



Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All Guiding Principles, Specific Goals and Targets for 2015

Adopted by the Asia-Pacific Conference
on EFA 2000 Assessment
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Introduction

During the Asia-Pacific Conference on EFA 2000 Assessment, 17 to 20 January, 2000, the Regional Drafting Committee produced the Draft Outline of the Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All. The Draft Outline document drew on the following information:¹

- ▶ the Draft Dakar Framework for Action, Preliminary Discussion Document (5 November 1999);
- ▶ the Asia-Pacific Region Draft Synthesis Report;
- ▶ the four Sub-Regional Draft Synthesis Reports; and
- ▶ points raised during the Plenary sessions on 17 and 20 January and the Sub-Regional Meetings on 18 and 19 January, 2000.

On the final day of the Conference, all delegates received a copy of the Draft Outline of the Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All and were asked to make further suggestions and comments. In subsequent weeks, the Regional Technical Advisory Group's Secretariat received forty-three submissions from Education Ministries, United Nations Agencies and non-governmental organizations throughout the region. All of the submissions were considered when constructing this document; many suggestions have been simply incorporated into the Draft Outline, while other comments have been listed in the Appendix, Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action - Additional Concerns.

I. Preamble

Education is a fundamental human right of all people – of value in and of itself, for improving the quality of life, and as an essential part of social and human development. The provision of basic education, whether it be formally or non-formally delivered, is a core responsibility of the state with active and genuine collaboration of parents, communities, and civil society. All people, especially those most disadvantaged and excluded,² must be guaranteed access to a basic education of decent quality.

II. The gains

- Increase in primary school enrolment
- Expansion of early childhood care and education programmes
- Higher priority given to quality

1. Some delegates suggested that ten years may be a better timeframe for assessment, rather than the fifteen years suggested in the Draft Dakar Framework for Action.

2. For the purpose of this document, excluded groups include the poor, ethnic minority groups, remote populations, the displaced, people affected by civil unrest or emergency, child workers and people with disabilities, whether they be physical, intellectual or emotional.

- Increase in functional adult literacy
- Improvement in educational management information systems
- Increase in national budgets for basic education
- Effective use of existing resources
- Increase in 'international' assistance to basic education
- Increase in the number of legislative measures, campaigns, projects and reforms in basic education
- More innovative initiatives in basic education
- More partnership between the private sector and civil society

III. The challenges³

- Growing disparities within countries, particularly a persistent urban/rural gap
- Persistent gender gap against girls, especially in South Asia
- Relative lack of emphasis on alternative, non-formal approaches to basic education and lack of interest in workplace education⁴
- While much emphasis is placed on getting children into school, not enough attention is paid to the retention rate nor to the completion of schooling
- Urban bias of early childhood programmes
- Continuing shortfalls in national education budgets, especially for countries in economic crisis and in transition, and in relation to school-age population growth
- Continuing shortfalls in international resources for basic education
- Weakness in identifying, refining, and expanding best practices in basic education
- Difficulty in re-casting curricula to address the new risks and challenges facing youth in the region
- Inability to implement the required management reforms for the education systems of countries in transition
- Lack of broad participation of communities and local leadership in management and delivery of education
- Lack of reliable data and statistics
- Increasing the visibility of people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups
- Disruption or cessation of basic education provisions, facilities and support as a result of national or sub-national armed conflict or emergency
- Lack of capacity to assess educational problems and contributing factors
- Limited testing, assessment and evaluation processes for learning often isolated from previous learning experiences

3. The point was raised that the challenges be ordered according to importance, though of course this is entirely subjective.

4. Some delegates suggested that this sentence be rephrased in a more positive way, expanded on (see Appendix, par. III) and be included as a Strategic Objective, rather than as a challenge.

- The (still) large number of illiterates in the region and the challenge of delivering meaningful and relevant literacy programmes to people living in different social, economic and political circumstances
- Inadequate means of assessing learning performance and achievement
- Disparities between big countries and small island states

IV. Regional objectives and strategies

A. Goals

1. Early childhood care and education (ECCE)⁵

At all stages of life, children should be provided with quality, comprehensive, integrated care and education. Child-centred, family-focused, community-based, holistic care and education of pre-school children is essential for securing the well-being and rights of all children, and should be supported by national policies and sufficient funds. This should be the result of synergistic partnership among families, communities, civil society, NGOs and the government.

ECCE programmes, whether they be family or community based, or linked to schools or learning centres, must focus on caring for and educating the whole child, from birth to school entry. These programmes must promote the child's optimum physical, psycho-social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development in ways that are culturally and socially relevant.

Investments in capacity-building to improve the quality of care and education through the diverse programme options and services for young children and families are critical. Improved data-gathering and analysis of both programme access and quality indicators, regular monitoring of programme implementation and regulatory frameworks linked to both local and national systems are essential.

ECCE programmes should remain flexible and adaptable to the needs of pre-school children and not become mere extensions of formal school systems. In addition, they should be developmentally appropriate and responsive to the needs and interests of children, and should be firmly anchored on the family and community as the child's primary caring and learning environment.

5. Some participants mentioned that Early Childhood Care and Development was a more appropriate term.

2. Universal basic education

All must have the opportunity to receive a basic education of good quality that focuses on the 'whole' person, including health, nutrition and cognitive and psycho-social development.⁶ In order for this to happen, education systems must be able to adapt to the individual needs of child, youth and adult learners, by incorporating formal and non-formal approaches and programmes within an integrated and inclusive system of basic education.

A strong and serious commitment must be made to include the excluded. Clearer analyses must be made of reasons for exclusion, including issues such as language of instruction, and there must be more innovative approaches made to address these reasons.

Greater, more explicit focus and commitment must be given to the identification of unreached children who are not in school and to the promotion of innovative and varied approaches by government and NGOs to meet their diverse educational needs.

There is a need to improve demand as well as increase supply through the closer collaboration and genuine involvement of parents, communities and the private sector in education.

There is also a need to mitigate the direct and indirect costs of basic education, especially for the disadvantaged. In order to achieve universal basic education, systems must become more internally and externally efficient, and focus more sharply on retaining children in school.

3. Basic learning and skills programmes⁷

There have been impressive gains in children's, youth and adult literacy in the region, especially for girls and women. These, nonetheless, remain fragile and need constant re-inforcement and recommitment.

Conflict, violence, social injustice and other risks affect the lives of people in almost every country in the region. Basic education must focus increasingly on developing skills and capacities for life and work in a rapidly changing world. Values and cultural identity and their preservation must continue to find a prominent place in all learning programmes and teaching practices.

6. A point of contention was whether a 'good' education could be quantified and how many years constituted a 'good' education. Bangladesh suggested that good quality should include at least eight years of education, whereas the Maldives want ten. Other countries, for example the Lao People's Democratic Republic, did not agree to this and felt it should be left to the country to decide what constituted a 'good' education. It really depended on country-specific goals and the level of development in the country.

7. Other titles – 'Linking Literacy and Skills Programmes' and 'Adult Literacy and Skills Programmes' – were suggested.

So, too, basic literacy and numeracy skills must be developed in the context of relevant life skills – whether these be work-related or address any of the risks increasingly confronting children, youth and adults. Such programmes should adopt participatory, age-appropriate, culturally sensitive and integrated approaches to peace education and conflict resolution, gender relations, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS education.

There is also a need to integrate functional education into equivalency programmes to provide opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults to gain access to relevant and meaningful learning programmes leading to educational certification.

4. Learning achievement⁸

Improvement in the quality of education is critical to economic and social development, and is therefore a national imperative. Approaches to improving the quality of education require adoption of curriculum content and processes that are learner centred, recognize the diversity of learning needs and stages of cognitive, social and emotional development, and develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for independent learning and problem-solving. Improving the quality of education also requires access to appropriate learning resources. Assessment strategies at all levels should reflect such changing emphases, especially the focus on learning how to learn, and include appropriately diverse, continuous and responsive assessment strategies. Training of teachers and educational managers is required to support curriculum reforms and should include modalities which strengthen teacher monitoring and support mechanisms which ensure continuity of reform.

5. Education of women and girls and the elimination of gender disparities

It is essential to eliminate systemic gender disparities, where they persist, amongst girls and boys throughout the education system – in enrolment, achievement and completion; in teacher training and career development; in curriculum, and learning practices and learning processes. This requires better appreciation of the role of education as an instrument of women's equality and empowerment.

Furthermore, specific measures should be taken to ensure the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all educational processes.

⁸ Other titles – 'Quality of Learning' or 'Learning Achievement and Quality of Education' – were proposed.

Where possible, also, specific programmes, both formal and non-formal in approach, should be developed to target the increased enrolment, retention and completion of education by girls and women.

6. Literacy and continuing education⁹

Via the support of literacy campaigns, the goal of universal literacy should be aspired to in the next decade.

7. Life skills and values: education for peace and global understanding¹⁰

The education system should strive to address issues of peace, order and socio-political cohesion. Whether school-based or delivered non-formally, basic learning tools should increase the capacities of learners to deal with issues of day-to-day survival, to resolve community conflict and to enjoy human, political and civil rights to a greater extent.

B. Strategic objectives

1. Investment and resource mobilization

Lack of resources is often a matter of political will, both within national governments and among international funding agencies. Both must continue to increase the absolute and relative size of their budgets devoted to basic education (without sacrificing needed resources for higher levels of education) and to push for more rapid debt relief and new funding mechanisms to complement existing resources directed towards education and health, if necessary through the transfer of budget allocation from the defense sector. Money saved through increased efficiency must continue to be reinvested in education systems and not subtracted from the overall allocation for education.

Special attention and support should be given to the most-excluded and least-accessible people in each country, and those suffering the consequences of armed conflict, civil displacement and natural disasters. The needs of these people should be continually reassessed and the necessary actions defined and taken.

In addition, education policy-making must assume a more central position in public policy dialogue and decision-making. There must be greater recognition of the interconnectedness of public policy issues so that the effects of actions taken in one sector on other sectors are clearly understood. This implies a need for more integrated processes and governmental mechanisms for public policy-

⁹ This additional goal was suggested.

¹⁰ This additional goal was suggested.

planning and a balancing of the influence of Treasury and Finance ministries with the advice of Ministries of Education, Health, Social Welfare, Labour and Regional Development.

2. New opportunities for civil society

The need to broaden the way education is conceptualized, implemented and evaluated requires the greater involvement of NGOs, the media, the private sector and other civil society stakeholders – including families and children – at all levels and all stages of education programme development.

To reach EFA goals, we must ensure that genuine decision-making responsibilities are shared among all elements of society. The strong trend toward decentralization has important implications in terms of the provision of adequate support from the centre and the transfer of both responsibility and decision-making authority to all levels in the administrative hierarchy. The latter requires both a more localized EMIS and stronger management training at lower levels of the system.

More effective collaboration and equal partnership between governments and NGOs must be encouraged. A commitment has already been made between NGOs and governments in the region to create new opportunities for genuine engagement and dialogue, bringing to the partnership strength in innovation, participatory processes, critical analysis, social mobilization, and school-community partnerships – but not at the risk of ‘user pay’ scenarios, polarized education systems and the increased exclusion of disadvantaged children.

3. Education and poverty elimination

Attempts must be made to ensure stronger linkages between education policies and programmes, poverty alleviation strategies and public policy-making. A strong focus must be placed on more and better education for excluded groups, culturally appropriate and cognitively stimulating early-childhood care, and education for girls and women, as well as education for life skills and employment.

In addition, the EFA process at all levels must be made barrier-free in attitudinal, informational and physical terms so that people with disabilities and socially disadvantaged groups can participate meaningfully in EFA activities.

Decentralized micro-planning and delivery with people’s participation may be utilized on a wider scale for provision of basic education to unserved and underserved populations. NGOs working for the underprivileged should receive support and assistance on a sustainable basis.

4. Equitable harnessing of new technologies

The information and telecommunication technologies of the twenty-first century offer new ways of managing the educational processes as well as delivering particular programmes. The ability to access and analyse data and information about formal and non-formal education, and about the community context in which education takes place, encourages better decision-making at local levels. At other levels, policy decisions about technology can be taken to enhance equity and reduce disparities between groups within society at large.

Such technologies can also help to deliver learning programmes at adult and professional levels, such as teacher education through distance education. Further study may be required to see where such technologies are cost-effective in serving the learning needs of children, youth and adults more widely.

In many parts of the region, learning is increasingly taking place in an informal, media-based context. This wealth of information resources must be accessible by **all**, and the growing disparity between rich and poor, and the urban/rural divide in terms of access to technology must be taken into account when policies about technology are formulated. In addition, these information resources must be accessible in an equitable and structured way to ensure overall improvement in learning achievement. Information resources should in particular be accessible to people with sensory impairments and in a format that permits ready assimilation of content. Further, the deployment of technology in basic education should be done in a culturally sensitive manner.

Governments must promote popular access to relevant media and technology systems, and incorporate media and technology as both a learning tool and as an interface for the expansion of information dissemination critical to better management.

5. Enabling teachers and learning facilitators

Public perceptions of teachers and teaching must be enhanced; incentives to identify, attract and retain good teachers must be provided; for example, policies should be in place to protect teachers’ salaries, rights and welfare. In addition, strong and ongoing teacher, supervisor and manager support and professional development services, at the level of the school and classroom, must be introduced. Teachers themselves must be more genuinely involved in decisions that affect their work. Adequate time and investment must be given to re-train the existing teacher workforce and to reform pre- and in-service training.

The role of teachers and learning is changing in the new decade and is crucial in the fulfilment of the goals of Education for All. New contexts — including new challenges — in which teachers and their learners operate must be clearly understood. Above all, teachers must be able to make learning environments more inclusive and welcoming to children — healthier, more effective and more nurturing.

Adequate learning materials, textbooks, teaching aids and supplemental readers are critical to educating all children. They should reflect learning outcomes and the time available for instruction in the classroom. Values and subject content should be gender-fair and reflective of acceptance of diversity and cultural differences. Policy should foster the development and adaptation of learning experiences and materials to ensure social and cultural relevance for learners.

6. Education management reform¹¹

Increased emphasis on decentralization of education management should be accompanied by the development of enhanced and comprehensive EMISs that provide timely, relevant, accurate and valid information for local decision-making. Locally relevant indicators compatible with national standards and curriculum frameworks, and that cover quantitative and qualitative aspects of learning, must be developed and monitored. The accountability of the school system to learners themselves, to parents and to communities should be emphasized.

Effective decentralization also requires extensive training of school leaders and local managers, both at the institutional level and in district and provincial offices. Decentralization of authority and responsibility that is supported by improved EMISs and management training will lead to greater accountability and transparency in the allocation and utilization of resources. At the central level, enhancement of EMISs will increase the capacity of policy-makers to model the effects of proposed policy reforms as a basis for policy dialogue aimed at identifying optimal linkages between resource inputs and education outputs.

In addition, mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that managers and policy-makers have access to the latest information and research in the field of education.

7. Integration of development activities

Partnership between government, non-government and donors/non-government organizations should encompass policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

¹¹ It was suggested that Strategic Objective 6 be expanded to cover not only EMIS, but other aspects of education management, for example, reforms in general systems of management and institutional management and delivery systems.

8. Exchange of information, experience and innovations

With the increasing availability of communication technologies in the region, governments and all stakeholders must promote an equitable exchange of information and experiences about educational innovations that have been, and continue to be, successfully developed by countries and communities in the region. This exchange should cover a wide range of educational dimensions: policy reform, planning and management, resource mobilization, curriculum, teacher training, measurement and evaluation, community participation and linkages between education and poverty alleviation. As a means of exchanging information and experiences, subregional resource centres could be set up in each country.

Appendix

Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Additional concerns

I. Comments were received about the language of the Draft Framework for Action. These comments highlighted the need for stronger and more action-oriented language. Feedback received on the Draft Framework for Action pointed out that it failed to offer mechanisms for translating the vision into reality, it did not outline the new commitments from the partner agencies UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO and the World Bank, and nor did it propose new directions for the future. Some went further, urging that a statement, acknowledging that some of the commitments and promises made at Jomtien were not achieved, be added to the Dakar Framework for Action.

II. Continuing education for lifelong learning was highlighted by a number of participants, notably APPEAL, as being an important goal if a society is to truly become a learning society. After the completion of basic literacy, it was recommended that post-literacy and continuing education be provided in order to sustain and expand literacy skills.

III. Emphasis must be placed on continuing education for the newly literate and on including in this continuing education the means of achieving scientific and technological literacy.

IV. Scientific and technological illiteracy was highlighted as a concern in the region, as well as the need for adequate teacher training in science and technology.

V. Non-formal education should be developed in quality, comparable with the formal education sector, leading to the establishment of an equivalency programme. Furthermore, non-formal education should be given institutional shape.

VI. Much debate was centred on the meaning and concept of 'quality education'. A suggestion was made that the EFA Forum promote measures and indicators of quality that are common to both formal and non-formal modalities of learning, focusing on competencies, aptitudes and functionality of the things learners learn and how they can apply them to their day-to-day existence.

VII. Although many argued for basic education to cater to the needs of disabled people, the fact remains that data on the educational experiences of disabled people remain difficult to access. One way of rectifying this situation could be to include the issue of disability as an indicator in all future country assessments.

VIII. Children's participation in the Education for All process should be encouraged, considering that childhood is the time when most people begin formal basic education.

IX. Care must be taken, however, not to place too much emphasis on child learners at the expense of adult learners. Learning is a lifelong process, and the language of the Dakar Framework for Action must be inclusive of all learners, whether young or old. Likewise, care should be exercised with official EFA documents, pronouncements and pictures, so as not to convey the false impression that EFA is only about children.

X. Attention must be given to the learning needs of adolescents.

XI. The Dakar Declaration must state in very clear terms whether secondary education will form part of basic education that should be universalized.

XII. Aside from the concern for access of those not in school, a concern for quality, relevance and content of basic education for those already in school was also expressed. It was felt that a fundamental re-examination of the curriculum and content of all forms of basic education was called for to meet the learning needs of a more complex and interconnected society in the future.

XIII. The structural reform of a country's basic education system could be viewed as an economic and effective way of meeting that country's EFA objectives. Consideration of structural reform is particularly pertinent in those countries where the projected rate of growth of the school-age population over the next ten years far exceeds any reasonable expectation concerning the rate of growth of public expenditure on basic education. Many countries would, understandably, be reluctant to attempt to meet the implied funding gap over the next decade by taking up further education loans from either the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank because of the additional burden it placed on their capacity to service such foreign debt. ■