

European InfoNet Adult Education

Uwe Gartenschlaeger: Quality and Equality in World Education¹

Teachers' qualifications need upgrading, and privatisation of education is a threat, because it promotes inequality. That was two of the main concerns at the World Education Forum in Korea in May. The Forum adopted the Incheon Declaration that stresses a broad outview on education, including adult education and non-formal education.

A transformative vision for education over the next 15 years was adopted at the World Education Forum, which concluded on 21 May 2015 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The so-called Incheon Declaration was welcomed by the global community, including government ministers from more than 100 countries, non-governmental organisations and youth groups. It encourages countries to provide inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Development Goals for 2030

The Incheon Declaration underpins the education targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will be ratified at the United Nations in September, and that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), ratified in 2000. In the Declaration, representatives agreed on suggesting "Equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030" as the global goal.

This reaffirms the commitment made in the framework of the Education for All (EFA)-process for a holistic understanding of education. Discrimination because of age, sex, social status or ethnic group should be eliminated. Based on an understanding of education as a human right, the declaration stresses the

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need for an integrated approach, which provides equal opportunities for all and ensures high quality education.

The Declaration marks a success for the advocacy efforts of the global adult education community to ensure that the global agenda won't be limited to formal education with primary, secondary, vocational and higher education sectors only.

However, what still remains open is how this broad commitment will be put into operation. A lot depends on the upcoming debates in New York on the SDGs in September, where the goal will finally be equipped with a set of targets that will shape the agenda for the next 15 years. Another important process deals with the formulation of measurable indicators, which is scheduled for the first months of the coming year.

Only if the adult education community will be able to suggest and get robust indicators approved for the sub-sector will we have the chance to be recognised. At least this is the lesson learnt from the Education for All process, where youth and adult education was neglected, mostly due to the lack of quantitative indicators.

Lack of European interest

Looking through a European lens, it was disappointing to witness the low level of most of the government delegations. Whereas Asian and African countries were mostly represented by ministers or vice-ministers, most European countries sent only civil servants, a large part of them from the institutions responsible for development cooperation.

There is some evidence to fear that the new global education agenda will again be mainly for the "global South", with a lot of influence being lost in Europe, especially in competition with respective European frameworks or national agendas.

Room for improvement

The two days before the WEF were dedicated to the NGO Forum, where civil society representatives shaped their view on the education agenda. One focus was the call for an inclusive and holistic concept of education, which is based on human rights and the concept of lifelong learning, a demand, which was shared by the Incheon Declaration.

Delegates emphasised that quality education is possible only with well-paid and qualified teachers and trainers in all segments of the system, who have possibilities for constant training and upgrading. Case studies and presentations

showed that in many regions of the world and especially in non-formal education a lot remains to be improved.

Another major concern was the growing tendency towards privatisation in education, which already affects all sub-sectors and promotes growing inequality. Governments in many parts of the world use this trend to reduce spending for education, despite the negative consequences, especially for marginalised groups.

The Korean experience

The event was accompanied by several impressive presentations by the Korean hosts, who highlighted the investments in education during the last 60 years as one of the main success factors for the development of their country.

The Korean vision for the future focuses very much on global citizenship education and creativity as objectives for the education system. Whereas this seems to be a reaction to what is perceived as crucial for the competitiveness of the country, the idea of “happiness education” as a subject might also be a reaction to the costs of the Korean way: e.g., each day, three students commit suicide due to an atmosphere of immense pressure to be successful.

