

Focusing on six action areas

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzulkifli Abd Razak

Comment

New Sunday Times - 06/14/2009

THE 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17CCEM) in Kuala Lumpur will be the biggest ever meeting of its kind since the first conference was held in Oxford 50 years ago.

Malaysia is honoured to host the 50th anniversary of the conference, starting tomorrow. The four-day conference is jointly organised by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Other organising partners include the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Commonwealth Teachers Group, and Nexus Strategic Partnerships Ltd.

Aptly, the theme of the conference is "Education in the Commonwealth: Towards and Beyond Global Goals and Targets".

It is time to seriously look into the future of education as all other sectors are also facing an uncertain future.

This year, the conference will introduce the Vice-Chancellors' Forum from participating countries. There will also be other forums which will serve to facilitate interactions around the key themes between civil society, teachers and youths.

These parallel forums aim to bring together representatives from national and international agencies, experts, academics, teachers, non-governmental organisations, youths and the private sector engaged in education at all levels in the Commonwealth.

At the heart of the conference, the "Commonwealth Education Showcase" will include over 200 exhibition stands, allowing governments, education institutions, NGOs and businesses from the Commonwealth to showcase their policies, projects and products to the delegates.

The showcase is also to provide a central venue for delegates to network and develop collaborative activities among members.

The conference is expected to create even greater interest given the emerging issues that affect the state of the world today, not least the impact of the global financial crisis on education goals and targets, and how education can assist to mitigate some of the undesirable consequences over the long-term.

In many places the impact is already felt in a significant way.

Coupled with this will be issues impacting on other global education goals, such as stated in the Millennium Development Goals in Education, and Education for All.

Not to be missed is the Education for Sustainable Development, all of which will end barely five years from now.

It is, therefore, urgent since there are indications that many of the targets are still way off the mark.

This would mean that many developing countries will be facing challenging times ahead in meeting the learning and socio-economic needs of adults and children beyond 2015.

Also to be celebrated this year is the anniversary of the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris early next month where deliberations at 17CCEM will provide significant input.

Among others, the Commonwealth is focusing on six education action areas, and Achieving Universal Primary Education is one of the key Millennium Development Goals that remains as an overarching concern for the Commonwealth.

The goals call for ensuring that by 2015, children everywhere are able to complete primary schooling.

The second is Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education through targeted programmes of action in education to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling.

Thirdly, Improving Quality in Education that needs to be urgently addressed, including the Continuing Professional Development of teachers which has been identified as a key element in ensuring quality in

education systems

The fourth area is the use of Distance Learning to overcome geographical barriers.

The fifth is mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS, especially in exploring the role educational policies and strategies can play in tackling the HIV epidemic.

Lastly, the goal supports Education in Difficult Circumstances, an attempt to address a spectrum of problems that hinder children from accessing quality education.

Dr Henry Kaluba, head of Education at the Commonwealth Secretariat, has been quoted as saying: "It is a historic meeting for the Commonwealth and for educators across the world, and a unique opportunity for different people committed to strengthening education in the Commonwealth to share ideas and build on agreements."

In 2007, at the Heads of Government meeting, the publication, Civil Paths to Peace was presented which states: "In the longer run, the biggest gains in shaping shared narrative across potential divides will most likely come from investment in, and rethinking of education."

It is, therefore, our fervent hope that the conference will have a fruitful outcome for all the objectives set; more importantly will transform the course of education for the 21st century.

On behalf of the Vice-Chancellors and Rectors of Malaysian universities, we welcome all delegates to the 17CCEM and may your stay here be a memorable one.

* The writer is the Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia. He can be contacted at vc@usm.my

[Terms & Conditions](#)