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

Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in the Era of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development

1-4 October 2019
Bangkok, Thailand

Concept Note

Background

Since 2015, the **Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030)** has served as a convening platform for education officials and development partners throughout the region to learn about the latest global and regional developments on SDG 4 and to advance the ambitious Education 2030 Agenda in one of the most dynamic and diverse world regions. It has provided an opportunity to collectively discuss progress and challenges, and exchange good practices and lessons in implementing and monitoring SDG 4-Education 2030. By doing so, APMED contributes to capacity development of key stakeholders at country and regional levels towards the common agenda in the Asia-Pacific region.

SDG 4-Education 2030 and its ten targets cover a broad range of thematic areas and issues. As such, APMED2030 aims to focus on specific targets,¹ allowing for more in-depth discussions and analyses of the regional capacity needs and priority action areas. The 5th APMED2030 will specifically focus on **Target 4.1 (ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes)** and **Target 4.6 (ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy)** and explore progress and challenges towards implementing and monitoring foundational learning and skills for all age groups.

The meeting will also convene the 3rd SDG4 National Coordinators' Network meeting to discuss the plans for i) the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Ministers' Conference (APREMC) in 2020 and ii) the regional mid-term progress review (MTR), among others.

¹ The previous meetings focused on SDG 4 targets 4.7 (3rd APMED2030); and targets 4.3 and 4.4 (4th APMED2030). Target 4.2 is discussed at the biannual Regional Policy forums on ECCE (2016 and 2018).

The following section briefly summarizes the regional trends and challenges in Asia and the Pacific related to SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6.

Regional trends and challenges related to Targets 4.1 and 4.6

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.² 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.

Target 4.1: Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Target 4.1 expands on previous education goals laid out in the Education for All (EFA) agenda from access to education, provision of 12 years free and publicly funded primary and secondary education, of which at least 9 years are compulsory and with a focus on ensuring that learners acquire relevant knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for lifelong learning. Captured within Target 4.1 is the understanding that the successful completion of quality primary and secondary education are necessary foundations for sustainable development. Unfortunately, the extent to which children, adolescents and youth are in formal school and completing the 12 years of education paints an alarming picture. Within the region, approximately 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.³ Data from 14 countries in the region shows that between 10 and 50 percent of adolescents are excluded from education at the lower secondary level, signifying that up to half of adolescents in these countries will likely enter the labour market with insufficient education qualifications and low skills.⁴ While Target 4.1 places an emphasis on the formal education system, some countries in the region have been exploring alternative learning pathways and flexible learning strategies to engage learners being left behind. These challenges and innovative strategies to address them will remain at the heart of the discussions for the 5th APMED.

While gender parity has been reached in primary and lower secondary education by many countries in the region today, there are still contexts where significant gender disparities remain. For some countries in the region, at least half of adolescent girls are out of school. Boys are no exception: in many other countries in the region, poverty, violence, migration and the need to enter the labour market to support family income or simply to survive on their own, has contributed to higher rates of adolescent boys being out of school as compared to

² UNESCAP. 2015. *Time for equality: The role of social protection in reducing inequalities in Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok, UNESCAP.

³ UIS. 2015. *Fixing the broken promise of Education for All: Findings from the global initiative on out-of-school children*. UIS, Montreal.

⁴ UNESCO Institute for Statistics and ECLAC calculations based on nationally-representative household survey data (such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS], Demographic and Health Surveys [DHS], Labour Force Surveys [LFS]).

adolescent girls.⁵ Harmful gender stereotypes that perceive boys as tough contributes to a higher likelihood of corporal punishment and mistreatment against boys, and consequently, develop a negative learning environment or relationship with school, and eventually contribute to dropout.⁶

Barriers to access and completion of 12 years of education extend beyond gender. It is estimated that 90 percent of children with disabilities in the developing world do not go to school⁷ and for children whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction, there is the risk of never entering or completing school.⁸ About 18.7 million primary-aged children in the Asia-Pacific are deprived of their fundamental right to attend school, many of which being migrants, refugees, stateless or internally displaced.⁹

Completing the full 12 year cycle of education was not enough for SDG 4. While the EFA was successful at improving access to education and enrolment rates, learning outcomes have not kept pace. Target 4.1 was specifically designed to address the learning crisis that shocked the world at the end of EFA, with an estimated 250 million children of primary school age in school were not even able to read and write and do basic mathematics and to meet the minimum learning standards. In low-income countries, nine in ten children and adolescents (241 million) have not achieved basic literacy and numeracy skills by the time they are of age to complete primary or lower secondary education. In lower middle-income countries, the rate was three in four.¹⁰ Many countries in Asia-Pacific fall under these two categories and these figures indicate that children and young people are not being equipped with the skills necessary for life and the labour market.

The target reminds us that effective and relevant learning outcomes can only be achieved through the provision of quality inputs and inclusive teaching and learning processes that enable all learners to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and competencies. It further promotes the need to develop and introduce better strategies to authentically support schools and teachers to improve student learning; and to measure learning outcomes based on reliable and updated data and information through formative, continuous and summative assessments at different levels of education.

⁵ UNESCO. 2018. *Achieving gender equality in education: don't forget the boys*. Policy Paper 35. April 2018. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002627/262714E.pdf> (22 May 2019).

⁶ UNESCO. 2018. *Achieving gender equality in education: don't forget the boys*. Policy Paper 35. April 2018. (pp.8).

⁷ UN. 2014. *The road to dignity by 2030: Ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet*. Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda. New York, United Nations. Available at http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG_Synthesis_Report_Road_to_Dignity_by_2030.pdf (22 May 2019).

⁸ UNICEF and UIS. 2013. *Out-of-School Children in Sri Lanka Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children*. Colombo, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

⁹ UNESCO Bangkok. 2019. [Infographic] Out-of-School Children: UNESCO Asia-Pacific in Graphic Detail #9. Available at: <https://bangkok.unesco.org/index.php/content/out-school-children-unesco-asia-pacific-graphic-detail-9>

¹⁰ UIS. 2017. More Than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide. UIS fact sheet. Available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs46-more-than-half-children-not-learning-en-2017.pdf> (22 May 2019).

While more and more countries in Asia-Pacific are conducting large-scale learning assessments, many countries face challenges to analyze and utilize learning assessment results. In some countries, these assessments are conducted on an irregular basis due to limited resources and the need for external technical assistance.¹¹ Moreover, as a region, it lacks regional frameworks and guidelines on student learning outcomes, although there are two sub-regional assessment programmes, SEA-PLM¹² and PILNA,¹³ that could offer some guidance. Additional data sourced from national or cross-national assessments, school-based, classroom and other formative assessments, citizen-led assessments, household surveys and census data could enable policymakers to identify systemic inefficiencies, address gaps in the delivery of a quality education and set policies and targets to ensure that no one is left behind. Targeted policies, on the use of these data and the development on effective policies to support schools and teachers to improve learning is urgently needed to accelerate results.

Target 4.6: Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

Target 4.6 reaffirms the global commitment to universal literacy for youth and adults and stresses proficiency, or the ability to use literacy and numeracy skills in daily life. Although the Asia-Pacific region has made significant progress in expanding access to basic education to all children, it remains home to more than 42% (43 million) of the world's illiterate youths (56% of which are female) and almost 60% (446 millions) of the world's illiterate adults (two third of which are female).

While these figures are disconcerting, there is evidence of progress in the region that indicates signs of promise. Literacy rates among male and female youth (aged 15-24) in South and West Asia indicate that the gender gap is closing, and the literacy rate for female youth has increased by 17 percent since 2000. Gender parity has been achieved amongst youth in Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific sub region. However, despite this progress, South and West Asia exhibit the greatest gender disparity among its youth with a gender parity index (GPI) of 0.95. In South and West Asia 57% of the illiterate youth (age 15-24) are female and 55% of those that are of working age (ages 25-64) and illiterate are female. Two thirds of the working age and elderly illiterate population are female in East Asia, South Asia, West Asia and the Pacific.¹⁴ Where adult learning and education programmes exist, they rarely respond to the needs of indigenous people, rural populations and migrants.

Targets 4.6 recognizes that proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills are prerequisites for higher order learning and meaningful participation in society, including contributing to the labour market. Reducing poverty and creating a more equitable society

¹¹ UNESCO. 2017. Large-scale Assessment Data and Learning Outcomes. Education thematic brief February 2017. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002474/247413E.pdf> (22 May 2019).

¹² The Southeast Asia primary learning metrics (SEA-PLM) is a regional assessment to assess learning outcomes of grade 5 children aimed at informing policies and ensure all children achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

¹³ The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) measures and monitors the achievement of Year 4 and Year 6 students in literacy and numeracy. The Assessment is carried out in select schools across 15 Pacific Island Countries and in 10 different languages.

¹⁴ UIS data source, extracted on 22 July 2019

can be achieved if countries take steps to improve transition to higher levels of learning within the framework of lifelong learning.

Evidence suggests that, of all factors considered, low literacy skills are most strongly associated with poverty.^{15,16} Addressing the root causes of absent or low literacy skills among youth and adults can yield great benefits for the sustainable development of countries. Reducing poverty requires that countries invest in equipping their populations with functional skills in reading, writing and numeracy. In consequence, they create a more skilled and capable workforce, and empower citizens to participate meaningfully in democratic processes, understand the importance of upholding human rights, and are more likely to exert respect for cultural diversity.^{17,18,19}

The APMED 2030 meetings are organized around specific targets each year to provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussions and greater clarity on how to monitor and achieve each target. However, it is important to bear in mind that SDG 4 targets cannot be viewed in isolation. We know that the achievement of Targets 4.1 is closely linked with Target 4.2 on pre-primary education as well as Target 4.5 on equity. Similarly, Target 4.6 complements Target 4.3, which focusses on participation in adult education and Target 4.4 which focusses on youth and adult skills for work. The interrelated nature of these targets will be a theme woven within many of the discussions envisioned for this year's APMED.

Objectives

The overarching objective of the meeting is to enhance Member States' understanding and capacity to implement, monitor and report on SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6. As such, the focus will be:

(Part 1)

- To take stock of regional progress, issues and challenges towards achieving SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6;
- To clarify and create a shared understanding of the definition, strategies and monitoring issues regarding SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6;
- To identify and build consensus on capacity building needs, including monitoring, for SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6.

(Part 2)

- To prepare the region for the five-year progress review in 2020;
- To discuss the agenda for the 2nd ministerial meeting on SDG 4 Education 2030 in 2020.

¹⁵ UNESCO and UNICEF. 2012. *Youth and adult literacy. Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All*. Bangkok, UNESCO and UNICEF.

¹⁶ World Bank. 2018. *Learning to realize education's promise. World Development Report 2018*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

¹⁷ UNESCO. 2004. *The plurality of literacy and its implications for policies and programmes: Position paper*. Paris, UNESCO.

¹⁸ UNESCO. 2006. *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for life*. Paris, UNESCO.

¹⁹ UNESCO. 2016. *Monitoring indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Asia and the Pacific: Country readiness and way forward*. APMED2030 II Working paper. Bangkok, UNESCO.

Expected outputs

- A set of sub-regional follow-up capacity building proposals on SDG Target 4.1 and 4.6
- Regional action plan for monitoring SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6
- Agenda items for the 2nd Ministerial meeting on SDG 4-Education 2030

Meeting theme and structure

The overarching theme of the 5th APMED is ***Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in the Era of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development***. The aim is to understand how Member States are progressing towards implementing the SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6, and to facilitate cross-national exchanges and sharing. The meeting has two main parts:

Part 1 consists of technical sessions that focus on SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6, which will be examined and discussed from the perspectives of completion of free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (SDG 4.1) and youth and adult literacy (SDG 4.6). Part 1 will be two days consisting of plenary sessions and concurrent breakout sessions for focused discussions and sharing organized around sub-themes identified under each target.

Part 2 will be one day dedicated to the 3rd meeting of SDG 4 national coordinators in Asia and the Pacific, during which global and regional updates on SDG4 policy debates will be shared and consultations on the five-year progress review, the 2nd ministerial conference and the regional inputs to the global steering committee meeting will be held.

Principles of inclusion, gender equality, youth and equity (Target 4.5) will be cross-cutting issues to be addressed in all discussions during APMED 2030. The role of teachers (Target 4.c) will also be addressed as a key stakeholder and change agent in pursuit of advancing Targets 4.1 and 4.6.

Country preparatory work

To prepare for the meeting, UNESCO Bangkok will send a pre-meeting survey to all Asia and Pacific Member States to gather information on the status of SDG 4.1 and 4.6 implementation and monitoring at the national level. SDG 4 National Coordinators/UNESCO Secretary-Generals will be requested to submit the completed survey to the 5th APMED2030 Secretariat by **20 August 2019**. Further details will be provided to all countries via the National Commissions for UNESCO. The information received will inform the format and focus of the sessions, and enrich the discussions during the meeting.

Participants

With support from the **Japanese Funds-in-Trust, UNICEF and UNESCO Bangkok**, approximately 250 key stakeholders will be invited from relevant organizations within and outside the Asia-Pacific region. Invited guests will include government officials, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations in Asia and the Pacific who are responsible for SDG 4 planning, monitoring and statistics. In particular, DG and technical level

officials, including Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) officials, of the ministry of education (MoE) and national SDG 4 coordinators will be invited. Representatives from the following organizations to be invited include:

- **Ministry of Education representatives responsible for areas covered under Targets 4.1 and 4.6;**
- Other ministries/institutions working on youth and adult literacy, skills development, youth, women;
- **National/regional institutions/organizations responsible for learning assessments;**
- Intergovernmental regional/sub-regional organizations (IGOs);
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) actively engaged at the national or regional level in work on SDGs 4.1 and 4.6
- Youth representatives;
- United Nations agencies;
- Multilateral development banks and bilateral organizations; and
- Teacher training institutes.

Organizers

UNESCO Bangkok
UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO)
UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)

Dates

1-4 October 2019

- Part 1: Thematic sessions (1-3 October 2019)
- Part 2: National coordinators' meeting (4 October 2019)

Venue

Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Language

English will be the working language of the meeting.

Tentative programme

Day 1: Tuesday 1 October 2019:

Thematic Sessions

- Global & regional overviews on SDG 4.1
- Technical parallel sessions on T4.1
 - Quality of/in learning
 - Equity and inclusion for quality learning
 - Learning outcomes
 - Right to Education
- Sub-regional discussion session #1: Regional recommendations on T4.1
 - Central Asia
 - South & West Asia
 - East & Southeast Asia
 - Pacific Island States

Day 2: Wednesday 2 October 2019

Thematic Sessions

- Global & regional overviews on SDG 4.6
- Technical parallel sessions on T4.6
 - Effective Advocacy and Capacity Development
 - Preventing and reducing marginalization through youth and adult literacy programmes
 - Creating literate environment (incl. harnessing ICT)
 - Innovative Pedagogies for the Disadvantaged Youth and Adults
- Sub-regional discussion sessions #2: Regional recommendations on T4.6
 - Central Asia
 - South & West Asia
 - East & Southeast Asia
 - Pacific Island States

Day 3: Thursday 3 October 2019

Monitoring of SDG 4

- Indicators of T4.1 & 4.6
- Preparation for Five-year Progress review of SDG 4
- Measuring youth and adult literacy skills (competency assessment)

Day 4: Friday 4 October 2019

SDG 4 National Coordinators Meeting

- Endorsement of the Regional Recommendations on T4.1 and 4.6
- APFSD & HLFP outcomes
- Updates on country actions and CSOs since 4th APMED2030 (incl. on the Recommendations for Action on Targets 4.3 and 4.4)
- Consultation on the Five-year progress review (5PR)
- Consultation on the 2nd Ministerial conference on SDG4, 2020

Contact information

APMED2030 Secretariat
 UNESCO Bangkok
 E-mail: apmed2030@unesco.org

Reference documents

1. UNESCO SDG 4 Webpage
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/sdg4-education-2030/>
2. SDG Indicators (Metadata Repository)
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>
3. UIS. 2017. Metadata for the global and thematic indicators for the follow-up and review of SDG 4 and Education 2030.
<http://sdg4monitoring.uis.unesco.org/metadata-global-thematic-indicators-follow-up-review-sdg4-education2030-2017.pdf>
4. UNESCO. 2018. Paving the Road to Education: A target-by-target analysis of SDG 4 for Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok.