Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education
Gulf Arab States
in preparation for the
48th Session of the International Conference on Education

Organized by

…………………………

IBE-UNESCO

within the Arab Gulf States Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development"

Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) -27-28 August, 2007

Background Note

Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education

I.   Theme of the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE)

The International Conference on Education (ICE) is a major international forum for educational policy dialogue among Ministers of Education and other stakeholders (researchers, practitioners, representatives of intergovernmental organizations and civil society). It is organized by the International Bureau of Education (IBE), the UNESCO institute specialized in assisting Member States in Curriculum Development to achieve quality Education For All. The IBE Council, composed of 28 UNESCO Member States, has proposed in January 2007 that the 48th session of the ICE should focus on the theme "**Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future**", to be tentatively held in Geneva in November 2008. UNESCO [1] defines inclusion **"as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education". "It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision, which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children"**. Based on this definition as a reference framework, four sub-themes have been proposed (see Annex 1) to structure the discussions:

(i)   Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content: "to broaden the understanding of the theory and the practice of Inclusive Education";

(ii)   Inclusive Education: Public Policies: "to demonstrate the role of governments in the development and the implementation of policies on Inclusive Education";

(iii)   Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions: "to create education systems which offer opportunities for life-long learning"; and

(iv)   Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers: "to foster a learning environment where teachers are equipped to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs".

The 48th session of ICE should play a pivotal role in orienting and clarifying the debate on the concept of Inclusive Education, its implication and impact. It will be based on evidence-informed policies.

II.   On the Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is an evolving concept that informs the processes of educational reform in both developing and developed regions. Traditionally, the concept of Inclusive Education has been limited to the gradual integration process of the group of students with special needs

---

[1] UNESCO. 2005. *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All.* Paris: UNESCO.

such as, and predominantly, physically and/or mentally handicapped students into mainstream schools. The approaches and the responses initially have been essentially remedial, mainly by setting up differentiated structures and special schools, which ultimately contributed to further segregation and isolation.

The objectives and implications of Inclusive Education have, however, shifted significantly since the 1990's, primarily due to the recognition that integration models are not well fitted to respond to the diversities of learners' expectations and needs. One critical issue is how the scope of integration is perceived, as supposedly based on a curriculum and school model that are the same for all students regardless of their differences: "*the students must adapt to the norms, styles, routines and practices of the education system*". Quite to the contrary, inclusion implies the implementation of a vast repertoire of different learning strategies to precisely respond to the diversities of learners': "*the education system must adapt to children and youth learning needs*". Indeed, different forms of exclusion seem to question the capacity of the educational systems to provide effective learning opportunities based on a restricted concept of integration. Exclusion can also come from within the mainstream educational system. Repetition, over-age and dropout intermingle, so as to perpetuate exclusion – empirical evidence clearly indicates that a student who repeats the first school years has a strong probability of dropping out in secondary education –, based many times on pervasive and regressive institutional and pedagogical practices. On the other hand, exclusion, as it was said in the 2004 International Conference on Education[2], implies the absence of professional and social competencies as well as the impossibility of acceding to essential knowledge, so as to achieve an autonomous and responsible citizenship.

How can the circuit of exclusion that occurs in the first years of primary school be broken? How can the relationship between the increasing access to secondary education and the subsisting elitist model that penalizes the deprived be addressed? How much do we respect, tolerate and empower diversity in school and children as a way of attaining more inclusion? What are the explicit and implicit contents that feed social and pedagogical exclusion? What is the relationship between a prescriptive curriculum and the processes of exclusion? Do low expectations of principals and teachers impact upon the learning outcomes of students?

The concept of inclusion has gradually evolved towards the idea that all kids be exposed to similar teaching and learning styles (mainstream schools) regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds as well of their differences of abilities. The focus is on effective integration and on providing equal formal access to the same type of education.

Forging conditions and opportunities for all is the laying foundation of a democratic concept of quality education, which is clearly embedded in the UNESCO statement that "Education for All can't be achieved without improving quality"[3]. Inclusive Education could be one core strategy in addressing the challenges of **Education For All** (EFA)[4] goals. Some of them indicate the need for:

> (i)   assuming in a more decisive way a human-rights based approach, which implies exercising and enjoying the right to education;

---

[2] UNESCO. 2004. *Final report: International Conference on Education. 47th session. Workshops 2A y 2B Quality education and social inlcusion. Ge*neva: IBE-UNESCO. Annex XVI, pages 8-14.
[3] UNESCO. 2004. *EFA Global Monitoring Report. The Quality Imperative*. Paris: UNESCO.
[4] The six EFA goals refer to the expansion of early childhood care and education, to the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all, to the promotion of learning and life skills for young people and adults, to the increase of adult literacy by 50 per cent, to the achievement of gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015, and to the improvement of the quality of education. See portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php.

(ii)   better visualizing education as a public good based on an irreplaceable governmental mission and responsibility as well as its commitment to providing appropriate funds, conditions and opportunities; and

(iii)   developing a comprehensive agenda of educational change and policy reform tied to promoting and facilitating the right to access in order to obtain a high quality, equitable education; which should not be driven by the demands and the corporate interests of the suppliers.

From a societal perspective, Inclusive Education is clearly linked to the discussion around the type of society and well-being as well as the quality of democracy to be pursued (a reciprocal relationship between education and society). It is based on the consideration of education as a central social policy, which lays the foundations for an equitable development of the society under a long-term perspective.

Under this broadened perspective, some central issues on Inclusive Education are related to:

- the education of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties;
- the struggles against poverty, marginalization, gender based segregation and HIV and AIDS related exclusion;
- the consideration of cultural diversity and multiculturalism as both a right and a learning context;
- the protection of the rights of minorities, migrants and aboriginal populations;
- the effects of natural disasters and conflicts on populations; and
- bridging the existing digital divide among groups.

From a purely educational perspective, an inclusive strategy implies the careful consideration of the specificity and uniqueness of each child so as to provide him/her with a real educational opportunity during his/her life. It is about the ways in which teachers and students interact and generate mutual empathy and nearness, understand and respect their diversities and jointly create suitable conditions for achieving relevant learning opportunities for all. Cognitive education plays a key role in achieving Inclusive Education, as it tends to make children aware of their own cognitive functions, which can help them to understand more and learn better.

The transformation of education to Inclusive Education[5] demands collective thinking and action on the concept of social justice, on the beliefs around the learning potential of each student, on the conceptual frameworks that sustain good practices of teaching and learning and on endorsing a comprehensive vision of curriculum that encompasses processes and outcomes.

In overall terms, Inclusive Education implies four key elements:

(i)   it is essentially a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as learning how to learn from the differences;

(ii)   it is linked to stimulating, through multiple strategies, the creativity and the problem solving capacity of students;

---

[5] British Educational Research Journal. 2005. *Thematic Review. Inclusive education: discourse and action.* Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2005, pp. 269-275

(iii)   it comprises the right of the child to attend school, to express his/her opinion, to have quality learning experiences and to attain valuable learning outcomes without regard of their natural, social, cultural and ethnic characteristics;

(iv)   it implies the moral responsibility of prioritizing those students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school, and of obtaining low learning outcomes.

III.   Objectives

In order to enrich the debates that will take place during the 48th session of the ICE, the IBE plans to carry out several activities mostly focused on generating opportunities for an in-depth, open and constructive discussion around Inclusive Education. Well-known experts and institutions coming from the Ministries, universities, international organizations, foundations, NGOs and civil society in general should be involved in the process. The IBE will carry out regional preparatory workshops in the different UNESCO regions[6] as a way of sharing visions, strategies, experiences and good practices. This will be followed by a worldwide e-forum where the regional inputs can be discussed, and the contents and strategies of a "roadmap" to achieve Inclusive Education will be formulated.

The objectives of the Regional Preparatory Workshops are:

(i)   to share visions, strategies and practices on Inclusive Education at regional and national level;

(ii)   to identify common challenges related to Inclusive Education; and

(iii)   to provide structured technical inputs from a regional perspective to the 48th session of ICE.

The first Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education covering Eastern and South Eastern Europe took place in Sinaia, Romania, on 14-16 June 2007, organised by IBE in partnership with the Center Education 2000+. A selected group of 23 high-level educators and curriculum specialists from 9 countries and international organisations attended the workshop.

The main outcomes of the first pilot preparatory workshop in Romania are the following:

General Outcomes:

- There is great value in sharing **national perspectives in a regional context**, such collective learning is very enriching and stimulating;
- The participants are now **aware of ICE** and its scope and modalities and will become agents for dissemination of this knowledge within their sphere of action; each participant is already a member of several other networks and will disseminate the workshops outcomes, with a **multiplier effect**, using existing websites, planned events, etc.;
- Additional professional **exchanges** among participants and with IBE were generated, like the planned IBE sponsored program for Montenegro, which will involve also BiH, Serbia and Croatia; furthermore, participants will rely on each other for provision of technical expertise and for moral and professional **peer support**;

---

[6] There are five UNESCO regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Gulf Arab States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and North America.

- Good cooperation relations were established with **potential partners** for the ICE, like OECD and the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation in this case, which are interested to work with IBE on some case studies.

<u>Specific Outcomes:</u>

1) <u>Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content</u>

- The concept of Inclusive Education provides a foundation for sound strategies and contents for exerting citizenship based on social justice and collective well-being. As a human rights-based approach to education, it is well embedded in EFA goals;
- The goal of Inclusive Education is to assure not only the inclusion of all children in education, but also of all citizens in society. This reflects a shift in social relationships – the ideal of social justice –;
- Inclusive Education can be viewed in a long-term approach: the learners of today will be the parents of tomorrow. If they can all benefit from Inclusive Education, our societies will be more likely to progress towards equity, equality and democracy.

2) <u>Inclusive Education: Public Policies</u>

- The government's role in developing policies on Inclusive Education, is necessary and irreplaceable; it should entail advocacy, coherent and sustainable policy design, the attainment of financial sustainability, capacity-development at multiple levels in the education system; the involvement of multiple stakeholders and accountability towards the public;
- The development of Inclusive Education policies should not be understood as the sum of initiatives and efforts for specific target groups. On the contrary, the focus must be placed on facilitating the provision of effective learning opportunities for every child in a mainstream school as well as recognizing and respecting his/her diversity;
- Policies and programmes on Inclusive Education should be based on, and foster, a cross-sectoral approach as an effective tool for developing a comprehensive economic and social framework.

3) <u>Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions:</u>

- A broadened definition of curriculum with a clear focus on school and classroom practices can provide opportunities for every child to learn and perform well in school (individualized learning plans and tutorial support based on early learning interventions);
- The functions of the education system should reflect flexibility and diversity in terms of attendance, learning opportunities, content, learning environments and teaching practices as well as the use of technology in order to successfully meet the needs of learners';
- The transition from/to different levels of the education system should be improved, for example, from early childhood to primary education; a common curricular frameworks and guidelines in relation to compulsory schooling should be developed.

4) <u>Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers:</u>

- Inclusive Education should be learner-centered and synonymous of a good quality education. High expectations should be conveyed to each child so as to encourage them to self-development;
- Students should be involved in the curriculum development process to ensure that their different needs are met. Curriculum designed by older generations may entail prejudices towards the learning potentials and capacities of certain students; a cultural adjustment is needed in the teacher's profile and Inclusive Education should be viewed as a core strategy of the education system;
- Inclusive Education should be advocated as a critical component of teacher's professional development. In particular, addressing it as a cross-cutting issue instead of separately ("special and isolated curriculum") in the teacher's education curricula. Teachers should be able to co-develop the curriculum from the school level by forging tailored approaches towards the learning expectations and needs of their students.

A second Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education covering Eastern and Western Sub-Saharan Africa took place in Nairobi, Kenya, on 23-7 June 2007, organised by IBE in partnership with the Kenyan Ministry of Education and the Kenyan Institute for Education (KIE). This process of collective thinking, solidly based on a vast geographical coverage linked to the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (at the moment 687 members from 84 countries covering the five UNESCO regions), should substantially feed into the elaboration of the ICE reference document as well as the ICE workshop's discussions.

IV.   The Project Process

The Gulf Arab States Regional Preparatory Workshop in Dubai will discuss a series of questions around Inclusive Education with high-level policy makers, educators and curriculum specialists from six Gulf Arab countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The questions are related to the ICE 2008 sub-themes.

Participants are expected to prepare a short country presentation (see terms of reference for the country reports), elaborating on the following questions, which are linked to the ICE 2008 sub-themes:

(i)   Sub-theme 1. Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content
What are the critical aspects of the conceptualization and the definition of Inclusive Education in your country and/or sub-region? How has the concept evolved over the last ten years? What are the groups to focus on? What are the current main sources of exclusion?

(ii)   Sub-theme 2. Inclusive Education: Public Policies
What is the role of Inclusive Education in the curriculum reform and educational agenda of your country and/or sub-region? Can you provide evidence about the significance of its role? Is it a government priority with regard to the construction of a public agenda, to carry out initiatives under a long-term perspective and allocate resources for their adequate development?

(iii)   Sub-theme 3. Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions
How is the concept of Inclusive Education integrated in the curriculum structure of basic education? Is this integration subject to a coherent transition

from primary to secondary education? Is Inclusive Education conceived as a way of democratizing opportunities for life-long learning? Is the system flexible enough to allow accessing education and developing life-long learning?

(iv) <u>Sub-theme 4. Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers</u>
Do on-going processes of curriculum change foster learning environments that can facilitate inclusion at the school and classroom levels? How can the learning processes be activated with children of very different abilities? How and to what extent are teachers equipped with the required competencies to attend the growing diversity of learners' expectations and needs? What outcomes are already achieved in these areas in your country/sub-region?

The Regional Preparatory Workshop will last two days:

(i) Country reports will be presented and some keynote speeches will enrich the discussions.

(ii) Each of the four sets of questions will be discussed and common issues as well as good practices will be identified.

(iii) The participants will formulate regional inputs leading to a "roadmap" on Inclusive Education.

The session will focus on:

(iv) Discuss and clarify the relationship between Inclusive Education, EFA goals and education as a right.

(v) Analyse and conceptualize the four ICE 2008 sub-themes from a national and regional perspective.

(vi) Priorities for regional inputs to form a roadmap on Inclusive Education.

The Report of the Session will be prepared by IBE, disseminated and posted online. It will include the presentations by resource persons, the country presentations and the minutes of the session.

A series of similar Regional Preparatory Workshops are planned over the period June 2007 – March 2008 in different geographical regions according to the following calendar

i) Eastern and Southeastern Europe: Sinaia, Romania (13-16 June 2007), completed;
ii) East Africa: Nairobi, Kenya (25-27 July 2007)
iii) Arab Gulf States: Dubai, United (27-28 United Arab Emirates (UAE), August 2007)
iv) Latin America: Victoria, Argentina (12-14 September 2007)
v) Europe and West Asia: Minsk, Belarus (29-31 October 2007)
vi) Asia: Beijing, China (22-23 November 2007)
vii) The Caribbean: Kingston, Jamaica (5-7 December 2007)
viii) Eastern Europe: Riga, Latvia (24-26 February 2008)
ix) Northern Europe: Finland (7-8 March 2008)

x)   Sub-Saharan Africa: Dakar, Senegal (tentative)

The contributions of all the Regional Preparatory Workshops will feed into the preparations of the concept papers as well as in the discussions which will take place during sub-theme sessions of the 48th session of the International Conference on Education.

V. Information about the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP)

The IBE Capacity Building Programme has been developing the above-mentioned global Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP) since 2005. The COP has been conceived as an interactive entity, providing an open space to generate collective thinking and action at intra and inter-regional levels as well as the national ones. Since its establishment, it has been working actively on the following issues, among others: renovation and adaptation of curriculum change to a broader vision of basic education, South-South cooperation in curriculum research and development, competencies-based approaches in curriculum design, reduction of inequalities through curriculum action, sustainable implementation, follow-up and evaluation of curriculum change as well as its links with school leadership and teachers' training and professional development.

One relevant asset of the Community of Practice is its dynamic role in getting curriculum professionals together, mainly through the coordination of:

(i)   Regional seminars, workshops and forums – aimed at facilitating policy dialogue and exchanging experience – carried out in collaboration with Focal Points localized in the five UNESCO regions. The regional Focal Points are Ministries, Universities, NGOs and UNESCO Field Offices led by high-level curriculum specialists and developers.

(ii)   Inter-regional comparative research on processes of curriculum change in basic education.

(iii)   Net forum discussions on curriculum issues led by high-level researchers and curriculum specialists.

(iv)   The elaboration and dissemination of regional and national curriculum resources aimed at improving the quality of educational change.

(v)   Sharing of information, research and documentation on a permanent basis.
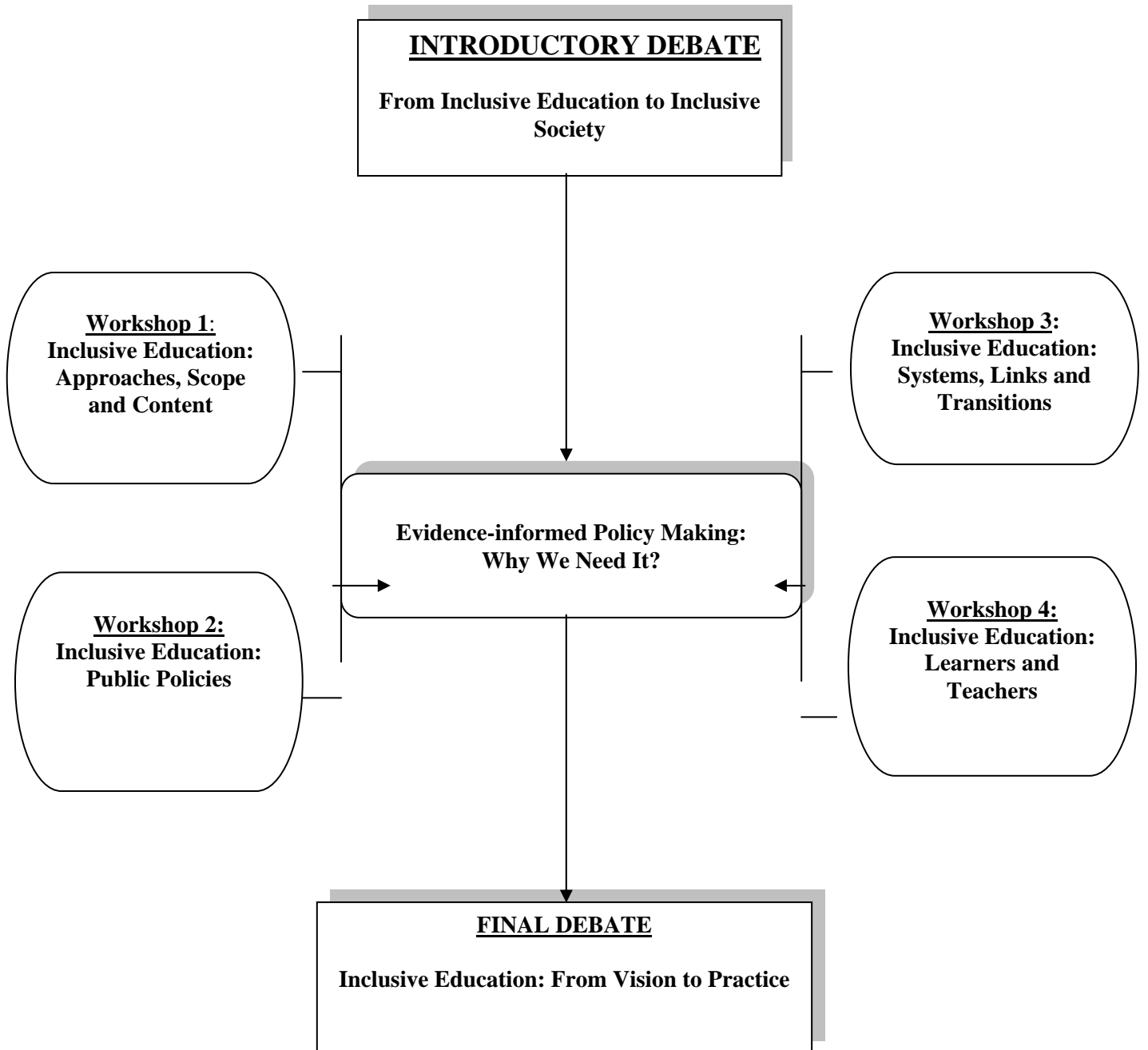
VI. Contact Person

………………….

- The IBE-UNESCO
  Renato Opertti, Programme Specialist, Capacity Building, r.opertti@unesco.org
  Lili Ji, Assistant Programme Specialist, Capacity Building, l.ji@unesco.org

  Phone: +41 22 917 78 00, Fax: +41 22 917 78 01
  Mailing address: P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland

Annex 1

48th SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

(Tentative: November 2008)

"INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE"

INTRODUCTORY DEBATE

From Inclusive Education to Inclusive Society

Workshop 1:
Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content

Workshop 3:
Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions

Evidence-informed Policy Making: Why We Need It?

Workshop 2:
Inclusive Education: Public Policies

Workshop 4:
Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers

FINAL DEBATE

Inclusive Education: From Vision to Practice

PROGRAMME (PROVISIONAL)

Monday, 27 August 2007	
8:30 – 9:00	Welcome of participants
9:00 – 9.30	Official opening/ Opening remarks by ….. ; IBE-UNESCO
9:30 - 10:15	**Welcome, presentation of objectives of seminar and participants** Moderators: Mr. Ali Bubshait, Researcher at the Gulf Arab State Educational Research Center (GASERC, Kuwait City, Kuwait), and Focal Point for the Gulf Arab region, and Mr. Renato Opertti, Coordinator of Programme Specialist, Capacity Building for Curriculum Development
10:15 – 10:45	*Coffee break*
10:45 - 12:30	**Session 1: Relationships between Inclusive Education, EFA goals and Education as a Right** Two Presentations: a. Inclusive Education as a main strategy to attain EFA goals by Mr. Renato Opertti b. The Right to Education for All: Global Perspectives in Inclusive Education by Inclusive Education, Division of Basic Education, Education Sector, UNESCO Open discussion Moderator: Mr. Ali Bubshait
12:30 – 14:00	*Lunch*
14:00 - 15:45	**Session 2: Inputs from the European Perspectives on Inclusive Education** Two Presentations: a. The Finland approach towards promoting an Inclusive Education and the key factors by Ms. Ritva Järvinen, Planning Specialist, Finnish National Board of Education, Finland b. Main outcomes of the Regional Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education Eastern and Southeastern Europe by Ms. Lili Ji, Assistant Programme Specialist of the Capacity Building Programme, IBE-UNESCO Open discussion Moderator: Mr. Renato Opertti
15:45 - 16:15	*Coffee break*
16:15 – 18:00	**Session 3: Country Presentations (1)** 2 Countries presentations on the set of 4 questions on Inclusive Education, and plenary discussion. Moderator: Mr. Ali Bubshait,

Tuesday, 28 August 2007	
9.00 – 10:30	**Session 3: Country Presentations (2)**

	2 Countries presentations on the set of 4 questions on Inclusive Education, and plenary discussion.
	Moderator: Ms. Lili Ji
10:30 - 11:00	*Coffee break*
11:00 - 12:30	**Session 3: Country Presentations (3)** 2 Countries presentations on the set of 4 questions on Inclusive Education, and plenary discussion. Moderator: Mr. Ali Bubshait
12:30 - 14:00	*Lunch*
14:00 – 15:30	**Session 4: Interactive plenary discussion on the ICE sub-themes** Discussion around the four sub-themes of the International Conference of Education (ICE 2008). Commonalities and differences between countries. Moderator: Mr. Renato Opertti
15:30 - 16:00	*Coffee break*
16:30 – 17.45	**Session 5: Shaping a regional roadmap on Inclusive Education** Outline of a Roadmap to move forward on Inclusive Education at the regional level (plenary presentation by UNESCO and group discussion) Moderator: Mr. Ali Bubshait
17:45 – 18:00	Closing remarks by………; and IBE-UNESCO