Participation of the

IFAP CHAIR

In the Breakout session 2.1: Advancing equity in education

(11:30 to 13:00 on 24 May, 2015)

International Conference on ICT and Post-2015 Education

Qingdao, the People’s Republic of China

UNESCO’s intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP)

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure, as Chair of the intergovernmental Council of the Information for All Programme (IFAP), to address your eminent gathering.

The UNESCO intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) was established in 2001. It provides a platform for international policy discussions, cooperation and the development of guidelines for action in the area of access to information and knowledge. The Programme supports Member States to develop and implement national information policy and strategy frameworks in the six priority areas of Information accessibility, information for development, information ethics, information literacy, information preservation and multilingualism in cyberspace.

Access to information and knowledge, for example through education, plays a critical role in achieving sustainable development. Education enhances human capacities to create, use, share and preserve knowledge. Education can support empowerment, enable persons to overcome barriers to participation and through greater participation we can strengthen social cohesion and advance equity. Access to information and knowledge is critical to ensuring equity.
IFAP’s interventions provide complementary, interdisciplinary and interdependent approaches that support national and global exchanges of experience, and facilitate the dissemination and adaptation of learning across its six priority areas to support inclusive and sustainable knowledge-based development.

Through its collaboration with governments, intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs and its network of National IFAP Committees and Working Groups IFAP is well placed, through capacity-building, projects and policy dialogue, to support Member States in their efforts to create inclusive and participatory knowledge societies. This involves:

- At the international, regional and national level the development of the relevant information and knowledge policy frameworks and strategies;

- The enhancement of national institutions to ensure they are able to effectively assess national needs and in turn contribute to the development, implementation and update of their national information and knowledge policy frameworks and strategies; and

- Supporting the capacity of information of professionals, youth and other stakeholders to develop the necessary capacities to effectively create, use, preserve, share and critically analyze information and develop knowledge relevant to their situations.

IFAP has undertaken a variety of projects in concert with various partners across the African continent to build capacity to effectively use information and knowledge and contribute to the realization of equity. Some examples of this work include:

- In West Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger) IFAP has worked with regional youth networks to train over 500 youth and 20 trainers of trainers to use and develop information/knowledge to address challenges such as desertification, unemployment and HIV/AIDS.
Through collaboration initiated in 2007, IFAP has supported the development of the African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE). This work has led to the establishment of an African Center of Excellence in Information Ethics (ACEIE), the development of curricula, training of researchers and capacity building of policy-makers to address the rapidly evolving social use and application of ICT. The network now included 25 universities in Africa and international partners in Europe, as well as in Latin and North America.

In concert with the United Nations University (UNU), IFAP has supported capacity-building of senior government officials in six countries (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania) in the use of the IFAP National Information Society Policy Template within the framework of the Executive Training in the Foundations of Government Information leadership. Additional programmes targeting Djibouti, Myanmar, Mongolia, Thailand and South Sudan have been launched.

The IFAP National Information Society Policy Template

The IFAP National Information Society Policy Template was developed in response to the needs articulated by Member States in the General Conference Resolution (34 C/Res.48) for tools to “assist in the formulation of national information policy frameworks...”. The importance of such policy frameworks is repeatedly highlighted in the outcome document of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

The IFAP Policy template therefore supports Member States in their efforts to:

- Democratize access to information and knowledge,
- Develop human capacities, and
- Establish adequate legal and regulatory framework to ensure access to information.

The IFAP Policy Template is structured around three modules comprising of:
i) A theoretical framework, definitions and other resources including model laws and case studies;

ii) A set of flexible and dynamic methodologies to support the development, review and implementation of policies; and finally

iii) A glossary of terms and bibliographic references.

The IFAP Template recognizes that each country is different, so it is not possible, to provide a one-size-fits-all recipe. The IFAP Template therefore adopts a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach and provides governments with good practices and examples of actions which might be adapted to their particular circumstances and needs. The IFAP Template has been used to support policy-makers in Africa, Asia-Pacific as well as Latin America and the Caribbean.

**The Inclusive Learning Lab (i2lab)**

Advancing equity in education and insuring quality education cannot be inclusive if it does not take into consideration the specific needs of all learners, in particular persons with disabilities. According to the World Health Organisation (2013), approximately 15 per cent of the population, representing some 1 billion people in the world have a disability.

For this purpose, the Information for All Programme (IFAP) has created the Inclusive Learning Lab (i2Lab) concept. The i2Lab concept was conceived with inclusive education experts, practitioners and persons with disabilities from developed and developing countries. The concept has been examined in a special forum organized during UNESCO’s international conference “From Exclusion to Empowerment: Role of ICTs for persons with Disabilities” organized from 24 to 26 November 2014 in New Delhi.

The i2Lab seeks to create a new type of learning environment which is dynamic, inclusive, scalable and accessible to all learners. The i2Lab is not a standalone initiative but is designed to be integrated into existing learning environments, whether formal as in schools, or in non-formal contexts such as libraries, community centers or other public spaces. The i2Lab is modular, using existing inclusive technologies thereby allowing it to be tailored to the local needs and context and scaled over time.
It provides seeks to promote self-education, self-accommodation, and independence and contributes to user empowerment which is of enormous value to persons with and without disabilities and has a positive effect on learning outcomes.

i2Lab is organized around four, overlapping and interlinked concepts that address:

- **Development** – providing a multidisciplinary approach to formal and informal educational settings with ICTs available to process, transmit and present information, focusing on learning about different subject matters.

- **Digital accessibility** – which focuses learning about and applying the principles of producing accessible products, services and content,

- **Dialogue and creative expression** – provides an area where ICTs are used to foster freedom of expression and access to information through reading, writing, communication and interactivity with others.

- **Diversity** – provides an area that develops an understanding of issues of social acceptance, tolerance and global cooperation, through learning via various media and media formats.

These are seen as integral to developing inclusive knowledge societies, and act as learning zones around a central hub which brings learners, co-workers and partners together for focused, interactive and inclusive group work.

With the prevalence in the use of technologies in all aspects of society, and specifically for educational purposes, new opportunities to overcome challenges to the inclusion of learners with disabilities in education become increasingly possible.

UNESCO in close collaboration with other partners has developed guidelines to provide recommendations to stakeholders to support access to quality learning opportunities for persons with disabilities through the wide range of available open and distance learning (ODL) methods, in tandem with open educational resources (OER), open access to scientific information (OA), free and open source software (FOSS), and other accessible and inclusive technological solutions.
In this field, IFAP has undertaken a Research study on the use of free and open source software (FOSS), open data and open standards in Latin America and the Caribbean (2012-2013) and organized Oman’s first Free and Open Source Software Conference (FOSSC-Oman 2013) for Promoting FOSS solutions and training in the Arab Region.

Dear Colleagues,

During the first Breakout session organized yesterday under the theme of Transforming teacher education institutions: Lessons learned from Africa, I was particularly interested to hear about the challenges and the successes of this important project initiated by the Chinese Government, in cooperation with UNESCO, to benefit eight African countries and I would like to commend the Chinese authorities for this good example of South-South cooperation.

IFAP is associated to a similar project: the Joint Initiative of UNESCO and the Republic of Korea on ICT Transforming Education in Africa. This Project will be implemented in the framework of a Funds-in-Trust Agreement for a total budget of US$6,000,000, in three African countries, during a period of three years. The Memorandum of understanding regarding this project was signed in Incheon, on 21 May 2015.

Through designing and deploying ICT-based innovative approaches in the target countries and other Member States, the project envisions facilitating policy development including the use of the IFAP National information Society Policy Template and catalyzing the scaling up of best practices towards leveraging ICT for equitable and quality education systems and relevant lifelong learning opportunities.

The project will be articulated around three (3) major components, namely:

(1) expanding access to and enhance the quality of basic education through blended solution of ICT

(2) strengthening higher education systems through the use of ODL, and
(3) facilitating policy development and knowledge sharing including supporting the Information for All Programme (IFAP)

IFAP’s intervention in this project will focus on three interlinked activities that while emphasizing information accessibility and information literacy also enhance actions under the other priority areas:

a) Supporting the assessment of country readiness to participate in and contribute to 21st century societies and economies through the application of the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Assessment Framework and the development of appropriate responses on the basis of identified gaps;

b) Enhancing access to inclusive ICT environments in both formal and non-formal settings with an emphasis on the integration of persons with disabilities and lifelong learning. This component will also emphasize the dissemination of the ODL Guidelines for persons with disabilities;

c) Developing the capacities of policy-makers to utilize the IFAP National Information Society Policy Template and in particular to apply the IFAP Template to capture and incorporate policy findings across the IFAP priorities, into their national information and knowledge society strategies and frameworks. An IFAP Template module that captures these learning will be developed. Capacity-building efforts will incorporate support to transdisciplinary exchanges between policy actors in the education as well as the broader information and knowledge society communities. This is expected to support synergies, overcome institutional and disciplinary silos taking into account evidence based data, thereby facilitating coordination and greater impact.

It is expected that at the end of the three-year time span, IFAP activities in the project will lead, among others, to the following outcomes:
1) national sector-wide ICT in education policies reviewed or developed, and master plans developed to scale up key ICT in education initiatives. In addition, the Ministry of Education Officials’ capacity will be strengthened, and the national policy will benefit all concerned institutions or schools, teachers, and students;

2) effective models and best practices of leveraging ICT for equitable and quality education systems and relevant lifelong learning opportunities documented and disseminated worldwide;

3) development of national capacities through organizing international, regional and national events and workshops on the development of ICT in education policies and critical mass of policy-makers in the three countries trained to use and apply the IFAP National Information Society Policy Template.

It is also expected to have Guidelines on leveraging ICT for equitable education and lifelong learning in Africa published, policy modules disseminated and cross-regional policy forums organized to share the knowledge and experiences drawing from the project and facilitate dialogues on IFAP.

It is our hope that such contribution of the Information for All Programme may benefit other similar projects and may be able to complement and bring an added value to the valuable work already initiated in Africa and other regions for the benefit of advancing equity in education.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Chinese authorities and the town of Qingdao for the successful organization of this International Conference and for their warm hospitality.

Thank you for your attention.