

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, planning is a process whereby a direction is mapped and then the ways and means for following that direction are specified. There are many forms of planning with several types of activities involved in this process. A plan is the product of the planning process and can be defined as a set of decisions about what to do, why, and how to do it. A plan of action implies that:

- f* It has to serve as a *reference for action*, built on the consensus, agreed upon by all those concerned as well as by those contributing to its implementation;
- f* It is designed as an *indicative, living framework*, in such a way that allows for adjustments in light of new developments during implementation;
- f* It includes not only policy directions, but also *information on the implementation strategies*, actions and benchmarks for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the *expenditure frameworks*.

More and more, education managers are “constrained” to think and plan more strategically, due to the reasons including:

- f* First, one may wish to plan and carry out all the activities that people deem necessary, but without achieving the ultimate goals and results.
- f* Furthermore, more resources do not necessarily stand for the best results. The way one uses these resources can lead to different levels of benefits and results.
- f* Thirdly, it has become more and more difficult to plan everything one would wish to do. One ought to make choices, often tough ones, through a balanced decision-making, trade-offs across the education system and through a consensus building process.

Over the recent years, the contexts in which education planning is conducted have evolved, some of which include:

- f* All education systems, in varying degree, are subject to rapid changes, most often driven by globalization, the marketization of some educational services, IT development, competitions, shift of traditional values and paradigms. The planning cycle has become

shorter and more frequent. This involves the need for planning to be flexible and continuously adjusted to the changing demands of the society and individuals.

f There is a plethora of plans and programmes in many countries. Frequent changes of governments with differing agendas, numerous international and regional initiatives, the search for resources and results, and the multiplicity of partnerships, to name a few, lead to a diversity of the planning processes and subsequently numerous, and often fragmented development programmes.

The high mobility of national cadres has often been at the expense of the education sector. In countries under difficult economic situations, the teaching and financial conditions offered to the education sector have become more and more unattractive, often resulting in national cadres espousing the education profession as a last resort.

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