

Investing in quality 'second chance' education

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In recognition of the World Day Against Child Labor 2012, the ILO reiterates that the ILO Conventions on child labor on Minimum Age and the Worst Forms of Child Labor are two of the most widely ratified conventions among the ILO member states.

However, there are many challenges to implementing the measures of these conventions, particularly to ensure that all children have the right to education.

As of today, more than 80 percent of the 183 ILO member states have ratified Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

The conventions have been respectively adopted and integrated into national policy by 163 and 175 countries, including Indonesia, a fact that indicates a clear global consensus with respect to child labor, and this has been followed by an increase in the number of formulated national policies in this field.

In Indonesia, approximately 2.3 million children aged 7 to 14 years and another estimated 2 million between 15 to 17 years of age are subject to child labor, working more than 40 hours a week. Many of these individuals are exposed to hazardous working conditions (UCW, 2012).

Thanks to the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education and conditional cash transfer programs in the country, child labor practice has declined.

However, children between 15 to 17 years of age seem to have been neglected. For this reason, we need a concerted effort to ensure that these children stay in school and/or have access to skills and vocational training.

The difficult part of this approach is that, according to the government, children between 15 and 17 years old are by law able to work regular jobs up to a maximum of 40 hour per week. Most of these children work for their families as unpaid labor and in agriculture and the manufacturing sector as informal employees who are exposed to hazardous conditions.

Furthermore, this segment of the economy is not protected by the labor law or covered by any labor inspection mechanism.

In general, child labor is a result of poverty. In most cases, children have no option but to work, and as a result, lack the skills to find gainful and productive employment. Promoting continued education is the best way to prevent this problem.

Statistics find that Papua and East Nusa Tenggara, two provinces with the highest poverty rates, are among the provinces with the largest gap in educational participation (48.6 and 49.6 percent respectively). The statistics also show that almost 9 percent of child laborers aged 7 to 14 years old live in eastern Indonesia, the highest in Indonesia (CBS, 2012).

To address the issue, coherent policies combining education and employment with linkages to social protection programs would help break this vicious cycle of child labor and deal with the vulnerability of children.

Having regional disparities of poverty, unemployment and informality within the country, the "one size fits all" policies have to be avoided and replaced with regionally sensitive policies.

Another pressing issue is the high rate of dropouts that seems to be a "byproduct" of the current education policy of building so many primary schools without measures for maintaining sustainability.

According to an Education Ministry report in 2008, there are 144,567 primary schools compared to only 26,777 secondary schools and 10, 239 senior high schools in Indonesia.

It is crucial to build more secondary and high schools to match the current program of building primary schools and to expand to a 12-year compulsory basic education system as part of an effort to curb these natural dropouts caused by the absence of enough secondary school facilities.

This has been the most challenging issue, particularly under the current decentralized government system

which, despite the fact that 20 percent of the state budget is allocated for education, has hardly been translated at the sub-province level, including the most remote rural areas.

To provide a clearer illustration on this, in one particular district in Papua, people have demanded building a school with the most basic services, but without much success for a decade.

Yet, building the education system cannot end by completing physical infrastructure.

Another tremendously difficult aspect is building the capacity of teachers and vocational training instructors to design curriculum fit for the needs of children.

The failure to equip the teachers and instructors with adequate technical and life skills will adversely affect the quality of education.

Last, in addition to formal education, expanding accessibility for older children and youth in rural areas by providing vocational skills training is required. This has to be done by revisiting existing employment services and integrating employment services with vocational training providers, more efficiently matching labor supply and demand of the labor market and delivering a “hands-on” skills training fit for the local and global market demand.

This includes building more mobile training facilities to serve the needs of older children and the youth for specific skills, including entrepreneurship skills in remote areas to address the slow growth of formal jobs.

In line with this effort, more affirmative action from the vocational training centers to accept dropouts under the age of 24 has to be pursued. Further, internship programs and “tailor-made” vocational training underscoring specific skills training in response to the local market needs are required.

Moreover, utilizing the capacity of the private sector through public-private partnerships schemes would be a crucial strategy to providing greater employment opportunities for older children and the youth, including the dropouts.

There is an urgent need to prepare second chance education now that the National Planning and Development Agency (BAPPENAS) has said that by 2025, the number of young people with minimum education of primary school will be cut to 48 million.

Building a mechanism to ensure access for second chance education is a key to addressing the issues of child labor as well as youth employment. Providing all dropouts a chance to catch up on their delayed school attainment and facilitating better access to educational and vocational skills training can increase their employability and access to the future globalized labor market.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/07/12/investing-quality-second-chance-education.html>