(VIRTUAL) SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ICT FOR EDUCATION (VSARSIE) 2020

'REBUILDING TOWARDS ICT-ENABLED RESILIENT EDUCATION IN THE COVID-19 ERA'

15-16 OCTOBER 2020

A.   Background

1.   The inaugural South Asia Regional Symposium on ICT for Education (SARSIE) on 27–28 February 2018 was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka with the generous support of the Japan Funds-in-Trust. It provided an opportunity for six South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) to learn about a variety of issues including the role of information and communications technology (ICT) in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in policy development, teacher development, and equipping children with relevant skills for the future.

2.   Since 2018, South Asian countries made a significant progress in national policies and activities that use ICT to support education. Bhutan drafted and launched iSherig 2 Master Plan 2019–2023 as their second ICT in Education Master Plan in 2019, and developed the Bhutan Professional Standards for Teachers. Sri Lanka has developed and launched their ICT in Education Master Plan 2019–2023. Bangladesh completed an internal review of their Digital Bangladesh 2012–2021 master plan for ICT in education with UNESCO's support. Maldives has commenced development of their second Master Plan and integrating ICT into their Maldives professional framework for teachers. Nepal has developed the ICT Competency Standards for Teachers and reviewed their first ICT in Education Master Plan and commenced development of their second Master Plan. India launched a series of initiatives for ICT-based application in school education and the use of education technology (EdTech) is on the rise with a large number of IT businesses in India.

3.   In 2020, South Asian countries faced the COVID-19 pandemic with limited preparation with regards to public health infrastructure, basic sanitation facilities and access to broadband connectivity. South Asian economies are likely to shrink for the first time in four decades due to drop in exports, return of migrant workers and adverse impact on MSMEs that could push an additional 132 million people into extreme poverty. Moreover, inequalities are likely to widen with women and vulnerable groups affected more adversely.[1]

4.   In the education sector specifically, of the 1.5 billion students impacted across the word due to school closures from pre-primary education to university-level due to interruption of classroom-based learning, some 430 million students reside in South Asia.[2] Without adequate information and communication technology (ICT) devices, internet/mobile network access, distance educational resources and teachers' training, appropriate and quality teaching/learning resources and content, students simply cannot partake in distance education to continue their learning trajectories.

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[1] https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper_5.pdf

[2] http://uis.unesco.org/en/blog/importance-monitoring-and-improving-ict-use-education-post-confinement

www.unicef.org/rosa/sites/unicef.org.rosa/files/2020-06/UNICEF%20Upended%20Lives%20Report%20-%20June%202020.pdf

5.   At most risk of being left behind are students from resource-poor areas, remote rural areas, and low-income households. In addition, learners with disabilities or bilingual students who speak a different language in the home than in school may need extra support. Quality of education and learning which was already a major gap for many south Asian countries has been widened further due to the learning disruption.[3] Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs have also been impacted by COVID-19 pandemic. While policy makers across regions are encouraging youth to embrace the idea of skilling, reskilling and upskilling themselves, considerable challenges remain on ground with regards to the delivery of vocational training and skills development programs, entry into the labour markets and transition between jobs.[4]

6.   With appropriate policy support, ICT infrastructure investments, teacher capacity building and relevant curricula and contents development, ICT has the potential to improve the teaching-learning process, education management efficiency and ultimately enhance learning outcomes, so that South Asian countries' quality education and skills development goals can be achieved.

7.   In this context, UNESCO will organize the second SARSIE on 15th and 16th October 2020 in the form of an online symposium. The symposium aims to present various applications of ICT in improving the quality of education and skills training, bridging the learning disruption, while ensuring equity. The symposium intends to provide a platform for policymakers, field experts and practitioners to share knowledge and experiences, and reflect on future actions for building more resilient national education systems to cope with disasters or emergencies.

B.   Objectives

8.   This South Asia regional symposium aims to achieve the following objectives.

- Share regional experiences of developing and implementing national ICT in education policy in light of COVID-19;
- Discuss case studies on good practices of using ICT to bridge the digital divide, improve education and training delivery, improving learning outcomes and achieving inclusion, especially in light of COVID-19;
- Explore emerging and cutting-edge technologies in developing contexts to facilitate forecasting in emerging skills, transition to labour market etc,
- Launch the TVET Regional Knowledge Hub and provide platform to further discuss ICT in Education related issues;
- Discuss actions to be taken to increase education system's resilience to future crises.

C.   Symposium Program

9.   The symposium is organized virtually by UNESCO New Delhi and Bangkok offices. The detailed programme is attached below.

D.   Expected Outcome and Outputs

10.   The primary outcome of SARSIE 2020 would be increased dissemination of knowledge on ICT applications pertinent to education and relevant to COVID-19 response. South Asian stakeholders and institutions actively engaged in this field are recognized for the efforts made in developing ICT master plans and policies. The expert input and subsequent discussions will

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[3]   http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/554381468294334286/pdf/Student-learning-in-South-Asia-challenges-opportunities-and-policy-priorities.pdf

[4]   https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_745879/lang--en/index.htm

lead to improved understanding of the array of activities and best practices that aim to integrate ICT for improving/tackling various educational challenges and the range of strategies and policies that underpin these activities

The key output produced and disseminated post the symposium would be an outcome document that would serve as a compendium of conference proceedings containing a summary of sessions and discussions.

E.   Expected Participants

11.   Government officials, education practitioners, edtech agencies/companies and private sector, researchers, development partners and civil society from around the world, and international speakers will attend this symposium. The expected number of participants is 500+.

F.   Schedule

12.   This is a two-day, 2-hr virtual event that will include five sessions presented by speakers from various organizations and selected countries in South Asia and beyond. For each session, a moderator will facilitate interactive discussions, followed by a Q&A session.

DAY 1: 15-10-2020 Venue: Online (Zoom/Teams)		
Time	**Activity**	**Speaker/Organization**
12:30 – 12:35 (New Delhi time)	**Welcome Remarks**	**Shigeru Aoyagi**, Director Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNESCO Bangkok
12.35 – 12.40	**Opening Remark**	**Mr Yoshiaki Ishida,** Director for International Strategic Planning, Office of the Director-General for International Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)/Deputy Secretary-General, Japanese National Commission for UNESCO
12:40 – 12:55	**ICT Keynote Presentation**	**Anantha Kumar Duraiappah,** Director UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) Title: "Role of ICT in shaping the Futures of Education"
12:55 – 13:00	**Overview of Project & vSARSIE 2020**	**UNESCO Bangkok**
13:00 – 13:45	**Session 1: Setting the Stage**	Presenting countries: 1. **Bangladesh**, MOE

	National Policy and Resource Planning for success in ICT in Education - Overview and country presentations - Highlight how national ICT policies have played a role in responding to Covid-19 - Q&A (10 min)	2. **Bhutan**, MOE 3. **Maldives**, NIE 4. **Nepal,** MOEST
13:45 – 14:30	**Session 2: Using ICT to bridge the digital divide, overcoming learning disruptions and promoting innovation** International best practices for the use of ICT/EdTech for improving access to education & training, and ensure continuity of learning during COVID-19 - Highlight and share COVID-19 specific examples - Q&A (10 min)	1. **Fengchun Miao**, Chief, ICT in Education Unit, UNESCO Paris - Title: Effective Distance Learning and Tech-enabled Open School Systems 2. **Ritesh Agarwal**, Lead - Growth and Partnerships, Educational Initiatives (EI) (Mindspark) - Title: "Mindspark Personalized Adaptive Learning Software for measurable change in learning" 3. **Frank van Cappelle**, Education Specialist, UNICEF ROSA - Title: "7 Myths of Technology for Learning: Overcoming learning disruptions and promoting innovation" 4. **Max Ehlers,** Associate IT Officer, UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET - Title: "Advancing learning in TVET with OER: Findings form the UNESCO-UNEVOC Global OER Grant Programme"
14:30 – 14:35	**Wrap up of the sessions**	**UNESCO NDL**

Time	Activity	Speaker/Organization
DAY 2: 16-10-2020 **Venue:** Online (Zoom/Teams)		
12:30 – 12:35	**Introduction** Review of Day 1 and Brief Introduction to the Day 2 Program	**UNESCO Bangkok**
12:35 – 13:15	**Session 3: Using ICT for development of teaching/training resources and aides and preparing teachers/trainers post COVID-19** This session focuses on use of ICT/mobile technology for creating engaging teaching aides and teacher training/development; also showcase how teachers are being supported to tackle an increasingly digital/virtual teaching environment • Highlight and share COVID-19 specific examples • Q&A (5 min)	1. **Riina Vuorikari**, European Commission 　• Title: "Innovating Teacher Professional Development & Professional Learning" 2. **Adam Seldow,** Director of Education Partnerships, Facebook 　• **TBD** 3. **Anusha Ramanathan,** Curriculum Consultant, Centre for Education, Innovation and Action Research (CEIAR), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) 　• Title: Reflective Teaching with ICT (RICT)
13:15 – 13.45	**Session 4: Use of ICT for enhancing inclusion of the marginalized** This session focuses on various uses of ICTs for 'building back equal' to promote education and training of girls, remote rural populations, persons with disabilities and those with special needs • Q&A (5 min)	1. **Madhu Parhar,** Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), Commonwealth of Learning (COL) 　• Title: "Use of ICT for enhance Inclusion of the Marginalized" 2. **Osama Manzar,** Founder & Director, Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) 　• Title: "Education & Empowerment: Digital Empowerment Foundation"
13:45 – 14:15	**Session 5: Leveraging ICT for skills anticipation and bridging the gap between education/TVET systems and the labor market** This session focuses on cutting-edge technologies applications and best practices in skills anticipation, enabling entry into and transition	1. **Janaka Jayalath**, Director General, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), Sri Lanka 　• Title: "Leveraging ICT for skills anticipation and bridging the gap between education/TVET systems and the labor market"

	within the labour market, particularly in light of COVID-19.
	
	    • Q&A (5 min)
		2. **Timothy Miller**, Founder & Managing Director, Certif-ID
		    • Title: "Blockchain and AI for the TVET sector"

14:15 – 14:25	**Closing Remarks and Way Forward** • Summarize take away points and closing	Summary: **Nyi Nyi Thaung**, Programme Specialist, UNESCO BKK Closing: **Omar Diop**, Head of Education, UNESCO NDL

G. Language of SARSIE 2020

13. The webinar will be conducted in English.

H. UNESCO contacts

14. **For any questions or further information related to SARSIE 2020, please contact**

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