Education for all: Exploring the principle and process of inclusive education

Stephen Roche¹

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More than seventy years have passed since the twenty initial signatories to UNESCO's Constitution proclaimed their belief in "full and equal opportunities for education for all" (UNESCO 1945, p. 2). This principle was reaffirmed three years later in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 26), which states unambiguously that "Everyone has the right to education" (UN 1948). There is no denying the advances which have been made since the Second World War in terms of access to education. To take just one key indicator – adult literacy – we can observe a dramatic progression from the 1950s, when UNESCO estimated that just a slight majority (55%) of the world's population could be termed "literate" (UNESCO 1957), to the present day, when that same designation is applied to 86 per cent of humanity (UNESCO 2015). However, not even the greatest optimist would argue that we are anywhere close to realising the vision set out in 1945. Despite repeated initiatives and targets (notably at Jomtien in 1990 and Dakar in 2000, and with the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals), Education for All remains elusive. Is it simply that a vision of equal opportunity is no less utopian than one of wealth equally divided; that this pie we hope to slice more equitably is really just pie in the sky? The problem appears to lie with the fact that inequality – in education, as in other areas of human life – tends to be systemic rather than specific. Thus, "making inclusive education a reality requires transforming education systems in all their elements and processes across formal and non-formal education" (UNESCO 2013). And "system change" is a tricky business.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that education and economic development go hand in hand. Not only is lack of education generally recognised as a cause of poverty, it has come to be recognised as one of three core "dimensions of poverty",

✉ Stephen Roche
s.roche@unesco.org

¹ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany

alongside living standard and health (World Bank 2016). Despite strong economic growth throughout most of the so-called “developing world”, poverty persists, and at levels which are causing many observers to doubt the meaning of “development”. It thus becomes ever more important to understand the relationship between equity and development. Equity is not merely equivalent to a process of inclusion; of ensuring equal access to a specific “good”, such as healthcare, education or income. It is also an objective ideal whereby achievements depend on personal effort, choice and initiative rather than on predetermined characteristics such as race, gender and socioeconomic background. As such, equity is a moral principle predicated on the belief that all people should enjoy equal access to chances in life.

While evidence suggests that education builds healthier, richer, more equitable societies, research on this has focused predominantly on primary and secondary schooling. The authors of our first paper – *Chavanne Peercy* and *Nanette Svenson* – examine “The role of higher education in equitable human development”. They begin with an extensive review of existing research, then report on their own study which explored connections between tertiary education and development using equity as a reflection of human development. They carried out a cross-national statistical analysis designed to examine the relationship between tertiary enrolment levels and a composite equity variable. Their results indicate a strong association between higher levels of access to post-secondary education and higher levels of social equity.

Our next article considers educational development. Composed of more than 7,000 islands, and with a population exceeding 100 million, the Philippines is one of the most marine-dependent countries in the world. It is therefore a country for which sustainable development is not merely desirable but imperative. Not only is this archipelago particularly vulnerable to the risks associated with global warming, such as unpredictable weather and rising sea levels, but tens of millions of Filipinos depend directly on marine fisheries for their livelihoods and food security. Education has a crucial role to play in sustaining these vulnerable resources. Educational development in the Philippines is complicated by the legacy of three centuries of colonialism: huge income inequality and a widely dispersed, multilingual and multi-ethnic population. However, that should not imply a lack of progress. For example, according to the 2015 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, the Philippines reached the target of raising the adult literacy rate by 50 per cent compared to the 2000 level (UNESCO 2015).

Adult education is the focus of the article entitled “Sustainable development of Philippine coastal resources: Subsidiarity in ethnoecology through inclusive participatory education”. It applies the principles of ethnoecology (the study of the relationship between society and natural resources) to adult education for sustainable development. Specifically, the authors – *Joey Ayala*, *Pauline Bautista*, *Marivic Pajaro*, *Mark Raquino* and *Paul Watts* – describe and evaluate a pilot adult education initiative undertaken to help fisherfolk better manage marine resources. While earlier adult education initiatives aimed at this group had limited success, in part due to a lack of cultural context, this project applied a Filipino form of *social artistry* known as *Siningbayan* [art whose canvas is society] to identify potential input strategies. Thus, culture was treated not only as a historical resource, but also

as a potential tool for change. The authors place particular emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity, meaning in essence a high sensitivity to local culture and knowledge, in considering how to transfer information to fishing communities and expand their roles in leadership, organisational and professional development.

It was no accident that the United Nations, when drafting the Sustainable Development Goals, placed poverty eradication front and centre as Goal 1. Yet, efforts to lift people out of poverty often appear antagonistic to environmental protection. This has certainly been the case in China, where rapid economic growth and astonishing success in poverty reduction pursued with the rationale of “grow first, clean up later” has resulted in immense environmental destruction (Economist 2013). There are both moral and practical cases for making poverty eradication a central pillar of sustainable development. Sudhir Anand and Amartya Sen expressed the moral argument succinctly: “Sustaining deprivation cannot be our goal” (Anand and Sen 2000, p. 2030). The practical argument is more subtle but equally compelling: poverty is one of the main drivers of instability and conflict. In the words of the Brundtland Report, the seminal document on sustainable development, “A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises” (WCED 1987, p. 34).

When South Africa finally shook off the shackles of apartheid, much hope was invested in the potential of adult education to reduce poverty and redress the systemic exclusion of Black and “coloured” citizens from education, training and economic opportunity. The legislative framework for this drive was provided by the Adult Education and Training (AET) Act 25 of 2010. Yet, despite impressive enrolment figures in a variety of non-formal education and training (NFET) programmes, poverty in South Africa is still starkly determined by skin colour (Leibbrandt et al. 2010). In a companion study to their paper in this journal last year (Mayombe and Lombard 2015), *Celestin Mayombe* and *Antoinette Lombard* examine the efficacy of material and human resources in non-formal education and training centres. Their earlier paper explored in general terms the importance of “enabling environments”, namely the aspects of NFET centres that are conducive to the acquisition of skills and their application in employment. This paper, entitled “The importance of material resources and qualified trainers in adult non-formal education and training centres in South Africa”, now focuses on three specific elements of that enabling: (1) how material resources enable or disable graduates’ practical skills acquisition; (2) how trainers’ qualifications enable or disable graduates’ practical skills acquisition; and (3) how material and human resources enable or disable graduates’ employment.

Their results show that material and human resource challenges in most public and some private centres have led to gaps in skills training. Programmes focus too strongly on academic credits and certificates and not enough on employment as an end goal. The authors argue that the existence of suitable training materials and qualified trainers with practical experience and specific technical skills constitutes favourable conditions (“enabling environments”) for graduate employment. Without improvement in material and human resources, adult trainees will continue to experience difficulties entering the labour market, and the cycle of poverty and exclusion is likely to remain unbroken.

In the last two decades, several countries in East and Southeast Asia have taken a global lead in the provision of lifelong learning opportunities to all of their citizens. While policies and programmes take diverse forms – from Japan’s *kominkan* [community learning centres] to the Republic of Korea’s Lifelong Education Act (first enacted in 1999); from China’s Learning Cities to Singapore’s Community Development Councils – they have in common a close identification with the idea of lifelong learning and a profound commitment to the goal of building a learning society. We may speculate as to the “why” of this – some suggest it is closely linked to Confucian ethics – but not to the “what” (Yang and Yorozu 2015). All of the four countries mentioned above boast high levels of participation and achievement in education – all the more astonishing considering this was a region marked by extreme poverty just a half-century ago (UIS 2016). Viet Nam is a fairly recent entrant to this “club”. Long restrained by the legacy of a terrible war and subsequent isolation, Viet Nam is now keen to learn from its regional neighbours and follow them in developing knowledge economies.

In his article entitled “Towards a lifelong learning society through reading promotion: Opportunities and challenges for libraries and community learning centres in Viet Nam”, author *Zakir Hossain* reviews governmental and non-governmental initiatives on reading promotion in pursuit of the Vietnamese government’s stated goal of becoming a lifelong learning society by 2020. He describes the recent explosive proliferation of community learning centres (CLCs) – from just 10 in 1999 to 11,000 in 2015 – and public libraries and reading rooms (estimated at 23,000 in 2008). These centres promote reading culture and provide programmes on literacy, post-literacy and life skills such as income generation, healthcare and family planning. In some cases, they also offer agricultural training and cultural and sporting activities. In addition, the author details the more recent involvement of NGOs and private enterprise in the provision of learning opportunities. He concludes his paper with detailed recommendations for further development under five main headings: marketing and outreach; improved use of ICTs by librarians; promotion of e-libraries and e-books; collaboration between schools, libraries and CLCs; and partnership building.

We conclude this issue with a short research note which takes a critical look at “The new language of instruction policy in Malawi: A house standing on a shaky foundation”. This paper by *Gregory Hankoni Kamwendo* examines a new policy which positions English as the medium of instruction from the start of primary education in a country where English is not the main language of household communication and many teachers struggle to use English as a medium of instruction. As absurd as it may sound to force children to learn and teachers to teach in a language neither of them master, this is the reality in many African primary and most secondary schools. This process is driven to a considerable degree by international donors motivated either by the belief that the plurality of languages used in most African countries necessitates the use of a (colonial) *lingua franca*, or by a desire to promote their own language in their former colonies. It has been described as an “intellectual recolonization of Africa” by Birgit Brock-Utne (2000, p. 289) in her book *Whose Education for All?* It not only flies in the face of empirical evidence that mother tongue is the most effective medium of instruction,

especially in primary education, but raises the spectre of educational policies and practices which are inclusive but inequitable (UNESCO 2016).

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