Towards EFA 2015 and Beyond – Shaping a new Vision of Education

9-11 May 2012, Imperial Queen’s Park Hotel
Bangkok, Thailand

Summary

UNESCO’s Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, in co-operation with the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and UNICEF Regional Offices, will hold a high-level regional expert meeting on developing the post-2015 education agenda for the region. The meeting will take place in Bangkok on 9-11 May 2011, and will bring together renowned regional experts and professionals in education policy and research.

The overall aim of this meeting is to initiate the process of developing a new vision for future education development and cooperation for the region and create partnerships and networks which will work jointly with UNESCO in pursuit of this goal. It will also identify research and analytical work to be undertaken and develop recommendations on the way forward in developing a regional post-2015 education agenda.

The meeting is undertaken within the framework of the work of UNESCO Bangkok, serving as the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, to support the shaping of a regional vision for the future of education development, as well as contributing to the global thinking about the international education agenda beyond 2015, in concert with the United Nations post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) discussions.

Background and Rationale

In the run up to 2015, UN organizations and the international community have commenced discussions regarding the effectiveness of the Millennium Development (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) Goals and reflections on defining a new vision for education and the post-2015 development agenda. Within the framework of developing a post-2015 education agenda, UNESCO will assess the implications of wider development trends for education today and tomorrow, take stock of achievements and identify areas for further improvement.

Today’s world is marked by its complexity. Multi-faceted and rapid changes, challenges and opportunities are emerging, ranging from increasing economic interdependency, globalization and technological development, growing pressure on natural resources and
increased energy consumption leading to environmental degradation; rapidly changing labour markets; greater interconnectedness, shifting geo-politics; older, highly mobile and more urbanized populations; amid growing unemployment and widening inequalities.

These emerging trends all have implications for education policy-making and delivery, and this needs to be reflected in the direction of international efforts toward future educational development. UNESCO Bangkok, as the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, aims to guide the shaping of a regional vision for the future of education development, as well as contributing to the global thinking about the international education agenda beyond 2015, in concert with the United Nations post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) discussions. In this role, it will stimulate discussions and thinking of regional stakeholders including universities and research institutions on a new vision of education whilst also considering the broader connections between education and societal development. UNESCO will create platforms for dialogue and exchange; catalyzing critical debate, creative thinking and knowledge; and feed contributions to global discussions.

**Development Trends in the Asia and Pacific Region**

The Asia-Pacific region has propelled global economic growth in the world over the past decade. Together with the emergence of a growing number of middle-income countries, wider social development achievements, and an increasingly outward-looking political environment, the region has become a considerable economic and political force.

However, despite these positive macro trends, there are vast disparities between and within countries and the highest prevalence of extreme poverty in the world is found in this very region. As elsewhere across the globe, the region's dramatic economic development has often led to a widening, rather than narrowing, of disparities in living standards and social and economic opportunities.

This phenomenon has underscored the need for development models that incorporate a wider range of dimensions in measuring progress, such as UNPD's Human Development Reports, OECD's Social Development Indicators, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index, and the ‘Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi’s’ Commission's report on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress.

The global economic crisis has also had its impact and progress has slowed considerably. To add to these difficulties, societies are changing. Rapidly ageing populations, youth bulges and large migrant populations raise questions of how education policy should adapt for the future. Issues of globalization, versus the need to maintain regional and local identities are also coming on to the agenda. The ubiquity of technology has raised questions about what role it should play within the education system. In turn, intensifying global competition and an increasing recognition of the importance of education to wider development has also sparked new conversations on how education can not only respond to but lead social and economic change.
Education Trends and the Post-2015 Agenda in the Asia-Pacific Region

While education is central to many Asia-Pacific countries’ development approaches and noticeable achievements have been made in the context of EFA, significant challenges remain. For example, enrolment in basic education has increased considerably; however, there are great disparities between and within countries. Peoples from war-torn zones, remote communities, ethnic minorities and women still face difficulties accessing education. Youth and adult literacy has made considerable progress, but is still inadequate to meet needs in Asian and Pacific countries, and the region contains the largest number of illiterate adults of any region in the world.¹ In the process of implementing the EFA agenda, countries have also become concerned with improving the quality of education, increasing access to post-basic education and to skills development, as well as improving learning environment.

These circumstances raise questions about the approach to the international educational agenda. The EFA goals were often perceived to be aimed at developing countries and were, to some extent, disregarded by middle and high-income countries. Yet despite their higher overall levels of educational development, these countries also face challenges and need to make improvements to ensure all children have access to quality education. We must also ask ourselves, should there be a single blanket agenda? Or would it be better to have specific goals pertinent to each country or group of countries? What will be the main priorities of education development and cooperation beyond 2015? Will there be separate education goals like EFA’s or will they be integral part of a wider development framework? What’s about region-specific educational goals and indicators like in European Union and Latin America? As 2015 approaches, it is imperative that these questions now be raised and considered carefully by the international community.

UNESCO High-Level Regional Expert Meeting on Developing the Post-2015 Agenda

UNESCO Bangkok, in co-operation with the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and UNICEF Regional Offices, will hold a regional high-level expert meeting on the post-2015 education agenda. The meeting will take place in Bangkok on 9-11 May 2011, and will bring together renowned regional experts and professionals in education policy and research.

Objectives and Outcomes of the High-Level Regional Expert Meeting

The overall aim of this meeting is to initiate the process of developing a new vision for future education development and cooperation for the region and create partnerships and networks which will work jointly with UNESCO in pursuit of this goal. It will also identify research and analytical work to be undertaken and develop recommendations on the way forward in developing a regional post-2015 education agenda.

The objectives are to:

- Share information on the region’s progress under the EFA agenda and identify areas for future focus;
- Take stock of global and regional processes of consultation, dialogue and research initiated to support the development of a post-2015 education agenda;
- Discuss emerging regional development trends and identify their implications for education and learning within Asia and the Pacific;
- Examine the relevance of the four pillars of learning\(^2\) as a means of conceptualizing education in light of the changes underway; and
- Formulate recommendations on the way forward towards the identification of the regional education priorities, including on areas of analytical work and forward-looking research and the role and contribution of regional research and development partners in this process.

As a follow up to the meeting, further reflections, debates and work will be undertaken, in association with a wide array of partners to ensure that the development of the post-2015 education agenda is enriched by a range of experience, knowledge and ideas. Moreover, UNESCO plans to establish and facilitate a core high-level expert group that will help to lead this important work.

**Format of the High-Level Regional Expert Meeting**

The three-day meeting will be divided into three main parts: Information sharing on on-going initiatives; debate on developments trends and their implications for education; and development of recommendations for follow-up action to jointly build a new vision for education.

1. **Information Sharing**

The status, progress and challenges for reaching the EFA goals in the region will be the point of departure for the discussions, with a view to looking ahead in light of changed contexts, development issues and opportunities which will shape the design of future education systems and international cooperation, globally and in this region. Information on on-going work on the post 2015 agenda from different perspectives will be also shared.

**Presentations and Discussions:**

- Regional initiatives and strategies for a new vision of education development and cooperation
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- Reflections of regional education think tanks and institutions towards developing a new education policy agenda
- The post-2015 UN development agenda – MDGs and post-2015 reflections

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• Rethinking educational paradigms: UNESCO’s reflection on the four pillars of learning

2. Discussion on Implications for Education of Development Trends
The meeting will then proceed to discuss key emerging development trends in the region and identify their implications for education as we look to 2015 and beyond.

Panel Discussions:
• Economic trends in the Asia-Pacific region and implications for education
• Demographic trends, migration and urbanization in the Asia-Pacific region and implications for education
• Socio-cultural trends in the Asia-Pacific region and implications for education and challenges
• Emerging trends in the education policy environment in the Asia-Pacific region and implications for education

3. Development of Recommendations
The final day of the meeting will consolidate findings and develop recommendations in the lead up to 2015 and beyond. The sessions on the final day will be guided by the following questions:

Guiding Questions:
• How should education be situated within the broader development agenda/discourse?
• Should there be an education-specific or a broader post-2015 agenda?
• Should there be a universal or a context-specific post-2015 agenda or both?
• What future policy directions are required for a new vision of education?
• What should be the key areas of this agenda?
• What are the research gaps and key areas for forward-looking analytical work and research to feed into the process of developing the post-2015 education agenda?

The meeting will be concluded with the development of recommendations as to future research and analytical work that needs to be conducted and advise on and propose modalities through which regional research partners may contribute to this process. The final day of the meeting should also serve to facilitate the building of partnership and networks for future work.

Participants
The meeting will be attended by selected high-level representatives and experts from ministries, UN and international development organizations, regional organizations, UNESCO National Commissions and NGOs.

Venue and Dates
The Meeting will take place on 9 to 11 May 2012 at the Imperial Queen’s Park Hotel, Bangkok.