

Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All

GUIDING PRINCIPLES, SPECIFIC GOALS AND TARGETS FOR 2015¹

During the Asia Pacific Conference on Education for All 2000 Assessment, held on 17-20 January 2000, the Regional Drafting Committee produced the Draft Outline of the Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All. The Draft Outline document drew on the following information:

- the Draft Dakar Framework for Action, Preliminary Discussion Document, 5/11/99;
- the Asia-Pacific Region Draft Synthesis Report;
- the four Sub-Regional Draft Synthesis Reports; and
- points raised during the Plenary sessions on 17-20 January and the Sub-Regional Meetings on 18-19 January 2000.

On the final day of the conference, all delegates received a copy of the draft outline and were asked to make further suggestions and comments. In subsequent weeks, the Regional Technical Advisory Group (RTAG) Secretariat received 43 submissions from education ministries, UN agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the region. All of the submissions were considered when constructing this document; many suggestions have been simply incorporated into the draft outline, while other comments have been listed in Appendix 1, Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action—Additional Concerns.

Preamble

Education is a fundamental human right of all people—of value in and of itself, for improving the quality of life, and as an essential part

of social and human development. The provision of basic education, whether it be formally or nonformally delivered, is a core responsibility of the state with active and genuine collaboration of parents, communities, and civil society. All people, especially those most disadvantaged and excluded,² must be guaranteed access to a basic education of decent quality.

The Gains

- Increase in primary school enrollment.
- Expansion of early childhood care and education programs.
- Higher priority given to quality.
- Increase in functional adult literacy.
- Improvement in educational management information systems.
- Increase in national budgets for basic education.
- Effective use of existing resources.
- Increase in international assistance to basic education.
- Increase in the number of legislative measures, campaigns, projects, and reforms in basic education.
- More innovative initiatives in basic education.
- More partnership between private sector and civil society.

The Challenges³

- Growing disparities within countries, particularly a persistent urban-rural gap.
- Persistent gender gap against girls, especially in South Asia.
- Relative lack of emphasis on alternative, non-formal approaches to basic education and disinterest in workplace education.⁴
- Emphasis placed on getting children into school, but not enough attention paid to the retention rate or to the completion of schooling.
- Urban bias of early childhood programs.
- Continuing shortfalls in national education budgets, especially for countries in economic crisis and transition and in relation to school-age population growth.
- Continuing shortfalls in international resources for basic education.
- Weakness in identifying, refining, and expanding best practices in basic education.
- Difficulty in recasting curriculums to address the new risks and challenges facing youth in the region.
- Inability to implement the required management reforms for educational systems of countries in transition.
- Lack of broad participation of communities and local leadership in management and delivery of education.
- Lack of reliable data and statistics.
- Increasing the visibility of people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups.
- Disruption or cessation of basic education provisions, facilities, and support as a result of national or sub-national armed conflict or emergency.
- Lack of capacity to assess educational problems and contributing factors.
- Limited testing, assessment, and evaluation processes for learning often isolated from previous learning experiences.
- The (still) large number of illiterates in the region, and the challenge of delivering meaningful and relevant literacy programs to

people living in different social, economic, and political circumstances

- Inadequate means of assessing learning performance and achievement
- Disparities between big countries and small island states

Regional Objectives and Strategies

Goals

Early childhood care and education⁵

At all stages of life, children should be provided with quality, comprehensive, integrated care, and education. Child-centered, family-focused, community-based, holistic care and education of preschool children is essential for securing the well-being and rights of all children and should be supported by national policies and sufficient funds. This should be the result of synergistic partnership among families, communities, civil society, NGOs, and the government.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs, whether they be family- or community-based, or linked to schools or learning centers, must focus on caring for and educating the whole child, from birth to school entry. These programs must promote the child's optimum physical, psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic development in ways that are culturally and socially relevant.

Investments in capacity building to improve the quality of care and education through the diverse program options and services for young children and families are critical. Improved data gathering and analysis of both program access and quality indicators, regular monitoring of program implementation and regulatory frameworks linked to both local and national systems are essential.

ECCE programmes should remain flexible and adaptable to the needs of preschool children and not become mere extensions of formal school systems. In addition, they should

be developmentally appropriate and responsive to the needs and interests of children, and should be firmly anchored on the family and community as the child's primary caring and learning environment.

Universal basic education

All must have the opportunity to receive a basic education of good quality that focuses on the “whole” person, including health, nutrition, and cognitive and psycho-social development.⁶ In order for this to happen, education systems must be able to adapt to the individual needs of child, youth, and adult learners, by incorporating formal and nonformal approaches and programs within an integrated and inclusive system of basic education.

A strong and serious commitment must be made to include the excluded. Clearer analyses must be made of reasons for exclusion, including issues such as language of instruction, and more innovative approaches made to address these reasons.

Greater, more explicit focus and commitment must be made to identify unreached children who are not in school and to promote innovative and varied approaches by government and NGOs to meet their diverse educational needs.

There is a need to improve demand as well as increase supply through the closer collaboration and genuine involvement of parents, communities, and the private sector in education.

There is also a need to mitigate the direct and indirect costs of basic education, especially for the disadvantaged. In order to achieve universal basic education, systems must become more internally and externally efficient and focus more sharply on retaining children in school.

Basic learning and skills programmes⁷

There have been impressive gains in child, youth, and adult literacy in the region, espe-

cially for girls and women. Nonetheless, they remain fragile and need constant reinforcement and recommitment.

Conflict, violence, social injustice, and other risks affect the lives of people in almost every country in the region. Basic education must focus increasingly on developing skills and capacities for life and work in a rapidly changing world. Values and cultural identity and their preservation must continue to find a prominent place in all learning programmes and teaching practices.

So, too, basic literacy and numeracy skills must be developed in the context of relevant life skills—whether they be work related or address any of the risks increasingly confronting children, youth, and adults. Such programs should adopt participatory, age appropriate, culturally sensitive, and integrated approaches to peace education and conflict resolution, gender relations, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS education.

There is also a need to integrate functional education into equivalency programs to provide opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults to gain access to relevant and meaningful learning programmes leading to educational certification.

Learning achievement⁸

Improvement in the quality of education is critical to economic and social development and therefore a national imperative. Approaches to improving the quality of education require adoption of curriculum content and processes which are learner centered; recognize the diversity of learning needs and stages of cognitive, social, and emotional development; and develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for independent learning and problem solving. Improving the quality of education also requires access to appropriate learning resources. Assessment strategies at all levels should reflect such changing emphases, especially the focus on learning how to learn,

and include appropriately diverse, continuous, and responsive assessment strategies. Training of teachers and educational managers is required to support curriculum reforms and should include modalities which strengthen teacher monitoring and support mechanisms which ensure continuity of reform.

Education of women and girls and the elimination of gender disparities

It is essential to eliminate systemic gender disparities, where they persist, amongst girls and boys throughout the education system—in enrollment, achievement, and completion; in teacher training and career development; in curriculum, and learning practices and learning processes. This requires better appreciation of the role of education as an instrument of women's equality and empowerment.

Furthermore, specific measures should be taken to ensure the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all educational processes.

Where possible, also, specific programmes, both formal and non-formal in approach, should be developed to target the increased enrolment, retention, and completion of education by girls and women.

Literacy and continuing education⁹

Via the support of literacy campaigns, the goal of universal literacy should be aspired to in the next decade.

Life skills and values: education for peace and global understanding¹⁰

The education system should strive to address issues of peace, order and sociopolitical cohesion. Whether school-based or delivered nonformally, basic learning tools should increase the capacities of learners to deal with issues of day-to-day survival, to resolve community conflict, and to greater enjoy human, political, and civil rights.

Strategic Objectives

Investment and resource mobilization

Lack of resources is often a matter of political will, both within national governments and among international funding agencies. Both must continue to increase the absolute and relative size of their budgets devoted to basic education (without sacrificing needed resources for higher levels of education) and to push for more rapid debt relief and new funding mechanisms to complement existing resources directed toward education and health, if necessary through the transfer of budget allocation from the defense sector. Money saved through increased efficiency must continue to be reinvested in education systems and not subtracted from the overall allocation for education.

Special attention and support should be given to the most excluded and least accessible people in each country and those suffering the consequences of armed conflict, civil dislocation, and natural disasters. The needs of those people should be continually reassessed and the necessary actions defined and taken.

Additionally, education policymaking must assume a more central position in public policy dialogue and decisionmaking. There must be greater recognition of the interconnectedness of public policy issues so that the effects of actions taken in one sector on other sectors are clearly understood. This implies a need for more integrated processes and governmental mechanisms for public policy planning and a balancing of the influence of Treasury and Finance Ministries with the advice of Ministries of Education, Health, Social Welfare, Labor, and Regional Development.

New "space" for civil society

The need to broaden the way education is conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated requires the greater involvement of NGOs, the media, the private sector, and other civil-soci-

ety stakeholders—including families and children—at all levels and all stages of education program development.

To reach Education for All goals, we must ensure that genuine decision-making responsibilities are shared among all elements of society. The strong trend toward decentralization has important implications in terms of the provision of adequate support from the center and the transfer of both responsibility and decision-making authority to all levels in the administrative hierarchy. The latter requires both a more localized Education Management Information System (EMIS) and stronger management training at lower levels of the system.

More effective collaboration and equal partnership between governments and NGOs must be encouraged. A commitment has already been made between NGOs and governments in the region to create new space for genuine engagement and dialogue, bringing to the partnership strength in innovation, participatory processes, critical analysis, social mobilization, and school-community partnerships—but not at the risk of “user pays” scenarios, polarized education systems, and the increased exclusion of disadvantaged children.

Education and poverty elimination

Attempts must be made to ensure stronger linkages between education policies and programs, poverty alleviation strategies, and public policymaking. A strong focus must be placed on more and better education for excluded groups, culturally appropriate and cognitively stimulating early childhood care, education for girls and women, as well as education for life skills and employment.

In addition, the EFA process at all levels must be made barrier free in attitudinal, informational, and physical terms so that people with disabilities and socially disadvantaged groups can participate meaningfully in Education for All activities.

Decentralized micro-planning and delivery with people’s participation may be utilized on a wider scale for provision of basic education to unserved and underserved populations. NGOs working for the underprivileged should receive support and assistance on a sustainable basis.

Equitable harnessing of new technologies

The information and telecommunication technologies of the 21st century offer new ways of managing the educational processes as well as delivering particular programs. The ability to access and analyze data and information about formal and nonformal education, and about the community context in which education takes place, encourages better decision making at local levels. At other levels, policy decisions about technology can be taken to enhance equity and reduce disparities between groups within society at large.

Such technologies can also help to deliver learning programs at adult and professional levels, such as teacher education through distance education. Further study may be required to see where such technologies are cost-effective in serving the learning needs of children, youth, and adults more widely.

In many parts of the region, learning is increasingly taking place in an informal, media-based context. This wealth of information resources must be accessible by *all*, and the growing disparity between rich and poor, and the urban-rural divide in terms of access to technology must be taken into account when policies about technology are formulated. In addition, these information resources must be accessible in an equitable and structured way to ensure overall improvement in learning achievement. Information resources should be particularly accessible to people with sensory impairments and in a format that permits ready assimilation of content. Further, the deployment of technology in basic education should be done in a culturally sensitive manner.

Governments must promote popular access to relevant media and technology systems and incorporate media and technology as both a learning tool and as an interface for the expansion of information dissemination critical to better management.

Enabling teachers and learning facilitators

Public perceptions of teachers and teaching must be enhanced, and incentives to identify, attract, and retain good teachers must be provided. For example, policies should be in place to protect teachers' salaries, rights, and welfare. In addition, strong and on-going teacher, supervisor, and manager support and professional development services, at the level of the school and classroom, must be introduced. Teachers themselves must be more genuinely involved in decisions that affect their work. Adequate time and investment must be given to re-train the existing teacher workforce and to reform pre- and in-service training.

The role of teachers and learning is changing in the new decade and is crucial in the fulfillment of the goals of Education For All. New contexts and challenges in which teachers and their learners operate must be clearly understood. Above all, teachers must be able to make learning environments more inclusive and welcoming to children—healthier, more effective, and more nurturing.

Adequate learning materials, textbooks, teaching aids, and supplemental readers are critical to educating all children. They should reflect learning outcomes and the time available for instruction in the classroom. Values and subject content should be gender-fair and reflective of acceptance of diversity and cultural differences. Policy should foster the development and adaptation of learning experiences and materials to ensure social and cultural relevance for learners.

Education management reform¹¹

Increased emphases on decentralization of education management should be accompanied by the development of enhanced and comprehensive EMIS that provide timely, relevant, accurate, and valid information for local decision making. Locally relevant indicators compatible with national standards and curriculum frameworks, and which cover quantitative and qualitative aspects of learning, must be developed and monitored. The accountability of the school system to learners themselves, parents, and communities should be emphasized.

Effective decentralization also requires extensive training of school leaders and local managers, both at the institutional level and in district and provincial offices. Decentralization of authority and responsibility that is supported by improved EMIS and management training will lead to greater accountability and transparency in the allocation and utilization of resources. At the central level, enhancement of EMIS will increase the capacity of policy-makers to model the effects of proposed policy reforms as a basis for policy dialogue aimed at identifying optimal linkages between resource inputs and education outputs.

In addition, mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that managers and policy-makers have access to the latest information and research in the field of education.

Integration of development activities¹²

Partnership between government, donors, NGOs should encompass policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Exchange of information, experience, and innovations¹³

With the increasing availability of communication technologies in the region, governments and all stakeholders must promote an equitable exchange of information and experi-

ences about educational innovations that have been, and continue to be, successfully developed by countries and communities in the region. This exchange should cover a wide range of educational dimensions: policy reform; planning and management; resource mobilization; curriculum; teacher training; measurement and evaluation; community participation; and linkages between education and poverty alleviation. As a means of exchanging information and experiences, subregional resource centres could be set up in each country.

Appendix 1

Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action

Additional concerns

- Comments were received about the language of the Draft Framework for Action. The highlighted the need for stronger and more action-oriented language. Feedback received on the Draft Framework for Action pointed out that it failed to offer mechanisms for translating the vision into reality; it did not outline the new commitments from the Partner Agencies of UNICEF, United Nations Development Program, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), UNESCO, the World Bank. Nor did it propose new directions for the future. Some went further, urging that a statement acknowledging that some of the commitments and promises made at Jomtien were not achieved, be added to the Dakar Framework for Action.
- Continuing education for life-long learning was highlighted by a number of participants, notably Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL), as being an important goal if a society is to truly become a learning society. After the completion of basic literacy, it was recommended that post-literacy and continuing education be provided in order to sustain and expand literacy skills.
- Emphasis must be placed on continuing education for the neo-literates, and the means of achieving scientific and technological literacy included in continuing education.
- Scientific and technological illiteracy was highlighted as a concern in the region, as well as the need for adequate teacher training in science and technology.
- Nonformal education should be developed in quality, comparable with the formal education sector, leading to the establishment of an equivalency program. Furthermore, Non-formal Education (NFE) should be given institutional shape.
- Much debate was centered on the meaning and concept of “quality education.” A suggestion was made that the Education for All Forum promote measures and indicators of quality that are common to both formal and nonformal modalities of learning and that focus on competencies, aptitudes, and functionality of the things learners learn and how they can apply them to their day-to-day existence.
- Although many argued for basic education to cater to the needs of disabled people, the fact remains that data on the educational experiences of disabled people remains difficult to access. One way of rectifying this situation could be to include the issue of disability as an indicator in all future country assessments.
- Children’s participation in the Education for All process should be encouraged, considering that childhood is the time when most people begin formal basic education.
- Care must be taken, however, not to place too much emphasis on child learners at the expense of adult learners. Learning is a life-long process, and the language of the Dakar

Framework for Action must be inclusive of all learners, whether young or old. Likewise, care should be exercised with official Education for All documents, pronouncements, and pictures, so as not to convey the false impression that Education for All is only about children.

- Attention must be given to the learning needs of adolescents.
- The Dakar Declaration must state in very clear terms whether secondary education will form part of basic education that should be universalized.
- Aside from the concern for access of those not in school, there was also expressed a concern for quality, relevance, and content of basic education for those already in school. It was felt that a fundamental reexamination of the curriculum and content of all forms of basic education was called for to meet the learning needs of a more complex and interconnected society in the future.
- The structural reform of a country's basic education system could be viewed as an economic and effective way of meeting that country's Education for All objectives. Consideration of structural reform is particularly pertinent in those countries where the projected rate of growth of the school-age population over the next 10 years far exceeds any reasonable expectation concerning the rate of growth of public expenditure on basic education. Many countries would, understandably, be reluctant to attempt to meet the implied funding gap over the next decade by taking up further education loans from either the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank because of the additional burden it would place on their capacity to service such foreign debt.

Endnotes

1. Some delegates suggested that 10 years may be a better time frame for assessment, rather than the 15 years suggested in the Draft Dakar Framework for Action.

2. For the purpose of this document, excluded groups include the poor, ethnic minority groups, remote populations, the displaced, people affected by civil unrest or emergency, child workers, and people with disabilities, whether they be physical, intellectual, or emotional.

3. The point was raised that the challenges be ordered according to importance, although, of course, this is entirely subjective.

4. Some delegates suggested that this sentence be rephrased in a more positive way, expanded on (see Additional Concerns document, second point and be included as a strategic objective, rather than as a challenge.

5. Some participants mentioned that ECCD was a more appropriate term.

6. A point of contention was whether a "good" education could be quantified and how many years constituted a "good" education. Bangladesh suggested that good quality should include at least 8 years of education, whereas the Maldives want 10. Other countries such as Laos did not agree to this, and felt it should be left to the country to decide what constituted a "good" education. It really depended on country-specific goals and the level of development in the country.

7. Other titles—"Linking Literacy and Skills Programmes" and "Adult Literacy and Skills Programmes"—were suggested

8. Other titles—"Quality of Learning" or "Learning Achievement and Quality of Education"—were proposed.

9. This additional goal was suggested.

10. This additional goal was suggested.

11. It was suggested that the sixth strategic objective be expanded so that it not only covers EMIS, but other aspects of education management such as reforms in general systems of management and institutional management and delivery systems.

12. "Integration of Development Activities" was suggested as an additional strategic objective.

13. "Exchange of Information, Experience, and Innovations" was suggested as an additional strategic objective.