

From HEEFA to SDG4: Building on Achievements

8 - 9 October 2015
Barcelona, Spain

Barcelona Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2-day meeting organized by the International Association of Universities (IAU) in partnership with the Jaume Bofill Foundation brought together some 60 people from 29 countries with all continents represented. The participants were Members of the IAU Reference Group for HEEFA (Higher Education for Educational For All), representatives of IAU Members, people invited by the Jaume Bofill Foundation, and a representative of the Higher Education Section, UNESCO Paris, France.

The main aim of the meeting was to take stock of the IAU and partners achievements for EFA and, in light of these and other initiatives, to comment on the draft Framework for Action (FFA) developed by UNESCO and other UN Agencies and partners and after consultation of their Member States that will support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on Education, from the higher education perspective.

In Barcelona, participants worked on the draft FFA dated 19 July 2015.

Conclusions presented here focus only on the recommendations made by the participants on the draft FFA during working sessions.

The participants welcomed the inclusion of universities in the SDG4 and expressed their commitment to raise awareness on the new agenda at their institutions. Yet, they regretted the inclusion of universities in a way that implied that it was only included as an afterthought, added at the end of the sentence, after a comma.

They recommended that higher education institutions and more particularly higher education associations be included in the multi-stakeholder Education 2030 Steering Committee since higher education was the best placed to find the means to reach the target on higher

education, but it could also help, in particular through research and community service, in reaching all other education targets.

Participants reviewed the FFA in 3 working sessions:

(1) The first working session (Thursday 8 October, 14:30) reviewed the overarching goal and strategic approaches for Education 2030 (p.3-6), as well as implementation modalities (p. 17-23).

The participants added the word "higher education" in the sentence *Complementing and supplementing formal education (from school to higher education)* to reinforce the link made to higher education from the start of the FFA by explicitly stating that higher education is comprised within the overarching goal.

They also suggested that research should be supported and conducted to be used to inform policies, actions and strategies.

On the implementation modalities, they recommended that referring to the *research community* was too vague and potentially excluded large parts of the higher education community and thus should be rephrased as *The higher education and research community*.

Under *Youth*, they proposed to encourage the setting up of students' associations and their greater involvement in the governance of their learning at all levels (especially since the FFA speaks of student-centered learning).

They also thought that parents and the local communities should be included.

Overall, they said that the FFA seemed a little outdated – especially in the terminology used, for example when speaking of STEM when the STEAM or STHEAM concept is emerging to include Arts and Humanities, and should be looking at new trends and reflect the future of the education sector.

(2) The second working session (Thursday 8 October, 14:30) reviewed all targets that were not linked to higher education (targets 1,2,5,6,7,a and c).

Target 1:

Participants expressed concerns and questioned the meaning of *developing more robust, comprehensive assessment systems...* They highlighted the facts that inequalities are many even in schools where learning is not always happening for every child and that even spending some time in school does not necessarily mean that one has learned something. The causes for non-learning need research more than assessments.

They also said that digital skills were missing when speaking of today's knowledge societies and should be added after *all children should have established the building blocks of basic literacy and numeracy skills*.

Target 2:

Participants regretted that parenting was not included in this target. For them, the role of education at that age also included assisting parents in caring.

Target 5:

Participants reiterated the idea that research was needed to identify and propose solutions to remove the barriers that hinder attendance to school. They thought that higher education should also be named in the 3rd strategy to enhance the participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in higher education. Targeted and non-discriminatory materials should also be included. Adults should also be a target (*Identify the barriers that keep marginalized children, youth and adults*).

Target 6:

Participants expressed the need to add digital literacy which could be the next illiteracy in the world to come. They also said that adult literacy should not be limited to competencies but also to building confidence.

Target 7 seemed obvious to participants and no comment was made.

Target a:

Participants said that if facilities were important, the increase of teachers with disabilities to be role models was as important and should be included in the FFA.

Target c:

Participants requested that since most teachers were trained at higher education level, the strategy to increase the number of well-qualified teachers should say that the higher education sector should be adequately supported in order to do so.

(3) The third working session (Friday 9 October, 10:00) reviewed the targets that included higher education (target 3 associated with target 4 and target b).

All participants – and especially those from Africa - stated that a stronger focus for more higher education was needed.

They regretted that targets 4.3 and 4.4 were combined in the FFA as this blurred the lines between different subsectors. They would have preferred seeing the target 4.3 linked to target 4.7 as education should be for life not only for employment and all disciplines were to be offered. Similarly, participants underlined that universities were not only research intensive universities anymore and that the higher education sector was also composed of applied universities, polytechnics, community colleges and that even research universities provide professional education and that this was not reflected in the document.

They highlighted the term affordable as key and said that research on what was meant by affordability by country, region, gender, community, etc should be undertaken.

They regretted that there were very few proposals of implementation strategies focusing on higher education. One of those could be to develop mentorship and coaching to enhance success. The need to raise awareness of university leaders on the role the higher education sector

could play for the agenda was another area that could have been highlighted as essential to help reach all targets.

They thought that the student body was not visible enough at times of student-centered learning. Students should at least be noted as strong advocates for equal access.

New trends in higher education such as multidisciplinary, collaborative work, or project-based education could have been included to make the target and strategies more future-oriented.

On scholarships for people from developing countries, participants underlined that while they were welcome, they could also bring more brain drain. Furthermore, scholarships should also be for administrators and university leaders. The participants felt that the diversity of the academic community was not addressed in the FFA.

These conclusions contributed to the IAU President's intervention (attached) at the High-Level Meeting to adopt the Education 2030 FFA which is being convened by UNESCO on 4 November 2015.