

## **ROOM DOCUMENT FOR THE MODERATION SESSION OF THE 10<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE COMCEC POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP**

A policy debate session was held during the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Poverty Alleviation Working Group (PAWG) and the Working Group came up with some concrete policy recommendations for improving education of disadvantaged children in the OIC and approximating policies among the member countries in this important issue. The policy advices presented below have been identified in light of the main findings of the research report titled “Education of Disadvantaged Children in the OIC: The Key to Escape from Poverty” and the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questionnaire which was sent by the COMCEC Coordination Office.

### ***Policy Advice 1: Improving access of poor and disadvantaged children to education through eliminating/reducing school fees and by developing conditional cash transfer and school feeding programmes***

#### **Rationale:**

Children living in poorer households are more likely to be out of school compared to children living in richer households. Lack of proper education is strongly associated with a higher likelihood of remaining poor in the later periods of life. Making education more affordable thus is an ample opportunity to save these children out of this vicious cycle. As a good example, school fee abolition has been adopted in a number of countries in recent decades and this has led to increases in enrolment rates.

Conditional cash transfer programmes also prove to be an effective policy tool to increase enrolment rates. They provide financial support directly to households, mothers or children in order to achieve this certain goal. In cases where families do not have the necessary financial means and motivation, providing a financial transfer on condition that the children keep going to school creates a strong incentive for school attendance.

School feeding programmes on the other hand fulfil two important purposes. First, they encourage families to send their children to school. Even the parents might not put a great emphasis on education per se and hence are not well-motivated to send their children to school, they would care for their nourishment. Second, better nourishment leads to better concentration of students in classes, which improves the educational achievement.

Therefore, making schools free, providing conditional cash transfers and school feeding programs for disadvantaged children can enhance school enrolment and continuity of education.

### ***Policy Advice 2: Enabling access of children in rural and remote areas by establishing new schools or providing free transportation for the children living in these regions***

#### **Rationale:**

Rural areas and urban slums have a greater likelihood to lack sufficient number of schools. Moreover, the dispersed locations of schools in rural areas necessitate much greater amount of travel. Schools in rural areas or disadvantaged regions also lack necessary number of trained teachers and sufficient amounts of education materials.

Hence, building new schools or modifying existing buildings as schools as well as providing free transportation and pocket money to children to allow them to reach the schools that are closest and to motivate their parents to send them to school are important. Also making rural and remote areas attractive for teachers by incentives stands as another policy option. Moreover, improving the quality of education by recruiting sufficient number of well-trained and motivated teachers, and upgrading the school resources are necessary.

***Policy Advice 3: Increasing access to inclusive education for children including those having disabilities by formulation of necessary political and legal framework as well as by providing them better assistance in the school environment***

**Rationale:**

Children with disabilities are more likely to be marginalised and discriminated in almost every aspect of life, specifically in education and employment. The likelihood of a disabled child being out-of-school is substantial.

For this reason, inclusive education with clear steps to be followed should be promoted in national plans and legislation. Afterwards, it should be ensured that these goals work in practice by means of infrastructure development to accommodate disabled children. Teachers also need to be trained to increase awareness surrounding disabilities. Innovative policies previously employed in some OIC countries such as sending teachers to disabled students or initiating vocational programs suited for students with disabilities shall be increased.

***Policy Advice 4: Prioritizing gender equality and equity in access to education***

**Rationale:**

While gender disparities in educational attendance have narrowed globally, girls are still more likely to be out of school. Around the world 8.1 percent of boys are out of school as opposed to 9.7 percent of girls at the primary school age.

Improving women's education has positive impact on economic growth and employment outcomes, as well as incurring positive effects for the society in general. Female education contributes to a better home environment for child development. More educated women tend to follow a better diet which also ensures children are well-nourished. Children of better educated mothers are also more likely to attain higher levels of education.

Therefore, gender equality in education should be given place as a priority in national strategies and plans, and girls should be targeted specifically in the education programmes.

***Policy Advice 5: Mobilizing and optimizing more financial resources and human capital towards improving the quality of education***

**Rationale:**

Receiving a good quality education is important in achieving later life outcomes and reaching one's full potential. Spending on education is positively correlated with learning outcomes. An adequate financing of the education system is important for providing children with necessary learning environment and materials. Inability of schools to provide a good environment for children could also affect household demand negatively.

Education is not a priority in the budgets of many member countries. Teacher shortages, teachers' levels of education and their absence from the classrooms are some of the challenges observed in the OIC particularly in rural and remote areas. More than half of the OIC countries spend less than 15 percent of their budget on education. On the other hand, allocating more financial resource solely does not guarantee rapid development in quality, which requires serious investments in human capital through specific programs. Therefore, the share of education spending in GDP can be increased gradually to the extent possible to address the challenges in terms of both education quality and physical conditions especially in rural and remote areas. Resources of the IDB can be utilized by the member countries in this regard.

Provision of life-skills training as well as technical and vocational education is also important for students with disadvantages since these students are generally more inclined to pursue vocational education and training instead of a purely academic path. Therefore, more financial resources for the programs in skills training and vocational education can be allocated by the member countries.

**Instruments to Realize the Policy Advices:**

**COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group:** In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.

**COMCEC Project Funding:** Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office issues calls for project proposals each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the member countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For realizing above-mentioned policy recommendations, the member countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding facility. These projects may include organization of seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparation of analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents, etc.

**IDB Funds:** The resources within the framework of the ISFD (Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development) can be utilized by the interested member countries.