Expanding the Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net)

Concept Note

1. Background

1.1. ERI-Net was established by UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in 2009 to facilitate regional collaboration among education research institutions in conducting analytical work on education issues that are particularly pertinent to the Asia-Pacific region. Currently, 17 institutions from 15 countries and economies are the part of this network.

1.2. Since 2009, the network has so far produced studies on key issues mostly in the areas of higher education. Past topics include research on the impact of economic crisis on higher education (2010) and international student mobility (2011). In 2012, the members of ERI-Net are meeting in Bangkok, Thailand to share findings from studies on two topics conducted since 2010: (1) public private partnership in higher education and TVET and (2) the question of youth employment – innovative approaches to human resource development.

1.3. While ERI-Net has been successfully facilitating knowledge generation and dissemination primarily from the higher education perspective, it is increasingly recognized that there is need to strengthen the network’s initial scope of sector-wide perspective, including coherence across sub-sectors, in order to identify and analyze problems and propose solutions in the education sector as a whole. The discussion on this issue and future strategies of ERI-Net will be held during the 2012 ERI-Net meeting (30-31 July) in Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Objectives of ERI-Net

2.1. In order to facilitate the discussion on the future strategies of ERI-Net, the participants of the meeting will be encouraged to revisit the network’s objective as stated in “ERI-Net Statement” developed in 2009, as per below.

1) To facilitate collaboration among institutes with existing research capacities to contribute to a powerful knowledge base that is not viable within national borders.
2) To allow cross-border interactions in areas which are traditionally local.
3) To construct knowledge about trends and discontinuities, commonalities and diversity, challenges and opportunities, successes and failures, as well as on-going undertakings and experiments in various systems of education.
4) To contribute to national policy-making process as well as front-line practices in the realm of education.
5) To contribute to a culture of respect to the rational basis in policies-making and practice.

3. **ERI-Net’s Role in Rethinking Education**

3.1 As a regional network of academic institutions specialized in education, ERI-Net has a great potential in contributing to the international discourse on the future of education, including revisiting the Delors report. Another imperative is the current global discussion on the post-EFA agenda.

3.2 UNESCO Bangkok recently organized a regional high-level expert meeting on “Towards EFA 2015 and beyond – shaping a new vision of education” from 9 to 11 May 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting was attended by approximately fifty high-level representatives and experts from research think tanks, universities, ministries, UN and international development organizations, regional organizations, UNESCO National Commissions and civil society from across the Asia-Pacific region. The meeting took stock of the region’s progress made under the EFA agenda and identified remaining challenges with special attention to emerging economic, demographic, socio-cultural and policy development trends in the region. It also examined current debates related to the post 2015 development and education agenda. For more information, see the [webpage on the meeting](#).

3.3 In terms of research themes on post 2015 and future visions of education, the meeting recommended that it should focus on topics which have either been neglected or remain unresolved, while also taking into consideration the broader societal and development context. Themes could include: learning and development (including early childhood, neuro-scientific perspectives, and pedagogy); metacognitive competencies; language of instruction; the role of culture and traditional values in education; expanded notions of literacy and lifelong learning; education and the peace dividend, impact of decentralization on education outcomes in terms of quality and equity, education-labour market linkages; migration and mobility; teacher policies (including deployment); financing of education (including household expenditures); the transformative role of ICTs; and the need for tools and measures to assess creativity and other non-cognitive skills; underperformance and drop-out. These issues go beyond the conventional understanding of EFA as an international agenda. Rather, it is a process of rethinking education – critical re-examination of the paradigms that frame our thinking of development and of education and training.

3.4 ERI-Net will need to scale up its contribution to this global discourse on development of the new educational agenda and the future of education development and cooperation. ERI-Net is strategically situated to facilitate the regional discussion on this movement. ERI-Net’s existing focus on higher education is an asset since there is a growing interest in those areas from both developing and developed countries while academic work linking these areas to educational development agenda is limited. By building on the good work the network has been involved in and widening the scope of the research to reflect the sector-wide perspective, ERI-Net can contribute to the international discourses significantly and play a key role in promoting evidence-based policy making in education in the region.

4. **Way Forward – a Proposal**

4.1 In order for ERI-Net to fully harness its potential to contribute to conceptually rethinking education and the formulation of the post-EFA agenda, UNESCO proposed the next steps, as per below. This will be further discussed at the ERI-Net meeting in July.
1) Expansion of scope for regional studies conducted by the ERI-Net members: in addition to higher education, there are several key areas that can be considered for further regional studies to inform policy-making at national and regional levels. They include: assessment of education system performance; private expenditure on education and its impact on learning; and integrating social outcomes of education in learning assessment.

2) As regards the future of education, forward-looking research and analytical work in any of the areas suggested under 3.3 could be envisaged. Areas of particular interest include research around the various domains and aspects of learning, skills and competencies for the 21st century; economic trends and education for the future, and socio-cultural dimension of development.

3) Expansion of ERI-Net membership: related to the point above, institutional membership can be expanded beyond the current composition to conduct regional studies on specific topics. Individuals from existing members are encouraged to act as focal points to facilitate participation of other researchers of relevant background and interest, depending on the agreed research topics.

4) Development of a new strategy for ERI-Net: in order to further increase its linkages to national, regional and global research and policy making process, ERI-Net can review its strategy on conducting research and disseminating the results. Considerations may be given to, for instance, (1) establishing linkages with existing regional and global networks (e.g., Asian Network of Training and Research Institutions in Educational Planning – ANTRIEP); (2) creation of an ERI-Net portal for information dissemination and communication among the members; and (3) preparation of “position papers” from ERI-Net on key educational issues.

5. Potential Areas for Regional Studies

5.1 ERI-Net meeting participants will be asked to discuss topics for next regional studies. Tentative list of potential topics include:

1) Higher education
   - Lifelong learning and higher education
   - Rethinking the role of universities: social responsibility of Higher Education
   - Entrance examinations to higher education: its educational & societal roles
   - Regional cooperation in higher education
   - Learning experiences in higher education
   - Learning outcomes at higher education level

2. Rethinking education beyond 2015
   - What meta-cognitive skills and competencies are required for the future? How can they be integrated into the curriculum at all educational levels? How can they be assessed?
   - Defining “education outcomes” beyond test scores
   - Socio-cultural dimensions of development and value education
   - Effective teacher policies for better education outcomes