



Summary of the Outcomes

Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference for the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) 29-31 May, 2008, Bali, Indonesia

Introduction

The “Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference for the 48th session of the International Conference on Education”, organized from 29-31 May, 2008 in Bali, Indonesia, was attended by 160 participants, from 23 countries - including ambassadors, ministers, vice-ministers, policy-makers, educators, curriculum specialists, teacher-trainers, as well as representatives from inter-governmental bodies, civil society organizations and NGOs. Proposed by the Indonesian Government at the International Bureau of Education (IBE) inter-governmental Council in January 2008 and supported by all Council members, this conference was a part of the consultative process among UNESCO Member States with regards to the 48th session of the ICE, which is entitled “Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future” (25-28 November, 2008, Geneva, Switzerland).

The participants expressed their deep gratitude to the Indonesian Government’s Ministry of National Education, Indonesia’s National Commission to UNESCO, the UNESCO Regional Bureau in Asia (Bangkok) and the IBE, for organizing this regional conference which provided an excellent opportunity and a productive setting to discuss and exchange visions, strategies, practices and experiences around inclusive education.

Social exclusion, inclusive education and EFA goals

Asia and the Pacific region have plentiful examples of diverse and fruitful experiences and strategies, which conceptualize and implement inclusive education policies and programmes. Inclusive education is progressively understood as a key human rights-based approach towards the realization of the EFA goals, thus an issue of growing policy concern throughout the region. Inclusive education as an approach seeks to address the individual learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It involves modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies in education and responds to and appreciates diversity amongst human beings. Inclusive education entails profound and progressive changes throughout the education system, with respect to the curriculum objectives, content and assessment tools; schools’ vision, principals’ leadership, relations with the community; teachers’ roles and classroom practices. It is an on-going process of removing barriers to learning, and of promoting the engagement, empowerment and participation of communities, schools, principals, teachers and learners.

Among other relevant aspects, inclusive education refers to long-term educational policies and their articulation with other ongoing social policies from different ministries of social services; the provision of life-long opportunities (from early childhood onwards) through a flexible and adaptable inclusive curriculum in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments; and the diversification of teaching practices to effectively address learners' diversities. The role of curriculum is crucial as it should provide the conceptual framework and the tools to address the specific needs of different learners coming from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. The empowerment of communities within a sound decentralization process is highly relevant to understand and to take care of learners' diversities.

In a more general sense, the discourse around inclusive education implies addressing the challenges towards attaining more inclusive societies (social inclusion) by coping with the lack of access to basic social services and to learning opportunities. Inclusive education implies social inclusion and vice versa, as guaranteeing effective learning conditions and opportunities are ways of addressing the problems, among others, of poverty, marginality, ethnic and gender disparities, HIV and AIDS, and residential and social segregation. The role of the government is essential to assure the effective provision of education as a public good, facilitate a dynamic relationship between the national and local levels in developing and implementing policies, and promote a strong collaboration among different stakeholders.

It is recognized that the learning that takes place in school environments in the region is far from satisfactory. Low achievement levels are reported and the minimal levels of learning are not acquired as defined by individual countries. In an era of globalization, it is critical to enhance and democratize learning opportunities, especially in environments where inequity, exclusion and marginalized groups are of great relevance. In the rapidly changing and increasingly competitive world, inclusive education is an essential approach to achieve high-quality equitable education.

To effectively and decisively encourage the challenges around inclusive education, it is absolutely essential to increase the resources allocated to education as well as to better distribute and use the existing ones. It implies, among other aspects, targeted support to marginalized groups or those who are excluded, and investments directed for example, to very poor families (conditional cash transfer) and to alternative modes of delivering instructions in formal school systems such as the use of self-learning modules for working children and for those living in conflict-affected societies.

The role of the Ministries of Education should be strengthened with regards to monitoring, supervising and evaluating policies and programmes on inclusive education – for example, to capture data on the profile of the excluded groups, to identify students/children and resources in order to provide services, to disaggregate data of those children who are in difficult situations and to design and implement indicators for measuring progress in inclusive education.

Within the broader conceptualization of the interfaces between social inclusion and inclusive education, the participants acknowledge the need for:

- i) further specifying and giving content to the role of inclusive education as a guiding principle within the EFA framework,
- ii) sharing and disseminating inclusive practices that prove to work at different levels – i.e. educational and curricula structures, school models and teaching practices, and
- iii) strengthening the role of UNESCO as a provider of intellectual leadership on how to foster and carry out a broader conceptualization of inclusive education, and exploring the creation of a clearinghouse on effective evidence-based inclusive practices.

The participants strongly recommend that these issues be brought up by the Asia-Pacific Ministers of Education in the 48th session of the ICE.

Topics to be addressed and inputs for the 48th session of the ICE

The regional conference has identified nine main topics to be discussed during the 48th session of the ICE.

The topics are:

1. children with disabilities,
2. HIV/ AIDS and health;
3. minorities (ethnic, linguistic and religious);
4. migrant children,
5. refugees and internally displaced populations;
6. social exclusion;
7. gender;
8. disaster risk reduction (DRR) education and
9. enhanced learning.

These topics were addressed in relation to the four sub-themes of the 48th session of the ICE: a) approaches, scope and content; b) public policies; c) systems, links and transitions and d) learners and teachers, from the perspective of going from visions to practice, by identifying issues and discussion points and by making suggestions. Participants strongly emphasized the urgent need for allocating resources to effectively implement inclusive policies.

1. Children with disabilities

The inclusion of children with disabilities in education has been on the international agenda for many years and is now gaining increasing attention. These children remain, however, the largest and most significant group being excluded from mainstream education in many Asian countries. This indicates a strong need for formulating policies to effectively monitor the full implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities. There is also a need to discuss the following concerns, issues and suggestions during the ICE.

- Formulation of policies that will help to clarify and define inclusion in a broader way, taking into account gender, ethnicity, class and other issues along with disability regarding the importance to the specialist skills and knowledge
- Formulation of policies to ensure that segregation is not practiced in inclusive classrooms.
- The need to establish a database of children with disabilities both in and out of school in the Asian region so that the progress of inclusive education can be effectively monitored.
- Formulation of policies regarding class size, examinations and standards, which currently act as a few of the many barriers to inclusion.
- Issues related to capacity building of teachers, parents, and children with disabilities.

- Issues related to equipments, resources and facilities and their importance in facilitating inclusion.
- The role of special schools in supporting inclusion.
- The role of child-centered teaching as a strategy towards inclusion.
- The practice of inclusive education at all levels, from kindergarten to higher education and the importance of early interventions and remediation.
- Issues related to collaboration among different departments and agencies in order to ensure effective inclusion.

2. HIV / AIDS and Health

Inclusive schools must welcome all children, and enable them to play, learn and grow up together along with their siblings and peers. Discrimination and exclusion of children affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS or other health conditions must therefore be prevented. Protection and anti-discrimination laws, policies and regulations need to be issued. Close collaboration and coordination between all concerned ministries, authorities and community-based organizations and groups will ensure that these are implemented. The following issues must be further addressed at the ICE:

- HIV-related stigma and the discriminatory attitudes and practices that prevent children from accessing quality education.
- Access for children and youth affected and/or infected with HIV to quality education in their home communities (i.e. in the nearest schools together with their other siblings and peers).
- Access to quality HIV prevention and response education for all children and youth –including reproductive health, sexuality and sex education, as well as drug prevention education in both formal and informal settings.
- Access to child and youth-friendly health services, free and voluntary testing and counseling services and treatment for HIV, as well as other related opportunistic infections.
- Issues related to media's potential role for promoting HIV prevention and response education by informing the public about HIV, as well as helping to correct myths and misconceptions related to it.
- Education and health institutions must guarantee that the HIV status of children and youth is treated with confidentiality in order to allow them to take their decision as to whom, when and how they would like to disclose their HIV status.

3. Minorities

Asia and the Pacific have thousands of ethno-linguistic groups whose mother tongue is not an official language of the country in which they live. In these groups, parents have, in general, a desire to see their children be able to achieve success and be integrated in an increasingly globalized society, through knowledge of national and international languages, without losing their ethno-linguistic identity.

Language is sometimes a major barrier to quality education. It is recognized that the language issue is closely interlinked with issues relating to culture and religion, therefore requiring a holistic approach. Depending on the context of individual countries it is recommended that the following issues are explored at the ICE:

- Development of a legal framework that allows for local flexibility and adaptation.
- Curricula and content development that encourages local adaptation in order to increase local relevance.
- Proactive recruitment policies for teachers' training in order to increase the capacity of the minority groups.
- The role of the education system in inter-cultural/religious dialogues to promote increased understanding and tolerance.
- The progressive introduction of mother tongue based instructions in the early years of primary education as a means of gaining mastery of national and international languages.
- Provisions should be made for the incorporation of official, national and/or international language instruction, along with instruction in one's mother tongue.
- Governments and multilateral organizations should devote resources towards the hiring and training of speakers of minority languages as teachers, and the creation, printing and distribution of bilingual and/or multilingual materials.

4. Migrant children

Regardless of their status, all children of migrant workers should be encouraged to pursue education.

5. Internally displaced children (IDC)

The category of internally displaced children essentially refers to refugees, children in conflict situations, transition/post conflict situations, and environmentally-displaced children. The role of education is essential to promote and facilitate IDC reintegration into their communities of origin. The issues mentioned below need to be discussed at the ICE:

In school-camps

- Psycho-social support for children should be provided in order to facilitate their adaptation to their new environment.
- The children should be taught in their mother tongue and depending on the context, refugee children should have opportunities to learn the host nations' language.

In mainstream schools in host nations

- Refugee children should have equal access to education in host nations. In order to make it possible international support may be required.

- In order to avoid bullying and discrimination from other children, teachers and parents, awareness raising and sensitization sessions about refugees should be organized in schools and communities.
- Orphan children's needs should be considered within the framework of inclusive education policies and programmes.

6. Social Exclusion

There is a need to build awareness for understanding the nature, relevance, scope and implications of social exclusion (faced by different marginalized groups) in various contexts at the national and regional levels. The following issues should be the focus of discussion at the ICE:

- Continued efforts to address social exclusion for various marginalized groups within the school and society.
- Access to quality education for children affected by war, civil strife and natural calamities.
- The need to review existing national level provisions for marginalized groups.
- Monitoring mechanisms so that the existing provisions, such as scholarships, reach the target group of marginalized children.
- Establishment of mechanisms to ensure the quality of education in faith-based schools so that the competencies developed and subjects taught are pertinent and relevant to the needs of national development.
- Ongoing support to teachers and other stakeholders for providing equal opportunities for full and meaningful participation of all children.

7. Gender

It is recognized that at the core of inclusive education are issues related to gender and education. Gender-based discrimination is a major barrier to learning in the Asia and Pacific region. Gender awareness and sensitization is needed at all levels of the education system, in order to become truly inclusive. The following issues need much discussion at the ICE:

- The need for gender disaggregated education data and additional qualitative and gender-sensitive indicators.
- The development and/or implementation of supporting legal frameworks to protect the right to education for all, specifically addressing the protection against gender-based discrimination.
- The necessity for the integration of gender awareness and sensitization into mandatory pre- and in-service trainings as well as into the content of the education materials.
- Gender equality guarantees in education in terms of enrolment, retention, survival and curricula.
- Pro-active recruitment strategies to address gender imbalances among teachers, principals and education system officials.

- The role of the education system is to actively challenge cultural, religious and social traditions that are gender discriminatory.

8. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) education

These recommendations deserve greater attention at the ICE:

- Natural disasters represent a major cause of exclusion of children from the education system, as it denies them access to education.
- Particularly marginalized children living in disaster-prone areas, as well as children displaced as a result of a disaster, should be allowed equitable access to education. Also effective temporary school provisions should be implemented immediately after disasters occur.
- Governments have the responsibility to provide all children with the necessary knowledge about disasters, including the risks and vulnerabilities and related competencies through the integration of disaster risk reduction into the school curriculum as well as through non-formal and informal education so as to better protect and prepare themselves, their family and their community for disasters.
- In order to achieve the objectives of “Education for All,” the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) by 2015 and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of Universal Education, it becomes imperative for the Governments to ensure school safety through the enforcement of building codes and the development of disaster-resilient school buildings.
- DRR education should be recognized as a crucial component of inclusive education and be discussed as a major policy issue.

9. Enhanced learning to achieve quality of education

These recommendations merit further discussion at the ICE:

- Improvement in learning, based on the involvement of multiple stakeholders at national and regional levels.
- Diversification and improvement of policies and strategies, so that learners are prepared to face the rapidly changing world.
- Preparation of frames and tools to assist in the measurement of qualities in learning.
- Encouragement of the establishment of communities of practices as settings for knowledge sharing on research studies with regards to learning.