The Role of Universities and University Students

Thelma Kay
Senior Advisor, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (Singapore) and Former Director, Social Development Division UNESCAP
Uneven progress in world

- Human progress uneven and mixed in recent decades
- Asia and Pacific region as a whole made more progress than sub-Saharan Africa but less than Latin America and the Caribbean.
- National level gains mask disparities among subregions, between countries and within countries
MDGs 2010

• In 2000, the Millennium Declaration was adopted in New York.
• 8 MDGs – identified priorities, with 18 targets to be measured by 48 indicators
• 2015 was set as target date to achieve most of the MDGs.
• In September 2010, world leaders reviewed progress, assessed obstacles and adopted action agenda (and pledged funding) to build on successes and close gaps in achieving MDGs by 2015
MDGs Report 2010

• Mixed report card - inroads in many areas but progress uneven and setbacks because of financial crisis.

- Gains in poverty reduction, primary school enrolment, gender parity in education, maternal mortality

- But inequalities persist with gaps between rich and poor, rural and urban, and disadvantaged/vulnerable
Impressive gains in Asia-Pacific

ESCAP/ADB/UNDP 2009/10 MDG report

Early achiever (already achieved MDG 2015 target) :
• Reduced gender disparity in primary/tertiary education
• Stopped spread of HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis
• Ensured proportion of protected area to maintain biodiversity
• Reduce consumption of ozone-depleting substances
• Halve proportion of people without safe drinking water access
Expected gains but....

On track (expected to meet 2015 target)

- Universal access of children to primary school
- Gender parity in secondary education
- Halve proportion living below $1.25 per day poverty line
- Between 1990-2005 reduction from 1 billion to 979 million living below $1.25 per day

BUT....

- Asia still has majority of world’s poor,
- Lagging behind in important targets, especially those related to higher standards of health
- Disparity among subregions, country groups (LDCs) and within country
Persistent and emerging challenges

• Threats to achievement of MDGs – slower economic growth, food and fuel concerns, governance

• New and emerging challenges
  - globalization
  - demographic changes
  - urbanization
Accelerating MDGs attainment

• Recognize that poverty and social development requires economic growth but growth alone insufficient
• Need to address issues like inclusion, social justice, inequality
• Need to target vulnerable and groups at risk; marginalized groups in rural and mountainous areas
• Focus on ecological issues and impact of climate change, especially on poor
Collective action needed

- Collective action to make services work for all esp the poor
- Interplay of policy makers, recipients, service providers
- Responsive institutions, empowered and assertive recipients, supported by civil society
- What is the role of universities and students?
Role of Universities and Students

World Bank STEP framework

Step 1: Getting infants off to right start
Step 2: Ensuring that all students learn
Step 3: Building job-relevant skills
Step 4: Encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation
Step 5: Facilitating labour mobility and job matching

• Prioritize the STEPS – different solutions in different contexts
Role of universities and students

• STEPs 3 to 5 of framework
• Universities provide knowledge/skills - underpinning of a knowledge society
• Provide theoretical knowledge to apply to real work
• Theories, tools, methodologies (statistical analysis, randomized trials, etc.)
Factors affecting child mortality

- Child mortality is correlated with:
  - health expenditure per capita
  - child immunization
  - access to improved sanitation
  - government efficiency
  - literacy rates in total populations esp of women
- Regression results indicate the following factors are key:
  - health expenditure per capita
  - child immunization
  - control of corruption
Combining theory with practice

• Combine theory with practice to validate and situate theory in reality
• Service learning, work-integrated learning programmes
• Towards social/community integrated education to increase relevance of education to national development
• Strengthen both job-relevant skills and innovation skills
Service-learning

• Combines community service with formal curriculum
• Hands-on, uses students’ knowledge as well as potential
• Students take active role, contributes to society, encourage civic participation (life-long)
• Reflection to assess and make connection between formal schooling and social/community learning
• Bridge between academia and community
Learnings and action

• Accelerating MDG agenda and addressing emerging challenges require innovative and fresh approaches

• Should not use obsolete and irrelevant instruments to address new 21st Century agenda e.g.- revisit pension systems established for shorter life span in Bismarkian times
  - review family welfarism in context of changing society and lifestyles
  - broaden concept of social protection

• Need to think outside the box, move beyond the conventional, and not be behind the curve
Learnings and Action

(1) Holisitic
   - breach interdisciplinary barriers
     eg. health outcome not just function of income – Kerala, Sri Lanka not just correlated to income, but also to literacy rate, women’s empowerment etc.
   - reach across sectors/industries
Learnings and Action

(2) Hyperconnected

• Harness the power of new social media to challenge, influence, advocate, connect

• Innovate from the bottom – chaotic but smart (Tahir Square)

• Learn from and exchange best practices and cross-culturally from other countries
Learnings and Action

(3) People-centric

• Put people first (not bankers, shareholders.....)

• Grow and share – debunk trickle down

• Restore social compact
Learnings and Action

(4) Intergenerational Solidarity
• Foster relations between young and older persons, avoid conflict across generations
• Change values and mindset, nurture culture of care and compassion
• Promote continuous life-long learning (now a new pillar of active ageing)
Does it work?

- Accountability and effective monitoring
- Outcome measures and impact evaluation
- Balance what should be measured, what can be measured, and what is most useful to be measured

Co-create relevant and innovative solutions for a rapidly changing world.
Thank you