This is an edited summary of "Benavot, Aaron, interview with Will Brehm, FreshEd, 141, podcast audio, December 24, 2018." Edited by Aaron Benavot.

Will Brehm 0:18
Aaron Benavot, welcome to FreshEd.

Aaron Benavot 0:44
Very glad to be here.

Will Brehm 1:43
So, to start, Aaron, I want to read SDG Target 4.7 and I'd like to hear what your reactions are. So, the target reads: "by 2030 ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development, and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of cultures contribution to sustainable development." What are your thoughts?

Aaron Benavot 2:26
I remember the first time I read that. You have to take at least two breaths to get through the whole thing. And I also remember saying, especially when I would present this to various audiences I came into contact with, it seems like every idea that they hadn't included in the first six targets, they put into target 4.7. The sense is that everything but the kitchen sink was included here. The other thing I recall is that when my colleagues, who are involved in gathering data and preparing information for monitoring purposes, read this target, they basically started laughing. They thought that the feasibility of coming up with any kind of systematic information about any of the issues in 4.7 is inconceivable. It was laughed off as a not very serious target. And so, at the beginning, there was a certain contradiction: on the one hand, people understood that 4.7 includes important concepts; on the other hand, they thought that any attempt to measure or monitor progress on this target was not going to be serious. Yes, it is clear that these are aspirational targets. And yes, we're trying to move policies of countries in a particular direction. But if we're also trying to hold governments to account, to a target they've actually committing themselves to, then what does it mean if we have little or no systematic information pertaining to the target? Thus, there was this ambivalence about target 4.7. It's lovely to aspire to such wonderful ideals in these concepts, but we can't be serious about reporting on them. It took quite a few months for this attitude towards 4.7 to subside. It began to change for all kinds of different reasons. There were, first and foremost, a lot of people who understood that this is actually a very serious and important target in relation to the broader 2030 Agenda. And if you compare the contents of 4.7 to international educational policies of the past, then you realize that this is a transformative, even revolutionary target. No previous global education policy regime had included a goal or target speaking to the humanistic, moral and social purposes of education.

Will Brehm 5:10
Usually, it's more economic.

Aaron Benavot 5:12
Well, it's not only economic, it was usually about getting kids into school.

Will Brehm 5:16
Access.

Aaron Benavot 5:17
Access. And completion. Making sure that children are in school and complete a full cycle. And mainly for primary education, but now also secondary education. In addition, it was about making sure that countries reach gender parity in enrollments. And a few other issues too. For example, adult literacy and early childhood education, but these are problematic targets for different reasons, mainly in terms of measurement. And then there was this broad category of quality. Historically, quality education was all about inputs: Are there sufficient numbers of teachers? Are the teachers well-qualified? How much is being spent per pupil? How large and well-equipped are the classrooms? Do schools have roofs over them? Do they have heating in the winter? Do they have air conditioning in the summer? Do students have enough textbooks? Do they have access to the textbooks in school? There were few attempts to explore what actually happens in the classroom.

Will Brehm 6:17
And is that where 4.7 comes in?

Aaron Benavot 6:19
Yes, 4.7 opens up quality issues in many ways. Much of the new agenda is focused at outcomes, not inputs. It's much more about learning outcomes and how to improve them. Learning issues can be found in many of the SDG4 targets. Achieving a minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, improving literacy for youth and adults, digital skills, and employability skills. In this regard, these learning outcomes have strong links to economic priorities. But target 4.7 uniquely talks about other kinds of learning -- knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, global citizenship, peace, human rights, cultural diversity, among others. So, target 4.7 is also about outcomes, but it talks about outcomes that have rarely been on the international education agenda. In this sense, it is really a target without precedent. The other thing to pay attention to about target 4.7 is that it refers all learners, not just learners in school. It includes learners outside of formal education. It could be youth outside of school, it could be adults. But in fact most people who think about this target, mainly think of school-based programs that promote education for sustainable development or global citizenship education in, let's say, primary and secondary education, which narrows the intent of target 4.7.

Will Brehm 7:52
So, on the one hand, it's comprehensive in terms of "who" they're targeting.

Aaron Benavot 7:56
Yes.

Will Brehm 7:56
But, I mean, even there's so many different terms in that target. And so, one of the terms, global citizenship education. I have a student who is struggling! She struggles with this idea and has done

this massive literature review of how all different academics and development agencies talk about it. And she comes back to me, and she says, I'm more confused now than ever. So, how on earth does the UN or UNESCO even begin to say, with just that one term? How do they then begin to say, how do we measure it? How can we agree upon particular measures or indicators of that target?

Aaron Benavot 8:36
I'll answer your question, but I need to do a bit of a back story here. All the terms in 4.7 have real histories in international agendas and agreements. Some of these concepts go back quite a few decades, even before World War Two. So, one of the things that it took me a while to figure out -- partly because there isn't a good history of how this thing was put together and why -- is that governments saw in this target a way of echoing past concerns, which had animated earlier political discussions and agreements, and bring them under a new umbrella, or a new framing. So, all the terms in 4.7 actually have important histories. These need to be reconstructed, to be sure. Indeed, there is value in doing an "archaeology" of these terms. And to your point, each of these terms does not have a consensus around how they should be conceived and defined. Not only among scholars, but also in international organizations and civil society, there isn't a conceptual consensus. Now, you could say that conceptual clarity is needed when you bring such terms into a global framework. And yet, conceptual flexibility might be preferable precisely because you are bringing together people from different backgrounds and cultures, who speak many languages, and by including terms like these, you can build a sense of collaboration and solidarity around a document like the 2030 Agenda. So, using terms that can be understood by different people in different ways both highlights their importance and allows people to move forward in support of an international consensus document. On the other hand, if you're an academic, this approach is a problem. Including imprecise concepts such as these undermines your analysis, especially if you're trying to quantify their meaning. An academic who's interested in global citizenship will ask: "what are the different dimensions of global citizenship? What precise definitions am I going to use for each dimension for the purposes of my work? And how am going to operationalize the concept so it can be measured using different indicators? Can I find some measures that are well aligned between the conceptual and operational definitions?" And then the academic would find ways, using different measurement strategies, to measure the various parts of global citizenship.

The other thing that's probably less known around this target is that there have been countries that have pushed certain terms politically and other countries that have pushed other terms. And so, this is also a way of bringing countries that have different interests to agree on a single comprehensive target.

Will Brehm 11:33
Do you have an example? Like, what countries were-

Aaron Benavot 11:35
Take, for example, the term education for sustainable development, which has an older history than global citizenship. ESD has been supported through funding and other mechanisms by the Japanese. And in fact, the cultural roots of ESD are really interesting. For the purposes of the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report, we had a Japanese colleague who read the Japanese literature around sustainable development, and helped the team to understand the idiosyncratic

history of this term in Japanese academic circles, which is not widely understood. Most people think of ESD as a Scandinavian concept that likely started in, let's say, the 1980s and 1990s. But in Japan sustainable development has a very different history. And perhaps, it is not surprising that the Japanese, who believe strongly in sustainability, have promoted ESD at UNESCO and elsewhere. And then you have the South Koreans, who have been the big backers of global citizenship education. In South Korea, the notion of global citizenship has been a way of engaging with the world and the planet. The idea of global citizenships aligns in some ways with the notion of sustainable development, but in fact they are distinct concepts. At the international level, global citizenship has become an umbrella term within which there are elements that are not all that dissimilar to certain ideas found under ESD. South Korea invested quite a substantial amount of money to promote this particular concept (GCED). And support its incorporation as part of the global goal on education. So, it's interesting how certain countries have promoted and built consensus around particular concepts in the global agenda. And remember that there are some countries that find the term global citizenship an anathema and have no intention of using it. They deeply believe that education should promote *national* rather than global citizenship. In their view, education involves loyalty, patriotism, national identity, and a sense of belonging to a country. We commissioned a study that looked at the content of social sciences textbooks. The study found that in the vast majority of textbooks, there is no mention, or very little mention, of countries outside of the borders of the country in which the textbook is used. Critical views towards the term "global citizenship" is one of the reasons, for example, that the OECD chose the term "global competence", and not global citizenship, when they initiated work in this area. Colleagues at OECD believe that there's less political contestation, or antagonism or antipathy toward, the notion of global competence in contrast to the notion of global citizenship.

Will Brehm 14:16
So, it's interesting that there is this, international politics sort of demands this consensus building by adding terms that can be understood differently, or different terms that have different histories in these different member states. And then you sort of create this long string of these terms, like 4.7 to, in a sense appease or support everyone's idea and get people to adopt the SDGs in the end. But like you said, there's that academic side. And so, it seems like there's going to be an inherent tension for when the UNESCO Institute of Statistics has to actually operationalize these targets.

Aaron Benavot 15:06
Probably so. One way to understand this is to recall that the 17 SDGs and 169 global targets, including 4.7, were part and parcel of a long, protracted negotiation leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The negotiations that preceded the final formulations of the goals and targets were run out of New York City. Typically, they included representatives of ministries of foreign affairs (and not ministries of education or heath or labor). International agencies were not deeply involved in these negotiations, although representatives of civil society played an important role. Representatives of member states, from each region, were in the driver seat in this process. If international agencies had been more involved, we likely would not have had so many SDGs, and we certainly would have had fewer targets and global indicators, and they would have been formulated differently. In some deep sense, the education sector was not really actively involved in the so-called post-2015 process. They received reports and from time to time sought to intervene, but at a distance. The big decision by the education sector happened in May of 2014 when they convened a meeting in Muscat, Oman. At that point,

representatives of the sector made a critical decision to end the EFA process and merge into the broader post-2015 development process. Up until then, there had been two parallel tracks, a comprehensive education approach known as EFA, and a fairly comprehensive development approach with a minor education component known as the Millennium Development Goals. The EFA goals and the MDGs had been running parallel to each other, with different education agendas. And then in Muscat, governments and non-government representatives and international agencies decided to bring these tracks together as part of a single post-2015 framework, which didn't have a name yet, emerging in New York City. This decision meant that the education sector was going to give up, in some sense, its sole control over determining the priorities of the education agenda, because now you had other people, many of them with a strong voice in New York, who were constructing the new agenda.

However, members of the education sector understood the value and legitimacy of declarations coming out of big international meetings, such as the 2015 World Education Forum, which was scheduled to take place in May of 2015 in Incheon (South Korea). They knew that developing consensus formulations about the specific targets of the global goal of education at such an international education forum would be influential. And after such a meeting they could come to New York and say, listen, we had 160 or 180 ministers of education, we had civil society, and international agencies and the private sector in attendance. Everybody contributed in the process. And here's what the education community believes should be the key target formulations. People in New York would have to pay attention, since it wasn't the view of one agency or organization, it was the view of almost all member states, who negotiated a difficult text, presumably for implementation purposes, called the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* in which alternative formulations of the targets were clearly articulated.

So, to your point, then. After this long process of formulating and then agreeing to the 17 goals and 169 targets, what would be the next big issue? Measuring, monitoring and accountability. Finding ways to develop clearly defined indicators and concrete measures that would enable countries and the global community to assess progress. However, here the process shifted. Once the discussions turned to indicators and measures, it no longer just involved politicians or representatives from ministries of foreign affairs. Now it shifted to expert statisticians and demographers from representative countries and the UN statistical commission. The UN created the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators made up of statisticians, people who are really serious about number crunching. And, they're the ones who began to formulate the indicators for each of the 169 targets. After mouths, actually years, of discussions, they agreed to 230 global indicators (July 2017). And that involved a rather different process. So, this is the challenge now: how to come up with high quality measures for these 230 global indicators, including the global indicator for target 4.7. They're not trying to measure target 4.7 per se, but rather the global indicator of target 4.7.

Will Brehm 18:57
And there's agreement on that indicator?

Aaron Benavot 18:59
Up until now, there's been agreement on the global indicator for target 4.7. I just want to point out that in some important ways, this global indicator has reduced the scope of the target. Now, we are

mainly talking about things that are going on in formal education and not lifelong learning. So, we're not including all learners, only those in school. And instead of looking at outcomes (knowledge and skills), the global indicator looks at inputs. The indicator asks: Are countries mainstreaming education for global citizenship and sustainable development, and other thematic areas, into their policies, curricula, teacher preparation and assessment?

Will Brehm 19:41
Yeah, so we're not worried about what the student learns after finishing school, how they act?

Aaron Benavot 19:47
Well, let's just say in the absence of any kind of methodology or instrument that actually captures an outcome of this kind, they are relying on measuring inputs. It's a fair point. But it basically assumes precisely what you're saying. In other words, the more a country succeeds in mainstreaming GCED, global citizenship education and ESD in their education policies, their curriculum, their teacher training and their student assessments, other things being equal, this shift should basically produce students who have more knowledge and skills in these areas. Notice, by the way, it doesn't talk about attitudes and dispositions, which many people argue are probably as important, if not more so, in this particular area, than knowledge and skills. You could maybe take the idea of skills and distinguished between hard skills and soft skills, and then bring these in through the back door. But the overall assumption is that countries that are including GCED and ESD in policy and curriculum and so forth are going to produce students who are going to have more knowledge and skills, and that these outcomes are not epiphenomena, which students learn just to pass a test and then forget everything the next day or week. Rather, they're going to carry these learning outcomes with them into adulthood. Well, that's a pretty big assumption. And it's not like we have a lot of evidence to validate it.

Will Brehm 21:04
Yeah, and, I mean, and the assumption that you might know, a lot of information about climate change but you're still going to go buy the gas guzzling, SUV car. So we can all agree that climate change is happening, but we're still going to hop on the airplane and travel all over the world.

Aaron Benavot 21:20
We can know about the science around it. We can even think that it's important. We can have the right attitudes, but it doesn't mean we are going to change our behavior.

Will Brehm 21:27
It also sort of misses that the students in Australia who are protesting today recently, all about they want more climate change education, but the government is saying no, and so the students are protesting. And to me that sort of symbolizes global citizenship. They are participating as active citizens on a topic of global importance, and that also wouldn't be captured in any of the indicators or in the indicator of SDG 4.7.

Aaron Benavot 22:00
It would not. And that actually brings up a very important point about the limits of the global indicator of 4.7. Even if young people and students are involved in lots of extracurricular or out of school activities, these are not captured by the global indicator. They could be going to museums

to learn about the world, they could be doing scouting and learning about sustainability. They could be involved in all kinds of activities organized by youth organizations, or they can be demonstrating in the streets, and they can learn a lot from these forms of participation, but this would not be included in the indicator since it focuses on formal education. Many would argue that participation in non-formal educational activities, or even informal ones, can be incredibly important with respect to the knowledge gained, the attitudes altered, and the skills acquired in these areas. All that is certainly not captured in the current indicator.

Will Brehm 22:43
So, you have been an academic and then you worked with UNESCO as the director of the Global Monitoring Report or the Global Education Report, or what is it called?

Aaron Benavot 22:55
The Global Education Monitoring Report

Will Brehm 22:57
That's right, okay. The GEM Report. More acronyms and terms that are hard to keep track of when you're dealing with international politics. And now you are back in the academic world, but you still maintain a strong foothold in the UNESCO sort of policy debates and the SDGs in particular. So, I want to ask you, what is the role of academics in this sort of convoluted process of not necessarily formulating the SDGs, but three years after their adoption, what have academics done? Or what could they do, or what can they do in the future to sort of help us accurately understand if these SDGs are being met? Or maybe providing some sort of critical angle on areas the SDGs are simply missing?

Aaron Benavot 23:50
I think academics can play a lot of different roles. Let me begin from the point of view of having been Director of a major international report on education. Certainly, the GEM reports would not be possible if not for the many important contributions and input we receive from academic experts from around the world. After each report is initially conceived, the team would put together a concept note, and we would involve academics in various kinds of consultations, and they would say, you should look at this, or these questions need to be looked at, or we know of some new studies in this area, there's lots of input there. After we had a detailed outline, and began work on a zero draft, there were decisions about asking academics to carry out a small study or desk review on issues or research related to the planned report. We would commission anywhere from 30 to 50 background papers for each report and, by and large, these were done by researchers and experts with academic degrees. They're not always located in universities, some of them are working in research institutes or serving as consultants, but they're all very well informed. So, the report would not be possible, if not for these academic inputs. And these inputs were used not only for the thematic part, but also for the monitoring part, of the report, which we're talking about now.

Fairly early on we asked ourselves how best to monitor the substance of target 4.7? What steps would I, as the GEM Report Director, need to take? Who should the team contact? Who might have useful information we could use? For example, we knew that the International Bureau of Education in Geneva is a storehouse of curricular information on countries. So, we turned to them and asked if they could support a coding process that would go through certain materials they had

in their possession. We also knew experts involved in textbook research and we reached out to them. We knew people who had studied teacher training programs in different parts of the world, we also thought about asking them if they could contribution something. You know, there are ways to take a look at different policies from different sources. We thought like academics, because we tried to think about, okay, here are the concepts that are embedded in the target, and here's what we know and here's what we're trying to figure out, and so what kind of content analysis might we conduct once we have access to certain kinds of documents or official statements. We need to identify someone who could carry this out, and we needed to develop a basic coding scheme, which would be understood by academics. And that was what we did.

Will Brehm 26:48
Is that how they measure this now?

Aaron Benavot 26:50
No, that was what we did for the 2015 report. Keep in mind that the GEM report is an editorially independent report. UNESCO, the agency that had the responsibility for measuring target 4.7, and UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, had not yet figured out how to measure the global indicator. Eventually UNESCO, with UIS's help, would figure out a measurement strategy. But we had our own deadlines and were considering different pathways -- things we could do more or less systematically, others that might take a lot more time. But we thought that for the purposes of the report it is worth trying to capture precisely what the global indicator talks about. At some point in time, somebody at UNESCO came up with the brilliant idea that UNESCO was already monitoring (basically soliciting reports from UNESCO national commissions) several terms from an international recommendation that UNESCO member states had agreed to in 1974, which were also embedded in 4.7. And part of this agreement mandated that UNESCO should take stock of country progress every four or five years. So, the idea was that if you're going to carry out a survey on some of these themes anyway, why not expand it to include things like global citizenship and Education for Sustainable Development, which weren't in 1974 recommendation when it was adopted, but could be add to it. This made sense. So now UNESCO could say, we have a mechanism, and we have the mandate to implement this mechanism. Member states are providing feedback on particular themes, which we're going to expand a little so that it is more closely aligned with the concepts in target 4.7. And so a decision was made to survey countries. They worked with UIS to figure out what would be the concrete items to include in the survey questionnaire. What would the format look like? And what questions would member states be asked to respond to? They basically took the global indicator for 4.7 and mapped out a questionnaire that made sense, and sent it off to countries.

Will Brehm 29:08
But methodologically, it's very different from doing some sort of content analysis using a coding scheme of documents put out by the government versus asking people's perceptions based on a questionnaire?

Aaron Benavot 29:22
Well, I wouldn't say its perception. Basically, the survey is asking countries to self-report. It's not exactly subjective, but it does entail allowing countries to tell you what they're doing without actually validating that information through some other means. So, the countries can say, "yes,

we're doing all these wonderful things", and that's what they write in the survey and then nobody's really checking whether it's true.

Will Brehm 29:51
There's no validation of it.

Aaron Benavot 29:52
There's no validation based on documented evidence.

Will Brehm 29:52
So, what incentive would a country have to sort of say, they're not doing any of this?

Aaron Benavot 30:15
Well, because there's a certain level of transparency. In the end all this information is going to come out in reports and on-line. Governments might be reporting or not. But then you have NGOs in the country saying, "the government reported that they are mainstreaming human rights education in their curricula. We don't think that that's the case." In other words, people who know what's going on in the country will take them to task. So, governments can't really pull the wool over everybody's eyes. And the more this is done, and data are collected, the more it becomes institutionalized and you would see trends over time. I mean, I haven't seen all the data, and there's certainly a degree of, "this is what we intend to do, not what we're actually doing." That said, there is a sense that countries are over-reporting the extent to which these things are being mainstreamed. And it's also not clear what is meant by "mainstreaming"? It could be that a country has a sentence in a textbook that says, global citizenship, and counts that as mainstreaming. And another country devotes a whole hour every week during the first four or five grades of primary education to global citizenship or something along those lines, meaning they have a very elaborate curriculum. In the survey these realities are treated in a similar fashion. Because the countries are basically saying, I mainstreamed here, and I mainstreamed there, there's no difference.

From an academic point of view, you would never get the results of such a survey published. Somebody would come along and say, this is just not valid information. When the GEM Report conducted its monitoring activities, experts commissioned by the team compiled and reviewed the documents that countries are producing. The team developed a coding scheme and asked that a content analysis of the documents be conducted. Such an analysis can look at the issues more superficially or more in depth, but it is basically an analysis of materials country produce and use. It could be a textbook, it could be a national curricular framework, or it can be an explicit policy, and you review it and come to certain conclusions. And yet it is important to remember that it still doesn't tell you what is actually going on in the classroom. But you are using a kind of objective measurement strategy to determine: Are the themes present? Are they absent? To what extent? And then you can report on the global indicator accordingly.

Will Brehm 32:19
So, is this like the first step? Because it's interesting, like you said that the 4.7 was quite revolutionary, to even include it. And yes, there's all sorts of measurement issues as you discussed in depth. But the optimist in you would say, Okay, this is sort of the first step, we're building it up, that survey is certainly not perfect, but maybe there will be future steps that we can take and make

it more robust, add additional measurement tools, or strategies or future indicators. I don't know if that's even possible. But I mean, would that be sort of the -not necessarily from an academic point of view, but from the international politics point of view, this is sort of pushing countries in a way to consider these aspects of education that we know people think are important.

Aaron Benavot 33:14
Yes and no. The fact that these issues and topics have been placed on the agenda is important in and of itself. And it opens up all kinds of actors -- governmental, non-governmental, academics and all kinds of civil society organizations -- to say: "listen, you've signed on to this agenda, this is one of the targets, we think this is really important, what are you doing about it?" And regardless of the reporting, or international comparability, having target 4.7 as a target, and putting 4.7 issues on an agenda, and having groups getting organized to promote activities along these lines, is important. It is also a way of saying we think our government should be more involved in 4.7 issues, and it produces all kinds of interesting activity at the national level, which absent the target, might not exist, or may not exist as extensively. And these activities wouldn't have the same legitimacy as they currently do because of target 4.7. So, all of that is important.

But another take on this is: the things that policymakers pay attention to are the things that can be counted and shown to exist. Maybe there isn't an agreement as to how to do the counting or how to build an index, or the kind of methodological strategy implemented. But when a number or an index is produced, it's a way of getting countries to be more proactive and indicate beyond just signing their name to a piece of paper, that they're doing something in relation to the target.

Will Brehm 34:51
The naming and shaming.

Aaron Benavot 34:52
Right. And I do think this is important. I mean, having some quantification or some systematic assessment, even qualitative data about these issues, helps to promote them, helps to keep them visible and helps to secure commitments for policies and resources and to make sure that they are sustained. That said, there is a different kind of danger: say, for example, we tried to measure 4.7, but the measure and data we came up with were highly problematic. And then when countries take a look at the data or constructed index, they go, this is really not very serious. Which might create a negative reaction even though you've tried to measure target 4.7, but you've done a fairly poor job. I personally can give you anecdotal evidence of instances where countries see themselves as very seriously committed to topics in target 4.7 and then when they review the data used to measure the global indicator of 4.7, it just doesn't match with the country's commitment. It doesn't align very well. So, then they question the whole measurement strategy, and they question the indicator. And you can you end up going backwards rather than forwards. So, there's a danger here of using weak data to capture such an important target.

Will Brehm 36:19
So how would you change the measurement strategy, if you could have a magic wand?

Aaron Benavot 36:23

First and foremost, I'd go back to the intent of the target, which is trying to capture a set of learning outcomes. I'd want to invest in developing assessment modules that are, let's say, culturally sensitive, and which could be used in different ways in different settings for different topics in 4.7. There would be modules that countries could integrate into their current assessment frameworks, which would try to tap into the extent to which learners both in school and maybe out of school have acquired knowledge and skills around 4.7 issues. I would also want to collect information on inputs. I would set up a platform to which countries and civil society can contribute documents, and strategies, and curricula and so forth. UNESCO or someone else could be commissioned to go through these materials and come up with a strategy of measurement (keeping in mind that you have to know quite a lot of languages), and maybe you would need more than one coder to ensure coding inter-reliability and so forth. I think this is possible, since in fact my colleagues and I are doing something similar for another study now, involving 10 countries. We have been compiling documents at different education levels, and then using a coding scheme to systematically review them and determine how much of a particular GCED or ESD theme or topic is embedded in the intended policy, or curriculum framework, or assessment. And in the end, with this information about both inputs and outcomes, you could return to the larger question, which is what we started with: is it the case that the more you mainstream GCED and ESD etc in official documents and policy, does it influence the actual knowledge and skills of learners? That would be the key issue somewhere down the line.

Will Brehm 38:25

Well, we'll have to bring you back on. I mean we have 12 years until 2030, we're only three years in, and we're still talking about indicators.

Aaron Benavot 38:32

One last point: the IEAG-SDGs, the UN agency responsible for all 230 global indicators, has classified them into three different tiers. When you have an indicator that the methodology and the definition around it are fairly well developed, and there are data for most countries in the world, this is called a tier one indicator. When there's a methodology that's fairly well developed, but there isn't global coverage of the data, this is a tier two indicator. And when there's little consensus about the conceptualization and definition of the concepts in the global indicator and the global coverage of data is poor, this is known as a tier three indicator. What's the danger? What may be about to happen? The current global indicator for 4.7 is defined as a tier three indicator. And the UN is continuing to assess SDG progress in terms of the global indicators. And there is a high level political event scheduled for July of 2019 in which SDG4 targets and indicators will be reviewed. Thus, the IEAG-SDGs is going through and looking at all global indicators that have tier three status, including target 4.7. And there is possibility that the global indicator for 4.7 will be jettisoned.

Will Brehm 39:42

Really?

Aaron Benavot 39:42
Yes, they would basically say: you haven't been able to develop a clear methodology to capture the themes in the global indicator for 4.7, and there's little valid data, global in scope, so go start again.

Will Brehm 40:13
So, we're just going to get rid of it?

Aaron Benavot 40:16
There's a possibility that the global indicator that we've been talking about -- namely mainstreaming GCED and ESD etc. in policies and curricula and so forth - is basically going to be reconsidered.

Will Brehm 40:25
But then that would mean that target 4.7 is not going to be able to be achieved or not?

Aaron Benavot 40:30
Well, countries can still make progress, but there would be no indicator of such progress. In other words, the current global indicator might vanish. And I don't exactly know what they're going to do. Will they come up with something else? Will they give UNESCO a mandate to come back in six months and submit another indicator and measurement strategy? I'm not sure exactly what they're going to do. But there's a real danger of something like this happening. I have been informed by people who are quite knowledgeable that UNESCO's strategy at this point is to try to find ways to upgrade the tier status of the 4.7 global indicator -- from a tier three to a tier two status -- in which case it would not be jettisoned. Thus far, they haven't succeeded. So, you don't have to wait a couple years, I might be able to come back in a couple weeks or months and tell you whether the global indicator for 4.7 has been dropped. In which case all the people who think target 4.7 is wonderful and important will have to come up with a whole new conceptualization and concrete measurement strategy and figure out how it can be measured. That's a real possibility.

Will Brehm 42:05
We will have to bring you back on to give us an update about where we're going and how we're doing. So, Aaron Benavot, thank you so much for joining FreshEd.

Aaron Benavot 42:53
My pleasure.