

LEARNING CURVE **PERSPECTIVE**

The road to dignity

**DZULKIFLI
ABDUL RAZAK**

THE Blueprint for Higher Education will be made public by Tuesday. It covers the next 10 years from 2015 to 2025, almost the same time frame as that of the Education Blueprint (2013-2025). Read together, both plans give a complete picture of the education landscape in the country beyond 2015.

The unveiling of the Blueprint for Higher Education is therefore much awaited, in particular within the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda on Education under the mandate of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) which dwells on a number of key issues.

One long-standing issue is that of education inequalities which are still prevalent globally. This problem is more pressing because it has been noted that education inequalities (in particular with respect to

quality) can lead to other inequalities, both social and economic. The disparities are getting wider over the years throughout the world and the question of access and equity in education are no different.

These realities, noted UNESCO, require a "more appropriate model of human development, one characterised by increased focus on social participation and equity and one that considers carefully the great richness and diversity of the Asia Pacific region."

In the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda on Education, this also means that the blueprint should be visionary enough to consider the "more appropriate model" rather than the run-of-the-mill types.

The model should embrace the emerging Asean Community (which Malaysia is currently the chair) expected by the end of the year. It is an opportunity that the country is uniquely emplaced similar to the role of Bologna in the European Community some 15 years ago.

This is related to the key issue of the way education systems adapt to the multitude of potential challenges in the context of rapid and tumultuous socio-economic changes and trends, and various crises, be they financial, ecological or — more recently — widespread violence and aggression, which include those that are induced through so-called "education" in the form of suicides, especially evident in the "successful" East Asian nations of South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, to name a few.

In other words, as UNESCO noted, we need to come up with educational responses to address the current crises while averting potential ones. Otherwise, it could be construed as a failure of the current system.

Succinctly, continuing vast disparities between and within countries point to long-standing gaps that make life in the world unsustainable at all levels. It is worsening given the millions from war-torn regions being displaced out-of-school by the day. By several estimates, it will take generations

to close the gap, not counting those in the remote communities of the South Pacific (including Vanuatu that was badly hit by a cyclone recently) for example.

It is little wonder that UNESCO noted that "despite considerable progress to improve youth and adult literacy, the (Asia Pacific) region still contains the largest number of illiterate adults of any region in the world". The other key issue is therefore about building on past successes to narrow the gaps by (re)humanising education in line with the ethos of Education for Sustainable Development and the other related agenda of Education for All, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Post-2015 Development Agenda on Education should not only further strengthen efforts in accomplishing the global agenda, but also instil the appropriate balance in mitigating the excesses that threaten the survival of the planet and humanity as a whole. In summary, we need to ask, if not redefine, what it means to be "successful" in the post-2015 era of

sustainability.

In the final analysis, it is about taking the road to dignity as a human species. While the blueprint sets out its targets until the year 2025, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's recent report, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, pitched it until five years later with the subtext, *Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*. This year, the international community is slated to sign two landmark agreements to help guide many dimensions of global cooperation for a generation.

The first is the confirmation by world leaders on a set of "sustainable development goals" to succeed the MDGs with new aims to establish quantitative targets to end poverty, achieve shared prosperity and protect the planet by 2030.

The second agreement concerns a new long-term global climate accord. Hopefully the new shifts can collectively put back the soul and dignify the human person.

education@nst.com.my

The writer is honorary professor at the University of Nottingham and Chair of Leadership at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia