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**REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
ON THE FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF A REGIONAL CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IN SHARJAH
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF UNESCO**

SUMMARY

In his opening address to the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 162nd session, the Director-General welcomed the request of the United Arab Emirates to establish a Regional Educational Planning Centre in Sharjah (United Arab Emirates). The Director-General informed the Board that the feasibility of such a centre would be analysed and that the conditions that might enable this centre to be placed under the auspices of UNESCO would be examined.

In the present document, the Director-General reports on the main conclusions of the work undertaken by a UNESCO mission to explore the feasibility of establishing the proposed centre under UNESCO auspices.

Decision required: paragraph 40.

INTRODUCTION

1. The discussion on the need of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for a modern educational planning capacity and possible ways to build such capacity with support from the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), began at the initiative of the United Arab Emirates in early 2000. At the invitation of the Minister of Education and Youth of the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Dr Ali Abdulaziz Al Sharhan, the Director of IIEP visited the United Arab Emirates in June 2000 to explore the possibilities of cooperation in training in educational planning, management and evaluation. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the Minister and the IIEP Director summarizes the understanding reached on a number of points, including the following:

- (a) to undertake joint Ministry of Education and Youth (MoEY) and IIEP fact-finding work on the needs for training of personnel assigned to administrative and management tasks in education in the United Arab Emirates at the central MoEY, regional and local levels;
- (b) to consider that a centre for educational planning, management and evaluation might be an appropriate organizational framework to attend to the needs that would be identified by the fact-finding mission;
- (c) to explore the potential for regional cooperation in capacity-building in educational planning among countries of the Arab Gulf Region, i.e. the members of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

In January 2001, during a visit to IIEP, the Minister of Education and Youth and the IIEP Director resumed the discussion confirming the understanding reached earlier.

2. The Director-General visited the United Arab Emirates from 18 to 21 March 2001. During this visit, His Highness Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasemi, Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, offered a building in Sharjah Cultural City to house a regional centre for educational planning.

3. In June 2001, a mission of IIEP and the MoEY began to explore the need for training in educational planning and management in the United Arab Emirates and appropriate ways of meeting such needs, for example in the form of a training centre, with possible regional coverage.

4. In his opening address to the Executive Board at its 162nd session, on 2 October 2001, the Director-General informed the Board about the request from the United Arab Emirates for the establishment, with support from UNESCO, of a Centre for Educational Planning for the Arab Region, to be located in Sharjah. The Director-General also informed the Board that the feasibility of such a centre would be analysed and the conditions that might enable this centre to be placed under the auspices of UNESCO examined.

5. In January 2002, a UNESCO/IIEP mission to the United Arab Emirates, together with the MoEY team in charge of preparatory work for the centre, completed fact-finding and exploratory work. The mission followed the feasibility criteria set by the General Conference at its 21st session (21 C/Resolution 40) which were confirmed and spelt out by the Director-General in DG/Note/00/16 of 28 July 2000. The mission and the MoEY team took a critical look at the need for the proposed centre and at its objectives, possible training programme and activities, proposed modes of operation, legal status, structure, staffing, location, costs and financing. The mission examined, in particular, the question whether – and if so, in what form – UNESCO could lend its support to the preparation and launching of such a centre. The summary of observations, assessment and conclusions of the mission are contained in the following sections of this report.

BACKGROUND

6. The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) was founded in May 1981. Its members are the following six Arab states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Council has set up a number of institutions to effect coordination and cooperation in various sectors which include the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS). In January 2002, Yemen became a member of several GCC institutions including ABEGS. It has not, however, become a full member of the Council.

7. The total population of the six GCC countries is estimated at almost 30 million inhabitants. Annual rate of population growth is around 2.9%. Around 45.5% are under 20 years of age. More than 30% of the population are non-citizens, i.e. foreign workers and their dependents, coming overwhelmingly from Asian countries. In some countries (e.g. United Arab Emirates), close to 87% of the population are non-nationals.

8. Compulsory basic education in the GCC countries consists of six primary grades and three intermediate grades. It starts at six years of age. It is preceded by two to three years of non-compulsory kindergarten education programmes. It is followed by three years of secondary education, and then by higher education. Enrolment in primary education is almost universal, for both nationals and non-nationals. Total enrolment in primary education in 2001/2002 is estimated at 3.7 million, of which about 11.7% are in private schools. Overall, the gender gap in primary education is insignificant in all six GCC countries. Gross enrolment in the secondary cycle is more than 70%. About 9.4% of secondary-school students are in private institutions.

9. Tuition in government schools is free of charge. The construction and operation of these schools is fully financed by the governments. Private schools are tuition fee paying. These schools cater mostly for the children of non-nationals. The GCC countries together allocate a little over 15% of total government expenditure to education, mostly for the basic and secondary cycles. This is relatively high by international standards; e.g. the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country mean is a little under 13% for all levels of education. Costs of education per pupil and overall education expenditure are rising. So far it has been possible to accommodate such an increase within still-growing government budgets.

10. All GCC countries are engaged in curriculum reform and major development activities. They are also envisaging the preparation and introduction of unified, region-wide curricula. The Ministries of Education are responsible for developing, printing and distributing textbooks. In each country, all students use the same official textbooks. The governments produce enough textbooks for each subject so that each student has his/her own copy. In government schools, books are distributed to students free of charge. All governments have plans to better equip schools with laboratories and workshops, and especially to equip students with IT-related skills.

11. In spite of the high level of spending on education, tests conducted to monitor learning achievement (as part of the EFA Assessment 2000) indicated that the quality of education is far from satisfactory. Moreover, the relevance of education to the needs of the labour market and employment is quite low.

12. A high percentage of government school teachers are foreigners: about 26% in the six countries and in one country 76%. This poses serious challenges regarding ongoing training of teachers, and quality and relevance of education.

13. The Ministries of Education in the GCC countries carry out several central tasks such as educational policy preparation (specifying the educational objectives and drawing up

implementation strategies, plans and projects through which objectives are achieved), supervision of schools and control and follow-up at both local and school levels so as to assure that the educational policies are carried out. The Ministries, in general, support decentralization in administration and encourage decision-making at the local level. In this respect, regional directorates of education have been established (except in Bahrain). They are responsible for the implementation of policies at local level. The Ministries supervise private education as well.

Need for educational planning capacity and for training in educational planning

14. So far the countries of the region have achieved educational development without much systematic technical planning. This has been made possible through the availability of financial resources, controlled growth of student population (through effective enforcement of immigration rules), and education and training abroad – particularly at post-secondary level – of nationals from the Gulf States. In the future, educational development will face a number of challenges including: the continued increasing demand on education, the rising cost of and spending on education, the need for highly skilled manpower in various sectors, the continued dependence on non-national manpower, the need to ensure equity in educational provision and development, the need to realize higher quality and relevance of education, and the need to improve the performance of teachers and managers in the education system.

15. Responding to these challenges through timely, adequate and efficient measures requires both (i) systematic, sustained and continuous educational planning, as well as (ii) educational research specifically designed to produce information on the functioning of the education systems and the teaching-learning processes of the countries of the region. Today such planning does not yet exist or it is just starting to emerge. Research activities are very small in number and not yet sufficiently oriented towards having an impact on policy-setting and on region-specific problem solving.

16. Modern educational planning is a continuous process of policy-setting, sector analysis, strategy design, preparation of action programmes, implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation. This planning process covers all essential components of pedagogical management (curriculum, teaching-learning materials, teaching-learning approaches, learning achievement, teaching performance, educational research, ICT, etc.) and of resource management (teachers, physical facilities, finance, information collection-processing-analysis, etc.). To be effective, such an educational planning process must be organized in an institutional, focused and coordinated way (e.g. in the form of a policy and planning unit reporting directly to the Minister of Education). It must be integrated into the decision process concerning education sector policy, strategy and resource allocation. To be able to function, the educational planning process needs highly qualified and experienced personnel at central level (i.e. in the Ministry of Education) and at local level (provincial or district).

17. In the United Arab Emirates and in the other GCC countries, such a modern educational planning process has yet to be developed. The countries (beginning with the Ministry of Education, and endorsed by the Government) need to define and adopt their concept of modern educational planning, and decide on its scope and function. On that basis, planning mechanisms and procedures will have to be designed and set up.

18. Fortunately, in all countries of the region a number of important components of such a planning process are already in place, including regular and quite comprehensive collection and processing of basic statistical information, the formulation of long-term sector development goals and, in some countries, as for example in the United Arab Emirates, the preparation of a medium-term (five-year) education plan. However, planning seems oriented towards the drawing up of a

document, the plan. Planning is not yet undertaken as a continuous process of policy-setting, implementation and monitoring.

19. Awareness of the need for modern planning is growing, as can be seen by the very initiative of the United Arab Emirates to create a regional centre for educational planning for themselves and the other GCC countries, and the dialogue between Ministries and Ministers of Education of the GCC countries on this matter. This awareness is also reflected in recent considerations of education research and development institutes of the region to include educational planning in their training activities.

20. At present, and for many years to come, the greatest obstacle to developing modern educational planning in the Arab Gulf States as well as in other countries of the Arab region, is the severe lack of planning know-how and experience. Capacity-building in educational planning is therefore of the highest priority, and training in educational planning has to be the core of such capacity-building.

21. There are no educational planning training centres or institutions and only a few scanty national programmes in the entire region on which one could build in order to develop the necessary training capacity to state-of-the-art professional standards for a number of persons sufficiently large to constitute a critical mass of planners in their own countries and for the region, and in a reasonably short time. The number of Education Ministry staff who have received more or less adequate education planning training is very small (it can be estimated as no more than two to three on average) in each country. There are a number of training courses available related to education sector management: for example, the Diploma course on school management run by the Emirates University, or short (up to one week) courses organized by the United Arab Emirates Institute of Administrative Development and similar courses in other GCC countries. But educational planning is not on their list. Based on information collected by the MoEY from the six GCC countries, their real training needs can be estimated to be about 200 senior and leading technical staff every year.

Proposed regional educational planning centre

22. The UNESCO/IIEP mission discussed at length with the MoEY officials the details of the proposed regional educational planning centre. Following is a summary of the most important points of the discussion.

23. The **objective of a regional training centre** for the GCC countries and other Arab States is to build national and regional capacity for modern educational planning, by targeting senior officials and technical staff of Ministries of Education, local level (provincial and district) education offices and other Ministries directly relevant to the education sector (such as Finance Ministries) through three types of activities:

- (a) training in all aspects of education planning, in ways that both allow on-the-job training and facilitate awareness concerning specific sector development issues that are of priority for the countries in the region;
- (b) facilitating access to professional-technical information in Arabic and English on education planning and management from other countries relevant to education reform and development of the GCC countries and other States of the Arab region; and
- (c) training in applied education research, by undertaking fact-finding and analysis work focused on the specific needs of the countries of the GCC region.

24. The annual **training activities** of the centre would be provided through short courses, of one to two weeks in duration, as well as courses lasting up to four months.
25. The centre would have an independent **legal status** as a non-profit, educational institution within the legal context of the host country (the United Arab Emirates).
26. It would be **supervised by a governing board** composed of representatives of the Ministries of Education of each participating country, UNESCO and of other participating or associated international and regional organizations, including ABEGS. The participating countries and organizations would select their own representatives.
27. The entire **costs** for providing all staff, facilities, furniture and equipment, and for maintenance and repair of the facilities and the equipment would be **financed** through a grant from the United Arab Emirates (made available by the Ruler of Sharjah Emirate). The Government of the United Arab Emirates is strongly committed to finance the recurrent costs of the proposed centre. UNESCO is not requested to provide any financial support to the proposed centre.
28. The **preparatory phase** of about 12 months concerns the formal, legal creation of the centre, the selection and appointment of the core group of staff and their training, the preparation and testing of the training materials, and the setting and equipping of facilities. This would be followed by the **launching phase** of about 14 months during which the first series of training courses would be undertaken. The **full programme** could start in the third year after the official creation of the centre.

Mission's assessment of UNESCO's involvement

29. There is a close relationship between the objectives, activities and modes of operation of the proposed centre and UNESCO's purposes as set forth in its Constitution, its programme priorities and the objectives which it seeks to attain through the implementation of its programme. The activities of the proposed regional training centre accord with UNESCO's contribution "to building Member States' institutional capacities with a view to renewing their education systems and to meeting rapidly changing societal needs" and promoting "regional and international co-operation ... and knowledge-sharing" (see Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007, document 31 C/4, Strategic Objective 3, para. 71). To get off to a good start and become successful, the centre needs **UNESCO's support** in the form of international state-of-the-art expertise; particularly during the preparatory phase but also during the launching phase. The United Arab Emirates Government is committed to cover the cost of UNESCO's technical support at all phases.
30. During the preparatory phase, UNESCO would provide support by mobilizing a team of international experts who would work with the core group of the centre by assisting in the preparation of the training materials, undertaking intensive training of the core group staff and advising on the selection of materials to be made available in Arabic and English under the information access activities of the centre. During the launching phase, the UNESCO team of experts would visit the centre from time to time to check on the quality and relevance of its performance, and to advise on suitable ways to improve the performance.
31. The objectives, activities and modes of operation foreseen for the centre are fully in accordance with the criteria which the General Conference of UNESCO set (21 C/Resolution 40) for its cooperation with international and regional centres. Furthermore, UNESCO would provide its support to the proposed regional centre on a cost-recovery basis.

32. In order to be able to make its support available, UNESCO would have to be satisfied in respect of three crucial aspects concerning the proposed centre: (a) the regional character of the proposed centre; (b) support from the GCC countries, such as commitments concerning membership in the governing body and the use of the centre's training services; and (c) advice of ABEGS on the objectives and structure of the proposed regional centre, and its relationship with other centres affiliated to ABEGS. UNESCO's cooperation with the centre would be closer if UNESCO were to be represented on its governing board.

Summary evaluation regarding the feasibility of the proposed centre

33. The need for capacity-building in educational planning, and for training in educational planning in the Arab Gulf States and in the Arab Region at large, is a high priority. There are no programmes or educational centres at present satisfying this need. The proposed centre will respond to this priority in the region.

34. The United Arab Emirates Government is clearly committed to supporting the establishment and the running of the proposed centre and to providing all its establishment and running costs. This is a strong favourable precondition.

35. It is clear that the establishment of the proposed centre is fully in line with UNESCO's objectives and programmes, and that the centre would contribute to building Member States' institutional capacities with a view to meeting rapidly changing societal needs and promoting regional and international cooperation and knowledge-sharing.

36. As UNESCO cannot contribute financially to the proposed centre, its technical assistance to the centre would have to be provided on a cost-recovery basis.

37. The proposed institutional structure of the centre is compatible with the guidelines of document 21 C/36, particularly on the composition and functions of the Governing Board.

38. The United Arab Emirates Government is committed to recruiting and funding the professional and administrative staff required for the smooth and efficient running of the centre. It will require UNESCO's support in training the staff, designing the centre's programmes, developing the training materials and participating in the supervision of its operations.

39. All the points above are favourable conditions for UNESCO's governing bodies to give the establishment of the proposed centre under the auspices of UNESCO further consideration.

40. In light of the foregoing, the Executive Board may wish to consider the following decision:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined the report on the feasibility study on the establishment of a Regional Centre for Educational Planning in Sharjah under the auspices of UNESCO, presented by the Director-General in document 164 EX/6,
2. Expresses its gratitude to the United Arab Emirates for its commitment to fully fund the establishment and the operation of the centre;
3. Noting with appreciation the progress already achieved in the discussions between the United Arab Emirates and the Director-General,

4. Invites the Director-General to pursue his discussions and to present to the Executive Board at its 166th session and to the General Conference at its 32nd session a report on the establishment of the centre under the auspices of UNESCO.

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CORRIGENDUM

The paragraphs 1(c), 20 and 33 of the document should read as follows:

1. (...)

(c) to explore the potential for regional cooperation in capacity-building in educational planning among the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

20. At present, and for many years to come, the greatest obstacle to developing modern educational planning in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as in other countries of the Arab region, is the severe lack of planning know-how and experience. Capacity-building in educational planning is therefore of the highest priority, and training in educational planning has to be the core of such capacity-building.

33. The need for capacity-building in educational planning, and for training in educational planning in the countries of the GCC and in the Arab region at large, is a high priority. There are no programmes or educational centres at present satisfying this need. The proposed centre will respond to this priority in the region.