

# DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND THE GLOBAL RESPONSE: TRADING PURPOSE FOR PROFESSIONALISM

Son Gyoh

## Introduction

Development education is a knowledge-based process aimed at challenging the root causes of underdevelopment. 'Underdevelopment' is used here to refer to the persistent circle of constrained capacity, low productivity, poverty and stagnant economic growth. While this article is not intended as a critique of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) per se, it makes reference to specific MDG goals in substantiating its arguments. MDG 1, 6 and 8 in particular illustrate fundamental gaps between the framing of global responses and the defining goals of development education (DE) on competencies that challenge the 'root causes of global inequality'. There is a need to embrace other approaches to learning that aim at perspective transformation beyond awareness on global issues as well as methodologies that enable the synthesis of DE discourses with policy processes that promote a more critical engagement with global responses such as the MDGs.

This article critiques the extent to which development education, as a system of knowledge, has influenced recent global responses to development challenges. It interrogates the nature of development education's (DE) current engagement with global responses, particularly the MDGs, by asking whether DE is merely reacting to global responses like the MDGs or helping to shape them? Could its adoption into formal education and an ideologically-framed policy arena constrain its proclivity to remain critical of dominant structures of global inequality without being branded radical? The article concludes by arguing the need for DE to critically engage with the MDGs (and similar responses). It also cautions against the shift in focus from purpose to professionalism that limits DE's capacity to expand its constituency beyond a growing elite of experts. With particular reference to the MDGs, this article will explore specific ways in which DE can promote a sustainable partnership between the global North and global South in following up on MDG 8 in the years ahead.

## Context

The difficulties faced by less-developed countries to provide basic services and infrastructure for the majority of the world's population, coupled with rising debt, prompted a variety of global responses to reverse the current structure of global interdependence. The adoption of the eight point Millennium Declaration action plan (2000-2015) under the aegis of the United Nations was the highpoint of international responses to global development challenges in the global South ([www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)).

It was also at the dawn of the millennium that the emerging field of development education encountered heightened debates on new and changing perspectives in its theory and practice: notably the concepts of global civil society, global citizenship and global partnerships, and the diversity in 'learner-centred' approaches to perspective transformation aimed at mobilising action (Kaldor, 2003; Smith, 2004). In an influential article on the fundamental shifts occurring in DE since the 1980s, Arnold analysed how NGOs' dominant role in public education on global awareness had been largely transformed by the incursion of official development cooperation in the arena of development education (Arnold, 1992).

By the early 1990s DE had effectively lost its 'radical roots' of action framed on knowledge and taken on a more liberal foundation (Huckle, 2004; Bourne, 2003). This has promoted the emergence of an elite group of professionals that seek to define DE more as an intellectual discipline ('body of knowledge') than as an intellectual discourse rooted in personal and social transformation. The latter can be regarded as a 'system of knowledge' that aims at specific goals and competencies. This professionalisation effectively situates knowledge and learning in DE within the domain of dominant 'modernisation' epistemology that recognises its moderation along ideological lines as hierarchies of knowledge. This appears to be at the heart of the current inward critical reflection in DE today.

## Millennium Development Goals and development education

Development education is widely defined as a system of knowledge that promotes critical thinking, reflection, action and empowerment that seeks change at local and international levels (Tormey, 2003:2; Regan, 2003; [http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/development\\_deveducation.asp](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/development_deveducation.asp)). The Centre for Global Education describes it as a participative learning process that aims to

tackle the underlying causes of global poverty and inequality through action (<http://www.centreforglobaleducation.com>).

The remit of DE therefore includes the following: critical awareness on development issues such as aid, debt, trade and the environment; fostering understanding of global interdependence; developing skills in analysing development issues; promoting values and attitudes to diversity and motivating individual action (<http://www.deeep.org/whatisde.html>). These values embedded in its objective to engender solidarity/alliances and critical reflection aimed at competencies in social transformation has come to be branded 'radical', the word being used as an adjective linked to irrational or extreme views, and therefore politically suspect.

Beyond responding to forms of global injustice, DE is also concerned with critical thinking on the pattern of global interdependence as currently structured (Ni Chasaide, 2009:28-32; DEA, 2010). It is however difficult to determine if or how much recent global responses such as the MDGs are influenced by DE. What is apparent however is the underlining commonality of purpose between the MDGs and DE to raise awareness and mobilise action in tackling pressing development challenges as broadly represented in the MDG framework. The concept of global citizenship and global civil society which resonates with MDG 8 have also emerged as very central themes in development education and structural mechanisms for articulating and mobilising global responses to development challenges.

It is reasonable to suggest that current global responses to development challenges are important to DE because these responses should mirror the pattern and level of DE influence on public understanding and perspectives on development issues. While it is probable that development education may be increasing awareness of global development issues in the industrial countries of the North, it is difficult to determine what influence such an awareness may have in framing current global responses to development challenges at institutional level. Available studies have only indicated continued public support for aid to developing countries. It appears however that DE has served more as a knowledge tool for promoting awareness of the MDG action plan and reviewing mechanism than as a knowledge system for critical reflection on the pattern of global response.

It could therefore be argued that rather than driving the framing of global responses, DE has tended to engage in a more reactive and less critical

way with greater emphasis on public awareness of global responses when they happen. It would also seem that the current focus of DE on pedagogical processes framed on cognitive learning as the ‘approved approach’ to knowledge/pedagogy has limited its reflexive capacity to engage new sources of knowledge and forms of learning. Its dialogue on global dimensions has had difficulty transcending the micro- (good practice) level to macro-level policy discourse and it is currently in danger of losing its social transformation element.

The Millennium Development Goals (looking at Goal 1 on poverty reduction; Goal 6 on HIV/AIDS and malaria eradication; and Goal 8 on global partnership) offer clear illustrations of how global responses to development challenges are framed on approaches that address the symptoms rather than the root problem of underdevelopment.

### **Illustrating gaps in the framing of global responses**

MDG 1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty and halve the proportion of people living with an income of less than a dollar a day by 2015 ([www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)). The 2009 MDG 1 review blamed its modest gains on the failure of donors to meet overseas development aid (ODA) targets following the global recession ([www.un.org/esa/policy/mdggap/mdg8report](http://www.un.org/esa/policy/mdggap/mdg8report)). The report stated ‘...the crisis will leave an additional 50 million people in extreme poverty in 2009 and some 64 million by the end of 2010 principally in sub-Saharan Africa and South Eastern Asia’ ([www.medindia.net/news](http://www.medindia.net/news); [www.UN.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.UN.org/millenniumgoals)). However, a major weakness in the implementation of the goal as a poverty reduction strategy is its primary focus on aid flowing from the North, rather than on institutional interventions at improving capacities, or on access of global South economies to global markets (<http://www.un.org/millennium/pdf/mgd/report>). For example, the World Food Programme (WFP) provides food assistance including cash and voucher transfer to the hungry, a laudable yet unsustainable venture. Imports from developing countries increased to 80 per cent in 2010 from 54 per cent in 2007. However, these imports were from a single region and tariffs remained high on clothing and agriculture with any processing of these items resulting in an increase in tariffs further (<http://www.mdgmonitor.org>). With projects targeting food price stabilisation and curbing child undernutrition, it is not clear how aid can eradicate extreme poverty and increase income levels where it is not applied in supporting the strengthening of institutions and access to global markets (United Nations, 2010).

Beyond the ability and willingness of donor countries to meet their quota, there is increasing criticism of the aid model in contributing to development. In *The Bottom Billion*, Paul Collier (Oxford economist and consultant to the World Bank) argued that aid is just one part of the necessary methodology for tracking underdevelopment in the global South. He also argued that developed countries could do more through institutional intervention projects and bilateral compacts that encourage market access and concessions for developing countries. The detached nature of aid from the wider national development plan of recipient countries is also identified as a major weakness. According to Collier, it is difficult to identify any one country that has experienced a long-term development impact when compared to the \$600 billion USD Africa has received in aid between 1960 and 2003 (Collier, 2008). Collier also argued that the persistence of poverty in certain countries with incomes beyond what aid in-flows could ever offer discredits the framing of aid programmes and responses to development challenges.

For DE, the challenge would be communicating better global awareness on causal issues and gaps in achieving landmark bilateral agreements/measures such as the Doha round of talks on trade that leveraged better access to global markets and support for institutional capacity development. It needs to critically examine the conditionality imposed by financial institutions in accelerating the pace of privatisation, and focus on institutional capacity building and provisions that would compel multinationals to act responsibly in meeting their obligations in terms of tax liabilities.

With MDG 6, recent reviews indicate that the MDG goal of reversing the HIV/AIDS and malaria pandemic by 2015 is not likely to happen despite the increase in annual global funding totalled at \$1 billion USD (World Health Organization figures on malaria, 2008). The experiences of Rwanda and Nigeria demonstrate common features of the bigger picture on context and sustainability issues regarding the malaria programme (<http://www.malariaenvoy.com>).

Rwanda is one of the acclaimed success stories of the Insecticide-Treated Net (ITN) programme, where approximately 2.5 million nets were distributed between 2001 and 2006 at an estimated cost of \$25,600,000 USD (\$10 per net) excluding cost in medication. In 2007 Rwanda achieved the 60 per cent mark for children sleeping under nets. While this figure would seem remarkable, it fell short of the 80 per cent threshold coverage 'experts' suggest for elimination of the vector (<http://www.rollbackmalaria.org/gmap/>). The fact

that this protection did not meet the 80 per cent benchmark and then dropped to 50 per cent could be interpreted as a failure or at best a partial temporary relief. The reliance of this programme on external supply and replacement render it dependent on external aid and therefore unsustainable. Today there is little indication that the malaria status in Rwanda has changed in any significant way compared to 2001. Similar shortfalls in coverage are experienced in highly prone infection countries as Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Tanzania (<http://www.globalhealthreporting.org>; <http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health>; Bill and Belinda Gates Foundation).

Nigeria tops the list of highly infected malaria countries and provides evidence of the weak link between the MDGs and a local context. A malaria progress report revealed that Nigeria requires 72 million nets, of which 15 million nets were delivered in 2009 at the cost of \$150 million USD (Office of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Malaria: <http://www.malariaenvoy.com>). Within the same period the UK Department for International Development (DfID) supported Nigeria's national malaria programme by £50 million GBP with little evidence of a real fall in the malaria menace. The big issue here is the shortfall in what is required to attain the 80 per cent ideal coverage and sustain any gains made in lowering the pandemic. In order to achieve the 80 per cent threshold necessary for a marked reduction in Nigeria for example, the cost of 72 million nets amounts to \$720 million USD which the programme could not put into one single country. An intervention in improving drainage and sanitation conditions linked to Nigeria's national development planning would have more sustained impact on the root problem with a wider and more integrated impact in improving public health even beyond the malaria menace.

There is also a country context issue highlighted in a national demographic and health survey report which suggests that of the mere 17 per cent households that had nets, only 6 per cent of children actually slept under nets (National Planning Commission NPC). When put in context of how much has been spent on the programme, this report raises the question of the sustainability and efficacy of the project in terms of being accepted locally beyond awareness on usage of the nets.

What these examples show are the contradictions and gaps in framing of global responses that coalesce dominant institutional perceptions of development issues that are currently being completely divorced from a wider public understanding. The challenge to DE therefore lies not only in public

awareness of the root problem but in developing competencies for action at discourse and policy level.

The last and perhaps most important MDG 8 aims at developing a global partnership for development, which seeks to address the special needs of least developed countries and an open ruled based non discriminatory trading and financial system. Although developed countries have lowered tariffs for selected imports from developing countries, the process has been less than transparent and discriminatory as only a selection of less developed countries enjoy the preferential tariff of 1.6 per cent compared to the 8 per cent tariff applied to other developing countries ([www.un.org/millennium/pdf/mgd/report](http://www.un.org/millennium/pdf/mgd/report)). The Doha agreement was drafted to secure and achieve further reductions on tariff hikes in agriculture textile and more transparent access to markets of developed countries, but has gained very little mileage. The Doha agreement also aimed at discouraging the practice of higher tariffs applied as the degree of processing commodities increases ([United Nations](#), 2010).

## **Development education and NGOs**

Development education has the unique advantage of being closely linked with NGOs that enjoy recognition and endorsement within global institution processes, giving it direct access to civil society network and policy structures. However, DE discourse, patterns and approaches to learning has tended to be driven by funding opportunities which have encouraged a dichotomy between social learning and structured cognitive education. Today the relationship between DE and NGO work around knowledge-based advocacy has remained underutilised in building a constituency of active global civil society. While social theories of learning may be often non-formal and self-directed, they are linked to larger communities of solidarity and the co-construction of meaning (Parks Daloz, 2000:116-118). This approach has the potential to influence discourse modalities at the practice and policy level of DE and therefore redefine how knowledge is produced and applied to development issues. Still, NGOs provide a valued link for DE in building a truly global alliance that could serve to minimise the influence of state ideologically-driven policy and discourse patterns in challenging structures that sustain current forms of global injustices.

## Conclusion

It would seem that DE is confronted today by two overarching internal tensions: a crisis of legitimacy that looms in the face of questions on deliverables and the distance between the DE target audience and its mission. The reluctance in DE to embrace and engage with forms of social learning that could provide the space to analyse and understand the use and dynamics of power in the allocation and distribution of global opportunities remains a fundamental weakness in its capacity to drive global responses in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The temporal and provisional mode of DE means recognising competing perspectives and theoretical instability in its constitution as a body of knowledge. DE needs to be conceptualised as a system of knowledge constantly influencing and receptive to new forms of knowledge occurring in multiple learning sites and striving to drive rather than be driven by global responses. DE needs to embrace social and transformative learning approaches that privilege advocacy as an evidential knowledge domain. This will offer learners space to negotiate meaning and a mechanism for action in influencing policies aimed at challenging current forms of ‘global interdependence’.

## References

Arnold, S (1992) *Constrained Crusaders? British Charities and development education*, Institute of Education, London.

Ball, S & Bowe, R (1992) *Reforming Education and Changing School*, Routledge, London.

Bourn, D (2003) ‘Towards a theory of development education’, in *Development Education Journal*, Vol 10, 1, pp. 3-6.

Collier, P (2008) *The Bottom Billion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

DEA (2010) *Global Matters: Case studies of education for a just and sustainable world*, available: [http://clients.squareeye.com/uploads/dea/documents/Global\\_Matters.pdf](http://clients.squareeye.com/uploads/dea/documents/Global_Matters.pdf).

Huckle, J (2004) ‘Further towards a Theory of Development Education’ in *Development Education Journal*, Vol. 11, 1, pp. 29-30.

Kaiser Health News (2010) website, available: <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/>.



Munk, R (2004) 'Global Civil Society. Myths and prospects' in Taylor, R (ed.) *Creating a better world: Interpreting Global Civil Society*, Kumarian Press, New Hartford.

Ni Chasaide, N (2009) 'Development education and campaigning linkages' in *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 8, Spring 2009, pp. 28-34, available: <http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue8-perspectives1>.

Parks Daloz, L (2000) 'Transformative Learning for the Common Good' in Mezirow, J & associates (eds.) *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, Jossey Bass Inc, San Francisco.

Roll back malaria (2010) website, available: <http://www.rollbackmalaria.org/gmap/>.

Smith, M (2008) 'International NGOs and Northern Constituencies: Development Education, Dialogue and Democracy' in *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 4, 1, pp.5-18.

Smith, M (2005) 'NGOs and Development Education: Dialogue, Negotiation and Knowledge', Stakeholder report for NGOs in UK and USA.

Smith, M (2008) '[International non-governmental development organizations and their Northern constituencies: development education, dialogue and democracy](#)' in *Journal of Global Ethics*, 1744-9634, Vol. 4, 1, 2008, pp. 5-18.

United Nations (2010) *The Millennium Development Goal Report 2010*, United Nations, New York, available: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202010%20En%20r15%20low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf>.

Yanacopulos, H & Baillie Smith, M (2007) 'The ambivalent cosmopolitanism of international NGOs' in Hickey, S, Mitlin, D & Bebbington, T (eds.) *NGOs and Development Alternatives*, Zed Books, London.

**Son Gyoh** is an independent resource Consultant in Global Development Education. He holds an MSc in Development Management and has particular interest in institutional development. He is based in Galway and currently undertaking a doctoral research in University of London (UCL) in the area of transformative learning in global development education.