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UNESCO EVALUATION INSIGHTS

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EVALUATION INSIGHTS provides a snapshot of UNESCO's work in evaluation. Its purpose is to share insights and ideas with all interested stakeholders and to feed into ongoing discussions about the contribution of evaluation to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The third edition of **EVALUATION INSIGHTS** is dedicated to an evaluation of UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet).

Evaluating the management and functioning of UNESCO'S Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet)

ASPnet - as a driver for innovation and quality in education - is recognized as an effective implementation mechanism in the context of the Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular for reaching target 4.7 of the SDG4 -Education 2030¹

The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) is a large and unique global network of schools committed to promote the principles and values of UNESCO through developing innovative educational contents, pioneering new teaching methods and learning approaches and facilitating interaction and exchange among millions of teachers and students across the world. Its strength lies at the grassroots level by practising quality education and approaches for learning and living together in schools in pursuit of peace and sustainable development. The programme was launched in 1953 in 33 secondary schools in 15 countries, and currently counts over 10,000 educational institutions in 181 countries as its members - ranging from nursery and pre-schools to primary and secondary schools as well as teacher training institutions. Dedicated ASPnet National Coordinators in the Member States are responsible for managing the network at the country level, while international coordination is guaranteed by UNESCO HQ. However, it is the school principals, teachers and students who are taking the leading role in implementing activities on the ground.

The ASPnet fulfils several of UNESCO's key functions and constitutes an effective implementation mechanism for Member States in putting the SDG4-Education 2030 Agenda, and in particular target 4.7 into practice at the grass roots level. The development and ample use of educational material like the 'World Heritage Education series' or guidance material on 'Education for Sustainable

Development', the visibility and outreach of Celebrations of International Days or the intercultural exchanges triggered by long lasting twinning arrangements among schools across the globe are only some of the examples that show how ASPnet has been successful in creating and replicating innovative educational material and approaches, in contributing to quality teaching and learning approaches, and in connecting and effectively facilitating exchange of good practices among schools from all over the world.



Why this evaluation?

In an effort to more effectively manage and better utilise UNESCO's partnerships and networks as valuable assets for delivering its programmes, the ASPnet had been identified as a network that has been functioning at a sub-optimal level over the past biennia. Many stakeholders consider it as a 'dusted jewel', recognising that its powerful potential has not been fully utilised. To support an already initiated process of revitalisation of the ASPnet and to inform UNESCO's Senior Management and Governing Bodies, as well as national level stakeholders on the most appropriate way forward, the UNESCO Education sector commissioned this evaluation.

What we learned: The ASPnet ...

... is a consolidated implementation mechanism

Although underutilised in the past, ASPnet has demonstrated strong resilience not least due to the strong commitment and engagement of its stakeholders. Now reconfirmed by Member States as a powerful implementation mechanism for increasing the quality of education on the ground in the context of the SDG4 - Education 2030 agenda, its working mechanisms, i.e. creating, teaching and learning and interacting are considered as highly pertinent for reaching in particular target 4.7 of the Education 2030 agenda.

¹ SDG target 4.7 envisions that "all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development"

... is a cost efficient programme for UNESCO

Based on the programme's decentralised structure and networking components, and due to its potential multiplier effects within the network and beyond, ASPnet can function as a cost-efficient programme for UNESCO. However, decreasing core resources for international coordination over the last biennia, diminishing educational resources for animating the network coupled with increasing scale and complexity resulted in uncontrolled growth with uneven level of activity and quality throughout the Network.

... has partly lost its coherence and identity

Furthermore, the proliferation of a variety of national implementation mechanisms, such as non-homogenous or non-equally respected procedures for selection and membership of schools, resulted in a loss of its global identity and decreased the manageability of the Network.

...past success is only true for parts of the network

Despite several examples of good practice identified in the evaluation, overall a mixed picture emerged in terms of results, with only pockets of the network actively participating, the capacity building potential sub-optimally exercised and networking, with few exceptions taking place mainly at the national, or at best at the regional level.

... has yet to realize its potential for policy relevance

Furthermore, the ASPnet was rarely found influential at the policy level. The awareness and recognition by national stakeholders of the potential relevance of ASPnet's educational contents for the national curricula is so far limited. A lack of communication and visibility of the ASPnet was found among the reasons why the ASPnet is often not sufficiently known or understood beyond the network and rarely found influential at the national policy level.

Key lessons

Key lessons emerging from this evaluation have been identified as important conditions for the effective functioning of the ASPnet, and shall inform its future strategic direction, however they may also provide insights for the functioning and management of other communities and social networks of a global scale.

1. Network identity and coherence need to be supported by strong governance and community building initiatives

Established membership and quality criteria as well as a minimum of common rules and procedures must be clear and equally respected by all members to ensure cohesion of the network. The direct connection between the schools and UNESCO was identified as the intrinsic motivation,

based on the sense of belonging to a global Organization with a humanistic mandate. Although the scale of the network is a challenge for the simultaneous gathering of all its members, community building initiatives, such as regular meetings, both virtual and face-to-face, online consultations and debates among key actors and stakeholders and the rotational involvement of schools in national/regional/international events, are critical.

2. Constant animation of the Network needs to be fuelled by relevant content and high quality material for maintaining the momentum

Maintaining a global network of such scale requires sound coordination, constant innovation and animation. Its programmatic Strategy must be supported by a detailed operational workplan that is geared at creating momentum and synchronous opportunities for cooperation and exchange, such as the launch of key themes for the network to concentrate on within a specified timeframe and linked to events, such as international days/years/decades and equally relevant for all members' specific context.

3. Innovative and quality ICT tools are fundamental to maintaining connectivity and quality standards and to support effective communication, and sharing of good practices for scaling up and replication.

While the engagement of all relevant stakeholders is essential for the success of the programme, better demonstrating and communicating good practices and success is a precondition for attracting partnerships and external resources. Furthermore, a systematic monitoring mechanism must be in place based on direct contact between the key partners, that foresees incentives and acknowledgement through feedback mechanisms. Where reliable quality assurance and reporting systems are established, establishing policy linkages, such as feeding ASPnet good practices into policy debate and national reform is more likely. The level of visibility of the programme, clear understanding of its mechanism and the full awareness of external stakeholders of the potential of the ASPnet are key for the engagement of local communities, potential donors and partners, as well as to allow policy level stakeholders identify examples for replication and scaling up of good practices that have been developed and experienced by the ASPnet.

