Third Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (AR-MED III)

Aligning Curriculum, Teachers and Learning Assessment to Reach SDG4\(^1\) Targets in Arab Countries

Dead Sea – Jordan, 4-7 November 2018

4-6 November 2018: Technical workshop
6-7 November 2018: Meeting of SDG4 coordinators

Concept Note

Beirut, Oct. 2018

\(^1\) Sustainable Development Goal #4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
A. Context and Rationale

The international community entrusted UNESCO to coordinate the monitoring and implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (henceforth referred to as SDG4), i.e. the Education component of the international 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

SDG4 addresses seven main targets related to educational quality and equity, including quality education for all learners across the education ladder in both formal and non-formal education; skills development for life and work; and Global citizenship for sustainability. It emphasizes three major means of implementation, namely:

- a. Safe and inclusive environments;
- b. Scholarships for higher education; and
- c. Teachers’ training and working conditions.

In coordination with Regional partners, UNESCO Office in Beirut (henceforth referred to as UBO) led the articulation of regional educational issues and challenges, as well as priorities for post-EFA agenda, which led to development and adoption of the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) in 2015. In order to provide a coherent, coordinated support to countries in the Arab Region, UBO established also the Arab Regional Support Group in 2016, comprising 21 organizations (see list attached). Chaired by RCEP for the 2018-2019 period, the Group aims at coordinating and sustaining multi-stakeholder partnership engagement by mobilizing commitment for the new education Agenda in the context of implementing the Arab Regional Roadmap adopted every two years during the Arab Regional Meetings on Education 2030.2

At country level, Arab States have created national focal points for SDG4 who meet regularly to exchange on achievements and promising practices, as well as on needs for policy dialogue and capacity development, information sharing and enhanced coordination and monitoring at both national and Regional levels.

As “Teachers” have been identified as a priority for both the international and Regional Education 2030 Agenda, UBO in cooperation with partners (Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education/MEHE and Teacher Education Research Group/TERG) conducted a two-day Regional SDG4 – Teacher Professional Development (TPD) conference. The high-level event focused on “Quality and Innovation in Teacher Professional Development: Issues and Challenges” (14-15 December 2017, Beirut). Arab country representatives and teacher specialists attending the conference emphasized the need of enhancing coordination among different educational components, such as curriculum, teaching practices and assessment as an important policy lever leading towards improving the overall quality of educational processes and outcomes3.

Participants in Regional and national SDG4 meetings have equally expressed requests for enhanced policy dialogue on key issues related to SDG4 targets in conjunction with providing technical support to Arab States to implement and monitor SDG4 indicators in a coherent and effective manner.

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2 The first regional meeting was held in Cairo in December 2015, while the second, together with RCEP, in March 2018, both of which adopted Cairo and Dubai Roadmaps, respectively, to define and work on how best to integrate national and partners commitments into operationalization of Education 2030 agenda at the national level and regional level.

Under the auspice of the aforementioned Arab Regional Support Group, UBO and partners consequently envisaged organizing a first Regional SDG4 meeting on the issue of alignment among curriculum, teachers and assessment as key dimensions in reaching quality SDG4 outcomes. The meeting will allow addressing SDG4 issues in a tangible manner by considering the specific context of Arab States, including the effects of different protracted crises in the Region necessitating adequate response strategies and corresponding actions with regard to curriculum/learning, teachers and assessment.

The meeting, held under the high patronage of H.E. Dr. Azmi Mahmoud Mahafaza, Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Jordan, constitutes the third Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (AR-MED III) encompassing two different, yet related, activities:

1. Technical workshop on aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment (4-6 November 2018); and
2. Meeting of SDG4 national coordinators (6-7 November 2018).

B. AR-MED III meeting scope and objectives

Why focusing on the issue of aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment?

The lack of alignment among curriculum, teachers and assessment has been raised in many international and regional meetings, as well as in studies on learning outcomes, such as the TIMSS and PISA reports. While countries, including Arab States, dedicate increased efforts to better aligning the learning content, objectives and approaches (curricula) with teaching practices and assessment procedures, lack of alignment still persists as a major hindrance towards enhancing the quality of learning outcomes for all.

Lack of alignment may consist in the existence of separate agencies at national levels who do not work together effectively in setting a forward-thinking shared education vision and then translating it into appropriate actions based on meaningful implementation processes. It may be also found at school and classroom levels in the context of national tests/exams that are not aligned with the curriculum; or in the way teachers work in silos without coordinating among different subjects and without considering cross-cutting issues in learning.

Alignment among curriculum, teachers and assessment may bring about more coherence at both national and school levels, which is a prerequisite of setting the education vision and preparing its sound translation into practice through consistent action plans. Only based on such alignment educational goals and learning objectives can be formulated and monitored in a consistent way, without expected learning outcomes being contradicted by inappropriate assessment strategies. The formulation and development of key learner competencies needs to be based on such alignment in the absence of which education systems risk being faced with imbalance in acquiring and developing relevant and updated knowledge; useful skills; and appropriate attitudes, all underpinned by shared educational values.

Needless to say, the ultimate goal of well-aligned system of curriculum, teachers and assessment at all levels of education is that children and young people receive quality and relevant education and acquire the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills needed for life and work, which is central to SDG4-Education 2030. For this to happen in a systematic manner, collecting, analyzing and interpreting evidence in the teaching and learning process is crucial to informing policy development/revision and planning, monitoring and evaluation of national education system through its the transformational process.
As shown in previous Regional meetings (such as AR-MED I, and AR-MED II), SDG4 indicators related to assessment (4.1.1), teachers (4.C.1) and Global Citizenship/Sustainable Development Education (4.7) are particularly challenging for Arab countries. AR-MED III meeting will tackle consequently the connections between education quality and such SDG4 indicators by addressing short- and longer-term country needs with regard to capacity development for monitoring and evaluation of, and reporting on SDG4 processes, achievements and challenges.

**AR-MED III meeting overall goal**

In the light of the above, and with a view of mainstreaming SDG4 Agenda through sound policy shaping/making and capacity development, the present AR-MED III meeting aims at advocating the issue of aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment as a means of supporting the implementation and monitoring of SDG4 targets in the Arab countries.

**Specific objectives**

1. **Objectives of the technical meeting**

   Based on building on the achievements and outcomes of previous meetings, including the aforementioned SDG4-TPD conference of last December, the workshop aims to:
   - Contribute to clarifying the issue, and advocating the importance of alignment among curriculum, teachers and assessment as an important policy lever in reaching SDG4 targets and thus enhancing overall education quality in the light of Education 2030 Agenda;
   - Sharing promising practices in aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment in the Arab countries and internationally;
   - Identifying issues that hinder alignment among curriculum, teachers and assessment, as well as way of addressing and overcoming problems;
   - Developing action plans at national and Regional levels to enhancing alignment among curriculum, teachers and assessment with a view of reaching SDG4 targets.

2. **Objectives of the SDG4 coordinators meeting**

   Based on building on the achievements and outcomes of previous SDG4 partners meetings, the present meeting aims to:
   - Review SDG4 Dubai Road Map of March 2017 implementation at national level;
   - Share promising practices with regard to advocacy for, policy dialogue on, capacity development with regard to, and monitoring of SDG4 targets;
   - Identify joint priority actions in support of better implementing and monitoring SDG4 targets in the Arab states;
   - Develop follow up plans at different levels based on the contributions of the Arab Regional Support Group, and the work of national SDG4 focal points;
   - Discuss the Regional preparation of the Global Education Meeting (Dec. 2018), as well as of the 2019 High-Level Political Forum on Agenda 2030 (July 2019).
C. Expected outcomes

1. Expected outcomes of the technical workshop

By the end of the three-day technical workshop, the following expected outcomes are envisaged:

- Shared understanding of what alignment of curriculum, teachers and learning assessment implies; and why it is important for reaching SDG4 targets;
- Arab country reports on the alignment issue shared focusing on achievements; challenges/gaps; and lessons learned;
- Inventory of promising practices in aligning curriculum, teachers and learning assessment through both policy interventions and school/classroom-based practices based on meaningful dialogue between top down and bottom up initiatives;
- (Draft) Action plans for follow up at different levels focusing on priority issues/solutions with regard to aligning curriculum, teachers and learning assessment; as well as support needed from Arab Regional support Group and other partners;
- Joint Statement with regard to Arab countries commitment to enhancing alignment of curriculum, teachers and learning assessment as an important lever in reaching SDG4 targets and thus contributing to enhancing overall educational quality in the light of Education 2030 Agenda.

2. Expected outcomes of the SDG4 coordinators’ meeting

By the end of the meeting of SDG4 coordinators, the following outcomes are expected:

- Updated overview of SDG4 implementation and monitoring issues in the Arab States (i.e. achievements, challenges/gaps; and needs for support);
- Collection of promising practices from the Arab states to be disseminated via the UBO SDG4 platform;
- Joint actions identified with regard to enhancing implementation and monitoring of SDG4 in the Arab States in the light of the Dubai Road Map; and
- Follow up plans developed to update/review the Arab Regional SDG4 Roadmap, including by disseminating the outcomes of the present workshop at national and Regional levels;
- Overview of Regional preparedness for the Global events on Agenda 2030 in 2018 and 2019.

D. Topics to be addressed

- Relevance of SDG4 targets for the Arab States;
- International and Regional trends with regard to aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment: what can we learn from such trends with regard to addressing/reaching SDG4 targets?
- Importance of aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment for developing and monitoring competencies for life and work;
- Importance of aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment for enhancing overall educational quality, equity and accountability;
- Enhancing alignment through institutional development;
- Enhancing alignment at school/classroom level through developing reflective practitioner capacities and implementing whole-school approaches;
Alignment issues in the context of Education in Crisis – how to ensure equitable access to quality educational services;
Arab States achievements, challenges/gaps and needs for support with regard to aligning curriculum, teachers and assessment with a view of enhancing education quality;
Arab States needs with regard to capacity development for monitoring and evaluation of, and reporting on SDG4 targets and indicators.

E. Who will participate?

**Arab country teams (maximum four participants from each country fully supported by UNESCO and partners: three technical specialists + one national SDG4 coordinator)**

- **Technical specialists and decision makers.** The three-day technical workshop will benefit from the contributions of MoE representatives who will attend the three-day technical meeting. Country teams will comprise responsible specialists for curriculum; teachers; and assessment (maximum three members in each country team will be supported by UNESCO; additional members should be supported by their respective MoEs).
- **19 National SDG4 coordinators.** National SDG4 coordinators will participate in both meetings, i.e. the three-day technical meeting and the SDG4 coordinators’ meeting. UNESCO will support one coordinator for each country. Additional representatives should be supported by their respective MoEs.

**SDG4 Arab Regional Support Group**

- **International and Regional consultants and support persons.** They will contribute to the three-day technical workshop as per Agenda – see list attached.
- **Arab Regional Support Group.** See list attached – they will contribute to both the three-day technical workshop and the SDG4 national coordinators’ meeting, as appropriate.
- **UNESCO staff.** UNESCO Beirut and UNESCO offices in the Arab Region (see list attached – they will contribute to both meetings).

F. AR-MED III meeting methodology

- **Interactive approaches.** Both the three-day technical workshop and the SDG4 national coordinators’ meetings will be based on interactive approaches. Plenary presentations (including panels) will alternate with group work; booth presentations; and hands-on development of action plans/recommendations. QR code facilities to interact with the panelists will be provided for participants to enhance participation opportunities in the context of plenary sessions.
- **Working languages.** Simultaneous interpretation will be arranged in plenary settings for Arabic/English. Interpretation will be also possible in working groups, as needed. Participants will dispose of appropriate sound equipment to facilitate their full engagement and interaction.
- **Sound information and knowledge sharing.** Country teams will be requested to prepare their presentations/reports based on a template to be shared in advance with them. All inputs (i.e. power points presentations; international and national documents on SDG4 and other issues; background papers) will be put at participants’ disposal on-line and on memory sticks.
- **Workshop Report and follow up.** For all meetings comprehensive reports will be issued, which will include follow up (action) plans.