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Mobilising the world's teachers



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UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

SDG 4 – to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – is both bold and ambitious. It is also essential if the world is to face an uncertain and fast-developing future with confidence. It cannot be a target that we fail to meet, and which then passes us by, as the 2015 Millennium Development Goal on universal primary education did. It not only let down all those for whom SDG 4 would represent real progress in their lives, but it generates a corrosive cynicism about any commitment to bring about real change.

How to make 2030 different?

The answer lies in tapping into the energy of one of the most powerful resources we have, but which we rarely recognise and seldom appreciate. It is the power of the world's teachers. Global policy-makers can help create the conditions to meet SDG 4's targets: securing the resources, building the global alliances and generating the necessary commitments. But the work will be carried out by the world's teachers.

Whether or not the aspirations of SDG 4 are achieved will ultimately depend on the ability to mobilise the collective power of a high-quality and committed teaching profession globally. This requires breaking out of closed policy circles in which the vast majority of teachers are totally unaware of SDG 4, let alone feel they have any part in realising its objectives. Making the goals of inclusive and equitable education and lifelong opportunities for all something real and meaningful for teachers is a major, but essential, challenge.

However, it is also necessary to break through the barriers that militate daily against teachers carrying out their jobs effectively and instead create the conditions whereby teaching everywhere is an attractive and sustainable career that makes a real difference to students' lives.

We know that vast numbers of teachers are constrained in their work by a lack of resources. These issues are obviously more acute in particular parts of the world, but the

legacy of the economic crisis means that resource problems are faced in some form almost everywhere. That said, the problems that teachers face cannot always be reduced to money and resources. Often teachers feel undermined as a search for 'quick-fix' solutions results in policy imposition without any meaningful consultation with professional teachers. Policy is increasingly driven by an obsession with numbers, which reduces complex educational processes to crude rankings. What might be attractive to policy-makers does not always make for good pedagogy.

The challenge is to develop a teaching profession globally in which the job is well rewarded and adequately resourced, but most importantly, it is the exciting, creative and inspiring job that is the real reason teachers want to teach. Endless policy imposition, an absence of trust, and gimmicks such as performance-related pay and privatisation will never succeed in unleashing the energy that is the collective power of teachers. That power is there, and can be built upon. The challenge is to work with teachers to make it happen. ■



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