

New Delhi Agreement for enhancing SAARC collaboration for Education 2030

Adopted by the participants of the Sub-Regional Conference on “EFA Unfinished and Post 2015 Education Agendas in SAARC countries”

(13 -14 October 2015, New Delhi, India)

CONTEXT

The “EFA Unfinished and Post 2015 Education Agendas in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries”, sub-regional Conference held in New Delhi from 13 to 14 October 2015:

Recognizing the New Delhi Declaration of the “Second SAARC Education Ministers Meeting” (New Delhi, 31 October 2014) that agreed to expand the scope of cooperation which would involve “formulation of the SAARC Framework for Action for the post-2015 education agenda”;

Recalling the central role of education in ensuring, “inclusive and sustainable development, accelerating social transformation and promoting peace, tolerance and social cohesion”, as affirmed at the Incheon Declaration, “Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all”;

Taking inspiration from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development on 25th September 2015 in particular the SDG4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”;

Understanding education as a building block and essential condition to the achievement of all the SDGs;

Affirming that remarkable progress towards EFA goals has been achieved since 2000 in South Asia, particularly in terms of universalizing primary education, reducing gender disparities in primary education, and improving access to secondary and tertiary education;

Confirming, however, that in South Asia the EFA agenda remained unfinished in a majority of countries, particularly those goals relating to youth and adult illiterates, out-of-school children of primary and lower secondary school ages, low access to early childhood care and education, inadequate opportunities for skills development and poor quality of education and student learning outcomes;

Considering that the South Asian region is home to 51 percent of the world’s illiterate adult population and to 17.3 percent of primary and 40.4 percent of lower secondary level school going age out-of-school children of the world¹;

Reaffirming the challenges faced by SAARC countries which call for innovative, targeted and sustained collaborative efforts to foster education development in the South Asian region.

COMMITMENTS

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF. *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children*. Montreal: UIS, 2015, 145 p

Accordingly, we the participants agreed in enhancing regional collaboration for education 2030 by:

1. Building on the past education gains and achievements in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality learning and education for all - children, youth and adults - at all levels of education, from early childhood care and education (ECCE) to tertiary education and beyond with gender equality;
2. Identifying critical bottlenecks to meet SDG 4, including the EFA unfinished business in particular the persistent challenges of illiteracy and out-of-school children; this includes setting earlier targets for EFA unfinished business;
3. Interpreting, contextualizing and prioritizing the SDG 4 indicators and developing and sharing national strategies to achieve SDG 4 in the SAARC Member States; Adapting SDG 4 to the South Asia context including formulating intermediate targets earlier than 2030, taking into account the country contexts;
4. Ensuring that both girls and boys, especially from marginalized groups complete their education with expected learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) defined for respective levels of education;
5. Promoting lifelong learning through better integrating formal, non-formal and informal education and addressing emerging challenges such as the need to improve the development of skills for life and for work and to foster global citizenship for all learners in all age groups;
6. Adopting convergent and cross-sectoral approaches, considering how child labour, child marriage as well as stunting and poor sanitation, among others, impact on learning and recognizing the critical role education has on improving human development outcomes;
7. Developing a national/regional monitoring and evaluation mechanism and measuring the progress in achieving SDG 4 with final set of indicators to be adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2016 and generate and use the evidence for better policy formulation and management of education systems and sharing it with other SAARC countries;
8. Endeavouring to achieve a minimum 4-6 percent of GDP and/or at least 15-20 percent of total public expenditure for the entire education sector, including ECCE to achieve SDG 4 targets with a prioritization for the EFA Unfinished Agenda through improved governance and efficient and effective spending; Advocating for greater international technical and financial support to complement country led efforts;
9. Institutionalizing responsive, inclusive and accountable educational systems at the national, sub-national and local levels through strong sector planning, adopting sector wide approach, evidence-based planning, governance and management which meet the demands of the population;
10. Reflecting on the establishment/designation of a regional cooperation mechanism and thematic regional entities in each SAARC country for SAARC Education 2030 Framework for Action in line with the SDGs and sub-regional priorities on education

inspired by such successful cases as the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

11. Recommending on the establishment of a SAARC Education Ministers Organization similar to SEAMEO.

The Way Forward:

To pursue the above commitments, we agree on the following priority actions for cooperation among the SAARC countries:

1. Develop a SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 within the broader scope of the Framework for Action (FFA)-Education 2030, including possible adoption of specific prioritized targets earlier than 2030 in line with the SDGs and taking into account national and regional priorities on education, the 2nd SAARC Education Ministers New Delhi Declaration, the outcomes of this conference and existing SAARC mechanisms².
2. Pursue a regional mechanism for advancing education in South Asia such as “SEAMEO”, “SEAMEO Secretariat” and “SEAMEO Centres” and establish linkage between SEAMEO centers and SAARC centers;
3. Enhance technical cooperation and exchange of experts for capacity building, promoting innovative approaches, sharing evidence and research findings for developing appropriate strategies for attaining the SDG 4;
4. Establish a regional mechanism, including an online portal to share/disseminate information/knowledge, including research results, best practices and innovations, relating to education policies and programmes, among countries to facilitate cross-country learning and the formulation of evidence-based policy options and programmatic initiatives, and also expand communications and public information on the progress among SAARC countries to advance South Asian-regional cooperation in achieving SDG 4.
5. Develop a strong regional monitoring mechanism, including periodic collaborative review to monitor the progress towards SDG 4 and South Asian comparable learning assessment results. Develop comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation systems in order to generate sound evidence for policy formulation and the management of education systems as well as to ensure accountability. We commit to improve the quality, levels of disaggregation and timeliness of reporting, including to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics;
6. Enhance collaboration among countries and with UNESCO and UNICEF in their respective areas of expertise and maintain respective MOU and Agreement with SAARC secretariat. Engage with the other co-conveners of the 2015 World Education Forum: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNHCR and the World Bank Group; as well as other UN agencies e.g. ILO, WHO, WFP; multilateral and bilateral organizations, the Global Partnership for Education, INGOs, CSOs, academia and the private sector at the South Asia regional level and with national Education Donor Working Groups/ Local Education Working Groups and regional coordination mechanism to support the achievement of SDG 4;
7. Report the progress of above actions in the next SAARC Education Technical

² Possible SAARC mechanisms that can be tapped include the South Asian University, the SAARC Human Development Center, other SAARC Centers established under SAARC agreements and the South Asian Centre for Teacher Development

Meeting to be hosted by India;

- 8.** Launch the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 and a regional mechanism for advancing education in the next SAARC Education Ministers' Meeting to be hosted by the Maldives.