EDUCATION
MICROPLANNING
TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTORY MODULE
Foreword

Over the past two decades, decentralization, as a process for devolving decision-making, has been increasingly common in different areas of government responsibility, in both developed and developing countries. In the education sector, decentralization is one of the most popular reform policies. As education systems continue to devolve decision-making to lower levels of administration, decisions on quality improvement, curriculum innovation, school development and financial resource management that were previously taken at the central level, are now in the hands of local actors.

Actors at the local level, particularly at the school level, are in a better position to understand the characteristics and needs of the population they serve than actors at the national (central) level. Yet, local actors can find it challenging to implement broad national or sub-national policies at the local level and decide on the local actions to take.

The Education Microplanning Toolkit has been developed to support education planning at the local level, emphasizing four main aspects of planning and change: increasing access, improving learning outcomes, enhancing community participation and supporting open and informed decision-making. This framework has moved education microplanning from being a functionalist planning and management tool to one that appreciates the social and cultural contexts in which planning takes place and attempts to bring communities together to meet identified needs at the local level.

The toolkit offers advice to appointed officials and administrators, especially those at the school and district levels, on planning local education changes so as to enhance the delivery of educational services in their areas. It also supports local development efforts in a national education planning context through empowering local communities to participate in such a way that local needs are clearly articulated and policy solutions are designed to meet those needs.

The toolkit is a work-in-progress; however, it can already provide useful advice for education planners at the local level. UNESCO seeks comments and feedback from the users of the toolkit on the usefulness of the information provided as well as any suggestions for improving the toolkit, so that the next edition will provide information that fully meets the needs of microplanners. Depending on the needs, additional modules may be added to a future edition of the toolkit. We trust that the current edition will be valuable and look forward to receiving your feedback.

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Acknowledgements

The Education Microplanning Toolkit was initially developed by a joint team of UNESCO Bangkok and the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The team comprised Gwang-Chol Chang and Le Thu Huong from the Education Policy and Reform (EPR) Unit of UNESCO Bangkok and Kerry J. Kennedy and Kwok Tung Tsui from the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Kate McDermott, Programme Assistant at the EPR Unit of UNESCO Bangkok provided organizational and part of editorial support to the team.

A number of experts in the fields of education planning and community participation, from India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, provided inputs and suggestions during the preparation of this toolkit. Furthermore, several UNESCO staff contributed technical inputs, in particular Nyi Nyi Thaung, Pierre Chapelet and Khadim Sylla. The inputs of the various experts and technical specialists are greatly appreciated.

This toolkit was pilot tested in Mongolia in collaboration with UNESCO Office in Beijing (Miki Nozawa) and a team of experts from the Mongolian State University of Education (led by Ch. Purevdorj) and the Ministry of Education and Science (led by Tsolmon Ariya).

In light of the feedback received during the pilot test in Mongolia and from other experts, the toolkit was further reviewed by a team led by Lina Benete at the EPR Unit. Rachel McCarthy and Jennie Ekedahl contributed to editing and Kar Hung Antony Tam, EPR Unit, supported the revisions in design and layout, with assistance from Warren Field, Information and Knowledge Management Unit of UNESCO Bangkok.
Instructions

The Education Microplanning Toolkit contains an introductory module and five thematic modules on different aspects of the planning process at the local level, such as: (i) principles of microplanning: working with communities; (ii) getting started: preparing for an education microplanning exercise; (iii) conducting a needs assessment: instruments, data collection and analysis; (iv) enhancing curriculum and teaching processes to improve student learning; and (v) data and information for decision-making and planning.

Each module is structured according to the following format of contents: learning outcomes for this module; structure of the toolkit; synopsis; elaboration of the specific topic of the module; summary; learning from the cases; evaluation tasks; and further readings and references.

To gain most benefit in the utilization of this toolkit, users are reminded of the following:

- The toolkit is a living document and your feedback is highly appreciated for its improvement;
- The modules should be adapted according to a given local context for actual use;
- The toolkit is to be enriched by including additional modules on other pertinent issues (e.g. education for disaster risk reduction, use of technology in education, school finance);
- The toolkit is sequenced to follow the microplanning cycle, yet care is given so that each module can be self-explanatory for users interested in a particular aspect of the toolkit; and
- Completing evaluation tasks and reading referenced documents will further enhance your learning.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS MODULE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE OF THE TOOLKIT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNOPSIS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION MICROPLANNING</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION TASKS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS MODULE

1.1 Understand what education microplanning is.

1.2 Understand the purposes of education microplanning.

1.3 Become familiar with one way that education microplanning can be implemented to address a specific issue.

1.4 Become familiar with some contexts in which education microplanning has been used.
Introduction to education microplanning

**Focus:** The purpose and functions of education microplanning

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**Module 1**

Principles of decision-making: working with communities

**Focus:** Working with local communities to build partnerships

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**Module 2**

Getting started: Preparing for an education microplanning exercise

**Focus:** Getting prepared for an education planning exercise at the local level: spatial, social, economic and educational considerations

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**Module 3**

Conducting a needs assessment: instruments, data collection and analysis

**Focus:** Understanding local needs through engaging communities in planning activities and building capacity

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**Module 4**

Enhancing curriculum and teaching processes to improve student learning

**Focus:** Getting to understand the planning, implementation and evaluation processes that contribute to successful student learning

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**Module 5**

Data and information for decision-making and planning

**Focus:** Using data for understanding and improving education at the local level: assessing the outcomes of planning in areas such as access, participation and learning
This module provides a general introduction to education microplanning. The module is designed particularly for education officers who have responsibility for local planning efforts and for making management decisions at the local level. This could be at the district level where officers have responsibility for implementing aspects of national or sub-national level education objectives. Alternatively, it could be at the school level where school governing bodies or principals have some responsibility for translating and implementing broad education policies that were created at the national or sub-national (province or state) level.

As will be shown throughout this module, education microplanning is a process that seeks to connect broad policy objectives to local contexts. The assumption is that action needs to be taken at the local level if the national objectives are to be achieved. Thus, education microplanning leads to local-level decision-making and the development of action plans regarding how to implement broad national or sub-national policies at the local level. As a management tool, education microplanning directs resources, aspirations and efforts at all levels towards the achievement of common goals.

Education microplanning exercises are carried out in many situations. These range from determining the best locations for new schools or early childhood education centres, to developing a locally relevant curriculum, implementing new approaches to assessment and strengthening the capacities of local actors in planning and monitoring the local action.

Education microplanning uses an evidence-based approach to decision-making. Evidence is built based on the data collected from the local area including local views, issues and priorities, using information gathering tools such as surveys, focus groups and interviews. These information-gathering tools will be discussed in Module 3, as will analysis of data and information gathered as a result of using these tools.

Information management systems can be developed to manage the information that is collected at the local level and to keep a record of the progress that is being made towards achieving targets. Information management systems will be described in Module 5.

Education microplanning involves accurately identifying problems, collecting information that can help to design solutions to those problems and preparing local action plans. Such plans include methods for evaluating progress towards completing the activities and achieving the desired results.
4.1 What is education microplanning?

The Education Microplanning Toolkit uses the following definition:

**Education microplanning** – education planning at the local (“micro”) level – is a holistic and participatory approach to local-level decision-making. While it is focused on the local level, it is linked to national and sub-national education policy directions.

It is worthwhile to spend some time reviewing this definition because it has a number of important features:

- Education microplanning involves planning at the local level, with the community affected by the education policy or reforms. It requires the participation of local actors, including, for example, district officers, school leaders, teachers, community groups, parents and students.

- Education microplanning takes up policy objectives that were set nationally or sub-nationally and prepares plans to implement those policies at the district and community level. The focus is on implementing common goals at the local level. Education microplanning assists local education authorities and communities to link national and sub-national education priorities to local needs. It involves identifying ways in which local communities and schools can put national or sub-national policies into practice.
4.2 Why use education microplanning?

In many education systems around the world, the management of education has been decentralized to the province, state, district or community level. This shift compels education systems to decentralize planning, based on the principle that local level involvement in planning often results in more effective activities and outcomes than centrally directed plans and programmes. This is because centrally directed plans and programmes are often unable to take into consideration local needs and views and local barriers to policy implementation.

4.3 What problems can education microplanning address?

Priority education policies are often defined at the national or sub-national government level and the policy objectives are often expressed in very broad terms (e.g. universal primary education, the inclusion of children with special needs, the achievement of gender equity and improving student learning outcomes in mathematics and science). Sometimes specific targets are set in relation to these broad policy objectives (e.g. universal education by 2015, the enrolment of 50 per cent of children with special needs by 2020), but they may be less relevant to local contexts. Local level planning is an attempt to develop local action plans to translate higher level policy goals into locally meaningful objectives and achieve locally-relevant targets.

National governments are held accountable for their policies even though the necessary action to achieve these policy goals is often in the hands of local authorities such as districts, communities and schools. Education microplanning is the necessary link between national policy objectives and the actions taken locally to achieve these objectives. The particular issues that can be addressed by education microplanning depend on specific contexts, but the following are some examples of possible local issues that could be taken up in an education microplanning exercise.

- School enrolments are not meeting national or state/provincial targets;
- Literacy rates for girls are very low;
- The number of out-of-school children in the community is increasing;
The performance of local students on national tests is below an acceptable standard;

Teacher attrition is very high;

School buildings and facilities are not keeping up with demographic changes;

There is a lack of early childhood education and care facilities in the local community; and

Children are not enrolled at the proper age.

4.4 How do you implement education microplanning?

There are various approaches to implement education microplanning. However, there are certain typical stages involving similar activities carried out in a similar sequence in microplanning like in any management cycle. The management cycle generally begins with analyzing the current situation. Findings and remedial options are then formulated and appraised, thus providing policy orientations. Once the situation is analysed and the future directions are appraised and defined, one will proceed with planning the necessary actions to correct or improve the situation. A plan can be long range (6 to 10 years), medium term (3 to 5 years) or short term (1 to 2 years). The next step will consist of designing specific development projects or programmes and/or mobilizing resources required to strengthen capacity and implement the planned actions and activities. Implemented activities are subject to feedback-providing operations, i.e. monitoring, review and evaluation (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: A Typical Management Cycle*
A key aspect of the microplanning process is to identify how to implement national education policies at the local level. To achieve this, it is necessary to collect information about the views, concerns and needs of the local community in relation to the education policies. Such information can be collected in various ways (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups). This information provides the evidence that is needed to make decisions and action plans to implement national education policies at the local level. An information management system should be established at the local level to manage this and other information that is required for decision-making and for establishing action plans.

Take, for example, the national policy of “universal primary education”. An issue related to this at the local level might be that “school enrolments are not meeting national targets”. How might this be addressed? There are a number of stages in implementing a microplanning exercise to address this issue:

I. Collect information

- Compile existing data, such as information contained within annual school census, to build the first understanding of the situation;
- Conduct a survey of parents to find out which parents do not enrol their school-aged children in school and the reasons why these school-aged children are not enrolled in school;
- Conduct a number of focus groups with the parents whose children are not enrolled in school, to enable parents to discuss their reasons for not sending children to school and the suggestions they have to overcoming the obstacles to enrolling their children in school; and
- Interview a sample of school-aged children who are not enrolled in school.

II. Analyse the information

- Outline the results of the survey in a simple format using basic descriptive statistics (e.g. total number of households, number of households that do not send all/some school-aged children to school, major reasons given for not enrolling children in schools and the percentage of households that gave each reason);
- Identify the main reasons that parents in the focus groups gave for not sending their children to school and their suggestions for overcoming these problems. Check to see if these themes are consistent with the survey findings; and
- Compare the reasons for not attending school given by the children with those given by the parents and with the reasons listed in the survey.
III. Prepare an analytical report

- Based on the survey results, focus groups and student interviews, prepare a simple report that lists the key statistics and outlines the key reasons given by local parents and children to explain why children are not enrolled in school. The reasons given by parents could include things like: “We don’t send our daughters to school because there is only one toilet at each school and we don’t want our daughters to share toilets with boys” (UNESCO, 2005); and

- As well as providing the information collected from the community, the report should also compare the results of the three sources of information (survey, focus groups and interviews). When the three sets of data provide the same information, this should be indicated. Likewise, when there are disagreements between the three data sets, this should also be highlighted.

IV. Discuss the findings with the community to identify solutions

- A meeting should be held to share the results of the information-gathering process with the community and to get their feedback and suggestions on how to address the obstacles they face in enrolling school-aged children in school, including specific activities that need to be planned.

V. Develop an action plan

- Based on the analytical report and the outcomes of the meeting with the community, an action plan should be prepared that lists the specific activities that need to be implemented to overcome the obstacles to enrolment of school-aged children in schools, as identified by parents and students (e.g. build separate girls’ toilets at all schools in the local community so that girls do not have to share toilets with the boys);

- The action plan should include a resource framework to indicate the costs of implementing each activity;

- The plan should include specific targets for each activity and milestones should be set for achieving targets so that progress can be measured (e.g. one toilet should be completed within one month of the start of the activity, two toilets should be completed within two months, three within three months, four within four months);

- Indicators must be set to measure progress towards each target (e.g. how many toilets per school have been built within two months of the start of the activity?).
Methods for monitoring the progress of the activities need to be outlined in the plan (e.g. a person will be assigned to make sure the people building the toilets—such as a community group or contracted builder—provide weekly and monthly progress reports and are completing each toilet according to the schedule); and

A professional development plan should be included if new skills or attitudes are required among professional staff in schools.

4.5 What kinds of skills are needed to conduct an education microplanning exercise?

It is clear from the above example that a range of skills and attitudes are required to conduct a successful education microplanning exercise.

Skills:

- Information gathering techniques that can be used in a local context (preparing and conducting surveys and interviews and facilitating meetings and focus groups);
- Analysis skills (to analyse quantitative and qualitative data);
- Report writing skills (to produce simple and accurate reports);
- Presentation skills (to present findings to the community clearly and concisely); and
- Planning skills (to prepare activity plans, set results and create milestones and indicators).

Attitudes:

- Willingness to listen to the opinion, concerns and solutions put forward by the community;
- Understanding of the need for discussion and interaction in order to find solutions; and
- Respect for local values (which may be diverse and conflicting).

Table 1: Skills and attitudes needed to conduct education microplanning

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<tr>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Designing surveys</td>
<td>• Active listening to the views of schools (teachers, principals, community members)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Analysing survey responses</td>
<td>• Empathy with local communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conducting interviews and focus groups</td>
<td>• Respect for consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysing qualitative responses</td>
<td>• Appreciation for diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Report writing</td>
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<td>• Presentation skills</td>
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</tbody>
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Education microplanning is a local level planning process that links national and sub-national goals and objectives in education policy to the local level context. It takes place in decentralized education systems that recognize local level action as crucial to the achievement of national and sub-national policy objectives.

At the heart of education microplanning is the recognition that local communities should not simply be at the end point of a top down policy process. Rather, effective policy implementation recognizes that local communities are invaluable to identifying local priorities and the obstacles to the implementation of national policies, so that the planning process creates useful action plans that address real issues.

Education microplanning is an evidence-based decision-making process that relies on the collection and analysis of relevant local information. It requires knowledge and skills to collect and analyse information, present the information and prepare reports and plans. Education microplanners must work to develop solutions which reflect local needs, are relevant to local contexts and which draw support from the local community. Such an approach has high potential for success.
Case 1: School mapping – an example from Tanzania

Despite a 1995 national policy commitment to provide free education for all young people, the Government of Tanzania found that gross enrolments in primary schools declined over the following decade. In response, the government devolved responsibility for increasing enrolments to the local level. Local level planners (microplanners) used “school mapping” techniques to identify the barriers to enrolment in primary schools. The school mapping process created a visual representation of the obstacles, which led to the identification of solutions to overcome these obstacles.

Case 2: Village Education Committees – an example from India

Each State of India has a policy to improve the quality of education. Officials in Tirumangalam in Tamil Nadu State felt that it would be necessary to improve local schools as a priority in order to improve the quality of education. They adopted the strategy of encouraging community participation through Village Education Committees (VECs). Each VEC was asked to develop a microplan (local action plan) that listed activities that would improve the schools in their communities. The VECs identified the problems and needs through meetings and discussions with parents, teachers and other community members. The VECs developed solutions and an action plan, which included a timeline for the implementation of the activities and each VEC was then given responsibility for monitoring the implementation of its action plan. However, the VECs were not successful until they received training. The shift in education management tasks to these new actors (VECs) required building their capacity, enabling them to develop and implement their action plans.
LEARNING FROM THE CASES:

1. Education microplanning can take place at different levels and for different purposes – it might occur at the district level, community level or school level.

2. In both cases, the microplanning exercise was adopted to achieve broad policy objectives articulated at national or state (provincial) level.

3. Methods for education microplanning vary widely. The methods used should be appropriate to the local community and their values.

4. New actors need support in building their capacity to develop and implement action plans.
Review the definition of education microplanning at the beginning of this module. How would you explain it to people in your community or district?

Who has responsibility for determining education policy in your country? Are local communities involved in implementing education policy at the community level? Do you see a role for education microplanning in your context?

What do you see as some of the advantages of education microplanning and what do you see as some issues and problems with using this approach within your local context?

Do you think the knowledge, skills and values required for education microplanning are available in your context? Do you think additional skills are required?

What are some current education issues in your district or community that could be addressed through microplanning? Develop a brief plan to show how you might go about an education microplanning exercise related to a current local issue.


