Education 2030

ARAB REGION
OUTCOME STATEMENT

Towards inclusive and equitable quality learning opportunities for all

November 2018

I. Introduction

A region of renowned civilizations and contribution to humanity, the Arab Region has become one of paradoxes: Young, highly educated, dynamic, well-endowed nations, on the one hand, and multiple protracted armed conflicts, high level of youth unemployment, volatile and vulnerable state of existence, extreme inequalities and disparities, on the other.

While the region indeed made tremendous achievements, many countries in the region have unfortunately seen their developmental gains significantly reversed primarily due to the protracted nature of conflict, while others struggle to improve the quality of education and achieve nationally set goals.

Available evidence shows that national education systems are struggling to deliver the outcomes needed for individual, economic and societal development. Indeed, children, youth and adults in the Arab Region are facing unprecedented challenges in terms of learning, employment, and social cohesion. For instance:

- 22 million Arab children are still out of school or at risk of dropping out. This is coupled with a growing number of youths in the region who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). NEET accounts for up to 45% in some countries.

- The quality of education is deteriorating. For example, results in the 2015 TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) for grade-8 mathematics indicate that while some countries have shown improvement as compared to 2011 results, six out of the bottom eight countries surveyed are in the Arab region, six have a mean score lower than 500, which is the global center point, and the remaining two score below 400. The gaps between the top achievers and those at the bottom are also more pronounced in the Arab Region as compared to other regions.

- The number of adults possessing low level of literacy skills is relatively high in the region (more than 50 million adults) and appears to be on the rise particularly in crisis-affected countries. This is exasperated by structural challenges, such as lack of vision of lifelong and life wide learning, and of comprehensive legal and policy frameworks, insufficient financial investment, and poor quality of educators and programmes.

- In most Arab countries, the expansion of educational opportunities has yet to translate into economic growth. The average rate of youth unemployment in the Arab region is the highest in the world, reaching 30%, which is more than double of the world average. This comes together with a severe skills mismatch with inverse correlation between education and employment resulting in low return on education. An additional year of schooling adds around 5.4 per cent to earning compared to the world average of 7 per cent.

- This is compounded by a value deficit with the erosion of social cohesion and increasing incidence of violence and conflict that is detriment to this region. This is evident in some countries where adolescents and youth are being exposed to violence and instability leading to staggering consequences: More than 70% of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence lived in the Arab region.

Responding to significant challenges, countries in the region are undergoing continuous education and public sector reforms leading to positive achievements during the Education for All (EFA) era with continuous efforts exerted thereafter.

II. Perspectives and priorities

Cognizant of the above, we, Ministries of Education in the Arab Region, whole-heartedly embraced Education 2030 Agenda as the prime opportunity to transform our national education systems into one of resilience and to contribute to the realization of our national development goals and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development as a whole.

Given the diversity and uniqueness of the region, it is extremely challenging to advance on the region-specific education agenda. Nevertheless, evidence points to three broad-based issues and priorities of common concern, as follows:

1. *Migration, displacement and education*

Ensuring access to safe and conducive learning environments at all levels, providing opportunities to gain life-saving and -enhancing knowledge and skills, supporting teachers and educators, and building resilient education systems

The most significant challenge to progress in the majority of countries in the region is armed conflict which results in millions of forcibly displaced populations and which in turn exacerbates inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization. The devastating impact of crisis puts pressures on conflict-affected and host governments and communities to ensure provision of access to quality education at all levels, including higher education, to internally displaced persons and refugee communities, including girl and female learners and those with special needs. At the same time, the region has seen large-scale movements of people, particularly younger populations, in search of better opportunities both within their countries and beyond. Available evidence shows that the more educated they are, the more likely they move and that immigrants and migrants encounter challenges in the access to education and continuation of learning.

Of critical policy and programmatic issues are: provision of policy and legal frameworks; continued support to basic education; role of non-formal and informal education for certified alternative and diverse learning pathways; recognition of prior learning; support for different languages of instruction; preparedness and competences of teachers and education personnel; quality data management; expansion of relevant learning opportunities in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education; and inter-sectoral collaboration, principally with child protection, health and nutrition (i.e. school feeding). These issues cross national borders and thus require regionally and mutually supportive strategies and partnerships to address them in the context of strengthening the humanitarian and development nexus.

2. *Quality and relevance of education*

Ensuring coherent, holistic, systematic and sector-wide approaches to addressing the dimensions of quality and relevance in education

Quality and relevance at all levels and alternative forms of learning are central to the Education 2030 Agenda and have long been the priority of all countries in the region. Nevertheless, an analysis of international large-scale assessment (TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS) and national examinations show low and, in some instances, further declining performance, while the difficulty in the transition to the world of work in the region results in high youth unemployment and skill mismatch. At the same time, education systems in the Arab region have traditionally been focused on schooling rather than learning, without really focusing on skills acquisition. Moreover, while important tensions between quality and equity are prevailing in many education systems, additional challenges to balancing quality, equity and accountability have occurred over the last decade following the Arab spring movements in several countries.

Regardless of the state of development in the region, there are numerous challenges to this effect both at system level (policy, planning, monitoring and evaluation) and content (curriculum, teaching, and learning) levels. This requires a transformation of the education system in terms of what we learn and how we learn, and the promotion of open and flexible learning systems that put skills for life and work at the core of the 21st century learning agenda.

Of particular significance is the critical need of the alignment of curriculum, teachers and learning assessment that brings about both pedagogical and socio-economic advantages. The alignment furthers both system cohesiveness and cost-effectiveness and serves as a lever of integrating Education 2030 commitments and dimensions into the curriculum to enhance learning quality, especially with regard to skills development, Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and sustainable development, gender equality, peace, and intercultural understanding.

3. *Financing of education:*

Increasing, optimizing use of, and accounting for, investment in education

All countries in the region have traditionally prioritized investment in education. The Gulf countries have recently become very important education donors in the region and beyond. Nevertheless, in recent times, the level of domestic spending in expenditures has plummeted in many countries because of such reasons as armed conflict, structural adjustment. In other countries, while there is high level of investment in education, it does not necessarily result in student achievement. In addition, many countries, including refugee-hosting countries, are highly dependent on external aid, which makes them highly susceptible to external shocks, and unexpected events, and which gravely compromise educational development. Furthermore, the education sector remains severely underfunded particularly to respond to the educational needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized in the region, including forcibly displaced populations.

Therefore, it is critical for countries to prioritize education expenditure, unify services provided by different organizations and strengthen national capacity in planning, managing, and accounting for resources through establishing a system like National Education Accounts, making use of a tool like projection and simulation model and further cultivating the public-private partnerships for innovative financing. At the same time, there is a need to ensure harmonization between the humanitarian and development funding.

III. Commitments and actions

In order to collectively address the above three inter-linked priorities and agree on actions, we adopted two-pronged approach:

1. *Biennial Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (AR-MED)*

Since 2015, we have gathered three times and adopted successive Roadmaps in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2015; Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in March 2017; and Dead Sea, Jordan, in November 2018, to discuss national and regional policy and programmatic priorities and agree on how best to operationalize and integrate national commitments to the Agenda at the national level. The Roadmaps focus on five pillars of action, namely Advocacy and Communication, Policy and Planning, Monitoring, Reporting and Financing, and Country Support.

2. *Inter-governmental regional, sub-regional and national policy and technical forum*

We have contributed to, and benefitted from, opportunities of mutual learning in order to deliberate on concrete issues and challenges related to the SDG4 Targets, learn from innovative and promising practices and reaffirm our commitment to taking further actions, in the following areas:
- Rethinking education in the Arab World through lifelong and life-wide perspectives
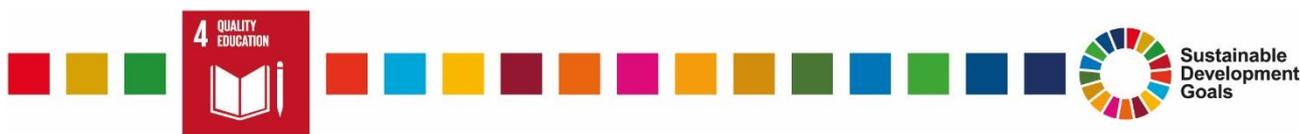
- Managing education response to crisis
- Aligning curriculum, assessment and teacher professional development for quality learning
- Revisiting policy and legal frameworks, such as the Arab regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education
- Expanding learning opportunities in higher education institutions in crisis situations
- Promoting literacy and non-formal education
- Implementing education for sustainable development in learning cities
- Ensuring inclusion for all, with particular attention to crisis-affected children and youth
- Improving the curricula contents by integrating concepts and practice of sustainable development and life skills for learning, employability, personal empowerment and active citizenship
- Enhancing the protection-nutrition-education nexus through school feeding
- Strengthening national education systems and capacity in planning, cost and financing of education, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on Education 2030 thematic indicators framework

To support country-led actions and the aforementioned Roadmaps in a coordinated manner and promote regional cooperation and collaboration, *Arab Regional Support Group for Education 2030* was constituted in July 2016 and has since supported a number of regional, sub-regional and national initiatives to address regional issues of common concern and provide coordinated, coherent support at all levels. The Group maintains a very strong connection with the Arab regional representation at SDG-Education 2030 Global Steering Committee to ensure and enhance the national-regional-global- nexus.

Recognizing that education is a fundamental human right and reiterating that Education 2030 agenda is inextricably linked with, and contributes to, the realization of our aspirations as set out in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, we, Ministries of Education in the Arab region, together with the Arab Regional Support Group for Education 2030, resolutely reaffirm our collective commitment to continuing to take decisive actions to make progress towards realizing the goal of Education 2030 Agenda.

Our actions for the 2019-2020 period will be guided by Dead Sea Roadmap agreed to in the Third Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (AR-MED III, Dead Sea, Jordan, November 2018) and outcome statements and declarations issued at various policy and technical forum held in 2017 and 2018, as annexed. For North Africa, as Member States of the African Union, we equally uphold our commitments to the Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education.

Annex I: Dead Sea Roadmap for 2019-2020 – Draft: Third Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (Dead Sea, Jordan, November 2018)

Annex II: Joint Statement - Regional Technical Meeting on the Alignment of Curriculum, Learning Assessment and Teachers: Third Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (Dead Sea, Jordan, November 2018)

Annex III: Tunis Declaration on the Centrality of School Feeding for Education, Inclusive Development and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa Region (Tunis, Tunisia, October 2018)

Annex IV: Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education: Bridging continental and global education frameworks for the Africa We Want (Nairobi, Kenya, April 2018)

Annex V: Action Plans and Way Forward: Implementing Education for Sustainable Development in Learning Cities (Aswan, Egypt, March 2018)

Annex VI: Declaration: Rethinking Education in the Arab Region (Arabic) (Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, December 2017)

Annex VII: Recommendations: Capacity development on the thematic indicators (Muscat, Oman, December 2017)

Annex VIII: Partnership Framework and Actions: Life Skills and Citizenship Education (November 2017)

Annex IX: Outcome Statement: GCED Networking Meeting (Luxor, Egypt, November 2017)

Annex X: Sharm El Sheikh Statement: Higher Education in Crisis Situations in the Arab States (Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, March 2017)