UNESCO Bangkok’s preparations for the EFA Mid-Decade Assessment and Mid-Term Review

National, Regional and Global Monitoring and Assessment

The Jomtien Declaration had foreseen the need for Member States to monitor progress toward the attainment of the EFA Goals. It was assumed that, along with the education reforms to fulfill their commitments to the EFA Goals, the Governments, as matter of good governance, would monitor the implementation and assess the outcomes of their policies. However, most Governments did not follow-through with investment in the long-term process of national capacity-building of this function with regard to each of the six EFA goals.

Ten years went by and less than a year before the Dakar Conference, Member States were invited to submit the end-of-decade “EFA2000 Assessment Report.” Of course, most countries could not adequately prepare the report in such a short time. It takes at least two years to conduct a nationwide data collection and analysis in areas where there was no infrastructure, i.e., in the context of developing countries. Many of them submitted reports written by agency-sponsored consultants who had to rely upon poor and out-dated data. In contrast, virtually all Sub-Saharan African countries conducted their own EFA 2000 Assessment through the region-wide task-oriented capacity-building programme, conducted by the DAE/ADEA Working Group on Education Statistics in Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, in almost all cases, relying largely on already available internationally standardized indicators based on school-administrative data and aggregated at the national level, the reports for the EFA 2000 Assessment left many areas in the dark, especially those not covered by the formal primary education – ECCE, Life Skills, Literacy and NFE – and sub-national variations in the impact of the education reforms since the Jomtien Declaration. Who constitute the un-reached target groups? To whom and how shall the EFA address its educational reforms? Who have been left out of the Education for All?

Following the Dakar Conference, Strategy 11 of the “international strategy to put the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All into operation,” (UNESCO 2002), refers to “Systematically monitor progress towards EFA goals and strategies at the national, regional and international levels.” Further, to improve EFA monitoring, partners will cooperate to:

- Improve the quality of data collected in each country and
- Build national capacity for data collection and analysis
- Improve the analysis of EFA progress
- Develop measures for the performance of international agencies, bilateral agencies, and NGOs and their partnerships with countries
- Facilitate the exchange of information and data collection methods between countries.
Asia-Pacific Region preparations and plans for Mid-Decade Assessment and Mid-Term EFA Policy Review

As a partner in this process and learning from the lessons of the past experiences that proper assessment of the six EFA goals requires at least three to five years of preparations, the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau of Education and the Office of the UIS Regional Advisor have been assisting Member States for the past three years in the development of national capacity to conduct their own evidence-based policy management, including the capacity to formulate, monitor, evaluate and assess its own policies.

To assist Member States, UNESCO Bangkok and the Office of the UIS Regional Advisor established the Assessment, Information systems, Monitoring, and Statistics (AIMS) Unit. This programme initiated the Capacity-Building for Monitoring and Evaluation of Education Development Plans Workshop, held in Bangkok from 24 to 29 November 2003. It was the first of a series of capacity-building activities undertaken in anticipation and preparation for the upcoming mid-decade EFA assessment and imperative need for sound and reliable data and data analysis for national decision-making related to education development plans.

Participants from 13 countries in the region attended the workshop along with representatives from UNESCO Paris, Bangkok, Harare, Dakar, and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics in Montreal. Participation from member countries consisted of three nominees chosen by their government as high-level decision makers, policy analysts, and statisticians, three crucial components of an effective educational statistics information system.

Based on the agenda set by the meeting, many case studies and pilot projects were conducted in areas that were found to be very weak in many countries across the entire six goals of the EFA programme – namely, uneven distribution of quality education across the sub-national target groups. Hence, the programme developed methods and tools for the analysis of sub-national disparities with regard to various unattained goals and un-reached target groups, such as studies on access to education among children with disabilities (Brunei, Cambodia, Samoa, Thailand, Viet Nam, WHO ICF-CFY technical meeting at UNESCO Bangkok), linguistic and ethnic minorities (China, Nepal, Thailand, Viet Nam), Dalits and Janjati castes (Nepal), children of undocumented migrants and hill tribes (Thailand), etc. as well as statistically poorly defined areas, such as life skills (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, and Asia regional review), functional literacy (Lao PDR, Thailand, planned studies in LIFE countries), ECCE (see below), etc.

In October 2005, organized by the AIMS-UIS Bangkok Unit in cooperation with the APPEAL unit of UNESCO Bangkok, national EFA coordinators, education planners and statisticians and ECCE focal points from 21 countries from South, South-East and East Asia, together with subject specialists, including linguists, child development specialists, special-needs education specialists, advocacy NGOs, GMR unit in UNESCO Headquarters, UNICEF Regional staff, met in Bangkok. Working in sub-regional groups, the participants identified the major issues to be assessed and drafted work plans for national assessment with regard to each of the six EFA goals. The statisticians remained an extra three days the following week, for training in the
measurement and analysis of disparities and the use of a common database (UNICEF’s DevInfo) for the production of indicators and reports including sub-national analytical breakdown. A similar workshop will be held in November for the Pacific Island States.

The current plan aims at mobilizing national and regional organizations and resources and producing a first draft of national working reports with raw data* by the end of 2006, which would enable direct input of sub-national assessments into the annual Global Monitoring Report.

*Caveat: Please note that the “raw data” utilized by the countries for their own internal analysis are not ISCED standardized and UIS quality-controlled and therefore may not be appropriate for comparison across countries with different education structures. For comparative purposes, you may refer to the data set published by the UIS Montreal (www.uis.unesco.org). ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education.

Subsequently, the country teams will continue to work on the analysis and policy-anchoring of the reports, which should be ready before the end of 2007. The Regional Synthesis should be available for the 2008 Regional Policy Review and for setting the agenda for the remaining period up to 2015.

Complementarity of national, regional and global monitoring and assessment

Above all, it is the prime responsibility of the Governments, who is accountable for their own policies, to implement, monitor and assess the education reform processes and outcomes in their own countries. Indeed, an integral part of the development problem-complex is the lack of capacities in these basic functions required for practicing evidence-based policy-making and good governance. Hence, on the frontline of direct contacts with the management and implementation agencies of the Member States, UNESCO Regional Bureau and Field Offices, as many other development agencies, receive many and persistent requests for technical assistance for building capacity in these strategic functions that have been long neglected.

Rather than building agency-driven bypasses for what should be the responsibility of the Governments, Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau has responded with a capacity building programme, based on a joint and collaborative approach in the region (for description, see section on preparations for EFA Mid-Decade Assessment and Mid-Term Review), supporting and facilitating the development of the Member States’ capacity to conduct informed decision-making and to enhance accountability of the national implementation agencies with regard to the education reforms to fulfill their commitments to the EFA goals.

An output at the regional level is the Regional Synthesis Report, summarizing the major issues and patterns of achievements and remaining disparities drafted by a group selected by the country teams of the respective sub-regions. The policy implications for the remaining period up to 2015 will be themes of the Regional Review.

Predictably and rightfully-so, the resultant national reports on internal disparities in the achievement of quality education are largely for internal use as part of their own
national development plans and strategies. The sub-regional and regional synthesis reports are likewise for use by the sub-regional, regional and international bodies concerned with education and other development goals.

All the above does not exclude or replace the need for an “independent” GMR. Instead, as the national assessments are largely inward-looking and somewhat parochial in details, the unique role of the GMR, with a focus on global themes and strategies, is enhanced. Only the GMR can take the global perspective and further strengthened by the availability of the details at the country levels.

As the participation of Aaron Benavot (of the GMR Unit in Paris) in the recent Asia-Pacific preparations and planning meeting in Bangkok demonstrates, UNESCO Bangkok welcomes and seeks consultations and exchange of information with the GMR team and UNESCO Headquarters that would be of mutual benefit.

**Details of the planned national and regional assessment**

With the objective of identifying the unattained targets and un-reached target groups for each of the six EFA goals, the participants discussed many aspects of the process. Among them, the following are the current plans with regard to the points raised in the concept paper for the Global EFA Review 2006-2007:

- In addition to the usual school-based statistics, they will use mostly the existing data collection, such as the population and housing census, various household surveys, labour force surveys, household income and expenditure surveys, etc.
- National IE policies on minorities, disabled, the extremely poor, etc.
- As the source of UIS data is the national statistics, the national assessment exercise will motivate and accelerate national data collection and reporting
- The exercise will generate materials that may be of use to the GMR
- Case studies have been conducted and more will be undertaken, especially in areas where standard statistics are not available and inadequate.
- The structure and process of implementation will be examined carefully to identify how the policies were differently implemented with regard to the different target groups
- Because of the composition of the participants, the discussions did not focus much on the financing aspects of the six EFA goals.
- Timeline: end of 2006, initial outline with raw data; 2007 analytical and politically anchored reports; 2008 regional policy review