisis include almost all fields of human endeavour. Climate literacy therefore implies multi-disciplinary skill and understanding. A holistic approach that combines insights and methods from a range of disciplines is essential achieving SDG target 4.7, which seeks to “ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development”.

4. Education needs to foster a sense of global citizenship and ecological responsibility in all. Tackling climate change requires a new ethic of responsibility and instilling of the values of global citizenship. We know that humans cannot flourish for long unless the ecological community of which we are all a part is also flourishing. Education needs to help us become true ecological citizens who understand that our well-being depends on the well-being of the ecosystems that support all life on this

Earth. It should inform and influence not only our daily behaviours, but also our stewardship of the planet. And it should also encourage the values of global solidarity, based on an ethics of responsibility that calls for each to respond to the condition of all.

5. Education reform and climate action should be pursued as mutually reinforcing objectives in public policy. Beyond improving climate literacy in the classroom, the educational system as a whole can help meet climate challenges. There are numerous win-win opportunities for educational reform that also advance climate objectives and vice versa. For examples, eliminating climate change accelerating fossil-fuel subsidies can free up budgetary resources available to public education. And investing in girls education in Sub-Saharan Africa can represent a major contribution to climate change mitigation through its impact on avoided population growth.

THE ACTION AGENDA

[The Action Agenda will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders and presented at the GEFS 2019].

REFERENCES

i UNESCO. 2016. Global Monitoring Report. Education for people and the planet: Creating sustainable futures for all. UNESCO Publishing: Paris.

ii Barakat, Bilal. 2016. “Projections of Educational Attainment and Its Development Impacts For Scenarios Of Full and Partial Progress Towards Universal Upper Secondary Schooling.” Background Paper for the Education Commission.

iii Report of The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. 2017. “The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World”. <http://report.educationcommission.org/>

iv OECD (2018), The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030 <http://www.oecd.org/education/2030/oecd-education-2030-position-paper.pdf>

v Climate literacy can be defined as the understanding of one’s influence on the climate and the climate’s influence on oneself and society. It entails: (a) understanding of the essential principles of Earth’s climate system; (b) knowledge of how to assess scientifically credible information about climate; (c) ability to communicate about climate and climate change in a meaningful way, and; (d) the ability to make informed and responsible decisions with regard to actions that may affect climate. Adapted from the Climate Literacy Network: <https://cleanet.org/cln/index.html>

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