

KEDI-UNESCO Bangkok Joint Seminar 2008
Decentralization of Implementing Education Policies and Reforms

(Seoul, Republic of Korea, 15-17 December 2008)

Concept Paper

1. Context

Education systems all over the world are under continuous pressure to seek alternative strategies to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, with a particular pressure being applied to finding alternative approaches for the administration and management as well as of financing education. One such approach, advocated by both governments and international agencies as a mechanism to improve educational provision, has been to entrust management decisions downward in the hierarchy, often to the *community and school levels*. The main forces for such a push include the need for countries with declining resources to seek alternate strategies for educational management and finance, the empirical evidence which suggests moving decisions closest to the scene of action improve education outcomes, the demand for participation of the civil society in choosing and managing education for their communities and children, and the need for partnerships to achieve Education for All (EFA). This push towards more decentralization was clearly articulated in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, which stated the need for countries to:

- develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational government and management, and
- ensure the engagement and participation of *civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development.*

A number of specific reforms typically accompany decentralization of education. These include downsizing of the central education administration, devolution of administrative and financial authority to lower levels of government, school-based management (SBM), community-based management of schools, local-governance of schools, community financing of education, curriculum reforms to the local level, school-based teachers training, and school vouchers and demand-side financing.

Along with the devolution of authority and responsibility for schools from central to local levels, decentralization also typically involves increased local financing of schools. In terms of functions that have been decentralized, the curriculum and testing remain centralized practically everywhere. On the other hand, functions such as the selection of teachers, textbooks, and other instructional materials, and facility construction and maintenance, are being left increasingly to schools.

To varying degrees, almost all the countries in Asia have virtually adopted one or more of these elements in their education systems. Throughout the region there are policy debates about whether decentralization should be pursued further, or whether some or all the elements of decentralization introduced so far should be reversed. Often these debates are related to discussion of such particular issues as school access, school quality, school financing, school management, and information related to schooling.

2. Objectives of the Seminar

- To clarify and compare concepts of decentralization used in the Republic of Korea and in participating countries
- To review policies and reforms concerning decentralization in education in different country contexts
- To discuss what difficulties/challenges they encounter and identify together the most suitable ways of addressing them
- Draw up recommendations concerning the main problems encountered and the good practices noted by each of the participants and identify priorities and modes of collaboration among and between countries and KEDI/UNESCO Bangkok in decentralization in education

3. Participants

- Experts and researchers from KEDI and UNESCO Bangkok
- A total of eight to ten participants from the four to six selected countries in Asia. Each country will be represented by at least one academic/researcher (and one official from the Ministry of Education if the seat is available). The following countries have been identified tentatively: China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand.
- Guest international expert(s) may be invited.

4. Tentative organization of the Seminar

Day 1

AM

- Opening ceremony
- Introduction to the seminar topic: Why focusing on decentralization of implementing education policies and reforms?
- Trends in decentralization and local management of schools

PM

- Sub-topic 1: School Management in the context of decentralization: School-based management (SBM), self-governing schools and community-based managed schools

Day 2

AM

- Sub-topic 2: School improvement and school effectiveness in the context of decentralization

PM

- Sub-topic 3: Decentralization of teacher training / professional development and quality & standard
- Sub-topic 4: Decentralization of curriculum

Day 3

AM

- Sub-topic 5: Leadership and change management

PM

- Sub-topic 6: Open Discussions, Recommendations and closing