



# 8<sup>th</sup> ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC8)

Outlook 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe

ARC8 EG2 Inclusive and Flexible Lifelong Learning Pathways

Session 1 | Monday, 14 December 2020

## Summary

### Presentation of Prof Dr Melinda BANDALARIA, Chancellor and Professor, University of the Philippines Open University

Melinda was asked to focus on the following questions in a 10-minute presentation to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are the national, institutional LLL policies and practices currently, what is the status quo? Do you have any numbers to show?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in LLL in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote inclusion in LLL the next 10 years?

Melinda started her presentation by giving her own definition of lifelong learning: integration of learning and living; covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys, women, and men) in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal). She proceeded with an overview of national lifelong learning policies in the ASEAN region, which which could enable institutional policies as well as initiatives and practices. (Source: “Lifelong Learning in Transformation: Promising Practices in Southeast Asia”, UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2017, available [here](#)).

- **Brunei Darussalam:** A National Education System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century 2009–2017 from the Ministry of Education devising programmes that promote lifelong learning and wider access to higher education
- **Cambodia:** Education Strategic Plan 2014–2018 from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, literacy and lifelong learning is one of several priority programmes
- **Indonesia:** National Strategic Plan 2015–2019 from the Ministry of Education and Culture defines education as a lifelong process. Education should be conducted through an open system that allows flexibility of programmes and time of completion across educational units and pathways.
- **Lao PDR:** Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2016–2020 from the Ministry of Education and Sport: ‘Improve the education system in order to develop human resources with knowledge, skills, have moral and right values ... love lifelong learning, love their own customs and traditions, love progress and science ...’ is one of several key objectives to 2025.
- **Malaysia:** Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for 2011–2020 from the Ministry of Higher Education: lifelong learning identified as the third pillar of a human capital development system.

- **Myanmar:** National Education Sector Plan 2016–21 from the Ministry of Education: alternative education introduced into the education pathways map for work and lifelong learning.
- **Singapore:** Thinking Schools, Learning Nation announced by the Prime Minister of Singapore in 1997: envisions a national culture and social environment that promotes lifelong learning among Singaporeans.
- **Thailand:** The Amended National Education Act 2017–2036 from the Ministry of Education: defines the education policy framework as creating educational opportunities for all people throughout their lives.
- **Timor Leste:** National Education Strategic Plan 2011–2030 from the Ministry of Education: one of the key principles of teacher education and training is to understand the value of lifelong learning in improving teaching quality.
- **Vietnam:** Framework on Building a Learning Society in the Period 2012–2020 from the Prime Minister focuses on creating a learning society in which the inter-relation and transfer between formal and non-formal education support equal access to lifelong learning for all.

Melinda proceeded to give a closer overview of lifelong learning policies in the Philippines. The Philippine development plan 2017-2022 issued by National Economic and Development Authority aims to provide lifelong learning for all to accelerate human capital development. In addition to this the RA 7277 Act on Providing For The Rehabilitation, Self-Development And Self-Reliance Of **Disabled Person** And Their Integration Into The Mainstream Of Society And For Other Purposes with a separate chapter on education which specifies the following areas:

- SECTION 12. Access to Quality Education
- SECTION 13. Assistance to Disabled Students
- SECTION 14. Special Education
- SECTION 15. Vocational or Technical and Other Training Programs
- SECTION 17. State Universities and Colleges

The National Government shall provide the state universities and colleges with the necessary special facilities for visually impaired, hearing impaired, speech impaired, and orthopedically impaired individuals can also be part of the teaching learning process. It shall likewise allocate the necessary funds in support of the above.

There is also the law to recognize and protect promote the rights of indigenous cultural communities **RA No. 8371:** An Act To Recognize, Protect And Promote The Rights Of **Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples**, Creating A National Commission On Indigenous Peoples, Establishing Implementing Mechanisms, Appropriating Funds Therefore. The regulation guarantees full access to education as per below:

- SECTION 26. The State shall provide **full access to education**, maternal and childcare, health and nutrition, and housing services to indigenous women. **Vocational, technical, professional and other forms of training** shall be provided to enable these women to fully participate in all aspects of social life. As far as possible, the State shall ensure that indigenous women have access to all services in their own languages.
- SECTION 28. Integrated System of Education. — The State shall, through the NCIP, provide a complete, **adequate and integrated system of education**, relevant to the needs of the children and young people of ICCs/lps.

The Magna Charta of Women (2008) Act No. 9710 makes sure that women will also not be marginalized in terms of the right to education and training. According to section 24 on the Right to Education and Training the state shall ensure the following:

- Women migrant workers have the opportunity to undergo skills training, if they so desire, before taking on a foreign job, and possible retraining upon return to the country;
- Gender-sensitive training and seminars; and
- Equal opportunities in scholarships based on merit and fitness especially to those interested in research and development aimed towards women-friendly farm technology.
- The cost of implementing GAD programs shall be the agency's or the local government unit's GAD budget which shall be at least five percent (5%) of the agency's or the local government unit's total budget appropriations.

Act RA 9994 focuses on senior citizens and aims to maximize the contribution of the senior citizens to nation buildings: An Act Granting Additional Benefits And Privileges To Senior Citizens, Further Amending Republic Act No. 7432, As Amended, Otherwise Known As "An Act To Maximize The Contribution Of Senior Citizens To Nation Building, Grant Benefits And Special Privileges And For Other Purposes". In terms of education, the Department of Education (DepED), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), in consultation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) for senior citizens, shall institute programs that will ensure access to formal and nonformal education.

Other initiatives include open high school program, targeting learners who are unable to attend the regular classes due to physical impairment, work, financial difficulties, or other justifiable and legitimate reasons. This is basically a dropout prevention programme (DORP) with the following objectives:

- Provide opportunity to all elementary graduates, high school drop-outs to complete secondary education;
- Prevent potential school leavers and encourage those who are out of school to finish secondary education;
- Reduce high school drop-outs and increase participation rate;
- Increase achievement rate through quality distance education

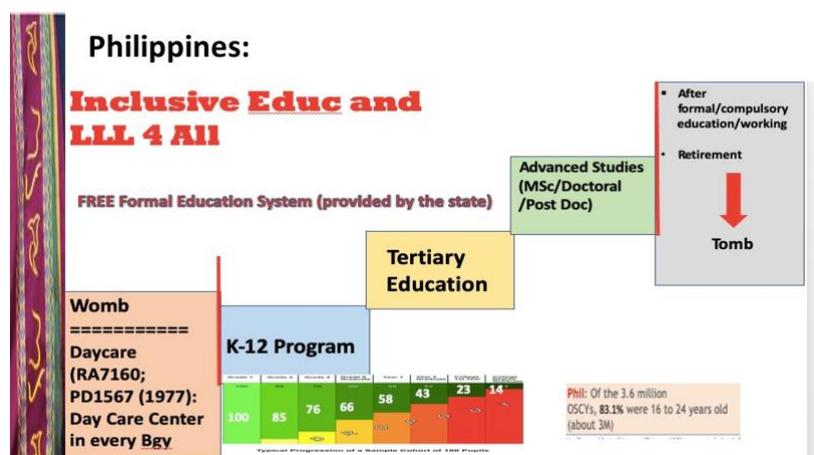
Another programme described as the "other side" of basic education combines non-formal education and accreditation and equivalency (A&E) test that grants elementary or high school diploma by studying through the system modules and then take the accreditation and equivalency tests afterwards. It specifically targets the learning needs of school leavers, adults and other learners from marginalized groups who are described by the law as "deprived, depressed and underserved" (DDUs). Such "other side" classes are held nowadays in about 4,467 community learning centers all over the country.

The Ladderized Education Act 2014 (RA 10647) institutionalized the ladderized interface between the technical vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education. It opened the pathways of opportunities for career and educational progression of students and workers, created a seamless and borderless system of education, empowering students and workers to exercise options or to choose when to enter and exceed in the educational ladder, and provide job platforms at every exit as well as the opportunity to earn income.

In 2014 another republic act (RA10650) entered in force, the Open Distance Learning Act. It aims to further democratize access to quality tertiary education through the promotion and application of open learning. It puts emphasis on open learning as a philosophy of access to educational

services, meaning that even the marginalized and underserved sectors of the society should be included in quality higher education and technical educational services in the country.

There are 112 state-funded universities in the Philippines. Each of them has three major functions: (1) instruction (2) research (3) extension and public service. Public service can be delivered in the form of training programs, non-formal courses for various types of learners or professionals, and the marginalized sectors (women, out-of-school youth, senior citizens).



In the Philippines in terms of inclusive education and lifelong learning we use the “from womb to tomb” concept. Free formal education extends from daycare up to tertiary education. Anyone who has the initiative and motivation to learn, will receive support from the government. Out of 100 who start first grade in the basic education only 14 would complete the tertiary education

level, so 86 of them would drop out from the formal education system at various stages for various reasons. As of 2018 there are 3.6 million out of school youth in the country and 83.1 percent of them where between 16- 24 years old. Majority of those participating in lifelong learning initiatives already have their college degrees or are already in the advanced stage of their studies. This can be attributed to the need for professional advancement especially if your profession requires you to renew your professional license and continuing professional development units would be required for that renewal.

In terms of potential risks that could jeopardize inclusion in the next decade Melinda has listed 5 options. First, even though there are many national policies are in place to promote inclusion and lifelong learning, there is a lack of funding for implementation.

**Q2: What potential risks do you foresee in the coming years that could jeopardize greater inclusion in LLL in the next 10 years?**

- Lack of government funding to support LLL programs
- Sub-standard programs/initiatives for LLL (lack of recognition for learnings acquired outside the formal school system)
- Veering away from the concept of education/learning as a public good to favor education as a commercial enterprise (which has become a model for some open education initiatives like MOOCs)
- Other major disruptions like the COVID -19 pandemic that would highlight social inequality (e.g. digital exclusion) or even armed conflict/peace and order disruption
- Re-emergence of hegemonic perspective that education and learning are confined to the brick and mortar universities (snobbery against off -campus learning)

The great advantage an Oxford or Cambridge man claims over his London rival is his social education. It is he says a moral training. His university career is far more than the acquisition of knowledge. He is no lowly student, working narrowly for his own hand, but a man among men, and he points to the union debating society, to the collegiate and university football, cricket and boating, as influence to this end. (Tait, 2008)

of funding for implementation. Second, there is lack of recognition of learning outside the formal education system. Third, despite that education or learning is considered to be a public good, many consider it as a commercial enterprise. It has become a model for some open education initiatives like the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and instead

of delivering its promise of being open and being inclusive, you still have to put in some resources so that you can complete a MOOC or be able to get a certification for having completed a particular course. Fourth, major disruptions like the COVID19 pandemic highlighted social inequalities (e.g. digital exclusion) which is a very serious problem in many countries in Southeast Asia. Fifth, the re-emergence of hegemonic perspectives and snobbery against off-campus learning, which open universities or distance learning universities have experienced in the Philippines at least.

In terms of opportunities, leverage points to promote inclusion Melinda has shared six points. First was the continuous rise of the open education movement and advocates which will increase inclusive lifelong learning opportunities like MOOCs and OERs



### Q3: What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote inclusion in LLL the next 10 years?

- The continuous rise of the open education movement and advocates which will increase inclusive lifelong learning opportunities like MOOCs and OERs
- The gains/insights from the COVID19 pandemic which forced everyone to embrace (and appreciate) online/flexible learning– the mode of instruction which can accommodate more opportunities for inclusion (UDL and open education; WCAG)
- Availability and continuous advancements in assistive technologies
- Push for SDG #4; universities SDG impact ranking for universities)
- Open Universities– the essence of existence is inclusion and lifelong learning (about 70-48 OUs in Asia; some of which are the largest in the world)
- Regional and global collaborations to promote inclusion LLL (AAOU; SEAMEO; ICDE; COL)



advocates which will increase inclusive lifelong learning opportunities. Hundreds of thousands open-source courses are being offered by the different providers and such, can be considered as lifelong learning opportunities. Also many universities are developing open source materials, which will offer further LLL opportunities. Second, insights from the COVID19 pandemic will force

everyone to embrace and appreciate online flexible learning. This mode of instruction, that universities must embrace now, accommodate more opportunities for inclusion especially through the integration of the features of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Open Education, and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Third, the availability and continuous advancement of assistive technologies will provide opportunities for inclusion. Fourth, new type of university ranking, e.g. THE Impact rankings are providing opportunities for poorer universities to also have an SDG impact and be included into the league of excellence. Fifth, open universities are also providing opportunities for inclusive lifelong learning, because the essence of their existence is anchored in inclusion and lifelong learning. There are about 70 open universities in the world and 48 of them are located in Asia, some of which are the largest in the world. Sixth, regional and global collaborations which are now promoting inclusion in lifelong learning are big opportunities, e.g. the Asian Association of Open Universities. Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), the International Council on Open and Distance Education (ICDE), the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) are all networks that we have in ASEM.

#### Comments on the Status Quo:

- It is very impressive how extensively lifelong learning is promoted in Southeast Asia. There are a lot of initiatives and legislations, would be interesting to see how these are being implemented, whether there are any gaps. It would be also good to see whether any research has been done on participation, outcomes, employability, civic engagement, impact on wellbeing. (Reply: yes, there are figures on participation, that could be shared later, but the timeframe for presentation did not allow for it.)
- The report will need to look at current policies and their implementation and impact as well.
- Agreed that the COVID19 pandemic suddenly drew the light on an awful lot of people who were already excluded from lifelong learning, but now we could see it in a far clearer way and there should be lessons learnt.

#### Comments on the Risks and Challenges:

- Lack of funding is a common risk, the question is whether the funding is matching the intended impact of the programmes.
- Governments of Southeast Asia are still struggling to fund lifelong learning programs because they are mostly still in a stage where they need to put more emphasis on primary education (literacy and numeracy) and according to comparative studies (UNESCO,

SEAMEO) most of their funding for education goes into these areas. They need to improve literacy, numeracy indicators.

- Commercialization is definitely a risk which is not just an issue in terms of lifelong learning and education, but also around a whole range of other public goods. Education and learning are certainly the kind of public goods that has to be provided by the state.
- The point about elitism is absolutely a great risk. Those who enter university via the traditional routes (from high school, with entrance exams) are considered to be the legitimate students, and everyone else entering via different routes are considered non-traditional. Even the term “non-traditional” itself is reinforcing this elitism.
- The mindset in Southeast Asia is that formal education is the correct pathway to universities, and non-formal education is a difficult, blurry way, that does not give proper credentials. This public perception can only be changed via a coordinated effort, a whole-of-government approach.

#### **Comments on Opportunities:**

- Digitalisation has been considered to be a great opportunity for lifelong learning for quite some time now (open sources, open education, and MOOCs). However, there has not been much progress, because the basic digital literacy skills of adults are missing. For example, there are over 40% of adults have no basic digital skills in Europe. It is important to note, that some opportunities have prerequisites.
- Regional and global collaboration is an important opportunity, ensures exchange of knowledge and practices. Regional cooperation among different stakeholders have advanced a lot also when it comes to inclusion mechanisms.

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