



Promoting Post-Secondary and Higher Education Eco-Systems & Diversity to Ensure Access, Equity and Success – Towards a New Global Framework –

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The issue of global access to post-secondary education is one of the pertinent issues that the International Association of Universities (IAU) has been voicing out as one of its core concerns, inter alia that of equity and success. In the recent 2015 World Education Forum, the IAU joined many others in acknowledging and advocating the inclusion of an equitable expansion of higher education and research as a pathway to enhance access and success. In addition to this the IAU firmly believe that limiting the request only to improving access could satisfactorily meet the aspirations of the Education for All (EFA) initiative, for instance, Goal 2 of the EFA initiative, which states: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Access, in our opinion, should always be associated to retention, quality and success. There will be even greater impact (without necessarily expanding access per se, that is, no need to increase the number of students) if the percentages of dropouts and students leaving the system without a diploma can be drastically reduced. In other words, good and quality primary and secondary education will be key to closing the global gap to post-secondary and indeed higher education.

In this regard, the IAU also believes that an equitable expansion of post-secondary (and higher) education should not be evaluated by conventionally counting the number of new education institutions and providers but also by looking at the ecosystems, which maintain or try to reach a diversified education landscape. Countries should commit to safeguarding this diversity, including by offering education as a public good.



Indeed, the Incheon Declaration that came out of the World Education Conference places due emphasis on the need to enhance and preserve linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity as part of the 21st century education global landscape.

Increasingly, the IAU also feels that the growing importance of the 'third mission' of education institutions vis-à-vis community (service) engagement and social responsibility – must be reflected in the entire education ecosystem as a continuum. This means that primary and secondary school education should take this into consideration beyond just the regular teaching of civil and/or citizenry education. It should form part of the societal activities to develop civic-social responsibility that supports all other education goals, for example in the context of developing life-skills learning as mentioned in EFA goals 3 and 6. These can also help in solving difficult issues such as those related to out-of-school children or adult literacy, and can even lead to social innovations in fostering new solutions when faced with new challenges on the ground.

In a similar vein, it can be a very useful 'bridge' to foster inter-disciplinary approaches that help to integrate the various disciplines or subjects, notably that of the sciences and of social sciences and the humanities. Increasingly this is seen as an important part of the 'new' learning, one that goes beyond the siloed or rigid disciplinary-type of approach to what is now encouraged as the whole-institution or whole-community approaches. This will go a long way to enhance a holistic and global mindset for the future especially in the context of the sustainable development post-2015 agenda. Inter-disciplinary approaches and a holistic and global mindset are necessary in co-creating the 'new' sustainable knowledges (sic) for a sustainable future. As a consequence, the IAU would like to support the notion of creating 'lifelong learning opportunities' for all, in all settings and at all levels of education. This includes the equitable expansion not just of technical and vocational education and training, but also of indigenous knowledges and wisdoms that have been kept away from the formal education systems to the extent that they are marginalized and at risk of being forgotten as knowledge sources to deepen the third mission of education.



That said, flexible learning pathways, as well as the recognition, validation and accreditation of knowledges, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education and the appropriate use of information and communication technologies are crucial elements that must be seriously considered to be matched up with the goals to ensure access, equity and success are satisfactorily fulfilled. In this context too the idea of *lifewide* (as opposed to *lifelong*) learning is equally important to be introduced and practiced. It “recognises that learning occurs in multiple contexts within a learner's life: school, home, work, etc. It is a concept that is compared and contrasted to lifelong education, recognising that not only does learning occur continually throughout one's life (from womb to tomb), it occurs broadly across every situation in one's (social) life.”

In summary, the global access to post-secondary and even higher education needs a framework of action where the multiple missions of education institutions – teaching, learning, discovery or research, and community engagement (service) – should be integrated in a way that access can be further enhanced by the goals of equity, retention and success simultaneously. And that the roles, efforts and actions of other actors, in particular the civil societies that are education-related, can be enlisted for the achievement of all education goals.

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