



SAARC recognises need to address the unfinished EFA Agenda in Education 2030

30-31 March 2016, Kathmandu, Nepal



The sub-regional workshop on the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 advanced the discussions amongst South Asian countries on their collective efforts to realise the Education 2030 targets.

Education 2030 adopted by countries in a sub-regional conference in Delhi held in October 2015.

The sub-regional workshop on the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 advanced the discussions amongst South Asian countries on their collective efforts to realise the Education 2030 targets. The workshop brought together 8 country members of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) - Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Bhutan, and Afghanistan.

This meeting follows through on the New Delhi Agreement for enhancing SAARC Collaboration for

Three civil society organisations (CSOs) attended the meeting – ASPBAE, National Campaign for Education, Nepal (NCE-Nepal), and the SAARC Teachers Federation. Although the CSOs participated only as observers, UNESCO and the government representatives in their presentations recognised the CSOs as key partners for Education for All, and now Education 2030. Shigeru Aoyagi of UNESCO-Delhi specifically commended the contributions of CSOs working on education, especially ASPBAE, while the Ministry of Education of Nepal mentioned the role of NCE-Nepal in grassroots consultations for the School Sector Development Plan.

The focus of the discussions was the Draft SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 that outlined the strategic areas for regional cooperation, partnerships and networks, modalities of sub-regional implementation and international support – both technical and resources for implementing the SDG 4.

The document states that *“the magnitude and complexity of the educational challenges faced by the SAARC countries call for innovative, targeted and sustained collaborative efforts in South Asia to attend to the unfinished EFA agenda”* and the ambitious targets of SDG4. The need for concerted efforts amongst Members States, UN partners, civil society, private sector, and other stakeholders was the refrain of all the speakers in the workshop, including the government officials. Abimanyu Singh, former Director of UNESCO-Beijing and who wrote the draft SAARC Framework, said that while the private sector is encouraged to contribute to education, he cautioned against government abdicating its role as primarily responsible for ensuring the right to education.



There was a consensus amongst the delegates that addressing the unfinished EFA agenda should be prioritised in sub-regional cooperation.

Emphasising the need for diversity of partnerships for quality implementation of SDG4, UNICEF-ROSA Deputy Regional Director, Philippe Cori, argued that it is important to take an inter-sectoral approach,



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ASPBAE, NCE-Nepal, and the SAARC Teachers Federation were the three CSO representatives at the meeting. Although CSOs participated only as observers, UNESCO and government representatives recognised them as key partners for Education 2030.

where for example, health and protection are integrated into education. He also said that the SAARC mechanisms for Education 2030 should include already existing strategic partnerships, such as those with CSOs, as well as partnering with new partners that can provide innovative solutions for education.

There was a consensus amongst the delegates that addressing the unfinished EFA agenda should be prioritised in the sub-regional cooperation. This view is embodied in the Draft SAARC Framework for Action which states that the Education 2030 focus on “*equity and inclusion, learning outcomes and lifelong learning, could provide the nucleus of collaboration across all levels and types of education*” in the sub-region. Venkata Subarao Ilapavuluri of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong

Learning reiterated the urgency of countries to address youth and adult literacy. He also argued that in monitoring the progress of SDG4, countries should initiate citizen-led/community-led data collection and importantly, the use of these data to improve education.

On the modalities of implementation, the SAARC draws inspiration from the long experience of sub-regional cooperation in education of the South East Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO). Despite the challenges faced by the SAARC Secretariat, the delegates expressed the necessity of building a sub-regional mechanism for education where it was proposed that the country focal person come from the Ministry of Education with the support of the National Commission of UNESCO. To build ownership on the education technical meetings, it was proposed that rotating the chair among SAARC members every two years, similar to the SEAMEO experience, should be built in the modalities of implementation. Gatot Hari Priowirjanto, Director of the SEAMEO Secretariat, advised the SAARC members to start small, start with one initiative to jumpstart the collaborative effort.

Delegates agreed on the next steps, some of which were to draft the SAARC Framework for Action and circulate to all delegates for comments; finalise the Draft Framework in the meeting in Maldives in Oct/Nov; conduct a literacy assessment that may lead to periodic report; have a sub-regional framework to inform country-driven implementation of SDG 4; and countries to mobilise CSOs to be fully involved in the process.

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