Civil society actors in the process of developing SDGs: the analysis of discourse on the education sector goal (SDG4)

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This presentation examines how the consensus on common global targets for educational development were shaped among various actors, with particular focus on the roles played by the civil society organizations. The data used for the analysis are written statements, reports, and comments posted on the web from 2013 and interviews with key informants who took part in major conferences at global and regional levels. The existing formal structure of global governance for international development is based on multilateralism which recognizes sovereign nation-states, representing national interests, as the participants. However, such an assumption is eroding, given that there is a growing number of state and nonstate actors who influence decision-making not only through conventional formal channels, but also informally. Urging the revision of theories of multilateralism, the presentation calls attention to nontraditional donors and horizontal networks of civil society actors in this volume.

It also demonstrates that the widening basis of participation in the global consultation processes and advanced communication technology have changed the ways in which discourse is formulated. The amount and the speed of exchanging information have been enhanced and different types of actors have been encouraged to take part.

Most of the forums and entities established as part of the global governance structure are composed of representatives from UN member states, civil society organizations (CSOs), and UN agencies. The driving force for state-based and civil society actors are fundamentally different. The first is motivated by national interests, while the second is driven by the mission or professional concerns of a specialist group. One of the significant factors that made the current discourse unique is that the latter group expanded its influence greatly, while the former is also diversifying.

At the same time, regardless of the broadened and diversified participation, at the end of the consultation process, stakeholders have to reach a common proposal. In fact, the so-called "education community" came up with Statements which were unanimously adopted. Therefore, ideas that came from various actors were somehow streamlined and standardized into a concise list of goals and targets. So how were these core ideas shaped and what kinds of people participated in the process of shaping them? What kind of orientation did they have and how did they find common ground?

In many cases, people took part in the process as the "representatives" of some category of actors. Although they "represent" their group, given that the key participants who took part in major meetings and conferences overlapped greatly, their personalities and personal views would have significant impact on the direction of discourse. This presentation untangles how agencies of the individual

"representatives", intra and inter group dynamics, and professional concern of "education specialists" have interplayed and drove the process of agenda setting.

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