



**ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review  
Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa**

**“The right to Education for All in Africa:  
Reinforcing quality and equity”**

**Concept Note**

**Lomé, Togo  
12 April 2011**

## Background

The Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) is a key function of the Economic and Social Council established by Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit. It was mandated as an instrument to track progress and step up efforts towards the realization of the internationally agreed development goals (IADGs), including the Millennium Development Goals, by the 2015 target date.<sup>1</sup> Over the last three years, the ECOSOC AMR has assumed an important role to assess and review progress (or lack thereof) in the implementation of these goals. General Assembly resolution A/RES/61/16, of 20 November 2006, entitled “*Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council*” provides general guidance on the AMR.

The AMR process features three main elements: national voluntary presentations, country-led regional reviews and a global review, based on a comprehensive report by the Secretary-General. These elements are complemented by an innovation fair; and, prior to the session, by a global preparatory meeting and e-forums on the theme of the AMR.<sup>2</sup> The first AMR was held in July 2007 in Geneva and focused on poverty and hunger (MDG1). The following AMR sessions focused on, respectively, goals related to sustainable development (MDG7) in 2008; health (MDG 4, 5, 6) in 2009 and gender (MDG3) in June/July 2010.

All AMR sessions are preceded by multi-stakeholder regional consultations. In 2007, the Government of Brazil hosted a regional consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean on the “*Key challenges of financing poverty and hunger eradication in Latin America*”. In 2008, Bahrain hosted a regional meeting for Western Asia on “*Sustainable Urbanization*”. In 2009, there were five regional ministerial meetings hosted respectively by: Sri Lanka for South Asia on “*Financing Strategies for Health Care*”; China for the Asia Pacific on “*Promoting Health Literacy*”; Qatar for Western Asia on “*Addressing Non-communicable Diseases and Injuries: Major Challenges to Sustainable Development in the 21st Century*”; Jamaica for Latin America and the Caribbean on “*HIV and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean*”; and Ghana for Africa on “*e-Health*”. In 2010, Senegal hosted a regional meeting for West Africa on “*Women and Health*”.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of the 2011 ECOSOC AMR is “**Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education**”. The global review will be held in Geneva during the ECOSOC High-Level Segment in July 2011. DESA is working closely with UNESCO, UNICEF and the United Nations Commissions in planning the AMR.

### A. Regional Preparatory Meetings in preparation of the 2011 AMR

Preparatory regional meetings, which capture specific regional issues in education and ensure multistakeholder involvement, will be held in Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. A meeting was held in Doha, Qatar in December 2010, for Western Asia. The summary reports of the regional meetings will be presented at the July 2011 AMR session.

### B. National Presentations

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<sup>1</sup> A/RES/60/1, Para. 155 (c).

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/amr.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> The reports of the consultations are available at: <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/amr/index.shtml>.

The following 12 countries have volunteered to make National Presentations in the 2011 ECOSOC AMR: Bangladesh, Belarus, Germany, Malawi, Mauritius, Mexico, Pakistan, Qatar, Samoa, Senegal, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

## Objectives

The primary objective of the regional consultation is to review and assess the progress of the Africa region in achieving the MDGs. The meeting will enable countries to engage at an early stage in the process leading to the AMR session to be held during the ECOSOC high-level segment in July 2011, in Geneva. The initiative will also support the global review by focusing, in addition to the overall performance of the region in achieving the development goals related to education (2011 AMR theme), on one specific aspect relevant to the region. The outcome of such a review would contribute to the analysis that will support ECOSOC's deliberations in July.

More specific objectives of the meeting are to:

- Examine in greater depth a specific aspect of the AMR thematic focus particularly relevant to the countries in the region.
- Review progress in achieving the education and development agenda in the region and related challenges, especially those that could best be addressed through regional cooperation.
- Exchange lessons learned.
- Promote stakeholder engagement – governments, civil society, UN system institutions and private sector – early on in the AMR process.
- Provide an opportunity to prepare the launch of new partnership initiatives at the AMR July 2011 session, in Geneva.

## Focus

The ECOSOC AMR Africa Regional Meeting will take place in the context of the African Union Teachers' Conference to be held in Lomé, Togo 13-15 April 2011. The Meeting will build on the preparations for the discussions to be held during the Teachers' Conference, address the critical aspects of equity and access, and use the ability of ECOSOC to address crosscutting issues by convening multiple stakeholders from a broad spectrum of constituencies, including beyond the education sector.

### **1. An overview of progress made in the region**

Since the Dakar World Forum on Education in 2000, significant progress has been made in the Africa region regarding the attainment of the six Education for All (EFA) goals. However, evidence shows that all the goals will not be reached by all countries in the region by the 2015 target date.

Regarding EFA goal 1 (expanding early childhood care and education), statistics show that pre-primary gross enrolment ratios (GER) increased by 5% in nine years. It is in the area of EFA goal 2 (free and compulsory primary education) that achievement rates show that significant progress has been made, increasing from 43% in 2000 to 64% in 2008. It is estimated that 22 countries will reach the 100% EFA target by 2015. The challenge of this

story is that 40% of the primary school leavers cannot read. Concerning goal 3, (technical and vocation education) the GER has decreased from 9% in 2000 to 7% in 2008. Regarding goal 4 (increasing adult literacy), much remains to be done: the number of illiterate people in Africa increased from 140 million in 2000 to 153 million in 2008, the majority of whom are girls and women. Concerning goal 5 (achieving gender parity and equality), in 2008, there were 94 girls to 100 boys enrolled in primary school. In the first cycle of secondary education this was only 84%. Finally regarding goal 6 (improving the quality of education), the situation is still quite challenging: some 40 per cent of pupils having attended grade 5 of primary school can neither master the basic competences required to avoid a relapse into illiteracy nor have the basic skills required to perform a job.

## **2. Situation of financing of education**

There are significant disparities in education financing between countries in the African region. For example, Sub-Saharan African countries as a whole allocate 11 to 28 per cent of their public resources to education. This means that despite a relatively low per capita Gross Domestic Product, these counties invest a relatively significant amount of resources in education.

## **3. The quality imperative: ensuring inclusiveness**

While the general notion of inclusive education aims at mainstreaming participation of individual learners with special education needs, inclusive quality education reaches out to all and encompasses good teaching, well equipped schools and learning centres, safe schools, enough instruction in the right languages, relevant and useful curriculum and well managed schools. Above all, ensuring a quality education for everyone, not only a few people or in a few places, is a human right. Inclusion is therefore a requirement for quality.

African countries have made significant efforts towards inclusive education, whose key principle is to accommodate all children regardless of their ethnicity and physical, emotional or social conditions, among others. Some African countries stand out clearly in the struggle to achieve this, such as South Africa, the network of inclusive education for East Africa and the nomadic schools project in Nigeria.

## **4. Ensuring equity in access and quality**

Countries in the African continent have the lowest primary enrolment and attendance ratios in the world. Children in many countries do not have as much access to primary education as those in other regions. There is significant meaning in exploring the equity-focused approach in looking at the education sector in the African region. In this regard, economic quintile analyses of school attendance from household surveys show different pattern and trends. For example, Sahelian countries with generally low enrolment ratios show a sharp contrast between the richest quintile and the rest. On the other hand, countries with relatively higher national average enrolments show a sharp contrast between the poorest quintile and the rest with generally higher attendance rates in all groups.

Economic disparity is the strongest factor in schooling, and other factors, such as rural-urban disparity as well as gender disparity, account for inequality. The economic gap and gender and urban/rural disparities interact and intensify disparity. While disadvantaged

children deserve a quality education, the supply of education for them is not always the best. The disparity in the quality of education between the rich and poor is significant.

Social protection strategies and interventions aimed at reducing cost barriers and opportunity costs for households to send their children to school are needed to ensure access to school and quality of learning for those disadvantaged groups. The provision of social protection subsidies, cash and food transfers conditional on enrollment and attendance, free uniforms, textbooks, school materials, transportation, school health, meals and nutrition interventions and scholarships for vulnerable households, as well as direct grants to schools, are examples that help eliminate barriers to schooling. These measures will need to be scaled up to respond to the recent financial and economic crisis, its impact on dwindling international development aid and the mounting pressure on commodity prices, including basic food commodities. These situations impact on the poor and marginalized households whose coping strategies often include pulling their children out of school.

### **5. Rights-based approach: Reinforcing teacher quality and learning**

The right to enjoy all the above mentioned rights is enshrined in a variety of international human rights treaties notably the provisions of articles 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 13 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that reaffirm the right of every one to education based on the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination. Taking a human rights-based approach means carefully planning work so that, for example, the poorest, socially excluded and those who suffer multiple discriminations, are reached. This involves a broad spectrum of people, from community members to grassroots activists to local, national and international NGOs, to trade unions and other civil society actors.

Six areas have been identified as central in the quality debate:

- Appropriate, relevant and inclusive educational aims
- Relevance and breadth in curriculum content
- Actual time available for learning, and its use
- Effective teaching styles
- Appropriate language(s) of instruction
- Regular, reliable and timely assessment, both summative and formative.

With specific reference to African languages, evidence shows their adequate use in education has contributed to improving the quality of teaching and learning through effective communication and interaction that sustain learning with more active participation of learners. UNESCO and ADEA are jointly supporting African governments in the implementation of the policy guide adopted by Ministers of Education in Ouagadougou, for the integration of African languages and cultures in education. The main outcome document of the Bamako+5 meeting on teachers organized by ADEA, in 2009 recommended to governments to adopt inclusive teacher policies that take into account the non formal education (NFE) personnel.

### **6. Nutrition as a means of enhancing learning outcomes**

Beyond quality teachers and teaching there are other factors essential to enhance learning. Factors such as poverty and malnutrition negatively affect the psychosocial and cognitive development of the child. Research evidence including neuroscience research findings confirm the importance of nutrition for the mental and physical health of the child right from the foetal stage to the very early years (0-8) of life for an optimal development of the brain. The 0-8 year period, therefore, remains the most crucial one for investment to attain successful learning outcomes for every child.

Although the damage done by malnutrition in the first 1,000 days of life is irreversible, addressing the nutritional needs of pre-school and school-age children is critical for improving health, maximizing learning and cognitive potential and increasing school enrolment, attendance and performance.<sup>4</sup> While undergoing considerable physical and mental development, children at school-age need high levels of energy, protein and micronutrients. Better nutrition for girls also reduces maternal mortality and low birth weight. Schools are an ideal setting and practical platform to provide integrated interventions at a critical age. School meals not only alleviate child hunger in school, enabling children to concentrate on their studies; it enhances school children's diets and can also reduce micronutrient deficiencies when meals contain a good level of micronutrients and when complemented with de-worming as well as hygiene and sanitation measures.

Evidence indicates that well-managed nutrition education programmes can bring about behaviour changes that contribute to improved nutritional wellbeing at relatively low cost. School gardens have also gained prominence as a tool for the promotion of healthy diets, nutrition education, and the development of livelihood skills. An integrated policy approach of health, education and nutrition would make an important contribution to reducing the expenditure on remedial education programmes, high drop-out rates and relapse to illiteracy. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) which is the most neglected among the EFA goals, needs to be given special significance if MDG 2 on education and EFA Goals are to be attained.

## **7. Conclusion**

The lessons learnt reveal a relatively weak commitment, on the part of governments, to a rights-based approach for inclusive, quality education of quality and on the part of development partners, to promises made to meet the financing gap to attain the targets set. A more concerted effort by governments, civil society actors and development partners alike is required to address the right of every child to an education of quality relevant for human, societal and economic development. Quality education and inclusive education are a constitutional right for every child. They are critical for the achievement of sustainable development in Africa. An integrated approach to inclusive education including quality and a rights-based education component that also takes into consideration equity issues may lead to a powerful tool to build sustainable development in Africa.

## **Format of the meeting**

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<sup>4</sup> Jukes, M. et al. 2008. *School Health, Nutrition, and Education for All – Levelling the Playing Field*. CABI Publishing

The meeting will consist of an opening ceremony followed by four plenary sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. The opening will be devoted to a brief introduction of the topic by a distinguished speaker. The first session would address the issue of equity in education, and the second would address education inclusiveness and quality. The third session would be devoted to the presentation of case studies, lessons learned and best practices. The fourth and final session would be a discussion of the main messages and policy recommendations to be transmitted to the 2011 ECOSOC AMR session.

## **Documentation**

A substantive background document will be prepared in advance of the event on the theme of the meeting, which will lay the basis for discussion and raise issues for debate. UNESCO and UNICEF will provide support in the preparation of this document. As a follow-up to the meeting, an analytical summary will be circulated (see below).

## **Participation**

Participants will include Ministers and other senior-level policy makers from countries in the region entrusted with the implementation of national development and education strategies; Representatives of international organizations working on the theme of the meeting; and Representatives of civil society, NGOs and the private sector. Participants will be drawn from the existing participants in the African Union Teachers' Conference. Additional speakers and participants will also be invited.

## **Outcome**

The meeting is expected to have three main outcomes. The primary outcome will be an analytical summary of the meeting, which will capture the lessons that can be learned from the experiences presented. This will be prepared by UNDESA. The summary will be submitted and circulated at the main AMR session during the ECOSOC high-level segment. A representative of the host country will be invited to present a report of the meeting to the July AMR session. Similarly, the case studies presented would be made available at the AMR session, as well as disseminated through the ECOSOC website (through an open database).

Secondly, the meeting will provide an important opportunity for key policy makers to develop new partnerships – both North-South and South-South – which could be announced at the AMR session in July 2011. Finally, the event will identify follow-up actions to be undertaken by the relevant stakeholders within the region in furtherance of the particular theme.