Between Tokenism and Inclusion: The Student Movement in the Post-2015 Process

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1 Introduction

Students at all levels of education are one of the central constituencies, along with teachers, parents, and families, of the global education community. As the recipients of teaching, students have a direct interest in the design, implementation, and evaluation of education policy and practice. As participants in the educational process, they have experience that can inform the improvement of policy and practice. Students have long organised themselves into associations and unions that struggle for their interests to be recognised at institutional, local, and national levels. Students have also brought their unions together into confederations at the international level in order to represent these interests in the relevant processes of international and intergovernmental organisations. In negotiations to adopt the post-2015 Agenda, which culminated with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), national unions and regional platforms represented the interests of the student constituency, with varying results. This chapter documents the involvement of students in the post-2015 process in order to record that experience and build on it, identifying lessons that can be learned for the implementation and monitoring of SDG 4, and, more broadly, for future global processes.

The chapter is based on the claim that students, as a central constituency in education, are entitled to be actively involved at every stage of education governance. It is a claim that is based on the principle that people should be involved in decision-making processes to the extent that those decisions affect their lives. In order to realise this, students, along with teachers and parents, should be allowed to associate into unions or other forms of representative organisations. In processes of education governance, these associations should then be granted a seat at the table and decisions codetermined between them, invited experts, and the relevant authority, which could be an educational institution, local authority, or state or international institution, according to the level of the decision-making process. To be considered as legitimate

representatives of the constituency, the associations must have an extensive membership base and adhere to the highest standards of democracy and accountability in their internal processes.

Such student participation in a system of education governance can bring a number of benefits. First, it can remedy inequalities in resources and representation by empowering the groups directly involved to participate in processes that affect them. Second, it can function as a means of citizenship education by socialising large numbers of people into processes of democratic governance and accountability, both in the internal processes of organisations and in codetermination with the authorities. Third, it can solve information asymmetries and failures by providing a mechanism for educational constituencies to continuously draw attention to problems about which the centralised authority would not otherwise be aware. Fourth, it can solve collective problems by providing a means for the various actors in education to discuss complex issues and explore, decide, and implement strategies for addressing them together (Cohen & Rogers, 1995, pp. 42–44).

Student participation is a conception of education governance broadly accepted by the entirety of the student movement, as well as by teacher and parent representatives, with the exception of small groups of activists from the autonomist and anarchist traditions that reject incorporation in favour of decentralised and nonhierarchical self-organisation. This corporatist approach, rooted in ideas of associational democracy, ensures that education reflects the interests of those directly involved, and of society more broadly, and that it optimises education as a public service. When we write of the student constituency, we refer to the corporatist approach outlined above, as represented by student movements, unions, guilds, and the like. The student constituency can be understood to overlap with the broader youth constituency on a range of issues but has a more legitimate claim to representation when it comes to education policy. It is also important to make a distinction between two types of student institutions. On the one hand, there are *student movements*, student unions, and student guilds, which embody the corporatist approach (e.g., a university student union, which is open to and mandated to represent all students on campus, who in turn direct its work). On the other hand, there are *student organisations*, which are student-led and often work with student issues but do not have the same standards of representativeness (e.g., a conservative or a radical students' organisation, open only to those who sympathise with its cause, and which promotes that ideology on campus and in broader society [Klemenčič, 2014]). In this chapter, however, we use organisations to describe both student unions and organisations.

As authors, we write from a European vantage point, which reflects the fact that European student organisations took a lead in representing the student constituency in the post-2015 negotiations. In constructing this narrative and analysis, we have consulted with actors from all world regions. We have endeavoured to ensure that this account faithfully reflects the experiences of the student constituency from around the world, while at the same time recognising this chapter to be a shared personal reflection. Although we reference published works where possible, one of the purposes of this chapter is to document knowledge that exists within the global student movement, but which has never been recorded in the literature.

2 State of the Global Student Movement in 2014

As the process to agree on the education component of the post-2015 agenda got underway, the global student movement found itself fragmented and uncoordinated. Although the Occupy movement and antiglobalisation movements, which were partly student led, had swept across the world in recent years, the same has not been the case for the student movement based around schools, campuses, and education issues.

The global student movement peaked during the Cold War, when the International Union of Students (IUS), aligned to Moscow, and the International Student Conference (ISC), aligned to Washington, were at their height. Both attracted thousands of national student representatives to their global meetings, coordinated student solidarity across the world, and, in the case of IUS in particular, represented students' interests toward global bodies such as the UN. IUS and ISC were, however, funded by the KGB and CIA, respectively. In 1967, the CIA's covert funding of ISC was exposed, which prompted a furious reaction from European members and soon precipitated the organisation's bankruptcy in 1969 (Paget, 2003). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, IUS faltered too. Its funding dried up in the early 1990s and the organisation eventually became entirely dormant following a final conference in Ghana in 2003 (Deca, 2012). The history of IUS and ISC has taught students that they can organise successfully at the global level. At the same time, it reveals the challenges involved, in particular, mediating the ideological positions of participating organisations, which tends to be further complicated by geopolitical considerations (Altbach, 1970). While students essentially agreed on education policy and practice, it was their language and tone as well as their interest in and perceived mandate to speak about broader social issues that have, historically, proved divisive (Grønne, 2017).

During the Cold War, in the 1960s and 1970s, students were not only well organised globally, but also regionally. The *Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes* (OCLAE) united students across the Latin American continent from its headquarters in Havana and wielded significant influence in IUS (Altbach, 1989). The Western European Students' Information Bureau (WESIB), later the European Students' Information Bureau (ESIB) and now the European Students' Union (ESU), was created in 1982 against the backdrop of the ISC bankruptcy 13 years earlier. It empowered national student unions at the tertiary level across Europe through information sharing (Sundström, 2012). The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) was founded in an effort to bring together school students from both sides of the Iron Curtain and came to play an important role in building capacity among existing national school student unions, representing students in secondary and vocational education, and helping to establish them where they did not yet exist.¹ The All-African Students' Union (AASU) was at its peak during this period, successfully uniting student movements that had played a crucial role in independence movements across the continent. In the 1990s, students in Asia established the Asia Students' and Youth Association (ASA). Until 2003, these regional movements maintained regular contact, even though IUS was perceived as communist and was then financially disabled (Deca, 2012).

In subsequent years, however, a number of factors eroded what remained of the global student movement. Out of many possible reasons, we highlight two. First, there was a lack of global education issues around which student organisations could organise. The MDGs did not include tertiary education, although some organisations attempted to make a case for 'Higher Education in Education for All'. The majority of student organisations were, and remain, focussed on tertiary education. Second, developing preoccupations with regional issues such as Latin American economic integration and the European integration of higher education systems meant student organisations turned their attention away from the global arena.

In Europe through the 2000s, ESIB slowly but steadily shifted its focus from information sharing and technical reporting to representation in policymaking processes. This development was a consequence of the Bologna Process (European Commission, 2019), in which ESIB had become the sole representative of the European student constituency. ESIB adapted its structure and changed its name to the European Students' Union to reflect its new foci (Klemenčič, 2012). Between 2008 and 2012, ESU had a working group on international cooperation, which initially made great headway, bringing together North American, African, Arab, and Asian student representatives, and applying for an international EU-funded Youth in Action project. The project application

was, however, unsuccessful and deeper cooperation never materialised. The UK National Union of Students (NUS-UK) organised an international student summit in conjunction with their 90th anniversary in 2012, but there was no agreement on shared policies or a strategy for cooperation going forward. Meanwhile, OBESSU was focussing its energy on supporting the establishment of school student unions in Central and Eastern Europe. It attempted to build connections with school student unions in other regions, but most countries did not have such organisations, student representation being restricted to universities and other tertiary-level institutions. While there is a strong tradition of school student unionism in Latin America, OBESSU struggled to establish stable contact with these organisations, its interactions depending on the mediation of its Spanish member organisation, the *Confederación Estatal de Asociaciones de Estudiantes* (CANAE).

In Africa, AASU, which was based in Accra and had previously been highly successful, ran into a major leadership crisis, which it only began to overcome in 2012.² A number of unions had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the Ghanaian government's attempts to influence AASU, which had allegedly, in some cases, extended to rigging elections. Some of AASU's strongest member organisations had also been weakened with implementation of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Policies across the continent. Others had been co-opted by their respective governments as partisan organisations (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). In Latin America, OCLAE continually attempted to revive IUS, within which it had been one of the most influential groups, but most of its member organisations were focussing on opposing the Latin American economic integration process, which had picked up pace around this time (Grugel & Singh, 2015).

It was in this context that UNESCO developed an interest in building momentum for a global student movement, holding the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 2009, at which students had their own parallel forum that fed into the plenary. Students had also been present at WCHE +5 in 2003, in larger numbers, in fact, but the forum did not present serious opportunities on which they could build. In preparation for the 2009 WCHE, UNESCO reached out to both national and regional student unions, the corporate representatives of the student constituency, as well as issue-based and party-aligned student organisations such as the *Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe* (AEGEE) and the European Democrat Students (EDS) (UNESCO, 2009; Deca, 2012). The different backgrounds of the participating organisations, particularly their different attitudes to representativeness and partisanship, meant that the students were off to a bad start. It was hard to establish consensus about exactly what the students wanted, and how it could be achieved, given the significant differences in how the organisations were

structured. As a result, the participants, who had not been extensively consulted in preparations for the forum, did not feel ownership of the process, resulting in a vague outcome document and little follow-up (Grønne, 2017).

Nevertheless, UNESCO was determined to continue its involvement with students. Among other things, it became engaged in a partnership between European and Asian students in an effort to build ASA's capacity, and supported ESU's working group on international cooperation to organise international student meetings at UNESCO headquarters in Paris during 2009 and 2010, in an attempt to offer a 'neutral' ground for the meetings. UNESCO also improved its connections with OCLAE through its regional office in Santiago (ESU, 2010). Despite UNESCO making headway, much if not all of this work was lost when its Higher Education Section was cut substantially in 2011, following the United States' decision to suspend funding for UNESCO. Consequently, students also turned their back on UNESCO, as there were no concrete projects, actions, or policies in which to engage.

About the same time, the Commonwealth nations launched the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA). Launched in 2012, CSA brings together student leaders from across the Commonwealth to advocate for student interests and strengthen the extent and quality of student representation. Backed by the expertise and resources of the Commonwealth Secretariat, CSA soon established itself as a strong platform, despite its lack of a formal governance structure (Day et al., 2016).

This was the backdrop against which students entered the debates around education in the post-2015 process. Student movements were well functioning at national level in much of the world, with the exceptions of Asia, the Middle East, and some parts of Africa, but there were almost no avenues of communication between the regions, nor was there any deeper understanding of the common struggles shared by students around the world. Despite UNESCO's involvement having peaked as recently as 2009/10, much of the experience had been lost by the time the post-2015 process had begun, not only in UNESCO, but in student organisations as well, due to their high turnover of activists, representatives, and staff members, and the disappearance of financial support for global cooperation. Finally, students were occupied with responding to the fallout from the 2008 economic crisis, in the aftermath of which sweeping changes were made to national education systems across the world.

3 Making an Impact on SDG 4

The Global EFA meeting held in Muscat in May 2014 represented a significant step in the process to agree on SDG 4, which culminated later at the World

Education Forum (WEF) in Incheon in May 2015 and at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2015. At this early stage, the student constituency was not engaged in the discussions, and their absence was reflected in the Muscat Agreement. Aside from a brief mention of learners alongside other stakeholders such as families and communities, there was nothing in the document about the interests of students, their distinct place in education governance, or their role in negotiating and implementing the post-2015 agenda.

Over the next few months, the student constituency became more engaged. CSA, ESU, and OBESSU led the way, participating in discussions about the post-2015 agenda with UNESCO, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Union, and the Council of Europe. At its general assembly in May 2014, ESU established a working group on the topic, which was led by the National Union of Students in Norway (NSO), with student unions from Austria, Denmark, Latvia, Spain, and the United Kingdom also participating. It was only because NSO had been approached by the Norwegian government for its inputs to the negotiations that the process had caught the attention of ESU, which otherwise had not taken much note of the process.

ESU took part in the 2014 World Conference on Youth in Sri Lanka, which gathered almost 1,500 youth from across the world to deliberate on youth in the post-2015 process. The conference took place within the framework of the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth and was the first time that ministers adopted a declaration together with youth representatives. Although the conference was hailed as a success by a number of organisations in the broader youth constituency and ministers, it largely proved a failure. Participants were selected on criteria that were not transparent, with some participants representing nobody but themselves and most participants coming from Southeast Asia or Africa, with the remaining regions poorly represented. The conference, which could have ignited a global wave of representative youth engagement in the post-2015 process, ended up as a footnote that never attracted notice outside the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The conference's deliberations were never brought into the Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs.

Following the World Conference on Youth, ESU engaged more proactively from the beginning of 2015, but by then the overarching framework for education 2030 was already in place. OBESSU engaged with the process in its own way. One of its board members was selected to be part of the Youth Advocacy Group of the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI). OBESSU actually had a mandate to speak on behalf of students, although this was not a criterion for GEFI, which was a group of hand-picked individuals. Through its resulting acquaintance with the United Nations system, OBESSU started to

contribute to the positions of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY).³

GEFI was not an initiative owned or spearheaded by student organisations, but since it was led by the UN Secretary General, it provided a certain level of access to the UN system for those selected to be involved. OBESSU also took a lead in developing the educational positions of the European Youth Forum, which was strongly involved in the OWG process through the UN MGCY. In its inputs, OBESSU supported the emerging focus on equal access to quality education, pushed for the inclusion of vocational and technical education, and highlighted the need for education to be safe, inclusive, and free of fees and hidden costs. ESU, OBESSU, and CSA followed the OWG proceedings with interest, occasionally participating in the consultations, but they did not have a strategy behind their advocacy. Without a permanent presence in New York, they had a limited ability to lobby member states, precluding a more sophisticated involvement with the process.

As Antonia Wulff points out in Chapter 2, at this stage it was also unclear from exactly which inputs the education agenda would be developed. Students focussed their attention on UNESCO, the institution with which they already had some familiarity. Looking back, had students had a better understanding of how the process would develop, it is fair to speculate they would have devoted more attention to the New York process. CSA had perhaps the greatest access to member states as their participation in the post-2015 process was supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat. As Commonwealth member states have some of the largest numbers of young people as a proportion of their population, the Secretariat had been pushing for a focus on youth in the post-2015 agenda and, in particular, for a specific youth goal. CSA lent its support to these positions but was not able to leverage its access to further the student agenda.

SDG 4 turned out to be relatively uncontroversial in the OWG process, although there was some debate about the extent to which education should be free as opposed to affordable. In these discussions, student organisations, like many other civil society actors, supported the language of universality and the language of rights, and advocated for free education. Perhaps the most contentious point on the student agenda was the inclusion of tertiary education. Most opposition on this point came from member states that wanted to reduce the number of targets, particularly the United Kingdom and Japan. Much of civil society did not push back: the basic education community tended to ignore tertiary education, while youth representatives were divided on the point. Actors from the Global North tended to support its inclusion, while those from the South felt it would be too much to take on in SDG 4. Some

actors, such as GCE, did not focus on tertiary education in their initial position but came to embrace its inclusion later in the process.

Despite these reservations, both member states and civil society eventually came together to support a much broader education agenda than the MDGs had contained. For CSA, ESU, and OBESSU, the priority was to have their issues reflected in the targets: for CSA the mainstreaming of youth; for ESU higher education; for OBESSU secondary and vocational education; and for the three of them, a focus on access, quality, and inclusion. As the OWG process approached its conclusion, it seemed clear that these issues would indeed be reflected in the OWG proposal for the SDGs, and so CSA, ESU, and OBESSU did not attempt to intensify their involvement in the process. Although they were not as involved as other educational stakeholders or youth organisations, CSA, ESU, and OBESSU regarded themselves, and the student movement as a whole, as among the most important stakeholders in SDG 4. Still, each organisation was restricted for its own reasons: CSA because, as a newly founded organisation, they had not established channels of institutional access beyond those provided by the Secretariat; and ESU and OBESSU because they did not have much spare capacity to engage in United Nations processes in addition to their day-to-day advocacy with the European institutions. For ESU and OBESSU in particular, there was also the problem that their member organisations, which dictated their strategic direction and priorities, had, with a few exceptions, little awareness of or interest in the post-2015 process, regarding it as distant, abstract, and peripheral to their concerns.

As the OWG process drew to a close, student organisations attempted to bring the post-2015 agenda closer to the grassroots through International Students Day. Observed on 17 November every year, the date commemorates the Nazi storming of Czech universities in 1939 and the subsequent internment and execution of students. It was observed for many years, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, but after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent crisis within IUS, commemorations became sporadic and uncoordinated. It was not until the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai that International Students Day was relaunched, with ESU and OBESSU providing international coordination ever since.

In the summer of 2014, OBESSU, in consultation with ESU, decided to launch a global call for action, which, on the 10th anniversary of the Mumbai forum, aimed to bring together students on every continent behind a common agenda. It was an ambitious project given the disconnect between student movements around the world. ESU and OBESSU worked together regularly, they had contacts with the North American unions and had recently started

to work with CSA on the post-2015 agenda, but there was little communication between them, OCLAE, AASU, and the member organisations of those platforms. It was decided that the call for action should focus on the post-2015 agenda, as a process in which student organisations around the world shared a common interest.

A call for action was launched, which included the demands for education to be free of costs and fees, free of discrimination, and free of fear, and called on the United Nations to prioritise free, equal access to quality education and safe learning environments in the post-2015 agenda. The call was initially signed by ESU, OBESSU, the United States Student Association (USSA), and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). Over the following weeks, more than 30 organisations, representing students from 97 countries across every continent, signed the call, with nonstudent organisations such as Education International (EI) also declaring their support.

On 17 November 2014, hundreds of thousands of students mobilised, with demonstrations and commemorations in over 40 countries. Students from secondary, higher education, and vocational systems participated in actions related to issues as diverse as rising tuition fees, changes to student evaluation, and the militarisation of schools and campuses. The scale and scope of these events took OBESSU and ESU by surprise. With this commemoration, the student constituency asserted that they are indeed an active stakeholder in global education and, in the post-2015 process, that they have common interests across the world, which they expected to be recognised and reflected in the Agenda. It was also a moment for the student movement to reassert the fundamental principles of access, quality, inclusion, and equity for which it stands, and to demonstrate its strength and unity. A few weeks later, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon released his Synthesis Report, which broadly accepted the proposals of the OWGs. ESU and OBESSU were pleased about the inclusion of higher education, secondary, and vocational education, while CSA was disappointed but unsurprised by the absence of a youth goal.

Student organisations continued to participate in the process through the Regional Ministerial Meetings during the spring of 2015. The meetings were organised by UNESCO and aimed at collecting input to and building consensus around the outcome document of the WEF that was hosted in Incheon, South Korea, in May of that year. CSA was given an opportunity to provide input into the Commonwealth's shared position for the African Regional Meeting in Kigali, as well as to the national position of Kenya, the latter owing to the then-Interim President working in the UNESCO National Commission. For CSA, the highest priority was now student mobility, specifically a strong draft of Target 4.b on scholarships. Student participation at the actual meeting was, however,

completely lacking. It has been claimed that this was because certain states worked actively to prevent students from entering the space, as well as there being a lack of funding for them to participate. At the Europe and North America Regional Ministerial Conference in Paris, the ministers assembled included the most significant mention of students in the official documents to date. In the 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education' section of the Paris Statement was the following:

We recognise that the participation of children, students and young people in education governance, can help develop skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making, and strengthen the behavioural capacities required to effectively engage in society. We commit to strengthen existing and emerging education governance processes in formal and non-formal contexts and ensure the active involvement of children, students and young people, parents, families and communities and work with them to monitor the quality of educational services. (UNESCO, 2015d, p. 4)

This was an important commitment to the participation of students in education governance and, by extension, to the involvement of students in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the Agenda. European governments had previously demonstrated their commitment to student participation in education governance in documents of the European Commission and the Bologna Process, the passage on students in the Paris Statement was successfully advocated by ESU, which was present at the meeting. It helpfully provided official support for including students in the Framework for Action (FFA).

The Paris Statement was also the first time that the notion of 'learner-centred learning' was introduced into the process. The notion has since become contested, in that private providers argue it refers to free school choice, but ESU had advocated a flipping of the classroom, with the teacher making learners and their needs the centre of attention. Other important issues addressed during the Regional Conference from the perspective of students included an entire rewrite of the paragraph relating to the labour market, traditionally a point of contention between student unions and governments, and as well as committing to ensuring that draft Target 4.b should not lead to a brain-drain effect from the Global South to the Global North, which, it was thought, would ultimately hold back sustainable development.

In many ways, the Paris meeting proved groundbreaking for ESU's involvement in the process. EI and ESU had only ever cooperated on European policy, and due to the limited scope of the MDGs, ESU had also never come

into contact with the GCE. The overlapping interests of ESU and GCE were, however, realised in Paris, and ESU's involvement developed largely thanks to the support from EI and GCE, which would later prove students' only point of access to the negotiating table. Nevertheless, ESU's late involvement with EI and GCE goes to show how little insight into global processes it had from the outset of the negotiations.

By the time of the WEF in Incheon, in May 2015, the goals and targets of SDG 4 had taken shape. UNESCO actively encouraged student participation at the meeting but at this point, it was too late for them to have a meaningful impact. While the NGO Forum offered some space for students to influence the discourse of the gathering, most of the policy developments took place in the drafting committee of the main forum, which was limited to the EFA Steering Committee, and saw neither student, nor youth, representation. Member states were reluctant to discuss the issues dealt with in the drafting committee, and as a result, students relied on representatives from EI and GCE to carry their voice into that committee. Student representatives were also absent from the plenary sessions. While GEFI participated in one plenary session, no elected student representative ever took the plenary stage, which once again shows a lack of recognition. Student representatives were not helped by their lack of coordinated representation.

The WEF mirrored the WCHE failure to meaningfully engage students. To make things worse, the UNESCO Youth Forum a few months later repeated this failure: students and youth were given a dedicated space out of a genuine interest to engage them, but since this space to build capacity and ideas was not followed by a genuine chance to impact the main conference, for example, by discussing the outcome in plenary, putting forward motions, or having a seat at the table where the main outcome was drafted, the Youth Forum remained a tokenistic attempt at inclusion.

4 Getting the Implementation Framework Right

After the SDGs were adopted, students and the rest of the education community slowly started shifting their focus to the FFA. The drafting of the FFA was done in a closed drafting committee carried over from the WEF without any student representation.

At this late stage in the process, discussions had also shifted to financing and indicators. It was at this point that student participation in the post-2015 process reached its limits. While student organisations were aware of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), the Financing for

Development, and other processes that would come to shape the actual implementation of the SDGs, they did not have the access or technical expertise to engage in them.

In these processes, students had a strong claim to participation, both as the recipients of education, and as partners in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of the Agenda. But students were not invited, despite requests to be included. These experiences point to one of the student movement's central challenges: had it been a national process, students could have protested, staged media events, metaphorically kicked in the door to the meeting room, and made their voices heard. Yet all these 'traditional' strategies fall short because when the discussions go global there are hardly any meaningful places to protest. International media are not concerned with the student voice, and with limited funding, students cannot justify paying their own way to meetings, only to be refused entrance at the door. The experience shows the need for students to rethink how they engage in international negotiations. From the European side, ESU attempted to mobilise their national members around the national discussions on SDG indicators and in that way influence the IAEG-SDG, but lack of technical capacity and the complex nature of the process meant the students could not make themselves relevant. Ultimately, student influence was limited to providing inputs to EI and GCE, which those organisations then carried into the closed EFA Steering Committee, directly or in the case of EI also through the Workers and Trade Unions Major Group.

The failure to develop effective lobbying strategies points to a challenge of paramount importance: If students want to succeed in the global arena in the future, they must build a better understanding of the international and inter-governmental bureaucracies, and learn how to both influence the system from the outside, for example by writing formal letters to the UNESCO Director-General, or from the inside, by putting forward a legitimate claim to student representation in all these processes.

UNESCO offered a small gesture of recognition to students when it gave ESU the opportunity to address the Special High-Level Meeting on the FFA for Education 2030, but as youth delegates rather than student representatives. UNESCO insisted the seat be given to a participant from the UNESCO Youth Forum, which in itself had placed more emphasis on individuals than democratic representation. It was only because ESU's representative had also participated at the forum as a national expert, nominated by the National Union of Students (Denmark), that UNESCO agreed. This experience highlights UNESCO's continued problems with recognising the distinct differences between the youth and student constituencies.

It is difficult to account for this change in UNESCO's approach to youth and students between 2011 and 2015. A possible explanation is that the coordination of the process was handled by a dedicated EFA team within UNESCO's Education Sector, which did not have the same understanding of the student constituency or experience in cooperating with students as UNESCO's former Higher Education Section. Another possible explanation is that the UNESCO Youth Strategy simply does not recognise students. It focusses solely on youth as a homogeneous group, in line with the broader UN Youth Strategy. Unfortunately, this means it does not recognise the differences that exist within the youth demographic with regards to educational status, a distinction of particular importance in UNESCO's area of work. Students are a distinct and central educational stakeholder, with democratically accountable and representative organisations. UNESCO's failure to recognise this demands continued attention and eventual resolution.

Whilst the post-2015 process has been widely described as the most extensive UN consultation in history, as well as one of the most participatory and open intergovernmental negotiation processes, the failure of institutions to engage the student constituency on SDG 4 indicates a fundamental problem with their approach to consultation. In order to elucidate the criticism, we believe it is instructive to establish a distinction between an inclusive process and a democratic process. In an inclusive process, there is an extensive consultation in which the institutions welcome inputs from every organisation that claims to have an interest in the process and considers those inputs to have more or less equal weight. In a democratic process, there is a similarly extensive consultation, but in addition, the representatives of the constituencies concerned have a seat on the relevant committees and working groups so that decisions can be codetermined between the authorities and the representatives of the constituencies affected.

In their approach to negotiating SDG 4, the institutions betrayed a conceptual confusion, operating an inclusive process with sporadic elements of a democratic process. In the EFA Steering Committee, the teacher constituency was afforded representation but the student constituency was not. In justifying their inclusion, the institutions argued that teachers are integral to the educational process and should be welcomed as partners in the development, implementation, and monitoring of SDG 4. Yet students are similarly central to the educational process and to include teachers without including these other constituencies is inconsistent. It is an oversight that has consequences for the legitimacy of the consultative process and for the prospects for successful implementation. It created a process that prioritised organisations with the most resources. Further, in neglecting to consider students as equal partners,

the institutions missed an opportunity to harness the grassroots force of their civil society networks to mobilise behind the agenda. While the special consideration given to teachers partly reflects their greater strategic engagement with the process and their having a global confederation of unions, which students do not have, it also conveys a certain ignorance in the institutions concerning the role of students in education policy and practice.

5 Engaging Students Globally in SDG 4

By 2016, member states had agreed to the most ambitious education goal the world had seen. Students had some success: tertiary education as well as vocational and technical education had been included in the goal; the language around labour market involvement had been softened; the right to free quality education had been reaffirmed, although still only progressively at tertiary level; scholarships had been included in a more sustainable way; and the distinct position of students in monitoring and implementing the goal had, to some extent, been recognised in the FFA. Yet, these victories did not come simply because of student advocacy. In fact, students were not primarily responsible for achieving these victories, with broader civil society organisations playing a larger role. Still, there is no doubt that student involvement, though limited to just a few actors, bolstered the move toward a broad and progressive agenda and pushed SDG 4 in a student-friendly direction, while also affirming students as vanguards of equitable access to quality education that takes a whole-learner approach and rejects narrow definitions of learning.

As the focus shifted from negotiating the goals to actually realising them, students once again had to reframe the work within their own movements in order to make it relevant to the struggles that students face at the grassroots level. An example of this was OBESSU, ESU, EI, and initially the European University Association developing 'A Joint Vision for Secondary and Higher Education for All in Europe', outlining how SDG 4 could be implemented in Europe in the area of secondary and tertiary education. For instance, it linked Target 4.5 on ensuring equal access to education with the need to develop National Access Plans that was already agreed upon in the Bologna Process. But despite external funding, ESU still struggled to convince the national unions to embrace the SDGs. There is a general consensus among them that the SDGs are important, and some unions like NUS-UK and the National Union of Students in Denmark have engaged actively with them in their policy work. Still, there is a long way to go before the SDGs are fully integrated and utilised in student advocacy at the national level, as well as through the local initiatives in which

they engage, including quality assurance, curriculum development, and extra-curricular activities.

In terms of the other regional platforms of student organisations, OCLAE has taken the opposite approach in Latin America to the Europeans. Viewing the SDGs as an attempt to mainstream capitalist development around the world, OCLAE, an avowedly socialist platform, continues to refrain from engaging directly in SDG 4. The irony, though, is that much of OCLAE's work is aligned with the goal: they emphasise a universal right to free education; they highly prioritise active citizenship education, even if it does not necessarily have a global dimension, and they view education as a way of empowering people to develop themselves and their societies.

Suffering from limited capacity to participate during the negotiations, AASU is now focussed on working proactively with the SDGs. The Secretary-General elected in 2016 has established a unit to work solely with the SDGs.

Meanwhile in North America, CFS and USSA have followed the SDG process from the sidelines. CFS seems keen to mainstream all 17 SDGs across their work and has a broad mandate to engage in societal discussions. Combined with a strong representation of indigenous students, many of whom still face major obstacles to accessing education and basic rights in general, CFS has also signalled its intentions to engage with other areas such as SDG 6 on water and sanitation, and SDG 13 on climate action.

Coordinating these efforts globally remains difficult for students. The latest attempt came in May 2016, when tertiary-level students from 16 countries met in Bergen, Norway, for the Global Student Voice meeting organised by NSO. They adopted the Bergen Declaration, which not only outlines the representatives' priorities for education but also aims to establish the meetings as a tradition. Although the Bergen Declaration does not mention the SDGs, due to opposition from OCLAE, it reaffirms the students' commitment to implementing SDG 4, such as when it discusses the existing development model:

Further, we also claim that education is one of the most important tools for providing global citizens with the necessary skills and opportunities to fight climate change, empowering individuals and building resilient communities that will challenge the current development model which is causing harm to the planet and its people. (Global Student Voice, 2016, p. 4)

The National Union of Students in Brazil (UNE) volunteered to host a 2nd Student Voice Meeting in 2017. It was postponed twice due to a lack of funding. At the time of writing, discussion about a potential 2nd Meeting still regularly

surfaces between national student unions, but it remains to be seen who will be able to gather all the different student unions and organise the event. As this demonstrates, students themselves are usually in no position to cover travel costs, as they are already burdened by student debt, and their organisations often have limited resources, too, being unable to collect substantial membership dues directly from students. This stands in stark contrast to teacher, head teacher, and rector conferences, which tend to enjoy reliable financial backing from their members. Thus, if there is a genuine desire to better include students at the global level, financial resources must be mobilised. But it remains to be seen if students can manage to unite behind one shared set of principles. The SDGs offer a common narrative, but as shown above, differences in the unions' support for the SDGs mean it is highly unlikely.

The FFA did leave the possibility for students to take on a role in the global governance of SDG 4 through a youth seat in the Education 2030 Global Steering Committee, though the process around the selection of the youth representative was unclear. Ultimately, a participant from the 2015 UNESCO Youth Forum was selected to sit on the Steering Committee, without a mandate from students anywhere in the world, yet another failure to recognise the distinction between youth and students, and a prioritisation of individuals over representative organisations. It is worth noting that UNESCO frames the Youth Forum as the democratic body through which youth can influence the organisation, but in reality, the past fora have tended to emphasise personal excellence above democratic organisations. Coupled with an unclear decision-making process when drafting, adopting, and presenting the Forum's recommendations, it cannot be taken as democratic, nor in any way representative of youth globally. As the Steering Committee composition rotated at the beginning of 2018, UNESCO once again selected an individual participant from the 9th UNESCO Youth Forum in 2015, although this time the person did represent an organisation working on education. That organisation, however, was founded by the individual herself, and does not have any democratic avenues through which members can seek to influence it.

UNESCO continues to argue that the failure of students to organise on the global level means that no one can legitimately claim the seat on behalf of the constituency. Although partially true, the explanation opens up a discussion about the standard of representativeness to which student organisations are held. Four representative regional bodies exist globally across three regions (ESU, AASU, OCLAE, and OBESSU), not counting USSA and CFS in North America, which do not have a formal partnership, yet rather than offer the seat to one of these, or mediate an ad hoc solution such as a system of rotating the seat or establishing a consultative council, it was decided to offer the seat to

an individual young person. This decision shows how meaningful involvement of students suffers from a UN-wide attempt at mainstreaming youth, which is often more concerned with the age of the individuals, than with whether they have a mandate from the constituency on behalf of whom they claim to speak. This narrow focus is not only undemocratic but also significantly reduces the quality of the youth input, thereby missing out on essential insights from a constituency with firsthand expertise. It is a practice that is completely at odds with that applied to other stakeholders, such as trade unions and indigenous people, and calls for reconsideration in the future. Allowing students into the Steering Committee would have positive implications for UNESCO and the broader SDG 4 agenda as the student movement would become more deeply invested in the success of the agenda, and thereby more effectively engaged at the grassroots level, too. It is a genuine problem in international politics that young people are not viewed as equal stakeholders who should be afforded a seat at the table where decisions about their lives and future are made. The intentions to offer youth a dedicated space are good and should not be discouraged, but what matters the most is that young people's democratic organisations are given the same voice in decision-making as those of their older peers.

For now, this leaves students to structure their engagement with the SDGs on their own. One possible approach, which was aired by Southern African and Canadian students, and which is likely to find support in Europe, too, is for students to provide shadow data and reportage on the implementation of SDG 4. While students were effectively unable to engage in the development of the indicators, they still have a proud tradition of reporting on the actual developments at ground level. This expertise can be leveraged at all levels – national, regional, and global – to challenge the positive framing on their progress that states will inevitably present at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the apex body for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and other similar fora, like the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (RFSD). The Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) Secretariat has already taken a step in this direction, by inviting European and South African student representatives to contribute to the GEMR 2017 and publishing a dedicated youth report with support from student unions as well as other education ambassadors (UNESCO, 2017b), but the involvement can, and should, be developed further. Students themselves could benefit from publishing their own comprehensive reports.

That said, students do not yet seem to be in a position where developing these reports independently is feasible. The issue is not as much about resources, though this is a challenge to students, as about the structure and culture of the student movement. Historically, education policy has always

been a domestic responsibility. Europe has moved beyond this slightly with the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes. This reality is also reflected in how students are organised, the strategies they deploy, and in their analytical lens. Increasingly though, education policy is being globalised, not only because of SDG4, but through global conventions, trade agreements, and the like. In Chapter 12, Clara Fontdevila describes an example of this development. The student movement needs to reconfigure itself to be better attuned to the international dimension of contemporary education policy. No radical change is demanded, but students must embed the global perspective into their existing argumentation and activities. The existence of international education agendas is, however, not just a challenge, for it can also offer students increased leverage with governments by giving them a new range of tools to hold governments to account.

For all the reasons just given, it is evident that there is a genuine need for students to come together globally and claim a voice, if they want to retain influence over the education systems in which their members find themselves. From our interviews with student leaders and coordinators of wider youth-led platforms, it is clear that there is support across the board for organising students globally. However, it is also clear that there continue to be major ideological differences between students, just as old misconceptions continue to breed distrust, particularly between the Latin American and European representatives. As such, any future attempt at organising must be sufficiently flexible that everyone can see themselves represented in it, while also being sufficiently strong that student unions will see the added value. There are two primary ways in which this can be achieved: either students start off with technical cooperation, building a platform that is devoid of policies, focussed on exchanging information, statistics, and common positions that benefit all members of the platform, or they focus their attention on universal student struggles around which they can achieve consensus, forming a more political sort of association. Having reviewed student-formulated documents, the most likely topics around which they might find consensus are the cost of education, students as equal stakeholders in education governance, and equity in education systems. The existing regional student bodies function as gatekeepers to the national unions, and any future platform must win support from the regional bodies but be centred around the national unions.

Even if a global student platform is limited to technical cooperation or to the three topics listed previously, it will still be able to engage with the SDGs. For the first part, the increased technical capacity, stemming from technical cooperation, will allow students to better follow and impact the global agenda through their governments. Should the students successfully manage

to organise around a political union, the three topics outlined above all have major implications for the SDGs, and in particular SDG targets 4.1 and 4.3, which are of relevance to the entire student constituency.

Failing to mobilise globally will have serious ramifications for student engagement in the implementation of SDG 4 and leave students exposed to future global processes that might be outright hostile to students. A process without the corporate influence of the student constituency may, by forgoing the positive influences on policymaking mentioned in our introduction, lead to less efficient resource distribution and management, and to outcomes antithetical to student interests such as reduced access, increased fees, poorer quality, the closing off of avenues for students to influence on the national level, and so on. As our account shows, the primary reason given by UNESCO and the broader UN system for excluding representative student voices, is the fact that no single organisation can legitimately claim to be representative of all the world's students. While this holds students to a higher level of representativeness than other constituencies, we also have to acknowledge that establishing a platform of cooperation, even if initially fragile or superficial, would mean that students have a stronger claim to participation.

6 Lessons for the Student Constituency

A number of different lessons can be drawn from the student constituency's participation in the post-2015 process, both for student unions and for the institutions. It became clear during the OWG process that if AASU, CSA, ESU, OBESSU, and OCLAE do not participate in meetings at the UN in New York, then other individuals and organisations, which though not actually representative of the constituency, will claim the mantle of the student representatives. It is not helped by the UN not recognising, and seemingly not understanding, the distinction between the student and youth constituencies, the composition of the student constituency, and the differing representativeness of different organisations. Nor is it helped by the UN's tendency to select individual advocates rather than representative organisations to participate in its processes, which undermines proper democratic representation. The UN and UNESCO in particular should make an active effort to engage independent, democratic, and representative student unions, and to ensure their deep and continued involvement throughout the monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of the SDGs, as well as in all stages of future sustainable development processes. This is important not only to improve the scope, diversity, and representativeness of the UN's inputs from civil society but to harness the reach, capacity,

and influence of student organisations around the world to promote education and sustainable development.

Had students had more meaningful ways of engaging in the post-2015 negotiations, or, for that matter, other international standard-setting instruments in the education sphere, we would be looking at a different global education landscape today. Students' dream of a free and accessible education system that empowers its learners and prepares them to engage with their society all too often suffers because of agendas narrowly aimed at developing a skilled labour force, which neglect the role of education in building an open society.

The student movement also has lessons to learn. AASU, CSA, ESU, OBESSU, and OCLAE understand that they are broadly united behind the same values, but their attitude toward, and capacity to engage in, institutional processes differs considerably. AASU has an impressive history but continues to suffer in the aftermath of its recent leadership crisis. It requires support from other actors in terms of membership development, capacity building, and financing in order to take its place at the table. ESU and OBESSU have years of experience engaged in institutional processes, those of the European Union and the Council of Europe especially, but their capacity to engage in United Nations processes is lacking. In order to improve their engagement, they need to dedicate resources to improving their understanding of the actors, issues, and processes, and to developing an advocacy strategy and to proactively intervening in discussions; they would benefit from support and advice from organisations with similar values and objectives in doing this. CSA needs to continue to strengthen its membership base, and thus bolster its own representativeness, and to engage more strategically in the interactions with member states, which its relationship to the Commonwealth Secretariat affords them the opportunity to do. With the formal establishment of the organisation, and the election of a new Executive Committee in February 2018, which includes experienced student activists, CSA seems to have taken a leap forward. OCLAE may have chosen to reject the SDGs, but it would be beneficial if they engaged in dialogue about their concerns with the other regional platforms. In fact, all of the regional platforms need to improve their communication and coordination with each other to share information and, where there is an appetite to do so, to develop shared policy positions and a shared advocacy strategy. This would help student unions break out of the cycle of neglecting and rebuilding their international contact over and over again.

Before entering global negotiations, students need to have clearer objectives and a strategy for how to achieve them. In the post-2015 process, students worked primarily through their regional platforms, which led to bottlenecks in their influence, particularly when those platforms were not given sufficient

recognition. While negotiations took place at the global level, students should have leveraged their national connections to influence the priorities of member states and ultimately the global agenda (see Chapter 2 by Antonia Wulff for a discussion of the OWG and member states' failure to involve national CSOs in determining their country positions). NSO in Norway remains the only national union to have done so in the post-2015 process. European students especially have extensive experience with coordinating national advocacy to influence international negotiations, as their strong influence on the Bologna Process testifies, and they should do the same in UN processes. Achieving such success requires not only cooperation from national governments but also that students establish, early in the negotiations, a shared understanding of how the process will impact students, and thus how it should be shaped.

7 Looking Ahead to Implementation

In the decade following the 2008 financial crisis, students have once again come to the fore as activists in their education systems and societies. Students in Chile and Colombia successfully waged protests against their governments to combat privatisation and a narrow focus on the needs of the labour market. Across the US, students are mobilising against tuition fee increases, which cause a debt burden that crushes young people. Students at the University of Cape Town led protests for a decolonised education system, as represented by their opposition to the statue of Cecil Rhodes, and then again later when students at the University of the Witwatersrand sparked national demonstrations against proposed fee increases. In Burma, students marched to the capital when new legislation severely limited their right to self-government and imposed restrictions on academic freedom. And the list goes on: in Denmark, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, UK, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Mexico, and Bangladesh students have been standing up to injustices in the education system and broader society (Grønne, 2017).

These grassroots struggles for access, quality, and equity continue, far removed from considerations of SDG 4. The adoption of that agenda has not given direction to their struggles or even to the language of their struggles, and it has not led to more cooperative attitudes from government. It certainly does not seem to have any bearing on the subjects of students' own struggles, which are determined by the corporate interests of their constituency, but more importantly, by their vision of education as a human right, a public good, and a means to personal and social emancipation. For many education activists, those values are at the heart of what SDG 4 is, or at least should be, about.

Nevertheless, most student activists are unaware that SDG 4 exists or do not see SDG 4 as useful to their causes. While many SDG activists are young people, they seem to be focussed on goals other than SDG 4. From a global perspective, the SDGs continue to struggle to establish themselves as a global standard. Young activists from the Global North working to implement the SDGs are still primarily occupied with devising and implementing projects in the Global South, rather than with their own local constituencies.

It would be easy then to dismiss SDG 4 as a bureaucratic exercise, more for administrators and statisticians than for students, parents, and teachers, but that would be a mistake. It matters at the grassroots level. It represents a commitment made by states in front of the international community. It provides civil society with a standard against which to hold their governments to account. Young people, and students in particular, have a vital role to play in campaigning for the SDGs and ensuring they are mainstreamed across the institutions in which students find themselves. There is no reason why schools and universities would not commit to the SDGs; integrate them into their curricula; adapt their operations to support the realisation of the agenda; and become SDG laboratories, whereby campuses are opened up to the surrounding community to experiment with the SDGs, and where research expertise can be offered on how to advance their implementation. Campaigning for this would give students a strong voice in how their education systems are shaped. Diving deeper into the FFA and the 2030 Agenda text, it becomes clear that the SDGs can also guide practical actions, such as creating new modes of learning; breaking down barriers to education; investing in education and research; and ensuring a vibrant institutional democracy – issues around which student movements have traditionally campaigned.

Students also have to recognise their privileged position in society vis-à-vis less educated members of society and make efforts to implement the broader 2030 Agenda. After all, the SDGs are interconnected, and SDG 4 can only facilitate the implementation of the remaining 16 goals if students develop their capacity, familiarise themselves with the goals and efforts to realise them and help to implement the entire agenda at the local level. Even if some student movements are not mandated by their members to work outside questions of education, there is no reason why student activists could not engage themselves outside the student movement itself and build a parallel SDG movement led by students.

Given the fact that regional platforms are only as strong as their members, it is perhaps too much to expect the SDGs to filter down from the regional platforms to local level. Instead, the success of student efforts to guide the implementation of SDG 4 starts with the local and national movements picking up

the baton themselves. Peer-learning, and indeed activists and organisations inspiring each other, will be key in ensuring broader student action on the SDGs. We do see some movements starting to take action, such as the NUS-UK, which has implemented an ambitious sustainability strategy rooted in the SDGs. Yet more movements will have to come forward and showcase the tangible change created through the SDG framework in order for that framework to gain traction among students.

Student action now shapes students' ability to influence future development processes, something which they should be concerned about as education policies are increasingly decided at international level. This development poses new challenges to student movements, as they must reinvent their activism and advocacy to make an impact in the global arena, from which it has otherwise been absent for many years. Ultimately, engaging students in SDG 4 and beyond should concern the education community as a whole. The member states should be held accountable to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the grassroots level, as the amalgam of local struggles and actions, rather than only in rarefied meetings in New York. If this is to happen, students will have to fulfil their role.

8 Recent Developments

At its 6th World Assembly, the GCE at long last elected its first ever student-led organisation to its board. In 2015, the GCE had already recognised the need to include the constituency for whom it worked to make a positive difference in its decision-making processes. The result was that two seats on the board were reserved for youth- and student-led organisations. As GCE at the time did not have an eligible member, the seats were occupied by representatives from organisations working with youth and students rather than youth- and student-led organisations.

In 2018, the GCE still only had one full member eligible to be designated youth- or student-led: the European Students' Union. The GCE had recognised that they could not build a youth and student movement around one organisation. With support from ActionAid and Plan International, they organised a youth caucus side event at the World Assembly, where national and regional coalitions were encouraged to send youth delegates identified within their networks. The members of the youth caucus were largely given freedom to organise the side event themselves, which presented an opportunity to discuss shared struggles and, not least, wishes for the global movement. The caucus also unanimously put forward ESU as a representative for the youth and

student caucus during elections. *Studentenes og Akademikernes Internasjonale Hjelpesfond* (Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund – SAIH), a Norwegian student NGO working to develop higher education and protect academic freedom, was also elected, but for the seat of the Northern Coalition.

The election of ESU and SAIH to the GCE Board testifies to a movement that recognises that it is accountable toward those same people on whose behalf they claim to be acting. But the way GCE approached the election is also interesting, because, in realising that no legitimate youth or student union with a global mandate existed, and would not come into existence any time soon, GCE chose to create its own constituency at the global level, based on the idea that representatives would at least face some degree of accountability.

In many ways, the GCE student and youth caucus does respond to many of the issues raised throughout this chapter. It seeks to ensure legitimate representation through some sort of elections open to everyone, aggregating opinions of the constituency, and it attempts to balance the Global North's stronger unions with participation from activists from the Global South.

That said, the current structure of the youth caucus is problematic. It faces challenges of representativeness, because many of its participants are either from youth sections of, or closely associated with and dependent on, GCE's existing members. As such, there is a risk that the representatives in the youth caucus simply end up carrying the policies of their 'adult' NGOs into the youth caucus.

Similarly, several of the participants in the youth caucus did not hold any sort of elected position but were instead chosen by existing GCE members based on their personal merits. While participants selected in this way can certainly bring forward novel and constructive ideas, the fact remains that they are not accountable to anyone. This way of selecting participants also has the unfortunate side effect of blurring the distinction between the youth and student constituencies.

While GCE at global level has at last acted justly with its youth constituency, the change has not taken root among all of its national and regional coalitions. Some youth and student participants are not welcome in their own coalitions, due to a range of issues, such as not being able to pay the membership fees or not being recognised by all members of the coalitions. This obviously also weakens GCE's global efforts to increase their own accountability.

Still, with its youth caucus, GCE and the youth and students involved exemplify the difficulty of walking the fine line between tokenism and genuine inclusion. Despite the challenges briefly outlined above, the youth caucus remains an initiative that should be applauded and followed with great interest. Many of its challenges can be worked out, and a group of participants in

the caucus are already working to set up structures that promise to increase its independence and representativeness. These ambitions, however, will require additional support from GCE and its international non-governmental organisation members if they are to succeed.

Notes

- 1 <https://obessu.org/about/about-us/>
- 2 Information about AASU is taken from a document entitled *History of AASU*, which formerly appeared on the AASU website (www.aasuonline.org), which is no longer available on the Internet.
- 3 The Major Group for Children and Youth is a space for the children and youth constituency to organise within United Nations sustainable development processes.