

## **NEW DELHI DECLARATION ON EDUCATION**

### **Preamble**

We, the Ministers of Education and heads of delegation of the SAARC Member States (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) met in New Delhi, India, on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014, to review our progress on the SAARC development goals relating to education and to strengthen our cooperation in consolidating the gains and addressing remaining challenges.

We note that significant progress has been made since the last meeting of SAARC Education Ministers held in 2009, particularly in terms of universal access to primary education, reducing gender disparities in enrolment in primary and secondary education, completion of primary education cycle and improving quality of primary secondary and higher education

### **SAARC Perspectives on the Post-2015 Education Agenda**

We recognize that despite substantial progress towards SAARC education development goals, our countries face several challenges relating to universalisation of primary education, gender disparities in enrolment and completion rates in primary and secondary education, and illiteracy among youth and adults. Challenges also remain in achieving the goals of Early Childhood Care and Education, skills development, and qualitative improvement of education and attainment by learners of the expected learning outcomes.

We also recognize that the challenges being faced by our countries call for innovative approaches and sustained efforts to foster education development in our countries. In this context, we agree to support the priority areas – quality improvement and improving learning outcomes; inclusive school education including education of children with special needs; skill building and vocational education; higher education and technical education with special focus on mutual capacity building; and use of ICT in education and introduction of Massive Open On-line Courses (MOOCS) – that have been identified for collaborative efforts.

We acknowledge that the Second SAARC Education Ministers' Meeting provided a timely opportunity for the SAARC Member States to put in place a cooperation mechanism to develop a shared vision and joint actions for the formulation and implementation of the post-2015 SAARC education development goals. We consider that the SAARC Member States are in a position to play an important role in the formulation of the global post-2015 education agenda.

We reaffirm that education is a human right and recognize the central role of education in ensuring inclusive and sustainable development, accelerating social transformation, achieving gender equality, and promoting peace, tolerance and social cohesion. We also recognize the importance of education in human development which is essential for inclusive growth and well-being of all in our countries. We, therefore, commit to work together in a concrete, coordinated

and strategic way to facilitate the achievement of the education sector development goals set by each of the SAARC Member States.

### **Regional Priority Areas of Action**

Recognizing the importance of education in National Development, we will continue to accord priority to expansion of education for ensuring equitable and inclusive access to education for all – children, youth and adults – at all levels of education, from early childhood care and education to tertiary education, significantly improving the quality of education imparted, and ensuring that educational opportunities are available to all segments of the society. In this context, we resolve to focus on the following education development priorities:

- Enhance the learning and developmental readiness of pre-school age children for primary education through participation in quality early childhood care and education with particular attention to children belonging to disadvantaged population groups;
- Accelerate progress towards the goal of Education for All and ensuring that all primary/elementary school-age children are enabled to realize their right to free and compulsory education and are supported to complete a quality primary education that is relevant, inclusive, learner-centred and gender-equitable, with all of them achieving expected learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) defined for different levels of education;
- Ensure quality education opportunities for the disadvantaged groups by evolving and adopting policies and programmatic responses required for (i) ensuring that all education programs are made accessible, inclusive and responsive to children and young people from disadvantaged population groups, particularly children with special needs and children with various forms of disabilities; (ii) ensuring that all enrolled pupils are supported to enable them achieve the expected learning outcomes; (iii) ensuring that social, regional and gender gaps in education are eliminated and gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment are promoted throughout the education system; (iv) ensuring that young people in the age group 15-24 years including those who have not been able to complete the compulsory stage of education and young people working in the informal sector of the economy, are provided with opportunities to attain skills for employability; and (v) undertaking system-wide reforms that are needed to tackle the barriers that prevent students from disadvantaged population groups from continuing their education and enhancing their skills for employability;
- Enhance the availability, accessibility and quality of secondary education to achieve universalisation of secondary/higher secondary education and ensure that all secondary and higher secondary school students are supported to complete education with acceptable levels of learning;
- Expanding opportunities for skill development including technical and vocational education and training programs, for facilitating acquisition by young people and adults of the skills and competencies for life and work, including technical and vocational skills that are

required for employability, work and entrepreneurship and for adapting to an ever-changing world of work;

- Revitalise higher education system in each of the SAARC Member States by strengthening capacity of higher education institutions in order to ensure equitable access to tertiary education by expanding the availability of higher education institutions, including technical and professional education institutions, by facilitating mutual recognition of qualification and mobility of students and faculty, as well as alternative learning modes such as open and distance learning modes, narrowing group inequalities in access to higher education, and improving teaching and research across all higher education institutions.
- Ensure utilization of common advanced centralized research facilities/services for Universities in the SAARC region.
- Network with Centres of Excellence and encourage channels of communication on an on-going basis.
- Reduce and eventually eliminate gender and social category gaps and inequalities in access to education, teaching-learning process and learning outcomes by ensuring that gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment are promoted throughout the education system; and implementing system-wide initiatives that are needed to tackle the barriers that prevent students from disadvantaged population groups from continuing their education.
- Foster quality education with a strong focus on enabling all learners attain relevant learning outcomes through reforms relating to curricula, learning materials, pedagogic processes, learning assessment frameworks, teacher quality and performance, improvement in institutional leadership and management;
- Ensure effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for improving access to education, enhancing the quality of teaching-learning process, training of teachers, and strengthening educational planning and management.
- Ensure that the systems of teacher preparation, and teacher management and development are reformed to ensure adequate supply of qualified and competent teachers to meet the demands of all levels/stages of the education system and that measures are put in place to institutionalize continuing professional development of serving teachers leading to professionalization and enhanced capacity of teachers;
- Institutionalize a responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational planning, governance and management by ensuring that the structures for the planning and management of the education sector at the national , sub-national and local levels are strengthened, educational planning and management practices are improved and made

more responsive to the emerging educational priorities and to the demands of the expanding education sector in each of the SAARC Member States;

- Professionalize and enhance the capacity of institutional leadership along with development and introduction of sound quality management systems to ensure improved governance of the education sector, both at the system and institutional levels, and the development of norms and standards for assessing quality and effective management practices at all levels of education;
- Ensure increased and well-targeted financing of education for education development programs by each of the SAARC Member States.

### **Scope of cooperation**

To pursue the above priority actions, we agree to expand the scope of cooperation which would involve the following activities:

- Formulation of the SAARC Framework for Action for the post-2015 education agenda;
- Technical cooperation and exchange of experts in the field of education and related fields for meeting the capacity building and research needs of SAARC Member States and for developing appropriate strategies for attaining the post-2015 education development goals and targets in a sustainable manner;
- Generating/expanding the knowledge base required to support the formulation of policies and programmatic interventions that match the needs and situation in each of the SAARC Member States;

Sharing/dissemination of information/knowledge, including research results, best practices and innovations, relating to education policies and programmes, among countries to facilitate the formulation of evidence-based policy options and programmatic initiatives.

- Networking with individual specialists, institutions and organizations, including National Ministries, in individual SAARC Member States in order to improve collaboration for addressing key education sector- related challenges and to promote exchange of experiences and know-how to facilitate the formulation of policy and programmatic initiatives relevant to the needs of each of the SAARC Member States;
- Policy dialogue among SAARC Member States on issues concerning education development;
- Advocacy for improved policies/practices and formulation of effective programmatic interventions for achieving the education sector development goals and targets set by each of the SAARC Member States;

- Periodic monitoring of and reporting on progress towards post-2015 SAARC education development goals/targets.

### **Reporting progress**

During the first half of 2015, we will jointly elaborate concrete action plans for our cooperation in the areas defined in paragraph above and hold a technical meeting in June 2015 to finalize these plans. We will hold a second technical meeting to assess progress and agree on remaining activities to be concluded before the Third Meeting of SAARC Education Ministers to be held in the Maldives in 2016. We will report back on achievements at the individual country level and on joint activities every year.

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