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EDITORIAL

We urgently need multiple knowledges to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary: *This editorial calls on the United Nations, political leaders, and development professionals to recognize explicitly that knowledge and knowledge management are of key importance to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030 and to adopt the knowledge-based goals of the Agenda Knowledge for Development. It is being published simultaneously in knowledge management and development journals around the world.*

There may be trouble ahead for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs were adopted by the United Nations and all Member States in 2015 to bring about sustainable development while leaving no-one behind. Now, halfway to the deadline for the 2030 Agenda, the UN warns that progress on more than half of the SDG targets is insufficient and on a third it has stalled or gone into reverse. UN Secretary General António Guterres argues that, unless there is action now, the 2030 Agenda could become 'an epitaph for a world that might have been' (United Nations, 2023, p. 2). Countries of the global South are bearing the brunt of the collective failure to invest in the SDGs. Many of them continue to be buried under a mountain of debt. Amid social unrest, economic crises and political conflicts, at least 23 African countries are at high risk of – or already in – debt distress. International commitments for climate change are far below original ambitions. Even more worryingly, the number of people living in extreme poverty is increasing for the first time in a decade.

The forthcoming UN Summit of the Future[1] is seen as a key moment for the international community to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. The aim of the Summit is to step up efforts to meet existing international commitments and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. The instrument for this action is an outcome document called *Pact of the Future* (Germany and Namibia, 2024), which will be ratified at the summit. Although the *Pact* proposes a variety of valuable measures to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, without decisive action to address a serious and persistent flaw in the SDGs, this initiative can also be expected to fail. ***The flaw is the fundamental lack of***

recognition by world leaders of the pivotal role of knowledge and its management in sustainable development.

Our understanding of knowledge is pluralistic and goes far beyond information and communication technologies, digital transformation and science. It goes beyond the explicit forms that can be gathered and shared through repositories, and includes know-how and other tacit knowledge, which are often not available online. To be able to successfully address complex problems such as climate change and social inequality, the development community needs to listen to all voices, and the widest range of actors. Equity is a basis for understanding local knowledge, tradition and cultural differences. We need to access local knowledge and ensure that all views and needs are shared to achieve holistic and comprehensive responses that address the roots and target the real needs. In short, ***the multiple knowledges of the widest range of different actors needs to be involved in shaping responses*** (Bammer, 2019; Brown, 2010; Jones, 2011).

Knowledge in the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs

The road map for the SDGs ignores the fact that the process of sustainable development is largely a bottom-up, national process, representing 'synergy among millions of innovative initiatives people take every day in their local societies, generating new and more effective ways of producing, trading, and managing their resources and their institutions' (Mendonça Ferreira, 2009, 99). As a result, the SDGs neglect local knowledge, containing only one reference to traditional knowledge, and focus mainly on science and technology (Cummings, et al, 2018), which are necessary but not sufficient to inform effective development. Given that development needs to be based on local initiatives and understandings, neglecting local knowledge and local development in the SDGs undermines the transformative agenda. Also, this focus on external knowledge, and that 'outsiders know better', can only disempower local and national communities and hinder crucial global partnerships.

Adopting the Agenda Knowledge for Development

Although the United Nations provides the Secretariat for the SDGs, it is everyone's responsibility to make sure that we do our best, as societies, to put all efforts possible to achieve them. Our local and indigenous knowledge, present and past, our experiences and know-how, our learnings and our failures, should guide us to understand the gaps and needs that we still need to cover to be able to achieve the SDGs. If they are to have any chance of succeeding, the SDGs must build from all the actual knowledge that is available and explicitly harness the transformational power of pluralistic knowledge. This can be achieved through the adoption of the *Agenda Knowledge for Development*[2] (Brandner & Cummings, 2017) as a living document, reflecting that understandings of knowledge are changing to reflect issues related to decolonization of knowledge (Boyes et al., 2023) and epistemic justice (Cummings et al., 2023). The *Agenda Knowledge for Development* is the outcome of an international initiative involving multiple stakeholders from universities, entrepreneurs, multilateral and bilateral development organizations, and nongovernmental organizations from all over the globe. The *Agenda* sets out 14 Knowledge Development Goals, which complement the SDGs and promote the development of pluralistic, inclusive knowledge societies (see Figure 1). It is garnering wide support in its efforts to develop a new vision of

knowledge and knowledge societies with knowledge agenda being developed by countries and sectors.

We call on all actors to recognize that knowledge and knowledge management are of key importance to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030, and to adopt the knowledge-based goals of the Agenda Knowledge for Development.

Keywords

Knowledge for Developmnt, multiple knowledge, SDGs, Agenda 2030, Knowledge agenda

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Knowledge Development Goals

Goal 1:   **Pluralistic, diverse and inclusive knowledge societies**
Responsible and transparent knowledge ecosystems, also for those who are excluded because of gender, migration status, disability, and other vulnerabilities.

Goal 2:   **People-focused knowledge societies**
Self-determination of the individual, founded on education for all, freedom of expression, universal access to information and knowledge, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

Goal 3:   **Strengthening local knowledge ecosystems**
Collaboration and context-based communication, based on local realities and local knowledge.

Goal 4:   **Knowledge partnerships**
Multi-stakeholder knowledge partnerships crossing sectoral and disciplinary boundaries to facilitate creative and rich solutions.

Goal 5:   **Knowledge cities and rural-urban linkages**
Profiled, internationally well-connected knowledge cities recognising and embracing their knowledge function so that rural areas can also be part of knowledge societies.

Goal 6:   **Improved knowledge strategies in development organisations**
Advanced knowledge management strategies with a recognition of these organisations' role in knowledge ecosystems and in strengthening local knowledge.

Goal 7:   **Capture, preservation and democratisation of knowledge**
Protection of intellectual heritages, including digital heritage, in libraries, museums and archives. Equal opportunities to easily access and use knowledge.

Goal 8:   **Fair and dynamic knowledge markets**
Private sector playing an active and relevant role in local knowledge markets based on fair market conditions for private knowledge services.

Goal 9:   **Safety, security and sustainability**
Evolving knowledge societies mitigating uncertainties and negative impacts.

Goal 10:   **Legal knowledge**
Legal frameworks based on transdisciplinary knowledge addressing the real needs of the people; citizens knowing their rights and being able to invoke them.

Goal 11:   **Improved knowledge competencies and knowledge work**
High competence in all kinds of individual knowledge work and organisational knowledge management. High quality of knowledge service professionals; protection of knowledge workers.

Goal 12:   **Institutions of higher education to play an active role**
Universities and other institutions of higher education deploying new, inclusive models to solve real world problems.

Goal 13:   **Information and communication technologies (ICTs) for all**
ICTs being utilized to access knowledge and facilitate communication and dialogue without hampering alternative or traditional methods of knowledge transmission.

Goal 14:   **The arts and culture are central to knowledge societies**
Literature, the performing arts and the visual arts are key elements of a knowledge society, as are religion and spirituality.

Figure 1. The 14 Knowledge Development Goals (Brandner & Cummings, 2017).

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[1] *Summit of the Future: multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow*, to be held at UN HQ, New York, on 22-23 September 2024. https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future

[2] The *Agenda Knowledge for Development* was formally launched at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 3 April 2017. https://k4dp.org/agenda/