

Education priority needs identified by Ministers of Education from Least Developed Countries during the side event held during the 34th Session of the General Conference on 18 October 2007

Under the Chair of the Honourable Minister of Education, Literacy and National Languages of Benin, UNESCO organized a side event on 18 October during the 34th session of UNESCO's General Conference with Ministers of Education from Least Developed Countries. The objective of the side event was to provide the Ministers from LDCs with a brief review of the Organization's strategic action in the area of education during the medium-term strategy period 2001-2007 (31 C/4), and to provide a platform for the exchange of views on how the priority needs of LDCs should be addressed in the coming years through specific and targeted interventions, as envisaged in the next medium-term strategy for 2007-2013 (Draft 34 C/4), including through the reinforcement of South-South cooperation and North-South cooperation.

The following priority needs were cited by the Education Ministers as areas that must be addressed if their countries are to meet the internationally agreed development goals, in particular the EFA goals; the MDGs goals 1,2,3 and 6; and the education-related goals defined in the Brussels Plan of Action for the LDCs:

Addressing the challenges of the knowledge society and globalization

- Develop policy options that address the emerging challenges of the knowledge society, such as the digital divide between the North and South and brain drain, by focusing on issues related to providing quality assurance in higher education, promoting all forms of cross-border education and addressing the internationalization of trade in higher education.

Developing effective sector-wide approaches to education

- Ensure a tailored sector-wide approach to education for each country in recognition of socio-political and cultural differences.
- Ensure that there are effective linkages between all types and levels of education to encourage children and youth to remain in the education system.

Developing capacities to promote quality education for all

- Develop capacities to promote quality education for all in the areas of curriculum development, particularly by providing support to the development of national book policies; teacher education and training; and the implementation of educational policy reform, including through support provided through UNESCO's core initiatives, namely Life for Empowerment (LIFE) and Teacher Training in Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) and EDUCAIDS, the UNAIDS Global Initiative on Education and HIV & AIDS.
- Promote technical and vocational education as a means of equipping citizens, in particular the youth, marginalized populations, and women with the necessary skills to find employment.

- Foster new approaches to the teaching of science so that young people will be encouraged to pursue careers in science and technology, and provide capacity-building for the development of science curricula for all educational levels, and identify how to use communication tools such as radios to educate the youth about science.
- Promote physical education and arts education as an important aspect of quality education.
- Strengthen the higher education system as integral part of the holistic approach to education, and for the creation of knowledge and the development of science and technology.
- Advise LDCs on integrating sustainable development into curricula and learning processes aimed at achieving the objectives of the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD), and on how to integrate the educational components needed to promote a culture of peace.

Literacy

- Enhance efforts to increase literacy through both formal and non-formal education and life-long learning, and through the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE).
- Promote the use of mother-tongue as the language of instruction and multilingual education.

Special focus on the disadvantaged and marginalized populations

- Support LDCs in narrowing the gaps and eliminating disparities in different areas, notably in gender and the gap between rural and urban populations.
- Promote the achievement of gender equality in education in LDCs by promoting good practices, policies and legislation that address this issue.
- Increase access to educational opportunities to disadvantaged groups in LDCs, such as girls and women, ethnic and linguistic minorities, remote and rural populations, indigenous peoples and nomads, disabled persons, street children, and people affected by HIV & AIDS by expanding the use of ICTs for distance education, ensuring that ICTs are integrated into all teaching and learning processes at all levels of education, developing other innovative non-formal education mechanisms, and through strengthened support to TTISSA, EDUCAIDS and LIFE.

Emergencies

- Assist LDCs in situations of emergency, natural disaster and post-conflict in providing educational opportunities as a basic human right.

Immediate Next steps for follow-up by UNESCO

The Education Ministers identified the following next steps as areas for immediate follow-up by UNESCO.

1. Promote South-South Cooperation

- Develop modalities to promote South-South cooperation by encouraging the sharing of experiences and best practices among LDCs in addressing the Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs and the EFA goals, through the creation of a dedicated website, publications, and the organization of periodic debates during sessions of UNESCO's Executive Board and at other strategic intervals.
- Strengthen the ASP network in all LDCs as a mechanism for South-South, North-South, and triangular cooperation, and the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme.

2. Increase EFA Coordination at the Country Level

- Strengthen UNESCO's visibility at the country level by increasing national capacity development efforts in LDCs to provide quality education for all, and improving coordination efforts of EFA with other UN partners in order to assist governments in the formulation of national educational plans that address particular country needs, taking into account UNESCO's limited financial and human resources.
- Provide assistance to governments to ensure that a sector-wide approach to education is reflected in UN common country programming documents, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the Common Country Assessment (CCA), the One UN Plan, and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and that UNESCO's related educational activities are integrated into these documents.
- Raise the political and financial commitments of governments and partners to the educational needs of LDCs through various EFA fora, for example, by raising education stakeholders awareness of the need to assist LDCs in gaining access to the EFA Fast-Track Initiative (EFA-FTI), and strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships for education for better alignment of partners' efforts and the effective use of aid.

3. Regularly Monitoring the Progress of LDCs in meeting the EFA goals, specifically the education-related goals defined in the Brussels Programme of Action

- Regularly monitor the progress of LDCs in meeting the EFA goals, specifically the education-related goals defined in the Brussels Programme of Action through the EFA Global Monitoring Report and through statistical data provided by UIS so that this information can be used as input for the formulation of evidence-based education policies by LDCs.