

Consultation for the Education Commission
UNESCO Expert Meeting on School Finance in the Asia-Pacific Region

1 April 2016, Bangkok, Thailand

Summary

Given the global focus on financing as implementation modality of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Education 2030 and the growing trend in introducing school finance policies, it is important to guide governments and schools in the Asia-Pacific region in order to allocate and utilize available resources efficiently and effectively to deliver quality education. This will require strong efforts in data collection and analysis, decision-making, capacity development, implementation and monitoring of school finance. Unfortunately, at present, there is a lack of practical guidance on developing and implementing a successful school finance system.

In this context, UNESCO Bangkok held an Expert Meeting on School Finance in the Asia-Pacific Region: Ensuring Adequate, Effective and Equitable Financing in Schools (31 March - 1 April, 2016; Bangkok, Thailand). Objectives of the meeting were: 1) to facilitate the sharing of experiences with regard to adequacy, efficiency and equity of school financing in the Asia-Pacific region, 2) to review findings of nine country case studies¹, a regional report and guidelines on school finance, 3) to agree on common issues and recommendations for strengthening school finance policies and practices in the region, and 4) to hold a consultation for the Education Commission.

Recommendations for strengthening school finance policies and practices, drawn from the country analysis, have been placed under four broad categories: resource mobilization and planning; budget execution and management; monitoring and assessment of resource use and skills; and capacity development for improved resource and budget performance in schools. The next steps of the regional meeting include: developing the learning

¹ Cambodia, China, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam

module for capacity building in school budget management²; publishing and disseminating the user-friendly resource package containing the regional report and selected country reports; and establishing synergies of the resource package on school finance with national, regional and global meetings on Education 2030, the Global Partnership for Education and the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity and to raise the visibility of strengthening school finance.

During the consultation for the Commission, the meeting participants noted that five questions offered by the Commission were provocative and generated some heated discussion but might not have captured the complexity of the education financing situation in different country contexts. Answers to the questions require a proper analysis; nevertheless, experts provided some preliminary responses.

1. Given that there are clear benefits of education, why do you think people have not acted and invested in education at the level needed?

The participants agreed that it is useful to analyze why the education stakeholders have not invested in education at a level needed by examining a specific national context. One of the reasons the investment in education is not made because education is regarded as a long-term investment. People who have not acted and invested in education may have wanted to focus more on trade, infrastructure, and/or health sectors, because it could bring a return in a short-term compared to the return in the education sector. Ministries of Finance need to recognize that education is a viable investment, especially since it has a long-term impact on human resources and economic development. However, there may not be a clear understanding of education benefits. For example, in India, people do not have a clear mind about a return on education and therefore do not have a motivation to invest in it, especially in rural areas. In addition, budget and financial allocations are sometimes politically motivated, hence there is a need for the civil society organizations to be more pro-active in terms of monitoring.

² The module is a part of the UNESCO Bangkok's objective to prepare a set of modules for the Education Microplanning Toolkit.²

2. What do you think has been the biggest single obstacle to raising educational quality in developing countries? How can we overcome this obstacle?

Numerous factors can be considered as obstacles to raising educational quality in developing countries. The single biggest obstacle has been a limited policy view. Over the past decades, the policy makers considered that enrollment was more important than education quality, since the government focused on enrolling children into schools to achieve Universal Primary Education. To overcome challenges in education quality, the focus should be shifted to improving what happens within a classroom. Tackling teacher effectiveness measures, including teacher status, salary, professional development, and accountability should be taken into consideration for strengthening education quality.

3. For those countries which have made the greatest improvements in education in recent years, what do you think have been the critical factors in their success?

Some countries which have made the greatest improvements in education in recent years have been successful due to improvements in education quality. On the other hand, other countries enacted legislation and policy which featured the right to education and more funding for education, while developing a link between education and economic and social sectors, and establishing a long-term vision for education achievement.

4. How do you think education/school will look different in 2030? What implications does this have on the Commission's recommendations?

Given previous experiences in striving to reach education goals by 2015, the education/school may not look much different in 2030, although a number of schools will be increased and more children will go to schools in the world. The concrete education situation will depend on the country context. Some regional trends indicate that 21st century skills related to ICT education, peace education, globalization and teamwork will be reflected in curriculum and teacher training which could bring positive effects to society in the future. In addition, governments may develop innovations on privatizing basic education, which is a threat since financing education should be the government's primary responsibility.

5. What will be the most important (new) sources of finance for global education over the next decades? How could these sources be harnessed?

Over the next decades, innovative financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships will be the most important sources of finance for global education. One of such sources of finance is taxation. There are still many unequal taxation processes and a leakage of tax collection worldwide. Through developing an innovative and effective taxation process, the amount of tax income could be increased.