

**OSCE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION REFORM  
REGIONAL COOPERATION IN MANAGING EDUCATION REFORMS**

- Many thanks for inviting ADB to address this conference.
- We are all here today because of the common conviction that education is fundamentally important in a nation's socio-economic development, in facilitating the process of transition, and in building long-term stability, peace, and prosperity.
- At the start of independence, countries of the former Soviet Union shared a common education system and faced similar reform challenges.
- However, their approaches to change and education policy direction led to different stages of reform and outcomes.
- The CARs have much to gain from sharing their experiences and stronger policy dialogue and coordination in the education sphere would improve both the processes and outcomes of their respective reforms.
- Thus, in mid-2001, ADB provided a grant for a regional technical assistance to facilitate exchange among 6 member countries (AZE, KAZ, KGZ, MON, TAJ, and UZB) while capitalizing on the comparative advantage of ADB to foster cooperation in the education sphere.
- Objectives of TA
  - identify best practices in planning and implementing education reforms in transition countries.
  - promote civil society participation in reform management.
  - facilitate high-level policy dialogue among national decision-makers and external partners.
  - identify areas and programs for fostering subregional cooperation
- The TA would enhance policy exchanges and debate at national level by encouraging the involvement of a variety of stakeholders in national education policy, at subregional level by bringing together education decision-makers of the 6 countries, and at international level by facilitating dialogue and concerted action between development partners and countries.
- TA's activities included:
  - preparation of country studies in education reform management
  - two subregional technical workshops



- national policy in each participating DMC
- final subregional policy conference (in October 2002)
- publication and dissemination of findings and recommendations
  - including website development
- I would like to share some of the findings and recommendations of the TA.
- General outcome
  - lessons derived from country experiences were helpful, particularly in decentralization, rationalization, cost-sharing, legislation, and privatization in the education sector
  - 4 issues papers - access, quality, finance, governance were prepared by the international consultants based on country info; these were useful in extracting findings from the case studies, comparing across countries, and identifying best practices
  - general results are published as part of a book "Challenges for Education in Central Asia" on articles edited by S. Heyneman and A. de Young
- Main sector challenge remains to set the legal, pedagogical, and managerial basis for improving the quality of education.
- Key cross-country concern:
  - curriculum modernization and examination systems
- Other concerns:
  - provision of pre-school education for all
  - access to education for disadvantaged and marginalized populations
  - development of rural schools
  - teaching of various languages
  - role and use of information technology
  - low level of teacher salaries
  - deterioration of school facilities and equipment
  - declining levels of inputs (textbooks in particular)
  - decentralization and privatization
  - combating corruption in education
- It may be noted that the above concerns break down into 4 general themes - quality and relevance, access, finance, and governance.
- Quality and relevance

- participants opposed the idea of new centers or permanent structure to deliver services on a regional basis.
- past efforts had been unsuccessful.
- regional efforts to raise education quality would best be done through regional task forces or councils composed of national representatives.
- recommendations for regional cooperation:
  - highest priority be given to training of teachers for regional cooperation.
  - curriculum development also a high priority for regional cooperation.
  - a regional network for identification and dissemination of effective practices be developed.
  - a regional initiative to develop education quality indicators be established.
  - an initiative to promote regional cooperation in distance education be developed.
  - enhancing regional cooperation on transferability of courses and credentials be promoted.
  - each country should develop an appropriate national mechanism through which regional cooperation to improve quality and relevance of education continues to be discussed.
- Access
  - recommendations for regional cooperation:
    - review and sharing of experiences in increasing access to education in rural areas be a priority for regional cooperation (focusing on children with special needs, ethnic minorities, poverty reduction, and school drop-outs).
    - a unified information analytical center for education access, oriented toward policy and strategy be created.
    - review and sharing of experiences in early childhood and pre-school education in families and communities be a priority for regional cooperation.
    - each country should develop an appropriate national mechanism through which regional cooperation to improve access to education continues to be discussed.
- Finance
  - recommendations for regional cooperation:



- **focused policy studies and comparative studies on experiences in the region as well as international studies be carried out. Priority topics:**
  - **practices in implementing per capita financing of primary and secondary education.**
  - **successful financial decentralization**
  - **strategies for improving the status of teachers in terms of salaries and benefits**
  - **mechanisms to offset the rising costs of schooling and strengthen social protection**
  - **review of student loan schemes**
  - **strategies to encourage private-public sector participation in pre-school provision**
- **a subregional network of educators be established to foster policy exchanges and sharing of experiences.**
- **Governance**
  - **recommendations for regional cooperation:**
    - **a regional network for cooperation in education planning and management.**
    - **a mechanism for standardizing formats for presentation and analysis of data and information from national EMIS be established.**
    - **a mechanism for the dissemination of information, conference findings, etc be established.**
    - **a regional journal of education be established.**
    - **a mechanism for regular subregional meetings at policy and implementation levels be put in place.**
    - **an Interstate Council for Regional Cooperation in Education be set up.**
- **Next steps:**
  - **platform or forum for supporting policy dialogue and promoting regional cooperation.**
  - **high-level subregional council tasked with organizing and overseeing cooperation initiatives.**
  - **subregional education network to ensure continuity in information/experience sharing in the region.**
    - **consisting of several task forces for further elaboration of priority proposals and initiatives.**
- **ADB and Open Society are now cofinancing technical assistance and cooperating in establishing a Central Asia network.**

- In conclusion, the countries gathered here today have already laid a substantial amount of groundwork towards regional cooperation in education reforms. The priorities and tasks have already been determined. We hope this conference brings the efforts of your countries and colleagues another quantum step further.
- May you have interesting and successful discussions at this conference.