PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETING

Nuku'alofa, Tonga

24-26 March 2009

SESSION FIVE

STATUS REPORT ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This paper was prepared by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

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STATUS REPORT ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Summary

Purpose

This paper is to update Ministers on the two initiatives under Monitoring and Evaluation:

   a)   Education Sector-wide Monitoring and Evaluation Initiative; and

   b)   Monitoring of literacy, numeracy and life-skills.

Issues

2.   Following considerable work by development partners at the both the national and regional level on monitoring and evaluation (M&E), Ministers are provided with an overview of the current situation.

Recommendations

3.   Ministers are invited to:

   a)   **note** progress on and continue to support regional work in education sector-wide monitoring and evaluation by development partners and countries; and

   b)   **note** progress on and continue to support regional work on monitoring of literacy, numeracy and life-skills.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva

3 March 2009

STATUS REPORT ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A. An Update on the Education Sector-wide M & E Initiative[1]

Purpose

To update Ministers on the two initiatives under Monitoring and Evaluation:

1)   Education Sector-wide Monitoring and Evaluation Initiative
2)   Monitoring of literacy, numeracy and life skills

Background

2.   Increased investment in and access to basic education has raised the demand for better education outcomes from governments themselves and development partners. Stakeholders want to know what public policies, investments and interventions work well, which do not, and the reasons why. This has necessitated a strengthening of education information systems as well as capacity development of staff for monitoring and evaluation activities.   Development partners have attempted to work with government partners on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) but, too often, it has been ad hoc, fragmented and disconnected. Finding new ways of working together in a more collaborative and efficient manner between governments and development partners has become increasingly important in advancing further the effort of achieving Education For All (EFA) in the Pacific region.

3.   Over the past decade or so, countries in the Pacific region have made considerable progress in achieving EFA with the support of the regional development community. However, this progress could be improved if governments, donors and development partners could better harmonize their work in some fundamental and yet critical areas in their education systems. One such area, for instance, is monitoring and evaluation (M&E) on a sector wide basis rather than just project M&E. Globally, more and more countries are now focusing on improving M&E at the system level to assess the progress and results of their educational improvement effort. Though Pacific countries have made achievement in M&E in education over the years, most M&E practices have been project/program based and fragmented.

4.   There is a lack of an overall M&E framework or institutional M&E in the education sector in most Pacific countries. As a consequence, good data and M&E results are difficult to find and are rarely used for making improvements in policies and decisions. Governments and development partners in the region could work together in a more effective way to change this situation. Regional development partners are willing to find new ways of working together to assist countries' effort in making further progress towards EFA through initiatives such as developing and strengthening national M&E systems in education. They have agreed to take a coordinated approach and work with the governments to make a difference in the coming years. To move the effort in this area forward, some ground work still needs to be done in the areas of awareness, consensus-building, and prioritization of improvement actions, even though we agree to build on the existing work done by the countries and by the development community.

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[1] This paper was prepared by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA)

5.   A three-day conference involving high-level policymakers and practitioners from all 15 Pacific countries was held at Sigatoka, Fiji in July 2008. Key messages from the meeting are in Appendix A. Following this conference, development partners in the region have made a commitment to follow up on the outcomes and provide necessary support both technically and financially to countries in implementing the agreed actions. As a consequence, UNESCO and SPBEA organized a capacity building workshop for 29 officials from 15 Pacific Island states from 27 to 31 October 2008 and agreed on the a number of recommendations which can be found in Appendix B.

Current Status

6.   In spite of various constraints and challenges, the various development partners are endeavouring to work together to develop and build capacity in countries with regards sector-wide or systems approach to M&E.

7.   PRIDE has developed strategic plans which lay the foundation for a systems approach to M&E. However, it is clear that an M&E culture is yet to mature in the Pacific. The work on M&E tends to be regarded as work for the donors and not for the countries themselves. The links between M&E, policy development and operations plans based on empirical data rather than anecdotal evidence need continuous advocacy, rather than being a compliance tool. The approach for compliance is one possible reason for only lip-service support is given to M&E systems. Following the 2008 October workshop, there is more awareness of the importance of sector-wide or system approach to M&E, but it still requires more harmonizing amongst development partners, donors and governments for this culture to be assimilated and integrated into the activities of national education systems.

8.   AusAID, NZAID, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, SPBEA, UNESCO, UNICEF and the University of the South Pacific (PRIDE) are trying to harmonize their efforts to share resources both financial and technical to support countries to realize a systems approach to M&E. Many obstacles have been encountered but a lot of effort is being put into trying to achieve harmonization.

9.   The Paris Declaration (PD) provides the context for this work. The PD provides countries with guidelines that they can use to ensure that donors and development partners support government directions rather than trying to influence governments towards particular priorities.

10.   The proposed systems M&E approach will be broader than EFA reporting. The distinction is that EFA has set goals, whereas national strategic plans often include those goals as well as other goals.

Implementation

11.   A tool that is being developed to support this work is being undertaken in Tonga by:
- the Tongan Government (with financial support from AusAID)
- SPBEA (providing technical database expertise)
- UNESCO (providing statistical and M&E expertise; and oversight of the project)

12.   This project started in 2008. and should conclude by 2010. At the 2008 October M&E Meeting in Nadi, the Tongan participants advocated very strongly for this approach to be used in other countries. A number of countries' participants approached UNESCO and SPBEA to carry out this work in their countries. However, funds are limited and bilateral funds need to be allocated as Tonga has done to support this work. Another important pre-requisite to this approach is the mindset shift towards evidence based decision making. There are indications that developments in this area will be realized in 2009 and beyond.

Pacific Regional Conference on

Harmonizing Monitoring & Evaluation for Better Education
2nd – 4th July 2008
Shangri-La Fijian Resort & Spa, Sigatoka, FIJI

KEY MESSAGES

M and E systems are a tool that assists governments in achieving their national educational goals.

Countries need to invest in developing M and E systems.
This will require a range of inputs e.g. incremental funding, technical capacity building

Changes in approach at the international level should enable the development of M and E systems e.g. Paris Declaration, UNDAF, MDG's

Countries need to take ownership of the policy agenda to which M and E systems respond

Increases in donor awareness of the importance of M and E should lead to higher levels of funding

Above all, realizing the potential of M and E systems will depend upon political commitment, leadership and the goodwill of all stakeholders.

REVISITING THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR BETTER HARMONISATION

M and E systems have to reflect the needs of users and the uses to which they put the data. M and E systems, must pay attention not only to data generation, but its analysis, interpretation, dissemination and communication.

Mechanisms need to be established that facilitate communication between the full range of stakeholders e.g. ministries, donors, teachers, parents and communities.

OTHER ISSUES

Participants reiterated a need for more focus on educational quality and a need to include national educational goals in M&E frameworks.

There is a deep concern with keeping youth engaged in education, including outside the formal systems

Concern also with the inclusion of Pacific knowledges, values and beliefs within the curriculum and M and E systems.

M & E 27 – 30th October Workshop

Recommendations

Following the July 2008 ministerial conference on harmonizing monitoring and evaluation for better education, 29 officials from 15 Pacific Island states participated in capacity development workshop from 27 to 31 October 2008 and agreed on the following recommendations to be submitted to 16th Consultation of Pacific Heads of Education Systems and subsequently to 2009 Forum Education Ministers Meeting.

- Special support for small island states to fast-track the development of M&E systems
  - capacity development
  - framework and EMIS development

- Improvement of data collection services could with regards to the following
  - physical realities e.g. population size (PNG) location (as scattered islands of Vanuatu and RMI); distance and isolation
  - teachers (recruitment, training, capacity and in-service training needs including M and E)
  - national human resource capacity in M and E
  - teaching resources for quality education
  - finances – 'if we had the finances could address all of these issues'

- Capacity development
  - size and technical expertise
  - collecting and managing qualitative data
  - support from development partners

- Establishment of support systems
  - resources
  - online forum
  - sharing regional technical expertise
  - harmonizing across the divisions within education and across the ministries

Status Report on Monitoring and Evaluation

B.   Monitoring of Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills[2]

1.   Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform the Pacific Island Forum Education Ministers on the background and current status of work being done in the area of monitoring national literacy, numeracy and life skills. This work comprises one aspect of the wider monitoring and evaluation initiatives being delivered by partners including UNESCO, UNICEF and SPBEA as endorsed by the Forum Education Ministers in 2006 on the Regional benchmarks for literacy, numeracy and life skills.

2.   Background

"Literacy is a foundation of learning. While schooling is the principal route for acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills, an exclusive focus on formal education for children ignores stark realities: first, too many pupils leave school without acquiring minimum literacy skills, second, one-fifth of the world's adult population – 771 million adults – live without the basic learning tools to make informed decisions and participate fully in the development of their societies."
EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, UNESCO

Achievement in literacy and numeracy has been shown to be a key determinant of educational outcomes.[3] For example, students who achieve high levels of literacy and numeracy during the compulsory years of schooling are more likely than lower-achieving students to stay on to complete Year 12 and enter higher education[4], and to obtain higher tertiary entrance scores [5]

Achievement in literacy and numeracy has also been linked to a range of labour market outcomes. Making a successful transition from school to full-time employment, the type of occupation obtained, and earnings are positively related to literacy and numeracy. Conversely, persons with lower literacy and numeracy levels are more likely to be outside the labour force or unemployed, and to experience longer periods of unemployment. Literacy and numeracy are essential ingredients for effective communication and participation in adult life. They have been linked to social outcomes such as community participation, engagement in lifelong learning, and health[6]; [7]

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[2] This paper was prepared by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA)

[3] Rothman, S & McMillian, J (2003) Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy, LSAY Research Report 36, Melbourne, ACER.

[4] Marks,G.N., Fleming,N., Long, M & McMillian, J (2000) Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia:Trends and Issues, LSAY Research Report No.17, Melbourne, ACER

[5] Marks, G.N., McMillian, J. & Hillman, K (2001) Tertiary entrance performance: The role of student background and social factors, LSAY Research Report 22, Melbourne, ACER.

[6] OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistical Canada (2000) Literacy in the information age: Final report of the International Adult Literacy Study

[7] Roberts, P & Fawcett, G (1998). At – risk: A socioeconomic analysis of health and literacy among seniors. Ottawa: Statistics, Canada.

The central role of literacy and numeracy in empowering people and laying the foundation for future achievements in education are also reasons why both developing and developed nations continue to monitor literacy and numeracy as well as other educational outcomes in the effort to monitor improvements in education.

In Pacific Island Countries, the monitoring of literacy and numeracy was a major focus of the BELS programme operating in the decade of the 1990s. All participating countries used the same test instruments for both English literacy and numeracy. These instruments were not constructed by establishing direct links with the curricula operating at the time. The countries did not take the results seriously as they were not integrated into their national systems. There was also a lack of understanding of the use of evidence to inform interventions or policy at the time. In addition, there was a general lack of ownership for the BELS project as it was developed by donors without input from Pacific Island Countries.

In 2002 work started in a number of countries on developing monitoring instruments based upon the specific curriculum operating within each country. Since there were curriculum differences between countries, each instrument had to be specific to a particular country. During the years 2004 to 2008, SPBEA worked with the curriculum and assessment units in six Pacific Island countries to develop, trial, modify and administer these instruments. In each country the instruments have been developed for use at the end of the primary years 4 and 6.

There have been obstacles in this process. These have included: establishing confidence in the representative nature of samples (particularly at island or provincial levels); modifications to curricula upon which tests are constructed; developing expertise of markers in thinking 'achievement' as opposed to 'marks' and developing understanding of the difference in purpose of these between these tools and high stakes examinations.

Nevertheless, valuable information is beginning to emerge in the areas of literacy and numeracy; information that can assist education ministries in identifying priorities relating to provision of resources and training.

In 2006, a separate regional initiative saw the development, and acceptance of sets of standards for literacy, numeracy and life skills. These were defined for the primary years 2, 4, 6 and 8 for literacy and numeracy and years 4 and 8 for life skills. These benchmarks were presented to the Ministers of Education at their 2006 meeting in Nadi, and were subsequently accepted as regional indicators.

Published literacy figures for Pacific Island Countries (PIC) are relatively high but this is misleading as it does not reflect the true situation in each country. However, the true level of functional literacy and numeracy depends on what each country considers as being literate and numerate. There is a general understanding that despite the high level of literacy published, there is a high level of hidden illiteracy resulting in a significant proportion of children completing school but still lacking the basic literacy and numeracy skills to be able to survive in our rapidly changing society.

3.   Current Status

Reports for literacy and numeracy in five countries have been completed for both Year 4 and Year 6 students. The CEOs of the Ministries of Education in each of these countries has received their specific reports.

It should be noted that development of standardised tests for Life Skills is lagging behind those for Literacy and Numeracy. The main reason for this relates to the delayed identification of life skills within the national curricula. Some countries are now in a position to proceed with development of the instrument to monitor the status of life skills. SPBEA and UNICEF expect to provide assistance to countries in this area during 2009.

Each report contains comprehensive data, relating to achievements, at National, Provincial and Island levels, broken down by gender, and by key strands and key skills. The reports also contain a set of recommendations for consideration.

Each of the reports presents sets of baseline achievements, against which data from future administrations of the instruments can be compared. Although country reports do differ from each other in many details, it is noticeable that the region does face similar challenges in the achievement of both literacy and numeracy skills.

Most countries are ensuring that the skills defined by the regional benchmarks are appropriately incorporated within the curriculum at the indicated year level. This opens up the opportunity for *Regional* versions of the standardised tests to be developed, which focus on skills common to all countries and which are aligned to the regional benchmarks.

SPBEA together with other development partners, UNESCO and UNICEF are now working on developing the regional instruments based on the common items from the countries. It is hoped that these will be trialed before the end of the year.

Recommendations

Ministers are invited to:

a)   note progress on and continue to support regional work in monitoring and evaluation by development partners and countries; and

b)   note progress on and continue to support regional work on monitoring of literacy, numeracy and life-skills.