

Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Education and Skills under CAREC

Scoping Study

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Background

- CAREC 2030 was approved in October 2017
- The new strategy includes a broadening of the scope of CAREC
- This entails exploring several new sectors
- CAREC 2030 has a new human development cluster, in which Education is a key sector

The Diversity of the CAREC countries

- Includes upper middle-income, lower middle-income and low-income countries
- Differences in education sector history, systems and standards
- Labor migration patterns differ; several countries highly reliant on labor exports and remittances
- Several countries have already joined international initiatives such as the EHEA (“Bologna Process”)

The Diversity of the Education Indicators

- Government expenditure on education ranges from 2% to 6% of GDP
- Adult literacy ranges from 38% to nearly 100%, but is generally high
- The tertiary enrollment ratio ranges from 9% to over 50%
- Rankings on the Human Development Index range from 0.498 to 0.800

Why is Education and Skills Development Important?

- Economies, technology and labor markets worldwide are changing at an increasingly quick pace
- Rapid change has put growing pressure on labor markets, higher education and skills provision
- Education is increasingly competitive, and there are many high-quality providers in the Asian region
- There is a risk that education in CAREC countries will have trouble competing and be left behind

Challenges in Higher Education

- Higher education standards in CAREC countries vary greatly
- Several excellent universities, but few in global rankings; by global comparison standards are quite low
- Resource levels, physical facilities and equipment are frequently of modest quality
- Difficult to attract top faculty, researchers and students; and international mobility of faculty and students is hampered

Challenges in Labor Markets and Skills

- Skills systems among CAREC countries vary greatly
- Generally less developed than in advanced economies and many Asian neighbors
- Limited resources, low quality of facilities and equipment, and difficulty attracting teachers and students
- Gap or mismatch between skills provided and labor-market needs
- Relatively weakly developed national qualifications systems

The “Hierarchy” of International Cooperation

- Country-level cooperation (mainly one-on-one)
- Multi-country cooperation, to share experience and discuss common concerns (e.g. regional workshops)
- Genuine regional cooperation, to establish common standards and improve inter-country flows of goods, services and people

Benefits of Regional Cooperation in Education

- Raised standards of higher education
- Enhanced movement of faculty members, students and skilled workers
- Greater specialization and enhanced efficiency of labor markets
- Improved revenue-generating opportunities
- Increased sharing of ideas and experiences

MORE BROADLY: Improved economic performance, economic diversification, and competitiveness of CAREC countries

Examples of Regional Cooperation in Education

- The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) or “Bologna Process”
- Cooperation within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
- The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Program
- University of the South Pacific

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- CAREC is a well-established program
- Several CAREC countries have strong historical links and systemic similarities
- CAREC can draw on the experience of several development partners active in education

SWOT Analysis

Weaknesses

- Education is a new sector: CAREC needs to build up its understanding of regional education, skill and labor market issues
- Lack of familiarity of policy-makers for TVET and higher education with CAREC
- Limited resources

SWOT Analysis

Opportunities

- The Bologna Process offers a potential entry point
- Several countries have experience in labor migration and remittances generation
- Good progress in raising educational standards in some CAREC countries (mutual learning)
- CAREC as a means of cooperation to achieve education-related targets under the SDGs

SWOT Analysis

Threats

- CAREC countries are diverse and geographically dispersed
- CAREC countries' education and human development indicators vary widely
- Lack of uniformity in higher education standards
- Changing labor market needs and diverse labor migration patterns

Recommendations

Potential Areas for Regional Cooperation in Education

- Harmonization of standards and mutual recognition of qualifications
- Promotion of student and worker mobility
- Labor-market information
- Exchange of new ideas and educational innovations

A phased and differentiated approach

- Short-term recommendations (1-2 years) and medium to long-term recommendations (3-5 years)
- Projects and initiatives among sub-groups of countries

Short-Term Recommendations

1. Incremental approach towards establishment of expert groups, covering the following areas:
 - TVET and labor markets
 - Higher education
 - Harmonization of higher education standards and recognition (e.g. supporting alignment with the Bologna Process)
2. Scope of work of the expert groups needs to be defined and their functioning could be supported by regional technical assistance

Medium to Long-Term Recommendations

1. Develop a strategic framework for cooperation in education and skills development
2. Assess the scope for providing loan financing for regional education projects
3. Following a careful review of the functioning of the expert groups, consider the need for establishing a sector committee

Thank you