Bringing regional spirit of cooperation back to life

ABDOUL QAUES LANCETA

Explained as the fee that binds Southeast Asian countries in education, science and culture, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) brought back to life the very essence of its mandate in its biennial High Officials Meeting that discussed agenda items that are significant for improving the quality of education and achieving the Education for All goals in Southeast Asia.

"If we are to overcome coronavirus and challenges like the current global financial crisis, it is vital that our cooperation efforts are effectively geared toward building the development agenda in the region," said Mala Khan, Thailand's minister of education, who officiated at the opening of the meeting.

Agenda of quality education

The gathering of Southeast Asian member education officials consisted of initiatives on providing education to the underserved, setting up schools, and improving health among others.

Declarations focused on ways to work together to provide education to as many Southeast Asians as possible. Strategies included aligning programs and mechanisms in the region within the Southeast Asian Network. Meanwhile, member countries and partner organizations volunteered to take part in various capacities.

Malaysia took the responsibility to lead the region in initiatives supporting learners with disabilities, raising awareness of girls' and women's education, and ensuring that indigenous populations in the region, the Filipinos, also be taken into their racial and cultural needs. It also agreed to work with Indonesia in meeting the regional plan to promote education in refugees and disaster-affected areas.

Meanwhile, Indonesia is working to raise leadership positions in providing education for marginal and underprivileged children in Southeast Asia, Thailand and Laos committed to working in an initiative to improve literacy for children in refugee contexts through community-based learning courses and multimedia teaching, respectively.

The United East Asia-Pacific Educational Office undertook to support Laos' projects on school health, nutrition, mother tongue instruction, preschool, and community-level education in emergencies. Bordered by the common commitment of improving the quality of education and providing education for all, the region expected more volunteers from member countries, across continents, and partner organizations when the regional collaborative projects roll out for implementation.

The six goals of education for all as expounded at the 13th High Officials Meeting, stressed the need for countries' efforts to bridge the development gap in the region, namely, constructing better quality education; achieving gender equality in education; and advance the quality of education.

Prelude to the meeting

Convened annually, the Southeast Asia High Officials Meeting is also a forum for discussions on other regional concerns, such as initiatives of new students, members, and institutions of non-migrant countries, and physical and financial perspectives.

The meeting was convened at the Anantara Riverside Hotel, Bangkok, from Jan. 30 to 31, and was attended by over 150 participants comprising Southeast Asian education officials from member countries, center directors, representatives of national and regional officials, and officers of national and international partners.

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Chaturangkorn Srinakiat, permanent secretary of Thailand's Ministry of Education, and the chief of the meeting.

The headquarters of SEAMEO is located in Bangkok, Thailand.

For more information about the committee, visit www.seameo.org, or email your comments to education@seameo.org.