Thailand Country Report
on
Education for All

Distributed during
the 12th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators
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**Introduction**

In 2010, 22.3% of national budget was allocated to pushing forward a Second Decade of Education Reform. From a total 379 billion baht (US$ 15 billion) approximately 282 billion baht (US$ 9.7) went to basic education covering pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

Education and human resource development remain important priorities of the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan which will be launched in October this year. Continued emphasis will be given integrating the basic principles of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and creating opportunities for people to help develop their quality of life.

**I. Update of Progress in Meeting the EFA Goals**

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<th>Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.</th>
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The country’s Long Term Policy and Strategy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2007-2016) continues to direct efforts to improve home environments, enhance the quality of education provision for the very young and support community initiatives contributing to the development of children 0-5 years.

Families remain the main providers of care and development among the 0-3 age group. Thus, one of Thailand’s on-going challenges is to educate those parents and other family members who act as care givers to ensure all children receive the best possible start in life. Recognizing that internal, work-focused migration to urban areas has impacted on family support structures and more families in which both parents work, Thailand is also exploring the possibility of workplace provision of ECCD. In 1990, the urban population stood at 10.4 million but by 2010 it has risen to 17 million.

Since 1990, enrolment in pre-primary education among the 3-5 year age group has more than doubled, rising from 33% in 1990 to 75% in 2010. In part this is due to the expansion of free education provision to fifteen years to include pre-primary education. In 2009, from a total population of just over 2,394,000 children in the 2-5 year age group, 1,780,074 were enrolled in kindergarten or pre-school classes in the formal system. The proportion of children attending public and private pre-primary education was 79.6 : 20.4 respectively.

With regard to disadvantaged children, 3,495 child centres have now been established under the jurisdiction of Local Administration Organizations (LAO). A further 14,326 child centres, previously under the jurisdiction of other agencies, have been transferred to the LAO.

Potentially we will achieve this goal. Major barriers to achievement include the difficulty in locating the most vulnerable children, incomplete data to work with and therefore difficulty in formulating relevant policy.

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<th>Goal 2 : Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality</th>
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Since the launch of major education reform in 1999, primary education has been administered jointly with secondary education. Government primary schools fall under the authority of Educational Service Areas (ESA) of which there are 185 in the country’s 76 provinces.

According to Ministry of Education statistics, there was 104.51 % enrolment at primary level in formal school system in 2009 and a total 5,138,475 students in public and private institutions. In 2009, this included around 100,000 stateless children who were studying in schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC).
In the Bangkok Metropolis the percentage of students attending public and private institutions was 59:41 respectively while in other provinces it was 84:16. A further 145,686 primary students were enrolled in the non formal system. Thailand has achieved gender parity at both primary and lower secondary levels.

While primary education is close to universal, it is recognized that it still does not reach all children. An estimated 1.7 million children, or 10 percent of all children in Thailand, still do not have access to basic education. Among these are children with disabilities and the children of around 2 million migrant workers and their families, including indigenous and hill tribe peoples. Incomplete data and not understanding what kind of education would be relevant slows progress.

Goal 3 : Ensuring the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes

It is widely felt that conventional forms of learning are no longer adequate to ensure people can cope with rapid changes in today’s world. Lifelong learning was first introduced in the National Education Act (1999) as a guiding principle of reform. Progress was limited during the first decade of reform, so in the second decade of reform (2009-2018) it is being given greater emphasis through non-formal and informal systems which will expand learning opportunities for people of all ages, workers and the underprivileged. Two urgent concerns for Thailand are to provide:

- second chance training to address low levels of educational achievement and a serious skills deficit among the current labour force
- diversified learning opportunities so people can upgrade skills or change career

Among the Asian countries, Thailand has the highest proportion of its workforce with primary education or less. Non formal and informal education are critical sub sectors in raising levels of achievement and promoting lifelong learning to all Thai people.

General non formal education provides second chance training to those who did not complete formal schooling. Between 2004 and 2010, the number of students enrolled in such programmes rose from 1,631,183 to 2,428,020. A further 2,885,735 students followed non formal vocational and technical training courses. Community Colleges and Learning Centres also provide training to uplift occupational, learning and life skills. 88 per cent of students who enrol in Community Colleges are employed workers who lacked education opportunities.

The Thailand Cyber University (TCU) is another platform for lifelong learning. TCU’s mission is to promote and support dissemination of knowledge including advanced technology and local knowledge through free course ware for non-formal and informal e-learning. Currently, TCU innovation to support lifelong learning includes developing standards for accessible e-learning and on-line courses to train content developers. Up to now, TCU delivers 672 on-line courses and 17 study programmes, self-pack learning programme, certificate programmes, Bachelor’s degree programme in Tourism Industry and Master’s degree programme in Social and Administrative Pharmacy, with more than 110,000 learners registered on-line to study in all courses.

With regard to life skills, the Office of Non formal and Informal Education (ONIE) organized a wide range of education programmes focused on local wisdom, morals and values, the family unit, music, democracy and environmental conservation. The links between education and health were also recognized through efforts to promote sport and tackle issues such as drug abuse. The training focuses on developing self-awareness, analytical and critical thinking skills, communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and problem-solving.
skills. In 2010, the ONIE programmes were extremely successful reaching almost 450,000 people – well above the target number.

There are also formal education activities and campaigns to address the problems of risky behaviours among the young.

- **Drug use**
  
  In accordance with the government’s Five Fences Policy, the Ministry of Education is working with young people, families, teachers, schools and communities to address this problem under the School Fence Project.

- **Sexual and Reproductive Health**
  
  MOE launched a national campaign called “Up to Me” to reduce teenage pregnancy. The campaign involves awareness-raising through first hand accounts, sex education and family studies.

Although progress is being made, it is unlikely we will achieve this goal by 2015. Support is needed to strengthen cooperation with relevant donor agencies.

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<th>Goal 4: Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.</th>
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Literacy policy enjoys high priority as an essential prerequisite for national development and is seen as a key factor in determining quality of life. Thailand has long been open to literacy promotion and this continues in the Second Decade of Education Reform. The literacy rate currently stands at 97%.

The definition of literacy goes beyond basic reading and writing to include a range of core skills such as numeracy and basic financial management as well as IT skills which will help people to function more effectively in the 21st century. In this regard, enrolment in functional literacy programmes has risen from 36,297 in 2001 to 123,482 in 2010.

In 2009, Thailand launched the National Reading Decade (2009-2018) as a means to improve literacy levels and broaden the learners thinking ability. This will be celebrated on 2nd April each year, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn’s birthday. The first project, called “First Book”, aimed to instill the love of reading among Thai youths. Other targets include increasing the percentage of literate people among workforce from 97.21 – 99%; raising the literacy rate among Thai youth from 92.64 to 95%; and increasing the number of books read from 5 -10 per year.

We are well on target for achieving this goal in terms of developing basic literacy. However, the reading habit among the vast majority of Thai people is poorly developed and parents are generally not good role models for their children. This inhibits progress to achieving higher levels of literacy.

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<th>Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full potential and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.</th>
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Throughout the 9 years of compulsory education (6 years primary and 3 years lower secondary) boys slightly outnumber girls in the formal schooling system. However, at upper secondary level when students may opt for general education or vocational education and training, wider differences have been observed.
Among those who stay on at school, considerably more boys than girls opt for vocational education and training while in the general education stream the number of girls enrolled exceeds the number of boys.

Thailand’s minimum age for employment is 15 and studies have shown that boys are more likely to drop out of school at this age to enter the labor market. In 2005, data from ILO informed that the economic activity rate for 15-19 year old boys in Thailand is 36.1% while girls’ is 26.6%.

In terms of performance, overall, girls are now outperforming boys at all levels of education. National test results show that female students in Grade 12 outperform male students in almost every subject except maths and science. This is also reflected by higher male participation in International Science Olympiad.

The number of female teachers is higher than male teachers at every level of education. However, in the Ministry of Education the number and percentage of female administrators holding senior positions is significantly lower and has been steadily decreasing over time.

Thailand will not achieve EFA goal 5 in 2015 because there is notable gender gap in upper secondary school enrolment. UNESCO has defined a GPI value of between 0.97 to1.03 as the achievement of gender parity. In the case of Thailand, the GPI for secondary gross enrolment was 1.1 in 2009.

To be able to eliminate gender disparities and gender inequalities in education, government needs to implement policies based on evidence. For many years, data collection systems did not support this and there is still limited disaggregated data available. This makes it difficult to analyze the situation in order to form appropriate policy. Beyond enrolment statistics, education needs to question some of the more embedded forms of discrimination prevalent in Thai society.

Goal 6 : Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

In the Second Decade of Education Reform (2009-2018), emphasis is given to developing students, teachers, institutions, and administration and management system. External quality assessment of all education institutions is conducted once every five years by the Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA). Higher education institutions also undertake internal assessment. Progress in schools is monitored in relation to strategies and projects implemented and through national testing of students.

Based on a nationwide evaluation in 2010, schools have been grouped at 3 levels: World Class Schools, Outstanding Schools at District Level and Outstanding Schools at Sub-District Level.

Outstanding schools at the district and sub district level are encouraged to work with schools in their vicinity in order to upgrade them to community schools. The Ministry of Education is working with local communities at 10,000 schools across the country in an effort to bridge the quality gap between urban and rural areas.

A pilot project focused on improving basic infrastructure and the mobilization of resources is also being implemented. Initially it involved one school from each of the 182 Educational Service Areas (ESA) outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Area but it has now been expanded to a further 6,000 schools with a target to reach 7,000 schools by the end of 2011.

With regard to educational technologies, by the end of 2010, some 26,000 schools were connected to internet through the installation of a fiber optic network, ADSL or satellite systems.
Nonetheless, quality remains a major challenge. National tests continue to show poor student performance in core subject areas. Of particular concern are the country’s small schools. Enrolments are steadily decreasing at smaller primary and secondary schools in rural areas. In part this is put down to a falling birthrate and in part due to improved transportation links which permit students to travel to larger and generally better equipped city schools to study. The number of small schools has risen from 10,741 in 1993 to 14,056 in 2009. Many schools already face serious teacher shortages and an estimated 30% of primary and secondary school teachers reach retirement age in the next decade.

With just four years to go it is unlikely there will be significant improvement in the quality of education.

II. Specific Measure Undertaken to Accelerate Progress towards 2015, Including Reaching the Unreached and Marginalized Groups in Education

a) Improvements in national EFA coordination structures, data collection systems and use of data in decision making

Thailand has taken steps to better integrate and share education-related information. In 2010, the Ministry of Education launched the 3Ns: for the Quality of Thai Education. The 3Ns include: the National Education Network (NedNet) which will link existing schools, colleges, universities and libraries; the National Education Information Systems (NEIS) which will bring together all available education data and facilitate the exchange of information between relevant agencies; and the National Learning Centre (NLC) which will serve as a virtual forum for the exchange of teaching and learning materials.

b) Strengthening donor coordination

The most significant example of strengthened donor collaboration for the Southeast Asia region is the ten collaborative projects for reaching the unreached to accelerate attainment of the Education for All goals. These were identified at a meeting convened by SEAMEO together with ASEAN Secretariat and UNESCO in 2008 and approved by the SEAMEO Council conference in 2009. They cover education as well as education-related concerns such as poverty reduction, health, environmental awareness and employment. A second meeting took place in Bangkok in June this year to follow up on progress made, and identify new strategies and activities which could be more effective.

Of the ten projects, Thailand, has taken a lead role on developing community based learning for literacy and livelihoods as this is consistent with our national agenda to expand lifelong learning opportunities and empower communities. Thailand has five models of learning centre. The first is the Sufficiency Economy model where the major role of the centre is to promote the peaceful co-existence among members of the community focusing on local culture wisdom and natural resources. The second is the CLC model which offers vocational education and training and Fix It Centres. The third is the sub-district Non Formal Education model. The fourth the Mae Fah Luang model which targets highland communities providing basic education, information services and vocational skills training. The fifth is a temple based learning centre (Wat Pa Pao) which targets disadvantaged persons including immigrant workers and people with no household registration. Early next year Thailand will host a regional meeting to look at these and other regional models. In the meantime we will be working closely with
SEAMOLEC to develop distance learning possibilities. The British Council has also offered to assist with translation of materials for use across the region.

Thailand also heads a second project focuses on HIV / AIDS education. A regional meeting to share best practices is scheduled for February 2012 and this will help to determine how the project is carried forward.

c) **Addressing marginalization**

In May 2010, Thailand won a seat to serve a three year term on the UN inter-governmental Human Rights Council, pledging to meet the country’s commitments under the national human rights plan of action. The Plan has a strong focus on enhancing human rights education and promoting political, economic, social and cultural rights, particularly among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups.

At the regional level, Thailand is working closely with other ASEAN countries to advance human rights education and training in the region. One important development was the establishment of the AUN Human Rights Education Network which aims to strengthen existing cooperation and enhance human rights education for ASEAN people. The first meeting was held in February 2010 in Mahidol University, Thailand. The network plans to compile relevant data which will be made available on the designated website, create a pool of web based resources and promote faculty and student exchange programmes, teacher training and youth camps.

In terms of our national agenda on reaching out to marginalized groups, significant progress has been made with regard to reaching out to certain marginalized groups:

**The Poor**

Thailand remains committed to the 15 year free education of quality project as this is an important strategy for maintaining educational access and participation of all students, especially those most at risk as a result of the global financial crisis. The relevant departments are currently gathering data to assess the success of this project. First available data confirm that despite the recent financial crisis, enrolment in schools has remained constant.

**Those Living in Remote or Poorly Served Areas**

To help bridge a widening urban-rural divide, the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education is expediting the development of around 8,000 community learning centres as Sub-district Non Formal and Education Centres to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for people living in poorly served or more remote locations. Among them people who did not have an opportunity to study when they were young as well as young people who dropped out of formal schooling. As of 2011, there are 7,409 such centres and the number is expected to increase.

Furthermore, authority over child centres and kindergarten has been transferred to Local Administration Organizations (LAO), since local bodies and communities are better placed to identify children who are not in school and understand the obstacles people face. The number of pre-primary classes in rural areas has been increased and special child centres for the disadvantaged have been established.
In line with the Persons with Disabilities Act (2008), Thailand must now provide free education to bachelor degree level for the disabled. Special education centres and special education schools accommodate students with disabilities whose needs cannot be met by regular schools. There are 43 special education schools: 20 serve the hearing impaired; 19 serve the mentally retarded and 2 have been established for the visually impaired. Recognizing that special schools and additional services can only reach a fraction of those with special needs, Thailand integrates children with learning difficulties, physical disabilities into regular classes within a network of 390 inclusive schools nationwide. Teachers at these schools receive training to work with children with special needs.

At the higher education level, the Development of Education Management for Persons with Disabilities Project was designed to address issues of access. Under this project, a database has been set up of students with special needs according to disability; Disability Support Service (DSS) Centres have been established and DSS officers trained; and some universities have formulated a quota system for persons with disabilities. In the academic year 2009, there were 2107 students with disabilities (1,184 male and 923 female) enrolled in higher education institutions. Most of them had vision or hearing impairments. In 2010, the Office of the Higher Education Commission allocated special budget from a Ministry of Education special fund to 28 universities to support educational provision for students with disabilities in degree programmes. Disabled students can follow degree course free of charge.

d) Improving overall quality through innovative approaches

Thailand has seen a rapid increase in the number of internet users nationwide from 2,300,000 (3.7%) in 2000 to 17,486,400 (26.3%) in 2010 and aims to see further improvements.

Providing and developing ICT and broadband infrastructure with 95% access by 2020, developing ICT human capital and general IT literacy and developing ICT for lifelong learning are among the seven strategies identified in Thailand’s new 10 year policy on ICT known as ICT 2020. This supports the country’s vision of becoming a knowledge-based economy and society. Accordingly, promoting the use of ICTs to improve the quality of teaching and learning is being given high priority in the Second Decade of Education Reform.

In terms of recent developments, there has been major investment in infrastructure to ensure internet connection for all schools. In 2010, 3,000 schools benefited from the installation of a fibre optic network which has significantly boosted internet speed and download times. A further 8,000 schools use the ADSL system while 15,000 schools in more remote areas use satellite technology.

In addition, around 400,000 teachers who were classified in the middle and low level performance category received e-training in 2010. Approximately 80% successfully completed the 32 professional development course modules and have gone on to advanced level training. As an incentive, the best performing teachers in this group in 2011 will become Master Teachers and as such will be entitled to in-country scholarships to pursue post graduate studies.
c) **Strengthening relevance of education**

**Basic Education**

The mobilization of community resources and integration of local wisdom in the curriculum have been combined in an Office of the Education Council (OEC) project to honour Masters of Thai wisdom which began in 2001. As of 2011, 300 local wisdom teachers have been recognized nationwide. Thai wisdom teachers are classified into 9 fields: agriculture, handicraft and cottage industry, Thai traditional medicine, natural resource and environmental management, community enterprises, artistic work, language and literature, philosophy, religion and tradition, and food and nutrition. The Ministry of Culture is currently conducting a survey as a means to promote the establishment of Wisdom Learning Centres for the general public, underlining the value of Thai wisdom and the importance of teachers.

**Vocational Education and Training**

Thailand’s unemployment rate is one of lowest in world standing at 0.87% in 2010 through rates vary according to levels of educational attainment.

On the supply side, generally speaking levels of attainment have increased. There has been a dramatic drop in the number of adults with only primary level qualifications from 24.9 million in 1997 to 3.8 million in 2009. In the same period, the number of workers who had obtained lower secondary qualifications almost doubled from 3.4 million to 6.1 million. There are also more students with diplomas and vocational diplomas in the workforce as well as more people with bachelor degrees. In 1997 1.75 million held a bachelor degree but by 2010 the number had risen to 4 million.

Despite this positive progress, on the demand side industry reports a severe shortage of low/semi skilled workers which forces Thailand to import labour from neighbouring countries. The modernization of vocational education and training under a Second Decade of Education Reform is one strategy which seeks to match skills to fit this economic reality.

Inter agency collaboration and public and private sector partnerships are two key strategies adopted by the Ministry of Education to raise the standard of vocational education. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour have joined forces to set up the Thailand Vocational Qualifications Institute (TVQI) and partnerships with private sector ensuring courses become more demand driven is helping to tailor programmes to produce relevantly skilled and knowledgeable human resources that country requires.

Public-private partnerships also have a vital role in developing higher technical skills among the workforce, promoting innovation as well as building managerial expertise. There has been an intensification of efforts to build and strengthen the networks for participation among business enterprises, communities, localities, and domestic and international networks.

**Higher Education**

At the higher education level, universities are urged to develop closer relationships with industry to ensure demand led manpower production and quality research for productivity improvement. The National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) is in the process of formulating a research and development master plan which focuses on five key social and industrial clusters: food and agriculture, energy and environment, public health, manufacturing industries and community. In a recent move, the Government is also trying to link research and
development systems with entrepreneurs in the manufacturing and trade sectors. Universities have key role in establishing a database on all research undertaken so that private sector, especially small and medium sized enterprise, will be able to make use of it. In Thailand, given that more than 50% of the workforce is employed in small and medium sized enterprises, strong support will be needed to facilitate their development into creative industries.

III. Identification of Areas where Specific Support is Needed to Accelerate Progress towards 2015

Between February and June 2011, representatives from the Ministry of Education, Thailand and UNESCO worked closely together to finalize the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) for the Kingdom of Thailand (2010-2015). The report identifies the following key areas where support is needed:

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<th>Ensuring Equitable Access to High-Quality Education</th>
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<td>The first major area of intervention for UNESCO involves supporting the RTG to address and overcome the remaining and emerging issues in the education sector in order to achieve Thailand’s goals for lifelong learning and building knowledge society. This directly corresponds to 3 major priority areas of the second decade of education reform, namely 1) improvement of education quality and standard, 2) increasing education opportunities for all Thais, and 3) encouraging participation in education provisions and management from all social sectors.</td>
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<th>Tackling disparities in basic education</th>
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<td>Although access to basic education is approaching universal in Thailand, there are concerns about reaching the remaining pockets of unreached disadvantaged population in remote rural areas, urban slums, poor households, migrants, and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. Ensuring that students from these backgrounds enrol in schools, regularly attend classes, receive quality basic education, and achieve satisfactory learning outcomes are the main challenges. By pursuing existing programmes in promoting EFA, inclusive education, rights-based education, and multi-lingual education, UNESCO can assist Thailand in finding and adopting appropriate measures to tackle disparities in access to and quality of basic education.</td>
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<th>Improving the quality and relevance of education at all levels</th>
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<td>The government and the general public in Thailand are very much concerned about the quality and relevance of education at all levels, especially in terms of acquired critical thinking skills and ability to apply knowledge in work and in daily life. Efforts are being made to embed learner-centred approaches in renewal of the curriculum, with emphasis on the acquisition of life skills and work skills. New educational contents and teaching-learning methods have been introduced on the sufficiency economy, sustainable development, moral education, and other topics of current relevance in Thailand. The government has also adopted a wide range of measures to update and upgrade the teaching force and educational personnel for implementing these changes in the curriculum (OEC 2007, pp. 75-92). UNESCO in its role to support the implementation of EFA (relating to Goal 6) and ESD (especially in relation to climate change) can render appropriate policy support to improving the</td>
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quality of education in Thailand, also concretely through the promotion of sharing of innovations, experiences, lessons learned in other countries, and dissemination of technical guidelines and training materials. In addition, improving school-to-work transition through more relevant education especially through improved TVET as well as better utilizing ICT can significantly improve quality and relevance of education. Thailand stands to benefit from the advances, experiences and lessons learned from some countries, and in sharing its own experiences to benefit other countries.

**Strengthening assessment of learning outcomes**
Thailand has been actively participating in international assessments of learning achievement. The Ministry of Education has built over the past two decades comprehensive computerized database on schools, teachers and students for different levels of education and non-formal education. Assessments of school performance and learning achievement have also been frequently organized by the MOE and ONESQA. In the coming years, there will be the need to build capacities and practices for more systematic assessment, analysis and use of available data and indicators at different levels of the educational administration especially down to the local administration organizations so as to better inform and improve policies, planning and management decision-making as well as to increase public awareness and mobilize community support. This is an area in which UNESCO can contribute its worldwide experiences and technical expertise.

**Expanding NFE for skills training**
Over the past decades, Thailand has developed a well-established non-formal education (NFE) sub-system and networks of NFE learning centres across the country territory which offer a wide range of learning programmes from functional literacy to second-chance equivalency to vocational training. Increasingly, NFE is being looked upon as a main channel for promoting lifelong learning and skills acquisition among youth and adults who are no longer attending formal education. Further improvement of the relevance and quality of NFE programmes will be needed, as well as of its organization and linkages to community needs and inputs so as to facilitate flexible access that adapts to the conditions and ability of learners. Much further research and development work including policy review, joint planning and coordination with formal education and informal education, etc. will have to be carried out for the NFE sub-system in Thailand to play a major role in promoting lifelong learning.

**Implementation of the education sector reform**
With recent policy to extend free education from 12 to 15 years, the Ministry of Education of Thailand will have to reform its education system in order to universalize pre-primary education and expand capacity of upper secondary schools in the coming years so as to accommodate upcoming waves of students completing lower secondary schools. In addition, ensuring opportunities for lifelong learning for all Thai people requires a balanced education sector development, including formal, non-formal and informal education. Such reforms will entail policy development, financial allocation, planning and concrete actions to strengthen pedagogical and management capacities, taking into account future impact on higher education and the labour market. The experiences of countries that have tackled related issues can be very helpful for Thailand.
Implementation of decentralization of education

Thailand has been actively developing education policies which fully embrace the vision and goals of EFA, and plans which incorporate the directions and principles recommended under the EFA Global Action Plan. The implementation of Thailand’s education policies and plans coincide with the ongoing government decentralization policy which aims at empowering local administration organizations with increased autonomy, authority and competence to manage local areas and population, including the provision of education. Many issues and problems emerged during this decentralization process that is of particular relevance to the education sector. The government is aware of the scale and complexity of this process, and the need to rigorously set standards, norms and procedure for implementation, and thorough actions to strengthen the capabilities of more than 7,500 local administration organizations to effectively manage the educational institutions and resources in the local area in ensuring quality delivery of educational services. Appropriate measures are also needed to dissipate current reluctance of schools and teachers to support and implement this decentralization process. UNESCO with its worldwide and regional networks and experiences in supporting education policy reforms, planning and capacity building for implementation can provide relevant advisory services to the Government of Thailand in better implementing this process of decentralization of the education administration.

Fine-tuning the government financing of education

Thailand has embarked on an ambitious plan to provide 15 years of free education to all. The financing such policy requires close review of the required financial resources and its implication to the future financing of the sector. In addition, a wide range of issues emerged in recent years during actual application of the per-student based financing of schools in Thailand. Such issues relate mainly to the determination of per-student allocations by type, level and grade in schools, the need for adjustments based on local costs, and the allocation process especially the respective roles and responsibilities of the Education Service Area offices and local administration organizations. It can be foreseen that empirical research based on feedback over a few financial cycles will be required in order to fine-tune this system and its efficiency and effectiveness. Other countries in the Asia and Pacific region and in the world may have faced similar issues and some might have found good solutions.

Improving analysis and utilization of the data

UNESCO with its UIS Montreal has extensive experience related to the development of educational indicators. Thailand in general is data rich, compared to many other middle income and developing countries (as an example, see Kermel Torrs, 2004). However, extensive data and policy-relevant statistical indicators are not the same thing. With increased emphasis on decentralization and school-based management, it is important to strengthen evidence-based local educational decision-making. Thus, high quality disaggregated data are extremely important. Also, at the national level Thailand needs a systematic set of benchmarks to assess the level of human resource development across sectors. Many of these types of indicators are available. The important data being now routinely collected by ONESQA makes this much more feasible. Thus, UNESCO could partner with Thailand in developing a rigorous, comprehensive, and integrated system of human resource development indicators, both at the national and local levels as well as analysis and utilization of such information for policy making.
Facilitate Thailand’s Involvement as a Development Partner in Education

The second major area of interventions involves facilitating RTG’s collaboration and cooperation with other developing countries, especially ASEAN countries, in the areas of educational and development. UNESCO can partner with Thailand to promote South-South Cooperation. This directly contributes to a specific UNPAF focus area – North-South-South global partnership.

Promote the sharing of Thai experiences and know how

Thailand has accumulated valuable experiences and know how in successfully expanding its education which was a drive to its economic and social development. UNESCO can facilitate two-way exchange of information (between Thailand and other countries), knowledge, expertise, experiences and “best practices” through its conferences, workshops, regional studies, and its existing networks of policy makers and academics. Potential areas may include (1) NFE and Community Learning Centers, (2) ICT in education, and (3) providing support to marginalized populations.

Facilitate bilateral cooperation in education between Thailand and other developing countries

As a middle income country, Thailand is increasingly viewed as a major development partner especially among the developing countries in the South-East Asian sub-region. Thailand’s support to other countries in education involves both financial support and technical assistance and many countries would appreciate increased collaboration with Thailand. UNESCO can facilitate such dialogue between Thailand and its potential recipient countries through its existing policy dialogue platforms such as EFA High-Level Group Meetings, and EFA Coordinators’ Meetings. UNESCO can also involve Thai experts in its programmes and projects in the region.

Proposed Interventions: Areas and Strategies

Based on UNESCO’s international and regional mandates, its five key functions (i.e. laboratory of ideas; standard setting; clearinghouse; capacity building; international cooperation), its political influence, professional strengths as well as past and current interventions and experiences in Thailand and in Asia and Pacific countries, a number of interventions may be proposed addressing the gaps and emerging needs identified above. These proposed interventions may be regrouped under four major components:

Component 1: The equity and quality of education
Component 2: NFE for skills training
Component 3: Lifelong learning and education sector reform
Component 4: Facilitating Thailand’s involvement as an emerging development partner

A detailed action plan will be developed at a later stage based on the general agreement of the UNESS document in the form of project proposals and work plans.