

LEARNING CURVE **PERSPECTIVE**

## New hopes for education


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**T**HE three-day World Education Forum (WEF) 2015 started on May 19 with a bang.

Incheon, South Korea's city of the future, played host to some 111 ministers of education from all over the world and more than 300 non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil societies concerned with education issues as well as experts, high ranking officials from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and other co-sponsoring UN agencies and The World Bank.

About 1,500 participants converged on the city to decide on the next journey for education under the theme Transforming Lives Through Education, or Education 2030, demarking education development goals for the next 15 years. This was the third in the series after Dakar, Senegal in 2000 and Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. The forum was said to be the largest education-related global conference.

Unlike the two preceding meetings of the Education for All (EFA) initiative aimed at providing basic quality education, the Incheon meeting took stock of achievements in the last 15 years, and set new targets and aims come 2030. Only one-third of member countries have fulfilled all the EFA goals, translating into existing gaps that need to be narrowed.

This gap becomes even more apparent taking into account Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Two: Achieve universal primary education.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2014 admitted that education goals set in 2000 will not be achieved by this year. This must be taken into account when devising new WEF goals if education is to "transform lives" by 2030.

What was clear, however, was that WEF 2015 seemed to take on a "universal profile" rather than project the Global South like previously.

This was evident from the active participation of the civil societies in WEF 2015.

They came from all over the globe with their record of success and invaluable contributions. This

also means that moving forward, the new education agenda must recognise the relevance of NGOs and civil societies as partners in education throughout the ecosystems.

More interestingly, higher education was better recognised in the 2015 WEF sessions. The discussions were wide-ranging and comprehensive in shaping the future global education agenda.

In essence, it is intended to affirm the rights to education with respect to access, inclusion, equity, gender equality, quality and lifelong learning; offers strong recommendations on financing education (with allocations and "benchmark" towards "guaranteeing" quality education for all); and promotes vocational training for youth and adults, and post-tertiary education, as well as education in emergency situations, including disease-affected and war-torn areas, and disaster-inflicted countries.

In such instances, it is not just inclusive but responsive and resilient too.

While the countries are implementing the agenda with support from partners, UNESCO is expect-

ed to continue its role to lead global coordination and monitoring through the Global Education Monitoring Report.

The issue of indicators and education governance as well as quality of educational leadership in the context of developed and developing countries remain a concern. This raises the question of common global goals and indicators to be set.

The developing countries represented by the NGOs felt that a nation should strive to achieve the maximum rather than aspire to minimal targets for all to meet.

The goals and indicators set are expected to be integrated into the UN Sustainability Development Goals (SDG) to be adopted this September by world leaders, giving credence to the critical role of education, including higher education, across many sectors unlike previously in the MDGs.

It will, at once, form the single agenda for education for the next 15 years as the new vision in line with SDG number four: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In the midst in all this excite-

ment and challenges, the sobering reality remains today — 121 million children and adolescents are still out of school, with major inequalities in terms of access and quality. At least 781 million adults are denied the right to literacy.

To put this right, the post-2015 education agenda must be universal, holistic and contextualised within a lifelong learning perspective of a more just and peaceful world in ensuring the survival of humanity and the Earth.

Malaysia, with its new transformation initiatives ending five years before Education 2030, has a chance to lead and showcase itself at the next WEF, hopefully to be hosted in Kuala Lumpur.

But for this to happen, it takes hard work as demonstrated by the Korean counterparts in overcoming the real threat of small-mindedness.

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