

**Karolína Burešová\***

**THE SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE  
OF UNITED NATIONS**

The article describes strategies and initiatives of the United Nations which on global field operate in order to support the sustainable development of local communities and community development work and their relation to global issues in the context of education. The aim of the text is to present the main initiatives and programmes of the UN which focus on education.

**Community development and its socio-educational aspects**

Recently, both educational theory and practice have been exposed to the fact that the globalised and multicultural society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces problematic issues regarding economic crisis, war conflicts and intercultural dialogue, social insecurities and disparities or environmental risks. These phenomena have naturally led to the transformation of families and their local communities. The social acceleration which is visible from the perspective of the latest research resulted in effects that are relevant in the socio-educational context of community life. The role, form, content and concept of education have been directly influenced by increasing diversity and therefore the ubiquitous need of inclusion.

The processes of social exclusion and marginalization have become an urgent social problem therefore securing equality of opportunities in education is one of the biggest existing challenges in education. Social inclusion is complicated because of the fragmentation of community life, *di-social* life strategies, and the failure of the social function of schools in furthering integration. UNESCO defines inclusion in the context of education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which

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covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children” (Global Monitoring Report... 2006).

However, nowadays education is no longer only in the hands of governmental sector and state institutions on national level. Nongovernmental and non-profit organisations often provide citizens with programmes and projects, which are closer to the regional context and particular socio-cultural background of the community. From this reason communities are currently very frequently linked to movements and initiatives supporting education of socially endangered and excluded citizens or lifelong learning. “Community education is a concept and practice often linked to adult education and involving the provision of courses and educational events outside the school or college premises in public or private buildings within the community. This type of provision is also referred to as ‘outreach’, since it reaches out to the community rather than requiring people to travel to the institution” (Wallage 2008, p. 59).

Communities put their specific philosophy in the practice in their own community schools where it is possible to foster orientation towards functional partnerships that bring both financial and human resources to the school and participate in extracurricular activities based on analysing community needs (Pappano 2010). It is proved by practice that extracurricular pursuits can lead to forming positive social interaction and connect schools to their communities (McLaughlin 2000). Therefore the role of the community in the everyday life of the school is considered to be particularly important, especially in socially disadvantaged and excluded localities. Basch (2010) argues that community schools are capable of providing health, psychological and social counselling and other services to students from low-income communities with poor access to these resources.

Providing students with adequate conditions, quality information resources and study materials is not the only indicator of academic success for the child. It is also the qualification levels of a child’s parents and their career which have proved to be very important. This has led to frequently presented view that those parents, who have succeeded in the education system are more likely to see the value of education, aid their child’s development and care more about the education of their child. (Murphy et al. 2009, p. 125)

Considerations of this kind are relevant in the context of *area-based initiatives* (ABIs), which might be the most efficient element capable of intervention in relation to poor education outcomes in particular places. The deeper exploration of the relationship between education, disadvantage and

place has led to an analysis of locally specific processes related to how people live and develop their identities with reference to their local environments, structure of the local school system, the types of schools that can be accessed, schools' locations and the characteristics they have acquired over time, how parents exercise school choice and how schools respond to their pupils' backgrounds. (Kerr et al. 2014, pp. 31-37)

ABIs should be based on sociological and socio-philosophical aspects of the community. The community which is understood as an entity connected by living conditions, *lived* experience, sensitivity, values, social relations, and shared perspectives which has been taken into account in theory (Bauman 2006, Delanty 2003, Gardner 1999). The school as a learning community has the following attributes: public participation (in decision-making, instruction, classroom volunteering), focus on learning (every pupil should be able to achieve their maximum), positive expectation (emphasising the potential of learners and not their deficits), and permanent development (the ongoing reflection upon and evaluation of the process) (Merino Fernández 2008).

These attributes are usually accompanied by extended hours, services and relationships, reconceiving education as a coordinated, child-centred effort, building stronger families, improving communities and creating environment where families and communities work together to support students' educational success. Such schools are usually referred to as community schools. The foundations for community schools can be described by a Developmental Triangle that places children at the centre, surrounded by families and communities. The triangle comprises of three interconnected support systems:

- A strong core instructional program designed to help all students meet high academic standards;
- Expanded learning opportunities designed to enrich the learning environment for students and their families;
- A full range of health, mental health and social services designed to promote children's well-being and remove barriers to learning (Building community... 2011, p. 1).

If we regard a community school as a connecting element between community life and socio-educational services of the region, there is a need to employ here a professional capable of working in this very specific field. It is usually "youth and community worker", who activates members of the community or works with young people within the context of their communities.

“Youth and community workers may also observe and intervene in community and institutional processes and tasks to promote young people’s participation.” (Sapin 2013, p. 9) However, “community development worker” is usually oriented towards communities themselves and helps to improve their capacity for managing and improving the quality of their lives.

Community workers and community development workers operate on local level and are often key elements in solving very urgent and fragile issues in both individual and group perspective. More importantly, tackling the disadvantages which prevent some children doing well should be a national priority. The debates on the methods and strategies leading to this goal do not always lead into agreement with the involved parts. One of the obstacles is, for instance, the decision on the level where these strategies should be formulated. It could be national, regional and local authorities or even city-region level (Dyson et al. 2012, p. 4).

Harlem Children Zones (HCZ), which is a geographically based non-profit organisation can be a very inspiring concept for European community schools. HCZ currently serve around 100 blocks in Harlem, New York and offer an interlocking network of education, health, family, and social welfare services for low-income black families. It is a unique concept supporting children from cradle to career, which is:

- focused on a particular local area,
- *doubly* holistic,
- able to act strategically for children and families in the area. (ibid., pp. 9-10)

Presented concept of the school appears in the discourse that analyses the possibilities of development in so called knowledge society where school is a learning organisation and operates in both European and global contexts. Community schools are often focused on global education motivating children to act like global citizens able to deal with issues such as sustainable development or intercultural dialogue. These institutions support the development of multilevel personal identity comprising of linguistic, personal and social layers. They create the suitable environment for the realization of lifelong and intergenerational learning across various age and ethnic groups. From this reason, it is obvious that community schools put together socio-educational aspects of a local region and have crucial role in community development.

**Community and regional development – European and global view**

Community development is inevitably linked to the characteristics of its region or locality and has got its specifics on each continent. The European view represented by the European Union (EU) on community development is predominantly influenced by strategies aiming at unification and harmonization which would enable sustainable management of the process on international level. This approach proved to be very effective in terms of agenda setting long-term planning and financial issues. On the other hand it has been criticised by public as it can result in suppressing traditional attributes of national states, their unique cultural heritage and history, which is shared on the continental level but is very diverse in the context of individual countries.

The global view on community development introduced by the United Nations (UN) is based on the protection of specific cultural and biocultural diversity, the support of sustainable development of the communities and dealing with alarming global problems concerning both village and town settlements. This concept is more sensitive towards very sensitive themes such as intercultural dialogue, safeguarding of endangered languages and their dialects or revitalization of local fauna and flora. It enables local communities to sustain their traditions and keep their lifestyle, but is rather different from the first approach mentioned above because of the remarkable role of the UN.

This role is very close to the principle of charity based work in the community context. Primarily, this international organisation creates safe environment supporting the global discussion of its member states on contemporary acute issues and aims to disseminate solutions respecting human rights and national independence. Securing financial matters is not the dominant responsibility of the UN initiatives. The position of this global leader can be understood as an umbrella capable of operating as an advisor, coordinator and protector in the sector of human rights compliance.

The UN focuses on long-term perspective on the theme of poverty in Africa and other regions, HIV/AIDS prevention, gender disparities, the problems related to urban poverty and slums or land-grabbing. At the same time it supports campaigns against slavery, domestic violence, child soldiers, child illegal work, child prostitution and pornography, child sexual abuse, stoning etc. These issues can be in some cases the intrinsic element of a particular community and its socio-cultural background related to religious and political characteristics of the locality. Dealing with them can be from this reason delicate and may cause controversial debates. The UN has four main purposes:

- To keep peace throughout the world;
- To develop friendly relations among nations;
- To help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, to conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy, and to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms;
- To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals (Charter of the United... 1945).

The UN operates around the world in the scope of its 193 member states and decisions are made on global, national and local level within local and national agencies of particular UN organisations. There are five world regions of the UN- Africa, Arab states, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional problems are always firstly addressed on local level, most frequently by the UN national agencies as social problems should be understood in national perspective. In the case of humanitarian aid performed by the UN material or logistical assistance is provided usually in response to humanitarian crises. The UN brings together governments, individuals, NGOs, charities, multilateral organisations, domestic organisations and private companies. The primary goal is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Development aid should take into account the underlying socioeconomic factors which may have led to a crisis or emergency.

The consequences of natural catastrophes and war conflicts cannot be settled within community resources. Lives are lost, houses are destroyed and material relief assistance and services are needed. They are often concurrently followed by emergency food aid, relief coordination, protection, and support services. The last phase is reconstruction and rehabilitation of the community infrastructure which often involves water, sanitation and emergency repairs. Moreover psychological support and education are necessary as well as disaster risk reduction. This system is based on projects aimed at prevention, preparedness and early warning systems. It is clear that in this regard the orientation towards the future on the global field has to be strengthened.

Year 2015 represents a very special period as the member states of the UN will adopt a new sustainable development agenda and a new global agreement on climate change. The actions will result at the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 in new sustainable development goals that are derived from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The process

of the post 2015 development agenda is based on broad public participation of various subjects – Major Groups and other civil society stakeholders. Citizens are also welcome to join the conversation on the post 2015 MDGs agenda and can vote on the World We Want 2015 website for the issues that are the most important as it appeared in the My World survey.

MDGs were established in 2000 and include eight anti-poverty targets to be accomplished by 2015. Since then, global poverty continues to decline, more children than ever are safe (Goal 2. Achieve... 2015) and child deaths have dropped dramatically. Access to safe drinking water has been greatly expanded and targeted investments in fighting malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis have saved millions. The following table compares MDGs and the proposed Sustainable Development goals according to the theme they address (2015 is the Time... 2015).

Table 1

Comparison of development goals

Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)	Proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End poverty in all its forms everywhere.</li> <li>• End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.</li> <li>• Reduce inequality within and among countries. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all,</li> <li>• Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.</li> </ul>
Achieve universal primary education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Promote gender equality and empower women	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Reduce child mortality	
Improve maternal health	
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases	Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

Ensure environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</li> <li>• Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss</li> <li>• Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.</li> <li>• Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.</li> <li>• Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (taking note of agreements made by the UNFCCC forum).</li> <li>• Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.</li> <li>• Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation.</li> <li>• Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.</li> </ul>
Develop a global partnership for development	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

*Source:* Millenium development... (2015), Towards sustainable... (2015).

The Table 1 shows that most Sustainable Development goals are devoted to the issues related to the poverty and the environment. On the contrary, other themes such as the reduction of child mortality or improving maternal health have been left out. It is obvious that community development is directly linked to all of the mentioned themes.

The SDGs also reflect on the important role of education. Therefore the part of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that made up the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development is also The global education agenda (Education 2030). The Incheon Declaration constitutes the commitment of the education community to Education 2030 and entitles UNESCO to lead and coordinate education within the overall SDG realization (SDG 4...2016).

The access to primary education represents here only the one of the goals which has been articulated in the scope of the UN. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2000 intro-



duced Education for all 2015 (EFA) movements oriented towards the quality of basic education for all children, youth and adults. *The Dakar Framework for Action* which was created at the World Education Forum (Dakar 2000) mandated UNESCO to act as the leading agency and coordinate strategic partnerships (Education for all Movement 2015).

The worldwide movement EFA is the most important commitment to education in recent decades. Efforts in its frame have made remarkable progress. However the EFA goals are very unlikely to be achieved by 2015. The new strategy is needed for a new and forward-looking education agenda that completes unfinished agenda while addressing new challenges. The following table presents the comparison of EFA goals and the education goals in the frame of the post-2015 development agenda (Beyond 2015: The Education... 2015).

Table 2

EFA goals and the education goals in the frame of the post-2015 development agenda

<b>EFA 2015</b>	<b>The Post-2015 Education Agenda</b>
Expand Early childhood care and education.	1.By 2030, at least x% of girls and boys are ready for primary school through participation in quality early childhood care and education.
Ensure Access to and complete, free, and compulsory primary education of good quality.	2.By 2030, all girls and boys complete free and compulsory quality basic education of at least 9 years and achieve relevant learning outcomes.
Ensure equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs.	4. By 2030, at least x% of youth and y% of adults have the knowledge and skills for decent work and life through technical and vocational, upper secondary and tertiary education and training.
Achieve a 50 % improvement in adult literacy by 2015, especially for women.	3.By 2030, all youth and at least x% of adults reach a proficiency level in literacy and numeracy.
Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015.	
Improve all aspects of the quality of education.	6.By 2030, all governments ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers.

	5. By 2030, all learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to establish sustainable and peaceful societies, including global citizenship education and education for sustainable development.
	7. By 2030, all countries allocate at least 4-6% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or at least 15-20% of their public expenditure to education.

*Source:* Beyond 2015: The Education... (2015), Education for all Goals (2015).

Table 2 depicts the major thematic similarities and differences between the mentioned two strategies. There are two new extra goals in post-2015 Education Agenda. The first of them is global citizenship education and education for sustainable development. The second one specifies the public expenditure to education. The only goal that is not explicitly contained in the new agenda is concerning gender disparities in primary and secondary education.

All the introduced strategies are going to have a remarkable impact on the launching of new programmes and projects in the context of both education and community development in global and European perspective. They introduce current general vision shared by the UN member states which is a unique basis for individual ongoing initiatives and movements in international context.

### **Sustainable development of communities in the projects of the United Nations**

The global strategies of the UN presented above function as a frame for other programmes and projects of individual UN organisations. For the purpose of the article, eight UN organisations were chosen as an example of subjects acting in the sphere of community development (very often also in the context of education). Initiatives of these organisations differ in their form, content, duration, but they are very inspiring because of their unique approach to the particular theme.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) operates in more than 170 countries and territories and helps to eradicate poverty, inequalities and exclusion. It provides assistance in developing policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and building resilience in order to sustain development results. UNDP is a strong partner for communities which need to improve their services, sustainability, governance and security. UNDP aims at helping countries to build and share solutions in three main domains:

- Sustainable development,
- Democratic governance and peacebuilding,
- Climate and disaster resilience (A world of development... 2015).

UNDP helps countries to strengthen their capacity to anticipate and withstand the impact of natural disasters and other sudden shocks, and to recover from these crises. In June 2014 UNDP assisted in Bosnia and Herzegovina after “Floors of the century” and supported the communities in implementing capacities and building strong partnerships with other international partners, especially local authorities. This recovery assistance of the communities had direct impact on more than 1.5 million people. UNDP also worked in eastern Ukraine in 2014 where more than a million people fled the fighting. It helped to provide citizens with adequate shelter and essential social services and paid special attention to the needs of children, the disabled and other vulnerable groups (Time for global action... 2015). UNDP is also an author of the UN-wide campaign to engage staff at all levels of the organization, detailing what’s happening to the green UN.

This theme is very close to the activities of The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which prepares the global environmental agenda of the UN. UNEP work involves:

- Assessing global, regional and national environmental conditions and trends,
- Developing international and national environmental instruments,
- Strengthening institutions for the wise management of the environment (About UNEP 2015).

One of the most popular campaigns is “Think eat save” initiated by the Save Food Initiative, which is based on a partnership between UNEP, FAO and Messe Düsseldorf and is supported by the UN Secretary-General’s Zero Hunger Challenge. The amount of food waste counts more than the total net food production of Sub-Saharan Africa and would be sufficient to feed the estimated 900 million people in the world. This campaign aims at creating global, regional and national actions which would reduce global food waste (About the Campaign 2015)

It is obvious that local communities need long-term, complex and professional support not only in social matters, security or environmental issues, but also in the context of building sustainable human settlements.

UN-HABITAT works towards a better future of towns and cities. It supports urban areas to promote and implement sustainable strategies, which would be socially and environmentally sensitive to the particular setting and which would help to create adequate shelter for those in need. The main goal is to slow the growth of the slums and build modern infrastructure (roads, public transport, water, electricity, sanitation etc.). These processes are related to facing social issues such as poverty, unemployment, crime problems or health issues. Modern cities face demographic and spatial challenges linked to the dramatic increase of urbanization and land-grabbing (UN-Habitat at a glance 2015).

The World Urban Campaign is coordinated by UN-Habitat and its goal is to make the urban agenda a priority of national development policies. 'I'm a City Changer' is the advocacy initiative of this Campaign. It raises awareness about positive urban change by engaging citizens in changing their urban communities and achieving green, safe, inclusive and well-planned cities (World urban campaign 2015).

Currently, it is not only European cities and capitals facing the new wave of immigrants and refugees. This issue is the mandate of The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), whose main purpose is to safeguard rights and well-being of refugees and asylum seekers. Today, UNHCR protects millions of refugees, returnees, internally displaced and stateless people (Office of the United Nations... 2015). City communities have become predominantly multicultural units where we can often find ethnic quarters or settlements sharing their own cultural patterns. As listed above, urban areas currently solve various problems and therefore this issue cannot be ignored without securing professional advocacy system. Advocacy is a major element of UNHCR activities, used in combination with activities such as information dissemination, monitoring and negotiation. These activities can lead to the transformation of policies and services on national, regional or global level. UNHCR is also analysing alternative forms to refugee camps, which would respect human right of refugees and would not negatively interfere with the local community life. For instance, refugees may live on land or housing which they rent, own or occupy informally, or they may have private hosting arrangements. Initially, UNHCR provides life-saving emergency assistance. Other vital assistance that is available involves refugee registration, assistance and advice on asylum applications, education and counselling. Other UNHCR actions are capacity building, protection of refugees, finding durable solutions and fundraising. The Agency must be able to offer aid and experts to the zone affected by war conflict or natural catastrophe without delay. Providing

fleeing civilians with emergency help is often the first step towards their long-term protection and rehabilitation (What we do 2015).

The process of migration is especially demanding for women and children. They are during critical situations often left behind without adequate shelter and dignified living conditions. Current transformations of communities should be always followed by special support of women. UN lately unified the systems of protecting women globally. The new initiative UN-WOMEN has joined four former divisions supporting the rights of women. The main roles of UN Women are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms,
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society,
- To lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress (About UN-Women 2015).

The UN also provides communities with professional assistance when securing public health. World Health Organisation (WHO) coordinates international strategies aiming at six main areas of work: Health systems, promoting health through the life-course, non-communicable diseases, communicable diseases, corporate services, preparedness, surveillance and response. It acts as a global player in world health by acting in the field of monitoring, technical support, research agenda, health norms and standards (About WHO 2015).

Health issues in the community are frequently related to the theme of hygiene and the access to drinkable water. Food and Agriculture organisation of the UN (FAO) strives to achieve food security, eradication of hunger and malnutrition, elimination of poverty, driving forward economic and social progress and utilization of natural resources (About FAO 2015).

Each of the seven listed UN organisations addresses the community life from a different perspective. These organisations represent the UN global view on communities, which are regarded as vital parts of world regions. Securing their sustainable development is the only way how to sustain their traditional specifics, such as oral traditions, languages or unique local knowledge of the locality and its original socio-cultural background.

## Community development and global education

The presented UN organisations and their projects take into consideration socio-educational aspects of community life and transform them into themes related to community sustainable development in the global context. The individual campaigns and initiatives are fragmented within each sphere but they always aspire to raise public awareness in the scope of specific issues.

To enable all learners to get knowledge about global issues on their educational track, we need to continue propagation of global citizenship education and education for sustainable development and place them into both compulsory curriculum and extracurricular activities of children and youth. Teaching young generation about the issues such as cultural diversity and world heritage, humanitarian aid, social inclusion, gender parity or environmental sustainability is the strategy leading to effective security of community development, community transformation and revitalization.

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Taken globally the community development faces unique situation that can be characterized by the unification of socio-economic policies and long-term strategies, as well as movements and initiatives aiming to foster community diversity. Enhancing the sustainability of indigenous community life is inevitably linked with socio-educational regional specifics that are to be expanded and supported both nationally and internationally. Our globalised world, where the issues such as war and intercultural conflicts, economic and social risks or environmental crisis are daily articulated should redefine the general concept of cultural diversity and its attachment to community life. This text describes strategies and initiatives of the United Nations which on global field operate in order to support the sustainable development of local communities and community development work and their relation to global issues in the context of education.