

MDGs Follow-up Meeting (June 2-3, 2011)
Breakout session 2: Accelerating Progress in Education and related MDGs
Chair's Summary of Discussion

On the occasion of the MDGs Follow-up Meeting, the Education Breakout Session was held on June 2, 2011 in Tokyo.

During the session, the participants from both bilateral and multilateral donors, partner countries, CSOs and academics reviewed the progress on the education-related MDGs and EFA goals to date, and discussed the challenges against and a way forward for achieving these goals.

Why education matters. The participants reaffirmed that quality education for all is a right. It can expand human potential, offer a strong foundation for poverty reduction and human security, and act as a catalyst for the accelerated achievement of other MDGs as well as for sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth. The participants also acknowledged that there is an opportunity for peace building and reconstruction through education.

Progress and remaining challenges. The participants recognized that remarkable progress has been made in terms of access to and parity in primary education, yet the quality aspect has not been fully addressed and the progress has been uneven among and within countries. They underlined the necessity to pay more attention to the quality of education, especially learning outcomes and acquisition of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. They also stressed the need to place more emphasis on the hardest-to-reach, particularly girls, children with disabilities, learners from ethnic and linguistic minorities, and those in conflict-affected and fragile countries.

Improving quality of education

- ***Can we set global standards for quality?*** It might be useful to have a global common set of standards for education quality and learning outcomes. However, this should go beyond a single quantitative target, considering its context-specific and complex nature of educational outcomes including its non-cognitive aspects. Such standards should also consider necessary knowledge and skills to obtain a job and thrive in a competitive global economy.
- ***A holistic approach is needed.*** A variety of factors affect quality of education, such as teachers' quality, leadership of head teachers, learning environment, curricula, teaching and learning materials, learning time, pedagogy, school feeding, use of ICTs and school-home links. The availability of quality ECCE (early childhood care and education), secondary, technical and vocational, and tertiary education, and the prospect for employment also influence students' and parents' commitments to education and hence students' performance at the basic level. To achieve quality education, these factors require to be addressed in a comprehensive manner both at conventional schools and non-formal and informal settings.
- ***Sufficient numbers of qualified and motivated teachers are the key to quality education.*** Facing a serious shortage of quality teachers in many countries, both quality pre-service teacher training and continuous professional development as well as supportive teacher policies are critical. Continuous and institutionalized peer learning, as can be found in the lesson study method, can provide a good practice model to improve the quality of teachers.
- ***Community engagement enhanced.*** The experience suggests that active and meaningful participation of community members and parents in the decision-making process at the school level has the potential to bring about positive effects on quality of education by increasing school accountability and responsiveness to the community needs. This will in turn require a sustainable supporting system

by the education administration.

Ensuring equity in education

- ***Who are out of school?*** To tackle the issue of equity in securing the rights of all children to education, adequate grasp of who are 'out-of-school' and at risk of not attending or completing schools, and the barriers to their education is necessary. It is imperative to ensure not only equity in access but also equity in schools and learning outcomes.
- ***Free primary education (FPE) policies are not enough.*** FPE policies have made a significant impact on increasing enrolment of the disadvantaged. However, there are still a range of factors, both within and outside education systems, which exclude children from schooling and learning. It is necessary to supplement these policies with other targeted measures which remove those barriers. Such interventions may include scholarships, quota systems, school feeding, subsidies, cash grants, and enhanced awareness of parents and communities on education.
- ***Promotion of inclusive education.*** The education system needs to be inclusive to serve the diverse learning needs by its system-wide change to welcome diversity. Various stakeholders' capacity building and awareness-raising on special needs and inclusive education that introduce learner-centered approaches are necessary to realize quality education for all.
- ***Shifting from gender parity to gender equity.*** Focus on gender and education should be intensified by expanding the support for gender sensitive educational environments, processes and achievements at all levels in education, especially at the secondary level and for the most vulnerable such as those living in rural areas or in poverty and those from ethnic minorities. Further support to countries moving beyond gender parity to gender equity is essential.

Sharing knowledge, experiences and good practices. The participants emphasized the significance of analyzing what constitutes quality and equity, identifying bottlenecks, evaluating the effectiveness of interventions or approaches, learning from each other's experiences, and thus contributing to improve their education systems. In this regard, the participants shared their good practices which produce sustainable results on the ground. These are listed in the *Annex*. They found such practices potentially useful, taking into account the economic, socio-cultural and political environment of respective country.

Strengthening the capacity for managing national education system. The participants underscored the critical importance to strengthen national education systems including policy and legal frameworks and linking downstream with upstream for achieving better results. Efficient and effective use and allocation of resources, both domestic and external, are indispensable to sustainable progress. Credible and timely data collection and use as well as continued monitoring and assessment are also fundamental at all levels from classroom to the national system.

Enhancing enabling conditions. The participants recognized that education outcomes are greatly influenced by factors beyond education policy and services such as early childhood nutrition and stimulation, access to health care, clean water and sanitation, and social protection as well as socio-economic, cultural and religious contexts. A multi-sectoral approach should be pursued in the support for other MDGs. The participants also reaffirmed that an effective implementation of education policies and plans requires the partner countries' strong political commitment, good governance, and, where appropriate, continued and harmonized support from the international community.

Way forward. The participants committed themselves to redouble their efforts towards the achievement of MDGs and beyond with a strong partnership and close collaboration among all stakeholders including CSOs, private sectors and foundations.

