



OUR COMMON FUTURE IN EDUCATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POST-2015 WORLD AGENDA FOR EDUCATION

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Abstract:

The year 2015 became acquired focus at the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, when the World set to achieve the six ambitious Education for All targets within fifteen years. Among the targets was the promise that by 2015, “*All children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality*” (Unesco ,2000). 2015 marked the deadline for the achievement of both Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s). As the close of the plan period came to an end the World Education Forum was held in Incheon, Republic of South Korea between 18th and 21st May 2015. This was aimed at reviewing the progress made following the World Education Forum of Dakar in 2000. The participants of the forum made an assessment of the finished and the unfinished business of the EFA, and set the post-2015 Education agenda which was to guide the education agenda up to the year 2030. This came to be referred to as the Post-2015 World Education Agenda. The forum that was built on the legacy of Jomtien (Thailand) 1990 and the Dakar (Senegal) 2000 asserted that education is a human right and a public good. It charted the new course that is tailored to times of rapid change and committed to ensuring that all children, young people and adults are empowered with knowledge and skills they need to live in dignity and contribute to their societies as responsible global citizens. The outcome of the forum was the adoption of the Incheon Declaration, “*Education 2030: Towards an inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*”. The participants of the forum, member states and the international community demonstrated their commitment to a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and inspirational, leaving no one behind (World Education Forum, 2015).

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1. Progress and gaps in Education prior 2015

Since the adoption of the Education for All goals at the Dakar in 2000, considerable progress was witnessed. More children, including girls, were brought back to school and the number of non-literate adults reduced. It was revealed that from 2000-2015 more than 50 million additional children enrolled in primary school. It was also reported that global primary completion rate was about 90 percent and only 70 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even though these progresses were termed impressive, the Education for All and the education millennium related goals failed miserably in terms of offering effective, equitable and meaningful education. With such an impressive achievement at the time of the review period, 2015, there were still about 57 million children of primary school age, including 31 million girls who were not in school due to financial, social or physical challenges. In addition, it was also revealed that wide disparities among regions and within countries remained to be addressed. (World Education Forum, 2015). Inequality within countries and among specific groups remained a problem. Providing good-quality education to those who are marginalized and vulnerable was identified as a significant gap that the next education agenda needed to address.

The education sector also remained underfunded; this resulted from the lack of political will to invest in education. Inadequate financing and lack of government commitment were cited to be key obstacles to making adequate progress in achieving the global education goals. Gender equality was not actualized during the prior-2015 period with many countries failing to provide equal access to education for girls. For example, girls accounted for 53 percent of the 61 million children of primary school age who were in school in the period 2010 and in 2013, they accounted for 49 percent.

2. Post 2015 World Education Agenda

The World Education Forum in Incheon, South Korea, 2015 endorsed the post 2015 World Education Agenda noting that there was still a long road to travel in fulfilling the commitments made in the EFA goals and the Millennium education related goals, despite the progress made in education. The forum came up with an expanded vision of education and needed to address the outstanding issues and respond to a changing global context characterized by increasing connectivity, climate change, knowledge based societies and shifting demographic dynamics and inequalities. Accordingly the overreaching goal for education focused on expanded access and quality, with a strong focus on equity being proposed “*Equitable, Quality education and lifelong learning for All*”

The World education forum provided a unique opportunity for global debate. Several issues were discussed and recommendations made on how to achieve education vision 2030. This included the following:

A. Improving quality of education

While many countries were termed to have made impressive gains in access to education since Dakar convection, improvement in quality did not seem keep pace. A discernable shift in emphasis towards quality and learning now became central to the post-2015 global framework. There was a widespread consensus that quality should be a core priority in the post 2015 education framework. The quality of education should be holistic, comprehensive, content-specific and intra-sectoral. Despite being highlighted in the EFA Goal 6, quality has been a somewhat elusive goal in education. There is now a growing understanding of the links between what people learn and economic growth. Good quality education and learning is at the centre of the post-2015 education agenda. Good quality education is defined as equipping people with skills, knowledge and attitudes to: obtain decent work, live together as active citizens nationally and globally, understand and prepare for a world in which environmental degradation and climate change present a threat to sustainable living and livelihoods and understand their rights. Given the dramatic shifts in the labour market and influence in technologies, the current education framework has emphasized the need to develop higher-order skills, including digital skills. Even though there seems to be good will from all spheres on improving quality of education, there are enormous challenges to good quality education. The post-2015 education framework may not achieve quality education goal as indicated. There are a number of reasons for this, first the education process itself is an obstacle to quality education.

There is narrow focus on assessment leading to a narrow curriculum, shortage of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, absence of linkages to employment and gender based violence in schools. There is also lack of good governance, a factor closely related to lack of political will to invest in education and to develop and implement curriculum and policy reforms. Poor learning conditions such as shortage of facilities, lack of teaching and learning materials may also hinder quality of education. This is may endanger the achievement of the new global education vision if not properly planned and implemented.

B. Access to education at all levels

Another key priority in the post 2015 world education agenda is access to education. The post-2015 education agenda has good promises to offer access to more than primary education. The narrow focus on universal primary education that was the overall goal of EFA has now shifted in the current global education framework, where basic education is now incorporating lower–secondary education. The education access target should, at minimum, extend to eight or nine years of basic education, as is already the case in many countries. The post 2015 agenda also calls for the goals for access to encompass secondary education and lifelong learning opportunities. The current overall goal is a move from the focusing efforts in the primary education towards a system of eight-nine years of basic education. The post-2015 education agenda is extending the right to access education to secondary and post-secondary

education. The biggest challenge to meet the post-2015 education agenda is financing, many countries cannot afford to meet such on their own.

Even though donor partners had agreed to assist poor countries to achieve EFA and education millennium development goals, many did not honor their promises. The Incheon Declaration urged developed countries to make concrete efforts to reach the target of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) for official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries. There is no guarantee that developed countries of the world will honour the request to meet the education vision 2030. The post 2015 education agenda may therefore suffer same fate as was the case with the EFA. While several contributions highlight the importance of upper-secondary and tertiary education, there is some variation in understanding across regions and countries. For those countries with nearly universal basic education, upper-secondary and tertiary education become top priorities. Notwithstanding the differences in emphasis, there is shared consensus concerning the value of access to higher education levels of education for advancing equality and national development. Post-basic and post-secondary education access is important in confronting inequalities, since access to such levels is often restricted to wealthy and privileged. Moreover, creating the conditions for growth and innovation requires countries to invest in upper-secondary and tertiary education. The challenge for the post-2015 agenda is to reach a balance between meeting the right to basic education and the need to invest in higher levels of education for quality and for sustainable and inclusive growth. While post-2015 education agenda focuses on equitable access and quality, there is need to redress the neglect of adult literacy and vocational education, as this is identified as crucial to the skills-for-work agenda.

C. Human rights approach to education

One of the strongest principles of the post-2015 education agenda is the right based approach to education. The agenda suggests that all aspects of education should be considered from a rights perspective, including the learning environment. It also suggests that over-coming structural barriers to accessing good-quality education is vital for realizing education rights for all. The Dakar framework neglected the right to education of marginalized and vulnerable groups and also failed to address issues of inequality in education that compromise this right. The post-2015 education agenda has therefore prioritized the right to education. Equity is arguably the strongest framing principle of a post- 2015 rights-based agenda, and calls attention to the need to redress historical and structural inequalities in order to provide access to good-quality education at all levels.

The post-2015 education agenda is therefore based on the principle of universality, applicable to all countries and underpinned by a strong commitment to education as a public good. Equal access to good-quality education will require to address wide-range and persistent inequalities in society and should include a stronger focus on how different forms of inequality intersect to produce unequal outcomes for marginalized and vulnerable groups. The biggest challenge of the post-2015 education will be on how to address inequality in education. Even though there is pressure for all

countries to overcome inequality in education, many countries may not have the specific plans and the required legal framework.

D. Lifelong learning

The post-2015 education agenda calls for a holistic learning framework that extends beyond literacy and numeracy. It emphasizes that learning should be at the heart of future goals, supported by clearly defined measures of learning achievement that incorporate equity and inclusion. The major ingredients of lifelong learning are inclusion of critical thinking, problem solving, general knowledge and life skills. Technological development, the spectacular growth in internet connectivity and mobile penetration, and the expansion of the cyber world is radically transforming the methods, content and spaces of learning. The internet has transformed how people access information and knowledge, how they interact, and how they engage in social, civil and economic activities. The increased availability of, and access to, diverse sources of knowledge are expanding opportunities for learning, which may be less structured and more innovative. This transformation of the educational landscape has led to a growing recognition of the importance and relevance of learning taking place outside formal institutions. The post-2015 education agenda calls for a more fluid approach to learning. Systems of education in many countries encourage rote-memorization of massive information and facts by way of drilling at the expense of understanding. Reforms in the education sector are now inevitable in all countries so as to match the education systems with the growing digital technology. The non-formal and informal learning spaces must better interact with and complement formal education and training institutions from early childhood throughout life. It is in this spirit that the current education framework is framed in terms of lifelong learning for all.

The Incheon declaration highlighted the importance of the lifelong learning opportunities. The post 2015 education emphasizes the key elements for developing sustainable policies that include high quality initial and lifelong learning, making learning everybody's business; effective links between learning and work; enabling workers to adapt learning to their lives ; improving transparency; guiding and helping employers to make better use of workers skills. Though there seems to be a lot of expectations from all countries to meet this commitment, the post 2015 education agenda has not given clear targets and mechanisms on how this will be achieved in the next 15 years given the variations in education systems. There is therefore need to harmonize global education framework where each goal would influence the achievement of others. The biggest failure of the EFA and the education related MDG's was the lack of interactions between the various goals.

E. Inclusion

Inclusion of all particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups is a top priority for the post-2015 education agenda. The inclusion agenda addresses core structural problems responsible for the exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups including those living in remote and rural contexts, ethnic groups, indigenous peoples and other

minorities, persons with disabilities and special needs, refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, children at risk of, or removed from , hazardous work or armed forces, and those living with HIV and those without parental care. Even though this seems to be a noble idea, the post 2015 world education agenda does not propose proper approach on how to remove obstacles to inclusion and learning for all. The education framework should adopt the Intervida Foundation proposals for inclusiveness, i.e. a policy on inclusive education prohibiting all kinds of discrimination, whether based on gender, cultural origin, social status, religious beliefs and any other factor. The following measures will improve inclusion;

- Training programmes for teachers that explore the implications of gender, cultural or other kinds of discrimination
- Programmes for children with special educational needs and special circumstances (learning and physical disabilities, working children).
- A working and functional student government that addresses students' school and community concerns.

Though the importance of equitable access to good quality education for children with disabilities is emphasized, there are no clear goals and targets. This may result to effective exclusion of children with disabilities from schools and education mainstreaming in general.

3. Fulfilling the post-2015 education agenda

Several measures need to be addressed to make post 2015 education agenda a reality, if this is not done this may suffer the same fate as the EFA and the education related MDG'S.

A. Assuring adequate financing

The greatest challenge towards achieving the education ambitions for the post-2015 education agenda is financing. The lack of political will on the part of national governments and international agencies to provide adequate financing is regarded as a crucial factor that could hinder implementation. The education agenda should provide innovative financing strategies to enable the achievement of the education vision.

B. Strengthening national education systems

This should be a top priority for the post 2015 education agenda. This should include sufficient national funding for education, improved education human resource management and leadership, and capacity development for all those involved in education, including teachers and parents. Without a strong education system, many existing structural deficiencies and inequalities will persist.

C. Targeted intervention measures to support marginalized and vulnerable groups

Such additional learning support in basic education for children from the lowest socio-economic status is essential in all countries.

D. Effective and well-regulated public-private partnerships

To achieve the goals of post 2015 education agenda public-private partnerships are needed to ensure a common and united vision of education for the common good. Such partnerships should identify points of convergence focused on strengthening national education systems.

E. Effective participation in education policy formulation

Effective policies should be central issues in achieving the post 2015 education agenda. Such policies can only be implementable through extensive participation of all stakeholders; this is the sure way to ensure ownership of the goals and consequently their realization.

F. Strengthening the capacities of national monitoring and evaluation systems

This is vital to making progress on any agreed education goals. A core part of national monitoring and evaluation should be the development of an evidence base to inform policy development, identifying what works and what does not, and under what conditions. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems will provide reliable and valid information strengthening accountability and system capacities for change.

4. Conclusion

In concluding remarks, it is worth to note that there is a strong commitment from all countries of the world to achieve the post 2015 education goals. This commitment should be accompanied by strong political will to invest in education and formulate effective policies that recognize the unfinished EFA business as well as emerging regional and global challenges. The post 2015 education agenda needs to be much more comprehensive and serious than previous efforts. First, the right to education should be the explicit foundation. It should be easy to accomplish as the rights as enshrined in United Nations agreements, conventions and treaties. Secondly, quality should be considered as part of access. Access to quality early childhood, primary and secondary education must be a fundamental goal. Quality must be viewed in terms of providing sufficient resources, adequate inputs, and professional processes, attaining satisfactory immediate and resulting positive longer-term outcomes for employment, citizenship and personal development. This includes hiring quality, well-educated and well-trained teachers. Quality must also be seen as equity in the sense that disadvantaged children should have access to education similar to that given to advantaged children. Abroad approach to learning is essential; much attention in the post 2015 education agenda is focused on a narrow view of learning as testing in reading and mathematics. This is a grave mistake; quality is much broader than immediate learning outcomes. Testing generally will neglect other dimensions of schooling. Selecting one or two outcomes, like reading, to emphasize and measure distorts education process.

Finally, public-private partnerships are not likely to improve education. As part of the privatization agenda and in recognition of major educational resources and results, public-private partnerships have been seen as a major source of system

improvement. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be the case. Corporate philanthropy in education may only provide few resources. It is also uncoordinated, misdirected, and self-interested thus likely to contribute very little to improving public policy and education. Governments should therefore find innovative ways of financing education to meet the set 2030 targets. Lastly, the post 2015 education agenda should focus on reducing the harsh social and economic inequalities between and within countries that underlie most educational problems.

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