UNESCO-KEDI REGIONAL POLICY SEMINAR 2013  
(Bangkok, Thailand, 5-7 August 2013)

Education Development & Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region:  
Shifting Dynamics, Increasing Collaboration

CONCEPT NOTE

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid globalization, comparison and competition between countries/jurisdictions as well as recognition of the commonality of many of the challenges faced by education systems, there is increasing cooperation between countries/jurisdictions as well as regional and international organizations in regard to education. This is particularly true in the Asia-Pacific, a region of great diversity in which the dynamics of sub-regional integration (e.g. formation of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015) and other factors are driving many different forms of cooperation in education. While some of this is not new (for example, there have always been cross-border exchanges between students, academics and universities), concerns about the more strategic use of official development assistance (ODA) and the emergence of new donors in the region is notable. In addition, there is a diversity of mechanisms through which such cooperation is being pursued, including via various strands of bilateral cooperation, sub-regional and regional bodies and policy dialogue and networking. It is also interesting to note that there are new initiatives in particular growing from the desire of countries/jurisdictions to analyze their systems vis-à-vis international norms and standards as well as to compare and benchmark the performance of their education systems against that of others.

Changes in global dynamics have led to a shift in trends when it comes to Overseas Development Assistance. Overall, global aid disbursements to education have increased by 77% between 2002 and 2010. However, the global financial crisis in particular has led to budgetary constraints, with total ODA to all sectors falling in 2011 for the first time since 1997, and trends showing that aid to education may fall faster than other sectors as some key donors made cuts between 2009 and 2010. While the five largest donors remain the same, of those OECD DAC countries whose ODA rose in real terms, two countries with the highest increases are emerging as major donors in the Asia Pacific – Australia (+9.1%) and Republic of Korea (+17.6) in 2012. This trend is also demonstrated by the DAC countries contributing the largest share of ODA to the Asia Pacific with Republic of Korea dedicating 68% of its total ODA budget to the region followed by Japan (55%) and Australia (53%) between 2009 and 2011. Development agencies such as AusAID, JICA, KOICA and NZAid have also become major players in development cooperation in the region, with activities ranging from policy dialogue with national Governments, working in partnership with civil society, non-governmental organisations and multilateral actors to promote capacity building and technical assistance.

2 ibid page 148-9
The economic rise of the “BRICS” countries, which in this region include India and China, and other middle-income countries has also contributed to increased South-South dialogue, which has led to increased development assistance in recent years. Although many of these countries also remain recipients of ODA, they will play an increasingly important role in the Asia-Pacific as donors. Some of these new players in the region have also shown a shift in their focus from the Asia-Pacific to other regions, especially sub-Saharan Africa. More broadly, the growing role of middle-income countries and increased emphasis on aid efficiency has shifted more attention to the concept of ‘triangular cooperation’, that is partnership between DAC donor countries, ‘pivotal countries’ (providers of South-South cooperation) and beneficiary countries. This has now emerged as a key theme in policy dialogues on international development cooperation. Another important part of the debate on education and international cooperation is the role of the private sector in education. According to Van Fleet (2012), the flexibility of the corporate sector and private foundations means that there is great potential for development assistance to be adapted to national education goals and global policy frameworks with funds more strategically deployed to target the most marginalized.

At the same time, cooperation in education goes beyond the traditional ‘donor-recipient’ relationship as recent years have seen increased cooperation and exchange in education at a regional level. International frameworks such as the Paris Declaration (2005), later strengthened by the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), have both placed a particular emphasis on ownership on the part of developing countries and results while increasing partnership and coordination. In the Asia-Pacific region, international cooperation in education has progressed through various modalities including through the work of regional and sub-regional bodies (e.g. APEC, ASEAN, SEAMEO), international and regional normative and standard setting instruments (e.g. the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the 1983 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific), the establishment and work of regional and sub-regional networks and the promotion of policy dialogue. Other forms of cooperation have also been noted as well, such as student exchange programmes and university twinning initiatives.

In South East Asia for instance, this increased cooperation also comes at a time where ASEAN countries prepare for economic integration in 2015, which will require countries to adapt their education systems to suit the needs of learners from other Member States by adapting curricula, preparing teachers but also in terms of recognition of qualifications and developing education structures at this level. ASEAN has also worked in collaboration with SEAMEO to develop an ASEAN curriculum sourcebook, which will guide schools, teacher training and teaching to promote knowledge.

Educational cooperation is also driven by the desire of countries in the region to compare and benchmark the performance of their education systems and students with those of their neighbours. The increasing participation of Asia-Pacific countries in PISA and other international assessments of student learning can be seen as one manifestation of this concern.

2. OBJECTIVES

- To facilitate the sharing of experiences and lessons in education development in the context of development cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.
- To identify emerging global, regional and sub-regional trends relevant to education development and cooperation.
- To identify possible areas for increasing regional cooperation within and amongst regional and sub-regional bodies, as well as countries/jurisdictions for education development.

3. TITLE

Regional Policy Seminar - Education Development & Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: Shifting Dynamics, Increasing Collaboration

4. PROPOSED THEMES/TOPICS

- Trends in regard to international cooperation for education, including ODA to the Asia-Pacific as well as from within the region, the role of emerging donors, the emergence of South-South cooperation and dialogue and the potential of the private sector.
- Various modalities of bilateral and multilateral cooperation including the dynamics of economic integration and its implications for education, the work of sub-regional and regional bodies and structures, existing international and regional normative frameworks, as well as policy dialogue, networking and academic and student exchange programmes.

5. PARTICIPANTS

- Experts, policy analysts and researchers from KEDI and UNESCO Bangkok
- Representatives from international, regional and sub-regional organisations/networks/bodies working on promoting educational cooperation and development (e.g. ASEAN Secretariat, SEAMEO, APEC, Asian Development Bank, SAARC, SPBEA, World Bank, etc.)
- Country participants: A total of 25 participants will be invited from a range of Asia-Pacific countries, including OECD DAC and other donor countries as well as developing countries. Each country will be represented by at least one participant who is either (i) a senior government official involved in issues of development assistance and cooperation in education (e.g. within the International Cooperation Bureau/Division of the Ministry of Education or responsible for matters relating to education within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or from a development agency e.g. AusAID, JICA, KOICA, NZAid) or (ii) a senior researcher from related research institutes and/or universities.

6. DATES AND VENUE

- Dates: 5-7 August 2013
- Venue: Bangkok, Thailand (exact venue to be determined)
7. WORKING METHODS AND DOCUMENTS

Preparation for the seminar will be undertaken by UNESCO’s Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok), Education Policy and Reform Unit and the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) which are co-organisers of the seminar.

The language of the seminar is English. The seminar sessions will be organized around the proposed topics whose results will contribute to the achievement of its stated objectives as well as to a possible publication. Discussion and exchange of experiences among the participants will be highly participatory drawing on the country specific experiences of the participants as well as the practices and perspectives of the international, regional and sub-regional organisations/networks/bodies. Working documents to facilitate the discussion include:

- Background paper on issues relating to ODA for education, South-South cooperation, and the role of the private sector (KEDI)
- Background paper on the various modalities of regional and sub-regional cooperation (economic integration, work of regional and sub-regional bodies and structures, international and regional normative frameworks, policy dialogue, networking, student exchange programmes, etc.) (UNESCO Bangkok)
- Research reports by researchers or institutions
- Country reports and presentations
- Field visit

8. FUNDING AND ORGANIZATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The seminar is co-financed by KEDI and UNESCO Bangkok. Participants from selected low-income countries will be financed through these funds. Participants from middle- to high-income countries and other interested persons (for example, representatives of international, regional and sub-regional organizations, UNESCO Field Office representatives, representatives from development agencies) should seek funding from their own or other sources. Participants with special requests or requiring further clarification should contact the event organizers directly.

9. CONTACT PERSONS

**UNESCO**

Ramya Vivekanandan Rodrigues (Ms)
Programme Specialist
Education Policy and Reform Unit (EPR)
Tel: +66-2-391-0577 ext. 380
Fax: +66-1-391-0866
E-mail: r.vivekanandan@unesco.org

Stella Yu (Ms)
Programme Officer, EPR
E-mail: s.yu@unesco.org

Aliénor Salmon (Ms)
Research Assistant, EPR
E-mail: a.salmon@unesco.org

**KEDI**

Ju Hur (Dr)
Director
Office of International Relations and Cooperation (OIRC)
Tel: +82-2-3460-0324
Fax: +82-2-3460-0157
Email: juhur@kedi.re.kr

Hyun Ki Shim
Project Officer, OIRC
Email: shim0923@kedi.re.kr