Education and Empowerment:
A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ROADMAP FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN ASIA
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There is almost a universal consensus among experts, civil society organizations, governments and global institutions with respect to Education’s crucial role in fostering individual empowerment collective cohesion, and national as well as regional development. Also, throughout the long history of the emergence and development of social democrats and progressive movements, from labor unions, to civil society groups, and reform-minded intellectuals, Education has remained as a central advocacy. Education is a primary mechanism for empowering members and the broader citizenry, enabling organizational consolidation and coalition-building, fostering vibrant and informed debates around pressing issues in the society, and advancing socio-political consciousness against ignorance and political passivity. Despite the rapid changes in the fortunes and circumstances of progressive movements and workers groups, with many social democratic parties enmeshed in direct day-to-day governance issues, Education still continues to serve as a pillar of public advocacy and outreach -- inspiring new generations of leaders with cutting-edge ideas, guiding political mobilizations, and shaping a socially-conscious citizenry.

The 21st century -- marked by the advent of information technology, simultaneous political integration-fragmentation, and intense competition -- has further underlined the significance of achieving universal literacy, promoting functional education, and pushing for cutting-edge research and innovation to not only ensure social mobility and consciousness among citizens and individuals, but also facilitate sustainable national development and international cooperation. With the Asia-Pacific region emerging as a new center of global economic activity and social dynamism, the issue of Education is of paramount importance, especially vis-à-vis sustaining a strong momentum for growth, tackling poverty, fighting corruption, and harnessing civic engagement and democratic practices. Along health and income, education is one of the key pillars of human development and security – and a pivotal element of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) under the United Nations.

Nonetheless, despite the expressed consensus by almost all states, civic organizations, and international bodies on the importance of Education, there seems to be a wide gap between agreed upon set of principles and goals on fostering Education, on one hand, and
the realities of access to and quality of education (and the actual implementation of relevant programs and reforms), on the other. Across different continents, there are major gaps in the quality and accessibility of education – as well as the degree of importance attached to it, as reflected in the percentage of the GDP spent on education and research and development (R&D) by individual states.

Within the Asia-Pacific region itself, there is a wide spectrum of educational indicators, challenges, pedagogical practices, and overall levels of development – suggesting a complex and less-than-uniform macro-educational landscape. Thus, it is very important to identify common and specific challenges in the realm of education, analyze obstacles to achieving universal and functional literacy, and understand the factors that contribute to a vibrant educational atmosphere within individual states and regions.

Education and Social Democracy

Inequality is a major challenge today. About two-thirds of the world's poor reside in middle income countries. And education has historically proven to be a pivotal aspect of (overcoming) inequality. Historically, public education, which ensured universal access to quality education among the citizens, served as a linchpin of democratic transformation, social cohesion, and economic equity in Europe. And the social democratic forces, from Germany to Sweden, played a central role in preserving this egalitarian social order, allowing many ordinary, working class citizens to break through socio-economic barriers, pursuing fruitful careers as individuals as well as fully participating in the determination of the democratic order in their respective countries.

Across Europe, especially in places such as Sweden, employment and education came to dominate the political discourse ahead of the September Parliamentary Elections. Throughout Europe, amid the discourse of austerity, there has emerged a vibrant debate vis-à-vis the rollback of the welfare state in Europe, and the impact of neo-liberal economic reform on the education sector. In Sweden, the increasing privatization and segregation of the traditionally state-dominated public education sector has led to a dramatic decline in educational standards and competency among the younger generation. In Sweden, the rise of right-wing/liberal governments has been accompanied by (state-subsidized) private schools, which follow standardized curriculum - but are driven by profits.

Now more than 40% of Swedish students go to the private schools. Consequently, Sweden has suffered the biggest loss in OECD's education indicators. Segregation and money laundering of state subsidies of these institutions has also become a huge concern – issues that hardly existed prior to the privatization of education institutions by right-wing governments. No wonder, the social democrats’ age-old (and increasingly more assertive) advocacy of public education has gained unprecedented traction among the electorate, especially the youth, which played an important role in the strong performance of social democrats in the Swedish Parliamentary Elections in September:

For social democrats, education is viewed as a gateway to emancipation, empowerment, and participation in the labor market and cultural life. It is a gateway to a good life. It is a foundation of democracy. The future of democracy and education and educational opportunities are interrelated. Historically speaking, education is not something that can be taken for granted. Prior to the democratization of Europe, the lack of education was used by the establishment as an instrument for political control. No wonder, the 19th century progressive, labour movements were grounded on the principle of popular education. These democratic social movements, which eventually came to play a role in the democratization and direct governance of their respective countries, pushed for obligatory basic education as a vehicle for enhancing social cohesion and political empowerment of the citizenry. As modern history vividly demonstrates, even economic prosperity depends on education. This is why the creation of quality and accessible education has been a central element of social democratic principles:

Social democrats believe that education rests on a number of key principles. First of all, it should be holistic, not only about skill development, but also about emotional development and human psychology – it is about shaping people’s character in a manner that is individually empowering and socially desirable. Equal opportunity is also an essential element of education, where social origins are not a basis for the determination of educational success; individual citizens, from all walks of life and from across the socio-economic spectrum, should have an equal opportunity to pursue their educational objectives and fulfill their aspirations in this regard.

Education is also about the state's indubitable responsibility to monitor quality. It is about the development of concrete indicators and standards to ensure educational institutions are achieving and sustaining quality education for individual and collective success. Moreover, education is about inclusiveness, serving as a platform for social cohesion, integration of diverse individuals into the body politic and encouraging them to play a role in the determination of democratic life, and empowering disadvantaged communities and individuals to have sufficient access to quality education.

In practice, however, many of the principles of education are yet to be fully realized. People from privileged background have greater chance to good education than their poorer counterparts. There is a necessity for targeted promotion of the potentials of all citizens; all children deserve a good start in life, but this philosophy is not supported by everybody. Some contend that formal education is enough. So widening educational opportunities is still a challenge. But education is a civil and human right.
As Ibarra Gutierrez, member of the Philippine House of Representatives (Akbayan Party-List), states in the Quarterly, Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees every individual’s right to education. ‘In the Philippines, this right is further established in Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which provides that, “The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels,” he explains. “The educational system should not only develop individual capacities but also inculcate social consciousness that would encourage active participation in national development.”

Continuous and sustained state-led efforts at promoting educational opportunities for all citizens are central to promoting participation in the determination of political life in the society. It is incumbent upon the state to encourage people to make the most of their potentials. Every human being should have access to free and quality education. Educational exclusion is a form of injustice, undermining innovation and progress, which is essential to national development.

In the long run, investment in education is central to sustained economic growth. Education is expensive, but lack of it is even more costly to the economic trajectory of nations. Highly-skilled individuals are the backbone of a productive economy. Multiple studies show how poverty and economic competitiveness, on one hand, and lack of education, on the other, are correlated. Thus, investment in education is a cornerstone of social policy. The state should develop an integrated view of education, which appreciates the centrality of educational opportunities to a vibrant economy:

Germany, for instance, only spends up to 1% of its GDP on education, which is below the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) standards. Education is an issue that covers all aspects of governance and policy-making. The African proverb that “It takes a whole village to educate a child” is true. “Even with similar achievements, the chance to be recommended for grammar school is 4 times higher for children from higher social backgrounds than for children from working-class families,” explains Mirko Schadewald, SPD-Party Executive at the Division for Education and Research, in the Quarterly, underlying the continued challenges in ensuring socialized education in Germany. “Of 100 children whose parents have an academic background themselves, 77 manage to go on to university. Of 100 children from non-academic families, it is only 23.”

Room for Reforms

With respect to education, policy-making should not only be confined to the federal/national level, but it should also be coordinated with, applied to, and appreciative of realities on the municipal and local government levels. With respect to vocational training, for instance, the principle under consideration should be: Every individual should be given qualified skills to be able to find meaningful education and careers.

The constant assessment, revaluation, and amendments of education-related regulations is extremely important to maintaining a competitive, quality education sector, which, in turn, is central to economic buoyancy and sustainable development. Education -- similar to social justice and other public services -- should not be treated as a commodity, but instead as a public good, which is non-negotiable; it can’t be bought and sold. The state should guarantee access to this public good.

From a macro-political perspective, education policy should ensure that the educational system reflects the democratic values of the constitution. The school and university curriculums should reflect the constitutional and democratic values of the society, and not promote segregation, alienation, and antagonism among varying communities.

One of the main problems with market-driven educational systems is their mistaken, atomistic conception of education; according to the neo-liberal argument, if you are going to benefit from your education then you should pay for it yourself. But in reality, education has a public dimension. Moreover, the privatization of education has led to decline in quality. Per Europe’s experience, the privatization of education has led to the decline in both quality and democratic character of the overall educational system.
against the backdrop of sustained economic development in Asia, a new era of prosperity and upward social mobility has brought about greater civic consciousness with respect to rising inequality and the deterioration of public welfare throughout the region. As recent popular uprisings and massive protests across Asia demonstrate -- some in relation to electoral fraud and others in response to the rollback of state services -- there is a general yearning for new ideas and policies, which can bring about true democratic transformation in the region. Recent years have seen sustained mobilization by the civil society and youth groups, who have not only asked for more political freedom and democratization, but also, perhaps even more importantly, demanded the preservation of the state’s welfare responsibilities and the protection of basic public services such as education. More and more people, most especially the youth, have continuously lamented and resisted the growing privatization of public services, since education, among other services, is increasingly being treated as a market commodity -- not as a basic component of human rights and a fundamental responsibility of the state, as social democrats contend. Education, as a result, is seen through the prism of market logic, with the primary purpose of enhancing the productive capacities of individual citizens. Education is less seen as a tool of social empowerment and self-actualization for individual citizens, but instead increasingly treated as a tool for enhancing the efficiency of the labor markets.

Economic globalization, therefore, has brought about a simultaneous rise in democratic aspirations as well as a decline in public services such as education. In recent years, many have come to view, rather naively, cyberspace as the emerging instrument for upgrading and expanding educational initiatives. But this overlooks the commercial interests underpinning such platforms, and the inherent limitations of such platforms for ensuring optimal face-to-face interaction, which is essential to any quality education.

Many leading universities have introduced Massive Open Online education, thinking this will serve as a panacea to the plethora of educational challenges we face in the 21st century. But this has proven to be very limited in its impact and efficacy, with many leading advocates in the West increasingly admitting so. In short, the advent of information technology has largely failed to supplant traditional public education as a source of quality, accessible training as well as an avenue for critical, creative thinking.

The commodification of education represents a huge setback for the democratic aspirations of Asia, undermining the long-term trajectory of democratization in the region. And this is precisely where social democrats, who emphasize the centrality of public education to democratic politics and social equity, can play an important role.

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“In achieving relevant education, the government must realize that education must be used as a tool for national development,” Gutierrez argues in the Quarterly. “[Relevant reforms in education should] serve the needs of the country more than the global, capitalist markets, integrating courses and methods which are responsive to the needs of the Filipino culture and society.”

In our globalized world, education has gained greater salience, especially for social democrats, who view education as a foundation of a democratic movement aimed at the empowerment of the citizenry.

Conceptualizing reforms: The German Experience

There are elements of the German system, which could be useful to Asia. Federal Germany’s experience with integration of East Germany (after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) raises important lessons for Asia and other developing regions. “Combining different places and organizations” has been a cornerstone of Germany’s response. So Germany is not alien to the problems, which beset developing countries.

In many Asian schools, the professional schools should play a major role in vocational training program. There should be a strong state-employer partnership on regulating the quality and standards of training among apprentices. Vocational training should emphasize wide-ranging skills, including administrative skills. The training should be comprehensive in its development of competencies. It is difficult, however, to fully guarantee private schools will reflect democratic values. This is why public education is ideal, and the state should pro-actively monitor the operations and curriculum of private institutions. The state after all has compliance-enforcement mechanisms. It can withdraw allowances and accreditation if they don’t follow constitutional values.

While many private universities are as competent as public universities in providing needed skills for the success of individuals, as seen across Asia, education actually represents something larger: It is about transmitting social values, which enhance democratic politics and inter-cultural communication. Even some big business leaders are worried about the lack of management skills among many who have not participated in and received public education. People tend to underestimate human potentials for learning. That is why the state has a political responsibility to correct this.

The success of German educational system has attracted attention from other advanced industrialized countries such as Japan, which seek to incorporate lessons, especially in the realm of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), an initiative initially launched at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development held in September 2002 – and now becoming a global movement.
Germany’s gymnasiums were even more successful than their American and British counterparts in motivating students and encouraging them to translate their motivation into action through a “participatory process,” explains Toshimitsu Tabe, Professor at the Department of Education, Faculty of Integrated Arts and Social Sciences, Japan Women’s University, in the Quarterly. “Japanese education should be re-examined while learning from Germany and other countries, and Japan should actively incorporate elements of ESD in its educational systems.”

Continued Challenges

In Asia, it is hard to speak of a singular trend in the realm of education across the continent. As a vast region, composed of varying sub-regions, Asia is home to one of the world’s least developed countries, mostly in Central and South Asia, as well as the world’s leading economies, mostly in Northeast Asia. As a result, in terms of educational standards there is a huge divergence in terms of indicators and standards vis-a-vis primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China are among the world’s most competitive countries in terms of proficiency in math and science and basic education indicators. In contrast, many countries in South and West Asia are below the world average in basic education indicators such as literacy rates, participation rates in varying educational levels, and in terms of proficiency in math and science.

The Asian region also exhibits divergent models of education, with some countries such as Japan successfully combining equity with quality, while other countries have, at best, managed to focus on either equity in access or quality of training, without striking the optimal balance yet. Across many Asian countries, especially booming emerging markets in South and East Asia, the privatization of educational institutions has gone hand in hand with rising inequality in the economic realm.

Other regions, especially in South and West Asia are still struggling with ensuring gender equity and universal access in education, with low levels of literacy among minorities. As a result, international organizations such as UNESCO have stepped up their efforts to assist these countries to close the gender (and other forms of) gap, which have undermined the ability of many Asian countries to ensure quality, accessible education for the majority of the people.

Given the vast gulf between educational trends and indicators between leading Northeast Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, and Chinese Taipei), on one hand, and other regions of Asia, on the other, any policy intervention and educational advocacy in the context of Asia should be highly tuned to domestic realities on the ground.

“There is no a single Asia, but several Asias...The education landscape in this region is dynamic, but also diverse...the Asia-Pacific region has made rapid progress in recent decades, especially in terms of access,” explains Dr. Gwang-Jo Kim, Director of UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, in an exclusive interview with Socdem Asia. “I must say that progress in terms of quality of education is mixed in the region...”

Despite their tremendous success, Northeast Asian countries such as South Korea, however, continue to struggle with unique set of challenges in the realm of education. The excessive emphasis on rote memorization, which happens to be crucial to the performance of students ahead of entrance exams for higher education, has deprived many students of a more comprehensive, fulfilling mode of education, which should emphasize creativity, critical thinking, and civic responsibility. As a result, many students in places such as South Korea suffer from fatigue, stress, and depression.

In places such as Japan, disparities among different regions is a source of concern, forcing the Ministry of Education to engage in varying studies to identify the root causes of the existing divergence in educational performance (i.e., the Programme for International Student Assessment) across Japan. While lack of financial support is a culprit for unequal educational performance across Japan’s regions, the response of the Ministry of Education, however, is to simply put more pressure on the educators to enhance the performance of the students. Another response from the government was to introduce the National Achievement Test to measure
Across the world, especially in Asia, the continued commodification of education has reduced educational attainment into a basic standard for market efficiency and value. Among university professors, the constant emphasis on publication and output, which happen to be crucial to faculty promotion, funding, and university rankings, may have also affected the propensity of teachers to more fully engage in the comprehensive education of the students. The increasing penetration of market logic and over-emphasis on standardized tests, primarily assessing math and science proficiency, has undermined the value of education as a source of personal empowerment, fulfilment, and “happiness”, which should be at the heart of any desirable and ideal educational system, especially from a social democratic point of view.11

In Southeast Asia,12 there are concerns over the impact of the impending Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community -- originally planned to take effect by 2015, but there are growing indications that ongoing negotiations might be extended for few years more -- which will reduce trade and non-trade barriers among Southeast Asian states, potentially leading to a more aggressive privatization of educational institutions across the region and rollback of state services such as education subsidies. Accelerated trade liberalization could pave the way for a more aggressive imposition of market logic upon educational institutions, further eroding the quality of and access to basic and higher education in the region. Many Southeast Asian countries consider education as a basic human right and have constitutional obligations to allocate optimal amounts budget for public education institutions and ensure universal access to education. In reality, however, many governments continue to ignore their obligations, increasingly rely on private education, and use labor market exigencies as basis for determining their educational policy.13 Lack of political freedom and state interference in education is another concern. Some Southeast Asian countries also continue to struggle with illiberal, autocratic regimes, which deprive universities, including premiere national universities, of much-needed academic freedom -- a cornerstone of liberal education and empowerment of the young generation.14

In South Asian countries such as Pakistan, however, there continues to be significant gender and ethnic gap in the educational system, reflecting not only the overall state of development in the country, but also persisting social cleavages, which undermine the provision of an accessible, quality education to all citizens, regardless of socio-economic status, age, gender, sex, religion, and ethnicity. The persistence of security challenges, from extremist-fundamentalist groups to ethnic separatists insurgencies, have undermined the ability of national and local governments to provide a systematic solution to a plethora of equity- and quality-related challenges, which prevent many citizens from gaining access to public education.15

Ironically, Pakistan is not short of any attempt at introducing educational reforms; the key issue, however, continues to implementation and appropriate coordination between federal and local agencies. “With almost 22 national education policies, action and sector plans since 1947, there is no dearth of education reform narratives in Pakistan, but a consistently poor record of implementation and allocations to education,” explains Baela Raza Jameel, among Pakistan’s foremost advocates and experts on education-related issues, in the Quarterly. “The current institutional and policy dissonance of the federation makes the business of education, learning and training into a multi-headed hydra difficult to comprehend by the citizens.”

Aside from bringing together insights by leading experts on educational reform, this issue of Socdem Asia Quarterly also includes special features on key elections in recent months in Europe and Asia: An exclusive interview with Ann Linde, Head of
International Unit of the Party of European Socialists (PES), on latest developments in the European Union (EU), particularly the rise of extreme-right parties in recent months as well as an article by Andi Saiful Haq, director of Institute for Transformation Studies-INTRANS in Indonesia, on the recent Indonesian presidential elections, which brought to power a progressive leader, Joko Widodo, paving the way for a more robust democratic transition in the world’s largest Muslim democracy.

This edition of the Quarterly was conceptualized on the heels of a SOCDEM Asia-organized Conference on “Education for the Future, the Future of Education: Developing a Progressive Education Agenda” in Singapore (13-14 April 2014), where the participants discussed, among other things, Asia’s youthful population and the demand for better quality and accessible education, Europe’s experience with education reform, education as a tool of empowerment, promotion of social cohesion, and an essential component of human dignity, the socio-economic externalities of educational policies, critical areas for policy intervention on both national and local government levels based on lessons from Europe and most successful Asian countries, areas for collaboration and dialogue between educational reformers and institutions in Europe and Asia, structural and emerging challenges in the realm of education, and the persistence of economic, cultural, and gender divide in terms of access to quality education, especially in the developing regions of Asia.

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Contents

10 Education in the 21st Century: LESSONS, CHALLENGES AND MOVING FORWARD IN THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE by Ibarra Gutierrez

13 EDUCATION: THE SOCIAL ISSUE OF THE 21ST CENTURY by Mirko Schadewald

16 PROMOTING ESD IN JAPAN AND GERMANY WORKING TOWARD THE REALIZATION OF A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY by Toshimitsu Tabe

18 Socdem Asia’s Exclusive Interview with DR. GWANG-JO KIM, Director, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

22 THE MONGOLIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW by Undraa Agvaanluvsan

25 THE EDUCATION CONUNDRUM: POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PAKISTAN by Baela Raza Jameel

28 Socdem Asia’s Exclusive Interview with ANN LINDE, Head of International Unit of the Party of European Socialists (PES)

31 JOKOWI: INDONESIA’S PEACEFUL REVOLUTION by Andi Saiful Haq
Education in the 21st Century: LESSONS, CHALLENGES AND MOVING FORWARD IN THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE

by Ibarra Gutierrez

Overview

Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees every person’s right to education. In the Philippines, this right is further established in Article XIV, Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which provides that, “The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels.” However, despite these guarantees to an individual’s right to education, the struggle to attain accessible, quality education remains. Even with a constitutional mandate in place, the same problems beleaguer the Philippine education system every year.

The State of Philippine Education

Article XIV, Section 5, Paragraph (5) of the Constitution mandates that the State should allot the highest budgetary priority to education, but regardless of the fact that the Department of Education (DepEd) actually receives the biggest allocation of the national budget, the amounts allocated per year fall short of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) prescribed spending for education of at least 6% of the Gross National Product (GNP) of the country.

Because of the State’s underinvestment in education, it perennially battles shortages in critical school inputs such as classrooms, desks, textbooks and sanitation facilities (DepEd 2012). Due to the shortages in these pertinent elements for learning, schools are forced to either create 2 or 3 class shifts per day or crowd as much students as permitted by the space in classrooms made for 40, in order to accommodate all enrollees. Despite a mean teacher-student ratio of 1:38 as of 2012 (DepEd), this does not reflect the disaggregated figures where schools in provinces have ratios that go as high as 1:82.

Contributing to the poor quality of education is the lack of competent teachers, who, as the primary sources of learning, do not adequately capacitate the students with the skills and knowledge required at their designated levels of schooling. The low quality of education is also reflected in the test scores obtained by the students in their National Achievement Tests (NATs). In School Year 2012-2013, the average achievement rate recorded at the elementary level is 68.88%, and worse, the secondary level reports an average of 51.41%, way off the national target of 75% Mean Percentage Score (MPS – percentage of correctly answered items in a test).
Apart from the problems encountered by the State in providing quality education, relevance is also an aspect of education that is questioned. The basic education curriculum is deemed to be congested and lacking in essential elements which should also be integrated in order to make both teaching and learning, such as the utilization of the mother tongue language as the medium of instruction and the indigenization of courses in consideration of regional and cultural differences. The 2000 Philippine Human Development Report on Education actually lists most (if not all) of the issues mentioned, and 14 years later, it is alarming to note that these are still the same issues that the country tries to resolve today.

Overhauling the Philippine Education System

In 2013, the President of the Republic of the Philippines Benigno Simeon Aquino III signed into law Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, popularized in the Philippines as the K to 12 Program. The enactment of the said law expands the basic education program from 10 years to 13 years, covering Kindergarten, six years of primary education, four years of Junior High School, and two years of Senior High School. As published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines (Official Gazette 2013), the K to 12 Program covers a longer period of schooling “to provide sufficient time for mastery of concepts and skills, develop lifelong learners, and prepare graduates for tertiary education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship.”

Despite being met with both cheers (that a policy intervention would finally improve the state of education) and jeers (that it would inevitably worsen the already deteriorating state of education) by the public, the Department of Education remains hopeful that the implementation of the K to 12 Program would be the key to improving the quality of education in the Philippines. With the Philippines being the only country in Asia and one of the three remaining countries in the world with a 10-year basic education program, it is unsurprising that the current administration would look for pathways for reform by comparison with the basic education cycles of other countries, especially given a highly congested curriculum, where students are either bombarded with information in a 10-year span or shortchanged by 2 years-worth of knowledge compared to the rest of the world.

The K to 12 Program, considered to be the flagship education reform program of the current administration, aims to target the perennial problems faced by the education sector in providing access to quality education (DepEd 2012), that it would specifically:

1. Decongest the curriculum to improve mastery of basic competencies;
2. Ensure seamlessness of primary, secondary and post-secondary competencies;
3. Improve teaching through the use of enhanced pedagogies (i.e. spiral progression in Math and Science) and mediums of instruction;
4. Expand job opportunities (by reducing job-skills mismatch) and provide better preparation for higher learning.

The Philippine Government does not view K to 12 as the sole solution to all the woes in the education system. Simply lengthening the number of years a child goes to school would be rendered useless if not accompanied by the support programs that would ultimately help in uplifting the dismal state of education in the country. The K to 12 Program may be the utmost priority in the line of education reform programs, but other projects and programs such as Universal Pre-schooling for All (to establish strong foundations for learning) and Mother-Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (to make lessons relatable to students, and thus making learning more effective), are also in place. This also includes existing programs under alternative delivery modes to address drop-outs such as the Alternative Learning System (A.L.S) and Open High School.
...the state must always go back to the nature of education as an unalienable right of every citizen, that education includes empowering all aspects of human life to ultimately attain full human development.

In the context of tertiary education, part of the Commission on Higher Education’s (CHED) Strategic Plans until 2016, is the “Amalgamation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Programs”. It aims to “restructure the education system specifically the public component to improve efficiency and in the delivery of quality programs, minimize duplication and promote complementation between and among public and private HEIs” (CHED 2011). The restructuring could be achieved partly through amalgamation of SUCs into Regional University Systems (RUS) and development of specialized institutions.”

Amalgamation is also seen to potentially build better academic and administrative capacity among the public HEIs. CHED has been studying the amalgamation models of other countries, to support the merging into one RUS. These models include the Australian university mergers that led to the reduction of institutions from 91 to 31, the US design was seen to have led to excellent and focused programs which are geared towards accessible, relevant and quality education.

However, in achieving “Education for All”, the government must ensure that it does not only address one aspect, but recognize each as a contributing factor in providing true quality education. In achieving accessible education, the State must recognize education as a social service that it must realize its duty to provide education most especially to the underprivileged, establish educational institutions in remote areas, ensure that admission processes are free from any kind of undue discrimination, and free its constituents from financial burdens by regulating fees imposed in both private and public institutions.

In achieving relevant education, the government must realize that education must be used as a tool for national development, which necessitates the reprogramming of the government to tertiary courses which would serve the needs of the country more than the global, capitalist markets, integrating courses and methods which are responsive to the needs of the Filipino culture and society; the educational system should not only develop individual capacities but also inculcate social consciousness that would encourage active participation in national development.

In achieving quality education, apart from the necessity of always being attuned to the basic needs of its educational programs and institutions, the state must always go back to the nature of education as an unalienable right of every citizen, that education includes empowering all aspects of human life to ultimately attain full human development. Attaining equilibrium between these characteristics of true, quality education may be tedious but it is not impossible, if only given the adequate attention and with solutions made more responsive to the needs of the people.

Ibarra “Barry” M. Gutierrez III is a member of the Philippine House of Representatives (Akbayan Party List).

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EDUCATION: THE SOCIAL ISSUE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

by Mirko Schadewald

To win the World Cup does not mean to be a world champion in all fields. Looking at Germany that is especially true for education. Not to be misunderstood: The German education system is a good one. But it’s still not good enough. We are facing a large number of challenges to create a socialized, fair, well-funded, open and inclusive educational system. Of course, the current framework conditions for education in Germany and Europe are almost different from the conditions in most Asian countries. Albeit the answers are different, the questions are the same. So we can learn much from each other and the discussions on both continents.

In May 1863 the German Social Democratic Party (SP’D) was founded and is today the oldest political party in Germany. Some of their predecessors were the so-called “Arbeiterbildungsvereine”. Workers’ Education Associations, where workers and craftsmen come together, to promote their social participation and their social rise through education. An important motive of many people in the struggle for a better future was the belief that “our children shall have an easier life”. Under changing conditions of the presence these aims once again must be put into the focus of political practice. But what are the goals of a progressive educational policy?

Education is decisive for our future, it is the most crucial social issue of our time. This is true for Germany and Europe as well as Asia and all other continents.
democracy and social responsibility and repeatedly cares for participation and perspectives of social rise.

Education is more than imparting knowledge useful for people's jobs. It needs a holistic educational approach, caring for discovery and knowledge, but also for social competences, creativity, aesthetic experience, ethical reflexion and sensitivity for values. Orientation does not necessarily derive from knowledge, therefore it needs to appreciate political education and enlightenment for democracy.

Education strengthens personality and qualifies for tolerance. Knowledge increases at breath-taking speed: acquired knowledge is outmoded after short time. People have always learned for life, nowadays even a whole life long. That's why we need to impart joy in learning, and awaken openness for the purpose of research.

Good education and personal development are fundamental rights, so participation and social advancement by education must be accessible to all. Especially from a social democratic and progressive perspective, chances in education and life in general still depend too much on a social and cultural background, level of education of the parents, and their financial means. Two figures on the situation in Germany can illustrate this: Even with similar achievements, the chance to be recommended for grammar school is 4 times higher for children from higher social backgrounds than for children from working-class families. Of 100 children whose parents have an academic background themselves, 77 manage to go on to university. Of 100 children from non-academic families, it is only 23.

In Germany this fact challenges us to not only make the educational system better, but first to make it more socially fair. Most especially, financial hurdles must not keep anyone from education. That is why state schools in Germany are free of charge. In places where study fees were introduced for a short time, they were discontinued. In comparison between Germany and Asia, the discussion about the role of the state and private schools is a difficult one. The German Social Democracy is convinced that the state has to make sure that everybody has equal access to education independent of personal origin. Education and personal development are not tradable objects -- that is to say, commodities for pursuit of instrumental ends; Education is a human right for which, first and foremost, the state is responsible.

The more we rely on private and commercial initiatives in that area, the more we risk a still greater rift in the education system. Those who can afford it migrate to private institutions and the state system is to serve all there remainder. That's not our way for a progressive educational policy in Europe. But of course it is understandable when this debate is going on in many Asian countries from a different perspective. If the state is not able or willing to guarantee a socially fair educational system, private institutions need to fill this gap. However, private institutions should be closely monitored, determining whether they pursue idealistic principles on education or, instead, purely commercial interests.

On the way to a fairer education system it is necessary also to have a well-equipped infrastructure -- qualitatively as well as quantitatively. It is not just about better equipment and better facilities for schools or universities, but also about greater numbers of qualified staff in order to provide the best conditions and individual support. Better education often requires higher expenditures. This has priority because it invests in people. Our aim in Germany is to spend 7% of our gross domestic product (GDP) on education. Looking at international standards, Germany currently still invests 1% of its GDP, which is less than the average OECD country. An additional 20-25 billion euros have to be allocated to at least match international standards. If we do not risk turning education into a trade object, then these investments have to be borne mainly by the state. For that end, it is not only necessary to set different priorities, but also to ameliorate revenues. One way would be to raise some taxes for some more
potent members of the public. That would be socially just and economically sensible at the same time. In Germany the SPD has called for this way in the last election campaign but were not able to keep to it in the negotiations with our new, conservative coalition partner.

As in some Asian countries, for some month now, there is an intense debate in Germany on the view that allegedly too many young people are interested in studying at university and too few start a vocational training. It is a fact that academic qualifications provide the best insurance against unemployment and the perspective of higher income. So it is only understandable that more and more young people seek a place at the university. In the middle of the 1960s, 92% of young people in Germany completed vocational training, and only 8% started studying at university. Today, the percentage of each is about 50%. There are now calls being raised to stop this “academicizing madness” and revert to promoting vocational training. It is correct that education is the most important resource we have – in Germany as well as in Asia. That is why we need the expertise of engineers as much as we need the skills of trained workers. If now 50% of each age group in Germany is studying at university, then that plays an indispensable part in this process. At the same time we need to strengthen vocational training and make it more attractive.

It is wrong to assume that the state could have a direct way of influencing young people’s decisions regarding their lives and professions. That decision is something they take for themselves, and that is good and right. We rather have to provide individual chances and open ways that again and again allow going from one form of education to the other. Just as economic frameworks change, so do individual life strategies change, too. For this reason, we may no longer view vocational training and academic studies as two independent pillars. Both systems need to be opened to one other and to merge. There must not be an “either-or” kind of choice, but rather an “as well as” choice.

Education is the key to a self-determined and free life. A strong education system based on social justice is decisive for individual opportunities in our children’s lives, and at the same time, constitutes a major requirement for economic success and social cohesion. It is essential to view education from the perspective of people and their individual opportunities for development and personal growth, not from the perspective of the marketability of knowledge. Education is a human right and we must not give room to the commodification of education – even though education and knowledge form of course an essential component of successful economic activity. It is this that distinguishes the social democratic idea from our political competitors, and this is what we should keep demonstrating. So Education is one of the most important issues of the 21st century – in Germany, Europe and Asia.

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Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) provides an essential perspective for considering the future of education in Asia from the standpoint of “fairness,” “educational opportunity,” and “paradigms for 21st century education.” It is my belief that ESD can play a decisive role in revitalizing education in Asia.

ESD was initially launched at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development held in September 2002, but is now becoming a global movement. It is notable that the Japanese government has played a central part in this development. For instance, the draft resolution for the “UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development” (2005–2014) was submitted to the United Nations under the leadership of Hiroshima University Emeritus Professor Shuichi Nakayama who was serving as Chair of the Education Sub-Committee of the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO. This is a policy proposal that Japan can truly take pride of in the world.

After the Johannesburg Summit, the United Nations assigned the task of formulating an implementation plan to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Prior to this, UNESCO had adopted Agenda 21 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. Agenda 21 constituted a global action plan for realizing sustainable development in the 21st century. Following on this, the Environment, Population and Development Project was launched in 1994.

There is much that we can learn from Germany as an advanced country in the field of ESD. With the financial support of the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO, nine geography teachers from Germany were invited to Japan in 2005 to participate in an advanced ESD project. As the coordinator for the Tokyo area, I was able to organize a successful workshop held at Japan Women’s University. (Tabe, 2011)

The International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education (IGU-CGE) Symposium was held in Germany’s environmentally advanced city of Freiburg during August 22-24, 2012. The central theme of the symposium was “Experience-based Geography Learning.”
Numerous concrete suggestions were received on what has become a global trend toward valuing experience-based learning in which children and students take the initiative in a participatory process. At this symposium, Professor Shigefumi Nagata of Mie University and I jointly presented a paper entitled “New Direction of Education for Sustainable Development in Japan.” The presentation delved into such subjects as Japanese responses to international developments in ESD, ESD in the context of Japanese government curriculum guidelines, and new directions in ESD in primary education.

During our visit, we had an opportunity to observe a gymnasium school and felt that Germany’s gymnasiums were even more successful than their American and British counterparts in motivating students and encouraging them to translate their motivation into action through a “participatory process.” The success of German schools appeared to be supported by three salient points. (1) **School facilities are diverse and well developed.** What particularly caught our attention was the teachers’ common room. Students were barred from entering the room where we found teachers relaxing, drinking tea, developing teaching materials, and discussing with other teachers. The open shelf library facilities were in many ways on par with universities. Storerooms were also available to stock books. There is much to be learned from Germany, particularly in light of the ongoing debate that Japanese schoolteachers are overloaded and too busy. (2) **The process of learning through “participation” is well developed.** We observed students as they presented their findings in a PowerPoint presentation and linked their findings to local community issues. The presentation summarized a survey of students who had been asked such questions as “Do you think that sorting of garbage is useful?” and “What points do you pay attention to when sorting garbage?” The results were shown using a bar graph tallied by respondent age groups. (3) **Ample time is spent on understanding fundamental and structural questions.** In geography class, we observed how the concept of “urbanization” was being presented. In science class, students used smartphones to investigate the skeletal structure of cats and the mechanism that allows them to retract and bear their claws and wrote reports. The three salient points we observed reflect the importance assigned to the “participatory process” in German culture, and provided us with much food for thought and learning.

To examine possible directions for ESD in Japanese education, on February 10, 2014, we conducted lessons for three classes of fifth graders at the Homei Elementary School, an institution attached to Japan Women’s University’s. The lessons were entitled “Thinking about global warming by observing changes in Arctic ice.” (Japan Women’s University’s Homei Elementary School, 2014)

Various teaching materials were used in these lessons organized around the theme “Thinking about global warming by observing Arctic ice,” including a map in an atlas entitled “The World’s Natural Environment and Global Warming,” globes, and a photo book featuring polar bears entitled “Life in the Arctic.” In the course of the lesson, students were prompted to list things that they knew and wanted to know about global warming. Comments received on such photos as “Polar bear emerging from its den,” “Mother polar bear and cub,” “Jump!” and “Bear stranded on the ice” showed that the photos were effective in promoting empathetic understanding. By drawing attention to the Arctic as well as to Alpine glaciers and the predicament of the Tuvalu Islands, the atlas helped create a real sense of global warming as a worldwide phenomenon.

The children first considered the rapid changes and current crisis caused by global warming reflected in the changes in Arctic ice. Surprised to learn how these changes are now affecting their own lives, the children earnestly considered how further warming can be prevented. The children read materials on how the environmentally advanced city of Freiburg is responding to global warming through such initiatives as wind power generation, installation of triple-glazed windows, and light rail systems. This provided them with an opportunity to think about participating in programs for the realization of a sustainable society.

Japanese education should be re-examined while learning from Germany and other countries, and Japan should actively incorporate elements of ESD in its educational systems.
The ultimate objective of ESD is to bring “tolerance,” “non-violence” and “peace” to the world and to ensure the achievement of the UN Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs). The use of the Earth Charter as an educational tool is indispensable to creating a just, sustainable and peaceful world. Moreover, ESD can be said to be an educational process in which the knowledge and wisdom of a broad range of people are brought together for discovering new paths and breakthroughs in coping with global problems. Likewise, partnership and collaboration among persons promoting ESD is an indispensable core element. The Japanese government’s White Paper on Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology was released on June 27, 2014. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014) “Propagation and Promotion of ESD (Education for Sustainable Development)” is featured under “Section 4: Fostering Global Human Resources” in the White Paper’s “Special Section I: Toward New Growth in 2020.” Japanese education should be re-examined while learning from Germany and other countries, and Japan should actively incorporate elements of ESD in its educational systems.

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References


Across the Asian continent, given the sheer size of the region in mind, there is obviously a huge disparity in terms of quality of education, and the universality of access to varying levels of education, whether primary/secondary or tertiary. What is the degree of divergence in terms of educational standards across Asia? What is the general architecture of the educational landscape in Asia? Which sub-regions are facing the greatest challenges, and what is the nature of the problems they face? Which sub-regions have been able to make considerable improvements in recent decades? Which are the leading sub-regions/countries?

As UNESCO director for education in Asia and the Pacific, I will have to refer to the Asia-Pacific region as a whole in my answers. And there is no a single Asia, but several Asias, at least in terms of geography and related cultures such as: Central Asia, Northeast Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania. The education landscape in this region is dynamic, but also diverse. Having said that, generally speaking, I think the Asia-Pacific region has made rapid progress in recent decades, especially in terms of access. When we look at primary enrolment rates in net terms, our region across its sub-regions, is above the world average of 91 per cent, with South and West Asia at 93 per cent, East Asia and the Pacific at 97 per cent, and Central Asia at 95 per cent. However, these averages mask important disparities between and within countries, and more effort must be made to ensure all children have access to quality basic education. In the provision of early childhood education, for instance, we see vast differences between countries in terms of access,
equity, coverage, quality. Enrolment ranges from as low as 9 per cent in Bhutan and Tajikistan, to around 50 per cent in the Philippines, Kazakhstan and India, and to over 100 per cent in the Cook Islands, Maldives, the Republic of Korea and Thailand. In addition, more needs to be done at the primary education level, especially in the region’s least developed countries, where the overall net enrolment rates are only at 74 per cent. I won’t be pessimistic though. Countries that lagged far behind have been catching up quickly. Lao PDR and Vietnam, for example, successfully reduced their out-of-school children by more than 85 per cent over the last five to six years, and were among the top three performers globally.

The sub-region which may experience particular difficulty is South and West Asia, especially in terms of student drop-out, teacher absenteeism and ghost schools etc. – all of which impose huge financial and social costs on the education system. Inequality is also a serious issue: by the end of 2010, 89 per cent of the richest urban males completed lower secondary school while only 13 per cent of the poorest rural girls did. Having said that, I still hope that the gaps will soon narrow. South and West Asia experienced the fastest decline globally in the numbers of out-of-school children between 1999 and 2011, with the proportion of girls in the out-of-school population falling steadily from 64 per cent in 1999 to 57 per cent in 2011. The sub-region has also made noteworthy strides in early childhood care and education, with total enrolment increasing by 130% from 1999 to 2011. So while definitely more needs to be done, we should also commend and celebrate progress.

Compared to other regions of the world, both developing and developed, how has Asia -- and its varying regions – compare in terms of quality of education and access to basic education? What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the educational landscape in Asia? What are the lessons that Asia can learn from more advanced regions, say Europe and North America? What are the possible lessons the leading nations in Asia hold for less advanced countries in the region as well as for other developing regions?

I must say that progress in terms of quality of education is mixed in the region. If we use learning outcomes as a proxy to quality education, we can say that the East Asian countries have achieved strong and equitable results across socio-economic spectrums: in TIMSS 2011, for example, all students tested in the East Asian economies reached the minimum standards in both grade 4 and grade 8 regardless of family background. Yet in some other Asia-Pacific countries, improvements have been both limited and inequitable. In Thailand, for instance, progress in improving the minimum learning standards was not widespread, with only around one-third of the poor reaching the minimum threshold for PISA assessments in both 2003 and 2009.

Teacher policy is one area in which Asia-Pacific countries can learn from one another. The teacher management systems of the Republic of Korea and Singapore are often cited as exemplary cases, and we see commonalities between their policies to attract and retain quality teachers. Both countries have been recruiting from the best graduates, offering competitive salaries and well-defined career progression paths, improving teacher status and providing comprehensive professional development opportunities. Several developing countries have been actively carrying out teacher reform as well, as is the case for Indonesia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. After Indonesia passed its wide-ranging Teacher’s Law in 2005, which was designed to raise teacher quality, the country is now reaping benefits: the quality of students applying for teacher training has improved, and many teachers have quit their second jobs as they no longer face income difficulties after the doubling of their salaries. Of course, there is room
for improvement, but I think Indonesia and several countries in the region are moving in the right direction.

Again as regards academic attainment, East Asian education systems, such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, have gained much international attention for taking the top places in international assessment results such as PISA and TIMSS, although results have been mixed for middle income countries. Vietnam for instance, attracted some interest due to its recent performance in PISA 2012, having performed better than two thirds of participating countries including several OECD countries. Other Southeast Asian countries are lagging behind in these assessments though. Let me however point out that test scores cannot fully capture the extent of learning. For example, there are no indices that measure the degree to which education impacts peace and sustainable development. And what about learner happiness? In the PISA 2012 assessments that ranked the East Asian countries top in academic performance, we see these very same countries underperforming in terms of percentage of students who reported being happy at school, with the Republic of Korea at the bottom of the list. On the other hand, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia were ranked 1st, 4th and 6th respectively. I think these are unexpected findings that the East Asian countries should reflect upon.

Relatedly, I have also seen countries in the region placing increasing importance on soft skills or transversal competencies in recent years, and there is much scope for intra-regional learning here. We have education systems such as Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore, which have been long been committed to teaching students how to learn, instead of only emphasizing content knowledge. Singapore had, in fact, shifted the focus of its education system to emphasize the development of a broader range of skills such as critical thinking and creativity since the mid to late 1990s, with its then-vision of “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” – and I think there are many valuable lessons and practices that other Asia-Pacific countries could harness from these experiences in terms of nurturing 21st century education systems.

Is there an inherent tension between ensuring access to and quality of education? Is it possible to ensure both access and quality issues are managed/addressed simultaneously? Have there been successful models in certain Asian countries, which have managed to develop both universally accessible and quality educational institutions?

Although a potential challenge, we can and should ensure both access to and quality in education. Particularly at the basic education level, there should be no “either or” reasoning, but more about how to ensure both. It should be about how to achieve both through the right mix of policies, and by focusing on key quality factors, such as teachers. It is well acknowledged that no education system can be better than its teachers. I believe that teacher policies are instrumental to ensure access and quality. It is about establishing adequate teacher recruitment, remuneration and deployment systems, which all contribute to improved teacher quality and motivation, and eventually improved access to quality learning. As previously mentioned, teachers in the Republic of Korea belong to top academic achievers which can be attributed to, among others, their public servant status and relatively high salaries. I would like to reiterate that the availability of well-qualified teachers contributes to creating quality basic education and attracting a sufficient number of teachers to improve access.

At the higher education level, expanding access and ensuring quality can be equally managed but should be carefully considered to maintain a balance between demand and supply as well as cost and benefit. In the Asia-Pacific region, most middle income countries have experienced an explosive growth of higher education (enrolment increased from 32.6 million in 1970 to 182.2 million in 2011) which stems from high public demand and the notion that university-based research is closely linked with economic development. We should remember however that increased enrolment puts pressure on university spending which can lead to a decrease in faculty salaries, condition of service and the overall quality of instruction. And what about the wastages due to an increasing number of the unemployed university graduates? Despite moves to expand private provision and shift costs to students, quality, equity and relevance concerns in higher education remain across the Asia-Pacific region. In my opinion, governments should carefully consider the benefits of expanding higher education to match the needs of the productive sector.

What are the key developments, especially in terms of educational policy reform, in Asia, and its varying sub-regions? How prepared is Asia for the 21st century, and the attendant challenges of globalization for labour markets?

We can see a notable development across the region which is the growing recognition that education is key not only for economic but more increasingly for social development, peace and sustainable prosperity. Governments are paying increased attention to education, recognising its role in transforming economies from low- to middle-income, and ultimately knowledge-based high-income economies. Recently, there have been some key changes and developmental shifts including (1) increased focus on soft or transversal skills, (2) higher public spending on education (3) moves towards decentralisation, and (4) use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education.

Across the region, we can see a move towards integrating transversal skills into education policies and curriculum frameworks. This move stems from the recognition that societies and workplaces are rapidly changing and people nowadays require more than just hard, job-specific skills but should in addition be adaptable, collaborative, innovative, enterprising, and so on. Besides economic relevance, these skills are recognised as critical for building just, peaceful and sustainable societies.
Also worth noting is the increase in public spending on education across the region. Education budgets have been a growing priority in countries like Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand, where public expenditure on education has been maintained over the past decade at around 20 per cent of total government budget despite economic and financial constraints. This is a positive development but should not be overstated as higher spending cannot be equated with improved access and quality. When we look more closely, regional disparities also become evident with South Asia recording some of the lowest levels of education spending. How to allocate these scarce resources is another factor influencing education quality as the lion’s share of the budget tends to go to teacher salaries, leaving little for learning materials and other expenses.

Decentralisation is another ongoing key development. In the majority of countries, standard setting remains centralized while high-performing education systems are decentralizing management responsibilities to subnational level. I should say however that it is not a one-size-fits-all policy solution. Regional experiences show that decentralization is often characterized by bursts of progress and frequent setbacks. China for instance had to re-centralize some management functions to ensure better equity and quality in education. Also, the challenge is to balance the level of responsibility and subsidiarity between central and subnational authorities, with the ultimate goal of ensuring equity and quality in education provision.

In terms of ICTs, many countries in the Asia-Pacific have endeavoured to tap on the potential of what technology can bring to ensure education equity and quality. However, challenges exist. Digital divide persists among countries, with Japan, Malaysia and Singapore continually updating and scaling up their related plans, and several countries in South and Central Asia struggling to catch up.

What are the key initiatives of UNESCO, specifically its Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau, for addressing outstanding educational challenges across Asia? Which challenges is the greatest priority? How do you assess the impact of the UNESCO - and other international organization’s – education-related projects in Asia? What are the areas in need for greater reform and international and national policy-oriented and financial commitment?

To respond to common educational challenges in the region, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education is supporting Member States through a range of programme activities. Let me give some examples amongst others. To improve equity in education, we are promoting multilingual and inclusive education and, to improve learning, we facilitate collaborative research on transversal skills and capacity development for improved learning outcomes through the Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net) and the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP). These are on top of our successful projects to accelerate the achievement of the Education for All goals, including supporting the review of national progress towards the six Education for All (EFA) goals.

I believe that the most important and urgent mission for education in our region is to promote learning to live together in order to achieve peace. Improving academic knowledge is important, but what is relatively neglected despite its urgency and prominent importance is how to ensure education can contribute to building more just, peaceful and sustainable societies. In order to help fix this widespread bias, we are facilitating research and experience-sharing on the theme “Learning to Live Together (LTLT)”. Supporting in the development of shared history textbooks in South-East Asia is another example. We are working hard to make sure that this mission strongly features in the global post-2015 education agenda.

As my final word, let me talk about the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference (APREC) taking place from 6 to 8 August 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand. We will take stock of regional progress in education and agree on the way forward, in respect of what the region can do in terms of education development and cooperation and also agree on a regional voice and perspective in relation to the shaping of the post-2015 education agenda. We will also discuss how to respond to regional education challenges through better policy and governance, capacity development, collaborative research and knowledge sharing, mutual support and accountability, financing and monitoring. I look forward to high-level participation from countries and agencies in the region.
THE MONGOLIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

by Undraa Agvaanluvsan

Abstract:

This article gives a brief overview of the history of Mongolian educational system starting from 1920s to the present day. Comparisons and contrasts of policies adapted during two periods, from 1921 to 1990 and from 1990 to the present day, are made. Some recommendations and suggestions are drawn at the end of the paper.

The history of the Mongolian education system can be divided into two phases. The first phase can be referred to as the socialist-era education period, which spans from 1991 Independence Revolution until 1990 Democratic Revolution. The second phase is from 1990 Democratic Revolution to the present day which can be defined as the free-market period education system.

During the socialist era period the foundation for the current education system of Mongolia was formed. During this time of history, traditional Mongolian lifestyle had taken a drastic turn. Majority of Mongolians were nomadic. The only semi-formal education offered were through Buddhist temples. After 1921 revolution, cities, large new industrial, educational, and cultural centers, were created. An education became mandatory for everyone and the nomadic families were required to send their children to school. Various ages grouped in the same classroom and classes were taught in gers, the traditional yurt tents.

The compulsory nature of the education and penalties imposed on the parents for not sending their children to school, forced the attendance rate to increase rapidly. Curriculums have developed, school buildings were built in every aimag (province) center and local soums (the smallest municipal unit). Currently, in Mongolia there are 22 aimags and 335 soums. In addition to the capital city Ulaanbaatar, which is a home to 1.2 million residents, there are two major cities Darkhan and Erdenet, both of which are major industrial hubs for the country. Now there are several schools in each aimag center and a school in all soums. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, the Mongolian public education system had become a rather mature system. Despite some weaknesses, the country had developed a solid educational foundation to build on.

During the socialist era, Mongolia adapted the Soviet style education. Although many critics argue that the Mongolian education system in the 20th century had problems such as political prejudice, the positive aspects heavily
outweigh the problems. The most remarkable achievement was the total eradication of illiteracy. The natural sciences were integrated into curriculum. Subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology, zoology and plants, geography were taught, and the state exams were instituted upon graduation from various levels for regular evaluation. Due to political situation, social sciences courses such as history and ethics were strongly skewed to reflect the centralized, the communist party controlled views. However, the quality of the natural science classes was excellent. Beginning from the 1960s, the Mongolian students began to participate successfully in International mathematics and physics Olympiads.

The academic institutions and universities were established and the country’s scientific research base was created. The leading universities of today, the National University of Mongolia, the Mongolian University of Science and Technology, the Medical Sciences University, and the Universities of Pedagogy, Agriculture, and Veterinarian medicine can date their establishment back to the socialist-era. After the World War II and the establishment of the National University of Mongolia, the country adapted the industrialization policy which triggered the opening of numerous vocational and technical training colleges. The former herders became the factory workforce. Those who excelled academically went on to get the university degree while the large majority of graduates joined the vocational colleges and integrated into the skilled labor force.

The National Academy of Sciences, with its member institutes, also constitutes the backbone of the country’s scientific and technical base even today. Thousands of graduates with good academic records went to attend universities in Eastern bloc countries, mostly Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and so on. The vocational training colleges prepared the skilled labor force which was an integral part of the development and industrialization of the era. Thus, the educational system, the universities and vocational colleges, provided the well-trained workforce which in turn enabled the industrialization and development of Mongolia.

Under the socialist system, all costs of higher education were fully subsidized by the government. The government was involved in policymaking, planning, and development of the entire higher education system from the date of its foundation. A number of ministries shared responsibilities for education and all educational institutions were subject to applicable laws, regulations, policies, and plans. University graduates were fully employed in accordance with the plan. In theory, unemployment was nonexistent. The eventual retirement of all state-employees and guaranteed pension gave people confidence and predictable future.

The beginning of the second phase of the education system may be marked by the Democratic Revolution in 1990 to the present day. The Democratic Revolution of 1990 brought in changes in the education system, most notably the private education enterprises. The curricula for the social sciences, including course materials in history, political sciences, and philosophy were changed dramatically. English became the primary foreign language, replacing the mandatory Russian language classes. Until 1990, the secondary education was for ten years which included 8-18 year olds. The system went through several changes to 11-year system to the current 12-year system. Rapid growth has occurred in a number of non-traditional providers of education, offering predominantly foreign languages, business courses and non-degree programs.

The major shift to allow private educational enterprises had significant impact on the quality of education and applicability of the skills of college graduates. Currently there are several dozen private schools emerged in Mongolia, mostly located in the capital city Ulaanbaatar. The tuition rates for the private schools range from 1000 to 35000 US dollars per annum. The
quality of education in private schools exceeds public schools, perhaps due to higher pay offered to attract better teachers.

The higher education is also comprised of public and private universities and institutions. Even at public universities, students now pay tuition, which is a major difference compared to the previous era.

During this second phase, effectively teachers’ salary went down compared to the rate of rise for the average income. In 1990s, the strike was common among teachers. As of 1999, many teachers were leaving the profession in order to pursue better paying jobs. (Rossabi, 2003) In the socialist period being a teacher yielded a great deal respect and higher salary. The respect for teacher’s job is continuing to decline.

The current paradox in Mongolia is that there are some 150 universities and institutes in Mongolia, for a population of 3 million. The high number does not necessarily reflect a better quality, and nearly 50 percent of recent graduates with bachelors degree are without jobs and many graduates have no choice but work in low-skill jobs such as waitress or store clerk. The tuition fee is an important source of income for universities. The state offers loans to help students. The state also provides low cost dormitories to the students. However, this model based on the tuition revenue causes the institutes to focus their priority only on the number of students over the quality of education, and as a consequence there are a large of number of university graduates today without a job and useful skills.

The 1991 Education Law of Mongolia, a series of education laws adopted in 1995 and amended in 1998, 2000 and 2002, and numerous executive orders by the Ministry of Science, Education and Culture (MOSEC) were clearly responses to changes in the higher education environment. Since the adoption of the first Education Act, there has been a significant expansion of private higher education providers. The creation of private universities and tuition pay system was adapted during when the Democratic Party was in power. The Mongolian People’s Party (MPP), as a social democratic party, has consistently adapted policies to increase the teacher’s pay. Frequent change in the direction and policy, attempts at adapting of various models (Russian-style, British-style, American-style, and the latest one the so-called “Student-centered” style and so on) are causing general confusion.

In conclusion, although the current education system in Mongolia has many flaws, still, some of the key strengths do exist and the system is on recovery from decline (Engel 2014). The recommendations to improve the system may include the teacher pay increase, policy to allocate more funds to education, adapt supportive policy to encourage public and private sector funding for scientific research, protection of intellectual property right and profit sharing mechanism in order to support innovation in the higher education organizations. Perhaps the most important is the concerted effort to increase the respect for the teacher’s profession, including higher salary, in order to attract the best and the brightest graduates to join the education work force.

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THE EDUCATION CONUNDRUM: POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PAKISTAN

by Baela Raza Jameel

Whilst there is an overwhelming consensus on the centrality of education for human evolution, social justice, sustainable development, productivity and happiness, there is a declining belief that this is a straightforward enterprise to be delivered by the state alone or, for that matter, by individuals and entrepreneurs. With less than 500 days left to the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there is a global groundswell of protest against exclusions that keep 58 million children out of schools due to early child marriages, child labour in its extreme forms, gender discrimination, conflict and ability (A World at School, 2014). Sadly Pakistan is home to many of those exclusions. With almost 22 national education policies, action and sector plans since 1947, there is no dearth of education reform narratives in Pakistan, but a consistently poor record of implementation and allocations to education. The GDP allocations have not crossed the 2% mark, instead of the 4% advised by UNESCO and 7% promised in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2009! The current Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, has promised to double education spending as percentage of GDP by 2018 (March 2014), buying political time for over 185 million Pakistani citizens, who know that this is likely to remain unfulfilled.

Razia’s Education – lifelong learning as a distant dream

Sadly for Razia and many like her living in Lasbella district in Balochistan, ranked at 127 out of the 140 districts in the Education rankings (Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2014), policy ambivalence has compromised the quality of her life. She is 12 years old struggling in grade 5 and she cannot cope with grade 2 level literacy and numeracy recorded by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2013. Her motivation to learn is low with only one teacher teaching 6 grades in her single room school for as long as she can remember with no new textbooks to follow the national curriculum 2006. Razia is demoralized knowing that she cannot continue beyond primary school, since there are no middle schools for girls for miles in her area, never mind secondary prospects. Each of the 200 homes in her
Pakistan has the second highest number of Out of School Children (OOSC) after Nigeria estimated at 5.7 million in primary years and 25 million for 5-16 years (GMR, 2013).

The national literacy rate is 60% (Punjab 62% and Balochistan 44%).

d village have mobile phones and 50% have televisions offering aspirations for a whole new world of possibilities. Her parents, siblings and community members have demanded elementary and secondary schools for more than two decades but they must wait patiently; the parliamentarians have conveniently forgotten their voters having won the election last year, with the next one still four years away.

Meanwhile, there are conversations in her home and village that Razia will be married off within a year as has been the custom for girls who cannot continue education. For someone like Razia living in the 21st century this is sad; time has stood still as if it was 1930 or perhaps 1947. Razia symbolizes the pyramid of sacrifice for unresolved political and economic compulsions that blocks education from becoming a national priority in Pakistan!

The Key Education Indicators & the Right to Education Promise

The story of social injustice depicted in “Razia’s” education landscape stands in stark contrast to the landmark 18th Constitutional Amendment on April 19th 2010. Education was finally declared a fundamental right guaranteed by the inclusion of Article 25-A in the constitution stating “the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law”. Whilst laws have been enacted in Islamabad Capital Territory and two out of the four provinces (Sindh & Balochistan) rules for implementation have yet to be framed. Four years down the road the challenge is amply illustrated by lagging access indicators. Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for early childhood education is 44%, Net Enrolment Rate (NER) primary (age 6-10) is 68%, NER middle (age 11-13) is 38%, NER secondary (age 14-15) is 25% nuanced by gender, geography and class in each territory. These sub-sectors cover the age groups under 25-A for 5-16 year olds (PSLM, 2011-12). Pakistan has the second highest number of Out of School Children (OOSC) after Nigeria estimated at 5.7 million in primary years and 25 million for 5-16 years (GMR, 2013). The national literacy rate is 60% (Punjab 62% and Balochistan 44%) (ibid).

Private Sector Response and Possibilities for Regional Collaboration

People cannot wait and many are taking the business of education out of state hands into enterprise, both, not for and for profit, as their children cannot wait indefinitely for quality education at all levels of schooling and beyond. Almost 40% of children in Pakistan go to non-state or private schools and some to madrassahs (religious-inspired schools) to make up for supply side gaps addressing excess and differentiated demand in a rapidly urbanizing country (38%-40%). India too has similar trends in non-state provision but its access indicators for elementary education are at 96-98% whilst learning challenges persist like Pakistan, as captured by ASER India year after year (2005-2013). Bangladesh is close to UPE with 92%+ primary enrolment and Gender Parity Index (GPI) above 1 in favour of girls up to secondary level.

Can the region (South Asia, in particular) collaborate to address multiple common issues and also share good practices? These are important considerations for political leadership and civil society for accelerating education progress for regional stability, economic integration and well-being. In the post-cold war period new centers of economic growth, technology enabled learning solutions and collaboration are emerging in Asia and the ‘developing’ South, such as BRICS and the 100 billion dollar New Development Bank (NDB) in Shanghai as a counterpoint to the World Bank and IMF. China is a close partner of Pakistan in many infrastructure and
technology programs, which must be extended to education. These partnerships need new visions of a new world not as uni- or bi-polar but multi-polar.

Pakistan is home to many of the 250 million children globally who are not learning (GMR 2013). The ASER Pakistan 2013 report, an annual citizen led household based survey covering each district (rural) and selected urban cities, holds the mirror to society and government alike on “learning, equity and access” challenges by district, province and aggregated nationally. This situation needs to be reversed quickly for enabling millions of Razias and indeed her male counterparts to learn and transit from primary to post-primary and post-secondary learning making the goal of education as a lifelong business become a reality. Whilst technical vocational training is available to only 2-3% of the youth, tertiary education has doubled in 12 years to reach 5% of the total eligible population (HEC 2013). The business of education needs to be holistically upgraded if article 25-A or Right to Education must become a reality- to (re)invert the education pyramid that mercilessly filters out children at each successive level of education making with a flattened bottom and an emaciated elongated peak. Each successive level of learning sacrifices large numbers of children to exclusion in a country where almost 40% of households are vulnerable and poor. To address equity, quality and access/transition that impinge on human survival, voice and sustainability, institutional issues must be urgently resolved in the federation.

Education in the Federation-devolved responsibility wither coherence?

The architecture of education and learning in the federation lies scattered, lacking in coherence after the passing of the 18th amendment. The concurrent list (entries 38 and 39) of the constitution were abolished, devolving the key functions of policy, planning, curriculum, syllabus, standards, implementation and Islamic education to the provinces and the oversized inefficient Ministry of Education was summarily abolished. However, some functions were retained and added at the federal level that are not being given any attention, such as Entry 6 on regulatory authorities under federal law; Entry 12: Standards in institutions of Higher education and research, scientific and technical institutions and Entry 13, Interprovincial matters and coordination.

As provinces assert greater autonomy for the sector planning, curriculum and language(s) of instruction, teacher preparation and recruitment and standards, the federal role for coordination, resource generation and standards lies scattered across several ministries and an evolving Ministry of Education and Training created in 2011. The pre-2010 federal portfolio of institutions ranging from early years to technical and higher education including textbooks and curriculum is currently shared across four different institutions and several autonomous bodies, each one disconnected across the Cabinet Division, Cabinet Secretariat, Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD) and the newly renamed Ministry as the ‘Federal Education and Professional Training Division’; the latter undergone a name change for the fourth time in 3 years! The provinces and political parties actively challenge the Division’s legitimacy and scope of work – specifically, that it must not undermine provincial autonomy. The Council of Common Interests (CCI) is a constitutional platform that brings together the federation representatives as often as needed for addressing key issues of coherence, quality and equity in education amongst other sectors in Pakistan. However, with federal institutional disconnects, provinces are weary of making demands for: innovative funds, standards, curriculum facilitation and other initiatives for fear of being over powered by federal authorities challenging their hard won autonomy.

The current institutional and policy dissonance of the federation makes the business of education, learning and training into a multi-headed hydra difficult to comprehend by the citizens.

The NEP 2009 is outdated; its proposed pre 2010 governance, curriculum and standards arrangements are out of sync with the post 18th amendment devolution that cannot be resolved with band aids. At a time when the world is actively taking stock of 2015 and finalizing the post 2015 development agenda-goals and targets, Pakistan’s voice is not as strong as it ought to be for the fulfillment of comprehensive sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the 21st century. The country delegations are missing on key global/regional events since a comprehensive institutional architecture of the federation is not in place to agree on key areas of the proposed 17 goals of the draft SDGs, or for that matter on 25-A provisions and implementation. Will this be a missed opportunity for social justice and the much awaited space for education, learning and entitlements in Pakistan?

Concluding Remarks

Civil society technicians -- whilst unable to step in where the state must deliver -- have demonstrated islands of excellence in service delivery across all sub-sectors, research and evidence based policy, capacity building and innovations (The Citizens Foundation-TCF; Teach for Pakistan; Aman Tech; ITA, ASER, Children’s Literature Festival; Alif Laila Book Bus Society (ALBBS) CARE; DIL; many partners of Education Foundations).
These initiatives demonstrate the art of the possible, but they cannot replace the role of the state to support our Razias for whom a functional and progressive public sector provision is the only choice available.

Pakistan is at a crossroads. Amidst the chaos and conflict and unpredictability, on the one hand, and 21st century global reconfigurations, challenges and opportunities, on the other, there is an intuitive resolve by Pakistani citizens to live in a society that is progressive, creative and caring. This can only be achieved if the policies, financing, standards and governance arrangements are aligned to upgrade the frame and substance of the country’s education system that can live up to 25-A and lifelong learning compulsions of the 21st century.

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The mainstream media has consistently painted the latest European Parliamentary elections as an unprecedented show of force by the extreme-right parties, which have managed to achieve considerable electoral success, especially in places such as France. What are your thoughts on this issue? Should we be alarmed by the recent trend? Are we witnessing the inexorable rise of anti-E.U. parties? Is the fabric of the E.U. under threat, or are we just seeing an ephemeral show of discontent among the electorate?

Linde: Quite simply, the extreme right wing parties are dangerous. Their carefully planned and targeted public pronouncements reflect xenophobic and indeed often racist values. Part of their political vision features the exclusion of those who look, behave, and worship differently. Obviously a growth of right-wing parties on any level is cause for worry, but they try to fight everything that the European Union was founded for: Strong partnership among nations, a continent moving closer and interlinking on all levels of life: be it government, business or personal. This very idea is what the extreme-right is fighting, therefore we as European Socialists and Democrats have an obligation to defend our vision of social and prosperous Europe.

When looking for answers, why the extreme-right has grown, distrust of the European Institutions, especially facing the greatest financial crisis in the modern era, seems to crystallize as the main argument. And here is actually something we as Social democrats agree with: The handling of the crisis was by far not democratic, not transparent and not social enough. While austerity programs in the...
member countries hurt the economic weak, banks were deemed system relevant and saved, but: Is the future of the next generation, now facing huge numbers of unemployment, not system relevant?

The EU is not above critic and there is massive room for change towards a better Europe. But does this critic mean we have lost faith in the fundamentals of the European Union? No. It means we have to work harder, not only on policies that truly benefit the citizens, but also on gaining the trust of citizens, to share the common vision of a united Europe.

It is true, that the elections have shown a significant gain for many extreme-right parties – but what will they accomplish with that gain? On election night Marie LePen told journalists, that her Front National and other right-wing parties will build a new parliamentary group with one goal: “Destroy the European Union”. Only weeks later, she and her friends from Vlaams Block and the FPÖ have found themselves unable to form such a group, because they couldn’t find enough members. Effectively, that puts an end to loads of their ambitions: As “wild” MEPs they will be less able to actually affect policy.

Also it is important to note: The political powers of the center-left & center-right have majority within the European Parliament. If we include other Pro-European forces like the liberals and the greens, we get a clear picture: The extreme right-wing, while having become bigger, are only a small fraction within Parliament and not well organized enough to form a group - and therefore partake effectively on actually working for the European citizens.

The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) has managed to maintain its position as the second most powerful coalition in the European Parliament, closely behind the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), which presumably gives it some leverage in the determination of the next head of the European coalition. In your opinion, was this a successful election? What is your assessment of the performance of social democratic parties? How will this affect the performance of the European Commission and other pillars of the European Union?

Linde: First off, we must stress that by proposing the common candidate process we have strengthened European democracy. Martin Schulz led an excellent election campaign across Europe. The campaign was widely recognised among independent observers as having been the most connected and engaged to voters across the continent. This election campaign was more European than any of the previous 4 European election campaigns. Our S&D Group has remained the only stable force in the European Parliament, while the EPP lost 20% of its vote, and other mainstream Groups also suffered. We now have a mandate to negotiate a strong package of top positions and policy priorities for the next five years. The S&D Group is the second largest political group in the Parliament and together we stand for a different, fairer and socially balanced Europe. We will continue our fight against the rule of harsh austerity in the EU and we will also focus on the fight against tax evasion. However, people also want to be able to trust Europe and their politicians. Making Europe more democratic and rebalancing its powers to make it more effective will be another priority for us.

Secondly, of course we had all hoped for an even better result, but in contrast with the other large political parties the PES is the only party that stabilised compared with the 2009 elections. The socialist, labour and social democratic parties will have a decisive role to play. The gap between policy makers and voters is very wide. The complicated language policy makers and politicians
use with all their abbreviations make people think they are elitist and that they use such language deliberately. The socialist and social-democratic parties made an effort to bridge this gap. Adjusting to this reality we must highlight the quality of Matteo Renzi and the Partito Democratico campaign in Italy. He was able to talk about difficult policies in an appropriate way taking all complexities in consideration in circles like parliament and government rooms, but still able to transmit his messages in understandable language to the citizens.

As for the future of the EC and EU institutions, the most important challenge ahead of the new European commission is not the names of the new commissioners, but the content of the programme the Commission is going to propose. We will fight for a more social Commission that puts the citizens first and to closes the gap left by the previous college and the right-wing led European Council.

Europe continues to face dramatic economic and socio-political challenges. And the austerity programs – in response to the Eurozone Crisis -- seem to have become increasingly unpopular and ineffective. Nonetheless, the center-right parties and advocates of the austerity program have retained substantial political capital in key European countries as well as within the European Union bureaucracy. What are your thoughts on this issue? What is the position of the S&D coalition on the austerity program? What are the alternative policies and advocacies of the S&D coalition in this regard?

Linde: The PES and Mr Schulz have been fighting since the beginning of the crisis for a return to growth, for investment, for an end to the austerity-only policies that have led millions of Europeans to unemployment. Our group will only support a Commission president ready to take up the fight against austerity as the most important policy. The fight against unemployment, especially youth unemployment, must be a priority as well as action against the rise in poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, the EU must lead in the fight against tax evasion and promote investment. Our infrastructure must be modernised and companies, especially SMEs, must be able to get money for their investments. Against this background we fully support the activities of the European Central Bank to increase the readiness of banks to lend money to private companies. The upcoming months and years will be pivotal for the future of Europe. A lot needs to be done over the new legislative period to ensure that Europe pursues policies that foster sustainable economic growth and that tackle unemployment. Important steps have been taken for further regulating and supervising the European banking sector. The Banking Union is a historic step forward in promoting a fair banking sector, although more needs to be done to ensure that banks start serving the real economy. Moreover we will continue to be at the forefront of the fight against tax evasion and fraud. Our aim is to tackle the issue of aggressive tax planning and closing down tax havens.

How will the direction of EU now be shaped given the balance of power after the elections? What challenges will the social democrats face in the mid-term in pushing for the agenda of a more “Social Europe”? How can these challenges be overcome?

Linde: We now have a mandate to negotiate a strong package of top positions and policy priorities for the next five years. We support a more accountable and democratic European Union. The PES insists on a strongly progressive policy programme for the next Commission. The overwhelming message from EU voters is that they want change and that they want policies that address their concerns.

We want to use our strengthened position to shape the Commission’s policy programme and to secure important commitments for the next five years. Our priority is to meet the needs of EU citizens by securing progressive economic and social policies. We need a more flexible application of the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact, to allow for more public and private investments to foster sustainable growth and quality jobs.

The PES's support for Jean-Claude Juncker is conditional on his policy programme. The EPP knows that they lost a lot of seats and votes, and that the people in Europe want a change. Austerity-only policies have been overwhelmingly rejected.

The PES Prime Ministers and leaders emphasised that the next EU Commission should deliver an investment and industrial policy which creates jobs and helps economies to grow.

The important progressive policies outlined in the Council’s strategic document include: sustainable growth, more and better jobs, boosting public investments, and fighting tax fraud and tax evasion; These were all central elements of the PES Manifesto that will be addressed by the new European Commission.

What we need today is a courageous and ambitious agenda for Europe, for the EU to lead on the global scene. We have to overcome the imbalance between the EU’s status as an economic giant but a political dwarf. Europe has to give serious answers to the great malaise that so many European citizens are feeling today. If we want to succeed globally in the next few years, we have to invest in research and development and must promote a competitive and sustainable economy based on a system of meritocracy.

We must have the courage to overcome our own egos and work together. Only by co-operating will we be able to deal with the urgent problems such as the recent immigration tragedies in Lampedusa and elsewhere. We must be ready to strengthen solidarity between the different EU member states. Europe must be dynamic and focus on the common problems of its people. For this to happen we must make sure the Stability and Growth Pact is not applied as an untouchable dogma but as a
flexible instrument – while respecting the EU treaties – to foster development, growth and employment.

Only by acting together can we be strong and make our voice heard, whether in the fields of economic, financial, asylum and immigration or environmental policy. We have one central demand for any candidate for EU Commission president: the new Commission must be committed to policies which improve the daily lives of those who have suffered most from recession and austerity, and above all the unemployed and the under-privileged in our societies.

The European Parliament elections have shown widespread dissatisfaction with the way that the EU has been run by the outgoing leadership. Many different factors have emerged, but the common thread across Europe is the need for change.

To win our support, the next EU Commission president will have to make a real commitment to promoting investment, sustainable growth and decent jobs, and to tackling poverty and inequality. Furthermore, he or she must commit to safeguard freedom of movement while putting an end to social dumping; strengthening respect for fundamental rights; reinforcing territorial cohesion policies; and establishing an effective common immigration and asylum policy. Finally, they must also commit to making the EU more democratic, transparent and accountable to citizens.

Our Group has always questioned the way that the Stability and Growth Pact has been designed and implemented. The new EU Commission must develop a strategy to eliminate these shortfalls and the existing rules (i.e. budgetary discipline) must be implemented in such a way as to stimulate public investment and support stronger sustainable growth and job creation.

It is time to start working on the Europe of tomorrow we all need.

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Democracy: A long wait

When reform reached the age of ten, a pessimistic tone started to spread. People grew anxious, and the elites became more confused on how to appropriately exercise political power. Election and local election were just ritualistic practices in democracy, without giving enough meaning to the essence of democracy itself. Or even just to convince the people that choosing democracy is the right way. Indonesia’s Democracy was facing economic problems, corruption, terrorism and also being undermined by other ideologies that are trying to be the antithesis of Pancasila, including Islamic leadership concept.

The effort to fight for and defend democracy during Reform era, instead of creating new hope, leads to mass fatigue due to corruption, conflicts, socio-religious violence, radicalism, terrorism, economic crisis, etc. When the people’s psyche grows impatient and fatigued towards democracy and reform, the situation then is manipulated by a few anti-democracy elites to re-establish their oligarchy-plutocratic power in Indonesia. The oligarchy’s propaganda was clear and often repeated: democracy has not resulted in welfare and order but rather disorder!

There were many development during the fifteen years of reform (1998-2013), a great number of events occurred and played big role in the formation of Indonesian society’s political awareness. They include those that represent the society’s courage – individually or collectively – in fighting against injustice; enlightening critics and opinions from intellectuals; as well as the development of technology and

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JOKOWI: INDONESIA'S PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

by Andi Saiful Haq
mass media capitalism which widened the people’s knowledge of social and political issues. All of the above mentioned issues have collectively formed the society’s frame of mind on “what is politics”.

We will further dissect, later, in what political context has Indonesia’s democracy managed to deliver Jokowi, who is supported by so many people; and, how the 2014 legislative election which resulted in ten political parties having seats in the parliament, did not determine the result of 2014 presidential election. What I am trying to say is that Jokowi is an authentic outcome of the people of Indonesia’s endurance in practicing (and pursuing the ideals of) democracy. No matter how long and hard the wait has been.

Jokowi’s emergence: the Birth of Participatory Democracy

The subtitle might be turgid, however let us dissect first in what level of understanding of democracy the Indonesian people voted for Jokowi. We have discussed in the beginning that there are several factors which form the frame of mind of Indonesian people on the definition of politic.

Politics (in the beginning of its reemergence after its confinement by Soeharto’s authoritarian regime) is a series of events around political parties/civil society organizations, parliament, and the government. In other words, a political system is the interrelation among those three institutions with the inputs from society, and outputs for society. Here the political system is depicted as something seemingly detached from the society’s life because it is assumed to have a different logic from the social system. Consequently, discussions on politics and/or political system is a discussion on how the elements in the system think and behave. When the society is involved in the political process or system, its position is outside the system, as the one who questions the output of the system, and/or as the one who judge the merits and faults of the individuals or institutions involved. At a glance, such view seems to not be a problem. At a closer look, such view will result in an understanding that politics is a boxing ring for the actors, and a cockfight show to place bets in for the spectators.

The political discourse which is based merely on the perspective on the political system does not create more space to learn about public participation. The consequence of such perspective is the perception that politics is a matter of individuals in relations to other individuals, whereby such interrelation will create a policy which might be negative or positive. The individuals are those who are in the aforementioned three institutions. Therefore when chaos occurs within the institutions, it is rooted in certain individuals or conspiracy among individuals to topple or promote another individual. Then where is the role or function of the people in such a way of thinking? None. Later, when the people have been registered in the Permanent Voter List, or when one or a few community leaders run for legislators at the City, Provincial or National level.

From this perspective, a result of the thought that every individual is a threat to another, how can the idea of a united struggle emerge? Then Joko Widodo came, a former Mayor of Solo, elected for the second term by the people of Solo, moved to Jakarta to become the city’s Governor, arriving to offer a solution. What are his virtues? He shows the weaknesses of the political system’s perspective, that the elitist way is incapable to accommodate the existence of the society. The society’s diversity was subordinated into a single entity, namely the outer system entity. That is the first. Secondly, Jokowi shows that it is wrong to see the individuals in the political system as independent and detached from their social surroundings outside their workplace. It is as if those individuals do not have siblings, wife, spouses, household assistants, friends, acquaintances, friends from university, etc. who have the potential to influence their thoughts in viewing one or a number problems. In fact, these individuals are free humans who need to be talked to and whose rights should be respected.

Jokowi emerges as a critic against the obsolete and outdated political perspective. He stands over all kind of differences to solve the people’s problems, and finally Indonesia’s problems. Jokowi offers the efforts to develop new political perspective, which does not limit itself in the discussion of one behavior to the other, but a perspective which is able to gather positive potentials from all kind of differences. The suggested perspective was “politics as An Excitement”. The definition of such perspective is the effort to see all kinds of differences as modalities to mobilize the struggle. In other words, the perspective tries to see every individual and/or institution behind it as the foundation to build unity.

The consequence of the perspective is that Jokowi positions the government as an organization which provides democratic space for every member to collectively formulize political policies and implement it. Democratic spaces provided are sectorial, legislative/executive, and intellectual spaces. Those spaces are in equal position and not hierarchical. Sectorial democratic spaces are immanence spaces, and/or adherence between organization and the community’s social life. It is where those who wish to actively get involved in social change -- and implementation of advocacies the grass root level -- operate, and also where the experimental efforts of developing communities’ potentials are originated and designated. Democratic legislative/executive space is discussion spaces of policy and political decision. In those spaces, the efforts to develop community in sectors become programmatic, progressive and sustainable as Jokowi’s political program. Intellectual democratic space is wherein knowledge on problems faced by the society is organized, including the examples of the solution. Thus, each democratic space has its own autonomy in one hand, and
related with the sectorial, even highly dependent on it. This is due to the basic core of “Politics as Excitement” which is the direct involvement of the people as the determinant of political policies. The function of intellectual democratic space is the philosophical function of the organization, namely the radar of the organization. Whereas the function of legislative/executive democratic space is to give political meanings, organizing works at the sectored level to become collective political works.

It is no wonder then that Jokowi’s preliminary activities comprised of continuous *blusukan* (visiting local, even slum communities), since this is where he started to build his politics, and develop his work programs -- and this he did sincerely, not for keeping up appearances but due to the emergence of the new political power model he practiced.

**Jokowi vs. Prabowo: People Logic vs. Elite Logic**

During the presidential election campaign, including official debates organized by the General Election Commission (KPU), **Jokowi seemed to understand well how modern democracy works.** His most important statement was “democracy is listening, listening and listening. Afterwards, working collectively.” While on the other side, Prabowo used normative logic on democracy, which is *trias politica*: legislative, judicative, and executive.

In terms of the programs offered, Prabowo repeatedly mentioned Indonesian economic revival, but failed to elaborate how to achieve it. On the other hand, Jokowi systematically put forward education and intellectual revolution of Indonesian individuals. Education as a way to produce new qualities of Indonesian individuals, then it could be utilized to manage our natural resources. For that purpose, Jokowi offered the launching of Healthy Indonesia Card and Smart Indonesia Card, as social security program in education and health, free for low-income nationals.

Prabowo still found it difficult to escape from his record as the mastermind of the 1998 kidnapping of activists. Newly leaked documents show that he was actively involved and evidently ordered the kidnapping of several pro-democracy activists at that time. On the other hand, Prabowo did not have any record in governance; his whole career was in the Indonesian National Military (TN1)’s Special Forces, which ended in his expulsion due to his involvement in the enforced disappearances.

This is in contrast to Jokowi, a bureaucrat elected by the people of Solo to be their Major, he even won 90,09 % of the votes for his second term, a phenomenal winning in the history of local election in Indonesia. Afterwards, he ran for Governor of Jakarta. In two years of his leadership in Jakarta, many notable changes could be seen in the capital: rejuvenated city parks, re-organized traffic, dam, trash, and the most phenomenal is the MRT project which continued after being shelved for years. All of these are Jokowi’s political modalities to convincingly be nominated by the coalition of Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDIP), National Democrats Party (Nasdem), People’s Conscience Party (Hanura), National Awakening Party (PKB), and Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI) as their presidential candidate paired with Jusuf Kalla.

There is another basic difference between Jokowi and Prabowo. Jokowi was born in a humble family, he made his living as a businessman trading timber furniture. Conversely, Prabowo was born in a wealthy family and a former son-in-law of former President Soeharto who ruled for 32 years in Indonesia. Prabowo ran as the Presidential candidate of a coalition that comprised of Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), Party of Functional Groups (Golkar), United Development Party (PPP), Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Crescent Star Party (PBB) and National Mandate Party (PAN). By simple mathematics, based on legislative election result, the coalition that endorsed Prabowo (Red White Coalition) was bigger. They gained 63% of the seat in the Parliament, compared to the coalition of parties that endorsed Jokowi, which gained 37% of the seat in the Parliament. In the beginning of the campaign, Prabowo started with Islamic spirit in a declaration at the Polonia house. On the other side, Jokowi was attacked with religious and ethnic issues, rumors spread that he is a Chinese descent, Christian, Communist, etc.
Such black campaign was conducted massively through mass media, printed and televised. Up to present, Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) has strongly rebuked almost all television and printed media. One of them, which still under the investigation of the police is Obor Rakyat, a tabloid that openly disseminated black campaign against Jokowi and Jusuf Kalla. Since 1998, there has been such tight competition to the extent that until 14 days before the election there was no single survey institution who could definitely confirm the winner of the 2014 Presidential Election.

Jokowi’s winning: People Power, Nobody can’t stop it

In May 2013, Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) released a survey on 2014 Presidential Election. Jokowi electability was at 51,6% and Prabowo at 35,7%, undecided voters at 12,7%. This means that Jokowi was surpassing Prabowo by 15,9%. However at the end of the third week of June, the decrease of Jokowi’s electability continued while Prabowo’s increased. Based on Saiful Mujani’s statement, in the third week of June, Prabowo was at 0,6% before Jokowi. In a normal condition, the trend will continue and most likely Prabowo would win the 2014 Presidential election.

The black campaign is suspected to be designed by a US based consultant, Rob Allyn, Margate House Film. Even an Indonesian famed writer, Goenawan Mohammad stated, “What is happening in Indonesia is a typically Allyn’s work: full of lies, defamation, fabrication, and twist. Jokowi for example, was alleged to be a communist, infidel, anti-Islam, Christian, has Chinese-Singaporean parents. The concept of Intellectual Revolution was labeled as communist idea as well. During the defamation process, fabricated evidences were disseminated, such as photos, birth certificate or even a fake marriage certificate.” (Indonesia-2014 – 13 July 2014)

The abovementioned is the primary cause of Jokowi’s electability’s decline during May and June. However, it turned out that the Black Campaign was also the contributing factor to the rise of the social movement against such campaign. Many public figures who did not wish to get involved in politics before, then decided to defend Jokowi. The most fascinating is the volunteer movement that started to spring in late June, consisting of the affluent class, musicians, actors and actresses, creative-workers, CSO activists; even those that had previously declared themselves as non-voters (golput; golongan putih) volunteered to support Jokowi.

The volunteer movement grew rapidly, through social media they fought back against the black campaign through various forms: short movie, short story, posters, hash-tags, comedy, etc. They volunteered to donate for Jokowi’s campaign team, to the extent when the donation was closed, the collected fund amounted to 100 billion Rupiah. Not to mention the art performances held by famous artists: SLANK, the rock band known for their millions fanatic fans, held concerts in 13 cities and declared that 133 Slankers organizations were ready to contribute to Jokowi’s victory.

The peak of it all was 2 Fingers Concert on 5 July 2014 at Gelora Bung Karno Main Stadium. It was attended by 145,000 spectators and the turning point of Jokowi’s electability.

It was proven later that the rebound occurred 7 days before the election. The number of volunteers grew and without any logistical support they held activities across Indonesia. Artists blended with the public to ascertain Jokowi’s winning. As I stated in my social media account, “This is the time when politics is supported by culture.” Finally Jokowi succeeded in gaining the vote from undecided voters. Even Anthrax Band and Jason Mraz gave their support in Twitter the night before the election.

Another interesting point is the level of volunteerism in the society, especially in support of Jokowi. It is not merely shown through active participation in campaigns. Jokowi’s campaign team published that they received donation from 59.000 individuals, amounted to Rp. 147.45 billions or approximately USD 12.6 millions. It is the biggest campaign donation throughout democracy history in Indonesia. The donation managed transparently by Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla’s campaign team and regularly reported to the public.

Image: ANTARA/Zabur Karuru
And so that is how the movement rose, a peaceful revolution, a political movement that mobilized millions to participate actively in the 2014 presidential election. The number of voters increased dramatically. The number of voters abroad increased 300% at several locations. Domestically, non-voters which usually reached 35% decreased to 27% in the 2014 presidential election.

Peace revolution: Democracy and Pluralism victory

In the 2014 presidential election, the coalition of Prabowo supporters compared it to Battle of Badr, Prophet Mohammad’s war against the infidels. This political identification was consistently utilized by Prabowo’s camps. Those who supported Jokowi were labeled as infidel, communist, Christian and anti-Islam. However Indonesia succeeded in showing that when they were told to choose between coexisting peacefully with their brothers and sisters of different religions and ethnicities and living in the victory of the majority religion, they preferred the first over the latter. This is evident in the fact that Prabowo camp’s campaign that highlighted tribal, religious, racial, group differences was defeated by the Indonesian people through their vote for Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla which reached 53.15%.

This is not only the victory of Jokowi, but much bigger than that. It was the triumph of democracy over oligarchy, pluralism over sectarianism, political solidarity over money politics, common people over elites, and furthermore, future over past. Indonesia should be proud that we have passed through democratic transition well. Previously we would not have been able to expect that a furniture businessman could be a president. Today as Jokowi won, the meaning of politics has been altered. Politics is no longer elites’ dispute, but rather people’s excitement. It is where everyone could participate; get the opportunity and equal position in substantive democracy.

In the latest survey released by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC), it is concluded that 75.7% of Indonesian people stated democracy is the best system for Indonesia.

The survey indicates that democracy in Indonesia is on the right direction. Various religious fundamentalisms that were trending during the campaign of 2014 presidential election turned out to be the aspiration of only 5.7% of Indonesian people. Similar conclusion is confirmed in the research conducted by SMRC on public satisfaction on the implementation of 2014 presidential election, which can be seen below:

Almost 90% of the voters think that overall the implementation of 2014 presidential election went well. Only 2.3% said that the presidential election was not independent and fair. We can conclude that the quality of democracy in Indonesia is improving gradually. In the midst of pessimism about democracy in the Middle East, Indonesia has recorded a democracy momentum, a new reference of democracy in a country with the largest Moslem population in the world. This also shows that Islam and democracy are not contradictory. Islam and Democracy are complementing each other.

DEMOCRACY SUITABILITY FOR INDONESIA

<table>
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<th>Not Suitable (1-5)</th>
<th>Suitable (6-10)</th>
<th>Do Not Understand</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Survey of SMRC in July 2014

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Presidential Election Implementation

Overall, how do you assess independence and fairness in the presidential election on 9 July 2014, a few days ago... (%)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very independent and fair</th>
<th>Independent and fair, with little problems</th>
<th>Independent and fair in overall, but with many problems</th>
<th>Not independent and fair</th>
<th>Do not know/Do not answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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