Education 2030: “Policy makers aren’t planning for the long term!”

University of Bamberg professor of education analyses international educational policy

Over 25 years ago, the United Nations (UN) designated the 17th of October the “International Day for the Eradication of Poverty”. And poverty continues to be a pressing issue: according to the UN, 783 million people currently live below the poverty line. One fundamental prerequisite for poverty reduction is universal education. In the developing world, education is the foundation on which democratic structures can be built and economic growth can be achieved. But analyses conducted by Prof. Annette Scheunpflug, chair of Foundations in Education at the University of Bamberg, reveal that less money is flowing into educational action programmes than political rhetoric would imply. What’s more, particularly needy countries frequently come up short.

According to the UN’s “Education 2030” framework for action, all children worldwide should have access to elementary, primary and secondary education by the year 2030. Scheunpflug, who analysed the data supplied by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, says that “the resolved goals are not represented in financial transfers”. She points out that increases in cash flow for education remain undetectable on both the international and national levels. “Quite to the contrary, the initial emphasis on financial support for primary education has been on the decline since 2010”.

Moreover, considerations regarding foreign, security and economic policy issues frequently figure into the question of which regions will receive funding. Poorer countries outside the main scope of political attention tend to receive less money than states considered politically relevant. Less focus is placed on countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, than on Middle Eastern or Asian countries. “From a European perspective, there’s an objectively great need for increased aid when you consider the refugee situation,” says Scheunpflug. “It’s the seismograph that shows us that in certain of sub-Saharan African countries – Eritrea for instance – something in their education policy has gone wrong and continues to go wrong.”

Scheunpflug also criticises the fact that neither elementary education nor teacher training programmes are being funded at the level required by “Education 2030”. “This is an area where investments truly pay off. Subsequent learning becomes easier. Policy makers aren’t planning for the long term, rather they seem to be more interested in fast results!” She also calls for the availability of more, higher quality data that can be analysed in order to create a stronger foundation for future action. “Only action based on scientific facts will help create policies that can achieve the goals of educational cooperation in our current, complex situation.”

An extensive, German-language interview with Prof. Annette Scheunpflug on this topic can be found at www.uni-bamberg.de/news/artikel/internationale-bildungspolitik-scheunpflug.

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