

*Fifth Conference
of Ministers of Education and those Responsible
for Economic Planning in the Arab States*

*Organized by UNESCO
in co-operation with ALESCO and ISESCO*

Cairo, 11-14 June 1994

Final Report

THE CAIRO DECLARATION

The Fifth Conference of Ministers of Education and those Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States, meeting in Cairo from 11 to 14 June 1994, considered a range of issues connected with the ways in which education can contribute to development in the face of the challenges of the twenty-first century.

A number of very substantial achievements have been registered in the region as a whole. Among the most significant is the dramatic rise in school enrolments at all levels since the previous conference held in Abu Dhabi in 1977, which is characterised, in particular, by a marked increase in the rate of female participation.

The Arab Region, made up of 21 countries, is unlike any other region of the world in that it shares a largely common language and culture which, together, provide a solid basis for the establishment of educational targets and reliable bench-marks against which to measure achievements.

The Conference expressed its determination to frame educational programmes that would bring the region into a position of world prominence in the next century. The work ahead is undeniably substantial since, in a world increasingly characterised by stunning advances in science and technology, many of the Arab States continue to be confronted by tremendous challenges which thwart the achievement of the Jomtien Conference goals of the universalisation and enhancement of primary education and the eradication of illiteracy.

The Conference examined a range of pressing issues but concluded that three areas commended themselves to the attention of the region's policy-makers, standing out from all others as urgent imperatives demanding concerted action:

I. The problem of illiteracy

It is impossible to imagine the development and resurgence of the Arab world without putting an end to the problem of illiteracy in the Arab countries. Relying solely on the efforts of official bodies will not solve this problem; there is therefore an urgent need to involve all individuals and associations in society, including official and popular organisations, voluntary associations, national universities, religious figures, the media and other bodies in the universalisation and enhancement of primary education and the eradication of illiteracy at an accelerating pace which should reach 10 per cent per year of the total proportion of illiterates.

Attention must also be devoted to methods of distance learning, enlisting its potential for contact with all those who are difficult to reach, in particular, women, girls and the inhabitants of remote rural and desert areas, in order to achieve the goal of lifelong learning. In addition, the progress of girls and women in the field of learning should be closely monitored on a continuous basis.

II. Quality of education

The challenges of the twenty-first century oblige us to make the enhancement of education a strategic goal that is the focus of concerted efforts by the Arab States and regional and international organizations.

In connection with this goal the following measures should be taken as a matter of urgency:

1. The establishment of centres of excellence in the Arab region in the following fields:
 - (a) language teaching, and first and foremost, the teaching of Arabic;
 - (b) teacher training;
 - (c) the teaching of science and mathematics;
 - (d) informatics; D
 - (e) distance teaching.
2. Curriculum development, the enhancement of curriculum content and the introduction of the concepts of democracy, equality and peace based on justice, while stressing at the same time the importance of nurturing the cultural identity of the Arab nation and intercultural tolerance and understanding.
3. Professionalization of the teaching profession by devoting attention to ensuring good quality teacher training, ongoing upgrading and in-service training, and the improvement of service conditions with a view to encouraging the efforts of teachers and to strengthening their role and promoting their position in society.
4. The adoption of advanced national human resources development strategies which ensure a close, flexible and comprehensive link between educational planning on the one hand and economic and social development planning on the other hand.

III. Regional and international co-operation

Co-operation should be strengthened among the Arab States and also between existing regional organisations, such as ALECSO, ISESCO and ABEGS, and UNESCO and other international organisations, with a view to achieving the goals set out in this Declaration and in the decisions and recommendations of the Conference.

ANNEX I

Recommendations of the Advisory Committee of the Regional Programme for the Universalization and Renewal of Primary Education and the Eradication of Adult Illiteracy in the Arab States (ARABUPEAL)

I. Education for all

Renewed commitment to education for all (EFA)

Education for women and girls

Education for rural and nomadic populations

Education for victims of poverty and conflict and for refugees and displaced persons

Education for the Palestinians and Arab inhabitants of other occupied Arab territories

Special education

Pre-school education

Adult education

II. Quality and relevance in education

Policy, planning and management

Curriculum and instructional materials development

Educational research and innovation

Secondary education

Technical and vocational education

Higher education

Teachers

III. Co-operation for the development of education in the Arab region

National co-ordination and partnerships

Regional co-operation

International co-operation

**Recommendations of the Advisory Committee
of the Regional Programme for the Universalisation
and Renewal of Primary Education and the Eradication
of Adult Illiteracy in the Arab States
(ARABUPEAL)**

Preamble

The Committee,

Noting with satisfaction that, thanks to the determination of many countries in the Arab region, the estimated percentage of illiterates aged 15 years and above will drop from 49 per cent of the population in 1990 to 38 per cent in the year 2000,

Recalling, however, that despite the increase in primary enrolment from an estimated 17 million in 1975 to an estimated 31 million in 1991, the estimated total number of illiterates has increased from 61 to 66 million in the same period,

Concerned that despite an appreciable increase in the primary enrolment of girls, females nevertheless constitute the majority of the illiterate population (62 per cent in 1990) and are under-represented at secondary schools and universities,

Concerned further that, for the region, public expenditure on education is presently only 5.5 per cent of GNP,

Emphasizing that the acquisition by Arab young people of scientific, technological and cultural literacy is a prerequisite to meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century,

Considering that the achievement of the Jomtien goals requires a strong commitment of Member States, the allocation of adequate resources, the elaboration and implementation of well-conceived national plans, and the co-ordination of efforts at the national, regional and international levels,

Recalling that, under Islam, the individual has twin obligations in respect to education, the first being to educate himself/herself and the second being to participate in the education of others,

I. Education for all

A. *Recommends* that the Arab States:

Renewed commitment to education for all (EFA)

1. Redouble their efforts in respect to the achievement of the Jomtien goals through increased levels of expenditure for formal and non-formal education and the provision of free compulsory basic education;
2. Reinforce ARABUPEAL as a regional programme for co-ordinating the efforts of all the States in the region with a view to meeting the needs of the Arab States;

3. Enhance educational research and expand and improve the database needed for realistic planning and decision-making in respect to EFA goals through the greater use of education technology and staff development;
4. Increase community involvement in the planning and implementation of EFA programmes by means of consultation and direct involvement;
5. Analyse the major causes of wastage (reduced participation, drop-outs and repetition) and poor quality and introduce measures to curb this major obstacle to the achievement of the Jomtien goals;

Education for women and girls

6. Prepare a Regional Declaration and Framework of Action for the Provision of Basic Education for Girls and Women in the Arab States as a contribution to the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women;
7. Review the extent to which national educational legislation and policies advantage girls and women and, in the event of shortcomings, introduce elements which strengthen their participation in education;
8. In order to ensure equity in the provision of education, increase levels of public expenditure on the education of women and girls and provide incentives to facilitate their enrolment in basic education and literacy programmes;
9. Within the national policy-and-programme framework for EFA targets, create or strengthen national task forces to provide education policy guidelines and necessary information to decision-makers and also promote issue-awareness among the public in order to achieve gender equality;
10. Undertake appropriate adjustments, wherever needed, to the content and methods of education to address the special needs of women and girls;
11. Increase the involvement of women in national and international decision-making, particularly in relation to education;

Education for rural and nomadic populations

12. Draw up plans and formulate methods aimed at providing education and enhancing its quality in rural, nomadic and pastoral areas; at encouraging graduates to enrol in teacher-training institutions and to work in such areas; and at urging adults to enrol in literacy programmes;
13. Improve the quality and relevance of education in these areas by developing curricula which meet the need to acquire life skills;
14. Investigate the cost-effectiveness of new methods for enhancing education for rural and nomadic populations, such as multi-channel packages (a mix of radio and correspondence), mobile teams and programmed instruction kits;

15. Provide incentives and opportunities for in-service training and professional support to teachers posted in rural and nomadic areas to encourage them to stay on in their jobs;

16. Introduce flexible scheduling to accommodate the needs of rural and nomadic children who must help their families during the harvest, planting and grazing seasons;

B. *Recommends* that UNESCO and the Arab States:

**Education for victims of poverty and conflict
and for refugees and displaced persons**

17. Examine ways of ensuring the welfare of those suffering from extreme poverty (the homeless and street children) and from violence (refugees and displaced persons), and of introducing the necessary measures to alleviate their physical and psychological suffering through a suitable mix of vocational with psycho-social education;

18. Provide educational services to refugees and displaced persons in the receiving countries;

19. Forge partnerships with NGOs at the national and international levels and with representatives of the target groups concerned with a view to establishing sustained programmes of emergency assistance to such groups;

C. *Recommends* that UNESCO:

**Education for the Palestinians and the Arab inhabitants
of other occupied Arab territories**

20. Assign a high priority to the building of infrastructures for Palestinian educational institutions and the provision of educational services to the Palestinian people and the Arab inhabitants of the other occupied Arab territories;

21. Launch an urgent appeal to Member States and donors for contributions towards a fund for higher education scholarships for Palestinian students and for the financing of projects adopted within the framework of the Memorandum of Co-operation between UNESCO and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO);

D. *Recommends* that the Arab States:

Special education

22. Develop policies, draw up appropriate national plans and allocate adequate resources for the education and training of those with special educational needs, including gifted and talented children;

23. Introduce appropriate changes to educational facilities and adopt more effective teaching methods to enable the disabled to participate, as far as possible, with their age-group in conventional schools;

24. Strengthen special education interest groups and promote the vigorous involvement therein of parents, the community and non-governmental organisations;

Pre-school education

25. Develop appropriate national policies and plans and allocate adequate resources to expand and improve the quality of early childhood care and pre-school education wherever possible;

26. Promote participation in pre-school programmes through support to health and nutrition needs;

27. Encourage the use of the family and community as a cost-effective and relevant source for content and for instructional materials;

Adult education

28. Frame more incisive adult education policies and programmes in order to raise the human and financial resource levels currently available for the promotion of ad forms and levels of adult education in- the context of lifelong learning;

29. Devise viable national and local mechanisms and develop strategies, through formal and non-formal structures, for providing post-literacy education and training for school drop-outs, and encourage senior administrators, head teachers and teaching staff to make available, to the extent possible, the full range of their resources, material and pedagogical, to further the goals of adult education;

II. Quality and relevance in education

A. *Recommends* that UNESCO:

Policy, planning and management

30. Assist Member States, particularly those most challenged by the Jomtien goals, in carrying out needs assessments, educational policy analysis and reconstruction of their educational systems;

31. Provide support for developing a system of effective indicators for monitoring the performance and quality of education and the assessment of school achievement;

32. Assist Member States in the establishment or strengthening of computer-based educational management information systems through the training of the various categories of staff required to make the system function;

33. Provide support for the improvement of the environment, the efficiency and the effectiveness of the primary school, through improved management and the strengthening of its links with its local environment;

34. Improve national assessment systems by ensuring that they are competency-based, valid and reliable, and improve the training of in-service teachers in classroom diagnostic testing and formative and summative evaluation methods;

Curriculum and instructional materials development

35. Support national efforts to develop basic education curricula which strike a suitable balance between traditional core skills (language, mathematics and science) and what are termed 'life skills' e.g. leadership, problem-solving, values education, health, population, environment, technology, arts and crafts, traditional and modern social skills and civic and national education, and to revise these curricula periodically;

36. Assist in efforts to speed the production and improve the quality of textbooks and other instructional materials through training of curriculum specialists and teacher-authors in the techniques of desktop publishing (DTP),

37. Foster improved teaching and learning by attaching greater emphasis to problem-solving approaches and to helping students acquire strategies for 'learning how to learn' and for accessing information sources;

B. *Recommends* that the Arab States and UNESCO:

Educational research and innovation

38. Support the Educational Innovation Programme for Development in the Arab States (EIP-DAS) with particular emphasis on the following areas:

sector information management systems development;

pro- and in-service teacher education, particularly as regards the skills needed to be effective in pre-school programmes, classroom support of distance education, diagnosis of special learning needs and strategies to cater to them, environment, health and population education, multi-grade classes and using the classroom as a vehicle for teaching about tolerance and the acceptance of difference;

development of a prototype '4000 hour' curriculum (i.e. the first four years of schooling) containing a mix of 'core' and indispensable 'life skill' subjects;

production of instructional modules and training packages on such topics as classroom supervision, school management and the use of educational technology;

examination of promising educational strategies (content and methods) which promote associative attitudes towards work, the community and State, democracy, human rights, tolerance, peaceful resolution of conflicts, international understanding and highlighting the contribution which the Islamic faith and other divinely inspired religions can make to the definition and application of these concepts;

assessment of legislation and policy with respect to private (non-governmental) education, cost-sharing and structural adjustment policies in conformity with national policies and strategies;

C. *Recommends* that the Arab States:

Secondary education

39. Undertake a national consultation on the goals of secondary education with particular reference to the preparation of young people either for further studies or for the world of work;

40. Introduce curricular modifications together with an assessment mechanism which facilitates the transfer, in both directions, between secondary academic and technical programmes and institutions;

41. Develop national plans which reflect the need for the increased participation of girls in secondary education and for greater use of multi-channel strategies including the use of computer-based networking, radio instruction and correspondence;

42. Develop competency-based criteria to be applied to teacher recruitment and student entry and leaving qualifications;

Technical and vocational education

43. Consolidate links between general and technical and vocational education (TVE), and between TVE and the world of work through the greater diversification of TVE content and of the related delivery systems;

44. Ensure, in co-operation with business and industry, the mutual recognition of TVE qualifications in the region;

45. Promote the use of the print and electronic media to deliver TVE programmes to areas and populations where access is difficult;

46. Provide equal opportunities in TVE programmes for women and girls;

47. Derive benefit from the International Project on Technical and Vocational Education (UNEVOC) through the enhanced participation of the Arab States TVE Associated Centres and institutions;

D. *Recommends* that UNESCO:

Higher education

48. Urge the Arab States to encourage post-graduate study and further basic and applied research as well as 'future' studies;

49. Increase the level of resources available to the Arab region for the UNITWIN/UNESCO chairs programme;

50. Through UNITWIN networks and the UNESCO chairs programme, promote co-operation and co-ordination of efforts between authorities responsible for basic education and higher education institutions;
51. Encourage the diversification of national higher education structures and programmes, and the reinforcement of open-learning efforts through multi-channel strategies;
52. Assist Member States to achieve a better numerical balance between those enrolled in Arts and Humanities courses and those studying the Basic and Applied Sciences, and also between institutions located in or serving rural and urban areas;
53. Provide technical advice on setting up effective university extension programmes to enable universities to participate more effectively in community education;

Teachers

54. Support national teacher development plans by:
 - undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the full range of academic, pedagogical and managerial skills needed for a teacher to perform his/her tasks effectively, irrespective of the level and type of education;
 - adopting a competency-based approach to teacher education with an emphasis on improving diagnostic and pedagogical skills including those having particular relevance to the teaching of children with special needs;
 - drawing up staff development programmes designed to prepare teachers for work in remote and isolated postings;
 - providing teachers in designated areas with the necessary skills to enable them to teach both children and adults;
- E. *Recommends* that the Arab States:
 55. Give due recognition to the key role of teachers in the attainment of EFA goals by:
 - raising the level of teacher qualifications and setting the certification level at that of the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree;
 - participating actively in the definition of basic learning needs, content, appropriate instructional strategies, entrance profiles and classroom diagnostic, formative and summative evaluation methods and procedures;
 - providing a salary which reflects the level of their training, their professional experience and which provides them with a respectable livelihood and an attractive professional future;
 - providing teachers with proper professional support and guidance, as well as opportunities for upgrading their knowledge and skills;

devoting attention to the pre-service training, upgrading and in-service training of support staff within the school, educational guidance and counselling specialists, laboratory technicians, and management and services staff;

III. Co-operation for the development of education in the Arab region

A. *Recommends* that UNESCO support the efforts of Member States to:

National co-ordination and partnerships

56. Promote broad-based partnerships that involve local communities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in support of EFA, and in the renewal of educational objectives, plans and curricula in the context of the work of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century;

57. Strengthen co-operation among themselves and with the modern and traditional communication channels in support of EFA new curricula and innovations, and with regard to education for peace based on justice, democracy, human rights and international understanding, in a manner that is consonant with the socio-cultural specificities of the Arab region;

58. Enhance the role of various forms of education, including pre-school and out-of-school education, and develop physical environments suitable for life-long learning by making use of existing conventional and Quranic schools and other social and cultural centres and institutions such as the family and community;

B. *Recommends* that UNESCO:

Regional co-operation

59. Give further support to EIPDAS and ARABUPEAL to enable them to fulfil their objectives relating to the quantitative and qualitative improvement of basic education;

60. Further develop ARABUPEAL by establishing a suitably staffed Regional Co-ordinating Unit within UNEDBAS;

61. Reinforce the staff and budget of UNEDBAS and other field offices in the Arab region to enable them better to implement regional programmes;

62. Revise the mandate of the present Advisory Committee for ARABUPEAL to include both ARABUPEAL and EIPDAS in order to achieve greater efficiency in the planning and implementation of their respective activities and to reduce the cost involved in maintaining two advisory bodies;

63. Establish or strengthen national and regional mechanisms for the follow-up of the recommendations adopted by Regional Conferences of Ministers;

64. Continue supporting the existing co-operation between UNESCO and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and its Specialized Agencies, the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the UNICEF Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa, all of which play a fundamental role in the development of Arab education, especially in the fields of primary education, literacy and adult education;

C. *Recommends* that the Arab States:

65. Increase the level of their voluntary financial contributions to EIPDAS to enable it to respond to the requests of Member States;

66. Set up a special fund for ARABUPEAL to enable it to provide the necessary support to Member States in the fields of primary education, literacy and adult education;

67. Set up a special fund for the education of girls and women in the region with special emphasis on the needs of poor and rural women;

68. Examine the feasibility of the establishment of specialised regional centres in some of the priority areas of education of common interest (e.g. the development of curricula in the fields of mathematics, science, technology and language instruction as well as the development of distance education) distributed in various regions of the Arab States according to interest and the available means and supported by Arab and international organisations;

D. *Recommends* that UNESCO:

International co-operation

69. Seek financial support from the international community and from Member States to the programmes aiming at the reconstitution and development of the education system in Palestine, and reinforce the co-operative activities of UNRWA and UNESCO within and outside the occupied Arab territories, in the context of the Jomtien recommendations and in co-operation with UNICEF and the other sponsors of the World Conference on Education for All;

70. Intensify its co-operative efforts with other United Nations agencies and bilateral donors to support EFA programmes in the region, giving particular attention to countries with large populations, high illiteracy rates, social turmoil, and the least-developed countries;

71. Establish a mechanism which fosters co-operation and co-ordination between donors, Specialized Agencies and regional non-governmental organizations.