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Turkey's Basic Education Programme

A. Remzi Sezgin

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TURKEY'S BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Introduction

In August 1997, the Government of Turkey greatly increased its efforts to implement eight-year obligatory education, through parliamentary approval of Law No. 4306 for Basic Education. The law mobilises significant resources for a major investment in school facilities through earmarked taxes, establishes a timetable for the Basic Education Programme and streamlines procedures to allow for swift action and implementation. This framework legislation ensures political and fiscal commitment and has engaged the interest and support of the public. Voluntary cash and in-kind contributions from the public have increased to unprecedented levels and amount to a notable share of the resources available.

Since the adoption of the law, there has been a big increase in enrolments. Total enrolments in grade six increased from 866 000 in September 1997 to 1 127 000 in September 1998 – an increase of over 30%. In rural areas, boys' enrolments in grade six increased by 62%; girls' enrolments increased by 162%.

The Programme adopts a broad approach to basic education and defines its benefits as reaching far beyond those which directly affect students in the classroom, to those which involve the families who are enriched by the education of their children and their own participation in educational activities. Under the Programme, schools are envisaged to be resource centres which will be accessible to the local community. Also incorporated are complementary activities which prepare children for basic school and facilitate educational attainment, including the extension of access to early childhood development programmes, literacy and skill development for adults. The Programme, which is planned in three phases, aims to achieve the following:

- expansion of universal eight-year basic education;
- improvement of the quality of educational instruction and materials, including computer-aided teaching and learning;
- strengthening management capacity to provide basic education;
- monitoring and evaluation to guide the implementation of the Programme.

The shift to a compulsory eight-year basic education system requires investments in facilities and teachers. Capacity expansion is needed both to bring all children of school age into the system and to relieve current overcrowding. Largely due to economic reasons, some school-age children in rural areas as well as in urban slums do not attend school and girls' enrolments are much lower than boys'. Primary schools are generally available in rural areas, but high teacher turnover due to difficult living conditions and, in some cases security concerns, limit access. There is also a shortage of basic school capacity for sixth to eighth grades particularly in many villages. Universal coverage will be facilitated through the creation of new school capacity, better teacher recruitment and incentives, and improved public information about basic education.

Additional facilities

An estimated 30 650 new classrooms will be needed to allow all students to continue on to sixth, seventh and eighth grades, and 50 000 classrooms will be needed to accommodate students in all grades who are currently not attending school. The Ministry of National Education (MONE) is addressing the need for added capacity in two ways, through new construction and the renovation of existing schools.



The government has mobilised an extensive effort to identify needs and initiate construction for the first phase of the Programme.

Preparation has been greatly facilitated by the compilation of a *Standards Manual for School Buildings*, which established and updates the Ministry's design norms for schools – including classroom furnishings, boarding facilities and teacher



housing where appropriate. Based on the manual, the MONE commissioned prototype designs for school construction from architectural and engineering teams from five national universities.

Planning for the first wave of construction has been conducted through provincial officials of the Ministry. Because of the need to act swiftly to define the construction priorities for the first phase of the Programme, the Ministry has relied on estimates to develop its infrastructure plan.

The Ministry plans to construct approximately 15 795 classrooms during the first phase of the Programme and an additional 105 705 during the second and third phases. This is an unprecedented effort in Turkey and requires close co-ordination within the MONE and its provincial offices. Construction will be supervised by four separate regional construction management consultancy firms.

There has been good progress in implementing the largest investment activities of the project. Contracts totalling USD 320 million have been awarded and construction is either complete or nearing completion for 271 new basic education schools throughout the country. Construction is also in progress for an additional 74 new basic education schools included in the first phase of implementation. Preparation of 2 828 information technology (IT) laboratories in 2 458 basic education schools throughout the country, costing about USD 85 million, is also in progress.

Under the Programme, the Ministry of Education is renovating a large number of village schools which are in need of repair and upgrading. A group of 300 rural and central village schools and about 40 urban schools are being upgraded during the first phase of the Programme through World Bank financing. Teachers and parents are involved in planning the remodelling of these schools.

Human resources

The availability of highly qualified and motivated teachers is an essential requirement for the success of the Programme. The government has undertaken a number of important measures to staff the new schools and to improve the overall efficiency of teacher allocation across Turkey, including:

- systemic reforms of pre-service teacher training;
- temporary measures to increase teacher supply, including the use of volunteer retired teachers;
- changes to regulations on teacher assignment and compensation.

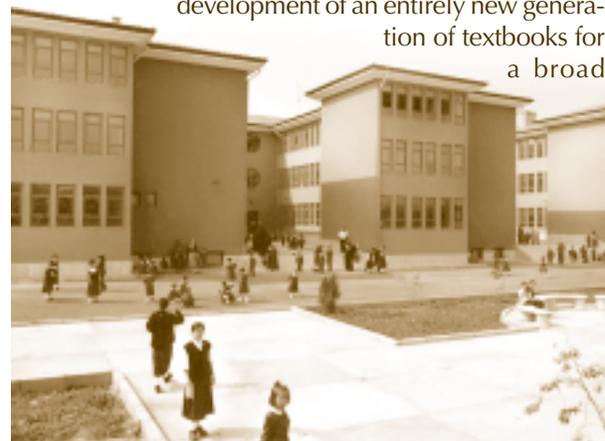
The Ministry plans to advance the skills and motivation of education staff across the system, including inspectors, teachers, principals and provincial officials of the MONE. In accordance with the Ministry's approach to basic education, training programmes for all staff will emphasise the role of educators as leaders within the local community. Inspectors are the key players responsible for organising and implementing in-service training activities for teachers and education managers, and for providing on-site support to teachers through school visits. The Ministry will expand these activities under the Programme, through the hiring of additional inspectors – in order to provide teachers with more frequent contact and mentoring opportunities.

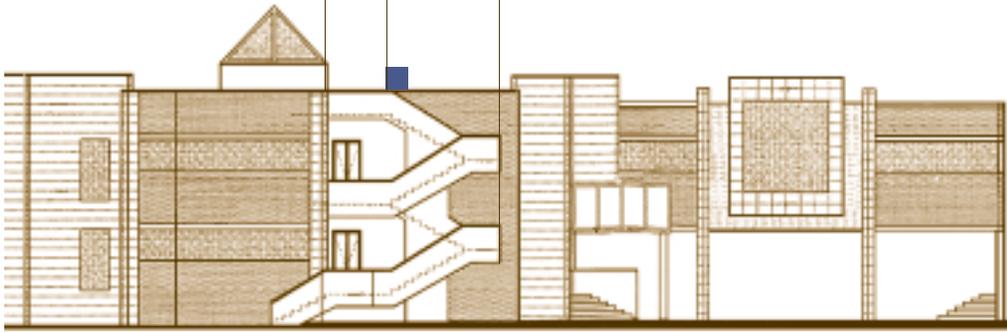
Training for education managers and principals aims to strengthen management capacity at the school level, in order to improve decision-making, parental participation and support for teachers' professional development. The Ministry has already developed a number of in-service training courses for managers addressing education planning, communication, leadership training and the use of technology in schools.

The Ministry is developing a resource guide on guidance issues, including psychological counselling and career guidance for teachers and school managers, and plans to incorporate training on guidance and counselling into the in-service training curriculum for teachers and administrators.

Learning materials

In order to jump start the change from the traditional “declaratory” method of teaching to a new student active learning approach, the Ministry has commissioned the development of an entirely new generation of textbooks for a broad





spectrum of basic education courses. They are also intended to complement the multimedia and IT resources which the Ministry is developing under the Programme. Each of the new student textbooks will be accompanied by a teachers' guide and a parents' guide. The parents' guides are intended to enrich the students' learning environment at home, to help parents understand what their children are doing in school and to equip them to be more supportive of and more involved in their children's learning.

Building an information workforce is an important challenge to Turkey as it implements its strategy for economic development based on open competitive markets. The young population is potentially the nation's greatest competitive asset, provided that the talent and skill base central to an information-based economy can be developed. The Ministry of National Education intends under the Basic Education Programme "that all basic education age students have access to computers in the learning process" in order to attain computer literacy, support and enhance the existing curricula and open the computer laboratories to the local community as technology-intensive learning environments.

Support for special needs

School quality will be additionally improved through greater parental involvement and participation in school-based activities. The Programme includes an innovative component, the Monitoring Response Facility (MRF), which will allow Parent Teacher Associations, school committees and other school-

based organisations to apply for funds to support local initiatives consistent with the Basic Education Programme. The MRF will provide direct support to schools to facilitate innovative projects which will be approved based on a pre-defined set of criteria and help them respond to special needs, such as those of children with disabilities. Activities supported through the MRF will build upon the results of the studies and assessments carried out under the monitoring and evaluation component of the Programme.

The existing social aid programme for improving school attendance and performance for low income students will be supported and expanded through the Programme. Under the initiative, the MONE uses its network of girls vocational schools and

adult education centres to make and provide school uniforms and meals to poor students. The programme is actively supported through donations from the public. Evidence illustrates that the provision of social aid positively impacts school attendance and student performance.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Ministry is relying on monitoring and social impact assessments for guiding Programme implementation and development. On-going evaluation will provide essential feedback for gauging progress, making course corrections and responding to changing circumstances.

The Basic Education Programme provides Turkey with an historic opportunity to invest in its future and to prepare children for the challenges of the 21st century. Through efforts to achieve universal access to eight-year basic education and to improve education quality, the Ministry of Education aims to elevate Turkey's stature and competitiveness in the international community.

For further information, contact:

*Mr A. Remzi Sezgin, President
Research, Planning and Co-ordination Council
Ministry of National Education
T.C. Milli Egitim Bakanligi
06648 Bakanliklar, Ankara, Turkey
Tel.: 90 312 418 6386, fax: 90 312 425 1724*