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## **Collaborative regional research as a basis for policy recommendations and educational reform in Asia and the Pacific**

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### **1 Introduction**

In general, collaborative research aims to bring together researchers interested in a common research topic, who are bound through curiosity and motivation to answer existing questions and in posing new ones. They work together sharing knowledge, expertise and resources to advance the debate on their chosen research area. In contrast to trans-regional research collaboration, inter-regional collaboration brings together researchers from the same region to work on topics relevant to that region.

In fact, collaboration is an important aspect of human nature. It allows people to get to know each other, share their passions, experiences and views. The fruit of collaboration often reveals innovative ways to solve age-old problems affecting vast numbers of people around the world. In research, collaboration is also important for more practical reasons. It helps maximise resources and avoid overlap. Indeed, there are great benefits to be made through collaborative research which enables the investigating of pertinent global and local issues. These issues need investigation to become part of social debates and ultimately much-needed policy responses. Research should, not only, respond to theoretical questions but also contribute to changing policies and improving the realities for people on the ground.

Collaborative research in education is particularly important. It is true that education plays a key role in solving many regional and global challenges. Therefore, it needs to become part of the regional global discourse to ensure that national policies are adapted to the ever-changing realities for today's learners. Collaborative regional research can contribute to shedding light on many pertinent issues in education and providing a regional perspective to global challenges in education.

In fact, collaborative research is a vast topic that can be discussed and debated at length. This paper is a short introduction to research collaboration in Asia and the Pacific. In the first section, it outlines some ongoing regional developments which need further examination and research. These developments have implications on existing education systems and, therefore, need concerted effort to become visible at policy levels. This paper points to several ongoing collaborations for education, describes challenges for research collaboration in the region and outlines ways in which UNESCO Bangkok, which serves as a regional bureau for education, is working to meet these challenges. The second section focuses on experiences UNESCO Bangkok has gained through facilitating collaborative regional research through analytical work, knowledge management, capacity building, partnerships and networking. It describes broad regional trends and gives practical examples of the challenges encountered in facilitating regional collaborative research.

It should be pointed out that this paper does not make any distinction between research in different scientific disciplines. Given the lack of reliable regional data, it focuses on applied research which addresses practical questions and seeks to solve practical problems in societies. Given UNESCO’s role in education, the focus of this paper is on the way collaborative research could contribute to improving education systems in the region. It argues that qualitative research which investigates reasons behind phenomena that are difficult to quantify – in contrast to quantitative research which focuses on measuring quantifiable ones – has great value for policy-making.

## 2 Regional perspective on collaborative research

### 2.1 Collaborative research as a way of addressing important regional issues

Many countries in Asia and the Pacific are facing a number of challenges that can be addressed through appropriate education policies. It is therefore important for researchers to work together to identify ways in which education systems can be improved and further developed to address the underlying societal changes and economic realities. Research collaboration offers a way for regional knowledge and experiences to be shared to improve mutual learning, empower stakeholders, and initiate reforms of existing education systems. These systems need to be adapted to ever-more pressing realities and changes. This paper focuses on demographic changes, skill mismatches, and migration.

As seen in graph 1, demographic changes in the region are placing great strain on the existing education systems. As a whole, the region has a large youth population with wide regional disparities in need of collective problem-solving. India and the Philippines, for instance, have a ‘youth bulge’, while China is experiencing a ‘population pillar’ as it deals with a declining working-age population. These demographic realities must play an important factor in the reform of current education systems in the region (IMF 2013).

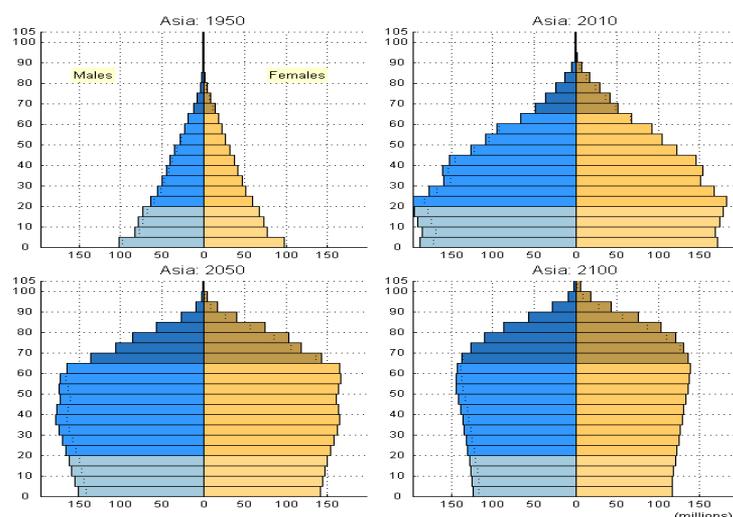


Figure 1: Demographic changes in Asia  
(Source: UN-DESA, Population Division, 2011)

Furthermore, there is a growing realisation that skill mismatches in the region are preventing youth from accessing the labour market. According to the Talent Shortage Survey (2012): “Forty-five per cent of employers in Asia faced difficulty in finding suitable talent in their markets in 2012 – up from 28% in 2006” (16). The challenge therefore is to equip young people with skills that will allow them to obtain gainful employment. Emphasis should be on up-skilling and, more importantly, on ‘right-skilling’ to allow young people to access opportunities created through the growing service economy and technological advances in the region. Equipping young people with the right skill sets would allow many economies in the region to shift to a knowledge-based economy and prevent others from falling into the middle-income trap.

Another pressing challenge facing the region’s education systems is migration. Despite recent numbers showing South–North movements as the the largest migratory flow (45% of the total), followed by South–South (35%), North–North (17%) and North–South (3%), it is clear that in the South–South context informal movements are likely to be more common and, therefore, unrecorded (IOM, 2013). People moving within their region, to neighbouring countries or within their own borders constitute a large, if not the largest proportion, of human migration. As seen in figure 2, migration is intra-regional and concentrated in lower income countries.

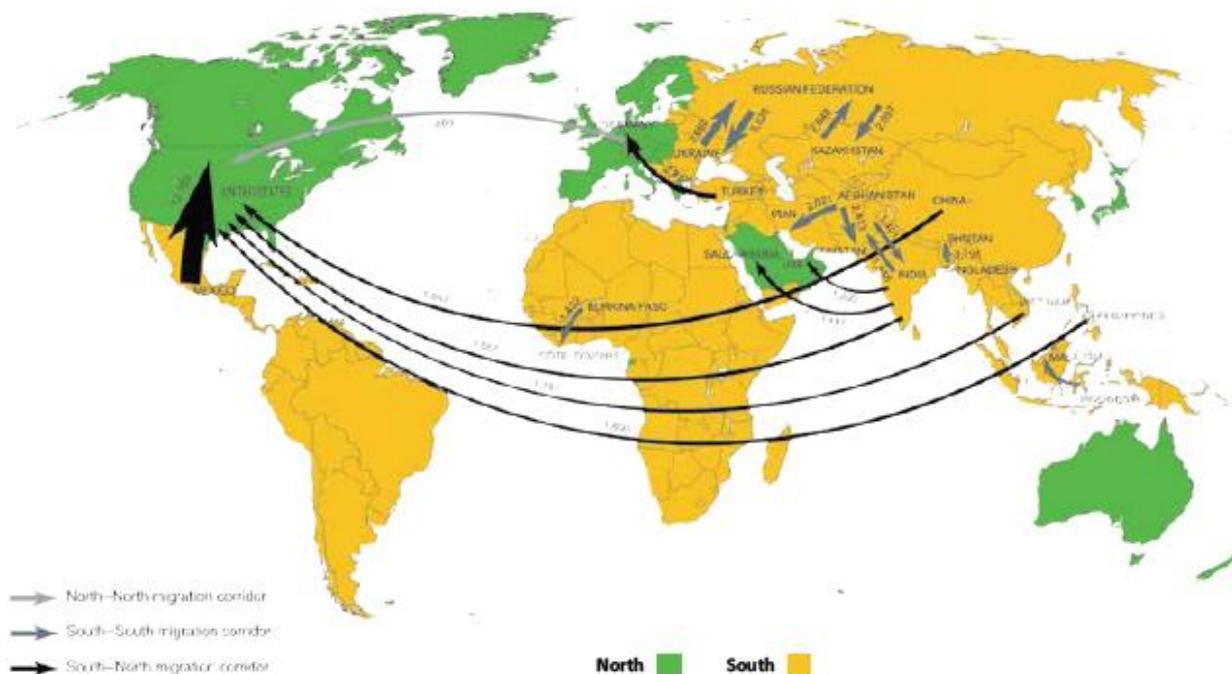


Figure 2: Global migration flows  
(Source: World Migration Report 2013, IOM)

Reasons for migration are diverse but can often be attributed to the ‘push and pull’ factor, i.e., reasons which force people to leave their homes and those that attract them to a new place. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 1.5 million

workers migrate from South Asia alone, mostly to the Gulf region to perform low-skilled, temporary work (2001). Besides labour migrations, there are important international and regional voluntary flows of permanent migrants as well as student and researcher mobility. Researchers therefore need to collaborate in examining the impacts of different types of migration while focusing on how education policies can be improved to address existing shortcomings.

These are only a few socio-economic factors impacting education in the region. They need to be closely monitored and considered before the complex endeavour of education system reform is undertaken. Regional research collaboration has the potential for informing policy-makers on the way ongoing regional developments are impacting/could impact education in their countries and, based on regional experiences, offer possible solutions for these challenges.

## **2.2 Ongoing collaborative efforts in the region**

In fact, regional collaboration is already ongoing. As the region is moving towards greater global and regional integration, collaborations are increasingly based on strong economic ties that exist within the region. From 2015 onwards, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) promises free movement of trade, labour, and capital among member states of the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Given the economic disparities in the region, the extent to which all countries will benefit from the opening up is still unclear. With regard to education, in 2012, ASEAN released the Work Plan for Education (WPE), which defines ASEAN's four strategic education priorities: ASEAN awareness, access to quality education, cross-border mobility and internationalization of education, and support for ASEAN sectoral bodies with an interest in education. These should be implemented at all levels of education in all member states (UNESCO-KEDI, 2013).

Many countries in the region are recognising the importance of collaboration for education. One such example is the attempt to establish a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) in Southeast Asia. Many believe that such a framework would provide a reference point and translation grid for qualifications in the region, making it a useful resource for students, education providers, jobseekers, and employers. A common reference framework needs to be based on national traditions while providing a clear basis for mutual recognition. While still being developed, RQF needs a strengthened commitment by participating countries. It is, however, a sign of interest in ensuring that a future economic community allows for student, academic and labour mobility.

A growing number of partnerships in the region points to a recognition that South-South collaboration is needed. Stakeholders are “eager to explore new ideas and approaches, learn from each other, share their experiences and build horizontal partnerships based on trust, mutual benefit, and long-term relationships” (World Bank 2012, 5). Research collaborations are crucial for developing expertise and overcoming weak research capacity that exist in some countries. Collaborative research draws upon the resources and expertise of researchers/institutions in more advanced countries and can therefore help democratise regional research.

At the country level, successful collaborations can contribute to increased national visibility as institutions showcase their research findings and gain recognition.

### 2.3 Challenges for collaborative research in the region

Despite the globalisation of research in general and research collaborations in particular, Asia and the Pacific remain at the periphery of the ‘global research system.’ Western research dominance has historical reasons and remains a reality today. This reality has a profound impact on the internationalisation of research. International collaborations bring many benefits such as knowledge- and infrastructure-sharing, which in turn allow for a global approach to global problems. However, the contribution to solving these problems remains skewed. In general, North America and Western Europe still dominate research output. Franken, Hoekman, and Hardeman (2010) have studied the number of articles published in science journals and concluded that “East Asia and the Pacific ranks relatively low in history in relation to the overall ranking” (146). As seen in table 1, the number of publications in all parts of Asia and the Pacific is relatively low. They assume that a significant language barrier in the region might be the reason.

Table 1: **Number of co-publications and ranks of regions per discipline, 2004–2008**

Region	Total	Anthro- pology	Area studies	Economics	Environ- mental studies	Geo- graphy	History	Inter- national relations	Political science	Sociology
North America	11,359 (1)	1,567 (1)	275 (1)	5,797 (1)	1,260 (1)	544 (2)	50 (1)	459 (1)	781 (1)	626 (1)
Western Europe	10,168 (2)	1,372 (2)	202 (2)	5,121 (2)	1,242 (2)	606 (1)	49 (2)	389 (2)	678 (2)	509 (2)
East Asia and the Pacific	3,206 (3)	315 (4)	117 (3)	1,665 (3)	491 (3)	187 (3)	2 (7)	155 (3)	112 (5)	162 (3)
Southern, Central and Eastern Europe and CIS	2,337 (4)	372 (3)	74 (4)	1,126 (4)	173 (7)	102 (5)	7 (5)	101 (4)	226 (3)	156 (5)
Oceania	2,270 (5)	220 (7)	34 (7)	1,093 (5)	335 (4)	187 (3)	14 (3)	96 (5)	132 (4)	159 (4)
Latin America and the Caribbean	1,348 (6)	295 (6)	45 (6)	498 (6)	242 (5)	80 (6)	8 (4)	42 (6)	68 (6)	70 (6)
sub-Saharan Africa	1,051 (7)	313 (5)	57 (5)	302 (7)	194 (6)	68 (7)	5 (6)	25 (7)	24 (7)	63 (7)
South Asia	570 (8)	88 (8)	14 (9)	229 (8)	142 (8)	30 (8)	1 (8)	14 (9)	23 (8)	29 (8)
Arab States	245 (9)	52 (9)	18 (8)	85 (9)	43 (9)	4 (9)	0 (9)	15 (8)	12 (9)	16 (9)

Source: Franken, Hoekman, & Hardeman 2010

English, a global language, is commonly used in research. The prevalence of English and Western legacy has its roots in colonialism and the early industrialisation of Western countries. Economic power allowed the West to benefit from scientific migration and gain expertise in research collaboration. Economic power allowed these countries to devote “superior resources for research and for the development of bibliographical databases and citation indices [...]” (Ammon 2010, 154). As a result, language benefits are unequally distributed. Non-native speakers have to devote a far greater effort in acquiring a foreign language to be able to participate in international research. Even though, ASEAN has declared English as its official language, its use is still limited in the region. As a result, researchers from Asia and the Pacific are often barred from conferences and publication opportunities due to limited English skills. Furthermore, conducting research in countries other than Anglophone ones requires the use of existing resources in native languages, which

often forces researchers to engage in translation work. There are several issues that untrained translators are often unaware of and unequipped to deal with. One of them is non-equivalence at word level, which “means that the target language has no direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the source text” (Baker 2011, 20). Aside from writing in English, the issue of usability is also relevant. A large proportion of available research and internet content is available only in English, shutting out the majority of the world’s population from accessing knowledge. As a result, many Anglophones’ competitive advantage contributes to their countries’ advanced position in research in general and collaborative research in particular. The number of English language social science publications in comparison to publications in other languages can be seen in figure 3.

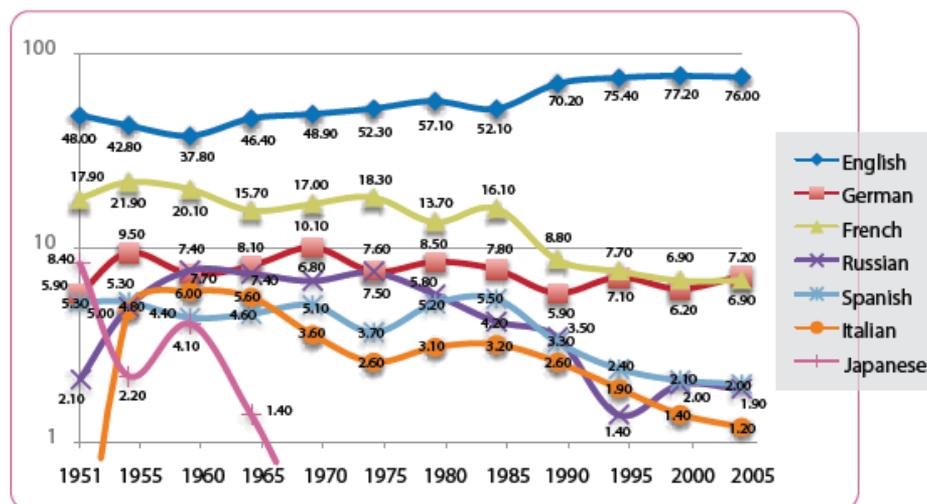


Figure 3: Percentage shares of major languages in social science publications worldwide (rank order following 2005; all other languages < 1 per cent) (Source: Ammon, U., World Social Science Report, UNESCO, 2010)

Despite a lack of conclusive national and international data, it can be said that flows of students, highly skilled workers, and scientists from developing to Western countries have increased over the past decades (Jeanpierre, 2010). Such international migrations have a profound impact on national research capacities. The reasons for migration are diverse — ranging from political upheavals to voluntary migration — but can often be attributed to push and pull factors. In the region, scientific migration continues to be directed at the West, but is currently undergoing a ‘silent change’: “Although 80 per cent of highly qualified migrants from India have continued to choose the USA as their ultimate destination for more than a decade — as have most migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — Canada is the second choice in North America and a route to the USA” (Khadira 2010, 124). Furthermore, post-9/11 restrictions on travel to the US have made Western Europe, Australia and Malaysia an attractive destination for researchers. Of course, scientific migration is not one-sided. In particular, students who study abroad and return home contribute to a ‘brain gain’ for the sending country. Regional scientific migration among renowned universities in the region is also an ongoing development. Higher education institutions are actively working on strengthening their regional ties. On a global scale, however, Western nations still offer the best

research incentives and therefore benefit disproportionately from scientific migration. Ultimately, work conditions in sending countries need to improve to attract returnees and ensure that home-bred researchers can form a research community working to give a regional perspective on global issues.

The lack of sufficient research funding is another significant hindrance to collaborative research in the region. There are considerable disparities in the availability of research funding between the global North and the global South. Government funding is one source that has been experiencing a decline — both in developed and developing countries. The effect is an increase in the number of non-state universities and institutions — especially consultancies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The ‘research marketisation’ has a profound impact on the type and quality of conducted research: “It has given unique prominence to certain themes, easily funded by aid agencies, and has led to an over-emphasis on data collection, empirical studies and expertise-oriented work at the expense of more theorised research. Furthermore, the quality of such research is far from guaranteed, since consultancy firms and NGOs work under strong time pressure and often shift quickly from one theme to another” (UNESCO 2010, 350).

Furthermore, research in the region suffers from considerable disparities in research capacity. Research capacity comprises three elements: human capital, infrastructure and research funding, and connectivity. There are important regional differences, with some nations enjoying large and well-developed support for research and research capacity from their governments, industry, and international networks, and others suffering from limited funding and weak infrastructure: “Some nations have exceptional scholars who suffer from pitiable infrastructure support and little connectivity. Other nations may have numerous researchers and sufficient infrastructure support, but lack the connectivity to remain informed about sophisticated research methodologies and advances in their international colleagues’ thinking” (Beaton, 2010, 106). Across the region, research spending constitutes a fraction of national expenditure.

There are several other challenges that can occur when facilitating regional collaborative research; these challenges frequently arise from the diversity among countries in the region. While it is true that regional trends occur, important differences between countries remain nonetheless. These differences range from socio-economic contexts to differences in education systems, languages, and cultures. At a practical level, several issues need to be considered. Producing collaborative research studies requires a common research framework. Agreeing on a research framework before embarking on country-specific research can prove a challenge given the aforementioned regional differences. Even if a common research framework is agreed upon, researchers can have vastly differing interpretations of it. Collaborative research can be further impeded by limited resources and time constraints. Researchers are mostly affiliated with research institutes that engage in collaborative research projects on top of their regular work. Furthermore, limited English skills can result in low-quality research and a heavy burden on collaborators to review and improve linguistic aspects of research papers.

## 2.4 UNESCO's regional role in collaborative research

To meet these challenges, UNESCO Bangkok is facilitating collaborative research in the region. Under the umbrella of the Education Policy and Reform (EPR) unit, research collaborations take different shapes and forms. Their main goal, however, is to support governments in the region and offer policy advice in reforming education systems to make for a better future for their citizens. EPR's policy advice is based on analytical work, knowledge management, capacity building, and regional networks.

A multi-tier approach to elaborating policy recommendations is important, because knowledge is both explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge can be codified and written down to be shared among relevant stakeholders, while tacit knowledge is best shared through direct interaction between people (World Bank 2012). Furthermore, knowledge is not static but influenced by ongoing socio-economic developments in the world. Therefore, EPR regularly brings together government officials, academics, and representatives of the private and non-governmental sector for policy dialogues. These dialogues aim to stimulate discussion, debate, and regional cooperation in addressing relevant issues affecting educational development in the Asia-Pacific region.

Furthermore, UNESCO Bangkok serves as a knowledge hub for education in the region. One of its activities is knowledge management, which transcends pure knowledge sharing: "Knowledge management is more inclusive and resource-intensive than knowledge sharing. Knowledge management also yields different results, as it has a quality assurance component that enables peers in a given community of practice to highlight desirable information, exchange good practices and share lessons learnt" (UNESCO 2012, 2). UNESCO Bangkok identifies and collects information, analysing and codifying it to be shared among relevant stakeholders who transfer and adapt it to different contexts.

To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of collaborations, UNESCO Bangkok is hosting two networks — Education Research Institutes Network in the Asia-Pacific (ERI-Net) and Network on Education Quality Monitoring in Asia and the Pacific (NEQMAP). ERI-Net facilitates regional collaboration among education research institutions in education policy issues relevant to the region. NEQMAP, on the other hand, is a regional platform for networking and information exchange among countries in the Asia-Pacific region on the issue of monitoring educational quality in the region.

Additionally, UNESCO Bangkok has been hosting the annual UNESCO-KEDI (Korean Educational Development Institute) seminars since 1995. The seminars bring together senior officials from Ministries of Education and researchers from Asian-Pacific countries to discuss education policy and reform issues that are high on policy agendas in Asia-Pacific countries.

UNESCO Bangkok's two networks and policy platforms have been set up to address many of the aforementioned challenges researchers face in effective collaborative work. Experiences from facilitating these networks and regional meetings will be described in the following section.

### **3 Experiences from facilitating regional collaborative research**

#### **3.1 Building an evidence base through collaborative research**

There is an ongoing discussion on research methodologies and the question of whether quantitative or qualitative research is more appropriate for policy-making. Von Fuerstenberg (2010, 336) argues that policy requires research-based knowledge produced through interaction with affected populations and relevant stakeholders in order to be socially relevant and robust. It can be argued that both types of research inform policy-making in a different way and that qualitative research, like other forms of research, faces challenges in validity and reliability. However, there is an understanding that building an evidence base through collaborative qualitative research can help policy-makers understand and address policy issues better. Smith (2003) argues that qualitative research can contribute to the policy knowledge base, particularly when it can add value to the deeper complexities of policy implementation.

Over the years, UNESCO Bangkok has been facilitating many collaborative research studies. The most recent ones include a study entitled Expanding Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) at the Secondary Education Level, which involved researchers from five Asian countries: China, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the partnership between UNESCO Bangkok and the Regional Cooperation Platform (RCP) brought together more than a dozen regional experts currently researching the extent to which transferable skills are included in TVET policies, and particularly in policies dealing with TVET teacher education. Such collaborative efforts contribute to building a knowledge base and expertise in the region. Furthermore, they allow UNESCO Bangkok to increase its expertise in facilitating research while giving researchers the opportunity to tap into its accumulated experience and benefit from specialist advice and guidance.

#### **3.2 Collaborative research as a basis for upstream policy advice**

As discussed in the previous chapter, research plays an important part in building an evidence base for policy-making. Through collaboration, this evidence can be enhanced and further validated. Indeed, collaboration plays a key role in knowledge exchange and mutual learning for education stakeholders at all levels. Working together is important as peer-to-peer learning via knowledge sharing, not only strengthens local ownership and leadership, but also improves and nurtures the enabling environment for designing and implementing difficult development policy reforms which help create more effective governments. Collaboration among stakeholders at different levels gives those involved the possibility to see challenges from a different perspective, discuss different ideas, and come up with different approaches to solving existing problems. This kind of participatory research gives policy-makers a possibility to engage with other stakeholders and ensure that their views and opinions are relevant and can withstand criticism. Ultimately, research collaboration can positively impact policy decisions.

There is, however, no guarantee that the findings of successful research collaboration will have a positive impact on national policies. The challenge is to find ways in which research findings can reach policy-makers and lead them to initiate policy reforms. Education reforms are costly, take a long time to implement, need continuous monitoring and adjustment, and require time for their results to become visible. Nevertheless, regional comparative research has the potential to contribute to successful reform implementation if its outcomes and recommendations are conclusive. This is, however, another important challenge. Given the regional diversity and different socio-economic contexts, drawing firm conclusions from regional research is challenging. Consequently, it is difficult to elaborate common recommendations for policy-making. Research collaborations in general can have many positive impacts, such as knowledge-sharing and capacity-building. They can also contribute to significant improvement for education at the policy level. However, the latter needs to be critically evaluated, and ways to engage policy-makers need to be established to ensure that fruitful regional collaborative research reaches the top levels where decisions on the future of education systems are taken.

UNESCO Bangkok is working to engage policy-makers through different channels. Recent examples include UNESCO's support to the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) in Myanmar, Education Policy Review in Malaysia (M-EPR), and TVET Policy Review in Lao PRD. It is true that providing policy advice is a complex endeavour. Given regional diversity and different levels of socio-economic development, policy advice varies from country to country. In many cases, there are several players who have to adapt and collaborate in a fast-changing environment. Communication and information-sharing can prove difficult given organisations' reluctance to share their activities. The lack of transparency regarding existing legislation and decentralisation plans at national levels can add to the complexity of providing relevant policy advice. Given that several countries in the region are undergoing profound structural changes, a lack of transparency is the reality on the ground. Communication and information-sharing are therefore important to ensure efficient and effective collaborations. Furthermore, upstream policy advice should ideally include all relevant stakeholders. Doing so, however, does not always happen, which is why collaborative research can serve to highlight current trends and pressing concerns on the ground.

### **3.3 Collaborative research through ICTs and networking**

There is a growing recognition that research can greatly benefit from collaboration and knowledge-sharing: "Knowledge sharing is a mutual learning process. Any country can be both source and recipient of knowledge. Relevant knowledge is often not codified but tacit. This is why recurrent interaction is necessary both between individuals and institutions" (OECD 2011, 10). Bringing expert knowledge and expertise together can enhance the quality and add value to a research project. Such knowledge exchange can be facilitated through ICTs and knowledge networks that take many different forms and vary in levels of expertise.

At a practical level, ICTs in research provide infrastructure for data collection, storage, and processing. They facilitate collaboration by overcoming the restrictions imposed by time and

space and help disseminate research results through various online channels. By means of ICTs, innovative ways of collaboration are being developed. Collaborative documents and specialized software, for instance, enable working groups distributed in time and space to work simultaneously. ICTs can facilitate collaborative work and bring together researchers who otherwise may not be able to engage with each other. However, it must be emphasized that ICTs are mere tools used by people interested in specific research topics and committed to shared goals.

Furthermore, the focus should remain on the reality of a persistent digital divide. With the economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region, emphasis on narrowing the digital divide between those with and those without access to technology and its related benefits has shifted to other seemingly more attractive topics. Even though the gap has narrowed in the early twenty-first century, it remains considerable, as evidenced by figure 4. Similar to other regions, Asia and the Pacific is diverse, which translates into different levels of ICT use and connectivity: “Over the last five years, developing countries have increased their share of the world’s total number of Internet users from 44% in 2006, to 62% in 2011. Today, Internet users in China represent almost 25% of the world’s total Internet users and 37% of the developing countries’ Internet users” (ITU 2011, 1). Besides access, however, it is important to consider the production of online content and infrastructure. There is not enough reliable data to make any conclusions for the region, which calls for further investigation.

Collaborative research should therefore not only make use of ICTs and knowledge networks but also examine ways in which the digital divide impacts societies. There is huge potential for ICT use to advance the wellbeing of large populations in the region that are currently not benefiting from the technology revolution. Regional collaborative research could advance this debate, offering possible approaches for narrowing the gap.

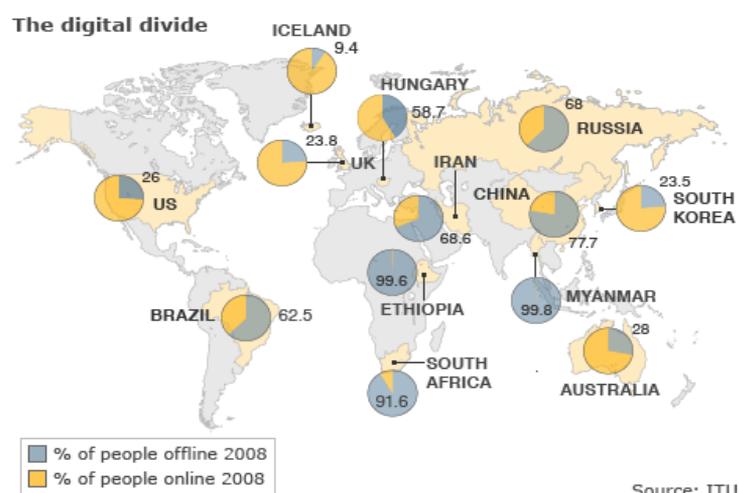


Figure 4: Digital divide from a global perspective  
 (Source: Wakefield, J. (2010) World wakes up to digital divide, BBC World News)

Knowledge networks in particular are a great tool for reducing the barriers to collaborative research. They offer a way of pooling common interest with the aim of addressing important regional questions. Facilitating knowledge-building and -sharing through networks, however, can be a challenging task. Networks can suffer from similar constraints as regular research collaborations. Successful knowledge networks are built on shared interest and commitment. It is therefore important to ensure that a clear strategy underlies any type of knowledge network. There is a range of conceptual and practical issues that need to be considered before setting up a network. The goals of the network and ways to achieve them need to be carefully evaluated. Reconciling common work and perspectives with individual interests and institutional priorities can prove another significant challenge. A lack of commitment, time, and resources can also negatively affect the momentum of a knowledge network. It is therefore important to ensure regular communication through meetings and e-discussions. UNESCO Bangkok's NEQMAP and ERI-Net are two examples of regional networks that link researchers through common interest. Through these networks, UNESCO Bangkok is working to strengthen regional research ties and improve collaboration in the region.

## 4 Conclusion

With a growing regional and global integration of the region, there is a need for close collaboration in research. Collaboration is a unique way of utilising regional expertise and resources to draw attention to national policy needs. Research collaborations are ongoing but face a complex set of challenges that are hampering their implementation and success at global level. However, these challenges can also be considered as opportunities. Asia and the Pacific is a region full of potential which should be harnessed to advance research through collaborative work. UNESCO Bangkok is continuing to facilitate collaborative research through its established practices and channels. Its global perspective helps overcoming some of the challenges in research collaboration and bringing research findings to the policy level.

Nevertheless, some important questions still need to be asked with regard to collaborative regional research and its impact on national policies. These questions do not have a one-size-fits-all answer but should be considered in context. They are an impetus for reflection whether for individual researchers or collaborating research groups. It is hoped that these questions will help to advance the debate on collaborative research in the region by drawing attention to existing concerns.

- How can we ensure that everyone benefits in collaborations?
- How to improve quality of collaborative research?
- How can we ensure findings of research are used for contributing to national policy and practice?
- How can we better engage civil society and the private sector?

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