

Editorial by VERA EL KHOURY LACOEUILHE

Are our Education Systems obsolete?

I will share with you my thoughts. They are the fruit of 20 years of work in UNESCO, following the implementation of the MDG's and lately, the negotiation of the SDGs, particularly SDG4. They also concur with my vision for UNESCO.

Yes, our Education Systems are obsolete.

They have been modeled to meet the requirements of the Industrial Revolution and have not changed much for over 200 years.

These Systems are no longer totally fit to provide the kinds of mindsets or skills we need to build the societies of the Connectivity era.

In 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity stated; "Today's generation of young people faces a radically changing world. Up to half of the world's jobs-around 2 billion- is at high risk of disappearing...demand for high-level skills will grow, and many low- and medium-skilled jobs will become obsolete..."

Inequality is the greatest threat associated with the 4th technological revolution. Today it is difficult to clearly identify the jobs of the future. However, there seems to be a general consensus on the skills required to allow youth to adapt in a continuously changing world and work flexibly.

Some of these skills are, Leadership, Digital Literacy, Communication, Creativity, Entrepreneurship, Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Team-working.

There is therefore a general agreement that reading, writing and math, although still essential will no longer be enough.

Talent is going to be key and has to be unearthed in every child. Today, students are learning the same things at the same speed despite the diversity in capacities and interests. Education has to become more flexible and modular to meet the needs and interests of the children. It has to boost creativity instead of killing it.

The students will design the future and the jobs of the future, not the markets – It is therefore crucial that they learn how to innovate.

The world we live in today is certainly not the one we wished for our children. We are challenged with rising inequalities, violence and extremism.

We have to recognize that to some extent; this world is the product of our Education Systems. It is time we admit that they don't seem fit enough for building peaceful and sustainable societies.

In reality, our Education Systems boost competition with one main objective: financial gain. They are Systems that privilege the survival of the fittest.

Many researchers around the world strongly believe that youth need to be equipped with competences such as “mindfulness, empathy and compassion” (MGIEP). Our children are the leaders, the politicians, the thinkers, the scientists, and the economists of the future. They will model our societies and determine the degree of sustainability of our planet.

It is therefore urgent to rethink Education.

A new mindset is necessary; one that considers that social and ecological achievements are as important as the financial ones and one that leads to peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies.

African countries like other developing countries are concerned by these changes. Today's change is exponential and technology is getting cheaper every day, which means that no country is immune to these transformations.

They will occur sooner than we think. The velocity, scope and impact of this technological revolution are unprecedented and will be highly disruptive everywhere.

But for Africa the 4th technological revolution is an unprecedented opportunity to leapfrog. One has only to observe what is happening in countries such as Rwanda and Kenya to understand the opportunities at hand.

The priorities set in agenda 2063 go into the right direction. For example the creation of e-universities and girl's education, especially girls in sciences will be key for the African continent.

Many of us know more than I do about how to transform Education Systems. We know about the increased importance of Technical and Vocational Education, about the absolute need from now on, for Long Life Learning for all, about the new methods of learning and teaching involving technology, and about the new role of teachers.

Teachers will continue to have a big role to play. I do not think that digital technologies will completely replace teachers as some are claiming. However the role of teachers has to evolve from transferring knowledge, to facilitating, guiding and enabling learners to deal with the volume of information and knowledge now available to them with a click.

To teach the new skills, it's a re-haul of the whole system that is needed. Each country has to identify its own vision and develop its own strategy, involving curriculum in its broadest form--not just textbooks, but delivery paradigms that identify the roles of teachers, of technologies and even of partners.

Countries should take full ownership of their vision and of their strategy. There isn't a single approach that is replicable around the world. There is no "one-size fits all".

Many institutions and organizations can provide help and advice to member states. However, I don't know of a single one that can deliver

the whole package and excels in doing so. There are excellent experts for the various phases of the reform and ideally, one would bring these experts where and when needed.

To conclude, I would like to state that our children will be the masters of their future, and education needs to give them the skills and aptitudes to engage and design their future.

Transforming education is expensive but we cannot rely on developed countries to provide the resources. We have to secure the financing ourselves and invest in what matters more than anything else, wherever we come from: our children and their future.

During my three years of intense campaigning, I have visited 43 countries. I had the opportunity to discuss my vision with officials in several donor countries.

We could not fully agree on two issues. Some of them considered that their development aid for Education should only target Least Developed Countries (and countries in crisis), and should concentrate on access to education.

I do not think that categorizing countries by relying solely on income as a criterion for determining wealth and the degree of development is realistic. I believe in the multi dimensional aspect of poverty. Many of the member states that are today in the category of Middle Income Countries still require help from the international community.

Moreover, I do not think that priority should be only given to access to education. I strongly believe that we cannot afford the luxury of waiting to achieve full access before we reform our Education Systems and strengthen our Higher Education.

As declared by the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity- "high-level skills will grow, and many low-and medium-skilled jobs will become obsolete."

The 4th technological revolution will not wait for us. Literacy and the transformation of Education Systems to introduce 21st century skills are two high priorities that should advance hand in hand.

This will require a lot of resources. The speed of implementation of this reform will greatly depend on the capacities of each country. We, Developing Countries, should rely on ourselves, and not allow anyone to decide our priorities for us.

The Heads of States and the Ministers of Education from Developing Countries that I had the honour to meet during my campaign are fully aware of the impact of the 4th technological revolution both in terms of its opportunities and its challenges.

They are aware of the importance of literacy, namely of digital literacy, but they also know that without high-level skills and Higher Education there can be no development. It was already the case before the Technological revolution; it is even more the case today.

If we concentrate only on literacy while Developed Countries are already transforming and modernizing their Education Systems to integrate 21st century skills, we will stay behind instead of leapfrogging.

We all know that the resources exist. When there is a will there is a way. It is our responsibility to invest in our children and in their future. There are no excuses for not doing so.

So, let us take our future in our own hands.

We will be held responsible by our children and by History if we don't.