

# THE 5TH ASIA-PACIFIC MEETING ON EDUCATION 2030 (APMED2030) PROCEEDINGS





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## Foreword

The Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 – or APMED2030 – is a regional flagship event. Not only has it served as a model for other regions, but it is also a crucial regional coordination mechanism and platform for the achievement of SDG 4. The Asia-Pacific Regional Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Education 2030+, co-chaired by UNESCO and UNICEF, drives this mechanism, in collaboration with UN agencies and partner organizations in the region.

SDG 4-Education 2030 and its ten targets cover a broad range of thematic areas and issues. Although it is comprehensive, APMED2030 aims to focus on specific targets each year, allowing for more in-depth discussions and analyses of regional capacity needs and priority action areas.

In 2019, the 5th APMED2030 focused on Target 4.1 (quality learning) and Target 4.6 (literacy and numeracy) in order to explore both progress and challenges towards implementing and monitoring foundational learning and skills for all age groups.

It is a significant achievement for the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 to have brought together over 200 participants from 36 countries across the Asia-Pacific region for this important event, including SDG 4 national coordinators, representatives from Civil Society Organizations, research institutes and academia, as well as SDG 4 co-conveners, UN agencies and colleagues from the field, Headquarters and UNESCO Institutes.

Education, as we know, plays a crucial role in building sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies, and it is inextricably linked to almost all other goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are already into our fifth year towards this ambitious and potentially transformative goal, and it requires a need for concrete, realistic, and feasible strategies to accelerate our efforts to achieve all SDG 4 targets by 2030. We also need to realize that such an ambitious vision cannot be achieved in isolation. We must work together to achieve our common goal.

APMED2030 is crucial to ensuring cooperation and collaboration at all levels, whether regional, sub-regional, national or sub-national. This requires the support and political will of all actors ranging from governments to international development agencies, and from civil society to the private sector. All stakeholders will need to be mobilized and engaged to contribute to its implementation. After all, it is our shared vision for education and our commitment to achieve SDG 4-Education 2030 that ultimately connects us all.

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This event would not have been possible without the generous support of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan, which has provided continued support to the SDG 4-Education 2030 regional coordination platform since 2016.

Our thanks also goes to the Ministry of Education of our host country, Thailand, for their support and cooperation in organizing this event in Bangkok.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the colleagues that have played a key role in leading the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030. These include the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) for leading sessions related to SDG 4.6, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) for leading the session on monitoring, and the members of the Regional Thematic Working Group Education 2030+ for contributing in various ways – whether sharing responsibilities to support participants, or facilitating sessions.

Finally, the conclusions of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 would have been impossible without the active engagement, commitment and contribution of all participants who attended this event, which has only strengthened and renewed our efforts in working towards achieving SDG 4 in the Asia-Pacific region.

# I. Background




The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and more specifically SDG 4, in 2015 marked a new era for education. This ambitious new agenda, launched with the adoption of the Incheon Declaration – also known as Education 2030 – set a universal, holistic and transformative vision for SDG 4 in order to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. Aiming to address future challenges in education, SDG 4 is comprised of seven targets and three means of implementation.

## SDG 4 Targets and Means of Implementation

### SDG 4 Outcome Targets [7]

-  **4.1** Quality primary and secondary education for all
-  **4.2** Early childhood and pre-primary education
-  **4.3** Equal access to TVET and higher education
-  **4.4** Relevant skills for decent work
-  **4.5** Gender equality and equal opportunities
-  **4.6** Universal literacy and numeracy
-  **4.7** Education for global citizenship and sustainable development

### Means of Implementation [3]

-  **4.a** Safe and inclusive learning environments
-  **4.b** Scholarships for higher education
-  **4.c** Professional development for teachers

In contrast to the previous global education agendas, Education 2030 places a unique emphasis on the quality of education and lifelong learning, while also seeing education as part of the overall global development agenda. It links to five other SDGs in particular:



#### Health

Target 3.7 on sexuality education and care



#### Gender

Target 5.6 on sexual and reproductive health care, information and care



#### Work

Target 8.6 on youth employment, education and training



#### Consumption and Production

Target 12.8 on sustainable consumption and production patterns



#### Climate Action

Target 13.3 to improve education and awareness on climate change mitigation

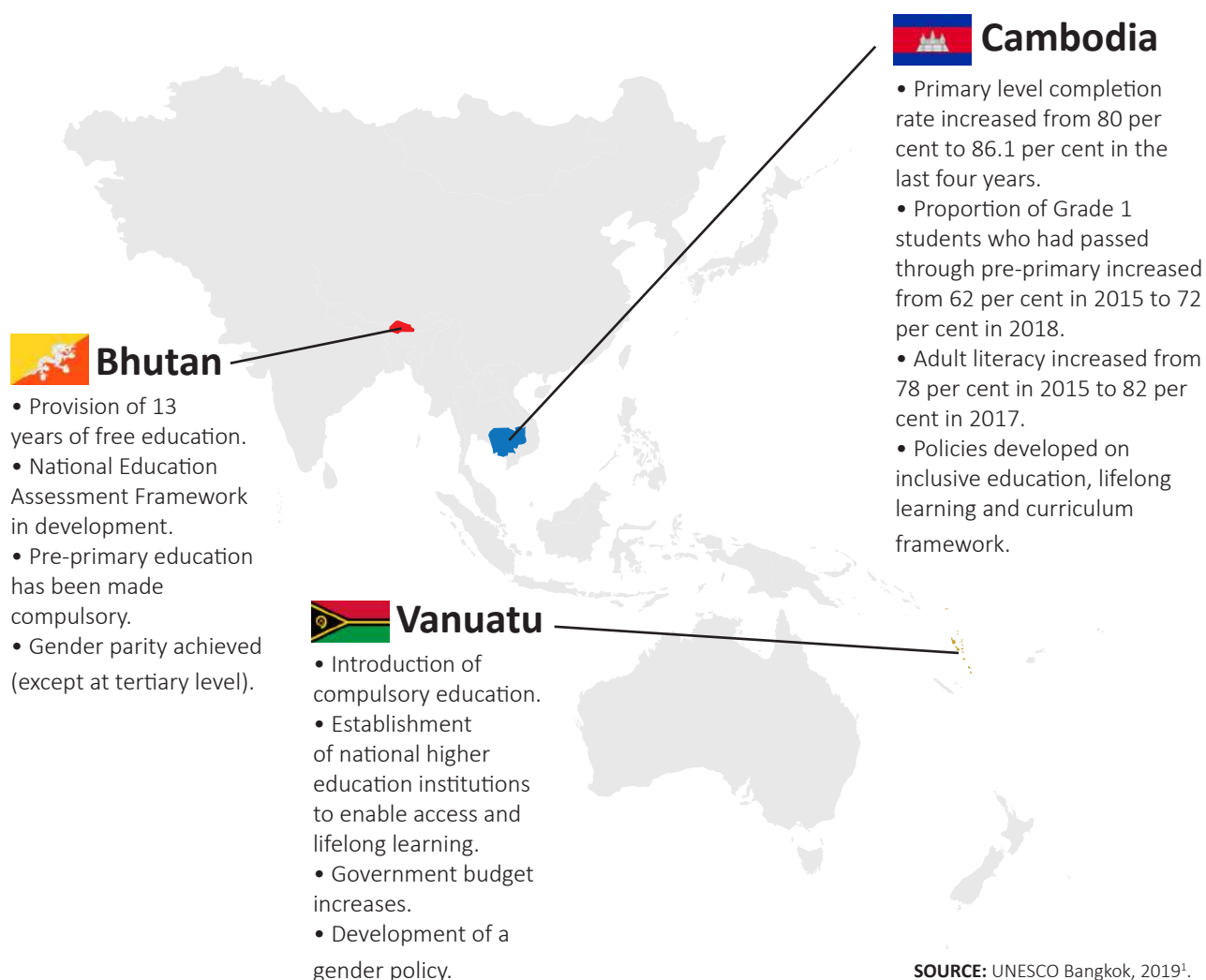
Moreover, the universality of SDG 4 also meant that this was an agenda for all countries – from the most to least developed – regardless of their income level. While past agendas had focused on access and completion of primary education, it now looked at quality basic and post-basic education and lifelong learning for all, beyond the traditional outcomes of learning and training in order to include skills, values and attitudes that are relevant for work and life.

## SDG 4 in the Asia-Pacific Context

Despite economic growth, political commitment and increased investment in social development, challenges remain in ensuring that all people in the region have access to, and complete, 12 years of quality primary and secondary education, and achieve literacy and numeracy in order to lead empowered and productive lives.

The most critical issues facing education in the region have been identified as centering around the themes of financing, equity, inclusion, teachers, quality of education and learning, and governance. More specific challenges include the low priority placed on non-formal and adult education, as well as literacy, the lack of disaggregated data in order to track and address inequalities, inadequate skills training for decent work, youth employment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), a lack of transparency, accountability, and poor management, to name but a few. However, some significant achievements can also be observed in the region, illustrated by selected cases in the following three countries:

### Progress and challenges towards SDG 4 in selected countries



Overall, the roll out of SDG 4 in the Asia-Pacific region thus far shows that countries are working to align the SDGs with their Education Sector Plans, with most having developed an indicator framework, and a number of Ministries of Education having designated SDG focal points. Nonetheless, in the

<sup>1</sup> The cases of Bhutan, Cambodia and Vanuatu were presented during this session of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 and serve as selected examples rather than a general overview of the region.



absence of a financing strategy there remains a critical financing shortfall with 15 countries in the region having decreased their spending on education. The priorities for the region were therefore identified as: a clear financing commitment and strategy, public education systems with a lifelong learning framework, the prioritization of women and girls and those who are furthest behind, teacher capacity, political will for good governance, and an institutionalized form of civil society participation that represents diverse voices at both country and regional level.

## The Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030

Since 2015, the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 – or APMED2030 – has supported Member States in the implementation of SDG 4 at both regional and country levels. It has also served as a convening platform for key education stakeholders to collectively discuss progress and challenges with regard to SDG 4, exchange good practices, as well as support capacity development in order to implement this ambitious agenda in one of the most dynamic and diverse regions in the world.

## The 5th APMED2030: foundational learning for all

Despite significant achievements in increasing participation in education, this has not necessarily equated to equal learning outcomes and opportunities for all, resulting in a global learning crisis. The 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 focused on the theme of foundational learning and skills for all age groups to examine how far learners in the Asia-Pacific are really learning, and was therefore specifically devoted to in-depth discussions based on the regional capacity needs and priorities with regard to Targets 4.1 and 4.6.

	<b>TARGET 4.1</b>	Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
	<b>TARGET 4.6</b>	Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

Globally, 258 million children and youth are out of school, of which just under half are in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>2</sup>, and only six out of ten children and adolescents are actually learning worldwide<sup>3</sup>. Data also shows that in some countries, an alarming proportion of children fail to reach the minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy levels as young as Grades 2–3, with many children not going on to complete primary or lower secondary school with adequate skills in reading and mathematics<sup>4</sup>.

This learning crisis also extends to adults, who make up almost 70 per cent of those in the region who are unable to read or write at basic levels. Moreover, three out of five illiterate adults worldwide are from the Asia-Pacific, of which the majority are from South and West Asia. Even for those adults who are literate, they often lack the opportunity to develop new skills that are in demand, with less than five per cent of the adult population having engaged in adult formal education in many countries<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>UIS Bangkok. 2019. [Are we on track in achieving SDG 4.1 and 4.6?](#)

<sup>3</sup>UIS. 2017. [More Than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide.](#)

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



The inequalities with regard to education quality and completion remain striking, whether based on socio-economic background, gender or location. The 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 therefore sought to clarify and create a shared understanding of the definition, strategies and monitoring issues, as well as identify and build consensus on capacity building needs with regard to Targets 4.1 and 4.6. The second part of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030, for its part, sought to prepare the region for the five-year progress review in 2020, as well as discuss the agenda for the 2<sup>nd</sup> ministerial meeting on SDG 4-Education 2030 in 2020.

This publication aims to reflect the key takeaways and recommendations during the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030. It is aimed at policy-makers and all education stakeholders, in order to provide overall guidance on key discussions and priorities in working towards reaching SDG 4. In order to capture the key conclusions of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030, the information presented in this report is based on the various presentations, meeting discussions and materials<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>The accuracy and validity of data contained in presentations is the sole responsibility of the presenter.

## II. SDG 4.1

### Ensuring Equal Learning Opportunities and Outcomes

Ever since the launch of SDG 4, there have been significant challenges in ensuring equal learning opportunities as well as learning outcomes for all. Globally, out-of-school rates have stagnated at all levels – representing 262 million (18 per cent) of children, adolescents and youth in 2017<sup>7</sup> – with the highest numbers found in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

Specific groups are particularly vulnerable, with only 50 per cent of countries reaching gender parity at secondary level, and refugee children being five times more likely to be out of school than the global average. Projections based on data between 2000 and 2017 indicate that the global out-of-school rate will only decline to 225 million (14 per cent) by 2030<sup>8</sup>.

	<b>TARGET 4.1</b>	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
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Target 4.1 focuses on the relevant knowledge, skills and competencies that are relevant for lifelong learning. While it aims for the successful completion of primary and secondary education, the extent to which children, adolescents and youth are completing 12 years of formal schooling paints an alarming picture. Across the Asia-Pacific, 16 million primary school-aged children and around 34 million lower secondary-aged adolescents remain out of school, of which two thirds are in South Asia<sup>9</sup>. High levels of exclusion from education at secondary level means that young people will be entering the labour market with insufficient education, qualifications, and low levels of skills. While gender parity has been reached in primary and lower secondary education by many countries in the region, at least half of adolescent girls are out of school. In other countries, boys are forced to leave school in order to enter the labour market due to poverty, violence and migration. Indeed, of the 18.7 million primary-aged children in the Asia-Pacific that are out of school, most are migrants, refugees, stateless or internally displaced.

Beyond the completion of a full 12 year cycle of education, Target 4.1 was specifically designed with the ambition to address the learning crisis. At the end of the EFA movement, an estimated 250 million children of primary school age were not able to read or write, or meet the minimum learning standards in basic mathematics. In low income countries, nine out of ten children and adolescents had not achieved basic literacy and numeracy skills, whereas in lower middle-income countries this figure was three in four<sup>10</sup>. With most Asia-Pacific countries falling under these two income levels, the figures indicate that many children and young people in the region are not being equipped with the skills necessary for life and work.

Key to addressing Target 4.1 is the need for effective and relevant learning outcomes, that can only be achieved through inclusive teaching and learning processes as well as quality education that enables learners to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours. In order to improve learning, however, it is essential for learning outcomes to be measured based on reliable and updated data

<sup>7</sup>UNESCO. 2018. [Global Education Monitoring Report. Migration, displacement and education: building bridges not walls.](#)

<sup>8</sup>UIS. 2019. [Meeting Commitments- Are Countries on Track to Achieve SDG 4](#)

<sup>9</sup>UIS. 2015. [Fixing the broken promise of Education for All: Findings from the global initiative on out-of-school children.](#)

<sup>10</sup>UIS. 2017. More than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide.

and information through formative, continuous and summative assessments at different levels of education. As more countries in the Asia-Pacific conduct large-scale learning assessments, they also face growing challenges in analyzing and utilizing learning assessment results. They are also not conducted regularly or consistently, and countries with limited resources require the need for external technical assistance. With the exception of two sub-regional assessment programmes<sup>11</sup>, there lack overall regional frameworks and guidelines on student learning outcomes. At the same time, data obtained at national, school or classroom level has the potential to enable policy-makers to identify systemic inefficiencies and address gaps in delivering quality education, while also identifying inequalities in learning so that no one is left behind.

## a) Quality of learning

The current model of learning that predominates education systems across the Asia-Pacific focuses heavily on large-scale assessments. These assessments do not always align with teaching and learning content and methodologies. This means that learners are not equipped for societal challenges as the content of education lacks quality and relevance to their day-to-day lives. The following priorities were therefore identified with regard to the quality of learning:

- **Re-alignment** between curricula, teaching and assessment to reflect societal changes and ensure participation in the future economy.
- **Address equity gaps in learning outcomes** by improving early learning, the quality of the learning environment, teacher quality and performance as well as targeted interventions for those that are most vulnerable and marginalized.
- **Harness the transformative role of teachers** through recognizing their role in defending fundamental values, strengthening teacher training and standards, as well as improving teacher autonomy and conditions, while also enabling them to participate in key education policy dialogues.

## b) Equity and inclusion in learning

Equitable and inclusive education are at the heart of SDG 4. Identifying gaps, as well as understanding promising practices, can help us to address the drivers of exclusion in quality education and learning, while also generating recommendations for education policy and practices in this regard. The following gaps and promising practices were highlighted:

- A **clear and comprehensive definition and policy for inclusive education** are needed that, instead of targeting specific groups, are inclusive of all learners.
- **Broader standards in learning assessments** are needed in order to target a broader spectrum of learners and considered with an inclusive mindset.
- **Citizen-led Assessments** could present a measure for promoting equity and inclusion by offering an alternative that is open source, low cost, as well as easy to administer and report.
- Education must be **inclusive of persons with disabilities** through early diagnostic assessment to identify learning disabilities, as well as flexible learning assessments for learners with special needs.

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<sup>11</sup>These are the [South East Asia Primary Learning Metrics](#) (SEA-PLM) and the [Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment](#) (PILNA).

### c) Learning outcomes, skills and competencies

In order to achieve the learning outcomes required of Target 4.1, it is important to recognize the importance of skills and competencies that go beyond formal academic achievement, such as socio-emotional skills, values, attitudes and behaviours – or what has been increasingly referred to as transversal competencies.

Ensuring that these competencies are integrated as part of education systems, however, requires creative and innovative pedagogies as well as systems for measuring and assessing non-academic learning outcomes. Some of the priorities identified with regard to learning outcomes are as follows:

- **Identify expected learning outcomes** – both academic and non-academic – that children are expected to achieve.
- **Develop assessment frameworks** that are able to encompass both cognitive and non-cognitive skills and competencies.
- Take a **holistic approach to assessment** by using multiple types of assessment tools and methods in order to assess different learning outcomes.
- Encourage **student self-assessment** so that they are able to assess their own outcomes.
- Harness **ICT capabilities** to both develop new innovations in assessments, as well as to facilitate access to assessments for those living in remote areas.

### d) Right to Education

Education is a basic human right, especially for those that are most vulnerable and marginalized. The concept of the Right to Education is critical to the achievement of SDG 4.1, especially with regard to inclusion and equity. While it is a right that cannot be compromised, the local context must also be considered. For example, many countries lack the resources to guarantee nine years of compulsory education, and therefore new innovations and solutions in education financing must be sought in order to reduce inequalities and improve transition and retention. Accountability and transparency in financial management and efficiency on the use of these resources are key, as well as knowledge of the local context, availability of data and sector-wide planning. The priorities highlighted with regard to the Right to Education are as follows:

- **Enforce human rights treaties and laws** that guarantee the right to free and compulsory basic education to all.
- **Explore innovative financing** methods in order to ensure the mobilization of resources, as well as their effective use in ensuring no one is left behind.
- **Ensure an inclusive, sector-wide and multi-stakeholder approach on planning of education** that takes into account the country context.

## e) Sub-regional conclusions

Reaching Target 4.1 involves the consideration of various issues – the quality of education, equity and inclusion, learning outcomes, skills and competencies, as well as the right to education. As the world's most diverse region, it comes to no surprise that each sub-region will have a different context, while also having similar and contrasting perspectives on sub-regional priorities as presented as follows:

### Central Asia

- Relevant indicators for education quality and inclusive education.
- Strengthened teacher education.
- Broader understanding of inclusion.
- Mainstreaming 21st century skills.

### East and South East Asia

- Introduce policies for non-formal education.
- Funding targeted at the quality of education.
- Emphasize the link between formative and summative assessment.
- Promote multi-lingual education.
- Integrate non-academic learning outcomes into teaching and learning activities.

### South and West Asia

- Policy provision and rights-based approach for fulfilling free and compulsory education.
- Allocation of adequate resources.
- Flexible and inclusive learning paths and assessment methods.

### Pacific Islands


- Strengthen national capacity to systematic formulation and effective use of evidence-driven education sector plans.
- Develop learning communities.
- Teacher development, accreditation and competency frameworks.
- Official definition of equity and inclusion in education.
- Holistic approach to assessment.
- Robust data collection, management and analysis.



## Ensuring Universal Literacy and Numeracy

Target 4.6 reaffirms the global commitment to universal literacy for all youth and adults. While there has undoubtedly been significant progress with regard to basic education in the Asia-Pacific region, there remain significant challenges with regard to literacy. The region is home to 42 per cent of the world's youth and 60 per cent of the world's adults without basic literacy skills – representing a total of 43 and 446 million respectively<sup>12</sup>.

Nonetheless, there is also evidence of progress. For example, the literacy rate among female youth between 15–24 years old in South and West Asia increased by 17 per cent – a sign that the gender gap is closing – and gender parity has been achieved in all other sub-regions. Among the adult population, the gender gap is more apparent, with two thirds of the working age and elderly non-literate population being female in all sub-regions (with the exception of Central Asia)<sup>13</sup>. In cases where adult learning and education programmes exist, they rarely respond to the needs of indigenous people, rural populations or migrants.

	<b>TARGET 4.6</b>	By 2030, ensure that youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
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Literacy and numeracy are fundamental prerequisites for higher order learning and for full participation in society as well as in the labour market. However evidence shows that low levels of literacy are strongly associated with poverty. This means that addressing the root causes of low literacy skills is crucial to contributing to sustainable development as this leads to a skilled workforce and empowered citizens that are able to participate meaningfully in democratic processes, uphold human rights, and respect cultural diversity.

In the Asia-Pacific, there are specific challenges, which if addressed, could support reaching Target 4.6. First there is a need to reach out to disconnected youth who have been pushed out of the formal education system, many of whom have low literacy skills. Second, the lack of disaggregated data means that it is difficult to identify who cannot read and write at the basic level of proficiency, those with disabilities or from specific demographics. Third, there is a need to look beyond the numbers at individual learners, to find out who they are, their learning needs and requirements. Fourth, there is a need to acknowledge the difference between adult education and school education. Since adults cannot be forced to learn, it is important to provide them with flexible platforms. Finally, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must be further engaged as they have the unique knowledge and network to identify groups with low literacy skills and their needs, as well as provide support from the grassroots level.

### a) Effective advocacy and capacity development

The 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 showcased selected innovations that have sought to address Target 4.6 through advocacy and capacity development. UNESCO Bangkok's online course for the professional development of community educators seeks to facilitate capacity development in

<sup>12</sup>UNESCO Bangkok. 2019. [Factsheet on Target 4.6](#).

<sup>13</sup>UIS. 2020. [UIS Database](#)

areas ranging from leadership to finance, while targeting the most marginalized. This initiative is particularly well-suited to the South East Asia sub-region, where internet usage rates are among the highest in the world. Through the use of infographics, media and visualization, it harnesses the potential of visual learning for learners to learn better.

In Afghanistan, where the national literacy rate stands at 40 per cent, promising practices have been seen at the policy level. This includes the National Peace and Development Framework, National Priority Programmes, as well as the National Education Strategic Plan. The country also implements various programmes to enhance literacy focusing on basic general and skills-based literacy programmes, as well as community learning centres and literacy schools.

In Lao PDR, DVV International has been implementing a Global Curriculum for Adult Learning and Education (Curriculum GlobALE). It aims to professionalize and standardize the training of adult educators through a common framework<sup>14</sup>, as well as support adult education providers and foster knowledge exchange between adult educators worldwide. As a result of the training, the aim is for participants to be able to design a course, facilitate a training workshop, and be able to plan, organize and evaluate the contribution of a training programme.

At a global level, the World Literacy Foundation demonstrates the economic and social costs of low literacy through its research to advocate for more investment in education and increase literacy in order to ensure full participation in the labour market, increased health, as well as reduced crime.

Overall, the priorities for enhancing capacity building and advocacy were identified as follows:

- **Relevant national capacity should be strengthened and institutionalized** for literacy rather than focused at the individual level.
- **Increase government budgets** for Adult Learning and Education.
- **Strengthen Private Sector Partnerships** in order to advocate for adult literacy and education.
- Increase **support and funding for effective programmes** among Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

## **b) Preventing and reducing marginalization through youth and adult literacy programmes**

Youth and adult literacy programmes play a significant role in preventing and reducing marginalization. However, there is a need to increase attention, research, and financing on adult education, as well as a need for sustainable interventions in order to reduce the likelihood of relapse into low literacy. In order to address these challenges, literacy programmes and adult education must be both flexible and relevant. Beyond the acquisition of basic skills, literacy must also be recognized as a powerful means to transform society.

Examples from selected countries highlighted some of the issues faced in the Asia-Pacific region. In India, there is a need to use literacy as a tool for women's empowerment and connecting basic literacy and numeracy skills to women's daily lives and linking it to their experiences and knowledge. Digital literacy was also highlighted as new source of marginalization, where the ability to navigate digital platforms was seen as crucial. Along the Thailand-Myanmar border, literacy should be strengthened as part of refugee education through community participation as well as ensuring that learners are prepared for repatriation. In Afghanistan, the politicization of education has meant

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<sup>14</sup>[Curriculum GlobALE](#) aims to standardize the training of adult educators to the equivalent of ISCED Level 5.

that it has been turned into a weapon, while at the same time efforts are being made to link non-formal education to formal education in order to provide more opportunities for lifelong learning. In Viet Nam, there is an increased demand for lifelong learning despite only 2 per cent of the national budget being allocated to such programmes. Of particular importance is the role of community learning centres as crucial hubs for social transformation, especially for ethnolinguistic minorities. Across these different case studies, however, a number of key recommendations were outlined:

- A **holistic approach** should be taken to literacy in order to link it with social development.
- An **inclusive definition of literacy** is required in order to go beyond national languages to also include minority languages.
- Solutions to **address the relapse rate** should be identified.
- The **institutionalization of community learning centres** is required in recognition of their role as crucial hubs for social development.
- More **comprehensive frameworks and action plans** should be put in place with regard to marginalized groups.

### c) Creating a literate environment for all

Harnessing the potential of ICT in order to create a literate environment for all relies on five critical dimensions: 1) policy and finance in order to ensure ground-level intervention, 2) ensuring equity through ICT solutions to ensure no one is left behind, 3) using ICT in teaching and learning with regard to content, modality, and digital literacy, 4) monitoring the use of ICT in achieving literacy, and 5) the need for partnerships in the use of ICT for literacy.

Different cases highlighted selected initiatives from the region that have harnessed ICT in order to increase literacy. In India, the Same Language Subtitling initiative by Reading Literacy by the Billion showed how technology can reach out to marginalized populations. In Pakistan, the Bunyad Literacy Community Council is using ICT to help improve women's literacy while also linking it to lifelong learning and sustainable development, while in Bangladesh the Learning Anytime Anywhere initiative is working to advance mobile literacy learning. At a global level, startup AutoCognita has developed an innovative mobile application that uses a structured architecture in order to improve literacy through pedagogy, design and modularity. It is available to any learners who wish to learn English anywhere in the world, and can easily be replicated for literacy learning in other languages. With this in mind, the key recommendations in creating a literate environment for all are as follows:

- **Cost-effective ICT infrastructure** along with the necessary human resources and technical support in order to provide inclusive and equitable access to proven learning technology and literacy materials.
- Increase the use of **ICT in teaching and learning** by literacy educators to use technologies in both formal and non-formal settings.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms** to track progress towards Target 4.6 should be systematized, standardized, harmonized and coordinated, including clear indicators to measure digital literacy and use of ICT in literacy learning.
- **Inter-sectoral partnerships through platforms and structures** should be built to bring together different actors and sectors of education, including those that target formal, informal and non-formal settings.



## d) Innovative pedagogies for disadvantaged youth and adults

Innovative pedagogies are an essential strategy to meet the education needs of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. A number of good practices highlight how different pedagogical approaches can be used in order to target disadvantaged youth and adults, also highlighting the role of ICT in reaching Target 4.6.

UNESCO Bangkok's literacy and lifelong learning team uses Karaoke as a tool to improve literacy among the Karen ethnic minority in northern Thailand – an activity that not only appeals to both children and adults, but also engages the community as a whole. UNESCO's Institute for Literacy and Lifelong Learning has been implementing an initiative on intergenerational literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa, which includes the development of parent-child learning modules and action plans by key literacy providers. These are adapted to the local context and relatable scenarios, such as teaching personal health through poetry and traditional stories for instance. In Cambodia, UNESCO's factory literacy programme aims to support female migrant workers in garment factories to gain basic literacy skills, critical thinking, as well as develop their work communication, performance and productivity.

In Thailand, two initiatives were presented. First, a MOOC for Ethnic Minorities which has been developed by the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) – considered the 'university for all' – which features video-based learning where marginalized groups themselves are the presenters. In the Golden Triangle – the intersection between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos which is home to more than 130 ethnic groups – the Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Committees Centre in the Greater Mekong Sub-region works with pedagogies beyond literacy and numeracy in order to cater them to minority groups.

Overall, the following recommendations were identified with regard to innovative pedagogies:

- **Strong commitment from governments** is crucial to support literacy programmes.
- **Flexible and learner-centered approaches** are needed to ensure that local needs, contexts and dynamics are addressed.
- **Data management and documentation** are essential for future literacy programmes through the use of ICT.

## e) Sub-regional conclusions

Reaching Target 4.6 requires finding new and innovative ways to improve literacy and to reach all youth and adults, including the most vulnerable and marginalized. This includes the various aspects explored during the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030: effective advocacy and capacity development, preventing and reducing marginalization through youth and adult literacy programmes, creating a literate environment for all via ICTs, and the use of innovative pedagogies for disadvantaged youth and adults. At the sub-regional level, the following observations were highlighted:

### Central Asia

- Establish a network of Community Learning Centres, enabling the exchange of knowledge and ideas.
- Enhance sub-regional cooperation through use of Russian as a common language and medium.
- Organize an annual conference or event devoted to lifelong learning in Central Asia to increase awareness and build capacity of policy-makers.

### South and West Asia

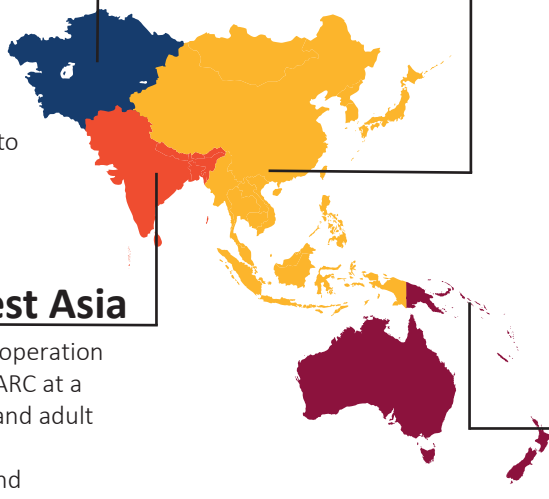
- Foster sub-regional cooperation through and beyond SAARC at a technical level (literacy and adult education).
- Document the costs and consequences of low literacy to advocate for resources and budget.
- Encourage the private sector to invest in adult education.
- Use ICT to deliver diversified and flexible literacy contents.

### East and South East Asia

- Ensure there is a law on adult literacy and lifelong learning in all countries.
- Ensure financing to mobilize interventions for young people and adults.
- Institutionalize community learning centres as a key entry point for increasing literacy among youth and adults.
- Target specific age groups and specific locations.
- Recognize the need to integrate skills development along with literacy and numeracy.
- Decentralize government interventions to ensure that they are more participatory.

### Pacific Islands

- Increase budget allocation for youth and adult literacy.
- Need for proper literacy assessments for youth and adults.
- Ensure a minimum standard of affordable internet access across the Pacific.
- Conduct feasibility studies in order to develop a plan on costing to roll out youth and adult literacy and learning programmes.



## IV. Monitoring Targets 4.1 and 4.6

Regional progress towards achieving SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6 show that while the Asia-Pacific region is on track with regard to access and participation at primary and lower secondary education, it is not on track in terms of minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics. Considerable setbacks are also found with regard to access and participation at lower secondary and upper secondary levels, especially in the case of countries where secondary education is not free or equitable for all. Progress towards Target 4.6 is on track in terms of youth literacy, however achieving adult literacy will be a considerable challenge across the region.

Crucial to monitoring progress towards Targets 4.1 and 4.6 is the capacity to collect quality and accurate data while also ensuring its international comparability. However, challenges can be encountered at every step of measuring the SDG 4 indicators – first in definition of those indicators, then in ensuring that they measure the target accurately, and that data can be produced to measure the indicator in question. The collection of data and ensuring its comparability, as well as analysis and interpretation of results, encompass another range of challenges.

### Indicators of SDG 4: Targets 4.1 and 4.6



#### TARGET 4.1

**Indicator 4.1.1** Proportion of children and young people (a) in Grade 2 or 3; (b) at the end of primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex.

**Indicator 4.1.2** Administration of a nationally-representative learning assessment (a) in Grade 2 or 3; (b) at the end of 10 primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education.

**Indicator 4.1.3** Gross intake ratio to the last grade (primary education, lower secondary education).

**Indicator 4.1.4** Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education).

**Indicator 4.1.5** Out-of-school rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education).

**Indicator 4.1.6** Percentage of children over-age for grade (primary education, lower secondary education).

**Indicator 4.1.7** Number of years of (a) free and (b) compulsory primary and secondary education guaranteed in legal frameworks.



#### TARGET 4.6

**Indicator 4.6.1** Proportion of a population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex.

**Indicator 4.6.2** Youth/adult literacy rate.

**Indicator 4.6.3** Participation rate of illiterate youth/adults in literacy programmes.

SOURCE: UIS. 2018<sup>15</sup>.

With the global mandate to develop the indicator framework for SDG 4, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) works in partnership with other indicator custodians in order to contribute to strengthening the indicators under Targets 4.1 and 4.6, especially with regard to identifying data sources and methodologies to produce comparable data. The considerable challenge with regard to indicator 4.1.1 is the difficulty in producing data on learning assessments that is comparable

<sup>15</sup>UIS. 2018. [Metadata for the global and thematic indicators for the follow-up and review of SDG 4 and Education 2030](#).

across countries. While UIS is working to develop new methodologies in this regard, pedagogical calibration may be an approach that could help to improve the comparability of nationally produced learning outcome data. Indicator 4.1.4, however, relies on household data in order to calculate completion rates, which underestimates the true completion rate. Finally, data available on literacy in achieving 4.6.1. is limited, especially with regard to functional literacy, with global data at less than 20 per cent.

## a) Measuring learning outcomes

Measurement of learning outcomes is essential in order to monitor Targets 4.1 and 4.6. The potential of data for monitoring was recognized by participants, as well as the need to strengthen education policies in this regard.

Each sub-region faces its unique issues with regard to measuring learning outcomes. In South Asia for instance, the lack of policy support for learning assessment highlighted the need for it to be given more priority. In the Pacific Islands, capacity building is needed both at ministry and school levels, whereas in South East Asia, classroom assessment and formative assessment systems need to be improved. Finally, East Asia's 'culture of testing' has brought out new learning challenges, especially with regard to developing 21st century skills and transversal competencies.

Some overall issues can be identified with regard to measuring learning outcomes in the region:

- A **'sufficient' competency threshold** which ensures comparability within and across the region should be developed.
- **Formative assessments** should be promoted in order to focus on the teaching and learning process as 'assessment for and as learning' rather than 'assessment of learning'.
- Both **qualitative and quantitative data** should be analyzed and utilized in order to show student learning outcomes as well as school and classroom-level outcomes.
- **Curricula-based assessments** should be used in order to promote and ensure capturing learning outcomes.
- **Increase the multi-lingual context** by including multi-lingual dimensions as part of curricula , pedagogy, and assessments.

## b) Measuring equity

The measurement of equity heavily relies on quality and disaggregated data. The use of data for equity is based on moral and political grounds in order to ensure the fair, impartial and just distribution of education. The 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 highlighted a few examples that are working to this end. First, a UNICEF EAPRO study on Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) that track individual students was conducted in Malaysia, Timor-Leste and Mongolia. It highlighted the importance of identifying and filling the policy-data gaps through multiple and quality data sources as well as enhancing analysis and utilization of individual student-level data, in order to ensure all students can have equitable access to learning opportunities based on their unique background. Second, SDG 4 monitoring in Indonesia has targeted areas where there are more than ten per cent of children out of school, which has proven to help identify disparity gaps. Finally, Nepal's Equity Strategy aims to reduce current disparities, and is based on access, participation, survival and learning outcomes. The strategy has also led to the development of an equity index. Overall, this session brought out the following recommendations at the regional level:

- Collect further **disaggregated data** in order to address qualitative issues in addition to quantitative issues.
- Establish a **repository of children at risk** as part of countries' EMIS.
- **Translate data into dialogue**, considering how it can best be shared with stakeholders.
- Seek **new innovations** in order to better capture disparities through data collection.
- Ensure the **validation and verification** of data that is collected.
- Conduct **data collection beyond schools**, and consider other sources of data such as household surveys.
- Increase **resources and government investment** for data collection, research and analysis.

### c) Measuring youth and adults' functional literacy

Measuring functional literacy in youth and adults requires a clear understanding of existing methodologies, their challenges, as well as identifying good practices and initiatives at national, regional and global levels. Although a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region have national assessments, or participate in the OECD or World Bank STEP<sup>16</sup> survey, the majority of countries lack the necessary resources to collect data for such assessments.

Initiatives that seek to measure functional literacy skills include the World Bank's STEP household survey, which aims to identify and map the skills profile of the labour force. Not only does it identify the nature and size of skills gaps, but it is also the first measurement of socio-emotional skills, which have been shown to be of high value among employers yet are in short supply. In the Philippines, the functional literacy, education and mass media survey (FLEMMS) aims to provide a quantitative framework as a basis for the formulation of policies to improve literacy and education status in the country. As a household survey, it is able to capture basic literacy, identify out-of-school youth, as well as socio-economic status. In Bangladesh, literacy assessments have been conducted via household surveys, focusing on reading, writing, numeracy, and application of skills. The following recommendations emerged at the regional level:

- Ensure the **measurement of Adult Learning and Education** by embedding assessments as part of programmes.
- Strengthen **collaboration between different UN agencies** in the measurement of adult functional literacy and numeracy.
- **Ensure funds transfers to local authorities** in Monitoring & Evaluation efforts so that they can engage local actors such as universities.
- Develop a **regional benchmark** for measurement of learning outcomes for effective progress tracking and monitoring towards Target 4.6.

### d) Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning

The Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL) was launched in 2016<sup>17</sup> as an initiative to foster and coordinate multi-stakeholder partnerships and concerted efforts towards achieving SDG 4.6. In 2018, the focus of the GAL initiative became on 20 countries with adult literacy rates lower than 50 per cent and in the E-9 countries in which the majority of adults lack basic literacy skills<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup>Skills Towards Employability and Productivity (STEP) programme.

<sup>17</sup>Further details on the launch of GAL and its phase one objectives are available [here](#).

<sup>18</sup>GAL Phase 2 is available [here](#).

### Six countries of the Asia-Pacific region are members of the Global Alliance for Literacy:



More than half of the total population of youth and adults who lack basic literacy skills live in the Asia-Pacific region, making it important to discuss during the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 meeting on SDG Target 4.6. During the plenary session, two major activities carried out in 2019 by the GAL Secretariat, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), were presented.

The first paper presented the cost of achieving Target 4.6 in the member countries<sup>19</sup> of the Alliance and advocates for increased domestic and international financial commitments for youth and adult literacy. Based on UNESCO's excel-based simulation model, the paper argued that 14 billion USD was the funding gap for GAL countries to achieve SDG Target 4.6. The second presentation shared the objectives and timeline of the online survey of literacy policies and programmes in 29 GAL member countries. The survey report would help generate up-to-date information on the status of policies and programmes in these countries.

### National Strategies for Development of Education Statistics

In order to effectively produce educational statistics and collect data from different sources, it is essential for Member States to have a national strategy for statistics and ensure the institutional environment and capacity development of its staff. A National Strategy for Developing Education Statistics (NSDES) therefore consists of a policy instrument with a medium-term vision that is results-oriented and based on sound analysis. NSDES ensure strong coordination and collaboration, sound methodologies and data integration, while also supporting a strong institutional environment through the dissemination and use of data.

To this end, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), in collaboration with partners such as UNICEF, has been supporting countries to put in place a set of tools and guiding documents through pilot CapED programmes for SDG 4 in order to develop their NSDES. Overall, it has also identified a number of challenges faced with regard to developing such strategies including:

- Only 50 per cent of data needed for monitoring SDG 4 is available
- Weak coverage outside the formal education system
- Fragmented data systems
- Multiple data sources
- Low technical and financial support

In order for Member States to develop NSDES, various ministries dealing with different line sectors must be involved. There must also be harmonization and coordination between the various sources in order to ensure the quality of the data and avoid data duplication. Human, technical and financial resources are undoubtedly crucial in this regard.

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<sup>19</sup>Press release on the findings of the GAL costing paper is available [here](#).

## V. The Way Forward

A review of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 included observing the current status of SDG 4 coordination at the national level based on the results of the pre-conference survey that was distributed among education stakeholders across the region. It also included a report on the outcomes of the High-Level Policy Forum on Multilingual Education.

The pre-APMED survey was conducted in order to review how far SDG 4 has been institutionalized at the national level, as well as to capture perspectives from public opinion. Among the findings, it emerged that of the 46 participating countries in the survey, only five have not appointed a coordinator or focal point for the implementation of SDG 4. It was also found that only 30 per cent of coordinators use social media to promote SDG 4, something that should be further utilized in order to raise awareness of its importance. While most respondents to the public survey felt that they had moderate level knowledge of SDG 4, they also highlighted quality as being the main challenge in achieving SDG 4. Overall, the key success factor to achieving SDG 4 was reported to be partnerships.

The outcomes of the High-level Policy Forum on Multilingual Education showed that language continues to be a highly politicized and sensitive subject with regard to education. At the same time, language is also a barrier to accessing quality education. If a teacher is unable to speak the language of his students, they are simply unable to learn, which brings up other challenges with regard to teacher development and management, as well as the development of learning curriculum and materials for multilingual education. In order to persuade policy-makers to take action, however, data collection and management are crucial.

### a) Regional inputs to the 7th Global Steering Committee meeting

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee was developed based on a multi-stakeholder arrangement, meaning that ownership belongs to all. In order to provide regional inputs to the 7th Global Steering Committee meeting on SDG 4, each country shared their inputs and specific recommendations. Two key questions were addressed in this session which are presented as follows.

#### Key messages from the Asia-Pacific:

- **Firm commitment** is needed on the part of all actors in order to mobilize resources, develop programmes as well as implement them.
- **Greater investment** in education is needed beyond national budgets to also include alternative and innovative mechanisms.
- Encourage **consultations with national commissions** of each country in their role as SDG 4 focal points.
- Provide a **regional coordination mechanism**, which includes technical support, management and expertise in order to better support countries.
- **Share good practices** that enable progress towards achieving SDG 4 in other countries to serve as inspiration.
- Ensure **alignment between national goals and SDG 4 Targets**, so that interventions are harmonized.



## Strengthening the linkages between national, regional and global SDG 4 coordination mechanisms:

- An **information sharing mechanism** should be established in order for all countries to ensure all updates are transmitted.
- Ensure that **sub-regional organizations** are included in order to provide shared perspectives.
- Ensure **sensitivity approaches and protocols** throughout Steering Committee modalities – whether based on language or culture.
- Ensure **streamlining with parallel mechanisms** operating at the sub-regional level such as SAARC or SEAMEO.

### b) 2nd Ministerial Conference on SDG 4 in 2020

In 2014, the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference (APREC), brought together ministers from across the region in preparation for the post-2015 agenda. The result of this high-level ministerial conference was the ‘Bangkok Statement’, an outcome which then went to feed into the development of SDG 4 and provide the priorities and framework for regional coordination and support efforts. Given that there has not yet been another ministerial conference since, the regional SDG 4 coordination mechanism reached the conclusion to hold a second ministerial conference on SDG 4-Education 2030.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030, SDG 4 National Coordinators were consulted on the preparation for this second conference, where they revisited the outcomes of APREC, reflected on regional developments since, and discussed the objectives, outcomes, content and timing. The main priorities and recommendations for the preparation of the second conference were highlighted as follows:

- **Youth representatives** should be involved as key participants in the second conference in order to take in the perspectives of those that represent the future.
- **Objectives at country level** should be shared in advance to capture a common vision for capacity development, programme implementation, as well as good practices.
- The **cooperation of ministers** is crucial in taking stock of country progress, exchanging good practices, and reaching a consensus on common challenges.
- There should be **stronger collaboration and partnerships** between different UN agencies, regional and sub-regional organizations, and Civil Society Organizations.
- The theme of **Good Governance** could be considered as it was identified as a key priority based on the pre-APMED survey results.
- **Artificial Intelligence and the future of education** could be highlighted for potential discussions in order to determine how education can tackle global challenges.

### c) Five-year progress review

The five-year progress review of SDG 4 will aim to take stock of achievements, as well as challenges, that have taken place within the first five years of Education 2030 since its launch. It will also strengthen national capacity as well as establish an institutional mechanism for the preparation of the forthcoming Mid-Term Review in 2023. The progress review will provide a snapshot of the situation of education in the Asia-Pacific region vis-à-vis the baseline data, in order to ensure more



systematic and effective monitoring of its targets. It will also highlight and identify regional issues for the development of appropriate policies and strategies.

The main purpose of the five-year review, which will be published in 2020, is to reveal the new challenges and emerging issues that the region faces by identifying key thematic areas that are important at regional and sub-regional level, as well as in urban and rural contexts.

At the same time, it will also highlight innovative policies and initiatives that are being promoted at country level, and conclude with the way forward and recommendations in the road towards reaching SDG 4.

Participants were in agreement on the crucial need to assess the region's performance in order for countries to be prepared for the midterm-review and fast track their national SDG 4 implementation. While the focus is the regional performance, countries are highly encouraged to contribute to the process by sharing their good practices.

## VI. Key Recommendations

Despite increased investments and political commitments, the Asia-Pacific still faces significant challenges in ensuring 12 years of quality primary and secondary education, and achieving universal literacy and numeracy. The region is home to half of the world's out-of-school children and youth, two-thirds of illiterate adults, and 43 per cent of illiterate youth. A lack of understanding of literacy as a lifelong learning continuum prevails, while vulnerable groups remain excluded and gender inequalities persist. Even when policies are in place to address these issues, lack of adequate or efficient financing prevents their implementation, while a lack of data reduces the ability to monitor their impact.

Based on the Regional Recommendations for Action, the outcome of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 puts forth the following recommendations:

- **Policy:** ensure policies reflect expanded notions of literacy and numeracy, including skills for work and life, strengthen coordination and partnerships, and raise awareness of the wider benefits of adult literacy through advocacy.
- **Financing:** allocate sufficient resources, revise and reform financing mechanisms, improve governance, accountability and efficiency.
- **Successful strategies and interventions:** improve education systems' capacity to support schools as learning spaces, provide alternative pathways for those that are most vulnerable, and harness technologies and innovations to universalize access to knowledge and skills for all.
- **Quality of teaching and learning:** ensure alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, develop teacher competency frameworks and competency standards and improve classroom-learning strategies and assessments to embrace a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to lifelong learning.
- **Monitoring:** improve coordination among key data providers and national capacities in data processing, analysis and use, prioritize assessment of learning and literacy skills as part of SDG 4 monitoring systems.
- **Partnerships:** engage all stakeholders through strengthening partnerships between all actors, including close cooperation between governments and the private sector.



## 5th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030)

Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education  
in the Era of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development  
(Bangkok, 1-4 October 2019)

### Regional Recommendations for Action to accelerate progress of SDG 4 Targets 4.1 and 4.6



By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcome.



By 2030, ensure that youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

### BACKGROUND

Over the past two decades, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced rapid economic growth thereby enabling countries to invest more in social development, including education.<sup>1</sup> Despite stated political commitments and increased investments, challenges still remain to ensure that all people in the region have access to, and complete, 12 years of quality primary and secondary education, and achieve literacy and numeracy to lead empowered and productive lives.

Following the decision at the 4<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 in 2018, the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 (Part 1) on 1 – 3 October 2019, specifically focused on SDG 4 Target 4.1 (quality primary and secondary education for all) and Target 4.6 (youth and adult literacy and numeracy) and explored progress and challenges towards implementing, monitoring and reporting on foundational learning and skills for all age groups.

The Regional Recommendations for Action to accelerate progress of SDG 4 targets 4.1 and 4.6 serve as the main outcome document of the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030, informed by the diverse perspectives of participants at the meeting and represent the collective commitment of the Asia-Pacific region.

### CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

In July 2019, the meeting of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development was convened in New York under the theme “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. Education (SDG 4) is at the forefront of this meeting, being one of the SDGs under

<sup>1</sup>UNESCAP. 2015. [Time for equality: The role of social protection in reducing inequalities in Asia and the Pacific](#). Bangkok, UNESCAP.

review along with the other goals, namely, SDGs 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. To prepare for the HLPF, a series of activities were organized at regional and national levels (e.g. voluntary national reviews or VNPs). In the Asia-Pacific region for instance, the Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030+ was entrusted to host and organize the roundtable on SDG 4 at the 6th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) held in March 2019. The Asia-Pacific SDG 4 profile report on the overall progress of the region, with corresponding six (6) policy recommendations was prepared and endorsed during this meeting as the regional input to the HLPF.

Three months after the global meeting on sustainable development, countries in the Asia-Pacific region gathered at the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030 to take stock of the regional progress, issues and challenges towards achieving SDG 4, specifically on achieving quality primary and secondary education for all (Targets 4.1) and literacy and numeracy for youth and adults (Target 4.6). This meeting also provided a platform for countries to discuss in more depth their crucial contributions and roles in accelerating implementation of SDG 4.

## KEY MESSAGES

As a result of the rich discussions at the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030, the following key messages were highlighted by education stakeholders of the Asia-Pacific region:

- Most regional countries have adopted 9 years of free and compulsory education in their national educational laws and legislations.
- Regional and sub-regional partnerships, collaborations and policy commitments for promoting SDG 4-Education 2030 have been strengthened, as demonstrated by initiatives such as the South Asian knowledge exchange platform on learning assessment, strategies for implementing the ASEAN Declaration on strengthening education for Out-of-School Children and Youth (OOSCY), or the adoption of the first regional policy statement on multilingual education (i.e. Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion), and global initiative as the Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL) as for example.
- Almost half of the global out-of-school children and youth live in the region and is home to two thirds of adult illiterate population and 42 per cent of youth illiterate population of the world.
- The dichotomous notion of ‘literate’ versus ‘illiterate’ still prevails, hence, there is a need to shift in policy formation and programme development to embrace the understanding of literacy as a learning continuum.
- Reduced and inefficient financing and the lack of data is hindering effective planning, implementation and monitoring of education policies and programmes.
- Population groups with documented disadvantages largely remain excluded.
- Gender inequalities persist.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION to accelerate progress

Reflecting on the above-listed key messages, inputs on promising cases and practices, participants provided recommendations to accelerate our progress in reaching SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6 in the region. The following recommendations are addressed to all key stakeholders of SDG 4-Education 2030: governments, international/regional organizations, CSOs/NGOs. For effective implementation,

it will be necessary for countries to prepare follow-up actions and monitoring mechanisms as well as integrated national-level plans of action, indicating not only their intervention and funding commitment, but also shared tasks, and responsibilities.

## 1. Policy and financing for accelerating progress

All countries of Asia-Pacific should:

### Target 4.1

- Integrate SDG 4 into national education policies and plans and allocate sufficient domestic resources, i.e. 4-6 percent of Gross Domestic Product or 15-20 percent of public expenditure, to enable progressive realization of the right to 12 years of free and 9 years of compulsory primary and secondary education by 2023.
- Revise and reform policies and financing mechanisms to allow holistic learning through innovative and flexible provisions to all learners, particularly for children and adolescents out of the system or at risk of dropping out or not learning.
- Improve governance, accountability and efficiency in financing, by ensuring that human and financing resources for education is to improve school and classroom learning strategies with the purpose of widening access and enhancing completion and learning outcomes.

### Target 4.6

- Ensure literacy policies reflect the expanded notion of literacy and numeracy, including multi-literacies and skills for life and work.
- Promote literacy as a continuum of learning, from basic to more advanced levels.
- Ensure the allocation of sufficient domestic resources according to national contexts for youth and adult literacy as a fundamental part of lifelong learning.
- Establish and strengthen multi-sectoral coordination and partnerships involving all stakeholders, to enhance investment, outreach and sustainability.
- Launch advocacy aimed at national authorities and high-level policy makers demonstrating the wider benefits of adult literacy for society, economy and health. At the same time, advocacy to motivate individual learners and introduce different modalities of learning is essential.

## 2. Strategies and interventions for success

All countries of Asia-Pacific should:

### Target 4.1

- Improve the capacity of the system to support schools, teachers and parents and education communities to make schools as effective learning spaces.
- Align curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, so that they respond to students' needs and abilities.
- Develop and update teacher competency framework and professional standards.
- Review and reform teacher initial and continuous professional development programmes to ensure teachers have the skills and knowledge to be responsive to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and participate effectively in the management of schools.
- Promote better use of formative and summative assessments to improve the holistic development and learning outcomes of children.

- Provide alternative pathways for learning, particularly for adolescents and those at risk of being left behind or out of the education system.
- Adopt, adapt and utilize technology and innovations to universalize access to knowledge and skills to improve equity and quality of education.

#### **Target 4.6**

- Develop and offer sustained programmes based on the notion of literacy as a learning continuum.
- Promote the development and expansion of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) as effective delivery mode of adult and youth literacy, other multiple literacies and other lifelong learning programmes.
- Customize learning content and delivery to ensure relevance, flexibility and accessibility of literacy programmes, including the use of ICT and other innovations.
- Ensure recruitment, retention, and systematic continuous professional development of adult literacy educators to improve learning outcomes.
- Strengthen community ownerships and local partners through decentralized mechanisms of the government or NGOs.

### **3. Monitoring**

- Set up and strengthen inter-ministerial coordination mechanism among key data providers/owners. Such providers/owners may include, Ministry of Education, National Statistical Office, Learning Assessment Institutions and other relevant line ministries with key data (e.g. health, civil registry) in order to share, harmonize, compile and consolidate data and indicators for monitoring the participation and learning of children, youth and adults both in school and out-of-school with all desirable disaggregation with an equity focus (incl. national data platform. Enhance technical capacity of key officials and stakeholders at various levels (from central, sub-national to school/institutional levels) on data processing, analysis, and effective utilization of data from various sources (administrative and household surveys).
- Institutionalize an inclusive partnership mechanism at all levels for monitoring SDG 4 with strong alignment with national SDG M&E system.
- Allocate sufficient and dedicated funds to improve the monitoring and evaluation systems for education data.

#### **Specific to Target 4.1**

- Prioritize assessment of learning in education policies, decision-making and budgeting to realize improved quality, equity and learning outcomes.

#### **Specific to Target 4.6**

- Integrate or embed direct and comprehensive assessment of literacy skills in a national SDG 4 monitoring system, which collects and provides disaggregated data of the population.
- Raise awareness among relevant national stakeholders about the importance of direct literacy assessment and monitoring literacy skills of youth and adult populations, including the wider benefits of literacy on society, economy and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

These recommendations and messages are put forward to remind all stakeholders of the urgency in addressing the remaining gaps and issues, and accelerating national efforts in achieving SDG 4-Education 2030 in the region:

- **Equity and inclusion** – Remove barriers for inclusion at all levels. Countries need to enact and enforce policies that address inclusion and equity, in all of its diverse aspects, i.e. gender, language, ethnicity, location, disabilities, socio-economic, status, etc. that allow and promote opportunities for all learners, from children to adults. Efforts need to be rooted with the rights-based approach, in order to leave no one behind.
- **Quality of teaching and learning** – improve classroom-learning strategies, mainstream transversal competencies to achieve learning outcomes beyond simple, narrow competencies of literacy and numeracy, and embrace the multi-dimensional and holistic aspects of learning and literacy outcomes for lifelong learning.
- **Financing** – Establish sustainable efficient, equitable and innovative financing mechanisms to address the significant funding gaps in education expenditure, to progressively realize universal free 12 years of education and youth and adult literacy.

**Partnership for success** – SDG 4 is everyone's business. While ultimately governments as the main duty bearer must uphold and guarantee the right to education for all, and their obligation to SDG 4.1 and 4.6 cannot be replaced by anyone else. However, the fulfillment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda requires strong public-private partnership to engage all stakeholders in this broad and ambitious mission. Governments must lead the efforts in close cooperation and partnership with the private sector and CSO efforts to improve the quality of education and ensure we progress towards SDG 4.

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**Bangkok, Thailand  
4 October 2019**

### Asia-Pacific Meetings on Education 2030

Since the first APMED2030 was held in 2015, each meeting has had a unique thematic focus with regard to the achievement of SDG 4. The list of meetings, links to all proceedings and materials are available online as follows:

#### APMED Meetings: Targets and Themes

MEETING	SDG 4 TARGET	THEMES
APMED I	ALL	<a href="#"><u>Building a common understanding of Education 2030</u></a>
APMED II	ALL	<a href="#"><u>Unpacking SDG 4-Education 2030 in the regional context</u></a>
APMED III	TARGET 4.7	<a href="#"><u>Mainstreaming SDG 4.7</u></a>
APMED IV	TARGETS 4.3 and 4.4	<a href="#"><u>Transforming Learning -- Meeting the skills demand to achieve SDGs in the Asia-Pacific</u></a>
APMED V	TARGETS 4.1 and 4.6	<a href="#"><u>Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in the Era of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development</u></a>





For more information about the 5<sup>th</sup> APMED2030, including the programme, presentations and background documents, check out our dedicated Knowledge Portal!

<https://apa.sdg4education2030.org/>



Scan this QR code to access the  
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