MIGRANTh

SDGS SPECIAL ISSUE

DAS MAGAZIN ZU MIGRATION UND ENTWICKLUNG

SDG INTERCONNECTIONS THROUGH EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION EXPERIENCES



EDUCATIONAL STORIES FROM

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MIGRANTh

SDG Interconnections through Educational Migration Experiences

January to December 2026

Dear readers,

This special edition of *MIGRANTh* follows education past the classroom door. Ten people who have studied in more than one country tell us what stood around their schools: electricity or candlelight, running water or a two-kilometre walk to fetch it, health care, family income, and help from abroad. Together, they show that whether a young person can learn depends on much more than the school, and that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be pursued one at a time. Our starting point is SDG 4, quality education, and its links to SDGs 3, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 17.

The ten were trained as multipliers by ANSOLE e.V. in an online series between March and August 2026. They interviewed one another in five pairs, and each wrote up their own interview.

Irene Osei-Owusu from Ghana and **Clara Uhde Lima** from Brazil open the interviews. Irene lived with power cuts from primary school to university and says that the barriers students face are “not individual failures, but structural conditions”. Clara describes a public school system that is “not completely bad” but not the best either, and contrasts the human-centred teaching she knew in Brazil with the more hierarchical university she found in Germany.

Frida Onyango from Kenya and **Arsene Rodrigue Pinlap Kouam** from Cameroon are the second pair. Frida describes students sent home over unpaid fees and the gaps in health and mental health support. Rodrigue studied by kerosene lamp, saw malaria keep classmates out of school for weeks, and sums it up: “You cannot have quality education without electricity, clean water, and basic health.”

Nnenna Veronica Ebem from Nigeria and **Sabrina Zearott** from the United States come next. Nnenna remembers a roster for fetching water over more than two kilometres, toilets that could not be flushed and a generator that ran for one hour. Sabrina describes how schooling in the United States depends on the state and on local taxes, and how her family’s water was once disconnected.

Jean Mbumba Banda from Malawi and **Mehrnaz Mokhtari** from Iran follow. Jean draws a chain from hunger to dropping out, from missing skills to poverty, and describes girls who leave school because they cannot manage menstruation. Mehrnaz describes an exam-centred system built around the national entrance exam, the Konkur, and names internet access and infrastructure as the biggest obstacle in her own experience.

Chrispen Gumunyu from Zimbabwe and **Rigon Harxhi** from Kosovo complete the series. Chrispen goes through the goals one by one: parents who must choose between school fees and food, water and power cuts, and a minister who donated computers to a school without electricity. Rigon asks whether students with ADHD or other mental health challenges are merely given access or genuinely included.

The pages before the interviews explain the problem and the goals involved. After the interviews, a closing page asks what you can do with what you have read.

Our thanks go to the ten multipliers, to the trainer Prof. Dr. Daniel Ayuk Mbi Egbe, to Irene Osei-Owusu for coordination, to Isabella Schneider for project support, and to our funders.

This edition was supported by the SDG-Fonds of Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken (“Gefördert durch ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL mit Mitteln des BMZ”) and by the Heidehof Stiftung.

Like earlier issues, this edition can be used as teaching material. It is the main reading for the student workshop on Friday 16 October 2026 at Universität Erfurt, where the multipliers present their interviews and lead small-group discussions. Questions, ideas and feedback are welcome at info@migranth.de or on Instagram (_migranth).

The MIGRANTh editorial team

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Article

Education does not happen in a vacuum

Irene Osei-Owusu

Whether a young person gets a good education depends on much more than the school.

It depends on whether there is electricity to study after dark, whether the toilets work, whether a child is healthy enough to attend, whether a family can pay the fees, and whether a girl is allowed to stay in class. The multipliers in this magazine describe all of these.

Rodrigue, from Cameroon, studied by candlelight or a kerosene lamp. Irene, from Ghana, lived with periods of load shedding from primary school all the way to university. Nnenna, from Nigeria, remembers a school where students took turns walking more than two kilometres to fetch water.

A promise that is slipping

In 2015, all United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda with 17 Sustainable Development Goals. They are voluntary commitments, not binding law, and they were meant to be pursued together. Ten years later the picture is sobering. The UN's 2025 progress report finds that only 35 per cent of the targets are on track or making moderate progress, nearly half are moving too slowly, and 18 per cent have regressed. [1].

Education shows both sides. Since 2015, 110 million more children and young people have entered school. Yet in 2023, 272 million children and young people were still out of school. [1]

Why the links matter

When goals are treated as separate topics, a gap in one quietly undoes progress in another. A school can have trained teachers and still lose students to malaria. A scholarship can open a university place for a young woman who has already left school because she could not manage menstruation. A computer lab can be donated to a school with no electricity, as Chrispen, from Zimbabwe, recalls.

The SDGs were designed with this in mind: they are meant to be pursued together, and progress in one often depends on progress in another.

Why these voices

Statistics show how large the gaps are. They rarely show what it is like to study inside them. The ten people in this magazine have studied in at least two education systems, most in Germany as well as at home. They can say which conditions made a difference to them, and they say it in their own words.

The next three pages follow six of those connections, from SDG 4 outward.

Sources
[1] United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025, press release. unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2025/SDG_Report_2025_Press_Release_EN.pdf

Six connections

Six goals shape whether SDG 4 can be reached, according to the multipliers' own experience. Each is described below in one line, followed by what the interviews say and who to read.

SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy: no light, no lesson

Without reliable electricity, study stops when the sun goes down and schools cannot use computers or labs.

Irene remembers load shedding "from primary school all the way to university", and Rodrigue "studied by candlelight or by a kerosene lamp". Nnenna's private school had a generator that ran for one hour, so each student had about a minute at the keyboard. Chrispen recalls a minister donating computers to a school without electricity. Rodrigue puts it plainly: "You cannot have quality education without electricity, clean water, and basic health."

Read: Rodrigue, Irene, Nnenna, Chrispen.

SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation: the walk before the lesson

When water is missing, time goes to fetching it and toilets become unusable, which affects health and attendance, especially for girls.
Nnenna describes a public school where "sometimes we had a roster where students would have to walk over 2 kilometers to go and fetch water" and where toilets could not be flushed. Jean went to an all-girls secondary school where, "sometimes we would go days with erratic water supply". Chrispen explains that most rural areas in Zimbabwe lack clean water and that towns face long water cuts, so a school without running water ends up with toilets that do not work.

Read: Nnenna, Jean, Chrispen.

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being: missing weeks, repeating years

Illness takes children out of class, and limited health care and support keep them out longer.

Rodrigue says malaria "alone caused students to miss weeks of school at a time", and a brilliant classmate eventually had to repeat a year. Frida notes that students with chronic illnesses such as sickle cell disease often miss school because care is costly and public hospitals are under-resourced, and she points to the gap in mental health support compared with what she has seen in Germany.

Read: Rodrigue, Frida.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality: who stays in school

When resources run short, girls are often the first to leave, through early marriage, household duties or lack of basic hygiene support.

Jean sees “so many girls dropping out of school simply because they cannot adequately take care of themselves during menstruation”. Frida names missing menstrual products and early marriage. Chrispen describes parents who find it easier to marry off a child at 13 to 16, and Rodrigue saw brilliant girls told to make way for their brothers or to marry early.
Mehrnaz adds another side: social expectations that steer girls towards teaching or the humanities and boys towards engineering.

Read: Jean, Frida, Chrispen, Rodrigue, Mehrnaz.

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: money decides

Family income decides which school a child attends and whether they stay, and this runs through almost every interview.

Jean chose reduced inequalities as the strongest influence: she knows “numerous girls”, some she believes were more intelligent than she was, who dropped out because they could not afford it. Frida notes that many students are sent home over unpaid fees. Clara says needing a private school for good opportunities “says a lot” about access. Sabrina, from the United States, describes how local funding shaped her schools and how her family’s water service was once disconnected.

Read: Jean, Frida, Clara, Sabrina, Mehrnaz.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals: the open door

International partnerships and scholarships open doors, but they can also pull skilled people away.

Rodrigue says his own chance to study in Russia and Germany “came through international partnerships and scholarships”, and he also notes that a lot of teachers travel abroad, which creates a brain drain. Jean thanks the DAAD for making her studies in Germany possible, and Irene came with a full scholarship.

Read: Rodrigue, Jean, Irene.

SDG 4 explained

Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

The goal has ten targets. This magazine looks at three of them, because they are the ones the interviews keep returning to. The UN’s deadline for all of them is 2030, which is less than four years away.

Target	What it says (UN wording, shortened)	How progress is measured	In plain words
4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.	4.3.1: participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex.	Can people afford to get into university or training, and are women and men treated equally?
4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.	4.5.1: parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators that can be disaggregated.	Does it matter whether you are a girl, poor, rural or disabled? The target says it should not.
4.7	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace and non- violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.	4.7.1: extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment.	Does school teach people how to live together and look after the planet? This is the target your workshop belongs to.

Source: United Nations, sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4.

Access is not the same as quality

The indicators above mostly count who gets in, who takes part and how fair the numbers are between groups. The multipliers say that being in school is only the first step.

- **Jean:** “access alone is not enough”.
- **Mehrnaz** says SDG 4 “focuses more on access” than on what happens once students are there.
- **Chrispen** points out that “quality education” could mean different things for three different children, depending on where they live and what their family can pay.
- **Clara** thinks aspects of quality “could be represented more strongly” in the goal.
- **Rigon** asks whether students are “merely” given access or genuinely included in learning, for example students with ADHD or other mental health challenges.

For discussion at the workshop: What would you add to Goal 4 if you could? Which of the three targets above would your own school have passed?

The Project

This magazine is one result of a year-long project of ANSOLE e.V. (African Network for Solar Energy), a non-profit based in Jena, Thuringia, which also publishes MIGRANTh. The project runs from January to December 2026 under the title “SDG Interconnections through Educational Migration Experiences” and is funded through the SDG-Fonds of Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken (“Gefördert durch ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL mit Mitteln des BMZ”) and by the Heidehof Stiftung.

The idea

Many of the Sustainable Development Goals are off track, and they depend on one another. The project starts from a simple observation: people who have studied in more than one country already know these links from experience. So instead of explaining the goals from the outside, it asks them.

How it worked

- **Ten multipliers.** Ten people from ten countries, most of them current or former international students, were trained as peer educators, an approach known as Training of Trainers. The idea is that what they learn is multiplied outwards to a much wider audience.
- **Six online sessions.** Between 17 March and 13 August 2026 the group met on Zoom to work through the SDG framework, SDG 4 and its connections, and how to run a workshop.
- **Five pairs, five interviews**. Each multiplier interviewed another about their education, at home and in Germany, and wrote the conversation up in their own words. The interviews are printed in this magazine.
- **A workshop.** On **Friday 16 October 2026** the multipliers lead a workshop at Universität Erfurt, using this magazine as the main teaching material. Participants from Thuringia are invited to take part.

Who is behind it

The project is led by Prof. Dr. Daniel Ayuk Mbi Egbe. Dr. George Akeliwira contributed to the drafting of the proposal. Isabella Schneider provides project support. Irene Osei-Owusu wrote the proposal and coordinates the multipliers. Esraa Nasr designed this educational resource.

The Ten Voices

Ten multipliers, ten countries, five conversations. Each pair interviewed one another, so the interviews that follow come in pairs.

Pair	Multiplier	Country
1	Irene Osei-Owusu	Ghana
1	Clara Uhde Lima	Brazil
2	Arsene Rodrigue Pinlap Kouam	Cameroon
2	Frida Onyango	Kenya
3	Nnenna Veronica Ebem	Nigeria
3	Sabrina Zearott	United States
4	Jean Mbumba Banda	Malawi
4	Mehrnaz Mokhtari	Iran
5	Chrispen Gumunyu	Zimbabwe
5	Rigon Harxhi	Kosovo

Six of the ten grew up in Africa, and one each in Asia, Europe, North America and South America. What they have in common is that each has seen more than one education system from the inside.

A short note on reading them. These are personal accounts, written by the multipliers themselves, and they describe their own schools, their own regions and their own years. They are evidence of how the goals connect in real lives. They are not a statistical picture of any country.

How to use this magazine

You can read this magazine from start to finish, but it is built to be used in pieces, in a workshop, a seminar or on your own.

1. By person. Pick an interview and read it as one story. Start with the pair you find most unlike yourself.
2. By goal. Pick one of the six connections (health, gender, water, energy, inequality, partnerships). Each ends with a "Read:" line pointing to the interviews that speak to it most directly.

Three questions to keep in mind while reading

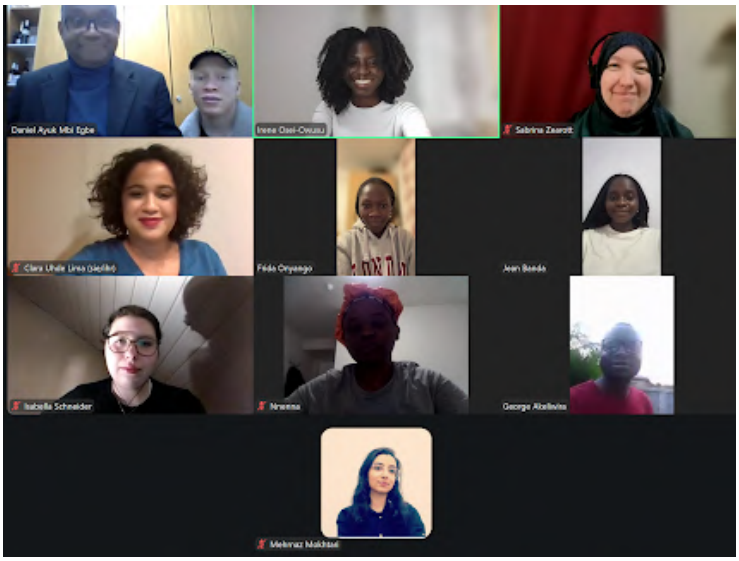
1. What around the school made learning easier or harder: light, water, health, money, family, rules?
2. Where does this person say access is not enough? What would "quality" mean for them?
3. Which of the six connections do you see in your own education, even if it was invisible to you at the time?

In the workshop on 16 October

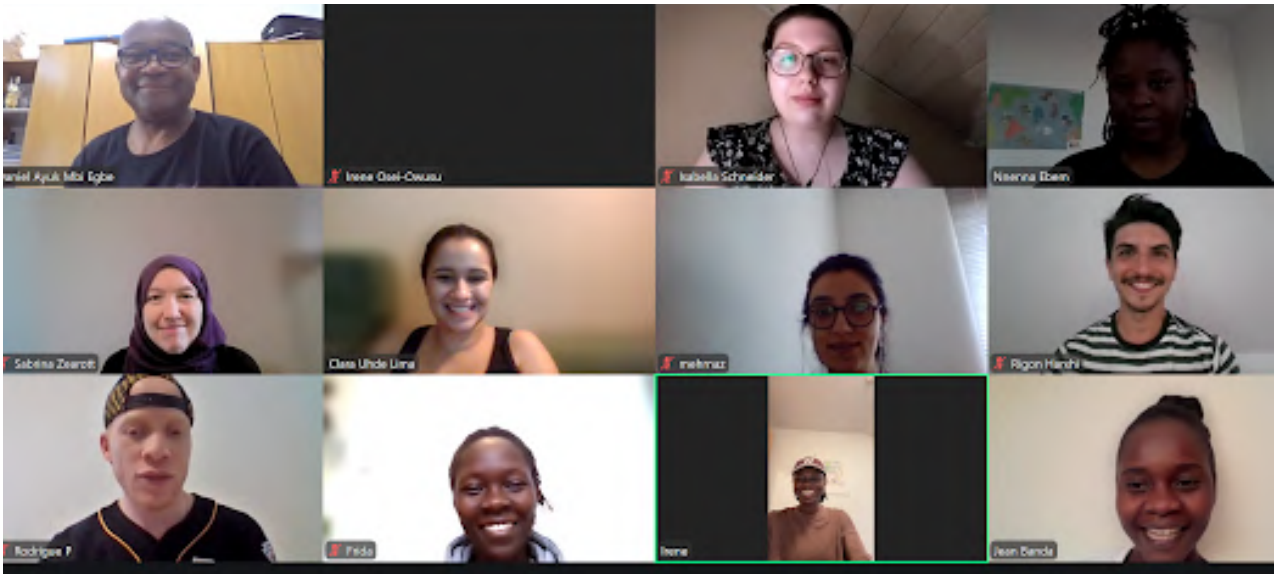
The multipliers will lead small groups. Please read the opening pages and at least one interview beforehand, and bring one connection that surprised you. You do not need to know anything about the SDGs in advance.

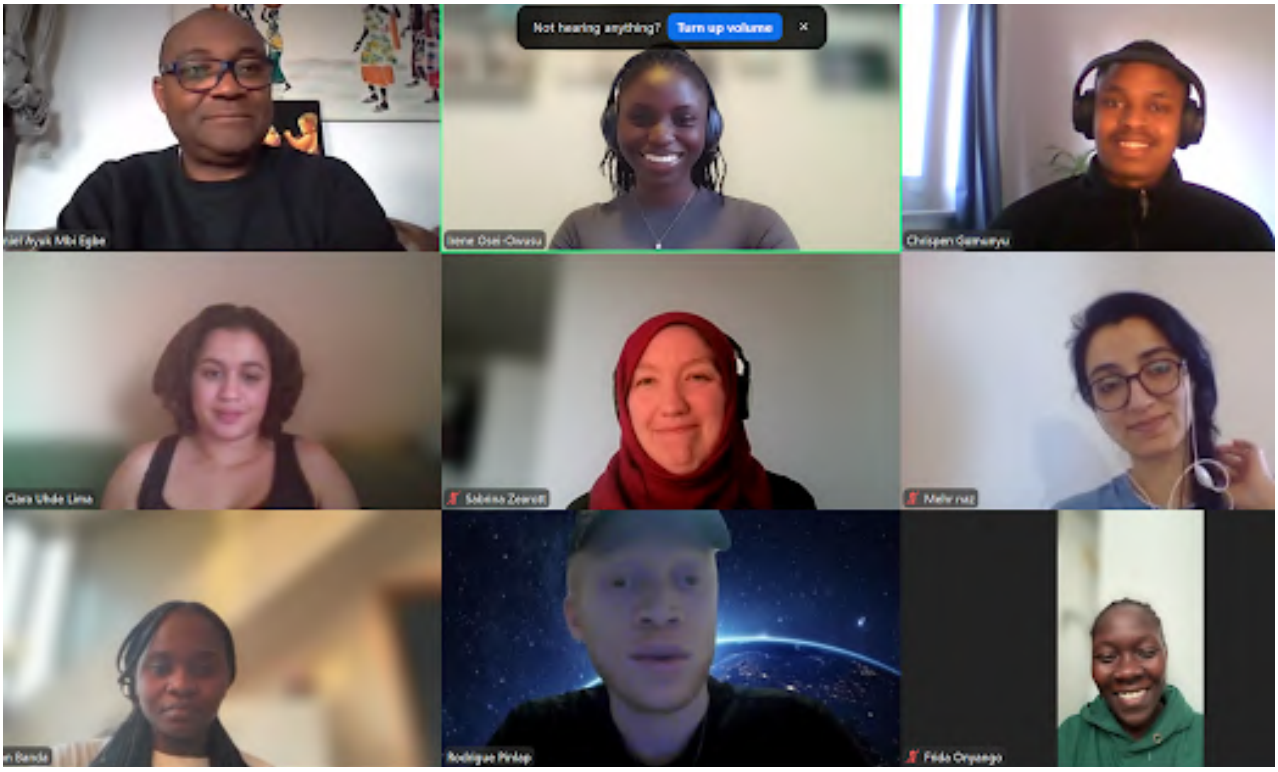
A word on how to read

The interviews are personal. Read them the way Rodrigue suggests approaching other people's experience: "with humility, curiosity, and a genuine desire to understand, not pity". Where an interviewee gives an opinion, it is an opinion, and the one next to it may disagree.


Daniel Ayuk Mbi Egbe
Ineza Osei-Owusu
Sabrina Zaarott
Clara Uhde Lima (she/her)
Fida Onyango
Jean Banda
Isabella Schneider
Nneoma
George Abelluvia
Mehmaz Makhtari


Daniel Ayuk Mbi Egbe
Ineza Osei-Owusu
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Rigon Harshi
Sabrina Zaarott
George Abelluvia
mehr raz
Clara Uhde Lima (she/her)
Frida
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r
Jean Banda
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Ineza Osei-Owusu
Isabella Schneider
Nneoma Ibem
Sabrina Zaarott
Clara Uhde Lima
mehmaz
Rigon Harshi
Rodrigue P
Frida
Ineza
Jean Banda


Not hearing anything? Turn up volume
Ineza Osei-Owusu
Chiispen Gamuriyu
Clara Uhde Lima
Sabrina Zaarott
Mehr raz
Rodrigue Pinkop
Frida Onyango

IRENE AND CLARA



IRENE OSEI-OWUSU

The interview was conducted by Clara





Could you say a little bit about yourself and your education in your mother country, why you came to Germany and how it's going here?

My name is Irene Osei-Owusu and I'm currently studying my Masters in Public Policy at the Willy Brandt School in the University of Erfurt. I grew up in Ghana, completed my primary, secondary and university education in Ghana, and also worked in the Ministry of Finance after university. In terms of my motivation to pursue higher education, in Ghana, education is seen as the path to success. So normally, if you don't have education, you are told, without education, you might not make it in life and so for that reason, we usually strive for higher education. So that was my main reason for going to university and afterwards pursuing a masters degree because I wanted to be an expert in my field.

How was your middle school and high school in Ghana? How were they structured?

So we have what we call primary school which you typically start at the age of six. You go from class one to class six in your primary school then Junior High School starts. Junior High School is for 3 years. Then you write a final exam called the Basic Education Certificate Examination, commonly called BECE. After this exam, you go to the Senior High School and from there you start your tertiary education. There are public and private schools in all levels of education in Ghana. I went to public schools throughout my education.



Figure 1: University of Ghana, Legon
Source 1: https://galexgh.com/2019/03/21/university-of-ghana-opens-undergraduate-applications-for-the-2021-2022-academic-year/#gsc.tab=0

I decided to come to Germany for my studies because I received a prestigious full scholarship, which made the decision much more feasible financially. Studying in countries like the US or the UK would not have been possible for me without significant resources, so the scholarship played a very important role in enabling this opportunity.
At the same time, I was also drawn to the idea of studying in a different educational and cultural environment. Coming from Ghana, I saw this as a valuable opportunity to experience a different education system and broaden my perspective, both academically and personally.

Like everything, there are good quality public schools and bad quality ones. I got lucky and went to some of the best quality public schools in Ghana.
Regarding my education history, I passed my BECE exam and was admitted into a good public Senior High School. It was managed by the Catholic Church. Usually in Ghana, the schools managed by the churches are very good quality and mine was managed by the

Catholic Church, so it was one of the respected schools in Ghana. It did still have its own internal problems, like maybe sometimes there were electricity issues and health care related issues. For example If a student was sick, it was a bit tricky to transport them to the hospital. It did have its issues, but then it was one of the prestigious schools.

After I completed Senior High School I got into the University of Ghana to study Political Science and Swahili. There are high levels of inequality in Ghana and this meant you could be very smart and very intelligent in your Senior High School with great final results but if you or your family is not financially comfortable, you'll not be able to go to the university.

This is where the power of community comes in. Ghana is a very communal country. So I again got lucky after my senior high school. My mother could not afford to pay for my university fees however a relative decided he would sponsor my university education. If not for that, I most likely would have been a dropout and would not be where I am today.



Figure 2: Example of a public school classroom
Source 2: DW https://www.dw.com/en/going-green-in-ghanas-schools/video-61865516



Figure 3: Example of a private school classroom
Source 3: DPS International Ghana



Figure 4: St. Rose's Senior High School
Source 4: https://www.strosesshs.org/

I mean, luck is always a factor for us in the Global South. What was your motivation to pursue higher education and what impacted you to pursue this education?

Like I mentioned earlier, education is seen as the most reliable path towards success. There's a genuine belief that if you are educated or if you have education, it'll be able to open doors for you, especially if you're from a poor background. So going to the University of Ghana, I wanted to be able to have access to a network and also be able to open those doors to lead to my success.

Now to my motivation for pursuing higher education here in Germany by doing my Masters in Public Policy. Working in government, I've seen how decisions made in the government offices directly affect people in the community. A government official's decision would determine whether a hospital will be built in this community, or a school will be built in that community, or if electricity would not be provided to this community. I wanted to have a better understanding of how to properly be able to make these decisions which will either positively or negatively affect different communities.

As a student in Germany now, how would you compare the education system here to the one in Ghana?

So the difference is quite striking but also it has a bit of nuance to it. Studying here at the Brandt School you are expected to think critically because it is a masters program for professionals. You are able to have debates with your professors about different topics. You are expected to not just absorb information, but to challenge them. This was a bit different for me personally, because in the education system I know in Ghana, culture plays a big role. In Ghana, culture is a very big thing where you have to respect your elders and it is less common for you to ask probing questions to authority and teachers and professors are seen as people in authority. So even if maybe there's something that you do not agree with while you're in class and you want to have a conversation with your lecturer, in certain cases it will be seen as you challenging your lecturer or trying to disrespect them so that is sometimes not very much encouraged.

Most of the time in Ghana, I found myself having to just absorb information to go write my exam and pass and not a situation where I try to absorb the information, understand it, think critically and have other opinions about it. I remember a lecturer once remarked in class that he wasn't interested in our bright ideas during the exam, he just wants us to give him back the information he gives us in class.

At the moment, those are the striking differences I can think of.

How do you think the SDGs relate to your experiences in the education systems of Ghana and Germany? What does 'quality education' mean in Ghana, and what does it mean here in Germany from your perspective?

In Ghana, indicators like enrollment rates, literacy levels, and performance in standardized exams are often used to measure quality education. But beyond that, even very basic things like access to clean water, electricity, and sometimes even healthcare in schools are part of what people would describe as "quality," because these are not always guaranteed. So in that sense, SDG 4 is very directly connected to SDG 6 on clean water, SDG 7 on energy, and SDG 3 on health. If those are missing, learning is immediately affected.

There is also a gender dimension, because access to education can be affected by factors like household responsibilities, safety, and socio-cultural expectations, which links SDG 4 to SDG 5 on gender equality. So in practice, education does not exist in isolation; it is shaped by these other development conditions.

Now, being here in Germany, I realize that many of those basic conditions are already assumed to be in place. So the conversation around quality education shifts more toward outcomes like critical thinking, independent learning, and technical or applied skills. In that context, quality is less about access to basics and more about depth of learning and intellectual development.

So for me, what this shows is that SDG 4 is deeply interconnected with other SDGs, but the way that interconnection is experienced depends on context. In Ghana, improving education often means first strengthening the surrounding systems like water, energy, and health, while in Germany those systems are already stable, so the focus moves further up the learning ladder.

What do you think is the biggest strength of the education system in Ghana?

In Ghana, the education system lacks a lot of things, but then it also tries to compensate for it in other areas.

In Ghana, the education system has its challenges and often lacks certain resources, but one of its strengths is how communities tend to compensate for those gaps.

For example, if a school or community does not have reliable access to things like clean water or basic infrastructure, people often do not just wait for government intervention. Instead, the community comes together to contribute in different ways to support the school and ensure that students can still access education.

So in that sense, the community plays a very important role in shaping how education actually functions in practice in Ghana. It is not only a state-driven system, but also very community-supported.

Like I said earlier, I, for instance, would not have been able to go to university, but then my family or my community came to my aid and paid for my education in the university.

How do education systems interact with local communities? In Ghana, are communities regularly integrated into the functioning of schools, or does community involvement only happen occasionally (in specific situations or actions)?

So in Ghana, the way communities are integrated into schools depends a lot on the type of school and the context. For private schools, they are usually well-resourced and can function more independently, so there is less need for external community support.

For public schools, however, community involvement becomes more important when there are gaps in resources or infrastructure. Ghana has a system where, aside from the formal government structure, there is also a strong traditional leadership system. So chiefs are highly respected in many communities, and if a school is facing challenges and government support is limited, the issue can be brought to the chief. The chief can then mobilize the community to contribute towards solving the problem.

In addition to that, religious institutions, especially churches, also often step in to support schools through donations or infrastructure support. So overall, this kind of community involvement is not strictly formalized or regular in a structured way, but it does happen quite frequently, especially when there are gaps in government provision. It is more of a complementary system rather than an officially integrated part of school governance.



Figure 5: Meeting of some traditional leaders in Ghana
Source 5:
https://www.aptnewsghana.com/index.php/2020/06/25/chieftaincy-and-politics-a-ghanaian-case-in-the-current-democratic-dispensation/

Now that you are in Germany, what problems or challenges in the education system do you think exist here that people don't usually recognize or talk about?

One thing that really stood out to me when I came to Germany is how early students are tracked into different education pathways. In early education, students are divided into academic and vocational tracks with one leading more toward university, and the other toward vocational training and immediate entry into the workforce.

What I find challenging about this is that this decision is made quite early, around the age of 10, when children may not yet fully understand their abilities or long-term interests. Because of that, I think it can be quite restrictive.

It also raises concerns about inequality. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially migrant or immigrant families, may be more likely to be placed in vocational tracks, even when they might have the potential to pursue academic education if given more time and support.

In contrast, in Ghana, all students generally go through the same basic education structure up to secondary level. After that, there is more flexibility in choosing what to study at university, and even switching fields later is still possible depending on academic performance. So for me, that difference stood out as a key challenge in the German system, particularly in terms of social mobility and equal opportunity.

Do you feel that the students and educators here have a realistic understanding of educational systems in the Global South?

Not really, I would say not at all in most cases. From my experience interacting with people here, a lot of the understanding of education in the Global South is shaped mainly by media narratives. There is often a dominant image of poverty and lack of development, and that becomes the default lens through which people interpret everything.

For example, I've had friends mention that when they were children, their parents would say things like "children in Africa are starving, so you should finish your food." So even from a young age, that kind of narrative shapes perception.

In some cases, this also translates into assumptions about academic ability or competence. I have personally experienced situations where people are genuinely surprised at how well I speak English, and I find myself surprised by their surprise, because English is something I have spoken all my life. So it sometimes reflects an underlying assumption that students from the Global South are less educated or less capable, even before any real interaction happens.

Because of that, when it comes to education, there is sometimes an assumption that students from the Global South automatically come from disadvantaged or under-resourced

backgrounds, without really understanding the diversity of contexts or systems within those countries. So overall, I would say the understanding is largely shaped by media representations rather than direct or informed engagement, and that makes it less realistic than it could be.

What do you think the Global North could learn from from the education system in general or in the Global South?

I think there are a few key things the Global North could learn from education systems in the Global South, particularly from my experience in Ghana.

The first is community-centered learning. Education is not only seen as something between the student, the school, and the government, but as a collective responsibility. The community plays a very important role in the success of education, and there is a shared understanding that education benefits everyone, so everyone has a role to play in supporting it.

The second is the ability to do more with limited resources. In contexts like Ghana, teachers often work with very constrained resources and still manage to deliver meaningful education. That requires creativity, adaptability, and a genuine commitment to teaching beyond just seeing it as a job. In that sense, it reflects a strong sense of vocation and resilience within the profession.

The third is humility and openness in terms of knowledge systems. I think education in the Global North can sometimes be quite centered on Western perspectives, and there is less exposure to other histories and contexts. For example, I realized that many people here are not very familiar with aspects of African history or African contexts, whereas in Ghana we are often taught European history and global perspectives. So there is already a level of exposure in one direction, but not always the other. So I think there is a lot of value in more mutual learning, where education systems recognize that knowledge is not one-sided and that there are meaningful lessons to be learned from different parts of the world.

What do you think the Global South could learn from the Global North?

I think one important thing the Global South can learn from the Global North is a broader understanding of what actually affects education outcomes. Education is not only about what happens in the classroom or about being in school and learning certain subjects. There are many structural factors that also shape the quality of education, such as access to clean water, reliable electricity, and good infrastructure like roads. All of these come together to influence how effectively students can learn.

Another important aspect is institutional accountability and independence. I think education systems should have a certain level of autonomy to function effectively, without too much political interference. For example, I recently heard about a case where a political leader influenced the dismissal of a school head due to personal disagreement. In my view, situations like that can undermine the stability and professionalism of the education system, because schools should ideally be able to make decisions based on expertise and what is best for students.

Related to that is the issue of proper resource allocation. There needs to be a more structured and consistent system for ensuring that schools receive the resources they need in order to provide quality education. When resources are allocated efficiently and institutions are allowed to function properly, it becomes easier to improve learning outcomes.

What would you like students in the October workshop to understand about how global inequality is connected to education

So for me, the main message I would want to share is that the barriers to education that students in the Global South face are not a reflection of a lack of ambition or ability. More often, they are the result of structural and systemic constraints that shape educational outcomes in very real ways. These can include things like unequal access to energy and infrastructure, broader governance challenges,

or even the effects of debt and unequal international partnerships, which in the long run can influence how much a country is able to invest in education.

So I think it is important to understand that these are not individual failures, but structural conditions that affect learning environments and opportunities.

And for me, that understanding should also change how people engage with international students. If you recognize these structural differences, it allows for more meaningful interaction, less stereotyping, and more openness to learning from each other's experiences.

Is there anything about your education journey or your perspective on the SDGs that you think is important, but hasn't been mentioned yet in this interview?

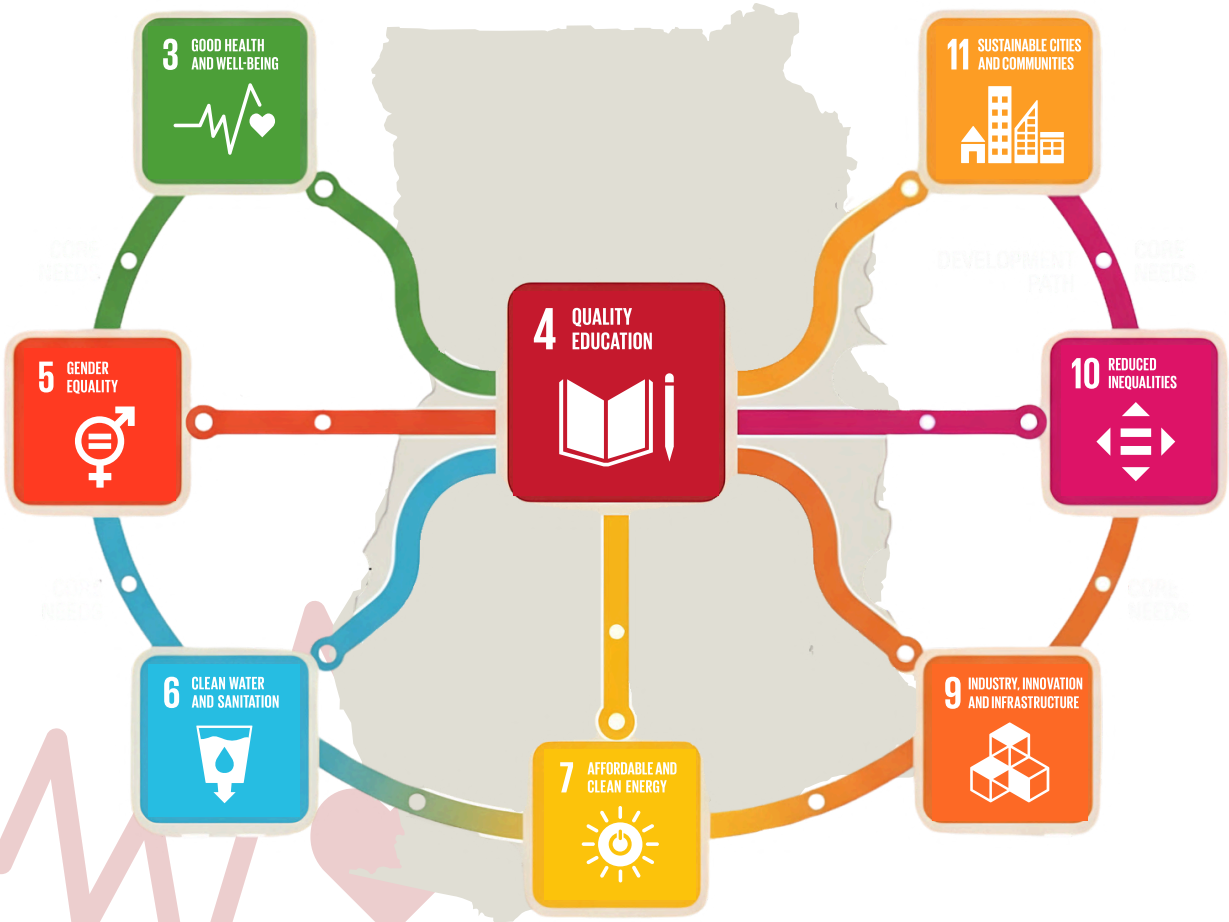
I think most of the key points have already come up, especially around the challenges within the education system. One thing I would add, though, from my own educational journey is the issue of intermittent electricity, which directly affected learning throughout my education in Ghana. From primary school all the way to university, there were often periods of load shedding. So electricity was not always constant. On some days or at certain times of the day, there would be no electricity, and at other times it would be available.

Because of that, students had to constantly adjust and plan their studying around electricity schedules. You had to know when power would likely be available and organize your learning accordingly. That was a normal part of the educational experience.

So for me, this clearly shows how closely connected SDG 7 on energy is to SDG 4 on quality education. Access to reliable energy is not separate from education, it directly shapes when, how, and whether learning can happen effectively.

I think that is the main additional point I would add from my experience.

That will be all for today, thank you very much.



CLARA UHDE LIMA

The interview was conducted by Irene



Tell me a bit about yourself.

I am from Brazil and I lived there for 22 years. I attended both middle and high school there. I completed my first bachelor's degree in Brazil in Visual Arts as part of an education program, so I have teaching credentials from Brazil. Then I came to Germany to continue my studies and pursue a master's degree, because I wanted international experience and the degree. It is easier to study for a master here in Germany than in Brazil; it is easier to find a suitable program. At some point, I decided to stay in Germany, and now I am studying social work here.

Why Germany specifically, not any other European country?

Because they offer really good conditions for student exchanges. The universities here have very good relationships with Brazilian universities, so it was easier for me. At the time, I also wanted to challenge myself and step out of my comfort zone. I was looking for a new country and a new language, and that was a big motivation as well.

Background

So, looking back, what are some of the most significant factors that shaped your access to education?

In Brazil, it is complicated. Brazil is a country with many different realities, and often these realities exist in parallel. Looking back, I realize that, to some extent, I was fortunate in life. I come from a family that had the financial means to support my education, and this was a very important factor for me. I spent my whole life in the private education system in Brazil, which had very good quality. My mother's family came from a poor background, so she really understood the power of education to transform one's life—not just economically, but also in terms of social transformation.

How would you describe the quality of education in general in Brazil?

As I mentioned, there are many different realities. We have the public education system, and I would say it's not completely bad. In some cases, it's good, but it's not the best—especially when talking specifically about middle and high schools.





Now that you are studying in Germany, how does the education system here compare to that in Brazil?

I finished my master's degree here. I would say, structurally and financially, the universities in Germany are better equipped than those in Brazil; I can't deny that. However, in Brazil, the education is more human-centered. We receive more feedback from our professors, we can talk to them, share our insecurities about our educational process and have more dialogue. Here, the system feels more hierarchical, and it's more difficult to access the professors.

SDG 4 & Quality

So do you know about the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals? When did you first encounter them, or when did you have to start learning about them?

I started learning about them because I used to work on a social project with children, and then I began my second bachelor's degree in social work. We talked a lot about the SDGs, but I don't think we really reflected on them. They were just there—they were the standard, and we were expected to work with them.

Do you know about SDG 4, which is the SDG on education? In your view, what does quality education actually mean? Does SDG 4 really cover what quality education means, or is there something missing?

I think education has a really powerful transformative effect, and that perspective comes from my family's story and from my teacher education in Brazil. Education is meant to open up possibilities, and I do see that reflected in SDG 4. However, I think it could be represented more strongly—it could be made more explicit.

Earlier, you mentioned that in Brazil, it's easier to have relationship with your professors and get better feedback. Aside from that, what are some strengths of the Brazilian education system that are not often talked about—especially outside the university context?

At university in Brazil, we learn that theory is there to support us, but we also learn to understand life—and life is really complex. No theory can fully explain life, so we need to remain flexible. I find that this flexibility is sometimes missing here (in Germany).

I worked on a social project helping children from Eastern Europe integrate into the German education system, so I had a lot of contact with schools here. That experience was one of the reasons why I decided I would never become a teacher in Germany. The teachers and public schools here have really good financial resources and infrastructure.

Here the teachers have many resources and receive good technical education, but sometimes they don't recognize that theory doesn't always fit perfectly with real life. The idea of the perfect student—who has all their needs met and comes from a well-structured, wealthy family—does not always reflect reality. Students do not always have everything they need to succeed in school, so schools and teachers need to remain open and responsive to the diverse needs of their students.

In Brazil, schools and teachers often don't have everything they need to run their activities, which is a big difference compared to here. As a result, Brazilian teachers have to be very creative. They are often more attuned to the diverse realities of their students and understand the need to adapt to these different circumstances, opening up possibilities for all students. It's very challenging to do this when you don't have the necessary financial resources and when the teaching profession has little social prestige. In Brazil, choosing to become a teacher is often seen as a poor career choice. (Our strength lies in an educational theory that is more integrated with real-life situations, flexible in response to life's uncertainties, and resilient in the face of structural barriers encountered in educational practice.)

SDG 4 in relation with others SDGS

How does SDG 4 (the SDG on education) relate to other SDGs, or how do those other SDGs influence SDG 4? From your experience, are there factors aside from the school itself that have affected your ability to study?

My family could afford private school, but I missed out on experiences that some of my colleagues here (in Germany) have, such as traveling and internships, because my family did not have the financial means to pay for private school and also afford all those additional experiences at the same time. When I started at a public university in Brazil, it was far from my home—sometimes up to three hours away by bus, and the buses in Brazil are usually crowded and uncomfortable. I used to spend about six hours a day commuting.

I would sleep and study on the bus... I left for university early in the morning and came back home only to sleep. I was always tired, and this had a significant impact on my life at the time. Infrastructure and public transportation in Brazil still require a lot of investment. This shows that factors like infrastructure (SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), poverty (SDG 1: No Poverty), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) are closely linked to access to quality education (SDG 4). The school itself is only one part of the picture—social and economic conditions, transportation, and family circumstances all influence educational opportunities.

Aside from the negative aspects, are there other aspects that supported your education, which might surprise people here in Germany?

Yes, it comes from the human-centered approach to education and the relationships we had with our professors and teachers. Since I was a child, I was always receiving feedback— about my strengths and about my potential. This really helped me to shape my self-image and to understand that I am capable of achieving things. Even the negative feedback was important, because it helped me to understand what I could improve.

Of the SDGs connected to education—such as those on health, gender equality, clean water, energy, reducing inequalities, and international partnerships—which one do you feel had the strongest influence on your education?

I would say economic and political inequalities had the strongest influence, because that is the reality in Brazil. I was fortunate to be able to attend a private education system, but the fact that I needed to go to a private school in order to have good educational opportunities says a lot about the availability and accessibility of quality education. Additionally, the structure of the cities—such as urban planning and infrastructure—was a big problem that also affected my educational experience.

Experience in German higher education

In Germany, there's more of a hierarchical system at the university, so you don't have a very personal relationship with your professors or lecturers. Are there other areas where you feel that Germany faces issues with the quality of its education system, which are often not discussed?

I think I can say that, structurally, the system is good in many ways. There is a lot of financial support, and that's a significant difference compared to Brazil. However, in some ways, the educational system here still reproduces certain forms of violence. For example, when I studied art history here, it was quite common for some students to go to the bathroom and cry after presentations because there was so much pressure. I think that this is a form of oppression rather than education.

Now that you have studied in both Brazil and Germany, has your perspective on educational inequality changed? Coming from Brazil, you had a particular understanding of what educational inequality there looks like, and after studying here in Germany, you might have a broader perspective. Is there any difference you can see, or has your view changed in any way?

My perspective has changed. Coming from a teacher education background in Brazil, I have been reflecting a lot on this topic recently. I now realize that simply addressing economic inequalities is not enough. Here in Germany, material conditions in schools are very good and the physical learning environment is excellent, but issues like racism, prejudice, and persistent social inequalities still exist. In some ways, the environment is beautiful and well-resourced, but sometimes it lacks humanity.

Based on your experience interacting with the education system here in Germany, do you feel that teachers have a realistic understanding of education systems in other countries, such as those in the Global South? Do they have a complete picture, or is their perspective mainly focused on the Global North?





In my experience, they do not have a realistic understanding at all. For example, many teachers do not know how to interact with children from other countries or backgrounds. If a child does not fit the profile of being white, cisgender, heterosexual, and middle-class, teachers often struggle to interact with them. I do not see that most teachers here make the effort to understand the realities of the Global South. I think the differences are just too far removed from their own experiences for them to fully grasp or engage with these differing educational contexts.

Learning with each other

Staying on that topic, is there anything that you feel the Global North can learn from the Global South in terms of education systems or educational experiences?

Yes, absolutely. I think one of the most important lessons is to focus on being human and flexible—to recognize that reality is complex and not everything can be addressed through fixed structures or rigid rules. It is important not to be afraid of making mistakes, as growth and learning often come from reflecting on and overcoming errors. Additionally, educational practices in the Global South often emphasize collective thinking and collaboration, rather than just individual achievement. These aspects—humanity, flexibility, embracing complexity and mistakes, and fostering a sense of community—are valuable qualities that the Global North can learn from the educational experiences of the Global South.

Is there anything that Brazil or the Global South could learn from the Global North or Germany?

I see that here, teaching is a respected profession; it is a good career and very well-paid, with many benefits. I think we need to reflect on this in Brazil. We cannot have education without educators, and we will not have good educators if they cannot support themselves on their salaries.

In Brazil, we do a lot with the little we have. Teachers and educators do their best with what they have. They are creative and positive. But it would be great not to have these restrictions, and to have all the structural resources needed to do the job. We need more investment in the education system.

If you could change one structural condition within the education system to improve education in your country, what would it be and why?

In early education, we still have a pre-school system that is primarily focused on discipline and tradition. I would like to see young children given more freedom—to truly be children, to play, and not be treated like little adults. I believe it is very important to invest in early childhood education, because this is where the fundamental processes of transformation begin. By allowing children the space to explore, play, and develop naturally, we can lay a stronger foundation for their future learning and well-being.

Message about SDGs

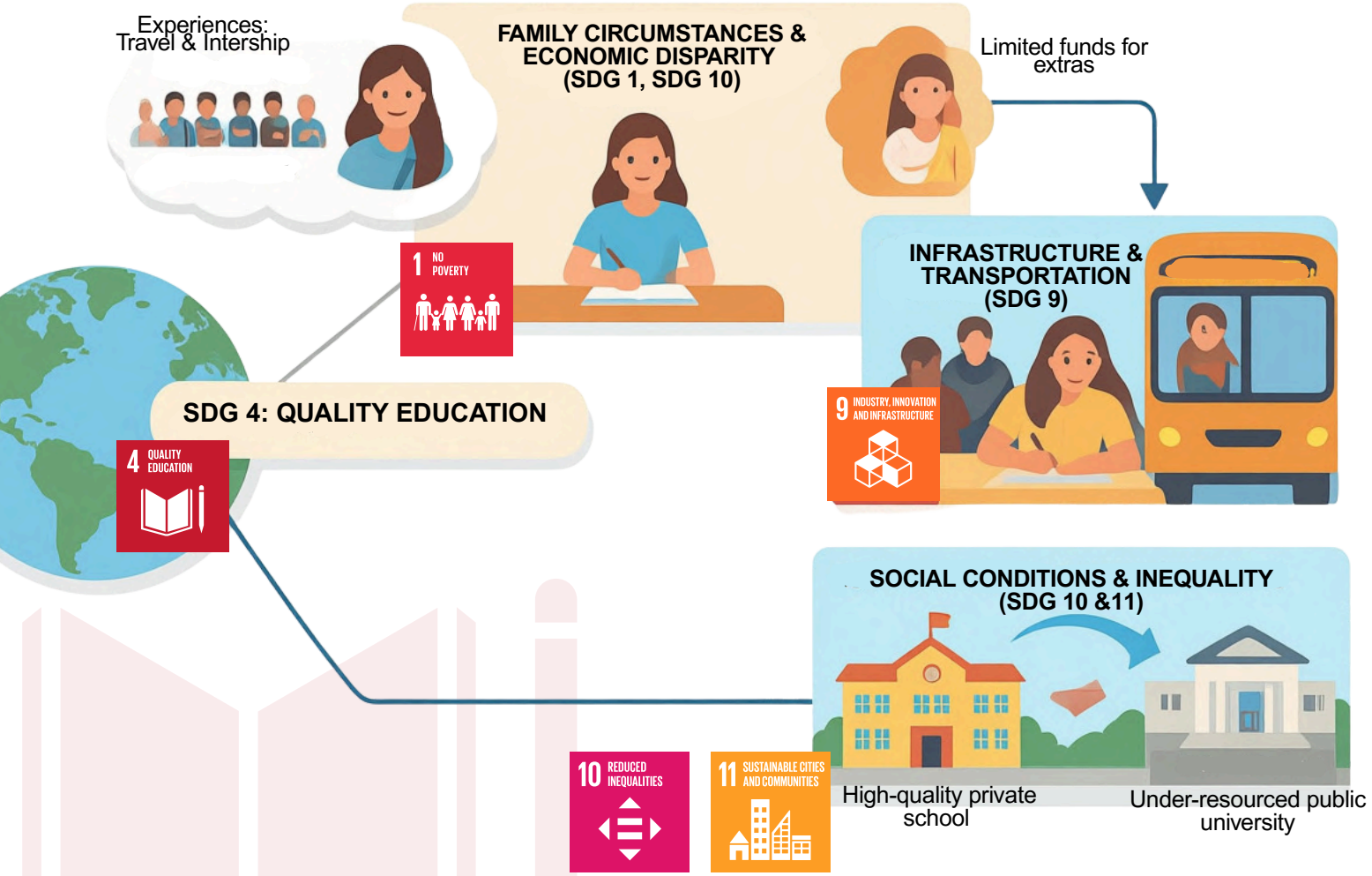
Since we have our workshop in October, where we will give more information to students about the SDGs and how the SDG on education relates to the other SDGs, do you have any message you would like to share with students about the connection between different SDGs or about global inequality and education?

I think, in some ways, we need to be really critical of the SDGs, their history, and how they were created. I would like to see a change in how we interact with these goals and the knowledge surrounding them.

We've spoken a lot about your educational journey and the SDGs, and how they connect to education; is there anything about your journey or your perspective on the SDGs that we haven't mentioned or that hasn't come up yet?

I think in Brazil we have good research on our own education system, but in some ways, European theories and models are still very strong in Brazilian society and education. We need to look for all the sustainable alternatives that suit us, because we are not Europe. We cannot just use the European system, as it does not fit very well with our society. But it is still present, in some ways.

We are still in the process of decolonizing our world. It is in this critical way that we need to engage with the SDGs.



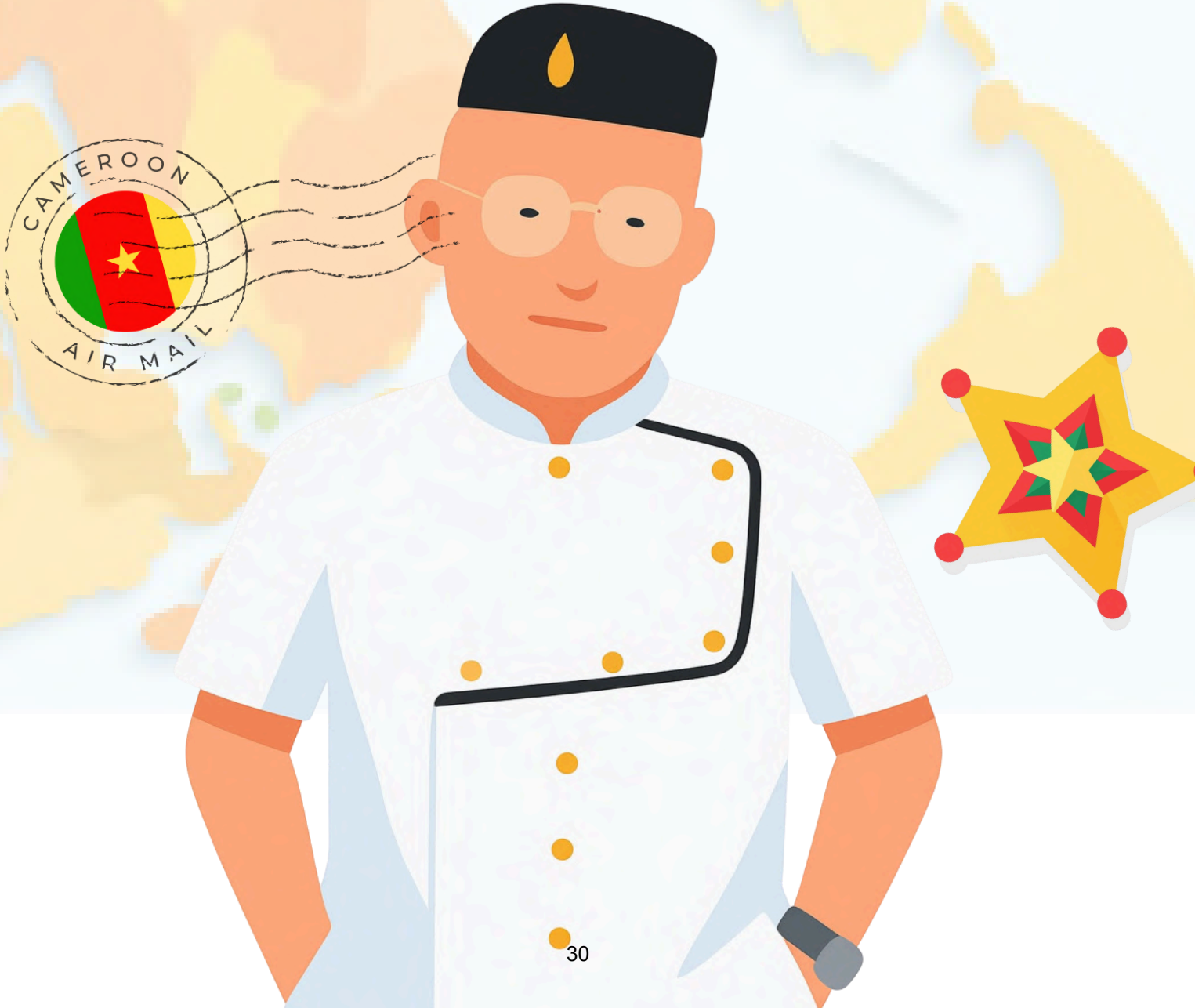
RODRIGUE AND FRIDA



ARSENE RODRIGUE PINLAP

The interview was conducted by Frida







Rodrigue, could you kindly tell us a brief summary of your personal background—where you come from, what you started with, and what motivated you to come and pursue your higher education in Germany?

My name is Arsene Rodrigue, I come from Cameroon. I grew up in Garoua and later in Bamenda. My family was not wealthy, but they deeply believed that education was the key to a better future. That belief shaped me from a very young age. I started with my secondary education in Cameroon, where I earned my Baccalaureate in Mathematics and Physics. Then I studied Petrochemical Technology at the Gulf Field Higher Institute of Petroleum in Limbe, which gave me my first engineering qualification.

But I knew I wanted more. I wanted to understand chemistry at a deeper level—not just theory, but how materials actually work and how we can use chemistry to solve real problems. That curiosity led me to Russia, where I studied at Lobachevsky State University in Nizhny Novgorod and completed a Diplom-Ingenieur program. That experience gave me a strong foundation in research. However, I still felt something was missing. I wanted to specialize further in materials chemistry. That is what brought me to Germany. I am now at Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, pursuing a Master of Science in Material Chemistry, focusing on macromolecular and colloid chemistry.

What motivated me? Honestly, it was a combination of curiosity, family support, and a deep desire to build a better future for myself and my community. Every step—learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, managing financial pressures—was hard. But I saw every move as an investment in myself. Germany offered me the research environment, the practical training, and the opportunities I was looking for. And here I am.

How would you describe the quality of education back in your home country, Cameroon?

In Cameroon, the education I received was academically rigorous in terms of theoretical content. The curriculum was demanding, and teachers were often highly knowledgeable. Students were trained to master complex concepts and to perform well in national examinations. What worked well was the discipline and the strong foundational knowledge we gained. We learned to work hard and to value education deeply.
What did not work well was the lack of practical application. Laboratories, where they existed, were poorly equipped. There were very few opportunities for hands-on experiments, internships, or real-world projects. The system was heavily focused on memorization and exam performance rather than on critical thinking, creativity, or problem-solving. Additionally, class sizes were often very large, making individualized attention from teachers nearly impossible. Students in rural areas faced even greater disadvantages, with poorly maintained schools and a shortage of qualified teachers.

When it comes to education in general, what are some of the strengths? I know not everything has bad sides—there are also good things you can talk about regarding education in your country. So, what would you say are the strengths of education in Cameroon?

First, I would say **resilience**. Because resources are scarce, students and teachers learn to be incredibly resourceful and creative. We learn to solve problems with very limited means. That builds a kind of grit and determination that you cannot easily teach in a well-resourced environment. When you have to study by candlelight because the power is out, or share one textbook between ten students, you develop a strength that stays with you for life.



Fig 1. Government Bilingual High School, Down-Town, Bamenda

Second, there is a strong sense of **community involvement**. In Cameroon, education is not just the responsibility of schools and the government. Families, churches, neighbors, and extended relatives all take collective responsibility for educating young people. When my family struggled to pay my school fees, aunts, uncles, and even church members contributed small amounts. That informal support network is powerful, and it fills many gaps that the formal system cannot address.

Third, the **multilingual environment** is a real asset. Cameroon is a bilingual country—French and English. On top of that, many students learn local languages, and increasingly international languages like German or Russian. I myself had to learn French, English, Russian, and now German. This linguistic diversity fosters adaptability and cultural awareness from a very young age. That is something not every education system can offer.

So, onto the last question: regarding the quality of education, what is the biggest challenge or barrier that quality education faces in Cameroon? In other words, what is something that is holding Cameroon back from providing quality education?

In Cameroon, education is not free. You have to pay school fees, buy uniforms, books, and cover transportation costs. For many families, even feeding their children is a daily struggle.

So when school fees are due, it becomes a crisis. I saw this with my own eyes. I had a friend—one of the brightest students in our class—whose father lost his job. His family could not afford to pay his fees, and he had to drop out for an entire year. When he finally returned, he had fallen behind and struggled to catch up. That story is not rare. It happens all the time.

Because of financial pressure, even highly talented students are often forced to stop their education. Scholarships exist, but they are extremely limited and highly competitive. So in practice, your family's income determines your educational future far more than your talent or hard work. That is the reality.

But financial issues are not the only barrier. The second major problem is infrastructure. Many schools in Cameroon lack electricity, clean water, proper sanitation, laboratories, libraries, and even adequate classrooms. In rural areas, it is even worse. I remember studying by kerosene lamp because we had constant power outages. How can you learn science without a functioning laboratory? How can you study after dark without electricity? You cannot.

Third, there is a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in science and mathematics. Teachers are overworked and underpaid, and class sizes are enormous. Individual attention is nearly impossible. And finally, there is a huge gap between urban and rural areas.

Students in cities like Yaoundé or Douala have much better access to resources than those in remote villages. That inequality is deep and unfair. And also due to the economic situation a lot of teachers travel abroad creating a brain drain, that is a very big problem in the educational system.

So, if I had to sum it up: the biggest thing holding Cameroon back from providing quality education is **poverty combined with lack of infrastructure**. You cannot have quality education when families cannot afford fees, when schools have no electricity or clean water, and when teachers are too few and too tired. It is a systemic problem. And it will take serious investment and political will to change it.

Let's move on to the SDGs. What comes to your mind when you think of them? Or what do the SDGs mean to you?

I know that the Sustainable Development Goals are a set of 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to address the world's biggest challenges: poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and peace and justice. I have studied them, yes. I am particularly familiar with SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy, and SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, because these connect most directly to my own life and my field of study in material chemistry.

If you look back at your experience while you were still in school in Cameroon — or not necessarily your own experience, but what you saw around you, with your neighbors or fellow students — how did factors like electricity or health affect your education? What did they go through when it came to electricity and health, and how did that affect their education?

Let me start with **electricity**, because that is something people here in Germany might take for granted. When I was in secondary school in Cameroon, power outages were a regular part of life. Almost every day, the electricity would go out, sometimes for hours, sometimes for the whole night. My family did not have a reliable generator. So what did I do? I studied by candlelight or by a kerosene lamp. That light is dim, it flickers, and it strains your eyes. After an hour or two, your head hurts, and you have to stop. So I could not study as much as I wanted to, especially before important exams.

But I was luckier than some. I had neighbors who had no electricity at all—not even a kerosene lamp sometimes. Those students would try to finish their homework before sunset, or they would gather outside under a streetlight if there was one. Imagine trying to concentrate on mathematics or physics under a flickering streetlamp with mosquitoes biting you. That was the reality for many of my classmates.

Now, let me talk about **health**. This is closely connected to electricity, because without reliable power, you cannot pump clean water, you cannot refrigerate medicine, and sanitation becomes a problem. In my community, waterborne diseases like typhoid and malaria were very common. Malaria alone caused students to miss weeks of school at a time. I remember a classmate who was brilliant—truly brilliant—but he kept falling sick with malaria. He would be absent for two or three weeks, come back, try to catch up, fall behind again, and then get sick once more. Eventually, he had to repeat a year. It was not his fault. It was the environment.

And because health clinics in many areas are under-resourced and often have no reliable electricity, even getting treated was a challenge. Some families relied on traditional medicine simply because they could not afford or reach a proper clinic.

So what did my fellow students go through? They went through **interrupted learning.** They went through studying in poor light, missing school because of preventable diseases, and falling behind not because they were lazy or unintelligent, but because the basic conditions for learning were not there. You cannot have quality education without electricity, clean water, and basic health. Those things are not separate from education—they are the foundation. And when the foundation is weak, everything else cracks.

That is why I mentioned earlier that improving energy access—SDG 7—would have the most transformative impact on education in Cameroon. Because when you turn on the lights, you don't just brighten a room. You open up hours of study time, you power computers and labs, you keep vaccines cold, you pump clean water. Everything changes.

What supported your education back at home?

The first and most important was **family support**. My parents were not wealthy, but they believed with all their hearts that education was the key to a better future. They made sacrifices I cannot even describe. When money was tight—and it was always tight—they would find a way to pay my school fees, even if it meant going without other things. My father, my mother, my aunts, my uncles—they all contributed. In Cameroon, education is seen as a collective responsibility, not just the job of parents. When my family struggled, extended family members would send small amounts of money. Sometimes it was not much, but it was enough to keep me in school.

The second was **community support**—churches, neighbors, and even local leaders. In my community, people believed that educating a child was investing in the whole village. There were times when a church member would pay part of my fees, or a neighbor would give me a notebook or a pen. These small acts of kindness added up. I never forgot them.

The third was **mentorship**. Older students often helped younger ones with their studies. I had teachers who saw potential in me and pushed me to work harder. They would stay after class to explain a difficult concept, or they would lend me books I could not afford. Having someone who believes in you—that is powerful. It is something you cannot measure, but it makes all the difference.

Okay, so you being a man — or of the male species, let me put it that way — can you say that being a boy, a male, or a man, in one way or another, affected you or gave you an upper hand in accessing better quality education?

In Cameroon, when a family has very limited resources—and most families do—there is often a painful choice to be made. Who gets to continue to higher education? In many families, the preference goes to the boy. I saw this with my own eyes. There were girls in my community who were brilliant—smarter than me, working harder than me—but when the money ran out, they were told, 'You cannot go to university. We need to invest in your brother.' Or even worse, they were expected to marry early, and education was seen as unnecessary for a wife.

I also saw families that prioritized daughters, recognizing that educating a woman lifts the entire family and community. But those families were the exception, not the rule. Especially in rural areas, the practice of prioritizing boys is still very strong.

What about the education that poor people or middle-class families get? Is there a difference?

Yes, the difference is huge. Wealthy families send their children to private schools with good facilities and then to university without question. Middle-class families struggle but usually manage to keep their children in school, often sending only one child to university. Poor families—the majority—face a completely different reality: they cannot afford school fees, uniforms, or books, and their schools often lack desks, roofs, clean water, and even teachers. So in Cameroon, your family's income determines your educational future far more than your talent or hard work—and that is the painful truth.

So, going back to your knowledge of the SDGs — which you say you have vast knowledge of — what can you say? Which among them, apart from SDG number four, Quality Education, which we are talking about, has affected or had a strong influence on quality education in Cameroon?

From my experience, the SDGs that had the strongest influence on quality education in Cameroon are SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities),

with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) also being critical. SDG 7 is fundamental because without reliable electricity, students cannot study after dark, schools cannot power computers or labs, and teachers cannot use modern teaching aids. SDG 10 is central because economic inequality determines almost everything—your family's income predicts whether you will finish primary school, go to secondary school, or attend university. And SDG 17 matters because my own opportunity to study in Russia and Germany came through international partnerships and scholarships, which create pathways for students from under-resourced systems to access world-class education.

Are there challenges when it comes to quality education in Germany?

Yes, definitely. People in the Global North, including Germany, face their own education quality challenges that are not always acknowledged. One is the lack of diversity and inclusion—the system can struggle to accommodate students from non-traditional backgrounds, including international students and those from immigrant families. Another is the rigidity of the system, especially when it comes to recognizing foreign qualifications; the process can be slow and bureaucratic, and previous education from other systems is sometimes undervalued. There is also the issue of mental health—the pressure to perform, combined with adapting to a new culture and language, can be intense for international students, and support systems, while present, are not always sufficient. Finally, there is sometimes a gap in global perspective—many students and educators here have limited exposure to education systems outside their own, which can lead to a lack of understanding of global inequality and its impacts.

Since you being a student here, has your perspective on educational inequality changed, or has it stayed the same?

My perspective has become more nuanced. Before coming to Germany, I saw education inequality primarily as a problem of resources—if only schools in Cameroon had better labs, more books, and reliable electricity, then everything would be fine. But now, I have come to see that education inequality exists everywhere, though it takes different forms.

In Germany, inequality is less about basic access to schooling and more about social mobility, the quality of education in different regions or school types, and the challenges faced by students from immigrant or lower-income backgrounds. I have also realized that the education system in the Global North is not automatically 'better' in every way—it has strengths and weaknesses, just like any system.

So my perspective has changed. I now think more critically about what 'quality education' really means and how different contexts require different solutions. Inequality is not just a 'Global South' problem. It is a global problem.

From your conversations with German students, is their perspective on education in African countries like Cameroon based on reality or mostly shaped by the media?

They have a perspective that I think is incomplete. Many students and educators in Germany see education in the Global South—like in Cameroon and other countries—primarily through a lens of deficit. They focus on what is missing or lacking. They often underestimate the education systems in those countries and think they are really poor. That's why, for example, when someone comes from the Global South to Germany, they are always tested—to see if they need to level up. There is a tendency to underestimate our educational system.

What is often missing from the picture is the resilience, creativity, and community solidarity that characterize education in many parts of the Global South. People work with very limited resources and still achieve remarkable things. There's also a lack of understanding of the real differences between these contexts.

Another distortion is the assumption that solutions from the Global North can simply be transplanted to the Global South without

adaptation. So in general, their picture is based on what they have read or seen in the media. But most of them cannot truly understand it unless they go to those countries and see for themselves.

So, as we sum up our interview, what can you say the Global South can learn from the Global North when it comes to quality education, and vice versa—what can the Global North learn from the Global South?

What the Global South can learn from the Global North: The Global South can learn from the North's investment in infrastructure—laboratories, libraries, and reliable electricity. It can also learn from the North's emphasis on critical thinking and research-based learning, moving away from pure memorization, as well as student support services like academic advising, career counseling, and mental health support.

What the Global North can learn from the Global South: The Global North can learn about resourcefulness and community involvement—how to achieve a lot with very little, and how families, churches, and neighbors collectively take responsibility for educating young people. The North can also learn from the multilingual and multicultural adaptability of Southern students, and most importantly, from resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity. Neither system is perfect. We need mutual learning, not one-way teaching.

For example, if you were in a position — as a politician, a policymaker, or in any situation where you could make an impact on the quality of education in your country — what is something you would change or do to improve the quality of education?

In terms of quality education, infrastructure also needs to be improved. The labs, for example — more focus should be placed on practical skills. Don't forget that education needs to be more practical.

So, in October, we are going to have a workshop where we'll talk to university students. What is the one thing you would like to tell them — when it comes to how global inequality affects education — that you want them to know?

The one thing I want you to know is this: education inequality is not about individual failure. It is about structures, systems, and circumstances. Where a child is born still determines too much about their educational opportunities and their life chances. A talented student in Cameroon faces completely different obstacles than a talented student in Germany—not because of any difference in ability or effort, but because of the systems they are born into. And this is not just a problem for the Global South—education inequality affects everyone because it perpetuates global inequality, limits innovation, and prevents the world from benefiting from the full range of human talent. When we lose a potential scientist, engineer, or teacher because of poverty or lack of infrastructure, we all lose. So I would ask you to see global learning as a two-way street, and to approach it with humility, curiosity, and a genuine desire to understand, not pity.

You've studied in three different countries — Cameroon, Russia, and now Germany. So, what are the main differences in terms of the quality of education, teaching styles, or student life between them?

I have studied in Cameroon (Global South), Russia, and now Germany. I consider Russia as part of the Global North, so I have both Global South and Global North experience before coming to Germany.

In Russia, at the beginning, it was really challenging — especially the language barrier. But once I managed to integrate myself, I saw that Russia is a very good country. However, integration for foreigners is really difficult. For example, to get a job, they always ask: 'Do you have the red passport?' (Russian internal passport). If you don't have it, you cannot get a job — even for the same position. Even if you get the passport — for instance, by marrying a Russian citizen — there are still some jobs you can never get as a foreigner.

In countries like Germany, you see foreigners working in offices, but in Russia, it's very rare. It's really challenging. Some people do manage, but it's not easy compared to other countries.

The educational system in Russia was also not easy. They don't allow foreigners to go on internships. For example, my Russian classmates would go for internships during the holidays, but when it was my turn, they said: 'You are a foreigner, you cannot go.' It felt like they were saying: 'You want to come and take our technology' — I didn't understand that. So how is a foreign student supposed to complete their internship? They just give you a topic, you search on the internet, write something, and submit it. You don't actually go into the industry. Most of us didn't get industry experience. Medical students had to go to the hospital, so they did. But for fields like mechanical engineering, it was different. Also, there are some domains foreigners cannot study in Russia — for example, military-related fields or nuclear science. Foreigners are not allowed.

Despite these challenges, Russian people are really welcoming and good, but they are not very open. They always keep a guard up. They don't easily trust — gaining trust is very difficult.

When it comes to the university environment: laboratories were well equipped. I would say there is no big difference between Russia and Germany in terms of equipment. Sanitation was good — the toilets were clean, especially at the university. However, in the student dormitory, it was really bad because many foreigners lived there — the toilets and kitchen were in poor condition.

One very good thing in Russia is the health insurance. If you have an emergency, you can call, and the insurance covers almost everything. It's not expensive. I paid about 100,000 Central African Francs (CFA) for the whole year — that's approximately 150–180 euros for 12 months. You can have any consultation or check-up. So that was excellent.

Would you say that the connection between SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) was better in Russia than in Germany?

I can say it was better in Russia. Because here in Germany, I saw some students complaining that they went to the hospital and spent the whole day without being checked on — even at a university clinic. They waited all day, and in the end, they were not even examined.
But in Russia, you hardly ever see that. If you have an issue, you just call, take an appointment, and they will send you the details — which hospital, what time. When you go, the consultation is covered, almost everything is free of charge. You might only pay for the medication.

Aside from the internship issue, would you say the quality of higher education in Russia is comparable or similar to that of Germany?

Germany is really good for internships and the practical domain, especially for foreigners. In Russia, education is good, but if you are Russian, you have good opportunities. However, Germany really emphasizes practical training, and that is very good. Also, the systems are quite different — and that's okay. In Russia, if you don't pass an exam, they don't just expel from the university. If after your fourth attempt you still don't pass, they send you to something like a preparatory school. You stay there for maybe one year, focus only on that subject, and then you come back and take the exam again. They give you a second chance. That's good.



FRIDA ONYANGO

The interview was conducted by Rodrigue



Personal Background and Educational Journey.

Can you tell us your name, where you are currently studying in Germany, and what programme or field of study you are pursuing?

My name is Frida Onyango, and I am from Kenya. I am currently pursuing a Master's degree in Public Policy at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt in Germany.

Could you briefly walk us through your educational background — where you grew up, where you previously studied, and how your journey eventually led you to study in Germany?

I was born and raised in Mombasa, Kenya, where I completed both my primary and secondary education. I later attended Pwani University in Kilifi, where I earned a Bachelor's degree in Education.

After graduation, I worked with an NGO while also serving as an adult education instructor at an Adult Education Centre. Through that experience, I became increasingly interested in education policy and social development.

I had always wanted to study abroad, and pursuing a master's degree seemed like the best opportunity. While researching programmes in Europe, I initially considered Hungary, but after further research I chose Germany because of its strong academic reputation, relatively affordable education system, and safe learning environment.

What initially motivated you to pursue higher education, and what has that journey looked like for you so far?

My main motivation for pursuing higher education comes from my desire to contribute to policy reform in Kenya, particularly in the field of adult education. Adult education often receives limited government attention and insufficient funding, despite its importance in empowering communities and reducing inequality.

Studying Public Policy allows me to better understand how effective policies are designed and implemented, and I hope to use this knowledge to contribute to educational reform in my country.

Looking back on your educational journey, what would you say were the most significant factors — whether positive or challenging — that influenced your access to education and shaped your experience?

One of the most significant factors that influenced my educational journey has been my family and the support they have consistently given me in pursuing my educational aspirations. Their encouragement, guidance, and belief in my abilities motivated me to stay focused and work hard, even during challenging times. Having a strong support system helped me build confidence, remain determined, and value the importance of education in achieving my goals.

Quality of Education and SDG 4

How would you describe the quality of education you received in your home country? What aspects worked well, and what areas do you think were lacking or could have been improved?

I would describe the quality of education in Kenya as strong in several respects. Kenyan educational qualifications are recognised internationally, and many students perform well academically. One major strength is the adaptability and dedication of teachers, who often work effectively despite limited resources.

However, one challenge is that the education system places heavy emphasis on examination performance and grades, sometimes at the expense of creativity, practical learning, and critical thinking.

Now that you are studying in Germany, how would you compare the education system here with the one in your home country — not only in terms of resources, but also regarding teaching methods, critical thinking, community relevance, and student support?

One major difference I have observed in

Germany is the strong implementation of educational policies. Institutions not only create policies but also actively follow through with them.
The German education system encourages critical thinking, independent learning, and student participation. Students are encouraged to understand concepts deeply rather than simply memorising information for exams.
I have also noticed stronger student support systems in Germany. For example, universities provide counselling services, tutoring support, food assistance programmes, and support groups for students with children.
In Kenya, some of these structures may exist formally, but implementation is often limited due to resource constraints. However, Kenya has stronger community involvement in education, where families and neighbours often play an active role in supporting students.

What is your general understanding or awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to education?

I am well aware of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and understand that they aim to address many of the major challenges facing humanity today. I also recognize that the SDGs are interconnected, meaning that progress in one goal often supports the achievement of others. In relation to education, I believe it is the backbone of all the SDGs because achieving any of these goals requires people to be informed, skilled, and empowered through education. Quality education helps individuals make better decisions, contribute to society, and drive sustainable development in different areas.

In your opinion, what does "quality education" truly mean? Do you feel the definition presented in SDG 4 is complete and accurate, or do you think it overlooks certain important aspects?

To me, quality education means providing learners with knowledge, skills, critical thinking abilities, and opportunities for personal growth in an inclusive environment.

While SDG 4 promotes inclusive and equitable quality education, I believe there are still inequalities in practice. For example, private and international schools often have significantly better resources, lower teacher-to-student ratios, and better learning environments compared to many public schools. This creates unequal educational experiences despite the goal of equity.

From your perspective, what are some of the biggest strengths of the education system in your home country or region that are often overlooked or not widely discussed?

One of the biggest strengths of the education system in my region that is often overlooked is its adaptability, even in situations where resources are limited. For example, I live near a public primary school where, due to the large number of children and limited classroom space, the lower classes are divided into shifts. Some students attend lessons in the morning while others attend in the afternoon. This system ensures that all children still have access to education despite the challenges.
Another strength is the efficient use of scarce resources. In many cases, one textbook may be shared among three or four students, and teachers work hard to make the best use of the limited materials available. Although these conditions can be challenging, they also demonstrate the resilience, creativity, and commitment within the education system to ensure that learning continues for everyone.

On the other hand, what do you consider to be the most serious barriers or challenges to achieving quality education in your home country or region?

One of the biggest barriers to quality education in Kenya is inequality driven by corruption and political favouritism. In some cases, educational resources and financial aid are not distributed fairly, which disadvantages already vulnerable communities.
As a result, some schools lack essential learning materials such as textbooks, laboratory equipment, and adequate infrastructure. This contributes to unequal

educational opportunities and higher dropout rates among disadvantaged students

Interconnections with Other SDGs

Reflecting on your own experience, did factors outside of school itself — such as access to electricity, clean water, healthcare, or economic pressures — affect your ability to study or the educational opportunities of people around you? Could you share a specific example?

It did not affect me personally but I could see it in the people around me and what I read on newspaper and saw and heard on TV\radio. Some of my classmates, since they did not have electricity, had to do their homework at school which was specifically meant to be done at home. On the news I could see children not going to school due to lack of water. Instead of attending school they would be going to search for water for consumption at home, thus affecting their education. This mostly affected the arid and semi-arid part of Kenya, which is mostly in the North. Most public hospitals in Kenya provide low quality services and the private ones are expensive and most Kenyans are middle to low class families. So when one has a serious health condition it takes a toll on them, even affecting their education. I remember one of my classmates had sickle cell and he barely attended school due to this condition. Economy is a major factor that determines the kind of education you get in Kenya, whether you attend a private or public school, have tutors or not, your parents can afford to buy your own textbooks or not. Finances determine who gets education first and who stays at home, especially for big families. In this scenario, men always get the priority to study.

Were there also supportive factors in your educational journey that people in Germany might not immediately expect or recognize — for example, strong community networks, informal learning spaces, or family support systems?

Yeah, in Kenya there is a lot of community support. For example, a neighbour who has enough space at their home and electricity will offer the space to kids to come and study for free. Or a bright student or former\retired teacher will offer free tutoring services. Most of the bright and poor students get support through fund raising, so as to support their education and pay school fees and any other needed expenses.

In your experience, did gender influence access to education in your community or context? If so, how did that manifest in everyday life or educational opportunities?

Personally, I was fortunate to grow up in a family where girls' education was strongly supported. However, in many communities, gender still affects access to education.
In economically struggling families, boys are often prioritised when educational choices must be made. Girls may also miss school due to lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, early marriage, or cultural practices such as female genital mutilation in some communities. These factors continue to limit educational opportunities for many girls.

How did economic inequality shape educational opportunities where you grew up? Who was more likely to attend university, who was excluded, and what factors usually determined those outcomes? Economics majorly determined your path of education.

Economic inequality greatly shaped educational opportunities where I grew up. In many cases, a family's financial situation determined the type and quality of education a child could access, such as whether they attended a public or private school. Even in public schools, where education is officially considered free in Kenya, there are still many hidden and recurring costs that some families struggle to afford. As a result, many students are often sent home because of unpaid school fees or other expenses.

Although there are government bursaries and educational aid programs meant to support needy students, corruption and tribalism sometimes prevent the most deserving learners from benefiting from this support.

Economic challenges have also contributed to high dropout rates at both the primary and secondary school levels. At the university level, many students are currently opting out of higher education because of the rising cost of tuition and related expenses.

Access to education was also influenced by factors beyond finances. Parents' level of education played a major role, as children from educated families were often more likely to value and pursue higher education themselves. Other important factors included the motivation of the child and parents, community influence, and the overall support system available to the learner. Together, these social and economic inequalities significantly affected who was able to continue their education and who was excluded.

Among the SDGs connected to education in this project — such as health, gender equality, clean water, affordable energy, reduced inequalities, and international partnerships — which do you think had the strongest impact on education in your context, and why?

In the context of my country, I believe that the SDG on reduced inequalities has the strongest impact on education. Inequality, which is often fueled by corruption and tribalism, greatly affects access to quality education. These issues contribute to the unfair distribution of educational resources, including funding, infrastructure, teaching staff, and learning materials.

As a result, some schools and regions are better equipped than others, while many learners in disadvantaged communities struggle with inadequate facilities and limited opportunities. This inequality creates a gap in the quality of education students receive and affects their chances of academic success. Therefore, addressing inequality is essential in ensuring that all learners have equal access to quality education regardless of their background or location.

From your perspective, are there education-related challenges in the Global North, including Germany, that you feel are often overlooked or insufficiently acknowledged when discussing "quality education"?

Based on what I have heard and observed, although I have not lived in Germany long enough to fully understand the entire education system, I believe there are still some education-related challenges in the Global North that are often overlooked when discussing "quality education." One of these is inequality in education linked to a family's financial status, which can influence access to opportunities and support within the education system.

Another major challenge is the integration of immigrants into the education system. In Germany, for example, language barriers and bureaucratic processes can make it difficult for immigrant students and families to fully adapt and access educational opportunities. In some cases, discrimination and social exclusion may also affect immigrants' educational experiences and sense of belonging. These challenges show that even in developed countries, achieving truly inclusive and equitable quality education remains an ongoing issue.

North-South Perspectives and Global Learning

Now that you are studying in Germany, has your perspective on educational inequality changed in any way? If so, how?
Studying in Germany has not completely changed my perspective on educational inequality, but it has helped me realize that educational inequality exists here as well. While the level and intensity may not be the same as in Kenya or many parts of the Global South, inequalities are still present. Factors such as financial background, social status, language barriers, and immigrant integration can still affect access to opportunities and the overall educational experience. This has shown me that educational inequality is a global issue, even though it may appear in different forms depending on the context.

Do you think students and educators in Germany have a realistic understanding of

education systems in the Global South, or do you feel their perception is sometimes incomplete or distorted?

I think perceptions of education systems in the Global South can sometimes be incomplete or overly influenced by negative media portrayals. Often, discussions about the Global South focus mainly on poverty, conflict, or lack of resources, which can create a one-sided understanding of the realities on the ground.

As a result, some students and educators in Germany may associate education in the Global South primarily with underdevelopment, while overlooking the strengths, achievements, resilience, and innovation that also exist within these systems.

From my personal interactions, I have noticed that many people form their understanding of Africa mainly through media representations rather than direct experience, and relatively few have had the opportunity to visit African countries themselves. Because of this, stereotypes or misconceptions can sometimes persist.

At the same time, I believe these perceptions can change through dialogue, academic exchange, and personal interaction. Conversations like this are important because they help create a more balanced and nuanced understanding of education systems across different parts of the world.

In your opinion, what could countries in the Global North genuinely learn from the educational systems and experiences of the Global South?

In my opinion, countries in the Global North could learn a great deal from the adaptability and resilience found in many education systems in the Global South. Despite limited resources, schools, teachers, families, and communities often find creative ways to ensure that education continues and that students are supported. For example, teachers and students frequently learn how to maximise scarce resources, and communities often work together to support children's education through informal tutoring, fundraising, or shared learning spaces.

Another important aspect is the strong sense of community involvement in education. In many parts of the Global South, education is not viewed as the responsibility of schools alone, but as something supported collectively by families, neighbours, and the wider community. This creates strong social support networks for students.

From my experience in Germany, educational systems are highly organised and well-resourced, but community involvement in students' daily educational lives can sometimes feel less visible compared to what I experienced in Kenya. I believe combining strong institutional systems with stronger community engagement could benefit education systems globally.

On the other hand, are there aspects of education systems in the Global North that the Global South could benefit from learning or adapting?

Yes, I believe there are several aspects of education systems in the Global North that the Global South could learn from or adapt.

One important aspect is the emphasis on equal opportunity and merit-based access. In many Global North countries, there are stronger institutional systems that help create more equal educational opportunities, whereas in some parts of the Global South, including Kenya, access to opportunities can sometimes be influenced by social connections, political influence, or economic background.

Another important lesson is the strong focus on critical thinking, creativity, and independent learning. In many schools in the Global North, students are encouraged to question, analyse, and develop their own ideas rather than relying mainly on memorisation and examination performance.

I also admire how education systems in the Global North tend to be more inclusive of students with disabilities or special needs. Many schools provide support services, specialised facilities, and learning accommodations that help students feel included and valued within society.

In many parts of the Global South, however,

access to special needs education remains limited because the facilities and support systems are expensive and often inaccessible to average families. As a result, children with disabilities may face major barriers to completing their education.

I believe adapting some of these inclusive and student-centred approaches could greatly strengthen education systems in the Global South while still maintaining the strong sense of community and resilience that already exists there.

Reflection and Looking Forward

If you could change one structural condition — whether related to healthcare, energy access, gender equality, economic inequality, or international cooperation — to improve education in your home country, what would it be, and why?

If I could change one structural condition to improve education in Kenya, I would focus on strengthening governance and policy implementation, particularly in addressing corruption and inequality. Kenya has many good policies on paper, but the challenge is often in implementation and accountability. Corruption and misuse of public funds can limit investment in important sectors such as education, healthcare, energy access, and social support programmes. As a result, resources that are meant to improve schools and support vulnerable communities do not always reach the people who need them most.
I also believe that reducing political favouritism and tribalism would help create a fairer distribution of educational opportunities and public resources across the country.

With stronger institutions, transparent leadership, and effective enforcement of policies, Kenya would be better positioned to improve healthcare, reduce inequality, promote gender equality, and strengthen education outcomes. In my view, good governance is essential because it influences the success of many other development goals.

What message would you like to share with students attending the October workshop about the relationship between global inequality and access to education?

My message to students attending the October workshop would be that global inequality has a significant impact on access to education, and this is an issue that affects both the Global South and the Global North, although in different ways and at different levels.

In many countries in the Global South, students from underprivileged or marginalized communities often face barriers such as poverty, limited educational resources, inadequate infrastructure, and unequal access to opportunities. These challenges can prevent many talented students from fully accessing or completing education.

In the Global North, inequality also exists, although it may appear differently. Immigrants, refugees, and minority communities can face challenges related to language barriers, integration, discrimination, or recognition of qualifications.

I think it is important for students to understand that educational inequality is a global issue, not just a problem of one region. Addressing it requires empathy, inclusive policies, international cooperation, and a commitment to ensuring that education is accessible and equitable for everyone.

Is there anything about your educational journey or your perspective on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that you feel is important but has not yet been discussed?

I believe one important point that has not been discussed enough is how interconnected the Sustainable Development Goals are. None of the SDGs can be fully achieved in isolation because progress in one area often depends on progress in another.
Personally, I see education as the foundation or backbone of many of the other SDGs. Through education, people gain the knowledge and skills needed to address challenges such as poverty, hunger, health, and climate change. For example, education can help reduce poverty by creating employment opportunities and encouraging innovation.

In relation to SDG 2, Zero Hunger, education can support the development of improved farming methods, drought-resistant crops, and better food storage systems that reduce food waste and increase food security.
Overall, I believe education empowers individuals and communities to create sustainable solutions, which is why investing in quality education is essential for achieving the broader SDG agenda.

In your opinion, how do disparities in the quality of education between the Global North and the Global South affect the global education system as a whole?

In my opinion, disparities in the quality and perception of education between the Global North and the Global South create inequalities within the global education system. Education from the Global South is often unfairly perceived as being inferior to that of the Global North, even though many students from the Global South are highly capable and academically strong.
As a result, immigrants and international students from the Global South are sometimes required to have their qualifications verified, partially repeated, or supplemented in order to meet the educational standards of the country they migrate to. While quality assurance is important, these processes can create additional financial, emotional, and professional barriers for migrants.
These disparities also contribute to unequal opportunities in employment, academic recognition, and mobility at the global level. I believe the global education system would benefit from greater mutual recognition, fairer evaluation systems, and a better understanding of the strengths and challenges that exist in both the Global North and the Global South.

Follow up question from Professor where he wanted to know about the relationship between education in Kenya and SDG 3 good health and wellbeing.

Any students who suffer from chronic illnesses such as sickle cell disease or severe Anaemia often miss school frequently because healthcare can be expensive, and public hospitals, although affordable, are often under-resourced. This negatively affects attendance, academic performance, and, in some cases, completion of education.

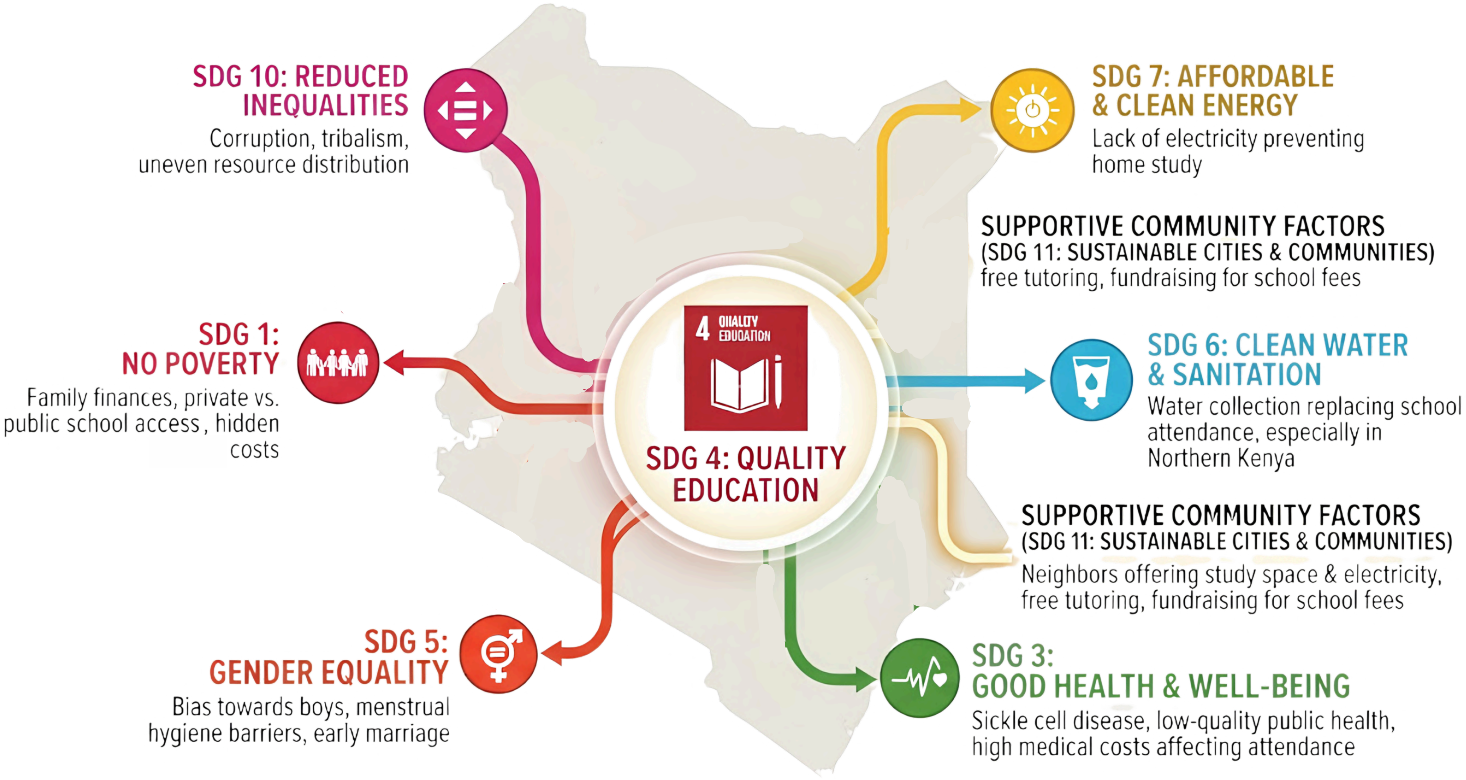
Students with special needs also face major barriers. There is still limited government investment in special needs education, which means many learners with disabilities or health conditions do not receive adequate support and may struggle to complete their education.

School infrastructure and sanitation also play an important role. In many public primary schools, students are responsible for cleaning toilets themselves due to lack of support staff. In addition, access to menstrual hygiene products remains inadequate. Many girls' washrooms either do not provide sanitary towels or provide an insufficient supply for the student population. As a result, some girls miss classes during menstruation, especially those from low-income families.

Healthcare access within schools is also limited. Most primary and secondary schools do not have clinics or healthcare facilities on campus. At my university in Kenya, there was a hospital within the university compound, but students could only access services if they had cleared their tuition fees and received their semester student card. This created challenges for students experiencing financial difficulties.

Mental health support is another area where there are significant gaps. Students facing financial stress, family responsibilities, or academic pressure often have limited access to counselling or support systems. Compared to what I have observed in German universities — such as counselling services, support groups, and assistance for student parents — these structures are still underdeveloped in many Kenyan institutions.

Overall, I believe improving healthcare access, sanitation, mental health support, and inclusive services would significantly strengthen educational outcomes in Kenya because students learn best when their physical and emotional well-being is supported.


SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES
Corruption, tribalism, uneven resource distribution
SDG 7: AFFORDABLE & CLEAN ENERGY
Lack of electricity preventing home study
SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY FACTORS
(SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES)
free tutoring, fundraising for school fees
SDG 1: NO POVERTY
Family finances, private vs. public school access, hidden costs
4 QUALITY EDUCATION
SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION
SDG 6: CLEAN WATER & SANITATION
Water collection replacing school attendance, especially in Northern Kenya
SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY FACTORS
(SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES)
Neighbors offering study space & electricity, free tutoring, fundraising for school fees
SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY
Bias towards boys, menstrual hygiene barriers, early marriage
SDG 3: GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING
Sickle cell disease, low-quality public health, high medical costs affecting attendance

NNENNA AND SABRINA



NNENNA VERONICA EBEM

The interview was conducted by Sabrina





Nnenna Veronica Ebem is a lawyer from Nigeria. She is currently earning her MPP (Master of Public Policy) at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt, Germany.
Sabrina Zearott is a 2025 MPP graduate of the Brandt School and is originally from the United States of America.

Sabrina: Thank you for being here today. Could you introduce yourself, where you're currently studying, and tell us what your program/field of study is?

Nnenna: My name is Nnenna Veronica Ebem. I am from Nigeria, and I studied law in my bachelor's and also went to law school. And afterwards, I worked for some years at a law firm and an NGO before I decided to pursue my master's in public policy at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, University of Erfurt.

Sabrina: And what made you want to do policy, since you'd already studied law?

Nnenna: Yeah. That is a very good question, and I get that a lot. So, you know, policy is one aspect that is also very, very important. I mean, studying law, it should have been enough, but I am very ambitious and I looked at contributing to the international sphere, not just locally. Most of the opportunities I've looked out for – United Nations, IRENA and the likes – they needed the services of policy experts. And I thought I would actually go into policy, public policy, and have a niche for myself in that area. So that's why I chose to do public policy.

Sabrina: And you want to do – you're mostly focusing on energy policy? You mentioned IRENA, which is renewables.

Nnenna: Yeah. Just a little background. I started off my career working in the Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission, which is the regulator for electricity in Nigeria. So that helped me develop my interest in electricity, energy, and energy transition is one of the most talked about things in the continent right now. So, I've been privileged to work in this space, the energy space in Nigeria, and have attended a lot of IRENA events, of course: IRENA, the International Renewable Energy Association, which is more like the umbrella body when it comes to energy issues in the world. So yeah, I have worked in the energy space and want to continue to strive and develop myself in the space.



Sabrina: Excellent. So let's talk about education. So what made you end up – tell me about your educational background and how you ended up in Germany. And then a little bit about – why did you want to pursue higher education?

Nnenna: Okay, maybe I'll start from the genesis, from the beginning. So, I come from a family of educated parents. My father is well educated. My mother is an educator. She retired as a teacher. So, my parents know the importance of education regardless of gender. I was also very fortunate – in Nigeria, we have the educational system and at all levels, we have for the rich and for the poor, right? So I was privileged enough to attend a private primary school, which shaped me in all aspects. And when it comes to Nigeria, primary private education is always highly respected because we have better access than the public schools. We have better teachers, we have a good environment. So I was able to study under such a conducive environment.

But then again, I had a taste of the two worlds. After some time at the private school, I was made to withdraw. I went to the public school because my mom taught there. She wanted to keep a closer eye on me because I was very terrible at mathematics. So that made me taste

both worlds, and I can categorically state that the difference is clear. Very clear. When it comes to public schools, they don't have a conducive environment to study.

I mean, from the private way, we had everything: a good environment, teachers, a conducive place we could study, a good library, a good computer room compared to public school. Where it was, I didn't know. I didn't know what I was doing there: for example, people had to bring their own chairs, some sat on the floor.

Sabrina: Oh, wow.

Nnenna: Yeah. Some students were made to buy chalk for writing. So it was very strange for me, but I'm happy I experienced both and both shaped me to understand that yes, I was privileged, but there are also people that are not so privileged. I went through this system and became something.

And moving forward, my secondary education, I went to a government school. In Nigeria, we have these, what we call federal schools. They're run by the federal government. It would be a big deal for you to go to a federal school. So, I was fortunate enough to go to a private and federal school, which further helped me to develop myself and also get better in general education. And after, like I said, you were privileged, I don't know if I should call it a privilege, you having some time to think about what you really want to do. But for us, you need to already decide. There is no time to think. And fortunately for me, I had parents I could always talk to – okay, this is what I want to do, and they only ever supported me. So I told them, look, I want to study law. It's difficult. My father always encouraged me, you could do it. And you just have to have a very high grade for you to be able to study law. So fortunately I was able to do that. I got to study law.

I thought, okay, I am not ready yet to do my master's. I just wanted to work. So I worked for over 5 years. Now I am developing interest in the energy space, I need to further my education to have a better understanding of what this space is all about and how I can contribute because the energy space is very broad. You can be involved in all aspects. So, fortunately, while on the job, I had this research project with ANSOLE, e.V., on green hydrogen. Then I had the opportunity to also further volunteer with ANSOLE and I got to hear about public policy through you and through every other person, and I was like, okay. And most jobs I've been trying to apply for, they need a policy specialist. So I was like, why not? And I chose Germany – again, because I've heard a lot about the educational system, how it is. It's very rigorous. You can't come out half baked. Like, you'll be drilled. You would get what you went to study.

Sabrina: Yeah. I just want to write down two things you said so I don't forget them because I think they're worth talking about – the difference between public and private school – later, I want to come back to that.

I personally think it's scary that you have to lock in immediately to a specific track, but it does sound like later you have the opportunity to change if you need to, to an extent, which is good. I mean, of course, you can get a different degree. But I would say, I guess my question – this is a question for you, but also your thoughts generally, because you mentioned the significant difference between public and private: looking back, what were the most significant factors shaping your access to education, but also what would you say is the case, do you think, for students in the public versus private school system?

Nnenna: Okay, just like I said, there is a huge difference between the public and private schools in Nigeria. And fortunately, I got to experience both. Positively, going through the private educational system shaped me a lot because as a student, you had special treatment. The teachers take note of students that are not doing well. They make sure you are well grounded. They make sure you understand. Unlike the public school, where it could be one teacher for over 60 students, 70 students. Nobody has the time to for all that.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Nnenna: Exactly. So going through the private school, I mean, I did that for four years. It already shaped me – vocabulary and otherwise. So I didn't need much of special treatment or special interest or putting eyes on me to do better. So that already shaped me before I moved to the public school. I moved there mostly because my mother wanted to also keep an eye on me, especially when it comes to mathematics.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Nnenna: Yeah. So, there are a lot of negative things I can't begin to talk about now, because even when it's negative, I was also very privileged in that aspect. Yeah, like for water, I would also say in my private school, we had access to clean water, running water. When you use the toilet, you could flush, you could drink water. But in the public school, we didn't have water. Sometimes we had a roster where students would have to walk over 2 kilometers to go and fetch water with a bucket for students to drink, and maybe sometimes do other things. So there are both positive and negative, which I experienced, but I think I've been able to share just a few of them. Yeah, they both shaped me.

Sabrina: That gets to the question of the SDGs. What is your – well, you already said about the – I was going to ask about quality of education, but you kind of mentioned that. What is your general knowledge and understanding of them? And also how do they fit with the two different pictures here that you're describing?

Nnenna: Before the SDG, the talks about SDG actually came out – I think maybe I was in university when it was the Millennium Development Goals, the MDGs. And education was also there. But I knew it faintly. I didn't know so much. But SDG, I was already working and I have a good knowledge or understanding of some of the SDGs. And when it comes to the educational system and the SDGs, I would say that – I will speak on a general aspect – when it comes to the African continent, we have a long way to go. I can categorically state that what is obtainable in Nigeria is also obtainable in most countries in West Africa, where access to education is not conducive, which also defeats the aims of SDG 4. It's not conducive, it's not so accessible, it's not equitable, it's not – there's no equality about it.

And we also have some parts of the country where they think education is mostly for the male gender. Because – they are the ones who take care of the home, they are the ones that need to be educated and all that. So when you look at the SDG4 and still let me narrow it down to the Nigerian context – I think we still have a long way to go and with SDGs ending by 2030, I wouldn't say we've totally achieved the goals of SDG4, we have more awareness that needs to really be invested in. We still have more, mostly funding, needs to go into the educational system in Nigeria and of course in, I mean, I would say most of the Global South countries.



Sabrina: I was going to ask if you agreed with what I had said in my interview about – yeah, you just said basically the funding aspect, as we discussed earlier, I mean, the different SDGs all need to be supported in order for one to work. So you think that is more of a matter of just funding generally?

Nnenna: Yeah – I think it goes beyond funding, actually. It also goes – that is also a question of structural and what is obtainable in the particular climate, right? Yeah. You could provide the funding, but it wouldn't do anything. So that's where the structural aspect

of it comes in and also adaptability of what is obtainable in that particular climate.
So we need to also look beyond funding and go into the roots. OK, what is the reason? Why are we not catching up with the rest of the world? What are the barriers that are being faced that are not receiving funding? So these we also need to address.
I mean, the issue of funding majorly is there, but there are also other structural issues and otherwise that are a barrier to education.

Sabrina: We talked about if people in Germany have a realistic understanding of Global South education systems. What are the strengths of the systems in the Global South?

Nnenna: Okay, so when it comes to the educational system in the Global South, because we already know where we are coming from and we are very disadvantaged, right, when we get the opportunity to be in school or be in any classroom, we are very resilient. We look beyond the structural defects, right?

I could give an example. Obviously, in the public school, we didn't have a computer room or computer lab. So, you know, learning the keyboard, ASDF, we learned almost everything about the computer, we learned it theoretically.

Sabrina: Oh, wow.

Nnenna: Yes.

Sabrina: That's so – okay – so like a picture on a desk or something.

Nnenna: Theoretically, we, I mean, in my private school, we could try to experience it, but coming to the public school now, we didn't have much, yeah, to experience – so that's just one example – but we looked beyond that. We didn't let that barrier define who we are.
But eventually, maybe when we get access to a computer, we already know what we've been taught. We have it in us. So that's despite the disadvantage of where we are coming from.

And we also know that being in the classroom already is a privilege, despite the defects.

I know that there are people that are not, that cannot be there with us, right? So we look beyond the classroom, right – we also try to form discussions like, how do I explain it? It's not in a formal sense, but we try to build groups where we study together, right? It wasn't a formal thing. It's just something we casually built amongst ourselves to study together with those study groups to help us. Okay, you are better at this. You teach me this. I teach you; I'm better at this. You teach me that. So I think that's one of our biggest strengths that has also helped our educational system despite the barriers we've encountered studying.

Sabrina: It sounds like you actually might have a better understanding then of how – for example, math. People just memorize math equations. They don't understand why the equations work.

Nnenna: Yeah.

Sabrina: And I remember teaching somebody one time how to do algebra, I think it was, and she just said, oh, they just tell us the formula. I said, yeah, but this is why it works. And it sounds like you may have a better understanding then because it was theoretically learned. Yeah, I think that's great, actually.
What would you say that the Global North doesn't understand about the Global South that it should understand?

Nnenna: So I think the Global North, I think they don't know how privileged they are to have such a conducive environment to study. I don't think it's something they would understand anytime soon, because for you to understand an experience, you have to live the experience, right? So you could understand, it could just be as a story, but these are people's stories. These are actually what people have gone through in their educational system.
But there are also people that beyond reading or telling a story, they want to experience – I know there's this program in Germany here where it's an exchange program where they have to send some of their students to any African country.

Yeah. So I've been able to meet maybe two or three persons that went to Africa, not necessarily studying, but they've seen the experience firsthand. So when we talk about barriers in the educational system in the Global South, they understand because they've been there. They've seen people that – they've seen the challenges, they've seen the barriers, that are not being talked about in the Global North. So I would say the Global North can never understand it unless they live the experience to understand…or better understand…what we're going through, what we're talking about when it comes to education in the Global South.
Yeah, but then again, I think maybe telling these stories, talking about it, maybe to bring more awareness of how disadvantaged we are. When it comes to the education in the Global South we are very resilient.

Sabrina: Yeah. I hope this workshop will be helpful for that. I mean, like I said about understanding the lack of resources – it's almost like when you're learning coding, like you have to also consider the case, the null case, right? Where something is not the case. Yeah. That's not how people typically think. We don't consider that.

Nnenna: Yeah.

Sabrina: And how would you? I mean, it's, you know, it's like you don't understand the importance of energy until you don't have it. But it's not something that you consider because it's – like for me as someone from the US, answering these questions about SDGs and their impact, I can focus largely on one SDG because the others don't – they don't not impact education, but they were kind of not…part of it. Like, for me, it was more income inequality. And yes, I mean, we had issues with food and so on, but education was not really impacted by things like energy access and gender inequality.
This is a tough question, I guess, but…how do I ask this question? I see the situation in my head as like a web, like these things that are connected together. And I think that the shape is different than in the US or in the Global North.
And I think…what's your take on that? And what do you think needs to be addressed? Or is there a different way that things should be addressed that maybe the Global North doesn't grasp about how these problems fit together?

Nnenna: OK, if I understand your question correctly, you're asking about the SDGs interconnection.

Sabrina: Yeah, like how they fit together. Like, so for example, like ODA, like official development aid, I think that – I took a class at the Brandt School and we learned about aid and how it's targeted toward a specific thing and how you can't – like you said, you can't just fund education. It's not one separate thing. It's linked.
Sorry if I'm getting too much into the interviewee and interviewer switching roles here, but I think it's important to talk about. It's a systems issue. Do you know what I'm saying?

Nnenna: Yeah. So when it comes to education in Nigeria, the Global South, I would say…and I am happy I'm talking about it because I lived the two worlds of private and public. I will just mention a few of the SDGs, how they are connected also to education. For example, even during my time at a private school, when we had to learn computer, we did not have access to electricity. So what we did was, we had a backup generator, where we had to put it on for one hour, thereabouts. Each student maybe had one minute to look at the keyboards, identify some of the things you've been theoretically taught.

So we did that. Then coming to public school, there was no computer at all. There was no light at all. There was no water. That's when I got to appreciate the little privilege I had while attending the private school. But even the little privilege is not so much of a privilege because of lack of access to electricity, we could not afford to spend time, a good amount of time, learning this, like the computer and other necessary, yeah, tech courses.

And also, when it comes to water, right, water is very essential. It's not just about drinking.

You literally live with water. You cannot, in the public school – you cannot go to toilets because it's very messed up. Because there's no water to flush the toilets.

So going to a public school was basically going to a jungle because as a little child, you could go, you would want to use the toilet and you get there and it does not flush. Some people just do it on the floor.

Sabrina: Oh wow. That's horrible.

Nnenna: Yes.

Sabrina: Wow. That's a health hazard.

Nnenna: Very. When you go to school, you know that whatever that will make you go to the toilet, you should avoid it. Because [laughing] – exactly, you should avoid it. And this goes further to show you how this impacts our environment. Because it's pollution.

Sabrina: Pollution, yeah.

Nnenna: So you see how this – and I've not even talked about the inequality. The women should – maybe they send them to go hawk wares during school hours. They hawk pure water, they hawk all these little things, all to support their parents, meanwhile the boys are in school. So education cuts across almost all the SDGs.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Nnenna: And I think because – I don't know if it's because it is mostly a Global South problem. It is not an alarm in the general global world: it's not an issue that there's cause for an alarm. These are things we go through. Yet when we talk about SDGs, just talk about the perfect aspect of it, SDGs, SDGs. But, if they need to ensure that these goals are being achieved, what are the barriers and all that… and I don't think there is a milestone, like a measurable milestone, a working measurable milestone that is being followed to ensure that these issues are addressed.

Sabrina: Okay. So the targets exist, but they're not really….

Yeah, I was looking at some of the targets. We can look at those if you want, actually. Let's see, because I wrote some comments on them. I found one very unusual.

Nnenna: Which of the targets?

Sabrina: I found 4.4 unusual. Because if you look at the indicator, it's 'by 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, etc.' And it's specifically measured by access to information and communication technology skills. That's it.

Nnenna:You see how, I mean, to me, it's very vague.

Sabrina: Yeah.

Nnenna:Yeah. Because how do you want to measure the information, etc.? What are the targets? What are the milestones in place to ensure that, okay, these milestones are being achieved or they're being followed?

Sabrina: I think I also found 4B unusual, the one about official development aid being used to encourage study in developed countries and other developing countries. So like scholarships for people to go abroad, basically. And I thought, but isn't the goal to foster the educational system within a country? I found that strange.

Nnenna: Yeah, like – why are you taking them to other countries to have better education? Meanwhile, you can make the environment or their own home country better for them to study.

Sabrina: Exactly.

Nnenna: Exactly.

Sabrina: What's your impression of…well, okay, I thought this question was interesting: What can the Global South learn from the Global North and what can the Global North learn from the Global South? In whichever order you want to take those.

Nnenna: When I looked at our question, I honestly tried, I kept thinking, what can we learn from each other? Because of course, in every situation, there are lessons to be learned, right?

Sabrina: Yeah.

Nnenna: Okay, I will start with: what could the Global North learn from the Global South? So, like I said, we have strong community and cultural integration into our educational system, right? From primary school, like I said, because we know the insufficiency we have in our educational system, we try to come together, even as kids, to study together to be better. Because the school would not give you everything you need. It's more about resilience. Right? With the little you've been given, you multiply it, you go forward. So I think that is something I would like the Global North maybe to adapt. I mean, here in the Global North, people mostly work in silos, everyone is doing their thing. But if we could have that strong community and proper integration of knowledge and all that, I think it will maybe take them a step further ahead. And that's one lesson I think the Global North could learn from the Global South.

For the Global South, I think we have a lot to learn. We need to learn – we need to have a conducive, working, good environment for proper education. And we cannot continue to rely on self-taught education. Right? So that's one thing because when you have a conducive environment, you will graduate the best brains. Despite our limitation, when it comes to education, Nigerians, we are well educated, Even when it comes to the global impact, Nigerians are, even in the US, UK, a lot of, what's it called? A lot of migrants, they are doing very well, be it in the medical field, in the legal field, whatever. And yeah, but imagine that's coming from the limitation of our educational system. Imagine when we now have a working system. Imagine where we would be. So we need, we really need to adopt having a good conducive environment, and also we need to invest in proper infrastructure and technology. Like I said, while studying at the private school, we had computers but very limited time; at public school, we had nothing. So the government really needs to invest more in infrastructure, technology, and all that to further enhance our educational system.

And we also need to have further professional development for teachers. Another aspect I didn't mention is, especially for public institutions, I think the teachers – I think they should be one of the highest paid professions.



Sabrina: Agreed, yes.

Nnenna: So many teachers are not motivated by their work. It's just maybe a few that are passionate about what they do so that they dedicate their time to ensure that students get what they're being taught. But I think if only we can include professional development for teachers, I mean, proper incentives to encourage them, I think it would have also a good educational outcome. These are some points I really thought about.

Sabrina: Yeah, I agree. I think that's also an issue in the US, the teacher motivation,

because it's so badly paid. Actually – it wasn't funny, but it was familiar, when you said that you had to buy your own chalk. Do you know how many kids in the US, every year, we get sent with the list to the store to buy our backpacks, and we also have to buy tissues and markers and stuff for the classroom because the schools don't pay for it. And I'm like, why? Like – what? So – not the same, but it kind of made me laugh when you mentioned it because, yeah, a lot of teachers end up paying for classroom supplies themselves **and** ***they get underpaid*** **and** ***they have to work so much like – it's just bad. Like, at least I think some countries really prioritize – I think Finland, for example, it pays its teachers very well.***

Nnenna: Yeah, yeah, I think that's why when it comes to the allocation, federal allocation of funds, education should be #1.

Sabrina: I mean, it's so important.

Nnenna: Yeah. Well, unfortunately, education is not being prioritized because it also boils down to willingness of the government to improve the educational system. I don't think, for me, I don't think our government are doing enough for educational improvement. Education and health should be at the top priority, but unfortunately, they have self-imposed priorities. We just need to have more awareness programs for our politicians to – I mean, they already know the importance of education.

Sabrina: I just wanted to ask before I forget, because you mentioned the not wanting to be so self-taught, I think you said self-taught – the idea of open courseware that I said I wanted to come back to later? I think – what do you think about that? Like using that as like a resource?
[Short pause.] I mean, well, I guess you have to have…a computer for that, but…

Nnenna: I was waiting for you to finish…
Sabrina: …yeah… [Nnenna laughs]

Nnenna: I also mentioned I took a course, I think Coursera, EdX, I mean, I did that. But I will count myself as a privileged person because I don't want to say outside Nigeria, but most people in Nigeria do not have access to the internet, not to talk of a working computer or a laptop.

Sabrina: Yeah. Yeah, I guess I'm trying to think of, is there a way to do that that doesn't involve a computer? Or like, I don't know, like, you know how people, I don't know. I guess I'm thinking of alternative models.

Nnenna: I've never thought about alternative ways of learning through, I mean, I don't know.

Sabrina: Traveling experts. You know what I mean? Like, there's people that give lectures, but…I guess you need it to be structurally there.

Nnenna: Yeah.

Sabrina: Yeah. It can't just be like a visiting type thing. I don't know. I don't know. I just feel like there's this huge disconnect and it's just an absence of resources. And I, yeah, I guess the big question is, how do you even approach it?
I mean, is it something you have to understand the problem in a certain way first? This is where I talk about systems thinking. But –
I guess because I'm taking extra time here, let me just, is there anything else you want to add? I want to look through the questions again and just see if there's anything important that we should go over, but…is there anything you want to add?

Nnenna: Yeah, I mean, what I would want to add is basically, it's just a word for everyone, Global North and Global South. We can all make impacts in our little ways, right? We don't have to wait till we have a certain position to make huge impacts. I mean, teaching someone. I would say, for example, we have a lot of migrant kids around. You could take up voluntarily teaching them. And yeah, you already make an impact in a little way you don't even know.

So you also get to learn from them because … I know where they're coming from, they might be very disadvantaged when it comes to education and all that, so they need a little help to properly – talking about now for those in Germany – properly integrate into the system. You could just do a program where you teach just migrant kids and all that. It's also a learning process for you as the teacher and a learning process for them. So that's just an example.
What I'm trying to say in a sense is that we don't have to wait to make grand impacts – impacts could be drops of water. Yeah.

Sabrina: I can't think of anything else. Thank you. I really appreciate it.

Nnenna: Thank you for having me.



SABRINA ANNETTE ZEAROTT

The interview was conducted by Nnenna



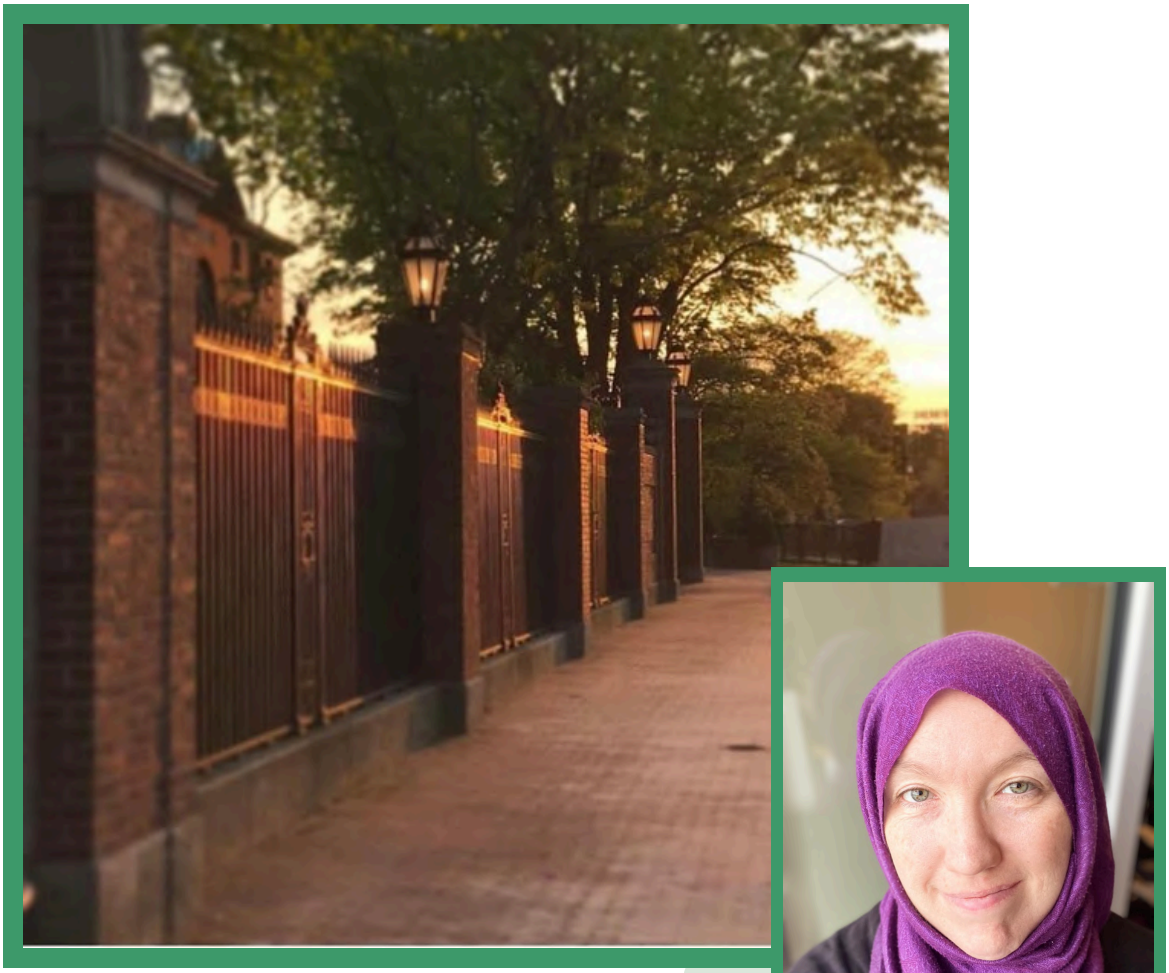
Sabrina Zearott is a 2025 MPP graduate of the Brandt School and is originally from the United States of America.
Nnenna Ebem is a lawyer from Nigeria. She is currently earning her MPP (Master of Public Policy) at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy at the University of Erfurt, Germany.

Nnenna: Please, Sabrina, can you introduce yourself, your educational background, what you're currently studying, and just give me a brief rundown of your educational background?

Sabrina: My name is Sabrina Zearott, I come from the United States of America, and I just recently completed my Master of Public Policy at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy in Erfurt, Germany. Before that, I did a Master of Arts in communication at Washington State University. And before that, I did a Bachelor of Arts at Harvard in social anthropology.

Nnenna: So why did you choose Willy Brandt School, why Germany as your study destination and not the USA or other countries in the Global North?

Sabrina: So, for one thing, I had been in Cambridge for a long time and I wanted to leave. I wanted to go to Europe; my brother was in Germany, and I visited him in 2021 and really liked it. I didn't speak any German at the time, about four words total, but I went home and I thought, okay, I would like to live there. How do I do that? So I started learning German. At the same time, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do long-term. I finally figured out that policy was what I wanted to study. Another thing, US education, professional school education, like an MPP, is extremely expensive. I don't remember how many thousands of dollars, for example, it is to go to Harvard Kennedy School. And so, I thought this makes more sense to go to Europe.



Harvard

Nnenna: How would you describe the quality of the education you received in the USA compared to that received in Germany?

Sabrina: I would say they're pretty equivalent. Part of it, of course – it helps that I have had a lot of background in higher education. I've worked in higher ed, I've done multiple degrees, so I know how to take advantage of the resources available and maximize my education.
I mean, Harvard also just has everything. It has all the resources you could imagine. So, I mean, that's, you know – but in comparison, in general, the quality of the education, I would say, is very similar.

Nnenna: Yes, of course, it should be so. I mean, comparing both countries, I think they should be at the same level. Just maybe when it comes to the fees and all that, US could be more expensive.
What is your general knowledge of the SDGs prior to your master's study?



Radcliffe Yard, Harvard University - near Sabrina's old workplace

Sabrina: In my understanding, the SDG/Sustainable Development Goals were developed by the UN. And the idea is to help countries develop in a sustainable manner. So not just development as measured by GDP, for example, but development that considers human factors, environmental factors, etc.

So, these things overlap, they enforce, reinforce each other. You know, you can't have education without having a safe place for children to go to school, and parents must be able to afford to send their kids to school. All these things interact.

Nnenna: And again, back to your educational background while in the US, what do you think are the biggest strengths when it comes to the education system in the US compared to what you've seen now?

Sabrina: I would say in terms of strengths, well, one thing is that it's reinforced. I mean, it's supported by the government throughout. You must, legally speaking, send your children to school in the US until – I forget, I think it's through at least sixth grade. It might be throughout.

If your children don't finish high school, I mean, people drop out, but at least for primary education it's required that you go to school, and parents can get in legal trouble if they don't send their kids.

There's also support for parents. So, for example, a lot of schools have free lunch programs if, you know, parents can't afford that. And there's, I don't know, I feel like it's designed as a system that is meant to help all children go through the program. And then at the university level, of course, there's the issue of research support, and it's kind of built into the economy. There's a research pipeline that's connected to universities and funded by the federal government. So, it's all kind of one big system. And I think it's – the other thing I really like about the US system is that it doesn't lock you into specific tracks. You can do a liberal arts education, which is what I did, where you go in and you specialize in something, but you also have a general education.

So, you're not required to decide, I want to be a doctor immediately, and that is my track. You have more of an option to go other paths.

Nnenna: Really, that makes sense because for me I knew all the way from secondary school what I wanted to study at the university, I don't know how the education system is divided in the US, but for me, after secondary school, you have to go to the university. You should already know your path and what you want to do.
What factors do you think contributed to you having good education in the US?

Sabrina: In terms of access to education or just everything?

Nnenna: Everything.

Sabrina: I mean, one thing is that my parents were educated, so that helped a lot. I mean, I, without getting too much into my background, I have worked in higher education, and there are a lot of people that don't know how the education system works, like higher education, either because it's not culturally expected that they're going to go to college, or they just have no access; they have no exposure to it. So, my parents knew – my father had a PhD, my mom had a bachelor's. And they knew that it was important, they knew why it was important. They encouraged me always to go as high as I could in terms of education.

They were able to find programs that were helpful for me. Even if I couldn't afford like test prep and things, they still got me into Gifted and Talented programs and those types of things. Also, the fact, of course, speaking of the SDGs, that I had electricity at school and I had – like, the infrastructure was stable. There were no issues with water sanitation. The worst that we had was significant poverty in my town.

I think I've gone off on a slight tangent here, but I think just the fact that structurally my family came from an educated background was very important. But I also think that, like I said, I mean, the infrastructure itself was stable and there was policy support from the government for education.

Nnenna: Yeah, I think you've also partly answered the next question.
Where you come from, do you think gender matters? Who got access to education? Did it play any role?

Sabrina: I mean, in terms of what people study, I think there's still cultural emphasis on – there's been a lot of, oh, women can do STEM too, you know, because historically that was kind of not emphasized for women, but I don't think it's a question of access, at least not now. I mean, 50 years ago, yes, but not now.

Nnenna: Good. And I know tertiary education in the US is a bit pricey, is it same with the primary education?

Sabrina: Not if you're at public school. So, like I said, legally, parents have to send their children to school. They have the opportunity or the option to send them to private school, which is very expensive depending on where you are. So that's kind of an individual family decision, but everyone must complete primary school.
And then tertiary education, yes, is very expensive. And I'm very grateful for scholarships because that was the only way I was able to go to college and graduate school.

Nnenna: Of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which do you believe had the strongest influence on your educational experience?

Sabrina: I would say SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 1 (No Poverty) were the most influential. These two goals are closely interconnected in my experience.
I come from a very poor and rural background. There were periods during my childhood when my family struggled to meet basic needs. For example, there was a time when our water service was disconnected, and food insecurity was a regular challenge. In the United States, public schools are largely funded through local taxes – as a result, communities with fewer resources often have less-well-funded schools. This structural inequality affected my educational opportunities and later influenced my pathway to higher education. Although I eventually attended university,

I had to be creative in finding ways to access those opportunities.

Nnenna: That must have been a difficult time for you.
Are there educational quality challenges in the Global North that are often overlooked or not widely acknowledged?

Sabrina: One challenge relates to educational track systems. In some countries, including I think Germany, students are placed into different educational pathways at a relatively early stage. My understanding is that socioeconomic background can influence these pathways, which may limit opportunities for social mobility.

While I am not an expert on every education system, I believe that when existing inequalities influence educational trajectories, it can become more difficult for individuals to access higher education or alternative career pathways later in life.

Nnenna: I share the same sentiment; socioeconomic background can influence these pathways. Since studying in Germany, has your perspective on educational inequality changed?

Sabrina: Not significantly. I have not been exposed to enough of the German education system to definitively say. Educational inequalities exist in various forms across countries, although they may show up differently depending on the institutional context.

Nnenna: Do you think students and educators in Germany have a realistic understanding of education systems in the Global South?

Sabrina: Educators generally have a solid understanding, I think, particularly in institutions that intentionally incorporate Global South perspectives into their curricula. At the Brandt School, for example, students are encouraged to engage with case studies from different regions and learn from classmates with diverse backgrounds.

However, I believe many students, myself included, still lack a deep structural understanding of education systems in the Global South. While we may be familiar with certain issues and examples, we often don't fully understand how these systems operate within their broader social, economic, and political contexts.

Nnenna: That is very correct – even as I come from the so-called Global South, I still do not grasp fully how it works in the whole region. What can the Global South learn from the Global North in relation to education?

Sabrina: One area is probably the prioritization of research and development. In many countries of the Global North, governments invest significantly in research institutions and support the entire educational pipeline from primary education through higher education and research.
Strong investment in human capital can create multiple long-term benefits. In some countries of the Global South, insufficient funding for research and educational infrastructure remains a challenge. More investment in these areas could strengthen educational outcomes and development.

Nnenna: If you could change one condition to improve education in your home country, what would it be?

Sabrina: I would place greater emphasis on systems thinking within education. While specialization is important, students should also learn how different systems interact and influence one another. For example, in my work on energy transitions, it is essential to understand not only the technical aspects but also the broader social, economic, and political systems involved. Encouraging systems thinking should help students develop stronger problem-solving skills in addition to a more holistic understanding of complex challenges.

Nnenna: What message would you share with students attending a workshop on global inequality and education?

Sabrina: I would encourage students to recognize that many conditions often taken for granted in the Global North such as reliable electricity, sanitation, and basic infrastructure are foundational to educational success. Education does not operate in isolation. Effective education depends on supportive policies, functioning institutions, and adequate infrastructure. Governments play a critical role in creating these conditions. Understanding how different SDGs interact is therefore essential. Quality education cannot be achieved without progress in other areas such as poverty reduction, health, infrastructure, and governance.

Nnenna: Is there anything else about your educational journey or perspectives on the SDGs that you would like to highlight?

Sabrina: One important development is the growth of open education platforms such as Coursera and edX. These provide learning opportunities to people around the world, often at little or no cost.

Access to educational resources is becoming increasingly global, but there is still a need to organize and adapt these resources, so they are useful and accessible to various audiences. Those who have access to knowledge and educational tools have an opportunity to support broader learning and capacity-building efforts worldwide.

Nnenna: How do disparities between education systems in the Global North and Global South affect global education overall?

Sabrina: Educational disparities ultimately affect human capital development and broader progress. Where educational quality is limited, long-term development can be constrained.

Another issue is the dominance of Global North knowledge systems within academic research. English-language scholarship and established citation networks often receive greater visibility and influence. This can result in the underrepresentation of perspectives and knowledge produced elsewhere.

Addressing these imbalances is not only a matter of equity; it is also important for ensuring that diverse perspectives contribute to global knowledge and problem-solving.

Nnenna: Thank you so much for this interesting interview, it has given me room to learn more about the educational system in the USA.

Sabrina: Thank you as well!



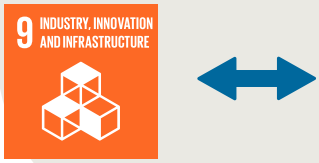
University of Erfurt in spring



Brandt School in winter



Influence on educational experience, poor/rural background, basic needs struggles





Access, infrastructure, higher education



Structural inequality, local funding disparities, unequal school roof resources

JEAN AND MEHRNAZ



JEAN MBUMBA BANDA

The interview was conducted by Mehrnaz



What is your name, where are you currently studying in Germany, and what is your programme or field of study?

My name is Jean Mbumba Banda, I am from Malawi. I am currently studying at the University of Erfurt, enrolled in a Master of Public Policy at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy. My main specializations are Global Public Policy and Development and Socio-Economic Policies.

Can you briefly describe your educational background, where you grew up, where you studied, and how you ended up studying in Germany?

I was born and bred in the Southern Part of Malawi, in a district called Chikwawa. I did most of my primary school in Chikwawa and went to complete my secondary education at Our Lady of Wisdom, a catholic school in Blantyre. I was then selected to the University of Malawi, where I did my bachelor's degree before pursuing a master's degree in public policy here in Germany.

Over time, through my personal and professional experience, I became more interested in understanding the systemic and structural issues surrounding my country. I mean issues like inequality, poverty, health systems, and governance in general. How they come about, and what that means for my future and that of my country. These are the things that compelled me to pursue higher education abroad, where I could broaden my understanding. Thank you to my sponsors DAAD for financing my study abroad and making this dream a reality.

What motivated you to pursue higher education, and what did that path look like for you?

My motivation came from a combination of personal ambition and the environment I grew up in. I saw many challenges around me related to inequalities and access to basic services like education and health. I always wanted to be part of a solution, whether directly or indirectly. But I could only meaningfully do that if I understood these issues and surrounding factors better. Higher education felt like a meaningful pathway to gaining the skills and knowledge needed to engage with those issues in a more professional and sustainable way.

Looking back, what were the most significant factors, positive or negative, that shaped your access to education?

In Malawi, we believe that education is the key to success. And I grew up in a household that strongly believed in that. My parents are quite learned. My father went to the University of Malawi; my mother studied at one of the best national secondary schools in Malawi. So going to school was never a strange thing in our household. It was just normal. I grew up with that mentality. I was exposed to people I could look up to, and I was given the right information from early on. That was one key factor, and I was privileged to have that.

I was also privileged to have parents who could afford to send me to comparatively good schools in Malawi. That made a real difference.



The Great Hall, University of Malawi

But beyond that, I think I was just a motivated child. I knew what I wanted, I knew how to get there, and I knew education was one of the key ingredients to getting where I wanted to be, like I said my household instilled that in me.

And then there are my siblings. I am the last of three children, and both my siblings are economists by profession, and are incredibly hardworking. They were my role models. They both excelled at every stage of their education, and seeing that, honestly, I felt like I had no choice but to do the same. My sister would excel tremendously, my brother would do the same, and I felt compelled to match that standard. They both eventually got selected to the University of Malawi, one of the prestigious universities in the country. I watched them work hard and get there, and it gave me so much motivation to keep pushing. Eventually I got there too. They just paved the way for me, and I will always be grateful for that.

How would you describe the quality of education you received in your home country? What worked well and what did not?

The quality of education in Malawi, I would say was mixed, still is. On one hand, there is a strong commitment from both teachers and students, and education is highly valued in society regardless of class or background. On the other hand, the system still falls short. It faces challenges like large class sizes, limited teaching materials, inadequate teachers and limited infrastructure. There is also a heavy focus on rote learning, memorization, rather than critical thinking. Students gain knowledge but are not always encouraged to question it or apply it. It is mostly memorization, and that is a major challenge. One memorizes just so they pass the exam.

Now that you are studying in Germany, how does the education system here compare in terms of teaching approaches, critical thinking, community relevance, and student support?

Germany has a very strong focus on analytical and critical thinking compared to Malawi. It emphasizes open discussions, extended seminars, and learning from people already working in real-life institutions. For example, one of the topics in my Public Administration and Finance course was taught by the Budget Director for World Bank or one of these big, internationally recognized institutions. I got to hear things from the horse's mouth. It was very useful and remains one of best sessions for me. It is also a sign that the lecturers in Germany acknowledge that someone else can explain certain concepts better. It's a symbol of humility and it is very commendable in my opinion. Independent learning is also encouraged here, so students can be creative and innovative in how they engage with ideas. Lectures can also learn from students. Moreso, students are encouraged to challenge ideas and apply what they learn to real-world situations. It is a much more interactive learning environment compared to the exam-oriented, traditional classroom approach back home. In Malawi, people study to pass exams more than to gain practical skills relevant for life after school.

What is your general knowledge or understanding of the SDGs?

I look at the SDGs as a global framework designed to address major development challenges like poverty, inequalities, health, and access to energy in an interconnected way. What is most important about the SDGs is that they recognize these as interconnected challenges that can also be addressed in an interconnected manner. Like one challenge is a result of another challenge and can lead to a yet another challenge.

For example, malnutrition is a health complication, that can affect school attendance and participation, which will eventually lead to dropouts. Lack of skills means lack of employment, and that will lead to poverty in the long run, and then we can talk about heightened inequalities because of poverty. So, it is a chain, we can go on and on.

In your view, what does "quality education" mean? Does SDG 4 feel complete to you, or does it miss something?

SDG 4 for me goes beyond just access to education. It includes critical thinking, challenging existing knowledge, inclusivity, and the ability of people to apply knowledge in real-life situations. But if I am being honest, I think the definition still leans heavily on access. And access alone is not enough. You can have a child in a classroom every single day, but if what they are being taught does not develop their ability to think critically or to apply knowledge practically, then what have we really achieved? In Malawi, for example, we have children in school but the system is largely built around memorization and passing exams. So technically, those children have access to education, yes but the quality of that education, the depth of it, what it actually equips them for; that is where the gap is.

What are the biggest strengths of the education system in your home country that are rarely talked about?

The biggest strength is the value that society has placed on education. You would be surprised at the lengths that the community networks and informal social support systems go to in order to educate a child. There is a saying: it takes a village to raise a child. Families and communities hold hands just to see a child through school. If a close relative who was paying someone's school fees passes away, you would see how family members step in to take up that responsibility. There is also incredible resilience among the students themselves, and among teachers who continue to teach even under very difficult conditions.

What are the most serious barriers to quality education there?

The biggest barrier is underfunding of the education sector. Because of underfunding, everything else follows; limited infrastructure, shortages of teachers, low salaries for teachers and the worsening of poverty itself.

There are also significant inequalities between rural and urban areas, which have a very negative effect on education quality across the country.

Did factors outside school; electricity, clean water, health, economic pressures affect your ability to study? Can you give a concrete example?

Yes, these factors had a direct impact. Limited and inconsistent access to electricity made it hard to study at night. When electricity went off, there was nothing to do but stop. Water access was also a problem. Sometimes we would go days with erratic water supply. I went to an all-girls secondary school, so hygiene was particularly important, and without water we were forced to walk distances or wait indefinitely just to get access. That took a lot of time away from studying. On health and nutrition, I was fortunate my family supported me adequately, but I know Malawi battles



Primary school children at school in Malawi

serious malnutrition levels caused by poor diets in boarding schools and at the household level. A malnourished child struggles to attend school consistently, which translates very negatively to their education goals and ultimately to national development.

Were there factors that supported your education that might surprise people in Germany?

Yes! Community support played a very big role for me. Knowing that so many people were looking up to me in the village I grew up in was motivation enough. That after every national exam, the whole community was eager to know my results was incredibly surprising, in a good way of course. When the results were good, I received so much encouragement that it pushed me to keep going. I also did not realize how many people I inspired simply by going to school. Beyond my community, my fellow students and the social life we shared also mattered enormously. And my father is an epitome of a support system. He had at least ten siblings, and as I speak, only him and one of his sisters are still living. He took it upon himself to educate most of the children of his late siblings. My cousins say that if any of them is not educated, it is because they chose not to be educated because my father gave each one of them the opportunity.

Did gender shape who got to access education in your context? How did that play out in practice?

It did, and it continues to. In many cases and I think this is not just a Malawian issue but a continental and global one. Girls face additional challenges such as early marriages, household responsibilities, and cultural expectations surrounding marriage at a certain age regardless of the girl's ambitions. There is also a lack of targeted support specifically for girls. For example, I see so many girls dropping out of school simply because they cannot adequately take care of themselves during menstruation, and the only reasonable option available to them is to leave school. It is a real and serious problem shaping access to education in Malawi.

How did economic inequality shape educational opportunities around you? Who got to go to university and who did not?

Economic inequality remains a very big challenge. It dictates who gets to access education. Students from well-to-do families are more likely to attend better schools and continue into higher education, while those from poor backgrounds mostly face barriers. They are very exposed to the extreme challenges Malawi's education system presents. They simply have no choice.

Of the SDGs connected to education, health, gender equality, clean water, energy, reduced inequalities, and international partnerships; which had the strongest influence in your context, and why?

I would say reduced inequalities. They are all interconnected and all connected to education somehow, but economic stability fundamentally dictates whether or not you access education. If you are economically stable, you access better education, you can pursue higher education, and you can meet your needs while studying without being derailed by socio-economic challenges which are among the biggest drivers of school dropouts. So, if I must choose one, it is economic inequality. For example, I was lucky to have gone to some good schools because my father paid my fees, yet I know numerous girls, some that I believe where more intelligent than I was, dropped out and became victims of early marriages simply because they could not afford the educational costs at the time.

Are there areas where the Global North, including Germany, faces its own education quality challenges that are not often acknowledged?

Yes, they are there, though they are less visible. One of the biggest is the inequalities that disproportionately affect students with migrant backgrounds. Universities talk about diversity and inclusivity strategies, but I feel they do not specifically address the unique challenges migrant students face like language

barriers and different support systems that students ought to have. See, surviving in Germany as a migrant student is hard because; you must think where to get your next rent, groceries and upkeep, while navigating classroom expectations. Just a handful here have scholarships, the rest need to hustle. Inclusivity and diversity strategies are important but the challenges migrant students face are beyond that. A migrant student and a native student are both students, yes, but they face entirely different challenges. Treating them identically without acknowledging that difference is itself a form of inequality.

Now that you are studying in Germany, how has your perspective on education inequality changed?

It has broadened considerably. Being in Germany has helped me understand how different structures either support or limit education outcomes. My perspective has expanded exponentially.

Do students and educators here have a realistic understanding of education systems in the Global South?

I think it is incomplete. The Germans I have met who ask about education in the Global South tend to focus only on the challenges. But that is not the whole picture. Malawi, for example, has a very resilient and committed education system; it just falls short on funding. The resilience and strength of these systems is not recognized, and that is actually a solid foundation to build on. When people here think about education in the Global South, the question they ask is something like, "Do children come to school on an empty stomach?" I understand yes, there is poverty, but the fact that children still show up hungry should tell you how willing they are to learn even under the most difficult conditions. There is much more to the story than the challenges alone. For example, I have a German friend that asked me to teach her how to speak English. I think it is because someone back in Malawi diligently taught me English, to a point that I can pass on the knowledge. I think that is underrated.

What could the Global North genuinely learn from education systems or experiences in the Global South?

If the Global North should learn two things from us; it would be resilience and community support.

By resilience, I mean that the education system in Malawi is largely underfinanced, but the people within that system still manage to produce quality results even with very limited resources. That is resilience. Teachers still show up and still teach even when their salaries are delayed or too low. And the students, despite the high poverty rates, despite everything they are dealing with at home, they still show up to school. They still make the most of the basic platform they have. When a system is underfinanced, it affects everything around it — infrastructure, materials and how and when teachers are paid. And yet teachers still perform. That is something the Global North does not always have to deal with, and I think there is something genuinely worth learning from that.

On community support, I touched on this earlier, but it really is something special. Communities in Malawi come together to keep a child in school in ways that people here might find surprising. Communities build school blocks and wells when they notice the state is falling short. People take up roles they were never obligated to take. But because there is this whole concept of togetherness, you still feel the need to contribute just to support children or families that are struggling. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and in Malawi you really see that. When a shock occurs in a given household; you would be surprised at how many people rush in just to make sure that child stays in school.

What could the Global South learn from the Global North?

Developing countries should learn from the strong institutional frameworks here, particularly around long-term investment in education, in infrastructure and in systems. Investment goes a long way. You continue reaping its benefits so many years later, even

after you seize to exist. But beyond funding, the approach to education is also something to learn from. The Global North takes a practical, balanced approach rather than one centered on rote learning. Why should a student memorize the parts of a grasshopper? I did it because I had to, but for what purpose now? The approach needs to change, it must be more practical, student-oriented, and based on the actual needs of the country and its job market.

If you could change one structural condition to most improve education in your home country, what would it be and why?

I would go for reducing economic inequality. Unless we reduce economic inequalities in Malawi and the broader Global South, we will continue facing the same challenges in our education systems. I would love for households to be more financially stable, and for students to be better supported financially so they can stay in school. That, for me, is the most impactful structural change.

What message would you want to share with students at the October workshop about the connection between global inequality and education?

That education inequalities translate to broader inequalities. We cannot improve education as a single item in isolation. We must address it in an interconnected way, because education is highly linked to poverty, health, and infrastructure.

If we are tackling education, we must carry all these development issues along with us, so we are not just solving one problem while another one quietly grows.

Is there anything about your educational journey or your perspective on the SDGs that has not come up yet?

What I feel was very relevant throughout this conversation is the blend, the balance between local context and real-life challenges. That interconnected nature of lived experience and development issues is something that has really run through everything we discussed.

To what extent do disparities in education quality between the Global North and Global South impact the global education system?

These disparities play a very big role. They influence who gets to access opportunities. They shape who produces knowledge and whose perspectives are considered valuable. People of high standing are more likely to be heard than those from the grassroots. Even in academic publication, there is a genuine concern that studies from developed countries are cited far more than those from developing countries which should tell us about who produces knowledge and whose knowledge is considered worth valuing. These disparities cause more systemic problems than we can imagine, and they need to be addressed urgently to improve the global education system and ensure that all voices are heard.



Aerial view of rural village in Malawi
by SINAL Multimedia


17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
Generally alluded to through the mention of international partnerships
5 GENDER EQUALITY
Equal educational opportunities
1 NO POVERTY
Economic stability supports access to education
6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
School hygiene & health
4 QUALITY EDUCATION
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Nutrition & student well-being
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
Rural/urban education balance
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
Power for studying
2 ZERO HUNGER
Energy for studying

MEHRNAZ MOKHTARI

The interview was conducted by Jean





What is your name, where are you currently studying in Germany, and what is your program or field of study?
Can you briefly describe your educational background, where you grew up, where you studied, and how you ended up studying in Germany?

My name is Mehrnaz Mokhtari. I am from Iran. I was born into an educated family that placed great importance on studying. I completed my bachelor's degree in law at the University of Tabriz. Then, I entered a master's program through the top-student admission system. I participated in the bar exam and received my law license. I worked as a lawyer for ten years. During this time, I also worked in an organization where I provided free legal services for people in need, especially women who were head of households or in difficult family situations.

Later, I decided to continue my education in Public Policy. So, I started preparing for applications and studying English. I was accepted into the Public Policy program at Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, University of Erfurt.

What was your motivation to pursue higher education then?

My motivation to pursue higher education came first from my own personal interest and curiosity for learning. I also had a strong will and determination to continue my studies and improve myself. My family environment played an important role, as education was always highly valued in my home.

I wanted to build a good professional career and achieve a strong social position in the future. Additionally, I believed that higher education would help me grow, become more independent, and make a greater impact on society.

How would you like to describe the quality of education in your home country?

The education system in Iran is largely exam-based and heavily centered around standardized tests, especially the national university entrance exam known as the "Konkur."

Students are often evaluated mainly through their performance in high-stakes exams, which creates a very competitive and stressful environment.

From an early stage, academic success is closely linked to memorization and test results rather than practical or critical thinking skills. Konkur is a major challenge, as it determines access to top universities and future career opportunities for many students. Despite these challenges, this system also builds discipline and persistence, as students must work very hard and stay focused for long periods to succeed.

One advantage of the education system in Iran is that many teachers are well-trained and provide strong academic knowledge. The exam-based system also encourages students to study hard, stay disciplined, and develop good time management skills. In addition, students often gain a solid theoretical foundation, especially in subjects like math and science.

However, there are also some disadvantages. Classes are often very large, so teachers cannot give enough individual attention to students. This leads some families to move their children to private schools, which creates financial pressure. Another issue is the strong focus on memorization instead of practical learning, and many subjects are not well connected to real job market needs.

How would you describe the quality of education you received in your home country? What worked well and what did not?
Now that you are studying in Germany, how does the education system here compare, and not just in terms of resources, but in terms of teaching approaches, critical thinking, community relevance, and student support?

The education systems in Germany and Iran have some important differences.

In Germany, universities often focus more on practical learning, workshops, and preparing students for the job market.

For example, at Willy Brandt School, we receive many emails about seminars, internships, and career-related workshops, which help students think about their future jobs. Some universities also provide mental health support services, which are very helpful for students under stress.

In addition, academic advising and job market orientation are strong parts of the system. Students are guided not only to finish their studies, but also to find meaningful employment after graduation.

In contrast, in Iran the education system is more exam-oriented and focused on memorization. Many subjects are theoretical and are not always connected to real job market needs. Also, large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to support students individually, and there are fewer structured programs for mental health or career development.

Because of this, some students may feel frustrated after graduation if they cannot easily find a suitable job, even after many years of study.

Could you just tell me, what is your general knowledge or understanding of the SDGs?

Sustainable Development Goals are a global framework created by the United Nations. They include 17 goals that aim to improve life for people around the world by 2030.
These goals focus on important areas such as quality education, poverty reduction, gender equality, good health, and environmental protection. The main idea is to create a more fair, safe, and sustainable world for everyone.
In simple words, SDGs are a plan for countries to work together and solve global problems, so that future generations can live in better conditions.

In your view, what does "quality education" mean? Does the SDG 4 definition feel complete and accurate to you, or does it miss something important?

SDG4 is very important because it focuses on ensuring equal and fair access to education for everyone. In my opinion, this is a strong and positive goal, especially for countries where not everyone has the same opportunities to go to school or university.

However, I think SDG4 focuses more on access to education, while less attention is given to the quality of education itself. For example, it does not always emphasize enough teaching methods, critical thinking, and practical skills.
For me, quality education means not only being able to attend school or university but also learning in a way that is useful for real life. It should help students develop problem-solving skills, creativity, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations.

Thinking about your own experience, did factors outside of school itself, such as access to electricity, clean water, health, or economic pressures, affect your ability to study or the ability of people around you? Can you give a concrete example?

Yes, I think electricity, water, and especially health can all affect education, but in my experience in Iran, the most important issue is internet and infrastructure.
Internet plays a very important role in modern education.

For example, during the Corona pandemic, schools were closed, and classes were moved online. However, the quality of internet was very poor in many areas, especially in less developed cities. This made it very difficult for students to continue their studies, and in some cases, they were completely deprived of education.

Even in normal situations, internet access is not always stable. For instance, during periods of political tension or conflict, internet shutdowns can happen for a long time. In such situations, students cannot attend online classes, cannot communicate with teachers, and even cannot access learning materials. This creates a serious barrier to education.

Another example is that in rural or deprived areas, families may not have strong internet connection or digital devices. This increases inequality between students in big cities and small towns.

Also, during COVID-19, although the government tried to continue education online, the weak infrastructure showed that the system was not fully prepared for digital learning. Many students struggled to follow classes properly.

In my opinion, this is mainly an infrastructure and investment issue. If there is not enough funding and planning for digital systems, education cannot continue smoothly during crises. So even if the education system wants to provide learning opportunities, without strong internet and technological support, it becomes very difficult in practice.

Were there also factors that supported your education that might surprise people here in Germany? For example, community structures, informal learning, or family networks?

First, my personal determination was very important. My hard work, resilience, and strong motivation helped me continue my studies even in difficult situations. I believe that without this inner motivation, it would have been very hard to achieve my goals.

Another important factor was my family and cultural background. In my culture, education is highly valued, and families strongly encourage their children to study and succeed. This created a supportive environment for me from the beginning.

My family also directly supported my efforts. They encouraged me during challenges, respected my goals, and motivated me to keep going, even when things were difficult.

So, I think the combination of personal determination and strong family and cultural support played a key role in my educational journey.

Did gender shape who got to access education in your context? And if so, how did that play out in practice?

Gender can still influence access to education in Iran in different ways, although this impact has reduced a lot compared to the past.

From my experience, in some traditional families, there are still concerns about girls studying in other cities. For example, when a girl is accepted to a university far from home, some families may hesitate because they prefer her to stay close to the family. This can sometimes limit her choices, even if she has strong academic ability. However, this situation is not very common today, and many families fully support their daughters' education.

In addition to this, gender can also influence the choice of field of study. In some cases, social expectations encourage girls to choose more traditional fields like teaching or humanities, while boys are more encouraged to go into engineering or technical fields. This can indirectly affect future job opportunities and career paths.

Another factor is safety and living conditions. For some families, especially in rural or less developed areas, concerns about transportation, dormitory life, or independence may be stronger for girls, which can influence their educational decisions.

However, it is also very important to say that education for women in Iran has improved significantly. Today, many women study in universities, and in some fields, they even outnumber men. Women are active in different academic areas and have strong achievements.

So overall, gender can still play a role in education through cultural expectations and social conditions, but access to education for women in Iran is much more equal than before and continues to improve.

How did economic inequality shape educational opportunities around you? Who got to go to university and who did not, and what determined that?

Of the SDGs connected to education in this project, health, gender equality, clean water, energy, reduced inequalities, and international partnerships, which do you feel had the strongest influence on education in your context, and why?

Economic inequality can strongly shape educational opportunities in Iran in several ways. From my experience, one of the main issues is that not all families have the same financial ability to support education. For example, some students can afford private schools, private classes, and extra tutoring, while others cannot. This can create a big gap in academic performance, especially in competitive exams like Konkur.

Another important factor is access to higher education. Although public universities are available, many students still need additional support like books, courses, or language classes, which can be expensive. Students from lower-income families may struggle to access these resources.

Economic pressure can also affect focus and motivation. For example, when students or their families have financial stress, it becomes harder to concentrate fully on studies. In Germany, I also noticed a difference between students who have scholarships and those who are self-funded. Self-funded students often feel more pressure because they must cover all expenses themselves, which can affect their academic performance.

In addition, students from wealthier families usually have more opportunities, such as studying abroad, attending better schools, or participating in extra educational programs. This gives them a clear advantage in both education and future job opportunities.

Overall, economic inequality creates unequal access to educational resources and opportunities. Even though many students work very hard, financial conditions can still play a very important role in shaping their educational path and future success.

Yes, I think economic conditions are very important, as you mentioned.

If a country has a strong economy, many other problems can also be reduced or solved.

For example, people can have better access to education, health services, and better living conditions.

It also helps improve mental health and reduces stress in daily life.

In my opinion, economic stability is one of the key factors that affect almost every other aspect of life.

Are there areas where you feel the Global North, including Germany, faces its own education quality challenges that are not often acknowledged? Do you think Germany also faces education challenges?

Yes, I think Germany also faces some challenges in education, even though it has many strong points.

From my experience, one issue is that not all courses are equally practical. Some courses are very useful and well-structured, especially project-based ones where students can really gain real-world skills. For example, I had a project course last semester, and it was very practical and helped me a lot in understanding real applications. I learned a lot from it, and it was a very valuable experience.

However, some other courses are more theoretical and, honestly, they do not feel very useful or clearly connected to the job market. In these cases, students may feel they are spending time on content that does not have a direct real-life application.

Another important challenge is the language barrier. For many international students, including myself, German language requirements can be a big obstacle when applying for internships or jobs. Even if a student is very strong academically and fully qualified, not having strong German skills can limit opportunities. This can be frustrating because it affects access to the job market, not academic ability.

In addition, adapting to a new academic system and culture can also be challenging at the beginning. International students often need time to understand expectations, academic writing styles, and communication methods. This transition period can sometimes create stress. So overall, while Germany has a strong education system with many advantages, it is still not perfect. There are challenges such as differences in course quality, language barriers, and the adjustment process for international students.

Now that you are studying in Germany, how has your perspective on education inequality changed, if at all?

Yes, my perspective on education has changed a lot after moving to Germany.

Before coming here, I mainly believed that educational inequality was mostly related to financial problems. In my experience in Iran, economic conditions play a very big role. For example, students from wealthier families can afford private schools, extra classes, and better resources, while others may not have the same opportunities. So I used to think poverty was the main reason for inequality in education.

However, after coming to Germany, I realized that the situation is more complex. Financial factors are still important, but they are not the only factor.

One important factor I noticed is language. Even if students are academically strong, not having strong German skills can limit their access to internships and jobs. This shows that education and opportunity are not only about money, but also about communication skills.

Another important factor is culture and adaptation. International students often need time to understand the academic system, expectations, and teaching style. This adjustment process can affect their performance and confidence at the beginning.

I also realized the importance of networks. In Germany, students who have strong personal and professional networks can find better internships and job opportunities more easily. Before coming here, I thought networks were mainly important in countries like Iran, but now I see that they also play a big role here. Knowing the right people, attending events, and building connections can strongly influence career opportunities.

So overall, my view has become more complete. I now understand that education and poverty are connected not only through money, but also through language, social networks, culture, and access to opportunities.

Do you feel that students and educators here have a realistic understanding of education systems in the Global South, or is the picture they have incomplete or distorted in some way?

I think people in the Global North can understand some general or surface-level issues about education in the Global South, but not the full reality.
For example, they usually know that there are economic problems, limited resources, and sometimes inequality in access to education. These are the common points that are often discussed in reports, media, or academic studies. However, I don't think this understanding is complete. Many important details are difficult to understand from the outside. For instance, how students experience these problems in daily life, how families make difficult decisions, or how much effort students need to put in to continue their education.

In my opinion, you really need to live in that environment to fully understand it. Only by being inside the system you can see the real challenges, but also the strengths, resilience, and ways people adapt to difficult conditions.
From outside, we can describe problems in general terms, but lived experience gives a much deeper and more realistic understanding. That is something that cannot always be fully explained in words or reports.
So overall, I think there is some understanding in the Global North, but it is limited, and real understanding comes from direct experience and close connection with the context.

What do you think the Global North could genuinely learn from education systems or experiences in the Global South?

I think the Global North can learn several important things from the Global South, especially in terms of resilience and how people deal with difficult conditions.
One important lesson is resilience and hard work. In many countries in the Global South, including my experience in Iran, people grow up facing different kinds of challenges such as economic pressure, limited resources, and uncertainty.

Because of this, they often learn how to adapt quickly, stay strong under pressure, and continue working toward their goals even in difficult situations. This ability to handle stress and uncertainty is a very valuable skill.

Another important lesson is responsibility and problem-solving in daily life. Many students and families learn how to manage problems with fewer resources. They become creative in finding solutions and more independent in dealing with challenges. This builds a strong sense of responsibility from a young age, because people are used to handling things on their own.

Also, I think people in the Global South often develop a strong motivation to succeed despite obstacles. Education is seen as a very important opportunity for a better future, so students usually work very hard and value their education deeply. This motivation and determination can be something that others can learn from.

So overall, I believe the Global North can learn from the Global South not only about resilience and hard work, but also about adaptability, responsibility, and the strong motivation people must improve their lives even in difficult conditions.

And vice versa, and what do you think the Global South could learn from the Global North, if anything?

I think Global South can also learn several important things from Global North, especially in how education systems are designed and how learning is delivered.

One important lesson is the focus on interactive and student-centered learning. In many universities in the Global North, students are encouraged to take part in discussions, group work, presentations, and projects. This helps students understand the subject more deeply instead of just memorizing information. I think this kind of learning style is very useful because it makes students more active and involved in the learning process. Another important point is the focus on practical skills. Many programs in the Global North try to connect education with the job market.

For example, students often do internships, project-based courses, and workshops that help them gain real work experience. This helps students understand how to apply their knowledge in real-life situations and prepares them better for future jobs. I think this is something very important that can reduce the gap between education and employment.

Also, flexibility in education is another strength. In many universities, students can choose different courses, explore different fields, and even change their study path if they find a better direction. This gives students more freedom to develop their interests and talents.

Finally, I think reducing unnecessary memorization is also very important. Instead of focusing only on exams and theoretical content, more attention is given to understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. This makes learning more meaningful and useful in the long term.
So overall, I believe the Global South can learn from the Global North in areas like interactive learning, practical education, flexibility, and reducing memorization, to make education more effective and closer to real-life needs.

If you could change one structural condition, whether related to health, energy, gender, inequality, or international cooperation, to most improve education in your home country, what would it be and why?

If I could change one structural condition to improve education in Iran, I would reduce economic inequality. Many students in Iran do not have equal access to good schools, educational resources, technology, or the internet. Students in poor or rural areas usually face more challenges than students in large cities. Because of financial problems, some families cannot afford books, private classes, or other educational support for their children. In some schools, there are also not enough facilities, modern technology, or qualified teachers. These differences create unequal opportunities for students and affect their future success. If the government could reduce inequality and provide equal educational opportunities for all students, the quality of

education would improve, and more young people could achieve their goals and contribute to society.

What message would you want to share with students attending the October workshop about the connection between global inequality and education?

At this workshop, I would like to share that education is strongly connected to global inequality. Students around the world do not have the same opportunities. Some students have access to better schools, better teachers, and more resources, while others face many challenges such as financial problems, limited facilities, or difficult living conditions.

Education is not only about schools and classrooms. It is also connected to money, health, safety, and the overall living situation of families. If these basic needs are not stable, it becomes very hard for students to focus on learning and succeed in education.
That is why I believe improving education also means reducing inequality in society. We need to think about fair access to education for all students, no matter where they come from or what their background is.

So, my main message is that education and equality are deeply connected, and if we want better education systems, we must also work toward a fairer and more equal world

In your opinion, to what extent do disparities in the quality of education between the Global North and Global South impact the global education system?

In many countries in the Global South, limited economic resources can lead to fewer opportunities for students. For example, there may be less access to modern schools, technology, trained teachers, and learning materials. This can affect the quality of education and make it harder for students to compete globally.

These inequalities also create a gap in skills and knowledge between students from different parts of the world. Students in wealthier countries often have more access to research, practical learning, and international opportunities, while students in poorer regions may face basic challenges such as lack of equipment, unstable internet, or overcrowded classrooms.

As a result, the global education system becomes unequal, and this inequality can continue into the job market as well. People from disadvantaged regions may have fewer chances to access high-quality jobs or international positions, even if they are talented and motivated.

In my opinion, improving economic conditions and investing in education systems in the Global South is very important. If countries have more stable economies, they can improve schools, train teachers, and provide better learning environments. This would help reduce the gap and create a fairer global education system for everyone.



CHRISPEN AND RIGON



CHRISPEN GUMUNYU

The interview was conducted by Rigon





What is your name, where are you currently studying in Germany, and what is your program or field of study?

My name is Chrispen Gumunyu. I am from Zimbabwe and that's where I completed my primary, secondary education as well as my bachelor's degree. I then moved to Germany in 2022 to study a master's program at the University of Erfurt which is Global Communication: Politics and Society. So that's the master's program that I am currently studying.

What motivated you to pursue higher education? Secondly, why also choose to study in Germany specifically?

I decided to pursue higher education because education can lead to more and better opportunities in life. So, it was always my plan to do a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree afterwards. One might ask, why didn't you do a master's in Zimbabwe? Well, there were opportunities to come and study in Germany which is a particularly attractive destination for international students. It is widely known that the level of education in Germany is very high, and this was the biggest pull factor. I chose Erfurt because the Global Communication masters at University of Erfurt is one of very few English taught communication master's programs. The master's program was particularly interesting because it dealt with media systems and communication cultures in international comparison.

Was Germany the only option or did you look for study programs in other European countries?

I think Germany was my best option because I have family friends who studied in Germany, so it was easier for them to recommend Germany. I knew that they had taken a similar route or path. So, I knew that this was something that I could do as well, and I had people who could help me through the application process. It was not my only option, but it was the best option at the time. I watched a lot of videos on YouTube from students from different countries who documented their journey as students in Germany and that helped me as well.

Looking back, what were the most significant factors, positive or negative, that shaped your access to education?

Well, the education systems are very different in Zimbabwe and here in Germany. In Zimbabwe we follow the British style education system. So, it goes from primary school to secondary school, and then either training colleges, polytechnics or university. For one to get to university, they should have completed and passed their A levels. One positive thing that I appreciated about going to school in Zimbabwe was the sense of community even in school or at university. To a certain extent individualism is appreciated but the sense of community always comes above everything else. One negative aspect I remember very well is that we went to school to be taught and to absorb the knowledge but not much emphasis was put on how that knowledge can be applied in different situations. Access to education is a general problem in less developed or developing countries such as Zimbabwe. Sometimes it depends on the household situation in which a child is brought up and the will to further a child's education. In general, some families struggle with money to pay for school fees because education is not subsidised and to buy uniforms and books. The economic situation of a country plays a crucial role in access to education.

How would you describe the quality of education you received in your home country? What worked well and what did not?

The quality of education I received in Zimbabwe was quite good. Zimbabwe was known to have a very good education system in the past and students from other countries came to be educated in Zimbabwe but that has since changed due to the political and economic situation. Instilling discipline in children especially when it comes to education works very well in Zimbabwe although it was a bit too strict when I was a student or maybe at the schools that I went to.

The lack of resources was a huge challenge to the quality of education. I would say it was fairly good for the resources that were there. I went to a primary school that, that, that I went to a government primary school. So, government schools in Zimbabwe are usually under-resourced and understaffed. I can imagine that it becomes a bit easier if you attend a private school which is usually well equipped. One other thing which is important to mention is that a lot of people in Zimbabwe go to university to study degrees which do not have a lot of demand, and this results in a situation whereby you end up having millions of unemployed graduates and that is a huge challenge.

Now that you are studying in Germany, how does the education system here compare, and not just in terms of resources, but in terms of teaching approaches, critical thinking, community relevance, and student support?

The education system in Germany is completely different from Zimbabwe in almost all aspects. In Zimbabwe, primary school ends at grade 7 when pupils are around 12 or 13 years old and they go to high school which are almost the same in terms of teaching content or focus. High school can either end at form 4 also known as Ordinary Level or form 6 also known as Advanced Level. In terms of teaching approach, I think the system in Germany encourages individualism and critical thinking from a very young age whereas that is not always the case in Zimbabwe. The sense of community within the education system is stronger in Zimbabwe as compared to Germany. However, I think that there is generally more student support in Germany as compared to Zimbabwe. I appreciate the seminar structure at university level in Germany whereby lecturers and professors do not lecture all the time, but students contribute as much as the lectures which was not the case in Zimbabwe.

What is your general knowledge or understanding of SDGs? What does quality education mean to you with regards to SDG4?

Is it complete, is it accurate or is something missing?

My general understanding of the SDGs is that they are targets that were set by the United Nations in which countries have to come together to work towards achieving a set of common goals so that's my general understanding of SDGs. SDG 4 is about quality education, and its main aim is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. I think it's all encompassing. It really hits to the core of what quality education should be. But then I'm afraid that what quality education means for a child in the United States of America and for a child for example, let's say in China and for a child in Zimbabwe, quality education could mean different things for those three children. So yeah, I mean, we do have to have a definition that includes all those people at the same time, but we also must acknowledge that these things will then mean different things to different people depending on where they are. Inclusive and equitable quality education, I think that's something that applies to everyone, regardless of where you come from and. To promote long life learning opportunities for all, that also applies to everyone, but I think it may lack specific targets for people living in different places. If only it could be a bit more specific depending on where people come from, then I think it would be better for everyone. I also think the timelines for the SDGs, especially when it comes to quality education, is not enough time to achieve these goals. I know that the SDGs were adopted from a similar type of project so it's a continuation from something else. We can just be hopeful that at least some of these things can be implemented. I think especially for countries like Zimbabwe, when it comes to such things as quality education, in most of the cases it becomes very political. They become a political ticket whereby political parties use this as a ticket to say, well, if you vote for us, we're going to give you quality education which is in line with SDG4. So, I think a lot of people, especially in Zimbabwe, link these SDGs to politics. It becomes very political, whereas it should not be political.

I mean, quality education for all should not be a political ticket. It should be something that's accessible to everyone.

Thinking about your own experience, did factors outside of school itself, such as access to electricity, clean water, health, or economic pressures, affect your ability to study or the ability of people around you? Can you give a concrete example?

Yes, the SDGs are all interconnected. We cannot just look at the quality of education on its own in a vacuum. They are all connected. For example, when it comes to gender equality, or for example, let me start from SDG 1 which is no poverty. There is a lot of poverty in countries such as Zimbabwe and in some areas, parents have to decide whether to pay for their children's school or to buy food. So, poverty then affects SDG 4 as well. SDG 2 is zero hunger and if a child is going to school hungry, it affects their performance at school. They might not even like going to school because of hunger and not being able to eat enough. SDG 3 is about good health and wellbeing. If children are not healthy and they do not have good wellbeing, it also affects their quality of education or how, or how good they are in school. SDG 5 is about gender equality and this is a serious problem in Zimbabwe. There's an issue of underage marriages especially in rural communities, whereby parents find it easier to marry off a child at 13, 14, 15 or 16 years of age. They're better off getting married than going to school because marriage means they can have someone to take care of them whereas going to school might be a burden for their parents and that's very unfortunate. SDG 6 is about clean water and sanitation and most rural areas in Zimbabwe do not have access to clean water and sanitation. Urban areas also face water cuts for extended periods of time. So, if a school does not have running water, the toilets are not working properly, and this can affect the wellbeing of the children. SDG 7 is about affordable, clean energy. I mean, some areas don't even have access to electricity. So, for them to have affordable and clean energy, that's something that's still far away.

We still have power cuts in almost all parts of Zimbabwe, very serious power cuts, whereby you don't have electricity for a very long period. I remember a funny story that happened many years ago whereby a minister in the government donated computers to a school that did not have access to electricity. SDG 8 is about decent work and economic growth, and Zimbabwe has a very high unemployment rate. If parents in a household cannot have decent work, it affects how the children view education and this happens a lot. Many people are well educated in Zimbabwe but they are unable to find good jobs. You can find someone with a degree working in a shop selling clothes. In such instances, the most important thing is to find any type of work that can pay you enough money to buy food and pay your rent.

Were there also factors that supported your education that might surprise people here in Germany? For example, community structures, informal learning, or family networks?

In Zimbabwe there's a community feeling whereby education is more of a community thing. So, you feel that you're not alone or you're not doing something alone. Whereas here I have the feeling that education is something which is private to you. In Zimbabwe, I would be very comfortable asking someone to help me with something, especially when it comes to education. If I don't understand something, I'll be free to ask someone to assist me and there is a lot of sharing whereas here it's a lot more individual and private. When I was growing up, we used to have holiday lessons which were private lessons offered by school teachers during school holidays so they could earn some money during the holiday. We would usually attend these lessons as groups, but others also offered individual lessons. Sometimes these would be done at a teacher's private residence. These were usually offered by teachers from other schools who lived in the same suburb. This might surprise people here in Germany but it's normal in Zimbabwe.



ERFURT UNIVERSITY



MILTON HIGH SCHOOL



MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

Which of the SDGs do you think influences quality education in your country?

I would say that all of them affect SDG 4. They all influence each other. But in Zimbabwe, I would say that decent work and economic growth is the most important one because if you have decent work and economic growth, everything else has the possibility to sort of fall into place. I think that if large parts of the population can find work and earn a good living then some aspects such as quality of education are bound to improve. I think it all stems from the economic situation of a country. For this to happen, there needs to be a good education system that can produce highly skilled workers and for this to happen poverty levels must be low and other conditions must be met as well.

Do you think that there are some countries in the Global North, including Germany, that face education, quality challenges that are often not mentioned or not talked about or it's just like a good picture sold to the world. Here in Europe, in the Global North, is everything perfect?

I think the education system in Germany, well, coming from Zimbabwe, does have very good public relations because you do not hear a lot about some of the things that are not working very well in Germany. Having moved to Germany now, I understand the intricacies of the education system. The option to separate children into different types of schools from a young age has its pros and cons, but I think it's very early to separate children but it's working so far. So, yeah, I guess there might not be any reason to change it. But there's a lot of differences in Germany, state by state. I think schools in East Germany tend to be short staffed and underfunded but I'm not sure how it's like in other parts of Germany. When it comes to the teachers, I think primary school teachers are the backbone of a society because that's where the standards of a society are set but then there's not a lot of respect that's given to teachers. I can also say the same about Zimbabwe as well.

Do you think your perception of the quality of education has changed since you came to Germany or was it just the same as what you thought about the quality or like all the aspects from your own perspective?

I think my perception has changed. I really thought that since Germany is a first world country, everything would be to the highest standard. I've realized that it is indeed a good system but it's not perfect. It might require adjustments, but it seems to be working for German society so far. I do admire the quality of education in Germany because schools and Universities here have so many resources that contribute to the success of the students. I always wonder what Zimbabwe could be if we had half the resources that are available for education in Germany. Some of my friends from back home can't comprehend that education is subsidised in Germany. If you live in countries such as Zimbabwe, it's hard to imagine that such things are even possible.

Do you think that people in the Global North and South have an adequate knowledge or a panorama of how the quality of education is in both parts of the world? And can either side learn something from the other?

I think people in both the Global North and South do not really have a good picture of education systems in both areas. I also have to say that a lot of people, especially in the Global North, are not even aware of the SDGs. They might just have a vague idea of what they are and the same goes for the Global South as well. I think the Global South can benefit a lot from the model of subsidised education implemented in most Global North countries, but this requires strong and stable economies.

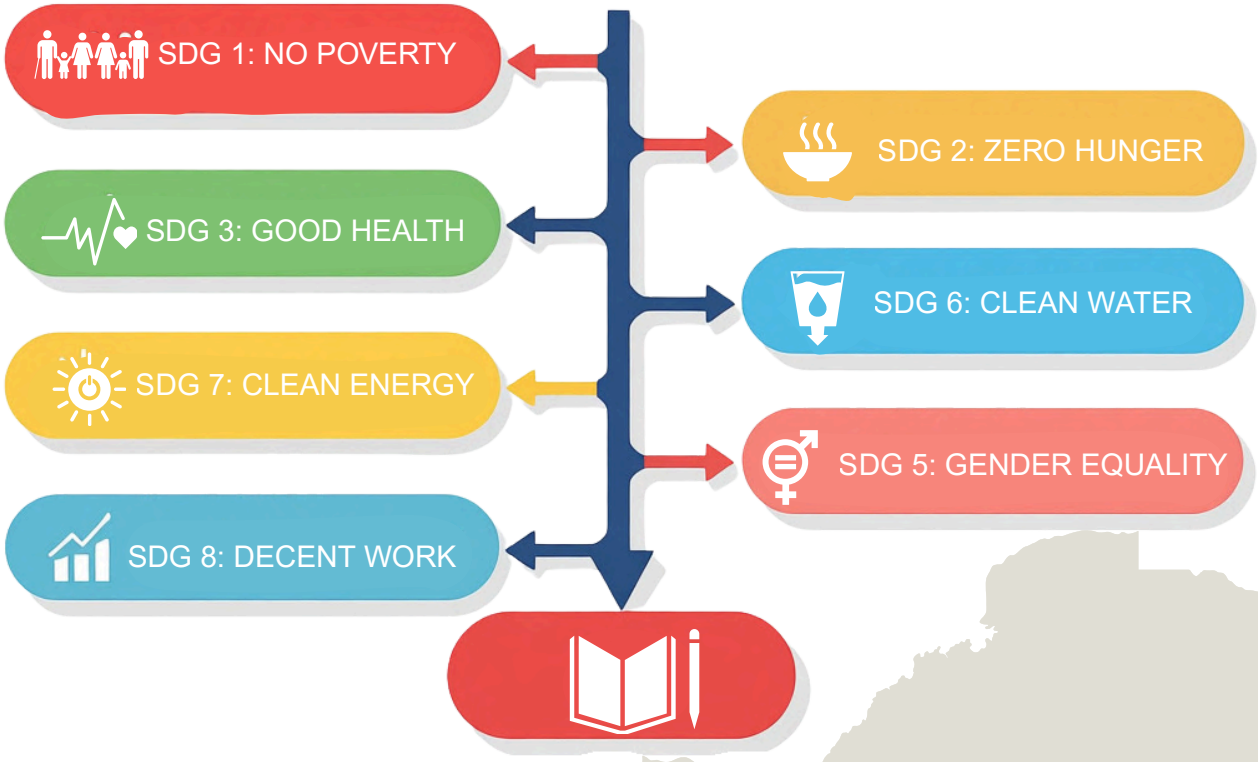
What do you think from your own experience must be improved in your country now that you also have this international education experience and which SDG is more important?

I think what I have learned since I've been living in Germany is that the education system of Zimbabwe needs to be structured in a way that works for the Zimbabwean society and the current situation in Zimbabwe which has high levels of unemployment and brain drain. I think the education system should be geared towards teaching people the skills that they need to be successful in their own country.
This might sound as if I'm being too critical, but I think a lot of emphasis is not being put on STEM subjects. A lot of emphasis is being put on humanities, which I think is a good thing, but then it doesn't really help a country to have millions of media practitioners, psychologists and the likes. I think the education system needs to be geared towards subjects that can be impactful in society. As I mentioned earlier, I think SDG 8 might be the most important
.

although they all influence one another and it might not be a good idea to focus on one while neglecting the others.
For example, a strong and stable economy requires highly skilled workers and there needs to be a good education system that churns out highly skilled workers.

Is there anything about your educational journey or your perspective on the SDGS that you feel is important and has not come up yet?

I think if we can eradicate poverty, everything else sort of can fall into place if there's no more poverty. Because I think poverty is the root cause of a lot of global problems. In many Global South societies. I think everything else has the potential to fall into place once poverty is eradicated.



SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

RIGON HARXHI

The interview was conducted by Chrispen





What is your name? Where are you currently studying in Germany, and what is your program or field of study?

My name is Rigon Harxhi, and I have recently graduated from the master's program in Global Communication, Politics and Society at the University of Erfurt.

Can you briefly describe your educational background, including where you grew up, where you studied, and how you ended up studying in Germany?

I was born and raised in Peja, Kosovo, where I completed both my elementary and high school education. At 18, I embarked on my journey in higher education by pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Communication Science at the Faculty of Philology and History under the University of Tirana.

After finishing my bachelor's studies, I continued to enhance my skills by obtaining my first Master's degree in Public Relations from the same university. While reflecting on my previous studies, I recognized some gaps in my foundational knowledge, particularly in research methodology and theoretical frameworks. I felt the need to address these gaps to deepen my understanding of political and social communication. This quest for knowledge motivated me to pursue a second master's degree.

Interestingly, studying in Germany was not initially part of my plan. However, I was drawn to its high-quality education and a specific program that perfectly aligned with my interests in political communication and advocacy. The program was conducted in English, which allowed me to engage with high-level academic content without the barrier of a language I was not yet fluent in. Germany's educational system offered me the rigorous, international perspective I sought. It became an opportunity to see how educational approaches differ across countries and shared a rich blend of specialized knowledge and global exposure. The accessibility of quality education in Germany, particularly given its affordability compared to many other countries, made my decision even easier.

My journey reflects a deep commitment to lifelong learning and the belief that education should transcend borders. My path, coming from a small city in Kosovo, going to Albania's capital for studies, and eventually to Germany, is a testament to my conviction that continuous self-improvement is essential, regardless of one's starting point. I believe that whether someone comes from a small village in Europe, Africa, or Asia, access to quality education is our fundamental right. This mindset drives my professional ethics: the idea that we must work together within our communities to foster growth and ensure that knowledge remains accessible to everyone.

What motivated you to pursue not only your first master's, but then a second master's as well, and what does that path look like for you?

The choice to pursue two master's degrees came from my desire to shift from working in a professional setting to focusing on academic knowledge. After finishing my bachelor's degree, I encountered a common issue many graduates face: feeling unprepared for the job market. While my education gave me a solid theoretical background, it often did not prepare me for real-world applications. In Albania, where I studied, more students were opting to pursue a master's degree right after their bachelor's degree, which made me realize I needed to deepen my understanding of the field.

I chose to pursue a master's in Public Relations because it seemed to offer better job opportunities. I thought the specialized skills I would gain would make me more employable compared to journalism, which was more general. After completing my first degree in Albania, I gained almost 4 years of work experience in the field. However, I soon realized that if I wanted to pursue a PhD, I needed to further strengthen my academic abilities.

This understanding pushed me to go for a second master's degree. This program allowed me to focus more specifically on a particular topic.

I found that while my first master's provided important knowledge, it covered a broader scope compared to the more structured approach of my second program. Switching from a Master of Science to a Master of Arts helped me narrow my focus and prepare for the academic challenges I wanted to tackle. Overall, my decision to pursue both degrees was driven by a strong desire for deeper understanding and a clearer path toward my long-term academic goals.

You mentioned something I found interesting. You said that it's a trend in Albania that when you finish your bachelor's, you jump straight into a master's. Are there other options for people who may not want to, for example, do a master's? Are there other options, for example, here in Germany, where there are a lot of options for one person, for someone to do if they don't want to maybe even do a bachelor's degree. So are there such options, or are they limited?

That is a very insightful observation. In contrast to the German system, which offers diverse pathways like the dual education system (Ausbildung), the options in Albania and Kosovo are much more limited.

While we do have vocational high schools, which last four years in Albania and three in Kosovo, they focus primarily on technical trades like electrical engineering or traditional crafts. However, unlike the German Ausbildung, these programs often focus more on general knowledge rather than providing a structured transition into the labor market. Once students graduate from these schools, they can enter the workforce, but there is no formal, nationwide system that bridges the gap between classroom learning and practical apprenticeship.

The educational culture is heavily centered on university degrees. Access to higher education is determined by a national ranking system based on exam points. This creates a significant challenge: students often list multiple degree preferences, and many end up studying a subject like journalism not because it was their passion, but because their points fit that specific program. This is where I see a major disconnect. We are encouraging people to stay in school and pursue degrees, but we aren't necessarily equipping them with the specific marketable skills they need. This reinforces the 'master's degree trend' I mentioned earlier; because students don't feel prepared after a bachelor's, and because there are few professional alternatives, they feel compelled to continue in academia just to remain competitive.

Moving on to the second section: the quality of education. How would you describe the quality of education you received in your home country? What worked well and what did not?

I think, as you mentioned before, the education in Albania and Kosovo shares some similarities because it is rooted more in theoretical knowledge, it often doesn't turn into practical skills. The education system tends to be overloaded with information that isn't always necessary, especially at the elementary and high school levels. As a result, students learn a lot of theory but struggle to apply it in real life. Both Albania and Kosovo have university systems that focus mainly on lectures. In my experience, unlike in Germany, where presentations encourage open discussion, it's often more rigid here. Professors present information, and students are expected to listen, which limits interaction and discussion.

This approach reflects a common mindset among teachers: many see their role as just delivering knowledge rather than encouraging a two-way learning process. This can lead to a lack of important skills like critical thinking and practical problem-solving. For example, we might learn about experiments in theory without ever having the chance to actually do them. In my journalism studies, I appreciated that my program included hands-on activities. We had to make videos, conduct interviews, and write articles, which made learning more engaging. Unfortunately, many other programs miss this practical side, leaving students unprepared for real-life situations.

Furthermore, there is a significant lack of institutional support, such as career guidance or academic advising, which makes the transition from university to the professional world very challenging. There is also strong cultural pressure in which education is viewed as a mandatory requirement for social validation rather than a personal choice. Because gap years aren't financially feasible or culturally encouraged, you aren't given time to breathe or reflect on your path. In our society, your merit and intelligence are often validated solely by a degree, which pushes many people to continue in academia as a necessary step toward getting a good job and being socially recognized, rather than focusing on what they can actually do in practice. Overall, while education is very important, it should include a balance of theory and practical skills to truly prepare students for their future roles in society.

What is your general knowledge or understanding of the SDGs?

I first learned about the SDGs when I was 19 years old, while applying for a volunteer program with AIESEC to go to Turkey. At that time, I wasn't familiar with the goals, as they had only recently become more prominent in discussions around global development around 2017 or 2018. Since then, my understanding has grown significantly, especially as I've become more involved in various sustainability and inclusivity projects.

The SDGs are crucial because they were established by the United Nations to promote a sustainable future for everyone, ensuring that no one is left behind. What I find particularly compelling about the SDGs is their interconnectedness. They go beyond isolated issues; for instance, education is not just about schools but is intricately linked to economic opportunities, social inclusion, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. This interconnected nature means that progress in one area can support advancements in others. Ultimately, I believe that these goals encompass various aspects of life and societal challenges, significantly contributing to a better quality of life, a brighter future, and a healthier environment for communities around the world.

What does quality education mean to you? Does the definition of SDG 4 feel complete and accurate to you or does it miss something important?

I believe that SDG4 addresses crucial aspects of education, particularly inclusion and lifelong learning. However, I think we also need to consider students' well-being and supportive learning environments, as well as how economic conditions can affect the quality of education across countries. The current definitions tend to be very broad, and we need to recognize that contexts vary significantly across regions such as China, Africa, and Europe.

We should look at education in a more contextualized way, adapting it to the specific needs and circumstances of each country. While it’s important to ensure education is accessible and free for everyone, we can’t ignore that the concept of “quality education” varies widely across individual situations.

For instance, we have students with ADHD and various mental health challenges. Are we merely providing access to education, or are we genuinely including them in the learning process? This is a critical issue. Many intelligent individuals can grasp knowledge, but the traditional education system does not always cater to their preferred learning styles.

Additionally, the education system often feels rigid—there’s a specific way of performing tasks and learning information that not everyone can follow. It’s essential to recognize that education should not only be about access to schools; it should also create an environment where everyone feels included, supported, and encouraged to think critically, rather than simply memorizing textbooks.

In my view, quality education should prepare students to engage actively with society and tackle real-world challenges. It’s not just about isolating individuals with textbook learning. For example, countries with large populations, such as China and India, often emphasize competition so much that children begin their

education at a very young age, overwhelming themselves with information. This focus on competition can rob them of their childhood and joy in learning.

I also think we need to reconsider how we define quality education in contexts like Germany, where students may take up to 10 years to complete their studies. While that may provide depth it can sometimes hinder their growth and adaptability. Overall, I think quality education is not just about access, but it needs to be adaptable and truly supportive, helping all individuals grow and thrive.

What are the biggest strengths of the education system in your home country that are really talked about?

I believe that one of the most significant aspects of the university experience is the motivation and resilience demonstrated by students. Many students are determined to complete their degrees despite facing challenges such as financial limitations and resource constraints. This determination often fosters a strong sense of community among peers.

For instance, when I studied journalism and communication, I observed that students frequently supported one another. Many of my classmates balanced work and studies, yet we always made an effort to help each other succeed. This informal support network was crucial; we shared notes and engaged in collaborative learning, which helped elevate our collective performance.

Beyond peer support, a professors' role is also vital. Faculty members often took the time to understand students' challenges, particularly when they noticed someone struggling. They didn't simply maintain a professional distance; instead, they actively sought to connect with us and understand our circumstances. This personal approach made a big difference, especially given the competitive nature of the job market in fields like media. I believe that the solidarity among students and the supportive attitude of professors create a positive environment that often goes unrecognized. This culture of mutual assistance, even amidst structural challenges, fosters resilience and encourages students to persevere in their academic journeys.

How would you compare that to here in Germany?

In Germany, I find the educational experience to be quite isolated compared to my experience in Albania. Here, self-directed learning is emphasized, and accessing professors can be challenging. After class, it's often difficult to approach them with questions, whereas in Albania, professors are more accessible for discussions post-lesson. Additionally, the bureaucratic process for course registration and grading adds to the sense of isolation. I often feel lonely in my studies here because the system seems designed for individual learning rather than collaboration and networking among students.

In Albania, we had more opportunities for group discussions where everyone could share their thoughts on topics. Moreover, there are barriers to accessing education in Germany, particularly for individuals from less affluent backgrounds. While German universities may offer free tuition, the financial and logistical challenges of moving to and studying in Germany can prevent many potential students from attending.

I believe this is also an issue. We are fortunate to be here, but if financial or economic factors prevented us from doing so, that would be problematic, even though German universities are free. However, I think access even here still remains difficult for global citizens.

Moving on to the third set of questions. Now, thinking about your own experience, did factors outside of school itself, such as access to electricity, clean water, health or economic pressures, affect your ability to study or the ability of people around you? Can you give concrete examples if possible?

When considering how external factors impacted my education and that of those around me, I believe economic pressures were

significant, as were issues related to gender, access to electricity, and internet connectivity.

During my bachelor's studies in Albania, I had the privilege of not having to work while in school. However, many of my friends and colleagues had to juggle jobs just to afford their education. In Albania, education is not free; there are fees that, while not prohibitively high, can be a substantial burden for families facing financial instability. Those from rural areas often find it especially challenging, as they might not be able to afford the cost of living in the capital city, where many universities are located. Some students even had to stay in dorms that were in poor condition, further complicating their educational experience.

I recall a significant protest a few years ago in which we demanded free education and scholarships for outstanding students. It highlighted how economic factors severely impacted our ability to study effectively. Many students were forced to prioritize work over classes, which is concerning. Education should be about learning and growing academically, not merely attending university out of necessity to earn a paycheck. There's a real concern that while we may be producing graduates, we are not necessarily cultivating knowledgeable individuals.

Additionally, during my first year, I often faced issues with internet connectivity and electricity in the dorms. These challenges directly affected my ability to study and access resources. Hygiene and overall living conditions added another layer of difficulty.

For younger students in rural areas, the situation is even tougher. Many schools lack proper infrastructure and qualified teachers, limiting learning opportunities. On a positive note, I believe that elementary school textbooks are now provided, but in high school and university, students still need to purchase their own materials. This adds significant financial strain, as not everyone can afford the textbooks or have access to a laptop and reliable internet.

In my experience, all these factors stem from economic challenges. Without adequate support or resources, education can be a struggle, affecting not just individual students but also the structure of the educational system itself.

Did gender shape who got to access education in your context? And if so, how did that play out in the process, in practice?

Thank you for this important question. Gender definitely plays a significant role in access to education, especially in my context of Albania and Kosovo. It's not just about the economy; gender equality is a crucial part of the equation.

For example, in my field of communication and journalism, I can count the number of men in my program. Certain areas of study are informally seen as gendered, meaning some fields are dominated by one gender. This doesn't always reflect people's actual interests or abilities; instead, it's shaped by stereotypes that suggest some careers are meant for men and others for women. For instance, engineering and architecture have historically been viewed as male-dominated fields, leading to the belief that these are "men's jobs."

This mindset still influences educational choices today. In many cases, girls tend to work harder to prove themselves, partly because boys often get a free pass if they perform poorly or don't engage as much in school. As a result, girls often excel academically, but even when they succeed, there can still be biases that label high-achieving boys as "feminine" because they are succeeding in traditionally female-dominated settings.

These traditional gender roles are deeply embedded in our educational system, affecting access and opportunities for different genders. Social and cultural factors, along with economic conditions, also play a big role in determining who studies what and why.

Overall, addressing these gender biases is crucial for achieving true equality in education and ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to succeed, regardless of their gender.

Okay. And of the SDGs connected to education in this project such as health, gender equality, clean water, energy, reduced inequality and international partnerships, which do you feel had the strongest influence on education in your context and why.

I believe that several key factors significantly impact education, particularly economic pressures, gender equality, and health.

Firstly, the economic background is crucial. It often determines who can attend university and who cannot. Students from lower-income families may struggle to access higher education due to financial barriers. This creates inequality in educational opportunities and outcomes. Moreover, students from wealthier backgrounds may be able to study abroad, gaining knowledge and experience that further enhance their prospects.

Secondly, gender equality plays a vital role in education. Certain fields, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, are often perceived as more suitable for women, which can discourage male students from pursuing degrees in those fields. This societal perception can limit students' choices and hinder diversity in various academic programs.

Additionally, health, both physical and mental, affects students' ability to succeed and perform. When universities lack adequate resources like counseling and support services, students may struggle to focus on their studies. Mental and physical well-being are crucial for academic performance; when students face personal issues or health challenges, it becomes difficult for them to excel academically.

Lastly, while elements such as clean water and energy are significant, I believe social and economic factors have the most direct impact on education. Addressing these issues can lead to a fairer and more effective educational system for everyone. Overall, these factors are interconnected and need to be addressed holistically to improve educational outcomes for all students.

Are there areas where you feel the Global North, including Germany, faces its own education quality challenges that are not often acknowledged?

In my perspective, the global education system faces several significant challenges that are not optional and vary from country to country. While each nation has its unique hurdles, the core issue lies in how education systems are structured and whether they adequately serve all students.

One major problem is that many educational systems are not designed to cater to diverse needs. Simply having students go through the motions of attending school or university without providing a quality education does not effectively prepare them for future success. This raises concerns about the system's adequacy and effectiveness.

Another challenge is the lack of understanding of students' backgrounds, particularly for international students. For instance, in Germany, there seems to be a disconnect in understanding where these students are coming from, especially regarding their previous educational experiences. Without acknowledging their unique contexts, it's difficult to support their learning effectively.

Cultural differences also pose challenges. International students often struggle with adapting to new academic environments. For example, when I started my studies, I felt insecure about academic writing and assignment formats, which were quite different from what I was used to in Albania. This is a common issue for many students coming from different educational systems.

Moreover, the limited availability of mentoring can hinder the transition for international students. Those coming from countries like Africa, Albania, or India often lack the guidance they need to navigate a new educational landscape. This lack of support can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in adapting to academic expectations.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of education systems globally depends significantly on their ability to recognize and address these contextual factors, including cultural

differences and mentoring needs. While many regions advertise their education as the best, they often overlook the importance of understanding each student's background and context, leading to gaps in learning and inclusion.

Now that you're in Germany, you just have to do things the German way and that's it. Regardless of where you come from, how you've been used to doing things. And I guess, yeah, if it's not done that way, then which other way can it be done?

The challenges in Western academia, especially in Germany, often come from a mix of Eurocentrism and local traditions. Coming from the Balkans, where we study various international theories, it's surprising how self-contained the Western academic system can be. It tends to view its own theories as universal while considering knowledge from 'the periphery' as irrelevant.

In Germany, there's also a great pride in local intellectual history. While I respect German scholarship, it often prioritizes local ideas over global ones. Adapting to this 'German way' has been tough, and I question why this expectation falls on us alone.

Every academic system has its blind spots, but for a truly international environment, it can't just be about students from the East or South fitting in. Western institutions should also be open to the diverse perspectives we bring. Real intellectual growth happens when we look beyond a Western-focused view and treat knowledge as a global, shared effort.

Moving on to the fourth section now. Now that you're studying in Germany, how has your perspective on education inequality changed, if at all?

Now that I'm studying in Germany, my view on educational inequality has definitely changed. I've realized that the issue isn't just about getting into universities or attending schools; it's really about access to quality support and resources. Students need guidance and spaces where they can think critically and actively engage in their learning, rather than passively absorbing information.

In Albania, many students face financial difficulties and social barriers, which can make it hard for them to perform well or even feel motivated. This is often because the education system doesn't take into account the needs and qualities of individual students.

Here in Germany, I've noticed that having access to things like libraries and study resources makes a big difference. In Albania, I often had to buy my own books or study in places that didn't offer the same level of support. For students to truly succeed, we need to provide the right resources, guidance, and a supportive environment, not just expect them to struggle through their studies.

Do you feel that students and educators here have a realistic understanding of education systems in the Global South, or is the picture they have incomplete or distorted in some way?

I believe that many students and educators have a limited and oversimplified view of education systems in the Global South. For example, when I had an ICT for Development class and we talked a lot about the Global South and Global North, I think it was the first time I realized how much my perception of education, when I was growing up in Kosovo, was influenced by the USA.

I previously thought of education in Africa as predominantly negative, focusing only on issues like poverty and poor quality.

This narrow perspective can lead to stereotypes and a one-sided view of the challenges faced by different education systems around the world. Every country has its own issues, but it's important to recognize its strengths, such as resilience and informal learning networks.

To truly understand these systems, we need to broaden our perspective and seek out information beyond our own experiences. It's essential to read and learn about these contexts to foster a better understanding and connection with one another.

Do you think that the Global South could learn from the Global North?

I believe that the Global South can adapt certain structural and systemic ideas from the Global North, as long as they fit local contexts rather than being copied directly.

First, adopting standardized educational frameworks, like the Bologna System, could improve mobility and consistency in higher education. This could help universities in the Global South align with international standards and promote global collaboration among students. Making higher education accessible and state-funded could also break down financial barriers to education.

Another important area is promoting diversity and social inclusion in classrooms. Many regions still have traditional gender- or social-based separations. The Global North's approach to co-educational spaces, where all genders and backgrounds study together, is crucial for building a more inclusive society.

By learning from these approaches, the Global South can make strides toward enhancing its educational systems.

Yeah, the gender aspect is still important, for example, I went to a boys' high school. So it was only boys. It was only a boys' school. And later on, for my A levels, I changed to a mixed college. So how is that, like, for you? Is there something like that in Albania or Kosovo? Are there boys-only and girls-only schools?

In Albania and Kosovo, schools are generally mixed. From kindergarten onward, both boys and girls learn together. It was surprising for me to learn about single-gender schools when I was in Turkey, when someone from Pakistan told me he went to a boys' school. I hadn't encountered the concept before and found it difficult to imagine. Now, I do know some friends who went to all-boys or all-girls schools, but this isn't common in my experience in Albania or Kosovo. The educational environment here is diverse and inclusive.

However, there are still some gender-related challenges, especially when it comes to educational performance. For instance, I've noticed that girls often excel in subjects like math, while boys may not perform as well. This highlights a different kind of inequality in which social expectations may affect how students engage with their studies. In terms of school culture, schools in Albania and Kosovo have a structured environment.

Unlike in Germany, where students can express themselves freely in clothing and behavior, students here often have to follow specific dress codes and behavioral standards. Therefore, I would say that while schools in Albania and Kosovo are mixed and inclusive, cultural norms and expectations still shape the educational experience.

So if you have to change something in the education system or the other related SDGs in your country, what would you change?

If I could change something in my country's education system or related to the Sustainable Development Goals, I would focus on addressing economic barriers. Poverty and social inequalities create significant obstacles for many students. It's crucial to create more programs, scholarships, and financial support that make education accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford it.

Education should empower students, allowing them to reach their full potential without being weighed down by financial burdens. It's not just about enrolling in a program; it's about being able to focus on learning and growing.

Additionally, I believe that fostering international cooperation would enhance educational opportunities. Students should have the chance to exchange ideas and experiences through various programs. Lastly, we can't overlook the environmental aspects; integrating sustainability into education is essential for preparing future generations. Overall, I think that a more inclusive and supportive approach can lead to a stronger education system for everyone. It is also important to foster international partnerships that focus on mutual knowledge exchange and ensure that students from the Global South are seen not just as recipients of aid, but as contributors of unique perspectives and intellectual value.

What do you think the difference is between the education system in the Global North and in the Global South? How do you think these differences affect the global education system?

I believe these differences do have a significant impact. They influence how knowledge is produced, students' mobility, and future opportunities. In many cases, these systems reinforce cycles of inequality rather than breaking them. It's essential to create an environment where everyone respects one another and values the knowledge they gain, regardless of their background.

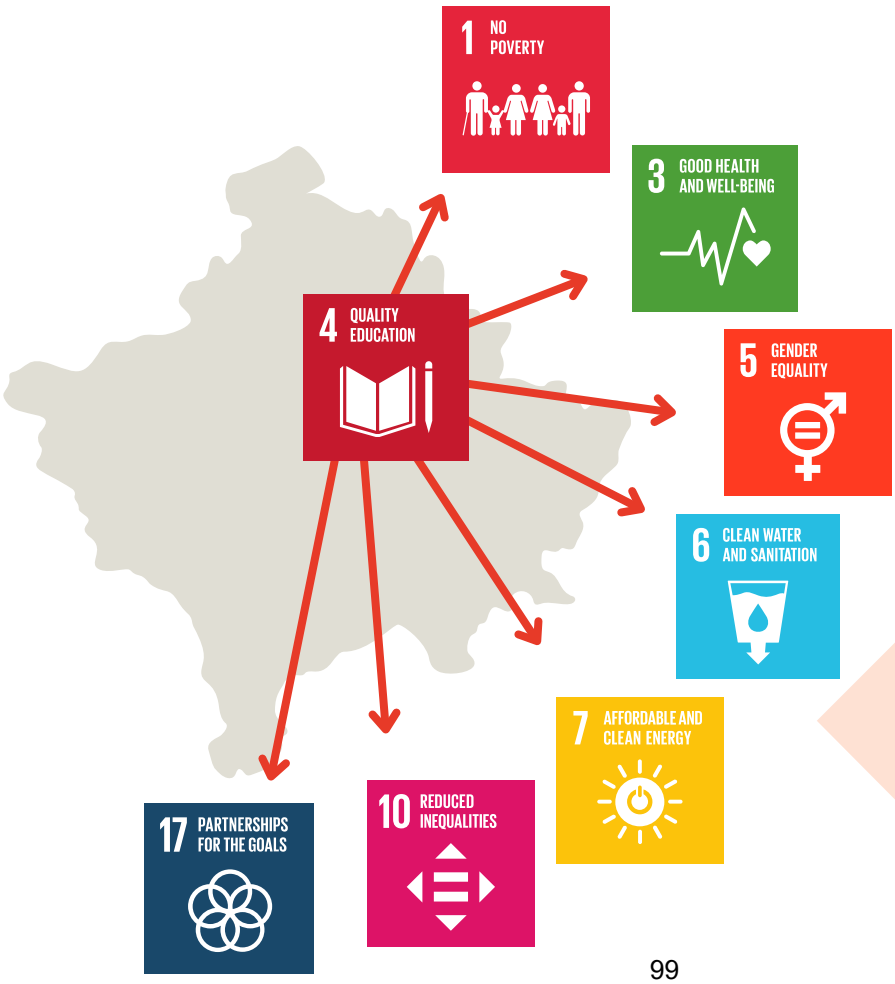
When we discuss quality education, it's important that this goal is universal. Knowledge shared in one country, whether in Germany or elsewhere, is valuable and relevant in different contexts. We must foster respect for this knowledge and recognize the opportunities it can create for others.

This is crucial because it has a wider global impact. It shouldn't just reflect the theories or ideas dominant in the Global North; instead, it should promote free access to education and respect for diverse perspectives.

By bridging these gaps, we can tackle not only local issues but also influence global development, innovation, social cohesion, and mutual understanding. Supporting each other in these ways is vital for creating a more equitable education system.

And as a last question, what message would you want to share with the students attending the October workshop about the connection between global inequality and education?

I think I have already said many times that education is not just about access and does not exist in isolation or in a vacuum. It's about active participation and the quality of that education. It's interconnected with social, economic, and political factors. To tackle global inequality, we need to recognize these connections. When we design fair and effective solutions, we empower people to truly engage with the system, driving change for themselves and their communities. Let's work together to ensure that education helps everyone thrive, aligning with the SDGs for a brighter future for all.



Conclusion

Conclusion and call to action

Ten people, ten countries, and one finding that none of them disputes: whether a young person gets a good education depends on far more than the classroom. Light, water, health, family income, gender and the kind of help that crosses borders all decide who stays in school and what they can learn there. Irene puts it simply: “these are not individual failures, but structural conditions”. Jean calls it a chain: “it is a chain, we can go on and on”.
The 2030 deadline for SDG 4 is less than four years away. Reading about it is not enough. Here is what you can do.

Right away

• **Ask one question.** Next time you meet a classmate who studied elsewhere, ask what was around their school: electricity, water, health care, fees. Listen first.
• **Share one interview.** Pass the interview that surprised you most to someone who has not read it, and tell them why.

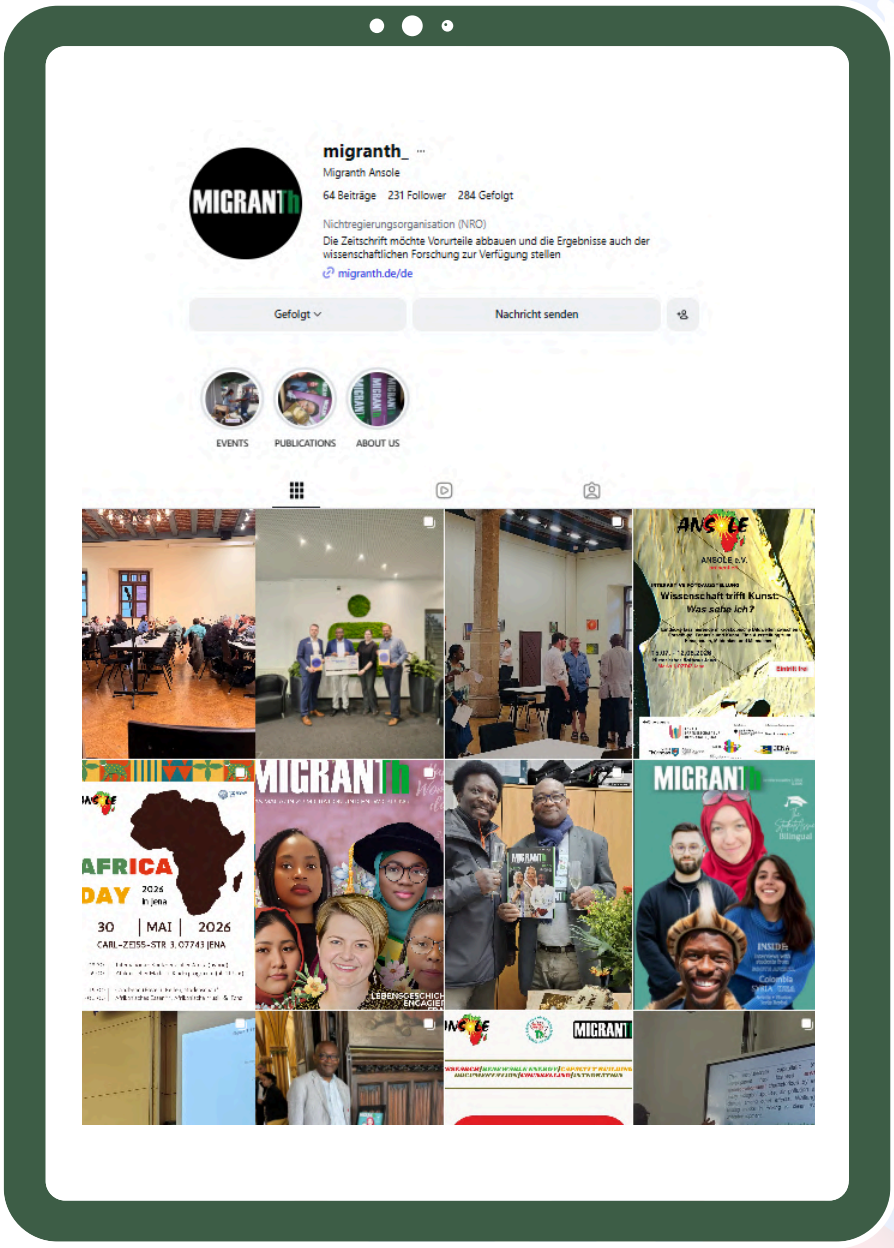
This semester

• **Look for the links in your own subject.** Whatever you study, find one place where it meets SDG 4 and the goals around it, and write it down.
• **Challenge the single story.** When someone talks about “education in Africa” or “in the Global South” as if it were one thing, point to what you read here: ten people, ten different systems.

Beyond the semester

• **Stay in touch with MIGRANTh.** Earlier issues are free to download at migranth.de. Questions, ideas and offers to help are welcome at info@migranth.de or on Instagram (_migranth). If you want to take part in future workshops, train as a multiplier or help organise one, contact ANSOLE e.V. in Jena. Donations are welcome; the account is in the imprint.
• **Ask your university and your city.** Where are international students’ experiences used in teaching, and where are they not?

The multipliers have shared what they know. What happens next is up to the people who read it.



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