



Executive summary

The Gulf Arab States Workshop on Inclusive Education (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, UAE, 27-29 August 2007)

Policy-makers, directors of education, educators, and curriculum specialists from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and United Arab Emirates as well as representatives from ED/BAS and Finland attended the workshop (25 participants). It was co-organized by GASERC (Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre), the Gulf Arab States Community of Practice in Curriculum Development and IBE.

The discussion was also focused on the need to broaden the concept and scope of Inclusive Education linked to the current processes of educational and curriculum change. These processes mainly imply the strengthening of Basic Education (Primary and Secondary), the development of competency-based approaches and the improvement in the provision of learning resources (i.e. textbooks). The conceptual understanding and use of the term of inclusive education remains very much limited to special needs education and the focus is on integration in mainstream schools by mainly providing physical facilities, installing resources centres and diversifying learning strategies with an increasing focus on tailored approaches. Likewise it also seems that immigrants, guest workers and temporary residents have much difficulty in accessing the social welfare system; education may not be sufficient for girls, the poor and rural students. However, these issues appeared to be too sensitive and complex to be addressed under the public policy framework.

Several regional seminars were organized by the UNESCO office in Beirut regarding inclusive education. In 2005, the Dubai Municipality, the Arab Urban Development Institute and the World Bank organized a conference entitled “Urban Children and Youth in the MENA Region: Addressing Priorities in Education”, leading to the “Dubai Declaration on Urban Children and Youth”. The declaration mentions “inclusive education for all children and youth” as the first priority and states that “conference participants stress the importance of inclusive education and reaffirm their commitment to improve the well-being and quality of life for all children and youth, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, or social background.”

The main challenges appear to be related to: (i) raise political awareness among different stakeholders around a broadened concept of Inclusive Education linked to the visualization of education as a right and to the attainment of EFA goals (participants agreed on this perspective and emphasized the need of a gradual strategy towards its fulfilment); (ii) disseminate the UNESCO vision on Inclusive Education (i.e. guidelines for inclusion) that is not very much known in the region, as a way of constructing institutional

capacities towards the implementation of inclusive visions and practices at different levels of the educational system; (iii) inform, sensitize and train professionals on visualizing inclusive education as a core strategy to address diversity of learners' expectations and needs, and (iv) strengthen cooperation and principally communication between countries to really share what they are doing, learn from each other and set up regional agendas.

Based on the actions that were discussed during the workshop and that are to be taken within the Gulf Arab States Community of Practice in Curriculum Development and jointly with GASERC, we plan to implement advocacy and raise-awareness activities on positioning the discussion on Inclusive Education within EFA goals, on broadening its conceptualization and on linking it to educational and curriculum reforms currently underway.