Decreasing the Number of Out-of-School Children in the Asia-Pacific

Despite the commitment to providing basic education in developing countries and the substantial strides made towards achieving universal primary education, data show that progress towards providing Education for All has stalled in the past decade. Globally, as many as 57.2 million children were not enrolled in primary and secondary schooling, and as many as 18 million children remained out of school in the Asia-Pacific region (UIS, 2011).

Working Together to Reach Out-of-School Children

In 2013, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) to renew the international commitment to place every child in school, identifying unaffordable costs, the shortage of classrooms, conflict and gender discrimination as barriers. The Learning for All Ministerial Roundtable event subsequently called attention to out-of-school children (OOSC) by bringing together ministers from eight countries with half of the world’s OOSC to discuss concrete next steps to ensuring that all children will have a chance to learn.

In April 2013, the Educate A Child (EAC) initiative held a high-level meeting in Doha to bring together government ministers and leaders from around the world to devise strategies for reaching out-of-school children in countries with significant number of OOSC. At the regional level, as part of a UNESCO-UNICEF meeting, governments from 26 countries from the Asia-Pacific region met together last year to share alternative and flexible learning programmes that have been successful in reaching OOSC.

An increasing number of partners are working alongside governments with the same goal of reaching OOSC around the world. Yet oftentimes these initiatives are implemented in parallel or in isolation. This meeting aims to bring together various partners working towards the same objective to productively share any barriers faced and lessons learned, to network and to discuss opportunities for leveraging partnerships in order to reduce the number of OOSC in the Asia-Pacific region.

Objectives of the Meeting

- To gain an understanding of the various partners’ strategies used for OOSC and share key challenges and lessons learned in the Asia-Pacific region.
- To discuss and set strategies to ensure and increase national education budgets for OOSC
- To network and to discuss opportunities for effective collaborations between the government and NGOs for OOSC
Reaching the Hardest to Reach

Why has progress stalled? Those who remain excluded are the most marginalized and hardest to reach for reasons that include conflict, minority status, disability and extreme poverty, among other causes. Including the most vulnerable children requires additional effort and a rethinking of the conventional strategy of “putting every child in school.” Given that the expansion of compulsory education is not enough to reach all children, there is a need to consider alternative approaches.

The conventional school infrastructure takes years and sometimes decades to reach poor and marginalized children, and even if they are available, such schools do not always succeed in retaining students from marginalized socio-economic groups who have the highest risk of dropping out, as for instance in communities where girls do not typically receive education.

Innovative Approaches and Flexible Learning Strategies

Special strategies to meet the needs of vulnerable children must be systematically integrated by governments into national education plans. Flexible Learning Strategies (FLS) are designed to meet children’s’ special educational needs and circumstances. Education does not necessarily have to take place in the formal school setting: the objective of FLS is that regardless of the mode, duration and place of study, excluded children can acquire core basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as the highly relevant, critical competencies and life skills required to live safe and dignified lives.

Some examples of programmes that use flexible learning strategies include:

- The ALS Mobile Teacher programme in the Philippines allows teachers equipped with supply packs to travel to remote villages in order to teach children who would otherwise not able to access schools due to distance, culture and capacity to construct schoolhouses in rural areas.
- In 2001, the Government of Myanmar initiated the Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) programme with the support of UNESCO. The programme has been expanded with the support of UNICEF. As of 2011, there were as many as 4000 learners enrolled.
- In Bangladesh, BRAC applied a cohort learning system to their community school for out-of-school children. As many as 5 million learners completed its programme in the last 26 years.
- In Thailand, out-of-school children regardless of citizenship have access to Community Learning Centres (CLCs) to complete primary and secondary programmes that allow them to eventually join the formal system through equivalency.

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Meeting Agenda (tentative: detailed agenda will be sent shortly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1  Thursday, 14 November</th>
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<tr>
<td>Session 1: The current OOSC situation in the Asia-Pacific region</td>
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<td>Key barriers to reaching OOSC in the region</td>
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<td>Session 2: Presentation of innovative, successful programmes</td>
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<td>Discussion of challenges faced in Asia-Pacific countries</td>
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<th>Day 2  Friday, 15 November</th>
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<tr>
<td>Session 3: The need for government financing and commitment to address OOSC</td>
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<td>Working alongside government and NGO partners effectively</td>
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<td>Session 4: Coordination for increased effectiveness</td>
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<td>The way forward: working together strategically</td>
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Expected Participants (approximately 20)
The goal of this meeting is to include 15-25 senior education and policy advisors from partner organizations that have been engaged in activities targeting out-of-school children (or those who will consider this) in the Asia-Pacific region.

Participation Arrangement
UNESCO will cover the cost of all local expenses (hotel accommodations, DSA, meals, hospitality). It is hoped that participants’ organizations will be able to cover the cost of their travel to Bangkok (except for in special cases).
Resources


The UNESCO-UNICEF FLS Regional Meeting report, the FLS booklet and other materials are available from: http://www.unescobkk.org/resources/e-library/


The Global Education First Initiative: http://www.globaleducationfirst.org/


Educate A Child: http://www.educateachild.org.qa/
Logistical Information

1. Meeting Venue

The meeting will be held in the fifth floor meeting room of the UNESCO Regional Office, located in central Bangkok:

UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education
920 Sukhumvit Road
Bangkok 10110 Thailand
http://www.unesco.org/bangkok

(A shuttle will transport participants to and from the hotel).

2. Travel Arrangements

a. Air Travel

Unfortunately, UNESCO will be unable to cover the cost of air tickets to Bangkok and we hope that participants’ organizations will be able to cover the cost of their travel (except for in special cases).

b. Visa Information

Participants are advised to contact the Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate to obtain an entry visa to Thailand before traveling. Requirements and processing times may vary by country. You may consult the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for further information: http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/services/123. You may also contact us if any special assistance is required.

Citizens of certain countries are eligible for a “Visa Exemption” to enter the country without a visa. Others may be able to apply for a “Visa on Arrival” conveniently at Suvarnabhumi Airport.

UNLP holders traveling on official missions to Thailand should obtain visas from their nearest Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate.

3. From Suvarnabhumi Airport to the Hotel

Traveling from Suvarnabhumi Airport to the central Bangkok area should take approximately 40-60 minutes in normal traffic. Metered taxis are readily available and they are relatively inexpensive. Alternatively, private minivans and cars can also be hired from the limousine service counter on level 2.

The card below contains the name of the Oakwood Residence Sukhumvit 24 hotel written in Thai. This may assist you in explaining your destination to your taxi driver.

ไปส่งที่โรงแรมโอ๊ควู้ดซอยสุขุมวิท 24 (จากปากซอยเข้าไป 100 เมตรถัดข้าง)
Pai-Song-Tee-Rong-Ram-Oakwood-Sukhumvit 24
4. **Hotel Arrangements**

A single room will be reserved for all participants at the Oakwood Residence Sukhumvit 24 Hotel, which is in close proximity to the UNESCO office (approximately 15 minutes by car and 10 minutes by BTS Sky Train). [http://www.oakwoodasia.com/bangkok/oakwood-sukhumvit-24.php](http://www.oakwoodasia.com/bangkok/oakwood-sukhumvit-24.php)

UNESCO will cover the cost of three nights’ of hotel stay, including breakfast.

A **hotel shuttle** will transport participants to the UNESCO Bangkok office in the morning and back in the evenings on both days.

5. **Climate and Clothing**

The temperature is expected to be around 30° Celsius in late October. The weather should be temperate and slightly humid.

6. **Electrical System in Thailand**

The standard voltage in Thailand is 220 Volts at 50Hz. Plugs are Type A (flat blade attachment plug) and Type C (round pin attachment plug).

7. **Special Needs**

Please do not hesitate to inform us if you have any physical, sight or hearing disabilities so that the meeting organizers can make appropriate arrangements.

8. **Dietary Restrictions**

Please also kindly inform us if you have any dietary restrictions so that we may make special arrangements.

9. **For further information or questions about this meeting, please contact:**

Ms. Karen Triquet, Intern  
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Mr. Ichiro Miyazawa, Programme Specialist  
E-mail: i.miyazawa@unesco.org

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