Education in Malaysia: what’s the big picture and how can donors help?

Huge improvements in the past 70 years

- In 1950, 60% of the population had no schooling whatsoever and only 6% had secondary level education.
- By 2010, over 90% had at least primary level education, with 60% at secondary and 15% at tertiary level.

But still many issues

Two big opportunities for private donors to make a real difference are:

1. Increasing access to education for marginalised groups
   - Up to 125,000 Malaysian primary-age children (citizens) are out of school (2010 figures).
   - >40,000 school-age children in Malaysia have never attended school (2009 figures), of which:
     - Around 10% are Malaysian citizens, mainly from indigenous groups such as Orang Asli.
     - Around 90% are non-citizens such as the children of foreign workers, undocumented sea gypsies, refugees, and illegal immigrants.
   - >70% of school-age refugee children are not in school (refugees are not eligible for state education).

2. Helping more children to stay in education and training at secondary level
   - 15,000-25,000 children each year drop out of school between primary and secondary levels.
   - Around 100,000 children per year drop out of school age 15.
   - WHO ARE THE DROP-OUTS?
     - Anecdotal evidence suggests that many drop-outs may be children with disabilities.
     - More boys drop out than girls.
     - Drop-outs are also most likely to be from poor families:
       - 75% of upper secondary school age children not in school come from households in the bottom 40% of income distribution.

"Some boys struggle with the mainstream academic curriculum and would probably benefit from greater access to vocational training or more applied coursework. However, the limited number of places in vocational and technical schools prevents this from occurring."

How can we help?

Charities and organisations supporting these children include UNHCR, IDEAS Academy, Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI) and Yayasan Chow Kit.

Providing more engaging vocational or alternative education. E.g. MySkills Foundation

Improving the school experience overall - e.g. teacher quality (see Teach for Malaysia), facilities (e.g. PINTAR programme); teaching and learning resources (EduNation).

Sources:
5. Extracted from UN Country team Malaysia, 2011, ibid.
6. T. Ratel, 2014 “Dropping out of school in Malaysia: What we know and what needs to be done”, IDEAS

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