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Education for All up to 2015 and Beyond Consultation summary: Asia and the Pacific

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Background paper prepared for the
Sixth Meeting of UNESCO's Collective Consultation
of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA)

by the

Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)

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Education for All up to 2015 and Beyond

Consultation summary: Asia and the Pacific

In preparation for the 6th Meeting of the Collective Consultation of Non-Governmental Organizations on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA) (24 to 26 October 2012 in Paris), the CCNGO/EFA Ad Hoc Group, with the support of the UNESCO Secretariat, carried out a consultation of all member NGOs of the global CCNGO/EFA network to feed into the process of defining the necessary measures to scale up progress towards 2015 and to frame the post-2015 education and development agendas.

This report summarizes the responses from CCNGO/EFA member organisations from the **Asia-Pacific** region.

1. Reaching EFA goals by 2015

Since the adoption of the EFA goals in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, significant progress has been made especially in increasing enrolment and reducing gender disparities at the primary level. Progress has, however, been uneven both between and within countries and in some cases it has started to wane. Advances made in access have often hidden persistent and significant challenges in other areas, notably the quality and relevance of education. Many countries are not on track to meeting the international goals for education by 2015 by a wide margin according to the GMR 2011.

1.1 Bottlenecks slowing down EFA progress

The survey responses indicated the following bottlenecks in specific country experiences:

- In Goal # 1, the lack of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers and appropriate learning materials that are accessible to children in remote areas are problems in Solomon Islands and Cambodia. ECCD teachers are also not qualified and trained.
- With respect to Goal # 3, despite increasing literacy, the youth from Asia Pacific suffer massive unemployment because of the impact of the global financial crises. Globally, there is an estimated 74 million unemployed youth (2011), 45% of them in the Asia-Pacific. And yet, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and life skills programmes that can respond to the learning needs of unemployed young people have been underfinanced and suffer of poor quality. They also offer limited response to problems of mismatch between the requirements of available jobs and the skills of those seeking employment.

In Solomon Islands, according to the Performance Assessment framework of the Ministry of Education (MEHRD), reporting on the progress of this goal is not clear and a bit difficult. There is also a lack of government recognition of NGOs' effort in the area of TVET and life

skills. Very few TVET institutions exist in the country. Government believes that the curriculum needs to be reviewed to integrate both formal and non formal learning in TVET programmes; and to further strengthen TVET subjects in the formal sector curriculum.

In Cambodia, the coverage of non-formal education is very limited.

- Goal # 4 on adult literacy remains a grossly neglected EFA goal. It is in Asia-Pacific where 518 million or almost 65% of the world's adult illiterates reside. Almost 65% of them are women (EFA Global Monitoring report (GMR), 2011). It is estimated that by 2015 the percentage of women illiterates will remain the same i.e. 63% as in 1985. Early marriage was identified by Indonesia as a big obstacle in girls' and women's literacy and education. Governments have invested very little in adult education. The UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) noted that while financing for education in schools witnessed tremendous leaps in the past ten years, investment for adult literacy has been very minimal. In most Asia-Pacific countries, the percentage of the national budget allocated to adult education fell below 3%¹.

In Solomon Islands, the lack of a strategic national literacy policy, adequate and accurate literacy data and programmatic interventions for adult literacy were identified as challenges. Most literacy classes are being run small scale by volunteer, church and community groups. Programs are also being run by untrained teachers.

- For Goal # 5, in Solomon Islands, the Gender parity index (GPI) has shown improvements in ECCE, Primary and Secondary Education. However there is an absence of systematic data about gender equality which includes social-geographic, income and cultural information and data in the education system. Some studies by NGOs highlighted the following barriers to education and literacy : 1) Parents want girls to help at home; 2) no schools in villages; 3) disinterest; 4) financial constraints; and 5) high school fees particularly in secondary schools.
- On Goal # 6 on Quality, a Cambodia respondent reports serious problems in quality where students complete grade 6 without being able to write or do maths at the appropriate level. Repetition and dropout rates are still high and causes for this have not been addressed by Cambodian government. The lack of trained teachers has been identified as a bottleneck in Cambodia, India and Solomon Islands. Particularly, there are challenges in addressing the teaching gap and teachers' absenteeism in Solomon Islands and Cambodia. In Cambodia, although the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) has been successful in deploying new teachers to disadvantaged areas, it is not clear how they can be retained here.
- Actions to remove disparities due to ethnicity and geographic location have been slow. Across age groups, gender gaps remain particularly wide for groups for whom ethnicity, geographical distance, and other factors (such as disability or sexual orientation) compound

¹ Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) 2010

gender inequality (Gender Equality and Development World Report 2012). Throughout Solomon Islands, there is very low enrolment of people with special needs and their enrolment continued to reduce by 3.1% in 2010.

- The political will of governments to finance education has been identified as an obstacle to achieving EFA. In Cambodia it is slowly decreasing from 17% in 2009 to 16.6% in 2011. In India the spending on education is still 3.7% of GDP which is far below the stipulated spending. The Right to Education Act in India needs financing to meet the need for 5 million trained teachers.
- ODA to EFA remains stagnant. The trend towards public-private partnerships in education poses problems in access to quality education of the marginalized groups as well as protection of teachers' rights and welfare which may have an impact on quality of education.
- Education governance is also crucial in the attainment of EFA goals. In Cambodia, weaknesses in planning and budgeting and audit as well as limited capacities at sub-national education offices were considered a bottleneck. Civil society participation in education governance is crucial but uneven across countries.
- Overall, it was observed that the speed of implementation of EFA goals are much centered on goal 2 and other goals are not as prioritized.

1.2 Policies and practices that have been successful with regard to progress towards the achievement of EFA goals

Survey responses highlighted several regional and national policies that strongly support meeting the EFA targets:

- The Government of India passed an Act making the 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education' a fundamental right, contributing to increased enrollment in schools. Also, the Government of India has introduced a legislation to ban all forms of child labor below the age of 18. This is envisaged to contribute to meeting the EFA goals. The government has also introduced innovative means of financing – an education cess (surcharge on taxes) – which sustains a massive school meals programme in the country.
- Major progress has been observed in primary school enrollment in Cambodia through government efforts. However, enrollment among ethnic minorities remains below 85%. The government has set in place the Child Friendly School (CFS) policy, a master plan to implement the CFS and developed action plans to trial the CFS programs in lower secondary schools. It has also endorsed policies on education for disabled children and is also in the process of developing a stronger teacher policy, aiming to attract and retain good students in the profession. In the area of adult literacy, the MoEYS has also supported literacy materials development, teacher training, literacy classes, and

community learning centers. Donor coordination has improved with the formation of a Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) with development partners, which facilitates the preparation of Annual Operational Plans (AOP) at sub-national level. Annual retreats between MoEYS and development partners are regularly conducted to identify common issues and solutions, as well as to monitor progress over the year and for planning.

- In the Philippines, the National EFA Committee composed of the Department of Education as Chair and E-Net Philippines (civil society) as co-Chair formulated the Fast Track Plan to Reach the Unreached in 2009 to address the EFA gaps. The plan formulates multi-stakeholder strategies to implement policies and programs to ensure that marginalized children, youth and adults are not left behind in education. However, government resources to implement these programs are slow in coming.
- In Solomon Islands, there is increasing indication that a basic education and fee-free education policy has contributed to increased access and greater gender parity in education. However, there has been confusion among education actors in implementing these policies. The School Grants Policy and Education Authority Grants Policy provided funds for school management and education authority operations but there were challenges in disbursement and eligibility of use of these funds. Policies to improve quality of teaching have been introduced: Curriculum Statement Policy, Teacher Development Policy and Teacher Service Handbook. The impact of these policies is however yet to be seen.
- Indonesia has put in place a policy of free nine-year basic education, but it has not been successful in enabling poor families to send their children to school for free. Literacy programmes in Indonesia suffer of very limited funding, thus failing to arrest the increase of the number of women illiterates.

Civil society advocates need to be vigilant to ensure that these favourable policy initiatives are followed through and translated to good practice.

Strong measures have been taken since Dakar (2000) to strengthen civil society competencies especially at the national level to influence and track education policy. The Dutch and UK governments were the first to respond in a big way towards shoring up CSO competencies in education advocacy through the Real World Strategies Programme & EFAIDS (with the Global Campaign for Education and Education International) and the Commonwealth Education Fund (through Action Aid, SCF and Oxfam GB). The EFA Fast Track Initiative's Education Programme Development Fund (EPDF) supported the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF), strengthening the institutional and overall advocacy capacities of 13 national education campaign coalitions in the Asia-Pacific. AusAID has supplemented this effort globally and with targeted support for CSOs in the South Pacific and East Timor. Current funding support to CSOs for education advocacy needs to be sustained and its coverage broadened to also include middle income countries in

the region as CSOs in these areas struggle to influence their governments to fully meet their obligations to marginalised children and learners.

The participation of civil society in the governance of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is commendable. There has also been strong participation of civil society in the Global Advisory Committee of the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), although the partnership with CSOs is far from developed at the regional and national levels.

The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) may not have delivered on EFA Goal 4, but its support to governments in policy development, data gathering and programme design for literacy have been critical in building a stronger ability locally to address the issue.

The processes undertaken regionally to review EFA progress as steered by UNESCO Bangkok (EFA Mid Decade Assessment, End of Decade Notes) offered a useful platform for governments and civil society to engage in dialogue, collectively appraise the EFA context and jointly agree on strategies that may accelerate progress. Prominent in the discussions has been the need to focus on marginalized groups – spurring a number of national and cross-country initiatives addressing equity in education, including the SEAMEO-UNESCO-ASEAN 10-Point Agenda for Education to Reach the Unreached which was defined in 2009. However, implementation was uneven across countries and there was an observed lack of monitoring on the delivery of commitments per country and within the ASEAN.

2. Actions to be taken by UNESCO in the run-up to 2015 in terms of EFA coordination and in terms of its collaboration with the civil society

Several suggestions were offered to UNESCO, to enhance its role in EFA coordination and in its work with civil society.

There was a strong recommendation for UNESCO to continue playing a strong role in assisting governments meet their EFA goals and targets – especially in reaching the marginalized or those left out of education. There is a significant body of work developed in the Asia-Pacific on this through the EFA Mid-Decade Assessment process steered by UNESCO that can be built on. UNESCO can offer platforms for governments and other EFA stakeholders (e.g. donors, CSOs, UN agencies) to continue to learn from different country experiences; agree on costed, targeted EFA fast track plan(s) to reach the marginalized; and the modes to track progress in ways that hold duty-bearers to account and assist governments improve and learn from their practice.

UNESCO can also play a strong role in lobbying with/influencing governments to allocate a higher budget for education. It can also play a role in expanding the public debate on public-private partnerships in education to deepen understanding of this phenomenon, its various expressions and the experience in different contexts, and the associated challenges and concerns.

UNESCO should also play a strong advocacy role for greater funding specifically for the neglected EFA goals such as ECCE, adult literacy and life skills for young adults and women. In line with the CONFINTEA VI commitments, it can push Member States to deliver on their commitment for fully-costed and sustained literacy and lifelong learning programs for women and adults. It can also assist in drawing greater attention and support for education in fragile states, integrating education in humanitarian work.

UNESCO can offer a platform to widen the current discourse on education quality and learning outcomes in the region – valuing and accounting for non-cognitive skills in measurements of quality, locating appraisals and measurements of quality within the concrete contexts and conditions of learners including the impact of layers of marginalization and discrimination in learning (e.g. if a child is hungry, or a exhausted from work, or feeling stigmatized in class, this will impact on their ability to learn). It will also be important for UNESCO to highlight the value of teachers in any serious attempt to achieve education quality. The right to quality education of all citizens cannot be met without well trained, motivated, justly paid teachers – and this should not be side-stepped in the quality debates.

With respect to partnership with civil society:

In many countries mechanisms and processes to enable genuine and substantive participation of civil society in the EFA decision-making process are uneven. UNESCO can encourage Member States to ensure CSO participation in EFA policy and programmes at different levels. They can offer spaces at the country-level for government and CSOs to partner in addressing the EFA deficits, in order to better reach the marginalized and hard to reach groups in education – ensuring their voices and interests inform policy and programme design.

UNESCO can dialogue with civil society and government in agreeing a concrete and costed plan to accelerate efforts in meeting the 2015 goals and targets.

It would also be useful if clearer mechanisms for CSO partnership with UNESCO are in place at the country level. CSOs are unaware of the spaces for involvement available to them in UNESCO processes and initiatives at the country level – it would be helpful if this was made clearer.

Several respondents suggested that UNESCO can also assist in facilitating funding for CSOs at the national level in policy work and in conducting educational programs for the achievement of the EFA.

3. The post-2015 education agenda

In three years, we shall be reaching the 2015 target date set by the international community for both the EFA and MDG goals. Different development stakeholders have initiated processes to review progress and experiences and to define the post-2015 development agenda.

4.1 Participation in processes related to the definition of the post-2015 education or development agenda

By and large, there has been very limited information at the country level on spaces for CSO involvement to shape the post-2015 education and development agenda.

However, in Indonesia and India, E-Net for Justice and NCE India respectively participated in post 2015 MDGs consultations organized in the country. In Cambodia, the coalition, NGO Education Partnership is still working out its strategy on how to engage with the government as it develops its National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2014-2018. Respondents from the Solomon Islands noted that there needs to be more emphasis on participation and awareness related to the defining the 'education' we aspire for post-2015. Learners and education stakeholders from remote areas have been almost absent in the post-2015 consultations. Gathering and disseminating information is very weak in the country so there is a very low knowledge-base within communities on the EFA and MDG goals and their future.

In the last ASPBAE Strategic Assessment and Planning Workshop (September 21-24, 2012 in Phnom Penh), a session was dedicated to brief ASPBAE members and coalition partners on the different initiatives and processes underway to craft the post-2015 agenda; and on the different global education policy processes and platforms where this will be debated and discussed as well (e.g. new EFA global architecture, UN Secretary General's Education First Initiative).

ASPBAE likewise participated in the UNESCO Bangkok High level Experts Meeting on the Post 2015 EFA agenda (Bangkok, May 9-11, 2012). ASPBAE participates in the annual National EFA Coordinators' Meeting: in 2011, the meeting discussed UNESCO's plans related to developing the post-2015 agenda including possibilities for an EFA review. ASPBAE is developing a brief statement outlining its main assertions for the post-2015 education, following consultations with its members in its last strategic planning workshop.

4.2 Priorities for the period post-2015

Education equity should be a priority. Clear targets must be set by governments to reach the marginalized through quality education and learning programmes. Government data systems should be enhanced to strengthen their ability to track marginalized groups and communities. Respondents proposed several equity measures, including the elimination of all forms of child labour; the abolition of school fees; and programmatic interventions to address the learning needs of out-of-school children and youth, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and indigenous learners. Measures should be taken to eliminate gender disparities in education.

Education quality should be high on the agenda. The teaching gap in education should be filled – ensuring both learners' rights and teachers' rights in education. Quality learning outcomes should be defined while taking into account the realities learners operate in, including the layers of disadvantage and marginalization that intersect in an education process and challenge learning. Measures to improve 'quality' will have to take these issues into account. The post-

2015 education agenda should bust the myth that schools alone are the key to quality learning and recognize that quality in schools can best be sustained by a supportive and enabling learning environment in homes and communities which adult literacy, non-formal education programmes and vibrant community learning centres provide.

The youth bulge in several countries, jobless growth and rising unemployment drive increased attention to issues and concerns of young people. By 2030 the youth segment in the region is estimated to exceed over 700 million, constituting almost 15 per cent of the total population. The sheer size of the youth population in the region underscores the magnitude of the challenge that governments and countries face in integrating youth and developing their full potential, most critically perhaps in the area of employment (see ESCAP, “Review of the Human Resources Development Status of Youth in the Asian and Pacific Region”, United Nations, New York, 2001, ST/ESCAP/2135). **TVET and life skills especially for young people** are therefore increasingly considered in the education policy discussions. In the current climate of severe unemployment, there is an understandable emphasis on aligning life skills with work. While important, it is essential to underscore that there are other life skills that young people and adults require to respond to the world’s current challenges: skills to broaden awareness and democratise information for responsible citizenship, tools for improved health, and measures promoting tolerance and peace.

More funds, not less, will be required to meet the post-2015 education challenges. **Education financing** should remain a priority concern to secure the right to quality education for all. Donors should be convinced to sustain support for education through ODA and governments should continue to be pressed to allocate 6% of their GDP to education. The case for donor attention to the full EFA agenda remains, as does the call for better quality aid. A broader debate needs to be had on how public-private partnerships in education contribute to ensuring the right of all to quality education.

The post-2015 education agenda should be defined with the **participation of all education stakeholders, including civil society** – involving NGOs, teachers unions, learners’ movements, child rights groups, students, the academia, community organizations, to name some.

Clearly, EFA is an unfinished agenda so efforts to meet the international commitments to education, enshrined in the 6 EFA goals should be sustained beyond 2015. However, it also has to be recognised that the issues facing humanity in the coming period will require education responses that **go beyond ‘schooling’**. The post-2015 education agenda should embrace a lifelong learning framework – equipping children and adults with the competencies to respond well to the pressing development concerns they face e.g. the financial crisis, climate change, natural disasters, war and conflict, massive unemployment especially of young people, rapid expansion of cities, extreme poverty etc.