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Beyond 2015 – Educating for a Sustainable Future

Key Considerations for the Development of the Post 2015 Agenda

Not only is education a basic human right, it equips individuals with the knowledge, skills and competencies to lead better lives and underpins nations' growth and prosperity. There is thus no question that education must be made prominent in all future development agendas.

UNESCO's works towards developing education for the sustainable future and for the Post-2015 Agenda

UNESCO works to stimulate region-wide reflections and consultations on the future of education and the Post-2015 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific. This process, coordinated by the Asia Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, has been undertaken through, amongst others, organization of a series of regional dialogues, networking of regional education and research institutions, conducting and facilitation of analytical work.

A first regional high-level expert meeting on the future of education, 'Towards EFA 2015 and Beyond – Shaping a new Vision of Education' (Bangkok, May 2012), was organized with the support of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the regional UNICEF offices. This meeting was the starting point for further work in this area in the region, to be pursued jointly by all partners and stakeholders. A main finding highlighted the fact that learning should be one of the areas of emphasis in shaping future education goals and strategies.

A second high-level expert meeting on the future of education 'Beyond 2015 – Rethinking Learning in a Changing World' was organized in Bangkok on 26 – 28 November 2012. The meeting discussed cutting-edge insights on learning from the perspectives of educationalists, learning scientists and economists as well as learning requirements for the future. It developed recommendations on possible responses to these requirements and what may be required to build effective learning systems from a life-long learning perspective, as well as in view of the post-2015 agenda.

Key Considerations for the Development of the Post 2015 Agenda

Education – a Catalyst for Development



UNESCO @ Dhaka

Over the past decade, the Asia-Pacific region has become a considerable economic and political force, characterized by a remarkable progress in improved access across all levels of education, rapid and dynamic economic growth, wider social development achievements, and an increasingly outward-looking political environment. A positive correlation between the quality of education provided across a number of countries and enhanced economic growth has been demonstrated. Despite these positive achievements, however, societies are increasingly divided in terms of the distribution of opportunities for "relevant" education, income and quality of life. Education inequalities in particular lead to economic and social inequalities. These realities require a more appropriate model of human development, one characterized by increased focus on social participation and equity and one that considers carefully the great richness and diversity of the Asia-Pacific region.

Implications of Development Trends for Education

In the context of rapid economic development and societal change, it is critical that education systems adapt to a multitude of potential challenges. Indeed, what sorts of educational responses are required to address demographic shifts such as rapidly ageing populations, youth bulges and growing migrant populations? How should education policies best address increasing environmental degradation, and the growing prevalence of natural disasters? How can education help ensure the appropriate balance between the preservation of regional and local identities and the clear benefits of globalization? And, given the ubiquitous spread of information communication, what does it mean to be 'literate' in the 21st Century and how can education systems harness the benefits of technology for enhanced learning? It is critical that any post-2015 agenda for education take careful consideration of these important trends.

Education For All (EFA) – an Unfinished Agenda

While education is central to many Asia-Pacific countries' development approaches and noticeable achievements have been made in the context of EFA, significant challenges remain. There are vast disparities between and within countries as concerns access to schooling, equity and quality of education and in resulting levels of learning achievement. People from war-torn zones, remote communities, ethnic minorities and women and girls still face difficulties accessing education and there are large numbers of out-of school children. Despite considerable progress to improve youth and adult literacy, the region still contains the largest number of illiterate adults of any region in the world. The post-2015 agenda for education should take into account that achieving EFA remains a key, yet unfinished agenda for basic education in the region, requiring strengthened efforts in order to meet its goals.

Beyond Current EFA Goals and MDGs

While the continued importance of the EFA goals has been acknowledged, future orientations for education require a widening of the EFA agenda in response to current development trends and requirements of the Asia-Pacific region. An increasing number of countries in the region have reached middle-income or high-income status and are faced with education issues beyond the EFA and MDG agendas. These include quality of education, equity, teachers, vocational and skills development and higher education, which should become areas of emphasis and feature prominently among the education goals and strategies of any future post-2015 development agendas.

Educating for a Sustainable Future

The transition towards a 'green economy' requires that we educate and train the human resources and prepare society at large for such sustainable future. This requires complete revisions of job qualifications and corresponding learning objectives of educational programmes at all levels. This requires both curricular and didactic review and overhaul of programmes. We are moving to the end of the ESD decade, the post 2015 agenda provides us with an opportunity to elevate ESD to be fully integrated into the sustainable development agenda. This will emphasize the need for educating for a sustainable future. Subjects such as environment, water, climate change, but also food/nutrition, hygiene/health, disasters and preparedness, could be strengthened. Science education provides a useful entry point for these subjects in the curriculum. To this end, the Regional Science Bureau in Jakarta has initiated a so called "Green schools action programme", which demonstrates the integration of ESD related subjects both into the curriculum and also in the overall school operations and via school based projects. The Green Schools programme will be further expanded to include also CLCs and as such it would reach the community at large.

A Renewed Focus on Quality Education and Learning

There is a growing concern in the region regarding quality of education and learning outcomes. Success or failure in achieving education for all hinges critically not just on countries providing access to education or delivering more years of schooling; the ultimate measure lies in what children learn and the quality of their education experience. Empirical studies provide robust evidence that quality education contributes to economic growth and that learning, rather than schooling, has a direct impact on growth and development. For an important part of the region's population, however, education systems fall far short of these expectations. Poor quality in education is jeopardizing the future of millions of young people. In shaping education for the future, efforts to expand enrolment at all levels must be accompanied by policies to enhance educational quality at all levels, in formal and in non-formal settings. Quality of education and learning will thus be one of the key areas of focus for UNESCO in the development of education for the future and the post 2015 agenda.

What knowledge, skills and competencies for the future?

Education systems for the future should train learners to be innovative, able to adapt to and assimilate change and be able to continue learning. Young people require a new set of skills to be competent in a connected and constantly changing world which include critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication and technology literacy. Moreover, education for the future has to go beyond academic achievements and cognitive skills to include non-cognitive skills and competencies, as well as education for social cohesion, creativity, and social and emotional development. For doing so, a new and broadened conceptualization of learning is required, using a life-long and life-wide learning approach. These considerations are critical in the development of a post 2015 education agenda, and should also be taken into consideration for broader development agenda post 2015.

Education in the Post 2015 Agenda

Education is at the basis of development and offers the possibility for people everywhere not only to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies, but also to create new opportunities in order to improve their lives. Whether in pursuit of creating new technologies, improved agriculture, preventing HIV/AIDs, the establishment of small businesses, improved governance, the protection of the environment, the expression of local culture or rehabilitation after conflict – education and learning are an essential condition of progress. Education enables individuals and communities to take greater control of the circumstances of their lives and to shape, rather than merely endure, the change that affects them. Given the fundamental role that education plays in achieving much broader development goals, there must be both an education-specific development agenda beyond 2015 and explicit education goals in all development agendas. In short, education should be given prominence in the development of the post 2015 agenda.



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