

**Regional High-Level Expert Meeting
Imperial Queen's Park Hotel
Bangkok, Thailand
9-11 May 2012**

Towards EFA 2015 and Beyond – Shaping a new Vision of Education



Summary Outcomes



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Bangkok
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau
for Education

유네스코한국위원회
Korean National Commission for UNESCO



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Asia-Pacific Regional High-Level Expert Meeting:
'Towards EFA and Beyond: Shaping a new Vision for Education'
Bangkok, May 2012

Summary Outcomes

The meeting discussed two distinctive, yet closely linked themes:

- Education for All (EFA) in the region – key achievements, challenges and gaps and their implications for the discussion on the post-2015 agenda, and;
- The possible future orientations for education development and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region in light of emerging development trends and challenges.

The main messages from the meeting are:

1. Achieving Education for All remains a key, yet unfinished agenda for basic education in the region; meeting its goals requires strengthened efforts including addressing persistent disparities between and within countries.
2. Future orientations for education need to deepen and go beyond current EFA goals. Key education issues such as access, learning, equity and quality of education, teachers, and skills development should be areas of emphasis and feature prominently among the education goals and strategies to be incorporated in post-2015 development agendas. Education should be addressed across the life-cycle and future approaches to education need to be underpinned by a life-long-learning approach.
3. There is a need for rethinking education in light of emerging trends; broader socio-economic development and challenges must be clearly reflected in the discussion on the future of education.
4. Fulfilment of the right to education is critical to human wellbeing, economic growth and sustainable development, and it therefore needs to be made prominent in the discussion on future development frameworks.
5. There must be both an education-specific development agenda beyond 2015 and explicit reference to education in all development agendas, given the fundamental role that education plays in achieving much broader development goals.

PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

This document captures the key points of discussion during a three-day regional high-level expert meeting organized by UNESCO in May 2012 with support from the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and from UNICEF on shaping a new vision for future education development and cooperation for the region and the post-2015 agenda. It serves as a record of the main points of the meeting and a means of disseminating the views of participants on possible future orientations for education to a wider audience, while contributing to the global discussions on priorities and processes in the post-2015 era. It also provides key recommendations based on which further work can be undertaken.

SUMMARY OF THE MEETING

On 9-11 May 2012, approximately fifty high-level representatives and education experts from research think tanks, universities, ministries, UN and international development organizations, regional organizations, UNESCO National Commissions and civil society from across the Asia-Pacific region met in Bangkok to examine the current status of EFA and to chart possible future orientations for education in the Asia-Pacific region towards and beyond 2015. The meeting took stock of the region's progress made under the EFA agenda and identified remaining challenges; it examined current debates related to the broader UN development and education agenda post-2015; it shared information on present global and regional consultation processes, research and thinking on education and discussed wider emerging development trends including economic, demographic, socio-cultural and policy trends and their implications for education. The discussion of these trends identified several issues to be taken into consideration for future orientations for education and the post-2015 agenda. The meeting also presented UNESCO's recent reflections on conceptualizing education and learning in light of the recommendations of the Delors Report.¹

1. Emerging development trends and implications for education

A rapidly changing development context and challenges for education in the region

The meeting focused on the Asia-Pacific region, which is characterized by rapid and dynamic economic growth and a growing number of middle-income countries, the deepening of trade, strengthened innovation and technological advancements, and remarkable progress in improving access across all levels of education. A positive correlation between quality of education and economic growth has been demonstrated in the region. However, this growth has yet to lead to equivalent increases in living standards and economic opportunities for all, as societies are increasingly divided in terms of the distribution of opportunities for "relevant" education, enhanced income and quality of life. The discussions highlighted the vast disparities between and within countries as concerns access to schooling, equity and quality of education and in resulting levels of learning achievement. Moreover,

¹ Delors, J., et al. 1998. *Learning: The Treasure Within*. 2nd edition. International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, Paris, UNESCO.

some of these inequalities are widening, and are further compounded by the effects of social, cultural, demographic, economic and environmental challenges such as youth bulges and ageing populations, youth unemployment, increasing migration within and across countries, rising urbanization, rapidly changing job markets, climate change, environmental disasters and conflict. Challenges in the region include the continuing large number of illiterate youth and adults, enduring poverty, and persistence of child labour, marginalization and disadvantage based on gender, language, ethnicity, location and livelihoods, disability, and HIV/AIDs. Women and girls continue to be of particular concern. Non-completion of formal schooling was considered to be a key problem in several countries. Indeed, while the issues underlying its persistence are complex, participants suggested that drop-out could be reconceptualised as 'push out' – referring to a system which not only fails to provide adequate support for everyone to stay in the system, but creates barriers to participation in certain circumstances. This compounds existing marginalization and discrimination. While education can support wider developmental goals, often disparities in education opportunities can also exacerbate disparities experienced in other aspects of human wellbeing, such as child survival, maternal health, nutritional outcomes, financial security and child marriage.

The need for rethinking education

The meeting reiterated the role of education as a fundamental public good, yet warned that its strong influence in society can both improve lives as well as exacerbate social inequalities. Accordingly, there was a view that there is a need to pay closer attention to the challenges facing education in respect of upholding principles such as human rights and social justice.

The discussions around implications of wider emerging development trends on education underscored the need for rethinking the kind of skills and competencies required in light of rapidly changing and increasingly globalized economies, technological advances and increased labour mobility and migration. The diverse demographic shifts in the region were also considered to have important implications for educational policies and will require a range of educational responses. Population pressures and environmental degradation, and an apparently growing prevalence of natural disasters will require increased attention to education for sustainable development and consumption. A utilitarian model of education is no longer considered adequate and the meeting voiced the need to focus on a more holistic and integrated vision which is characterised by increased attention to cultural diversity including use of local languages, the inclusion of traditional knowledge as well as values in education policy and planning. Taking into consideration the various implications of the above for education, the meeting highlighted that education systems should train learners to be innovative, able to adapt to and assimilate change and be able to continue learning. Young people require a new set of skills to be competent in the connected and constantly changing world which include critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication and technology literacy. The great importance of lifelong learning underpinning future approaches was stressed repeatedly throughout the discussions. People will need not only to learn, but learn to continue learning, to re-learn and to even to unlearn.

There was consensus that society has evolved and changed rapidly in the region and that education should not only respond to persistent challenges, but must be proactive in the face of this rapidly changing context by being instrumental in leading the change in a positive manner. Greater educational opportunities with greater equity should be a primary objective. Moreover, changes in development patterns have contributed to greater demands for both better quality education, strongly linked to learning outcomes, and for higher levels of education, demands which also need to be addressed.

2. Key Findings and Recommendations

EFA and Beyond

EFA as an unfinished agenda

The meeting reaffirmed the continued relevance of EFA which defines the current international education agenda for 2015, and which is seen as an unfinished agenda. Of particular concern are persistent disparities in access, participation and learning outcomes at various levels of education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups and minorities. Strengthening teachers is another critical factor to achieve the current EFA goals. In general, there is a need to accelerate efforts towards achieving EFA goals by 2015, paying particular attention to issues of equity and preparing for the EFA review in 2015.

Widening the EFA agenda in response to emerging trends and going beyond current EFA goals

While it was acknowledged that all EFA goals have not, and will not, be met by 2015, it was also observed that there is a need to widen the EFA agenda in response to emerging trends and go beyond current EFA goals. Key education issues such as access, learning, equity and quality of education, teachers, and skills development should be areas of emphasis and feature prominently among the education goals and strategies to be incorporated in post-2015 development agendas.

Issues to be taken into consideration for a post-2015 education agenda and possible future orientations for education in the region

Equity

In order to meet the EFA goals as well as future challenges, there is a need for a sharper focus on addressing disparities. Equity should be explicitly addressed and four dimensions in particular should be incorporated: 1) enabling conditions; 2) learning objectives²; 3) the learning process; and 4) learning outcomes.

² Learning objectives here refer to what the education system tries to achieve beyond the learning of the individual, such as making societies more equitable, more versatile for change etc.

Teachers

Attention must also be paid to the issue of teachers in the discussion on the future of education, including pre- and in-service training as well as their professional status. There is a need to ensure a focus on the qualifications and conditions of teachers as key levers for the quality of education.

Culture and values

It was also considered key to give sufficient importance to culture (including language), values and indigenous knowledge for curricula development and teacher training.

ECCE and post-basic education

Greater emphasis needs to be given to ensuring successful early learning as well as relevant opportunities for post-basic education.

Skills and competencies

More effective skills development both in the formal and the non-formal sectors should be promoted, thus ensuring more effective transition from school to work. It is important to look beyond academic achievement and cognitive skills to emphasise non-cognitive competencies and skills and to re-emphasize the importance of education for social cohesion, creativity, and social and emotional development. Education for the future requires revisiting the purpose of education from an ethical and social perspective, and not simply an economic one. In doing so, a new and broadened conceptualization of learning is required, which encompasses learning of generic skills and meta-cognitive skills (including creativity, flexibility and adaptability), learning for living together, and learning for a world in which sustainability is becoming increasingly vital.

Education financing and partnerships

In addition, education financing needs to be carefully examined to articulate a more nuanced understanding of fee-free education and the role of non-state actors. Attention should be paid to phenomena such as private tutoring (or "shadow education"). As the global economic crisis continues and the spectre of recession looms, the Dakar pledge of providing additional donor funding to those countries which are being thwarted in achieving EFA goals for lack of financial resources, is unlikely to be met. In this scenario, stimulating resource mobilisation by all EFA partners for EFA up to 2015 and beyond becomes even more critical. A balance needs to be struck between the responsibilities of the traditional donors and the emerging donors, such as the BRICS, through North-South-South cooperation that can be quantified. The potential of the newly created 'Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation' at the Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (November 2011) and innovative ways of funding EFA (e.g. education cess³ imposed in India for supporting education of girls) need to be

³ An additional tax levied for a specific purpose.

explored. Concurrently the engagement of the private sector in education should be intensified bearing in mind the heightened awareness of the value of public-private partnerships (PPPs), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the rising demand for a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Targets and indicators

In addition to the need for clear targets and indicators to measure progress and determine budgets, it is important to move beyond reporting on national averages and also map and report on gaps and disparities within countries. In general, it was noted that there is a need for relevant, timely and reliable disaggregated data to ensure that educational provision is contributing to equitable development.

Need to adjust our approaches

Such new areas of focus also require a shift in our approach to:

- widen the scope of measurements (moving toward the use of output and outcome indicators);
- strengthen education at the systemic level, rather than focusing only on sub-sectoral issues;
- adopt a broader and more holistic view of education and training, with quality of learning outcomes at its heart; and
- ensure a shift in focus from education systems to increased attention on learning, from schooling as the main vector of formal education to a lifelong learning perspective, from a purely economic/utilitarian perception of education to a more humanistic one.

Considerations on the global relevance of an education agenda

There is need for a global agenda for education post-2015 which should be relevant to all countries, while ensuring that the processes and approaches adopted for its implementation are context-specific. While universally-relevant goals may be formulated, target-setting is perhaps best defined at the national level (with due consideration given to sub-national disparities).

In this context, a renewed focus on issues of equity (disparity reduction) and quality should be pursued in order to make the post-2015 education agenda truly universal and relevant to countries across the development spectrum.

Consequently, the merit of presenting a common voice from Asia and the Pacific is that it can illustrate the value to all nations of a strong education agenda given the rich diversity within the region.

Considerations relative to the format of any post-2015 agenda

It is still unclear at this stage what form any future development agenda will take beyond 2015. Indeed, it is not yet confirmed whether or not the MDG framework shall be pursued, whether these shall be supplanted by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or whether an entirely new approach will be agreed upon. Current debates on the post-MDGs are exploring various options including that of

extrapolating international development goals beyond 2015 and focusing on completion and/or expansion of the agenda to include new goals and targets (including in relation to the SDGs); the need for further reflection on measurement including in relation to learning, interactivity, and integration; the trade-off between comprehensiveness and conciseness, and the need to consider how global goals can be tailored to local needs; and the crucial importance of consultation throughout the process.

Interrelatedness between education and all development goals

The regional experts agreed that education in any future development agenda should feature on the basis both of its intrinsic value, as well as an enabling or facilitating factor for the achievement of other development goals. Increased attention should be given to the fact that there is cross-fertilization between education and other areas of development when progress in one area is both a condition and a contribution to progress in other areas.

Strengthening education within any post-2015 international development agenda

As a result, the positioning of education within the definition of the broader MDG and/or SDG development agendas beyond 2015 should therefore be strengthened. If education is to be high on policy agendas, it needs to feature explicitly in the post-2015 development framework. To this end, renewed and strengthened discussions should be held at all appropriate levels and advocacy undertaken on the centrality of education for the achievement of human development goals, beyond economic and environmental concerns.

The need to maintain an education-specific international agenda beyond 2015

Concomitantly, an education-specific agenda should be maintained in any post-2015 international effort in order to retain the focus on the specific challenges facing the sector as well as in recognition of the continued relevance of EFA and the need to attend to its unfinished goals. Looking at broader development trends in the region and sub-regions and their implications for education in the post-2015 perspective, it was observed that there remains a tension between the fact that while education is cross-cutting and foundational to the delivery of other development agendas, the absence of a sector-specific agenda may lead to a dilution of the need to consider the intrinsic value of education in and of itself. In this context, it was noted that at present, the Rio+20 draft declaration is mostly focused on environment, and while references to education note its supporting role, they are limited in their breadth and depth. The consideration given to education as means to other development goals is noted, while education as fundamental human right and an overarching goal seems overlooked.

Considerations relative to the process of formulating a post-2015 agenda

In order to ensure the inclusion of educational goals within the post-2015 development agenda, advocacy based on compelling evidence needs to be undertaken via the development of key messages, advocacy briefs and position papers aimed at global and national decision-makers and the framing of

education beyond the formal sphere in order to increase its linkages and relevance to other sectors. This should be done by all key actors in education, including UNESCO, both individually and in partnership.

Consultative and agenda-setting processes at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels should make greater attempts to be inclusive and bring in voices from a range of stakeholders including civil society, youth, students, parents and teachers and representatives of marginalized groups.

The process of formulating goals for the Asia-Pacific region requires voices from the various sub-regions in order to capture the highly diverse nature of the region. Regional collaboration is of the essence.

Putting further efforts into completing the EFA goals as well as diversifying and expanding the education agenda will require increased efforts beyond the traditional education community, demand greater resources and more innovative thinking. In addition to traditional education financing, innovative financing and delivery mechanisms (e.g. specific forms of PPPs and CSR), and South-South cooperation should be explored to accelerate towards 2015 and to open up the beyond 2015 agenda. Research and case studies on more effective use of education resources (including teachers) and new models of education financing and their impact on equity (e.g. BRAC, community financing) could be conducted.

Accountability and governance are as critical to success as financing, and the new framework should acknowledge the shared responsibilities of all parties (governments, education systems, teachers, development partners, civil society, opinion leaders, and households).

Avenues for research

Possible research topics

Research on post-2015 and future orientations of education should focus on topics which have either been neglected or remain unresolved, such as: learning and development (including early childhood, neuro-scientific perspectives, and pedagogy); education and social competencies; language of instruction; the role of culture and traditional values in education; expanded notions of literacy and lifelong learning; education and the peace dividend, impact of decentralization on education outcomes in terms of quality and equity, education-labour market linkages; migration and mobility; teacher policies (including deployment); financing of education (including household expenditures); the transformative role of ICTs; and the need for tools and measures to assess creativity and other non-cognitive skills; underperformance and drop-out (also on reasons for and ways to address boys' underperformance and drop-out).

Who should undertake research and how should it be done?

The region houses a rich network of researchers and institutes, and we should therefore jointly begin by mapping and stock-taking existing knowledge and expertise. Research should harness existing networks in the region and beyond. It should acknowledge the role that civil society organizations can play in contributing to and complementing research by offering different perspectives. Academic and action

research and field-level practice should be linked, while attempts should be made to build national research capacity rather than relying on external experts.

3. Next steps and the way forward

The meeting sparked reflections and initiated the process towards shaping the post-2015 education development and cooperation agenda as well as possible future orientations for education in the region. It is a starting point to be pursued jointly by all partners and stakeholders that will be engaged in this process.

UNESCO Bangkok will be taking the lead in further stimulating reflections and consultations towards this goal for the Asia-Pacific region while also contributing to the global debate around the post-2015 agendas.

All partners and stakeholders should identify their role in this process on the basis of their own mandate, perspective, relative strength, comparative advantage and interest. The key partnership with UNICEF for example could focus on topics such as equity and advancing rights for children and draw on its extensive field level presence and convening role between government and civil society, which has been instrumental in reaching the most marginalized and for translating policies and frameworks into field level practice.

As a follow up to this meeting, a second high-level expert consultation is planned to be held in November 2012 on 'What education for the future?' in the light of emerging developmental and societal trends in the region and a focus on quality of education

There will be a two-track approach in the follow-up of this meeting, in accordance with its two themes:

A) Lead-up to EFA in the region and the post-2015 education agenda

The reflections and recommendations of this first consultation on the post-2015 education agenda and future orientations for education for the Asia-Pacific region will be brought to the attention of the international EFA community, including the EFA Steering Committee and regional EFA groups as well as other international and regional stakeholders and be made available for discussions at relevant EFA meetings.

The outcomes of the meeting should further be used by all EFA implementing agencies during discussions of the UN Task Force on the post MDG agenda as well as on the SDGs to ensure that education is included in the future development framework.

As a follow up, UNESCO will undertake wider consultations with member states and other key partners identified by the meeting on the topic.

A global conference on EFA and beyond which should be the culmination of national, sub-regional and regional reflections is planned to be held in the Republic of Korea in 2015.

B) Possible future orientations for education development and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region

UNESCO will continue to advocate for the broader conceptions of education and learning for the future discussed at the meeting, including through research and facilitating partnerships and exchange of best-practice. This will include an overview of the work of other international and regional organisations on emerging development trends, as well as a synthesis of the proceedings of the meeting regarding these trends and their implications for education. Consultations with regional education think tanks and research institutions will be undertaken to further the thinking on possible future orientations for education in the region.

Critical areas identified that will be further investigated include:

- Revisiting the paradigms of learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live together⁴ and lifelong learning;
- Exploring issues of skills development, ensuring equity and quality/relevance of education; the changing role of teachers, governance of education, and financing of education in a changing world;
- Addressing the tensions that may arise between (i) the global and the local; (ii) the universal and the individual; (iii) tradition and modernity; (iv) long-term and short-term considerations; (v) the need for competition and concern for equality of opportunity; (vi) the exponential expansion in the volume of knowledge and our capacity to assimilate it; and (vii) the spiritual and the material and implications for education;
- Continued and deepened investigation of the implications of wider development trends on education and exploring the possible future orientations of education from a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary perspective.

⁴ See *The Delors Report*. Delors, J., et al. 1998. *Learning: The Treasure Within*. 2nd edition. International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, Paris, UNESCO.