

Improving education for all

INTERVIEW WITH MUHAMMAD NUH

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MUHAMMAD NUH graduated with a degree in engineering from ITS (Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember) in 1983 and also holds a DEA (diploma of further studies) and a doctorate from USTL in Montpellier, France. He has been a lecturer in electrical engineering at ITS since 1984 and received his professorship in digital control systems from the Institute in 2006. Mr Nuh was appointed Minister of Communication and Information Technology in 2007, a position he held for two years until his appointment as Minister of National Education in October 2009.

In line with Indonesia's Millennium Development Goals, spending on education has increased over the last 15 years, resulting in improvements in the quality of primary and secondary education. How is your Ministry tackling the challenge of increasing access to, and the quality of, secondary and higher education?

Indonesia's education development aims to improve equal access, quality, relevance, and efficiency in education management. As a commitment to education, in 1994 the government launched *Compulsory Basic Education (CBE)* to ensure that all children aged 7–15 years attend basic education up to the junior secondary level (SMP/MTs). The involvement of Indonesia in the Millennium Declaration, the Dakar Declaration on Education for All, and the Convention on the Rights of Children strengthened government commitment to education and to achieve equal access for all Indonesian children.

Improvement in access and quality of basic education in Indonesia has resulted from implementation of the policy to achieve universal basic education. In 2009, the government allocated 20 per cent of the national budget for education. Starting from 2003, the government has also provided specific or earmarked funding (*Dana Alokasi Khusus – DAK*) to local governments to support the compulsory basic education programme, particularly for the rehabilitation of primary school buildings and provision of furniture. The budget allocations for the education DAK have been increased from year to year, reaching Rp 10 trillion in 2012. The use of the DAK was extended not only for primary education but also for junior secondary education and can be used for building new class rooms, rehabilitation, and improving the quality of buildings.

In addition, starting from 2005 the government has provided School Operational Assistance (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah – BOS*) funding directly to schools to reduce the burden of operational costs. The block grants are disbursed to all private and public primary schools (SD/MI) and junior secondary schools (SMP/MTs) and are aimed to eliminate school fees. For schools located in poor areas, the BOS was very beneficial since it replaced financial contributions from parents to schools, particularly for tuition fees. Several districts provide District BOS from their local budget. Over the last six years the coverage and unit costs of

BOS had been improved. In 2010 BOS covered over 44 million students and around 210 thousand schools/madrasah with a total budget of Rp 27.6 trillion.

A number of key policy measures are organised into expanding access, improving quality, and reducing the disparity of the nine-year compulsory education, as well as strengthening institutional capacity. The efforts include increasing the availability of school and madrasah infrastructure; equipping schools with better library and laboratory facilities; reaching the unreached groups through such programmes as the provision of subsidy for the poor, 'one roof' system schools for SD-SMP, and special incentives for teachers teaching in the remote areas; implementing a nationwide programme for rehabilitating all the primary and junior secondary schools in poor condition; improving the curriculum; improving teacher quality; and strengthening school-based management.

These sustained, concerted efforts have shown a significant increase in the enrolment rate at junior secondary level, accompanied by a steadily decreasing disparity among the socio-economic groups. This significant progress has also put Indonesia on track to achieving the MDG target for primary education and literacy. The country aims to go beyond the MDG education target for primary education by expanding the target to junior secondary education (SMP and madrasah tsanawiyah-MTs, grades 7 to 9).

Since basic education has become compulsory and the gross enrolment rate at Junior Secondary level has reached nearly 100 per cent, the next challenge is to ensure that all the graduates are able to continue to the Senior Secondary level. The key policy measures to address this challenge are to expand access, improve quality, and reduce disparities through building new schools and classrooms, equipping schools with better facilities, training and upgrading teacher competencies, providing school operational assistance, and providing more subsidies for the poor, as well as strengthening the partnership between school and industry.

The main outcomes of the policy measures are reflected into a significant increase in the gross enrolment rates of senior secondary education, from 52.2 per cent in 2005 to 76.4 per cent in 2011. This significant progress of the education enrolment is partly due to the rapid expansion of the school capacity and provision of massive subsidies for the poor. The

government increased the number of poor students receiving subsidy. Over the same period, the number of student drop-outs also declined and the continuation rate of the Junior Secondary to senior secondary education steadily increased over time.

Starting in 2013, the government will initiate a new initiative – Universal Secondary Education (*Pendidikan Menengah Universal* – PMU). This programme is directed to expand the opportunities of all junior secondary graduates, so that they are able to continue to the next level. The initiative will involve the massive expansion of access, teacher recruitment, equipping the schools with better libraries, laboratories and other facilities. It is expected that by the end of 2020, the gross enrolment rate of senior secondary education will reach 97 per cent at least.

Higher education institutions nationwide now enrol around 5 million students. The expansion is particularly characterised by the significant provision of higher education by private institutions. Indonesia's current higher education system consists of approximately over 170 public and over 3,400 private higher education institutions. Although the public institutions only account for 5 per cent of the total number of institutions, they account for over 30 per cent of the total enrolments with the remaining enrolled in private institutions.

A number of key policy measures taken by the government of Indonesia include increasing access and equity by ensuring better alignment between the provision of study programmes and labour market needs; strengthening the autonomy and governance of higher education; promoting equal access through provision of a subsidy for the poorer students; and improving competitiveness. In addition to that, the higher education development is geared to support the *Masterplan for Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia Economic Development* (MP3EI).

Since the end of the Suharto era, Indonesia has reformed its national education system, establishing the right of all citizens to education regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, race, social status or level of ability. How would you assess your progress in implementing a plan for nine years of basic compulsory education, along with further decentralisation of the curriculum, including local content provision and adjustment of national content to local circumstances?

Since the government launched *Compulsory Basic Education* (CBE) in 1994,

the participation and quality of basic education have increased steadily. Disparity among socio-economic groups, region and gender also consistent declined.

Progress has been achieved in increasing the proportion of females in primary, junior secondary schools, senior high schools and institutions of higher education. The ratio of NER for women to men at primary education and junior secondary education levels was 99.73 and 101.99 respectively, and literacy among females aged 15-24 years has already reached 99.85. As a result, Indonesia is on track to achieve the education-related targets for gender equality by 2015.

A number of key policy measures implemented by the government of Indonesia include expanding the coverage of education services; strengthening the quality and relevance; improving effectiveness of the learning process, including curriculum; providing subsidy to the poor, improving the professionalism and equal distribution of teachers; and improving education management accountability and efficiency in a decentralised system.

Central government funds education, but local and provincial governments are responsible for service delivery, school maintenance, planning, and quality oversight. How successful has the decentralisation policy been whereby schools self-managing themselves, with school committees made up of parents and teachers, and with considerable autonomy over funds allocated from the central government?

The constitution stipulates that central and local government are responsible for financing education. In line with the increased commitment of the government

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Indonesian school children read copies of the Koran during a school trip in Jakarta



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and community to education, the government has dramatically increased public funding allocations for education from 11.4 per cent in 2001 to 20 per cent in 2009. The challenge is to ensure that the increased transfer of resources from central government to districts and to schools has also resulted in increase of local budget allocations for education.

Through decentralisation, the principal responsibilities, authority, and resources for the delivery of education are transferred to lower levels of government, while some decision-making power is transferred to individual schools. Another important challenge is to strengthen the capacity of local government and school (school principal, school supervisor and school committee) in providing efficient and accountable education services.

'National Plus' refers to schools offering education beyond minimum requirements specified by the national curriculum. These schools experienced a boom during the 2000s, with the number of schools and the enrolment in them rising every year. This was largely due to national foundations and business leaders looking to fill a perceived gap in the educational system in the 1990s. As a rule, National Plus schools conduct some subjects in English. What strategies do you have to extend the teaching standards of the National Plus to the rest of the education system?

As I mentioned earlier, Indonesia's education development aims not only to improve equal access, but also to provide quality education. The key policy measures to achieve this objective are to expand access, improve quality, and reduce disparities through building new schools and classrooms, equipping schools with better facilities, training and upgrading teacher competencies, providing school operational assistance, and providing more subsidies for the poor, as well as strengthening the partnership between school and industry.

The important policy to improve the quality is to establish *Minimum Service Standard (MSS)*. The standard describes the minimum quality and quantum of education services that should be delivered by district/city government and the local office of Ministry of Religion. The purpose of MSS is to ensure that in every school and madrasah, at least the minimum conditions are provided for quality teaching and learning to occur. In addition, the central government encourage the local governments to develop schools with level of services beyond the MSS. The National Standards of Education is used as reference to improve the quality of education services, covering eight standards: content, process, competence of graduate, teacher, infrastructure, management, funding, and assessment.

Around a fifth of total government expenditure is set aside for education. The Education Ministry's flagship school grant programme, the School Operations Fund is central to delivering high-quality education to students at all income levels. At the same time, the 2005 Teacher Law focuses on solving systemic problems such as sub-par qualifications and absenteeism among teachers. The law changed teacher's employment conditions, certification requirements and compensation. Based on the outcome of national certification exams implemented in 2007, teachers are now allotted benefits depending on their qualifications, functional area and place of work. In addition, certification is based on an assessment of the teacher's competencies.

How successful have these ambitious strategies been to date?

One the most important and innovative policy instruments is the BOS (Bantuan Operasional Sekolah or School Operational Assistance) programme, which is provided to every primary and junior secondary school, both public and private. The resources are directly managed by each school committee, consisting of community leaders, students' parents and the school principal. This programme is instrumental in strengthening the implementation of school-based management.

The BOS programme is considered to be one of the largest education programmes in the world, currently involving over 44 million students and around 210 thousands schools/madrasahs. BOS is part of the government's effort to provide quality education to students of all income levels.

To address the problems related to qualifications, competency, quality and distribution of teachers, Indonesia enacted the law on teachers and lecturers (No. 14/2005). The law provides the basis for developing comprehensive policies for managing and providing quality teachers and lecturers. The law on teachers provides a foundation for the development of a framework for managing teachers that consists of systems to educate and prepare, recruit, develop, and to maintain high quality teachers.

Indonesia's teacher reform is organised into the following components: (a) optimising the number of teachers needed; (b) Preparing teacher competencies in four areas (pedagogic, social, personality, and professional including the use of Information Technology). The process includes a transparent recruitment system, quality education and training for teachers using a boarding scheme, and teacher deployment; (c) Strengthening teachers' performance system; and (d) Improving teachers' career, welfare, and protection. F