“Information and communication technologies (ICTs) must be harnessed to support EFA goals at an affordable cost.”

*Dakar Framework for Action*

More of the same is just not going to work. Building more classrooms, and training more teachers to reach those currently unreached by education systems is unrealistic and will not be enough to meet the Education for All (EFA) challenge. Some countries are already spending considerable percentages of their Gross Domestic Product on education and have little room for manoeuvring. In addition, traditional education models will no doubt be unable to achieve educational empowerment effectively in the emerging Knowledge Societies.

UNESCO Bangkok launched this Meta-survey to obtain information on existing ICT applications and models that have proved to be efficient or hold promise of contributing substantially to achieving EFA goals. Particular attention was paid to models that could be adapted and improved for large-scale use.

The Meta-survey allowed UNESCO to obtain a more accurate picture of the current state of ICT use in education in the Asia and Pacific region. UNESCO uses a broad definition of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for this study to include broadcast technologies, such as radio and television, as well as the use of computers, related peripherals, e-mail and the web. Both formal and non-formal learning environments are targeted, reaching from primary to secondary levels, technical and vocational education and teacher training, but generally not including the higher education level.

This study helped UNESCO to identify, analyse and summarise current applications and practices in the use of ICTs in formal and non-formal education. It has furthered the process of creating or strengthening regional networks on ICTs and education and provided valuable information to be used in UNESCO’s programme formulation, activity prioritisation, and training strategy development.

The researchers were asked to map and analyse ICT initiatives in education, especially for disadvantaged groups and girls and women. In their analyses of UNESCO Member-states, special attention was paid to the following aspects:

- National policies, strategies and programmes, including policy goals, action plans, current implementation status, budgets allocated, sources of funding, gaps, limitations and needs perceived.
- Current levels of ICT access and use in education, spelling out which technologies are being used, for what purposes, and to what extent in basic education (primary/secondary), vocational education, teacher training, and non-formal education. This part includes “digital divide” issues, especially those relating to gender. Some instructive examples of partnership experiences between levels of governments, civil society, and the private sector were described as well.
- Illustrative examples of initiatives which may be major successes or failures with a focus on delivery models, the development of learning materials or resources related to ICT use, efforts to address issues of access to ICT, and any evidence on ICT use in education initiatives.
Training being systematically implemented in the countries, especially that for teachers, educators in non-formal education settings, and learners. What are the strategies, and sources of expertise; is it compulsory or optional; is there evidence of effectiveness; and what are the needs?

Constraints regarding the use of ICT in the country, particularly those involving gender, rural/urban divisions, ethnic minorities, learning software language, issues of ICT use and learning quality, resourcing and sustainability.

Analyses focusing on actions/initiatives that the researcher felt might facilitate the increased use of ICT in the country to support educational goals.

The research method applied included a careful selection of organizations and individuals with knowledge and expertise in the use of ICTs in education in the Asia-Pacific region. They were invited to prepare the country and thematic reports and gathered the necessary information using publications, the web, e-mail and telephone interaction with individual contacts within the countries, personal information and other sources. The researchers therefore analysed and synthesized already existing information, but also integrated new knowledge gained. A much more comprehensive survey including detailed questionnaires to Ministries of Education for the thorough analysis of school and country situations is currently being undertaken by UNESCO’s ICT in Education Indicator Project in selected Member States.

For this reason, the Meta-survey neither attempts nor pretends to reflect country situations in their diversity in the limited space we have here. This task was sometimes difficult because information was hard to obtain. At other times, because of our broad definition of the term ‘ICTs’ and the coverage of formal and non-formal learning environments, there was a sheer information overflow. The criteria for selecting and synthesizing information have been mentioned before: lessons to be learnt in order to reach the Education for All (EFA) goals, better understanding the countries’ key players, initiatives, constraints, and needs and opportunities for UNESCO to contribute to development.

When we received the first drafts of the country reports we noticed that the gender analysis component was generally incomplete, even though this is a major EFA priority. To make up for this lack, we contracted an ICT and gender specialist, Ms Lyndsay Green, to write a separate chapter on gender issues and trends in the use of ICT in education in this region. The report benefited directly from Ms Green’s participation in the very timely Forum on ICTs & Gender: Optimizing Opportunities, organized by the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) in Kuala Lumpur from 20–23 August 2003.

The Meta-survey is composed of the following chapters:

The first chapter gives an overview of developments and trends in the application of ICTs in education. It provides an illustrative overview of applications and models of ICT use in education, looking more carefully at trends in content development and in applications for primary and secondary education and for non-formal education, and in research and evaluation, and at emerging infrastructure developments.

Gender-based issues and trends in ICT applications in education in Asia and the Pacific are the focus of the second chapter. It shows exciting examples of how ICTs can increase access to and improve the quality of learning experiences for girls and women, including in non-formal education. Trends in strategies, including gender mainstreaming and the engendering of ICT and education policies, are discussed.

The third chapter includes the collection of the ICT in education country papers, grouped by sub-regions.

The concluding section summarises the apparent principles of ICT applications in education and discusses different policy framework developments, constraints and challenges of successful ICT integration in the region and possible strategies and opportunities for UNESCO assistance.

We trust that initiatives beyond those launched by UNESCO will benefit from, and be inspired by, the knowledge shared and networks created through this survey.

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