

Quality Learning for All through Inclusive Education

Terms of Reference

1. Background

Inclusive- and Child Friendly Schools seek to address the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. At the core of inclusive- and child friendly education is the fundamental right to education for all as well as the right to non-discrimination and participation. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Spain, 1994, and was reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 2000. Since then inclusive education has become a much wider concept, and has also become the overarching principle of the main dimensions of Child Friendly School development. As a result of the World Education Forum, the challenge of getting all children into school has been put on the political agenda in many countries and is reflected in Education for All (EFA) national action plans. This has helped to focus the attention on a much broader range of children who are not in school or may be marginalized within the education system for reasons not linked to special needs or disability.

The overall goal of inclusive- and child friendly education is developing educational settings where all learners are welcome, participating and treated equally. Inclusive- and child friendly education is defined as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and of reducing exclusion within education system, while focusing on enrolment, effectiveness, diversity (including gender), health, and active involvement of parents and communities. Inclusive- and child friendly education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in both formal and non-formal educational settings. It advocates for changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, policies and strategies. At the heart of inclusive- and child friendly education is the vision to transform the education system so it can provide responsive quality education for all learners.

Providing access to education is only the first stage in overcoming exclusion or discrimination. There is a need for a shift in perspectives and values so that diversity is appreciated and even welcomed, while teachers are given skills to provide all children, including those with different learning needs, with quality education. Inclusive education is still often seen as a matter of providing education for children with disabilities in a regular school setting. UNESCO, similar to other development agencies, is promoting a much broader view of inclusive education, which encompasses all children who are excluded on grounds of gender, ability, ethnicity, linguistic or poverty related reasons. In many countries failure to increase retention rates and poor levels of achievement in low quality schooling environments continue to remind us that claims of improved enrolment rates insufficient as evidence of progress in the education system. Furthermore, a child's learning is also influenced by factors such as family background, health and nutrition, community involvement, etc. which are the dimensions that bring about a more holistic approach to education, making it more inclusive and effective.

2. Objectives

2.1

The meeting aims to provide a regional forum to discuss the potential of inclusive- and child friendly approaches as means to improve the overall quality of education and to ensure inclusion for all. Furthermore, the meeting will generate an opportunity for an in-depth discussion on regional practices and policies as well as develop recommendations on how to further promote more rights-based approaches to education in the region within the framework of EFA.

2.2

The meeting is also the platform for collating regional experiences and expertise in order to enrich and strengthen the debates that will take place during the 48th session of the ICE. IBE has identified 4 sub-themes for the ICE and the regional meeting will address those. The identified themes are:

- (i) Sub-theme: **Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content** (to broaden the understanding of the theory and the practice of inclusive education).
- (ii) Sub-theme: **Inclusive Education: Public Policies** (to demonstrate the role of governments in the development and the implementation of policies on inclusive education).
- (iii) Sub-theme: **Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions** (to create education systems which offer opportunities for life-long learning).
- (iv) Sub-theme: **Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers** (to foster a learning environment where teachers are equipped to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs).

2.3 The specific objectives are:

- 1) To contextualize the meaning and concept of inclusive education and try to understand what it may mean in the East Asian context.
- 2) To identify good practices in the field of inclusive education from the sub-region that may be shared in the global forum
- 3) To discuss the potential of inclusive- and child friendly approaches as a means to improve the overall quality of education and improve education systems to ensure inclusion for all.
- 4) To develop recommendations of how to promote inclusiveness with particular emphasis on the implementation of EFA national plans of action (NPAs) building on recent regional and national initiatives.
- 5) To create a regional action plan linked to East Asia for continued networking, cooperation and inclusive and child friendly education policy development.

- 6) To provide structured technical inputs from a regional perspective to the 48th session of ICE.

3. Organisers

- UNESCO National Commission China
- UNESCO Beijing
- UNESCO Bangkok
- IBE
- UNICEF China

4. Participants

The participants of the workshop will include:

- Senior policy-makers from Ministries of Education in the East Asia region;
- EFA Coordinators from participating countries
- Teachers, headmasters and other selected practitioners from the East Asia region;
- Representatives of international organisations, NGOs and donor agencies;
- International experts and academic researchers.

5. Preparatory Work by Participants

- A selected number of the participants will be asked to share their country and practical experiences in relation to implementing inclusive education.
- Selected international experts and researchers will be asked to share the latest academic thinking and research on inclusive education.
- International agencies, NGOs and donor organizations will be invited to share any innovative approaches, lessons and resource materials related to inclusive education.
- Government representatives will be asked to present a country report based on instructions given by the organizers.

6. Time and Venue

3-5 November 2007