

Arab States Regional Conference on Education Post-2015: Towards Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All

Sharm El Sheikh - Egypt, 27-29 January 2015

Preamble

1. We, the Ministers of Education of Arab States, high-level government officials, representatives of the United Nations and intergovernmental agencies, civil society organizations, professional unions, organizations working in the field of education, as well as technical and development partners, gathered at the Arab States Regional Conference on Education Post-2015 from 27-29 January 2015 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, co-convened by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Ministry of Education, Arab Republic of Egypt under the auspices of His Excellency President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, in partnership with the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations High Commission for the Refugees (UNHCR).
2. We express our appreciation to the Ministry of Education of Egypt for facilitating and hosting this important event for the region.
3. Having reviewed the progress made and remaining challenges towards reaching the six goals of Education for All in the Arab States, the Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, and taking into account the Muscat Agreement adopted at the Global EFA Meeting (GEM) in Muscat, Oman, 12-14 May 2014, we endorse the principles and targets set forth in the Muscat Agreement, as well as the Report of the United Nations General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) for Sustainable Development Goals and the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the post-2015 agenda 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet.' We particularly note the primary goal of the future education agenda: "Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030."
4. Cognizant of the exceptional circumstances that some Arab States are going through and their negative impact on what has been achieved in the framework of Education for All, we adopt this statement that reflects our regional concerns and priorities for the Education Post-2015 agenda.

Perspectives of the Arab States

5. Education is a fundamental human right. We reaffirm that it is a basis for the realization of other rights and essential for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, as well as prosperity in the Arab States. We, therefore, commit to work together in our region with its shared unique language and rich cultural traditions and history in order to ensure the fulfilment of everyone's right to education. We notably commit to the principle of education as a public good and a building block for prosperity, well-being, social cohesion and sustainable development.

6. We acknowledge that our countries of this region have made considerable progress since the year 2000 in achieving the Education for All goals. However, collectively we must exert further efforts to meet the new challenges and demands. We maintain that the EFA framework is still valid, but the current EFA goals need to be extended into the Post-2015 agenda to address all levels of education by giving focus to learning and taking into consideration the transformative, inclusive, lifelong learning approaches.
7. The most significant challenge to progress in education in the Arab region is conflict which exacerbates inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization and puts pressures on us to ensure access to quality education for internally displaced persons and refugee communities. Evidence clearly demonstrates the long term negative impact of the absence of provision of education on refugees and internally displaced persons. We must acknowledge that these issues cross national borders and thus mutually supportive strategies and partnerships across the region are required to address them.
8. The promotion of peace and sustainable development must be founded on the provision of equitable and inclusive quality education for all, enabling them to realize their rights and untapped potential in society. Therefore, our education systems need to be resilient in order to prevent conflict and mitigate its impact, and further enhance social cohesion, tolerance and peace. We call upon all parties to observe education as a fundamental human right. We therefore commit to develop policies that support the provision of sustainable quality education for all children and others affected by emergency and crisis situations and to ensuring that they have access to educational systems through special educational programmes and policies.

Priority areas for the Arab States

Equitable and inclusive access for all

9. We will reinforce our efforts to provide at least nine years of free, compulsory quality basic education for all by 2030, with special attention paid to early childhood education. We recognize that the foundations of human development are laid during a child's early years and thus early childhood requires an integrated approach to care, development and learning. Therefore, every effort will be made to ensure quality ECCE and increase learning opportunities through community participation, family awareness, and qualified teachers.
10. We commit to exert more efforts in order to achieve justice, equity and parity by addressing all forms of exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, disparities and inequalities in access to and completion of education at all levels. We must take serious steps in eliminating the barriers that people with disabilities face to attain their right to education. Despite the fact that Arab States have achieved gender parity in primary education, significant disparities still exist within countries. We will work with our partners to develop effective strategies to overcome all obstacles to enable girls and women to continue their education. We recognize the value of women's education for our societies to be productive. We will therefore strive to make equity a priority for our education policies, planning and management.

11. We will reinforce the provision of youth and adult education and learning, including literacy, through formal and non-formal pathways, in collaboration with all governmental and non-governmental actors.

Quality and relevance of education, and teachers

12. We recognize that education quality is the priority in our region. We must therefore develop and improve all aspects of education quality and invest in policies, programmes, procedures and systems of measuring and monitoring learning outcomes.
13. Since the quality of our education hinges on the quality of teachers, we acknowledge that, while the number of qualified teachers continues to rise, we must ensure the support to, and the provision of sustained professional development for, teachers, educators, school management and members of supporting technical institutions, taking into consideration the best practices in the region and sharing information on these.

Citizenship and Education for Sustainable Development

14. We commit to integrate values of citizenship, patriotism, tolerance, acceptance of others and 21st century skills into our education systems by emphasizing the knowledge, skills, values and practices conducive to sustainable development.
15. We reaffirm our commitment to improve Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education, linking youth training to the requirements of the labor market and providing them with guidance and opportunity to become productive citizens, which in turn contributes to inclusive development in our respective societies.

Enabling policies and mechanisms for the future education agenda

16. Considering the impact of experimental and applied educational research on the educational and developmental policies for the Post-2015 agenda and tackling the equity and quality imperatives, we must support such research and make better use of best practices and experiences within the Arab region and from other regions. We resolve to develop comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation systems to generate sound evidence which we will use for policy formulation and management of education systems.
17. Among the most important areas for improvement in the Post-2015 agenda are related to the governance and management of our education systems. We will work together to enhance accountability measures and community involvement to rationalize education decisions.
18. We shall seek to allocate sufficient financial resources in an equitable manner and in accordance with the set internationally recognized benchmarks for public expenditure on education reaching 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and/or 20% of the total public expenditure at least. We will cooperate with our international partners to develop mechanisms enabling long term planning for providing educational services in emergency situations.

19. We must ensure and invigorate community involvement in articulating educational needs of the most marginalized populations and developing innovative approaches to ensure access, equity and quality of education.
20. We call upon UNESCO, in collaboration with the EFA co-convening agencies and other partners, to continue leading the coordination of the development of the Post-2015 education agenda and the corresponding Framework for Action. We further recommend that UNESCO continue to provide technical support for the implementation, monitoring and enhanced accountability of the future post-2015 education agenda, including reinforcing innovative tools such as the flagship EFA Global Monitoring Report and working to mobilize adequate financial resources to support educational systems affected by crises and conflicts in the region and advocating to support education for all.
21. We stress the importance of coordination and cooperation with all organizations working on education, in particular the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS), the League of the Arab States (LAS) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in all matters relating to the implementation of the Post-2015 agenda.

Towards World Education Forum and Beyond 2015

22. Recognizing the challenges our region encounters such as slow economic growth and high levels of unemployment especially among the youth, we will strive to ensure the integration of educational priorities within the broader development frameworks of our countries and in national development agendas as well as to sustain political support at its highest levels and enhance social mobilization given its paramount importance.
23. We therefore commit to continue our efforts in preparation of our participation in the 2015 World Education Forum to be held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 19 to 22 May 2015 and in following up on its outcomes.

Sharm El Sheikh, 29 January 2015