

3. Three Stages of Strategic Planning

3.1. Sector Analysis

Sector analysis is the first stage of sector development planning. Sector review, situation analysis, diagnosis, etc. are sometimes used interchangeably. Basically, sector analysis consists in conducting data collection on and critical analysis of the aspects relating to (and surrounding) the education sector. Planners and managers carefully examine both internal and external aspects of the education system. In other words, they:

- f* review how the system functions (internal dynamics) to meet people's needs and economic demand;
- f* examine various driving forces behind the education system and external conditions (the environment of which education is a part), e.g. macro-economic and socio-demographic situations and developments.

Planners and managers can look at the above aspects from the perspective of the system's strengths, weaknesses, lessons and opportunities regarding educational development. They also examine the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the inputs, processes and outputs of the system in its current setting. This helps to identify critical issues, challenges and construct remedial actions and policy provisions.

The main categories of aspects to be considered when conducting an education sector analysis (ESA) and/or when describing the diagnostic part of an education sector development plan are: (i) macro-economic and socio-demographic frameworks; (ii) access to and participation in education; (iii) equity; (iv) quality and relevance of education; (v) external efficiency; (vi) costs and financing of education; and (vii) managerial and institutional aspects. The aspects (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi) and (vii) can be documented by sub-sector (pre-school, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education, higher education, non-formal education, etc.)

3.2. Policy Design

Education sector policies represent the government's public commitment to the future orientation of the sector. A clearly formulated policy can play an important "operational" role as a reference for action. It can help to guide decisions and future actions in educational development, including the interventions of international and bilateral cooperation agencies, in a coherent way. It is important that policy promote the coordination and success of programmes and projects. The formulation of a "good policy for education" is a necessary step in promoting the emergence and effective implementation of action plans, programmes and projects.

A policy is a set of the goal and purposes (specific objectives). Often, education policies are defined along the following threefold dimension:

- f* access (access, participation, including gender and equity issues)
- f* quality (quality, internal efficiency, relevance and external effectiveness)
- f* management (governance, decentralization, resource management).

These dimensions are addressed (i) either as a whole, by programme component or by sub-sector, (ii) with target indicators by time-range (medium or long-term) and with a few quantitative indicators. One cannot say that there is a perfect way of writing policies or of listing different policy aspects. An indicative, though not exhaustive, checklist is presented below as a way of providing specification of some of the fields requiring definition in an educational policy and the implementation strategies:

- f* access to and participation in education;
- f* equity and the reduction of disparities in terms of genders, regional, rural/urban and social disparities;
- f* quality and the relevance of education at different levels (basic education, general secondary education, technical and professional education, higher education, adult education, etc.);
- f* the place that the private sector and local groups occupy in the organization of education;
- f* regulation of student flows between (i) formal and non-formal education; (ii) public and private education; (iii) general secondary, technical, and professional education; (iv) short and longer higher education; (v) elementary and secondary, secondary and higher education, etc.;
- f* institutional aspects such as governance, management and planning, including the decentralization, de-concentration and centralization balance;
- f* partnership and communication between actors and partners, the level and form of participation and communication;
- f* cost control in recurrent and capital expenditure; and
- f* policies and strategies to mobilize resources in connection with decentralization, the development of the private sector and partnership development.

Particular emphasis should be placed on formulating quantified objectives such as enrolment, admission, and flow rates, pupils/teacher ratios, the supervision rate, the space utilization and the share of education in the national budget. For this purpose, simulation techniques and models have been used successfully to define policies that can then be quantified for consultation and the negotiation of trade-offs between stakeholders and development partners, on issues related to enrolment objectives, the organization of provision of different levels of education, and public, private, external financial contributions.

3.3. Action Planning

A national policy should establish the framework for its implementation by giving the main goals and priorities, as well as the strategies to achieve them. It should be credible: that human and financial resources are available for carrying out the policy. Action planning is the preparation for implementation. An action plan aims to translate into operational terms the policy directions that education authorities intend to implement in a given time horizon. It is a tool for “clarifying” to some extent the goals and strategies in relation to the education policy, programming the activities required, establishing the timing, indicating the necessary resources, distributing institutional and administrative responsibilities, preparing the budgets, etc. It is important to consult and negotiate with the various development partners throughout the action planning stage if the country is to mobilise their support for plan implementation.

It is necessary to differentiate between an action plan/programme and an investment programme which often deals with the infrastructures and equipments to carry out the action plan and the recurrent expenditure incurred by such investments. The duration of an action programme, in general, is five years. One of the criteria of an action plan – in order for a plan to be called action plan - is to go beyond mere policy statements and lists of activities to further define and prioritize the actions, activities, and required resources in a coherent manner. These actions and resource projections should be defined within a given macro-economic framework using appropriate technical tools such as a simulation model.

In general the education policy framework document concerns the whole of the education sector. The action plan, which is linked to this policy framework, should also be sector-wide. Sometimes, a policy statement may concern either a particular sub-sector (secondary technical and professional education, for example) or a cross-cutting theme (improvement of the quality of education, for example), this within an overall, sector-wide development framework.

Different methodologies and techniques of action planning have been designed and used by different countries and agencies. Among them, two instruments are emerging as reference tools in developing action plans in the education sector: the Logical Framework Approach and simulation modelling. In reality, these two and other approaches are used, not in isolation but to complement each other, resulting in the preparation of a credible and coherent action plan for educational development.

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