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Regional synthesis report

Manzoor Ahmed



United Nations  
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for Lifelong Learning



confintea VI

# **The State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in Asia and the Pacific**

## **Regional Synthesis Report**

**Manzoor Ahmed**

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“Study without thought is labour lost; thought without study is dangerous.”

Confucius (551 – 479 BC)

“Scholars have tried to interpret the world. The point is to change it.”

Karl Marx (1818– 1883)

“Where the mind is without fear/ And the head is held high/ Where knowledge is free;/ Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;/ Where words come out from the depth of truth;/ Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection;/ ... Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever widening thought and action;/ Into that heaven of freedom/ My Father let my country awake.”

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) from his Nobel prize-winning collection of poetry

# Acknowledgements

It is a daunting task, but a privilege to be asked by UIL, to prepare this synthesis of the reports on Adult Learning and Education submitted by the countries of the region for the CONFINTEA VI Asian Regional Preparatory Conference, 6-8 October 2008, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

The primary material for this synthesis is the National Reports. Since only 29 of the 46 countries covered in this synthesis submitted reports and they covered the topics in varying depth, other recent materials were also used. The sub-regional reviews prepared by the EFA Global Monitoring Report Team and the EFA Mid-decade Assessment for the Asia Pacific Region undertaken by the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok were particularly useful.

My colleague Layli Uddin at the Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, was of immense help in reviewing relevant materials and summarising and synthesising these. Muntasim Tanvir of ASPBAE pointed to relevant documents and reports and commented on the draft. I am grateful to them for their help.

I am indebted to colleagues at UIL, particularly Carol Medel-Añonuevo, who commented on the outline of the report and later patiently provided feedback on the initial draft. However, I remain responsible for the shortcomings of this report.

This report, as intended, was presented as a draft to the regional preparatory meeting. It was discussed and some suggestions were made including some factual corrections; but on the whole, it was well received and seen as a fair review of the current situation and future challenges in adult and lifelong learning in Asia and the Pacific. It served as a starting point for discussion and forging a consensus on the regional strategies and recommendations for the global conference in Brazil. I hope that the regional perspective reflected in this report will also be found useful in preparing the Global Report on Adult Education and Lifelong learning.

Manzoor Ahmed

December 2008

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# Introduction

This paper is the regional synthesis report for the Asia-Pacific Region, presented and considered at the Asia Pacific Regional Conference, 6-8 October 2008, Seoul, Republic of Korea. This was one of five regional preparatory conferences preceding the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) to be held 19-22 May 2009 in Belem, Brazil. The theme of CONFINTEA VI is *Living and Learning for a Viable Future – The Power of Adult Learning*. This synthesis report has been prepared on the basis of national reports and other relevant materials on the development and state of adult learning and education in Asia Pacific. The purpose of the report was to identify the key issues on adult learning and education in the region and suggest recommendations and benchmarks for CONFINTEA VI.

The history of adult learning and education is a hit-and-miss story – starting off with strong rhetoric, promises and expectation and concluding in limited success, and even neglect and disappointment in too many cases. Adult learning and education has been conflated into the broader agenda of education and development more at the level of discourse than in action. In the arena of action, it has been too often confined to a narrow interpretation of literacy skills. Hence, for most governments in developing countries where financial and human resources are limited, adult education is low in the pecking order when it comes to assigning priority to sub-sectors of the education system (Tanvir, 2008). Furthermore, NGOs are often the major providers of adult learning, although this is largely limited to adult literacy programmes, which then becomes a reason for the state not to fulfil its responsibility.

The right to adult education is recognised by most state constitutions and national laws and is inherent in the right to education, which is reflected in the various international declarations and treaties. These include the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNESCO, 2008). The UN conventions on the rights of children, women, minorities, indigenous people, and people with disabilities also have proclaimed the right to education of the target groups of these international laws. The UNESCO International Conferences on Adult Education – Elsinore in 1949, Montreal in 1960, Tokyo in 1972, Paris in 1985 and Hamburg in 1997 – and many other regional and national events have been occasions to renew state, national and international commitments, engage in forward thinking and develop policy and action agendas in adult education.

At the national level, early on in the 1960s–1980s period, movements and campaigns on adult education, largely confined to literacy, flourished but showed desultory results, often because the programmes were too prescriptive in their content, structure and duration and insufficient resources and efforts were put into their design and implementation. Hence, with some exceptions, large proportions of those who participated in the literacy campaigns in that period dropped out and up to half of the participants who passed the test relapsed into illiteracy (Abadzi, 2003). Was there a problem in the premises regarding the inherent value of adult education? Or was it the design and conceptualisation of the programmes and the inadequacy of resources and management efforts? These questions were not sufficiently probed. But a calculation of low returns of literacy projects led international donors to either withdraw or significantly reduce their support (Torres, 2002; Abadzi, 2003).

In the 1990s, the Education for All movement, by drawing attention to the importance of basic education, has helped to give a new lease of life to adult education and literacy programmes. Since the 1990s, Bangladesh, China and India have shown an increase of ten or more percentage points in adult literacy rates and the World Bank Operations Evaluation Department rated the outcomes of their literacy-only funded projects in the mid-1990s as



'satisfactory' (Abadzi, 2003). Far more importantly, adult learning and education (ALE) has been re-affirmed as integral to countries' political, social and economic development agenda. The 2000 Dakar Framework of Action set benchmarks in Goals 3 and 4 for adult education and literacy.

The UN Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012) and Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE, 2005-2015) are examples of international initiatives spearheading progress in the area of adult education and learning, although these are also focused on the acquisition of basic literacy skills. (UNESCO 2008, UNLD Mid-decade Progress Report: Asia and the Pacific, Draft.)

The benefits of adult education including effective literacy programmes, in spite of their desultory history in many instances, are well documented. There is a positive association between adult education programmes and increased levels of self-esteem and higher levels of knowledge and skills, which thereby encourage positive and active engagement of people in their own development. Although establishing direct causality between adult education programmes and poverty alleviation may be difficult, research shows many positive spill-overs of adult literacy programmes, particularly involving women. Adult education programmes can help to break the chain of intergenerational transmission of poverty. For example, Nepalese neo-literate women who participated in literacy programmes became more engaged in their children's studies, and children of neo-literates in Bangladesh were more likely to go to school (Abadzi, 2003; Assad, Levison and Zibani, 2001).

The low rates of literacy skills among vulnerable populations such as women, indigenous communities, elderly and the disabled, who are deprived in multiple ways, are tell-tale signs of their peripheral existence. They lack the skills to negotiate a living wage; are helpless when it comes to huge problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic; are unable to deal effectively with different adversities or act against inequalities, as they may be unaware of their rights and remain dependent on often inadequate social services. Illiteracy and absence of educational opportunities thereby lock vulnerable populations into the poverty trap.

# The Asia-Pacific Region context: diversity and richness<sup>1</sup>

The region is home to four billion people, or 60 per cent of the world's population, although it has 29 per cent of the land area of the world. Given its size and diversity, Asia is perhaps more meaningful as a "cultural concept" than a geographical entity. Differences and disparities are more prominent features than the common geographical space that the countries share.

The Asian continent is of unique geo-political importance because of its size, natural resources and strategic position. Asia has in the last two decades experienced dynamic economic growth, and a high level of innovation and improvisation. India has become a technological hub and the economies of India and China recorded higher growth rates in GDP than those of the North American and Western European economies. Furthermore, the East Asian Tiger Economies (such as the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand) have recovered from the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1999, recording impressive growth in GDP since then. Countries are also reducing their economic dependency on agriculture, shifting their economic activities to industry and services with higher levels of productivity and income for workers.

Asia has five of the E-9 (high-population) developing countries of the world: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Among them, they account for half of the world's population and three quarters of the non-literate adult population of the world. Asia has many countries wracked by political instability, conflict and violence.

The Central Asian Republics have overcome the turmoil in the early 1990s following the dissolution of the Soviet empire and are witnessing an upsurge in economic growth. Low-income countries in the region such as Bangladesh, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic have experienced a GDP growth rate of 5 per cent or more in recent years. However, many of these countries remain in the bottom half of the Human Development Index – a composite measure of human development based on indicators of life expectancy, education (including literacy) and GDP *per capita* (UNDP, 2006). Ten countries in East Asia and Pacific and four countries in South Asia have Least Developed Country status, with a high level of poverty and dependent heavily on external donors for development assistance (UNESCO, 2008). The greatest concentration of extreme poverty, accounting for half of the world total, is in South Asia. Even in countries undergoing rapid economic growth, acute poverty is still the experience of significant proportions of the population. For example, India has recently reached annual GDP growth of 10 per cent; nonetheless, over 80 per cent of its people were living on less than US\$2 a day in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> The Asia-Pacific Region of UNESCO consists of 48 member countries. These are: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, New Zealand, Niue, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu and Vietnam. The Russian Federation and Turkey are not included in this review of the Asia-Pacific Region.

The varying patterns of economic growth and investment policies and planning have created an unequal geographic distribution of wealth among the population in South Asia, China and, to a lesser degree, in many other countries.

Urban areas have greater access to formal schooling, higher-quality education and non-formal education programmes, with the exception of urban slums where the poor are concentrated.

In South-East Asia migration and displacement of populations, language diversity, the need to develop alternative energy sources, issues of deforestation and broader sustainable development, structural shifts in the economy from farming to industry and services, and the need to acquire and upgrade skills for the competitive and rapidly-changing labour market are some of the factors shaping social and individual goals for adult learning. Growing demand for democratisation and resolving social conflicts which affect the social fabric of countries and communities challenge adult education work. In this context, the quality of adult education provision needs to change and its scope needs to expand. The skills and competencies of adult educators/facilitators also have to be enhanced to respond to these requirements.

Countries in the Asian sub-regions are rich in cultural and linguistic heritage, each given a special character by their distinctive ecology and history. For example, Indonesia has around 1,000 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups and about 700 languages are spoken. However, the national language is Bahasa Indonesia, which is the primary medium of instruction at all levels of education (UNESCO, 2005). India has about 415 languages and has multifarious cultures and religions co-existing side by side. However, ethnic, caste and other minority groups often live on the margins of poverty, face great disadvantages in access to opportunities in life and public services, which frequently do not meet their cultural, economic or linguistic needs.

Central and East Asian sub-regions have a relatively high literacy rate, but face new challenges such as changing employment markets and workplace environments which demand improvement of literacy skills and renewal of occupational skills. However, affordable opportunities for enhancing skills are limited. Growing cross-country movement of workers has given rise to the demand for re-adjustment of work skills and language skills. As globalisation and the knowledge economy put a premium on the continuing upgrading of knowledge and skills, the influence of the neo-liberal market doctrine has led to increasing commercialisation of both skill upgrading and general adult and non-formal education.

Change in the demographic structure of the population is raising the dependency rate with growing proportions of the older retired or semi-retired population in East and central Asia, and to a lesser degree in other countries. Lifelong learning for the older age-group, to prepare them for new areas of work including social and community services and leisure pursuits, is assuming new significance. This is of course a more urgent concern in developed nations such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

Landlocked countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal and those of Central Asia are subject to special constraints. The lives and livelihoods of large numbers of people in the island nations of the Pacific, the Maldives and the coastal areas of Asia are under threat from the rise of the sea level due to global warming. Other aspects of the fragile environment are affecting seriously people in all countries.

There has been much talk – prompted by the dizzying changes on the social, political and economic landscape of Asia – about the “Asian Century” (Sachs, 2004). Expansion and development in educational opportunities, initially at the basic level of education and later at other levels, have been regarded as a prime mover in the emergence of Asia as a political

and economic force on the global scene. This very development for large parts of Asia heightens the urgency of the question about all countries and people of Asia having a stake in the Asian Century. The key to ensuring such an inclusive development may lie in making it an “Asian Education Century,” that will extend participation in quality education to all the people, building human capabilities for all and expanding the choices in their lives (Kennedy and Lee, 2008, p.1).

Adult learning and education in the Asia Pacific countries, according to statements of purposes and programme objectives, is intended to play a key role in their development agenda, as an investment in individuals but also in the type of society that they would build collectively. Adult learning and education should help develop the capabilities of individuals to fight poverty and prevailing gross inequalities in economic terms and more broadly in health, education and opportunities in life. This, in turn, would allow people to exercise and claim their democratic rights and fulfil their obligations as citizens, help build democratic cultures and institutions and make government and the state responsive to the needs of its citizens. These pronouncements of intentions are not reflected evenly and effectively in actual policies and programmes in all cases, as will be seen in this overview of adult learning and education in the region.

## The sub-regional perspective

From a geographical point of view, five sub-regions with distinctive characteristics are often identified – West, Central, South, East and the Pacific. Other kinds of groupings may be more relevant from a developmental perspective, such as developed countries (eg, Australia, Japan and New Zealand); East Asian Tiger Economies (eg, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand); large population countries (eg, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan); and small island countries. These groups represent different developmental circumstances and challenges. For this review, we propose to group the countries under four sub-regions: Central Asia; East Asia; South Asia (including Afghanistan and Iran); and Pacific.

The justification for looking at groups of geographically contiguous countries is to apply a comparative perspective among countries which have a degree of similarity in contexts, historical circumstances and developmental challenges. The expectation is that a sub-regional synthesis will also allow us to look at the future prospects and constraints regarding actions and strategies with somewhat greater specificity than an overall review across all countries may allow. It has to be remembered, though, that intra-regional diversity can be as significant as the inter-regional differences. It is also anticipated that the challenges of adult learning and education, while different, can be encapsulated into a broad policy agenda for the region that will be helpful in setting the agenda for policy and action towards the development of sustainable lifelong learning environments.

The immediate challenge for our purposes is to make sense of the complex diversities and disparities in this large region, let alone assessing and providing an overview. This is precisely what we will attempt to do in the sphere of adult learning and education.

# Concepts and definitions

## Consistency of definitions

It is often said that there are frameworks and declarations on adult learning and education, yet there is a lack of agreement on the definition, scope and focus of adult education activities (National Report, Thailand, 2008). Rather, concepts on adult learning and education are contextualised according to the needs, historical discourse and shifts in paradigms in a particular country. In high-income and middle-income countries such as Thailand, where adult learning and education is well established and where there is a coherent policy with responsibility for the government and others indicated, the concepts are well-defined and focused. However, in many other countries the definitions, concepts and scope of adult education and learning are not well articulated. Overall, the experiences and records of Asian countries in this regard suggest that, rather than focus on international consistency and uniformity it would be more appropriate, instead, to concentrate on developing contextualised, endogenous concepts and definitions to design and guide programmes.

It is nonetheless important to have commonly understood and accepted definitions and terminologies so that all involved in planning, managing and evaluating programmes are on the same wavelength. Concepts such as 'adult education', 'lifelong learning', 'adult literacy' and 'non-formal education' are often used interchangeably and can cause confusion. The overwhelming priority given to literacy in low-literacy countries and the domination of conventional literacy programmes have led to headlining these under different terminologies relating to adult education and lifelong learning, thus limiting the sphere of adult learning in scope and purposes. In many countries in the region, non-formal education is equated with adult literacy programmes (Dahal, 2008). For all these reasons, trying to standardise assessment tools for adult learning and education is often difficult. As a consequence, data to ensure programme effectiveness, as well as for cross-national or regional review, may not be reliable or comparable.

In mitigation of these difficulties, some agreement has been achieved on commonly-used terminologies relating to adult learning and education as a result of international frameworks and professional exchanges, although their meaning may sometimes change in implementation.

**Adult education** is often interchangeably used with 'continuing education'. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCE), it is a system of formal and non-formal learning approaches that may differ in content, level and teaching-learning method and it may act as a substitute or a continuation of initial education (UNESCO, 1997). As articulated in the CONFINTEA V documents, *adult education* denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society.

**Adult learning** encompasses formal and continuing education, non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning environment. Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, learning denotes the outcome of the education process. It is thus a broader concept, and points to the link between adult education and lifelong learning ([www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/declaeng.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/declaeng.htm)).

**Adult literacy** has been traditionally perceived as a dichotomous concept – one is either literate or illiterate, that is, one is able to read and write or one is not. This has been particularly the case when countries have used a simplistic measure to assess and produce official literacy rates. The operative definition has been whether a person can read and write a short and simple statement (Annex Table 1). The definitions of functional literacy, however, relate to specific levels of reading and writing skills useful in the learner's own environment. They may differ in terms of age, type and level of skills. For example, the language of literacy is an issue in many countries. In Sri Lanka it is the ability to read and write in one's first language whereas in Bhutan a literate person is defined in terms of the national language and the script. Nepal is the only country in South Asia to include numeracy explicitly in its definition of literacy. The definition of adult literacy has evolved and is now regarded as being part of a continuum of learning and linked to the wider social and development context (*Global Monitoring Report 2006*, pp. 148-57; Global Campaign for Education, 2005). (See below.)

**Non-formal education (NFE)**, according to the ISCE (UNESCO, 1997), is a structured and sustained body of educational activities that takes place outside of formal education. NFE activities can be offered by state and non-state actors, can take place in any location and can be for the general population or specific groups. NFE activities can focus on one type of educational activity or engage in a wide range of activities such as basic education, livelihood skills and vocational skills training. For example, in Thailand, NFE activities fall into five domains: literacy promotion, continuing education, life-skills development, vocational development and vocational training (Ministry of Education, Bangkok, 2008).

**Lifelong learning** offers a more holistic perspective on the role of education in the life-cycle of an individual and affirms that learning is continuous and plays a critical role in enabling individuals to adapt to and deal with new challenges and changes in their lives and their surrounding environment. Lifelong learning, embracing all forms of educational and learning experiences, can help prepare individuals to engage in purposeful interaction with their own environment by developing their knowledge, skills and their critical thinking abilities. Implicit in the idea of lifelong learning is lifewide learning. While the former emphasises the continuity of learning through the human life-cycle, the latter recognises that people find it necessary to engage in multiple learning activities simultaneously through different modalities of learning and in varying settings. Lifelong learning is intended to develop individuals as active social agents – people who are able to act, reflect and respond appropriately to cultural, social and development challenges they face. Its connotations are thus contextually determined (Medel-Añonuevo, Ohsako and Mauch, 2001).

For example, in the context of labour shortages and the need for new skills, lifelong learning in Australia emphasises post-school education, in which the participants who already have some level of education are re-skilled and up-skilled to deliver higher levels of productivity. Bangladesh adopts a social and rights-based approach in its policy statement on non-formal education. Lifelong learning is meant to develop an individual's social, mental and physical coping mechanisms and help to achieve recognised rights. In Pakistan, lifelong learning focuses more on the development of basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and psycho-social skills.

## Literacy and a broader vision: Differing contexts and priorities

The CONFINTEA V synthesis of National Reports pointed out that there were different interpretations of adult education in industrial and developing countries. Lifelong learning has been taken seriously in the industrial countries and more developed countries in the south as indicated by the initiatives, intensive discourse and programmes in these countries. These

initiatives are a recognition of the significance of the concepts of the knowledge economy and the information society in these countries.

It is a classic paradox of national development that countries which have a greater need for adult learning and education opportunities to fulfil their developmental aspirations remain behind in the scope and scale of their efforts compared to those which have advanced further.

The Jomtien Education for All conference in 1990 presented a broadened vision of adult education that embraced, among other things, cultural expressions, human rights and responsibilities and being equipped for citizenship. It visualised adult education as a key component of lifelong learning. It was emphasised that the adult was his or her own agent of education and personal development.

Almost all member states regarded adult education as an important part of their education system and recognised it as complementary to formal education. However, the structural links with the formal system rarely went beyond the stage of “proclaimed intentions.” There are no bridges between the two categories that would make these intentions credible. There is no equitable balance in the allocation of budgetary resources (CONFINTEA V *Synthesis of Questions*).

In 2000, the Dakar Framework for Action attempted to redress a perceived imbalance in the Jomtien “framework for action” in the relative emphases it placed on primary education and other elements of basic education, including early childhood education and development, literacy, and adult and continuing education. The Dakar Framework for EFA set two goals related to adult learning and education – one on adult literacy (Goal 4) and the other on life skills and lifelong learning (Goal 3). It also indicated targets for literacy and the kind of actions that might be pursued by countries to achieve these goals.

*Dakar Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.*

The commentary on this goal in the Dakar Framework document mentioned that “All young people and adults must be given the opportunity to gain the knowledge and develop the values, attitudes and skills that will enable them to develop their capacities to work, to participate fully in their society, to take control of their own lives and to continue learning.”

While the commentary mentioned “young people and adults” once, the rest focused on youth and adolescents, who did not continue or participate in formal education. It spoke about young people, especially adolescent girls, who “face risks and threats that limit learning opportunities and challenge education systems.” (“Expanded Commentary”, *Dakar Framework for Action, 2000*)

*Dakar Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.*

In the commentary on the literacy goal, the Dakar Framework document noted that there were some 880 million people who could not read or write, two thirds of them women; “yet, the education of adults remains isolated, often at the periphery of national education systems and budgets.” (“Expanded Commentary”, *Dakar Framework for Action, 2000*)

A close reading of the two EFA Goals and their elaboration suggests an attempt to differentiate the purposes to be served by the two Goals – in terms of content, objectives and learners. This attempt seems to have created an untenable dichotomy. The life-skills and lifelong learning Goal is not quantified. It actually refers to learning content and objectives –

the learners should be able to acquire the values, attitudes and skills which would serve them throughout life and the learning process would continue throughout life.

The adult literacy Goal, on the other hand, emphasises the mechanics of literacy skills, equipping learners with literacy as an instrument. Having acquired this instrument, the learners may continue to participate in education. The somewhat narrow and restrictive view of literacy skills, and its separation as a goal from that for life-skills and lifelong learning appear to have caused a lost opportunity to place literacy and adult education firmly within a common framework of lifelong learning that is purposeful for each learner.

The above observation is not just a speculation based on a textual analysis of the Dakar documents. The Education for All initiative proclaimed in Jomtien in 1990, and the subsequent Dakar Framework in 2000, have influenced policy-making and programme strategies in developing countries. Some of the Asian countries which have long-established non-formal and continuing education programmes have overcome to a degree the apparent disjunction implied in Dakar between learning content and objectives, on the one hand, and the acquisition of the mechanics of literacy, on the other. However, the weakness in coherence in definitions and concepts of adult learning, widely prevalent with adverse consequences in many countries across sub-regions, shows in part the influence of what may be called the Dakar dichotomy.

The tension between a limited view of literacy and its place as a component of lifelong learning is more evident in countries where adult illiteracy remains a serious problem than in countries where major progress has been made in expanding basic education opportunities. These latter countries have had a longer experience in developing a wide array of literacy, non-formal and continuing education activities which are indeed the building blocks of lifelong learning.

**Measuring literacy.** The dominance of literacy efforts in the low-income Asia Pacific countries involving large numbers of the population, and its continued centrality in adult education programmes in the region, make it important to consider how literacy is defined and assessed. As noted above, a narrow definition of the concept of literacy has been common. The restrictive view has led to assessment of literacy that is not quite assessment in a meaningful way and is self-defeating for the lofty purposes of literacy as the means of personal self-realisation and the development of society and nations (*Global Monitoring Report, 2006*).

As shown in Annex Table 1, almost all countries accept a variation of self-reporting about the level of competency in literacy as the basis for calculating national literacy rates. This has created confusion about the rates and meaning of what these officially-announced and widely-discussed numbers – often cited in international league tables – really mean, as far as the goals of education and development are concerned.

Scholars and policy-makers have been expressing dissatisfaction about the way literacy is conventionally defined and measured. An example from Cambodia illustrates the problem (see Figure 1). Conventional definitions and measurements provide a literacy rate which is about double of what appears to be the real situation, based on measurement using an actual test. It also highlights the importance of recognising the continuum of literacy skills, or the recognition of at least several levels, and the need for moving away from a dichotomous view.

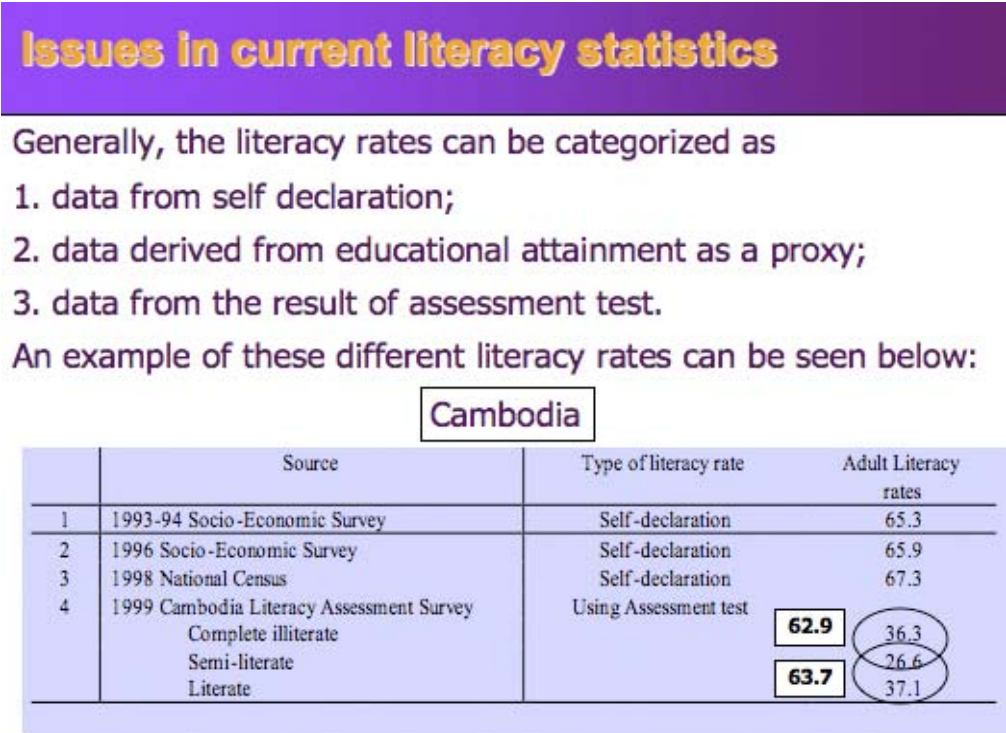
Bangladesh, applying a similar methodology of tested measurement of literacy on a nationwide representative sample in 2002, found that 41 per cent of the 7+ population had literacy skills at a very basic level, whereas the official rate for the same year was reported as 63 per cent. The Bangladesh survey also found that only half of those tested as literate, or



21 per cent of the adult population, had a level of skills that was found sustainable and self-sufficient, in the sense that this population could use literacy in simple transactions in their daily life and could use their skills for further learning without seeking assistance or attending courses to improve further their literacy skills (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003).

Some countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, which have been more successful than others in overcoming large-scale adult illiteracy, have recognised the importance of multi-layered assessment of literacy and have built in different levels of literacy of the population in their regular system of literacy assessment (see below).

**Figure 1. Issues in literacy statistics**



Source: UNESCO, 2008, *Literacy in Asia*

## Adult education and lifelong learning

Formal education – usually confined to the early phase of childhood, adolescence and early youth in human life cycle – is the dominant part of the national education system. It is, therefore, necessary to look at adult learning in relation to its interaction with formal education. It will become evident in the account of adult education and learning in the Asian countries that it can be remedial, supplementary, complementary or a substitute to formal education. It is remedial when those who drop out from primary or secondary education or those who do not acquire the necessary competencies and knowledge find it necessary to resort to non-formal learning opportunities. It is supplementary and complementary when learning opportunities outside or beyond school are necessary for strengthening, extending or adding to the knowledge and competencies acquired in school. It is a substitute when learners, for whatever reason, miss the opportunity to participate in formal education and need a second chance to acquire competencies or credentials through adult education.

**Adult learning in its own right.** However, the role of adult learning and its concomitants – non-formal education, literacy programmes, continuing education and lifelong education – need not be and should not be defined only in terms of the role of formal education. The perspective of lifelong learning – learning any time, anywhere, at any age, to satisfy diverse individual and societal needs – lends adult learning and education its inherent legitimacy and *raison d'être*. This justification has assumed a special significance in today's information society and knowledge economy. This fundamental justification still appears to be sporadically and indifferently reflected in conceptualisation, definition and programme design in many Asian countries.

It is imperative that the discourse on adult learning and education moves beyond the straitjacket of conventional adult literacy focused on the mechanics of reading and writing, which dominates literacy programmes in countries where the level of illiteracy is high. Literacy occurs on a continuum of lifelong learning and is a stepping stone to developing skills, competencies and knowledge that will enable people to live a life that they have reason to value (Sen, 1995). Adult learning policies and purposes cut across agriculture, industrial development, health, environment, criminal justice, governance and good citizenship – unlike the general formal education system. The broad arena of adult education and learning and its pertinence for the varied needs of the lives and livelihoods of people make it essential to adopt a multi-sectoral approach, more so than in other spheres of education.

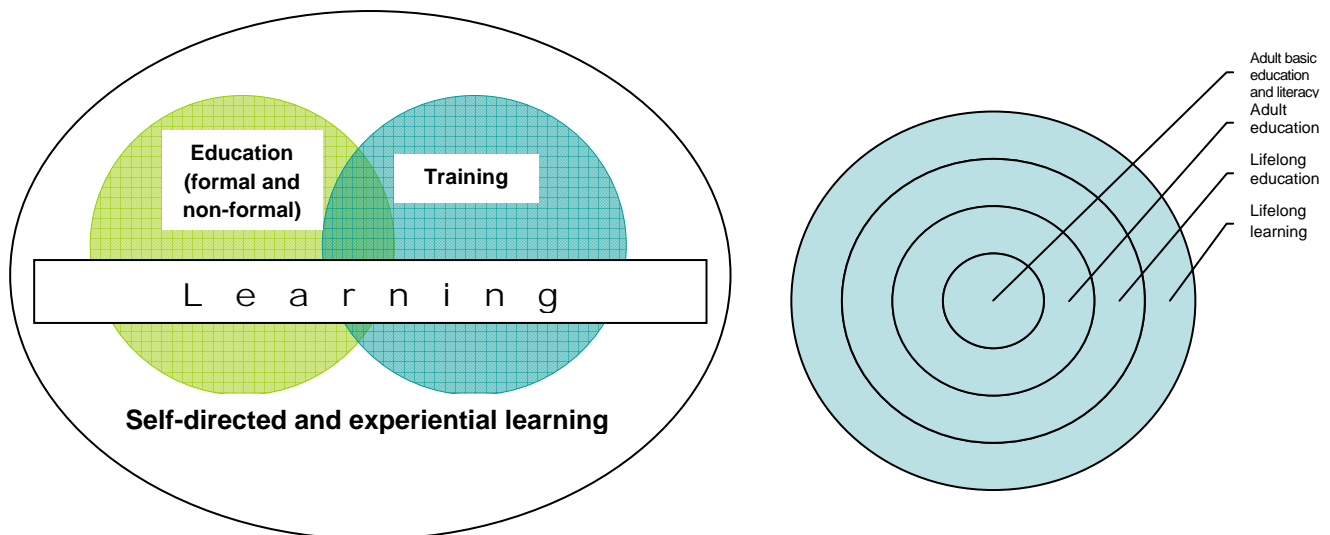
**A convergence of vision.** The broader vision of adult education and learning has been evolving through developments in national programmes and international expressions of consensus reaching a convergence that places adult education firmly within the framework of lifelong learning (Table 1 and Figure 1). The evolving and convergent concepts will continue to be further shaped and refined in practice.

The purposes of adult education, and by implication of lifelong learning, and its clientele and the conditions for its modes of delivery and management, are its own and cannot be served or replaced by the general formal education system. The key challenges in adult learning and education that both developed and developing countries in the Asian region face in varying degrees are in respect of wider access, improved quality and enhanced relevance. This critical role of adult education in building lifelong learning and creating the learning society cannot be neglected any longer (ICAE, 2008).

**Table 1. Convergence of broader and renewed visions** (Adapted from Torres, 2002)

“Expanded vision of basic education”	“Renewed vision of literacy”	“New vision of technical and vocational education and training”	“New vision of adult learning”
World Conference on Education for All – EFA (Jomtien, March 1990)	United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2013) (approved in December 2001)	Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Seoul, April 1999)	Fifth International Conference on Adult Education – CONFINTEA V (Hamburg, July 1997)
Basic education understood as education addressed to meeting basic learning needs of all – children, youth and adults – throughout life, within and outside the school system.	Literacy throughout life and across diverse educational and learning institutions and settings. Literacy goals include literacy acquisition, development and effective use. Literacy is functional and sustainable.	Education and training go together. TVET is a component of lifelong learning, its content introduced in the school curriculum and with training in the workplace. It can be used for self-development.	Adult education and learning comprise adult basic education including functional literacy, adult continuing education, vocational and technical education, and higher education. Lifelong learning is the organising principle for linking all related components.

**Figure 2. Convergence of literacy, adult education and lifelong learning**



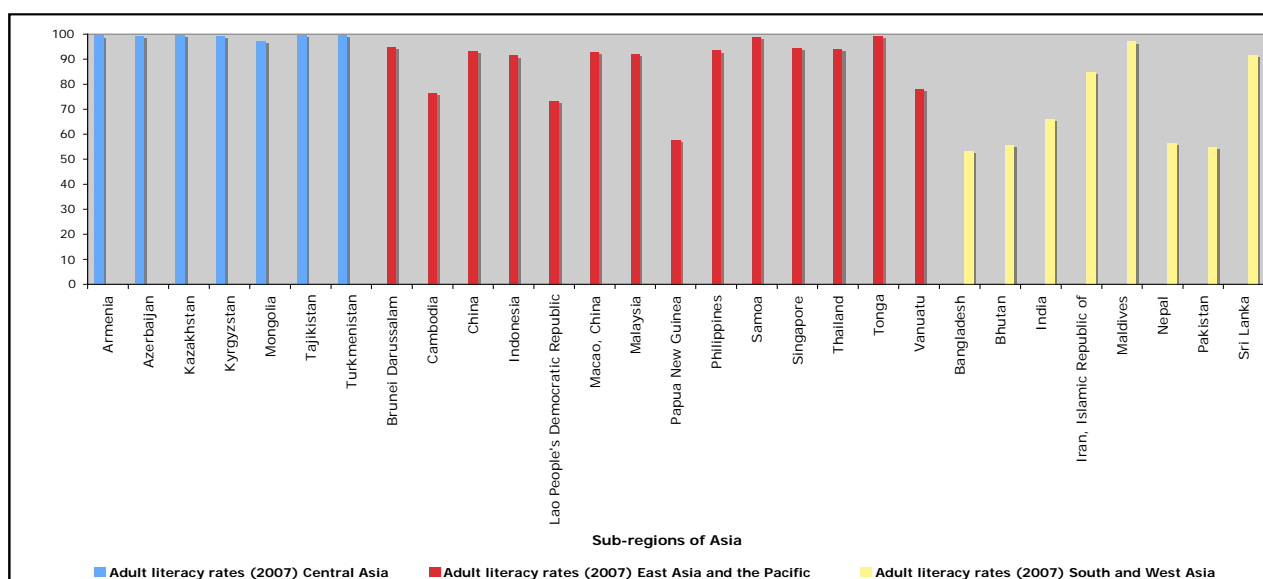
Adapted from Torres, *ibid*, p. 9.

# Educational development since the 1990s

This section provides a summary overview of developments in adult learning and education in the context of EFA progress in the Asia Pacific region by examining countries in sub-regional groups – East Asia, Central Asia, South Asia (including Afghanistan and Iran), and the Pacific. It draws on the sub-regional overviews, analysis and report prepared by the EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, as well as National Reports prepared for CONFINTEA VI.

Overall progress in literacy in the Asia-Pacific Region for countries for which data were available is shown in Figure 3, estimated for 2007 by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

**Figure 3: Adult literacy rates in the sub-regions of Asia, 2007<sup>2</sup>**



Progress in respect of adult literacy and expansion in life skills education based on available information is presented. The scale of the task left for adult education services to complete is shown by data relating to the state of participation in primary and secondary education (see Annex Table 3; also Annex Figures 5 and 6). The state of progress towards EFA indicated by the Educational Development Index (EDI) for the sub-regions is also presented and discussed. Basic socio-economic profiles for the Asian countries are shown in Annex Table 4.

A table containing the literacy rates for 30 countries in Asia measured in the conventional way is given in Annex Table 2; Annex Table 3 shows net and gross enrolment rates in primary and secondary education.

<sup>2</sup> Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics. The literacy data is based on conventional cross-country data drawn from censuses or household surveys that rely on self-assessments, third-party reporting or educational attainment proxies. Conventional literacy data are subject to bias and tend to over-estimate literacy data and therefore should be interpreted with caution. Literacy data for 2007 are UNESCO Institute of Statistic Estimates using Global-Age Specific Literacy Projections Model, when no national observed literacy data is available.

Age-specific youth literacy rates across sub-regions for the periods 1985–1994 and 2005–2007 are shown in Annex Figure 2. Gross pre-primary enrolment ratios by sub-regions for 1999 and 2005 are shown in Annex Figure 4.

## The Central Asia Sub-Region

The countries included in the sub-regional group for this report include Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Since the momentous political changes in the 1990s, Central Asia has been in a mode of recovery in terms of political, economic and educational development.

Education services were disrupted during the transitional period in the 1990s in the Central Asian countries. Participation in education was restored and expanded at different levels over the past decade. Progress has been recorded at the primary level with a slight increase in net enrolment ratio from 88 to 90 per cent between 1999 and 2005. Still some 380,000 children of primary school age remained out-of-school in the sub-region. The sub-region has high retention rates at the primary level, with median survival rates to the last grade at 97 per cent.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan achieved 95 per cent coverage for the age group for secondary education, while others had a GER of 80 per cent or more. Demand for secondary education continues to grow in the sub-region. Provision for secondary education has grown by 34 per cent in Mongolia between 1999 and 2005. The gap in enrolment between lower and upper secondary education remains high with a difference of at least 15 percentage points in most countries. In tertiary education, the increase was a spectacular 61 per cent between 1999 and 2005, reaching a number of 2 million or 27 per cent of the age group.

**Adult literacy.** By conventional literacy assessment, the average adult literacy rate in Central Asia was 99 per cent during the 1995–2004 period. Of the 380,000 adults without basic literacy skills, 72 per cent were women. On the whole, however, general and gender disparities in adult literacy rates among the countries in this sub-region were small.

Achieving EFA Goals will require strong attention to youth and adult literacy through the provision of a diversity of literacy and skills programmes. It will also require attention to the creation of a literate environment, in particular to the availability and use of written materials and of information and communication technology (ICT), which will encourage literacy acquisition, a reading culture, improved literacy retention and access to information.

Based on measurable indicators for universal primary education enrolment and completion, adult literacy, and gender parity, the Educational Development Index (EDI), calculated by the EFA Global Monitoring Team of UNESCO, for Central Asia is relatively high. Kazakhstan has achieved these EFA Goals and all others except Mongolia are set to achieve the measurable EFA Goals. Mongolia's rating was pulled down by relatively low UPE completion, which also has consequences for adult literacy and education. In all the countries, greater efforts are needed to improve the quality and content of life and livelihood skills, and cultural and civic education as components in the development of a comprehensive structure of lifelong learning for youth and adults.

The mean distance from the four EFA Goals for countries in Central Asia are as follows (2005 estimates):

**EFA achieved** (EDI between 0.98 and 1.00): Kazakhstan

**Close to EFA** (EDI between 0.95 and 0.97): Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan

**Intermediate position** (EDI between 0.80 and 0.94): Mongolia

**Far from EFA:** (EDI below 0.80): None

## The East Asia Sub-Region

According to the EFA Monitoring Team's classification, the East Asia region comprises 15 countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao (China), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Despite the overall improvement and expansion in formal and non-formal education, 124 million adults in East Asia in 2005 lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills by conventional assessment of literacy, 71 per cent of whom were women. The priority in this region has been on expansion of formal primary and secondary education.

In 2005 the regional gross enrolment ratio (GER) in secondary education was 73 per cent; the ratio was considerably lower for the upper secondary level. Substantial progress has been made in the last decade in reducing gender disparity except at the tertiary level. Overall, the challenges remain in reducing the number of out-of-school children, improving education quality, expanding early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes, and increasing opportunities in youth and adult education programmes.

Most countries, especially those with larger populations, are in an intermediate position in respect of achieving the EFA Goals. There has been significant progress in the last decade in access and participation at the primary level, yet some 9 million children remained out-of-school. Primary level NER for the sub-region in 2005 was 94 per cent. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Vietnam had primary NERs below 90 per cent; Cambodia, Japan and the Republic of Korea achieved universal primary education.

Demand for secondary education in East Asia has increased significantly in recent years. The secondary education GER rose from 64 per cent to 73 per cent between 2000 and 2005. More than ten percentage points increase was seen in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao (China) and Vietnam. Despite this progress, low secondary GERs (50 per cent or less) were found in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, while high rates (above 95 per cent) were reported in Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Macao (China) and the Republic of Korea.

Growth at the lower secondary level was higher, as expected; most countries in the region include lower secondary education as part of compulsory schooling covering eight or nine years of schooling.

In general, governments in the region have mainly responded to the learning needs of young people and adults by expanding formal secondary and tertiary education. Several of the countries, however, have developed a structure of diverse non-formal learning opportunities for youth and adults (see the next chapter). These programmes have targeted school drop-outs and disadvantaged groups and are operated by different agencies of the government with a wide range of content, objectives, clientele and duration. For example, at least nine different ministries and national bodies are involved in Indonesia and Thailand. Non-



government organisations (NGOs) and local communities are also supported by different government agencies or the private sector to carry out programmes which are relatively small in scale. Many of the countries have set up equivalency of non-formal programmes with formal education. Cambodia, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, among others, have developed stages of equivalency from primary to tertiary levels.

In the area of skill training, there is collaboration between Ministries in managing and granting credentials for skill training. For instance, programmes focusing on rural development and run in cooperation with ministries of agriculture are found in China, the Philippines and Thailand. Some non-formal education programmes are linked to community development. Thailand, for instance, had established more than 8,000 community learning centres by 2006 to provide structured learning activities according to community needs. Community learning centres in different forms in China, Indonesia and the Philippines include literacy classes, continuing education and skills training as the most frequently offered activities.

In the Philippines, as in several other countries, equivalency or 'second chance' services are available for out-of-school youth and adults, sometimes linked to literacy programmes. Additional programmes focusing on rural development are run in cooperation with the ministry of agriculture. In Vietnam, some communities have set up evening classes for out-of-school primary and secondary children.

Despite the variety of skills and continuing education programmes, household surveys in several countries show that only a small proportion of youth and adults say that they obtained their highest educational attainment level through a 'non-standard curriculum': less than 10 per cent in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Vietnam.

**Adult literacy and literate environments.** On the basis of conventional measurement of literacy, the average adult literacy rate in the region increased from 82 per cent in 1985–1994 to 92 per cent in 1995–2004. Yet, 124 million adults, 71 per cent of them women, lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills in the sub-region. The sub-regional progress, as well as the scale of the remaining challenges, is largely attributable to accomplishments in China, where 98 million people became literate between the two periods. Progress in China resulted from a combination of increased primary school participation, highly targeted adult literacy programmes and the wider reach of literate environments. The large absolute number of illiterates in the region is due in large part to at least 85 million from China. (See also the next chapter.)

Calculating the EDI (which is based on quantifiable indicators related to literacy, primary education enrolment and completion and a composite indicator for gender equality) for ten of the 15 countries gives the following results:

The Republic of Korea and Brunei Darussalam have either achieved the four most quantifiable EFA Goals, on average, or are close to doing so. Seven countries are in an intermediate position, with EDI values between 0.80 and 0.94. In most of these countries, low adult literacy rates and/or low survival rates to Grade 5 pull down the overall EDI. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is far from achieving the EFA Goals, with an EDI score of 0.75. For it to move forward, significant improvement needs to occur in all four components. Data for Vietnam indicate a slight decline in the EDI value since 1999, mainly due to a lack of improvement in the total primary net enrolment ratio.

**EFA achieved** (EDI between 0.98 and 1.00): Republic of Korea

**Close to EFA** (EDI between 0.95 and 0.97): Brunei Darussalam

**Intermediate position** (EDI between 0.80 and 0.94): Cambodia, Indonesia, Macao (China), Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam.

**Far from EFA** (EDI below 0.80): Lao People's Democratic Republic

Many of the countries in the region have put in place non-formal education frameworks and sizeable programmes for out-of-school youth and adults. The challenge will be to reduce the disparities in opportunities for further education and employment for those who are not participating in formal education. Pressure for new approaches to this challenge is evident in high-population countries and those with lower literacy rates.

## The South Asia Sub-Region

Despite progress made in the last decade South Asia lags behind other sub-regions in Asia in moving towards the achievement of EFA Goals. In the grouping of countries for this report, the South Asia sub-region includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan. Poverty remains widespread in the region; and in spite of economic growth, inequality has risen in many parts of the sub-region.

There has been an acceleration in the increase of primary school participation in the last decade, yet 17 million primary school-age children were out of school in 2005; two-thirds were girls. Over the past two decades, the sub-region has achieved a 25 per cent increase in the adult literacy rate by conventional measure of literacy – one of the fastest in the world. Yet the sub-region is home to half of the world's adults without basic literacy skills.

The sub-region reached a net primary education enrolment ratio of 86 per cent in 2005, making rapid progress in the past two decades from a low base to catch up with the developing countries' average. It varied among countries: 89 per cent or above in Bangladesh, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sri Lanka, and below 80 per cent in the Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan. Retention or non-completion of the primary stage remains a serious problem, with an average of three quarters reaching completion.

The average secondary education GER rose from 74 per cent to 83 per cent, with increased enrolment rates in most countries with data – reaching a total of 122 million in 2005. There remains a high disparity between lower and upper secondary levels in participation – approximately 60 per cent and 40 per cent respectively at the two levels.

***Learning needs of young people and adults.*** A wide array of diverse non-formal education and skill training programmes for youth and adults exists throughout the sub-region.

At least 17 different ministries and national bodies are involved in both Bangladesh and India, besides non-government organisations (NGOs) and local communities with small-scale programmes. Literacy programmes of sizeable scale that include elements of life and livelihood skills are present in most countries. Many of these are supported by international NGOs and bilateral and multilateral agencies – thus organised as externally-funded projects, which raises issues about their institutionalisation and the development of a sustainable national system for lifelong education.

Steps have been taken to establish equivalency between non-formal education and skill development and formal education and training. India has pursued a multi-tiered equivalency strategy including equivalencies to primary, secondary and tertiary education. The National Institute of Open Schooling in India is a large distance learning system, with over 3,000 study centres for 'basic education', vocational study, and secondary and tertiary academic study.



Some programmes are linked with rural development, as in India and Nepal, and are run in cooperation with agriculture ministries. Other non-formal education programmes are often linked with community development. These provide a range of learning activities including literacy classes, continuing education and skills training as in the “post-literacy and continuing education” projects in Bangladesh.

**Adult literacy.** With at least 388 million adults who cannot read and write – 63 per cent of them women – South Asia was home to half of the world’s 774 million illiterate adults estimated for the period 1995–2004. Despite progress in the past two decades, population growth has meant that the number of non-literate adults declined only slightly (by 2 per cent) since the previous period, 1985–1994. The efforts in the past two decades have led to the increase of adult literacy rate to 60 per cent in 1999–2004. This is still well below the 77 per cent average for all developing countries. Increases were impressive in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Nepal, each with rises of 16 percentage points or more. Low rates of adult literacy below 50 per cent, even at a very basic level of skills used in the conventional assessment criteria, persists in some countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. By contrast, the Maldives and Sri Lanka reported adult literacy rates in 1995–2004 of over 90 per cent.

The conventional method of literacy assessment based on self-reporting and the criteria of measurement limited to mechanics of “decoding the symbols” is a generic problem about the significance of the literacy statistics. This is particularly so in South Asia where large numbers remain illiterate even by conventional definition and the governments are under pressure to demonstrate improvement in terms of the position of their respective countries in the international league table.

The sub-region on the whole moved towards gender parity in primary education, with the most impressive gains in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. However, this improvement has not carried over yet into adult literacy. Strong gender disparities in adult literacy (GPI of 0.67 in 1995–2004) continue in South Asia. Although there have been significant improvements in some countries, particularly India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, very high disparities remain – in Afghanistan, India, Nepal and Pakistan literacy rates for females are still less than two-thirds of those for males. Illiteracy, as expected, strongly correlates with poverty. Literacy rates in the poorest households are substantially lower than those of the better-off. Rural populations fare much worse than their urban counterparts – a serious problem in the sub-region, since three quarters of the population are rural inhabitants.

**Education Development Index.** The EDI for 2005 was calculated by the EFA Global Monitoring Team for six of the nine countries in the region, focusing on four quantifiable goals. The results show that no country in South Asia is close to achieving all four of the most quantifiable EFA Goals. They all need to intensify their efforts to reach the goals.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Maldives are in an intermediate position, with an EDI value between 0.80 and 0.94. The three high population countries – Bangladesh, India and Pakistan – are not on track to achieve EFA as a whole and literacy and adult education goals, in particular, with EDI scores lower than 0.80. In Bangladesh and India, where the total primary NERs are close to 95 per cent, the low adult literacy rates and survival rates to Grade 5 strongly influence the EDI score. Also included in this low EDI category are Pakistan and Nepal where, in addition to low primary school participation, adult illiteracy and gender disparities and inequalities in education are prevalent.

## The Pacific sub-region

According to the EFA Monitoring Team's categorisation, the Pacific sub-region comprises 18 countries: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Progress has been recorded for universal primary education, and most countries have high net enrolment ratios (NERs). Adult literacy data are not available for many of the small island countries; it remains a problem as indicated by some of the very few countries which had data. There are small gender disparities overall in the Pacific.

The total primary net enrolment ratio (NER) was 90 per cent in 2005, an improvement of three percentage points over 1999. However, the primary NERs declined by about three percentage points in Fiji and by two points in Samoa during the period and the Solomon Islands had a low ratio of 63 per cent.

There were still 335,000 out-of-school children at primary level in the Pacific region in 2005, compared to 447,000 in 1999, and the share of girls among out-of-school children increased from 50 per cent to 55 per cent. School progression and completion remain a concern in some of the few countries with relevant data. More than half the countries in the region have secondary school GERs at or above 85 per cent. However, there are large variations in the participation level in secondary education, with the GER ranging from 26 per cent in Papua New Guinea to 148 per cent in Australia. As in other sub-regions, GERs in over half the countries at the lower secondary level are higher by 30 percentage points or more than at the higher level. Notable exceptions to this are Australia, New Zealand and Tonga.

**Adult literacy.** Nearly 1.6 million adults in the Pacific region lacked basic literacy skills during the most recent period (1995–2004), compared with 1.3 million in the previous period (1985–1994). The estimated average adult literacy rate was 93 per cent in 1995–2004, only marginally different since 1985–1994. There are disparities among the countries which provided data; Samoa and Tonga had a rate of 99 per cent in 1995–2004, but the rates were 57 per cent in Papua New Guinea and 74 per cent in Vanuatu. Overall, very little gender disparity was reported, with some exceptions such as Papua New Guinea, where 80 adult women were literate for every 100 adult men who were literate.

Calculation of the Education Development Index and projection to 2015 for some of the measurable EFA Goals show that substantial challenges remain with regard to the learning needs of young people and adults. Given the pressure to extend the cycle of basic education in schools and expand secondary education, non-formal education opportunities have received lesser priority. The countries which have built up their formal primary and post-basic systems, such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand, have in fact, given systematic attention to non-formal life skills and lifelong education for youth and adults, especially at the post-schooling level.

# Policy framework, programme focus and strategy

Having provided an aggregate overview of EFA progress, and with the limited information available on non-formal youth and adult education in the Asian sub-regions, this chapter probes into policy, strategy and programme focus. These are important determinants of progress. This discussion is organised under the headings of Participation and equity; Markers of inequality in participation; and Elements of quality with equity.

## Participation and equity

Given that many countries in Asia Pacific do not have a comprehensive framework for ALE, efforts are fragmented and divided between multiple actors in the field without a clear targeting of clientele and strategy for participation and equity. While adult education programmes in developing countries focus on providing 'basic competencies' in literacy, and sometimes numeracy, participation in these programmes is still disparate and unequal in terms of gender, age, location and ethnic and linguistic categories. This is because individuals from excluded groups suffer from multiple disadvantages, their needs are complex and immense, requiring a comprehensive learning framework, rather than stand-alone programmes which meet only a part of their need. Many governments in developing countries of the Asia-Pacific Region do not have specific policies or resources that will place these programmes within a lifelong learning framework. The deficiencies include the lack of well-thought out plans, tailored curricula, capacities for professional and specialised functions, monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes and collaboration among many providers.

The lack of data on adult education as a whole, with the exception to a degree in adult literacy, has arisen from the absence of overall organisational structures for adult education, let alone lifelong learning, to guide and coordinate diverse actors and providers of services in this area. This situation makes it difficult to provide hard data on participation, let alone on the impact of these programmes on un-served or disadvantaged groups.

One way of making sense of the diversity in policies, programmes and strategies in respect of adult education and lifelong learning is to categorise countries according to common features. Such groupings are shown below, based on empirical observation of the state of development in adult education and lifelong learning, which suggest a taxonomy of ALE/lifelong learning status in the Asia-Pacific region.

Many of the countries in the region which still have to ensure access to basic education opportunities for large proportions of their people, including groups especially disadvantaged in multiple ways, are beginning to give attention to developing systematic approaches guided by a policy framework. The policies, with varying degrees of comprehensiveness, attempt to set realistic priorities within a time-frame. In order to offer an overview that is meaningful, a taxonomy of situations has been attempted: low basic education countries; Asian giants (China and India); Advanced basic education countries; Developed Asia; and Foreshadowing the future, illustrated by the Republic of Korea.

## Countries with low basic education

**Mongolia.** The Government of Mongolia adopted the *Government Action Plan 2004 – 2008*. The government committed itself to support civil society initiatives towards provision of compulsory education for school drop-outs and adults who had no opportunity to study at school. The adults who were employed would continue in their employment under this programme. Another important step was to amend the National Education Law of 2006 to widen the coverage of NFE and make its mission to serve the whole population outside the formal education system. (Mongolia National Report for CONFINTEA VI, 2008)

**Pakistan.** In Pakistan a Literacy Ordinance was approved by Parliament in 1987 which included provisions for making literacy a prerequisite for participation in economic and social activities. The current education policy (1998-2010) envisaged democratisation of education through adult education, literacy and functional literacy programmes. The implementation of policies and plans, however, faltered, in part because of political changes, shifting priorities, and lack of continuity in commitment.

Pakistan takes a critical look at the recent state of adult literacy and reports that adult literacy had been a neglected area, particularly with respect to policy and financing. “No clear cut policy could be adopted for promotion of adult literacy and non-formal education. Policy makers could not be convinced about the importance and significance of adult literacy.” (Pakistan National Report for CONFINTEA VI, 2008)

**Bangladesh.** In 2006, the Government of Bangladesh adopted a forward-looking Non-Formal Education Policy Framework. The principal features of the policy include:

- The mission is to provide lifelong learning opportunities to improve the quality of life of children, youth and adults including those with special needs and who have missed out on formal education. An early priority is to reduce the number of illiterates by at least 50 per cent by 2015.
- An emphasis on alternative learning opportunities through non-formal channel for the basic education of children not able to participate in formal primary schools, second-chance learning opportunities for adolescents and adults, and a “menu” of need-based continuing education.
- An aim of building a “culture of quality” in all NFE programmes. Third-party involvement in assessment of effectiveness is seen as a means of quality improvement.
- The promotion of non-formal channels for vocation-, entrepreneurship and employment-related skills and an aim to establish equivalency between formal and non-formal qualifications.
- A proposal to move to a decentralised operation system of NFE with coordination and linkages among GOs, NGOs, CBOs, private sector and civil society.
- The encouragement of community ownership as a means of ensuring sustainability of NFE programmes.

At present, the Bureau of Non-Formal Education at the central level is engaged in managing a number of post-literacy and continuing education projects. Building the organisational structure and mechanism for implementing the policy framework with the involvement of the major stakeholders including non-governmental development organisations, community organisations and research and academic institutions is recognised as the major challenge for the future.

The Bangladesh National Report notes that a recent mapping study of NFE has shown the coverage of on-going projects to be very low and unequal in comparison to the potential target population. With respect to programme delivery, the teaching and learning process, the development of curriculum and materials, the room for choice by the learners and

providers is very limited. The technical capacity in NFE, especially in the public sector, is inadequate and “it would be an uphill task to launch the programmes ideally required unless a massive professional skill development programme is planned.” A comprehensive NFE sub-sector plan is expected to be developed in line with the NFE Policy (Bangladesh National Report, 2008).

The results of recent policy and programme strategy initiatives in many countries are still to become evident with their effective implementation. Some of the countries, especially in the South Asian sub-region, which has announced government commitments and developed plans, face difficulties in implementation. They have become self-critical as they have assessed the situation and looked ahead, as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. This self-examination will help the countries move forward with realistic goals and plans.

## **Asian giants – China and India**

China and India, with 40 per cent of the world’s population and 50 per cent of world’s illiteracy between them, dominate the adult education and literacy scene not only in Asia, but throughout the world. Despite progress recorded since the mid-20th century, the struggle to eliminate illiteracy remains the key feature of adult education efforts in both countries. Geographical, ecological, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity and differences in economic development within each country have affected how literacy and adult education have progressed. It is, for the same reason, difficult to give a meaningful picture of the situation in these countries with aggregate data.

China, having adopted the spread of literacy as a key strategy in its revolutionary struggle for social and political change even before the liberation in 1949, has advanced further in broadening the literacy effort into a lifelong system of adult and continuing education. India has struggled in its own way and has begun to transform the adult education programmes so far dominated by literacy into multi-faceted learning opportunities for youth and adults.

### ***China – from literacy towards lifelong learning***

With more than 10 per cent of world’s illiteracy, literacy efforts dominate the adult education and learning scene in China. Literacy as the vehicle for nation-building and economic development has been a dominant theme in the history of reform and revolution in China throughout the twentieth century. The communist revolution led a nationwide struggle to overcome mass illiteracy. “Indeed, the literacy programs mounted in China after 1949 constitute what is perhaps the single greatest educational effort in human history.” (Peterson, 1997, p.3)

Confronting the challenges of bringing prosperity to all its people and taking its place in the world, China has recognised the necessity of broadening the scope and purposes of adult learning and to make it an instrument of lifelong learning.

Despite progress in universal primary education, there are still large numbers who have missed primary education or have not achieved basic competencies. Altogether over 25 million young and middle-age adults became literate during the period 1997-2007. Literacy skills were generally combined with knowledge and skills of production and those related to improving living standards (China National Report, p.12). In 2006, 2.7 million people graduated from adult primary schools. At the secondary level, 390,000 completed specialised adult secondary education, which emphasised production-related skills; 120,000 graduated from adult senior secondary schools; and 800,000 completed adult junior secondary schools.

**Women prioritised.** About 70 per cent of the illiterates are women. The Women's Federation of China, the nationwide mass organisation of women, in supporting and promoting adult education, has followed the principle of integrating literacy education for women with the mastering of agricultural techniques, popularisation of knowledge about laws, and safeguarding of women's rights and interests

**Rural adult education.** By the generally accepted international definition, three quarters of the people in China may be regarded as rural inhabitants. Since the 1980s, rural adult education has been consistently emphasised by setting up adult primary and secondary schools for farmers, and rural adult cultural and technical schools and colleges.

**Distance education.** Since the 1990s, broadcast and television universities have been developed to offer diploma-oriented academic education and various kinds of skill training courses. The distance education network at present consists of the Central Television University, 44 provincial television universities, 945 municipal television work stations, 1,842 county work stations, and 46,724 classes (teaching points), linked to the television university system. By 2007, some 5.6 million people graduated with academic diplomas from this network. Another 18.6 million people completed non-academic training, certificate-oriented courses or continuing education during the period 1990–2007.

Since 1999, the Central Broadcast and Television University took the lead, in collaboration with regular universities, in establishing equivalencies and promoting the building of the lifelong education system and the "learning society." The key components of this initiative are a two-year specialised open education and four-year undergraduate open education.

**The community education experiment.** In January 1999, the State Council approved the Action Plan for Vitalising Education for the 21st Century, a part of which was to undertake pilot work on community education as an important element of establishing the system of lifelong education.

In December 2004 the Ministry of Education circulated *Guidelines for Further Promotion of Community Education*. The provincial authorities, based on these guidelines, worked out their plans, policies and regulations for developing community education. During the period 2001–2007, by building on the existing educational resources, nearly 300 provincial pilot areas of community education were set up (China Report, pp. 44-49).

The China National Report notes the challenges facing the national adult education effort. These include according a higher priority to adult education in the total education effort as a policy objective and in allocation of resources; more balanced development of adult education across regions and localities in the country; making the equivalency system work better to achieve full recognition and acceptance of non-formal education credentials; and strengthening the professional preparation and development of adult educators.

The literacy challenge remains paramount. Research literature on the "stubborn barriers to literacy for all" in China echoes the challenges mentioned above and identifies some others. These include both the absolute numbers and location of China's remaining illiterates; state policies and international aid agreements that may leave the poorest communities with inadequate support; substandard school facilities and continuing problems of teacher quality, training, and pay; household conditions of poverty and poor health of educationally-deprived families; poor and/or corrupt fiscal management in education at local levels; and weaknesses in the educational legal provisions and their enforcement. (Ross, China country study prepared for UNESCO Global Monitoring Report)

### ***India – Moving towards a lifelong learning approach***

The National Literacy Mission (NLM), launched in 1988, was based on the 1986 National Policy on Education. The literacy movement that India witnessed in the 1990s and later has few parallels elsewhere in the world in respect of its scale, scope, implementation structure and innovations including its “Mission” approach to overcome bureaucratic constraints. It was set up with the aim of imparting functional literacy to 80 million adults in the 15-35 age group by 1995. It started with a mass campaign approach, known as the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), but has evolved into a massive programme of adult education. Literacy for youth and adults still remains its core, but it is developing elements of lifelong learning for increasingly large and diverse groups of participants.

The National Literacy Mission conceived literacy as an active and potent instrument of change and for the creation of a learning society. Functional literacy was defined as:

- Achieving self-reliance in literacy and numeracy;
- Becoming aware of the causes of their own deprivation and ways of overcoming their condition through organisation, and participation in the process of development ;
- Acquiring skills to improve economic status and general well-being; and
- Adopting the values of national integration, environmental conservation, women’s equality and observance of small-family norms.

Implementation of this functional and instrumental concept of literacy varied greatly and often veered towards a conventional approach that focused more on the mechanics of recognising alphabets at a rudimentary level, rather than self-sufficiency in acquiring the tools for further learning and developing critical consciousness. With over 300 million adults in illiteracy, India accounted for about 40 per cent of the world’s adult illiteracy.

As proposed in the revised National Policy on Education of 1992, NLM combined Post-Literacy and Continuing Education (PL & CE) activities in order to consolidate and improve functional literacy skills of neo-literates. The Post-Literacy Campaigns had three broad learning objectives – remediation, continuation and application.

A new scheme of Continuing Education, distinct from the previous PL & CE, was launched by NLM in 1997. The aim was to provide learning opportunities to neo-literates on a continuing basis and to reinforce and widen the literacy skills for personal, social and economic improvement. The Community Education Centre (CEC), the main delivery point of CE programmes, looked after by a Prerak (Animator), is meant to be a community-based centre with a library and reading room. It plans and carries out activities in training, information, culture, sports, communication and discussion forums for the communities it serves. The CEC is seen as a permanent institution, located in a public place, open to all, and run with close community involvement.

The participants, mostly neo-literates, the majority of whom are women, and the Panchayats (elected local self-government bodies) are regarded as key stakeholders of the CEC.

At district level the programme implementing agency is the Zila Shaksharta Samiti ( ZSS or District Literacy Society). It is a registered society with a General Council and an Executive Committee, with official and non-official members, under the leadership of the district head of administration. It receives funds from the government and disburses funds to CECs on the basis of approved plans. A District Resource Unit (DRU), located in the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), and the State Resource Centre provide technical and academic support to the programme. The Jan Shikshan Sansthan (People’s Training Organisation), a district-level institution, often managed by an NGO, works with the ZSS to provide vocational and life enrichment education. It offers courses based on local market demands.

About a quarter of India's 600 districts which have a low education level now each have a district literacy society and a functioning adult education programme under its auspices.

Although the NLM objectives and programmes are conceptually linked to a broader approach to adult and lifelong learning, the heavy burden of illiteracy compels India to remain focused on narrow literacy objectives, especially in seven of the 28 states which account for 65 per cent of the total illiterate population. It is in the same states that the national programme for primary education, Sharva Shiksha Abhijan (Education for all Campaign), is weak and, therefore, continues to feed the pool of illiteracy. This is so much so that the primary schools have been described as maintaining a system of 'institutionalised sub-literacy.' (*The Statesman*, editorial, 22 August, 2006). Other challenges relate to finding effective pathways to address the multiple disadvantages of educationally-deprived populations who are living in extreme poverty, are largely low-caste or ethnic minorities, often in poor health, and women (Govinda and Biswal, 2005).

### **Countries with advanced basic education**

Countries in the Region, particularly in East and South East Asia, which have expanded the reach of basic education up to the middle level of secondary education, have begun to diversify the scope and range of adult learning and non-formal and continuing education. Countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have had more than three decades of experience in developing and expanding national non-formal education programmes largely in the public sector. They are now able to consolidate and deepen the gains and place adult learning and non-formal education firmly within a progressively comprehensive framework of lifelong learning.

**Philippines.** In the Philippines, life skills programmes provided through the Alternative Learning System (ALS ) are based on a curriculum that contains five learning areas or strands: communication skills; problem solving and critical thinking; sustainable use of resources; development of self and a sense of community; and expanding one's world vision. An accompanying testing and assessment system monitors and profiles the progress and achievement of learners to determine appropriate level and learning interventions. A certificate is granted to learners who complete the Basic Literacy Programme. Learners may then proceed to undertake the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test. It offers an alternative pathway for out-of-school youths and adults to earn an educational qualification comparable to that of the formal primary and secondary school system.

Administered once a year, learners who pass this test have the option to join the formal education system (be it in any technical-vocational school or in higher education) or to use the certificate as credential for finding employment. Other measures to ensure quality in life skills programmes include the establishment of core groups of trainers at the national and field levels. An ALS Service Provider Accreditation System was also established to ensure the quality of services provided by partner NGOs and other private entities under the ALS Service Contracting Scheme.

The Philippines uses two levels of literacy for statistical measurement: (a) basic literacy, which consists of reading and writing with comprehension; and (b) functional literacy, which includes basic literacy plus numeracy skills. Literacy is measured in the eight major languages in the Philippines, in addition to the national language, Filipino, and English.

**Indonesia.** In Indonesia, opportunities for training to produce a skilled workforce are still limited. To address this, the government requires vocational students to undertake



internships in enterprises to gain experience. Another obstacle is geographical – mainly the uneven distribution of the population.

Indonesia has developed competency-based standards to recognise and certify skills based on labour and work analysis that links learning, education and training programmes with the work or employment requirements in the local economy. The competency-based training and skills upgrading are aimed at ensuring qualifications and labour quality that are competitive domestically and internationally.

Somewhat uniquely, literacy is defined in Indonesia as having three levels of competencies: Level 1 pertains to basic reading and writing, and numeracy skills; Functional Level, which is Level 1 plus life skills; and Advanced Level, which is Level 1 plus academic and professional skills. Literacy is measured through equivalency tests for certification.

**Malaysia.** Malaysia has put in place policies and strategies to expand life skills and skills training opportunities to young people, especially those with low academic achievement. Malaysia's definition of adult literacy is conventional – that is, aged 10 years and above, with an ability to read and write with understanding a short simple statement related to everyday life.

More than 29,000 professionally active technical-vocational education teachers and administrators in Malaysia acquired new skills between 2000 and 2005. Around 90 formal secondary level technical schools are distributed nationwide to widen access for rural youth for acquiring life skills (Malaysia National Report, 2008)

**Thailand.** Thailand has taken several policy measures recently to make non-formal education more inclusive and to integrate it within lifelong education. For instance, the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999) and the Amended Act of B.E. 2545 (2002) require that educational management be guided by the principle of lifelong education through the integration of formal, non-formal and informal education, enabling the learners to improve their quality of life continuously throughout their lifespan.

A Ministerial Meeting Resolution of 2 December 2003, regarding reform strategies for non-formal and informal education to promote lifelong learning, stated that budgetary support to lifelong learning through non-formal and informal education reform should be comparable to that for reform in the formal education system. The Thai Constitution (2007) made the provision that every individual has the same right to free quality education for at least 12 years. This includes training programmes provided by employers and industry, alternative education programmes by NGOs, and self-learning programmes, all of which would be promoted appropriately by the state (Thailand National Report, 2008).

## **Developed Asia**

The developed countries in the Asia-Pacific Region – Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore – achieved universal primary education and succeeded in making secondary education close to universal. They now find it necessary to give priority to vocational and technical upgrading of the workforce at the post-secondary level and to broadening the scope of continuing education at the tertiary level. Parallels of Australia's measures, described below, can be found in the other developed countries in the region.

A series of steps have been taken since 1997 in Australia to make general post-school education flexible and more accessible to mature adults and to make higher education more responsive to the needs of society and circumstances of learners. The measures include: a

*Learning and Teaching Performance Fund* that rewards higher education providers who demonstrate excellence in teaching and promoting learning for undergraduate students; *Disability Support and Equity Support* to encourage higher education providers to promote equality of opportunity in higher education; a *Higher Education Loan (HELP)* that allows student choice and facilitates access to higher education by providing loans to eligible students; and *Commonwealth Learning Scholarships* to provide financial support to eligible undergraduate students.

- The vocational education and training sector has also introduced innovations since 1997. One measure is to develop “pathways between VET and higher education to provide flexibility for students to respond to changing employment needs and personal interests”. Other steps include: the adoption of National Training Packages in 1997, which are training courses developed by industry;
- introduction of the Australian Apprenticeships system in 1998, that is responsive to the needs of individual employers and industries;
- implementation of the User Choice Scheme in 1998 which allows employers and their apprentices to choose among the off-the-job components of the training supported by public funding;
- adoption of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) in 2001 – a set of nationally-agreed standards for vocational education and training throughout Australia;
- ten industry skills councils established in 2003 to enable industry to lead the vocational and technical education system; and
- the *Skilling Australia’s Workforce Act 2005*, creating a new government-funded national training system (Australia National Report, 2008).

More traditional adult education not tied to formal higher education in equivalency or delivery mechanisms, known as the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector, has continued to flourish in Australia. Outside the main vocational and academic streams, it includes (a) an employment focus and is designed to equip students with specific technical skills; and (b) non-vocational programmes, which contribute to the overall personal, cultural and social development of an individual.

The ACE sector courses are often delivered by community organisations including local churches, who also provide a range of non-vocational courses. Some non-vocational education is provided by formal education institutions, but separate from their mainstream academic and vocational courses of study. There are approximately 1,200 not-for-profit community education and training providers around the country, 770 of which are training organisations registered with the government (RTOs) (Australia National Report, 2008).

New Zealand also has an Adult Community Education structure similar to that of Australia, in addition to the initiatives taken to expand post-secondary and tertiary education opportunities beyond the formal academic courses (New Zealand National Report, 2008).

## **Foreshadowing the future – Republic of Korea**

The Republic of Korea has crossed the threshold between developing and developed countries, achieving a per capita income of over US\$ 20,000 in 2007, and already attaining membership of the OECD. The experience of the Republic of Korea in its development of adult education and lifelong learning may be regarded as the precursor of where other developing countries of the region may expect to be in the future. They may find the premises and approaches underlying the course followed by the Republic of Korea instructive, although each country has to adopt the strategies most suited to its unique conditions.

Since the adoption of the Social Education Act in 1982 as the legal and policy guidance for non-formal and adult education, there has been a steady broadening of scope, scale and diversity of educational objectives, participants and delivery modes. The wide range of provisions has evolved into a variegated mosaic of learning opportunities that constitutes the lifelong learning approach aiming to serve all according to their needs and preferences.

The objective of Korea's lifelong education strategy is to build a learning society, where all citizens may find adequate learning opportunities at any place and time of their choice.

A comprehensive legislative framework has been established to achieve the goal of lifelong learning. The Lifelong Education Act of 2007, a revision of the 1999 Act under the same title, clarified the scope and field of lifelong education, defining it as "all types of systemic educational activities other than regular school education". It includes education equivalent to diploma level in formal education, basic adult literacy education, vocational capacity-building education, liberal arts education, culture and arts education, and education on civic participation. It also requires the Minister of Education, Science and Technology to establish a comprehensive national lifelong education promotion plan every five years. The 1999 Act also provided for a system of paid study-leave for employees in enterprises beyond a certain size.

The 2007 Lifelong Education Act provides for an administrative structure across central, metropolitan and municipal governments. At the central level, the National Institute for Lifelong Education was launched under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in February 2008. The National Institute is responsible for administering the Academic Credit Bank System, the Bachelor's Degree Examination for Self-Education and conducting research and providing policy recommendations. The Act makes it compulsory for local governments to establish their own lifelong education promotion plans, and to form regional committees for the implementation of such plans.

The policy objectives of the Second National Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan (2008-2012) are to provide tailored learning programmes at each stage of human life, offer appropriate lifelong learning schemes tuned to changes occurring on an individual's vocational cycle, and extend opportunities for under-privileged groups to take part in lifelong learning activities (Republic of Korea National Report, 2008).

## Markers of inequality in participation

The policy framework and programme strategies described above determine how and to what extent adult education (including literacy) efforts reach and serve each country's citizens. The markers of disparity and inequality which must be overcome are described below briefly.

**Gender disparities.** One of the common disparities is the unequal participation of women in adult education programmes. According to UNESCO (2008), adult literacy rates for females between 1999 and 2004 were less than two-thirds of the adult literacy rates for males in countries such as India, Nepal and Pakistan. These disparities become even more pronounced if geographical and socio-economic factors are taken into consideration. For example, in Pakistan, some rural districts had female literacy rates lower than 10 per cent. Overall, countries that tend to have high literacy rates, such as the Central Asian Republics, tend also to have achieved gender parity in adult literacy rates.

Annex Table 2 shows that most Central Asian countries have female adult literacy rates of 95 per cent and above, which correspond to the overall adult literacy rates in those countries.

Low-income countries with low-literacy rates tend to have pronounced gender disparities, such as Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Papua New Guinea which have a gender parity index of 0.80 and below. Interestingly, India reported low participation among men in its NFE programmes (approximately 31 per cent) in 2000 because of migration and frequent travel for work (India National Report, 2008). However, it is usually women who are unable to attend adult learning programmes because of social, cultural, religious and economic constraints.

Developing countries in the Asia-Pacific Region are starting to recognise not only the benefits of female participation in adult education programmes, but also the injustice of preventing women from playing an equal part in the political, social and economic development of a country. Hence, they are developing initiatives to encourage female participation. For example, India has taken several initiatives such as an Accelerated Female Literacy Programme in four Indian states with a female literacy rate of 30 per cent and below.

**Age disparities.** Participation in adult education also varies according to age groups. People who are 45 years or older are more likely to be illiterate than people aged 15 to 34 (UNESCO, 2008). Annex Figure 1 shows high youth literacy rates across all sub-regions of Asia, particularly in Central Asia and East Asia and the Pacific regions. Higher youth literacy rates are possibly due to the expansion of primary education. The opportunity costs of taking part are much higher for the older age group than for the younger group. Furthermore, many countries including India have deliberately given priority to younger adults in their programmes.

Older participants may require more time to learn because of social, motivation, instructional and cognitive barriers to their learning. Given that results are not immediate, short-term and poorly resourced, adult education programmes are inadequate to develop the basic competencies of older participants. There is often a relapse into illiteracy for older participants who participate in stand-alone literacy projects (Abadzi, 1994).

Change in the demographic structure of the population is raising the dependency rate with the proportions of the older retired or semi-retired population growing, even in some of the developing countries. Lifelong learning for the older age group to prepare for new areas of work including social and community services and leisure pursuits is assuming new significance. This is of course a more urgent concern in developed nations such as Australia and Japan, where a burgeoning ageing population that needs to be re-trained and its skills upgraded to meet worker and skill shortages for industry and economic growth as well as for a fulfilling personal life.

**Geographic disparities.** There are strong geographical disparities in participation of adult education programmes. Rural residents have lower literacy levels than urban residents. This is particularly pronounced in low-income countries of the Asia-Pacific Region. However, even in middle-income countries, there are wide urban/rural disparities. For example, in Indonesia, the urban literacy rate was seven percentage points higher than the rural literacy rate in 2005 (*Insular Southeast Asia*, 15 January 2008). In 2001, the officially-reported adult literacy rate in urban areas of Bangladesh was 82.2 per cent and the corresponding rate in rural areas was 52.4 per cent (*South Asia*, 27 June 2008).

The pattern of economic growth and investment policies and planning have created unequal geographic distribution of wealth amongst its population. Urban areas have greater access to formal schooling, higher-quality education and non-formal education programmes, with the exception of urban slums where the poor are concentrated. Furthermore, urban employment is more likely to require acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills than rural employment. Low participation in adult education programmes may be due to the remoteness of some of

the rural areas, the lack of a focused and relevant curriculum and lack of locally trained teachers.

Special adult education programmes targeting the rural poor in many countries of the Asia-Pacific Region have been developed, which have attempted to integrate literacy with broader development activities. The government of Malaysia, to take one example, has increased its allocation of resources to scale up its literacy programmes in the countryside (*Insular Southeast Asia*, 15 Jan 2008). Special adult and non-formal programmes for the rural population in China have been mentioned earlier. In India, the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREGP) is a literacy and livelihood model of the Ministry of Rural Development, which provides for at least 100 days of guaranteed wage in every financial year to every household where an adult volunteers to do unskilled manual labour. This worker is also given lessons at lunch break by a Prerak – the honorary facilitator in charge of Continuing Education Centre at the village level (India National Report, 2008).

**Socio-economic disparities.** It is well known that illiteracy rates are highest in countries with the greatest poverty. Widening income inequalities in many developing countries have made these disparities even more pronounced. For example in Vietnam, the literacy gap between the poorest and the wealthiest households is about 25 percentage points (UNESCO Regional Overview – East Asia and Pacific, 2006).

The poorest in the developing countries of Asia suffer from a combination of disadvantages that hamper their participation in adult education. The poor are often women, come from remote and rural areas and belong to an ethnic minority group and their needs are often immense and complex. Moreover, the opportunity costs of attending for those living on the periphery of economic development are extremely high. Therefore, incentives are needed to encourage participation that will offset opportunity costs, such as removing fees, offering help on setting up enterprises and finding work placements. The Language, Literacy and Numeracy programme in Australia, for instance, helps job-seekers of working age (15-64 years of age) to look for work and develop their basic competencies (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

**Ethnic and linguistic disparities and socially-excluded groups.** Many tribal, ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous people in the Asia-Pacific Region face a series of disadvantages: poverty, high rates of adult unemployment, poor health, low educational participation and exclusion from state-provided services. Tribal, ethnic and religious minorities are under- or unequally represented in adult education. Low literacy rates characterise these populations and it is particularly pronounced in low-income countries.

Nepal – a country that has LDC status, had literacy rates among the economically and socially privileged groups ranging from 60-94 per cent, whereas among the more disadvantaged groups such as dalits, janajati and Muslims, the rates were as low as 3.7 per cent in 2001 (*South Asia*, 27 June 2008). In India, where the Muslim population is large, the literacy rate of this minority group is below the national average (India National Report, 2008). Minority and indigenous groups in developed nations also face similar disadvantages. For example, in Australia, the aborigines have very low literacy rates and are often found in the lower rungs of social and economic development.

The limited participation of tribal, ethnic, indigenous and religious minorities is due to the fact that they are often under-counted in census and household-based assessments and are therefore missing from literacy targets. They also face overt and subtle forms of discrimination in accessing programmes delivered by formal educational providers. The curriculum does not take into account their linguistic, cultural and social diversities. Socially-excluded groups such as internally displaced people and refugees also have limited participation in adult education, largely because their rights are often not recognised by

formal state providers. Examples are some Hill Tribes people in Thailand on whom citizenship is not conferred because they lack birth registration documents.

Many countries in the Asia-Pacific Region are undertaking innovative programmes to encourage participation of tribal, ethnic and religious minorities as well as socially-excluded group. Some governments in East Asia and Pacific are providing adult education and literacy in local mother tongues. The Philippines has prepared instructional materials for literacy in seven regional languages, and have developed an Adult Literacy Curriculum to be delivered in people's native languages (Soliven and Reyes, 2008)

Overall, participation in adult learning eludes many of the poor, women, old-age groups, ethnic minority and indigenous groups and socially-excluded groups because of structural, political, economic and social barriers. Adult learning in Asia needs to adopt flexible structures that are able to adapt to the evolving needs of these groups. Furthermore, adult learning must be an integral part of a comprehensive framework of lifelong learning opportunities that place individuals on a learning cycle and will help meet their occupational, professional and personal needs.

## Elements of quality with equity

The strength of adult education rests on the learning experience of adults – the relevance of what they are learning, their ability to remain engaged and motivated in classrooms, and the value of what they learn and its impact on their life. Overall, the quality of education depends on the curriculum, teaching-learning strategies, monitoring and assessment mechanisms and processes, and finally, on learning achievement and outcome. It is difficult to assess the quality of adult education programmes when there is a lack of proper documentation or systematic approach to adult education. Nonetheless, the major constraints to quality and good practice can be identified from available accounts of the efforts of public, private, and non-governmental service providers.

**Curriculum.** An adult education curriculum defines the structure, content, pedagogy, resources and target population. In many Asia-Pacific countries detailed curricula and syllabi are prescribed centrally, which limits the possibilities of being adaptive and responsive to local conditions and the circumstances of learners. Paradoxically, the need for maintaining quality and relevance of content is seen as the reason for centrally-provided detailed curricula.

In countries where NGOs and private organisations are the main service providers, the curriculum on adult education may have greater flexibility. Nonetheless, in Thailand, for instance, where adult education is a core component of the education system, the government provides a comprehensive and detailed framework for adult education which stipulates learning outcomes, materials and methods of delivery, assessment and evaluation processes and regulations for multiple service providers.

On the other hand, in Bangladesh, BRAC, the well-known non-governmental development organisation, has developed an innovative programme for adolescents and youth – both girls and boys. The model of curriculum content, development and implementation may be relevant in other countries seeking to offer appropriate educational opportunities for out-of-school adolescents and youth. (Box 1)

## Box 1. Adolescent education and development in Bangladesh

The adolescent development programme (ADP) started in 1993 has four components: *Kishori (Adolescent Girl) Club*, *APON/LSBE (Adolescent Peer Organised Network/Life Skill Based Education)*, *Livelihood Training*, and *Community Participation*.

**1. Kishori Club:** The Kishori Club is held twice a week for two hours. Each KC has 25-35 Kishori members from the 11-19 age group. One adolescent leader is responsible for the operations of a given KC. At present there are around 8,772 Kishori Clubs with 168,000 members all over the country. KC activities include exchanging books, reading newspapers and magazines, playing indoor games, performing cultural shows, and organising APON/LSBE courses and livelihood training.

**2. APON/LSBE:** The APON course began in 2000 after a year of piloting. There are 20 one-hour sessions for this course for 25 members in each group. The course content includes social issues (dowry, child marriage, birth and marriage registration, gender and child rights, abuse) and sexual and reproductive health issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexually-transmitted diseases and substance abuse. Along with the Kishori Kendra members the course is given to boys and girls of secondary schools and boys who are not continuing in school.

**3. Livelihood Training:** Livelihood is another important component of ADP. Members of the kishori club who complete the APON course are eligible for livelihood training. This training includes locally marketable skills such as poultry and livestock rearing, tailoring, embroidery, block printing, fishing, candle-making, handicrafts, photography, driving and so on. ADP organises livelihood training collaborating with the Directorate of Youth & Sports, other government bodies and private organisations. Besides that, ADP also has Economic Life Skills courses to provide girls with knowledge on basic business and financial skills. ADP helps link the trainees with BRAC's micro-credit for financial support if needed.

**4. Community Participation:** ADP utilises a holistic approach for adolescent development. Therefore ADP has included parents and people from all levels of the community to create a supportive environment for adolescents. ADP works with the wider community in order to change general societal attitudes regarding child marriage and dowry. For this purpose ADP organises mothers' forums, parents' meetings, community meetings, and community leaders' workshops.

Adolescent leaders are responsible for the operation of Adolescent Clubs and facilitating the APON/Life Skill courses. They are accountable to ADP Organisers based at the Upazilla (sub-district) level and Area Managers at the district level. There is also a staff of 35 trainer-supervisors to support the peer facilitators of clubs. A programme development unit in BRAC provides technical assistance to develop curriculum and training content and teaching methodology.

*Source: BRAC Adolescent Development Programme*

**Teachers and teaching and learning approaches and practices.** There is insufficient documentation on teaching and learning approaches and practices in adult education. Nonetheless, research has shown that the teacher-student nexus is critical, particularly in adult literacy where there is a strong danger of relapse into illiteracy (Abadzi, 2003).

The task of teaching an adult is both similar and different to that of teaching a child. A survey of learner motivation in India revealed that literacy volunteers and organisers found good results by introducing joyful and participatory activities to retain the interest of learners – similar to methods used for primary-age children (Bhola and Gomez, 2008). However, the task of teaching adults is also different because of the position of an adult in life and society. Adults bring in experience, opinions and thoughts, are more concerned with the concrete and

practical realities of their environment, and have a better sense of self and community, which must be taken into account in the teaching-learning approach and practices.

A learner-centred process in adult education engages the learner in critical and participatory action on issues that matter to the learner, and is essential for successful outcomes (UNESCO, 2006). Hence, activities that combine literacy with income-generating activities or explicit community participation and planning are more successful than typical literacy classes.

Many developing countries are using a multi-purpose approach to adult education: for example, in Malaysia, vocational courses such as fashion, batik making and sewing classes have literacy components (National Social Institute, 2008). However, facilitators or teachers in adult education programmes often lack the required qualifications or experience for this purpose and have little pedagogical training, as noted in the Afghanistan and Bangladesh National Reports. The facilitators/teachers' limited pedagogical abilities are an important factor in the low motivation of participants in adult education. For example, drop-out is commonly expected in adult education programmes, but lower drop-out can be expected if teachers show up in class regularly and treat students with respect. Teachers/facilitators who are not sensitised to inter-personal dynamics in an adult class are likely to treat adults as children and neglect slow learners (Abadzi, 1994).

According to one study on the professional development and status of teacher education in the Asia-Pacific Region, it is in the adult and preschool sub-sectors of education where teachers/facilitators and specialists are particularly neglected (International Reading Association 2008). The study concludes that in many of the countries adult education and pre-primary teachers are not considered in national teacher education plans and programmes. For a region with an extraordinarily high number of illiterate, out-of-school adolescents and adults, it is paradoxical that the training of teachers for non-formal education is not generally incorporated into an overall education personnel development framework.

Overall, the field of adult learning, dependent to a large extent on voluntary service and voluntarist ethics, needs to pay attention to human resource policies and practices, recognising the critical role of ALE and lifelong learning in the context of total education and national development. The complexity of the field does not lend itself to a standard solution or a single mechanism for teacher development and professional support. It calls for creative approaches – drawing on formal education personnel development arrangements, where appropriate, as in equivalency courses, and developing specialised provision, utilising existing institutions and creating new ones as necessary.

Some countries are taking steps to improve teacher quality. For example, the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), launched in Pakistan and Bangladesh with UNESCO support, includes training of literacy managers and teachers (Saleem, 2008). The effectiveness of teaching-learning strategies is dependent on the teaching material that is available to facilitators. If the instructional materials are outdated and insufficient in quantity, and not in the local language/mother tongue of the learners, then teaching-learning is compromised seriously – a problem reported in many countries.

**Professionalism and the professionalisation of specialised functions.** The professionalisation of key education personnel (policy-makers, adult education managers and trainers and adult educators themselves) remains a neglected area. Policy-makers must be able to bridge literacy and adult education with broader development agendas. Adult education managers and trainers have the key responsibility of disseminating and translating policies on adult learning and education into innovative and engaging teaching-learning strategies. As noted above, adult education teacher preparation and support is a problem in many countries. They are at the front-line, working with diverse groups of learners in greatly



varying circumstances, with the responsibility of engaging and motivating learners and ensuring that they acquire the desired skills and competencies.

Selection and recruitment of the right people is critical. This entails methods and systems of identifying and assessing academic and professional qualifications, determining and applying job security criteria and providing appropriate remuneration packages. Furthermore, in order to ensure that they are working effectively; support structures, professional development opportunities and prospects for advancement must be available (GCE, 2008). However, particularly in low-income countries, adult education is not regarded as a specialised profession, policy-makers lack technical expertise, educators and trainers lack qualifications, are often under-paid and over-worked, and have few professional development opportunities. The status of adult education personnel compares unfavourably with that of other education sectors, which, in turn, is relatively low compared to civil service positions requiring equivalent qualifications. As noted, literacy programme teachers and facilitators are expected to be volunteers in many countries receiving little or no monetary compensation.

There is a shortage of qualified personnel in many countries. For example, in Afghanistan, most of the facilitators have the basic academic qualification, but lack training and experience. Among existing facilitators, less than two per cent have a Bachelor's degree and less than one per cent have a Masters degree (Afghanistan National Report, 2008). In Pakistan, adult education is not regarded as a specific profession; hence, there are very few educational institutions, which provide such qualifications. Furthermore facilitators in Pakistan have only Matriculation (passing examination at the end of ten years of schooling) and in remote, rural areas where there is no matriculation-qualified facilitator, the basic qualification may be lowered to Grade 8 (Saleem, 2008).

It is difficult to comprehend why there is a lower bar for qualification, given that research shows that the task of teaching an adult even basic skills and competencies is as demanding as teaching a child, if not more (Bhola and Gomez, 2008). It is likely that entry requirements are low because salary levels are low (when the teachers are not unpaid volunteers) and there is no guarantee of job security. In Pakistan, the monthly remuneration of a teacher is about \$25-30; there is no added incentive. Facilitators are hired either on a part-time or temporary basis (Saleem, 2008). In India, where adult educators are volunteers, only recently have some state governments started paying literacy instructors, for example, in Rajasthan (India National Report, 2008). Training for adult educators in many countries, such as Pakistan, is very short and there is little follow-up. Typically, they receive one or two weeks' pre-service training and little by way of refresher and continuing professional support and supervision.

In middle- to high-income countries, which have established a framework of adult education, such as Thailand and Indonesia, there is a greater investment in human resource development. Trainers and educators who are recruited have some form of relevant experience and training. They are given an appropriate remuneration and compensation package (Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, Indonesia, 2008).

There is not enough information on the capacity of educational personnel at the policy level and professional development opportunities available to key personnel in the Asia-Pacific Region – in part because this aspect has not been a high priority and has been given little attention. In the absence of a lifelong learning framework, most low-income countries in Asia are unable to effectively develop human resource policies and practices and apply these in their programmes. On the other hand, middle- to high-income countries with established and well-run education systems have greater resources and capacity to invest in the professionalisation of adult education.

**Achievement and outcome indicators and equivalency.** Most countries in Asia have attempted to define clear targets for adult literacy. The census data on literacy is normally used as an indicator of achievement in adult literacy. Census data on literacy in India provides comprehensive information on literacy rates from national to the village level, based on age, gender, socio-economic status and so on (India National Report, 2008). However, the reliability of census data is problematic as it is usually based on self-assessment, or a third-party declaration on educational attainment.

When literacy is reported as a dichotomous variable, as noted earlier, incremental achievements of learners and adult literacy programmes are not captured (*South Asia*, 27 June 2008). The indicators for achievement of literacy are disconnected from other fundamental competencies such as critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills and communication abilities.

Some countries have developed or adapted their literacy measures to provide a more nuanced understanding of literacy achievements. For example, in the Philippines, there is a continuous upgrading of the literacy standards to adjust to current requirements of domestic industry and international employment opportunities (Soliven and Reyes, 2008).

Equivalency frameworks are essential, and have to be developed and applied when formal credentials are expected to be given on completion of a course. Several countries have accumulated experience in this area which others can emulate. In other areas, appropriate ALE assessment methods and tools have to be developed and professional capacity and technical mechanisms improved for formative evaluation, in order to strengthen the teaching and learning process, as well as summative assessment to evaluate the outcome and results.

To develop meaningful and relevant achievement and outcome indicators and to apply these in assessment require technical capacity, which many low-income countries in Asia-Pacific Region do not have. However, achievement and outcome indicators for nations with advanced and varied adult education programmes also appear to be inadequate for measuring the impact of programmes. The emphasis appears to be on numbers who have enrolled and completed rather than qualitative assessment of what has been learned and understood by participants and how it has been applied in their occupational and personal life.

**Monitoring mechanisms and processes.** Several countries, such as the Maldives and Pakistan, note that they do not have effective mechanisms in place to monitor and assess the status of literacy skills or knowledge levels of learners. An absent or weak monitoring mechanism makes it impossible to review and improve programmes. Monitoring and assessment tools and processes appear to be under-developed and insufficient for a proper evaluation of the design, planning, implementation and outcome of adult education programmes in many countries.

Some countries have made a relatively strong effort to develop a systematic approach to monitoring and assessment. For example, in India, the National Literacy Mission has designed a Monitoring Information System, which consistently collects data at the block level and produces consolidated state reports with district-level data, which is then used for Annual Status Reports. Monthly monitoring meetings take place to review programmes in different districts, and site visits are made by Executive Committee Members of continuing education centres, journalists, literacy consultants and non-official members (India National Report, 2008).

In many of the low-income countries, while governments recognise the need to develop monitoring mechanisms, technical and resource capacities have constrained progress in this respect.

**Making curricula and programmes relevant to social and individual needs.** The innovative adolescent and youth programme in Bangladesh (see Box 1, earlier) highlights the need for making curricula and programmes relevant and responsive to the needs and concerns of society and individual learners. The learning objectives and the related programmes for youth and adult learning, often not given sufficient attention or not accessible equitably in many Asian-Pacific countries, include:

- Literacy programmes aimed at developing the “critical consciousness” of learners and equipping them with functional literacy and numeracy skills and the tools for continuation of self-directed or organised learning;
- Early childhood development and pre-school education; especially parenting, family and community roles and appropriate knowledge and skills for child development, child-rearing and guidance and support for children and adolescents, which can be highly relevant content for adult education;
- Non-formal alternatives for children not able to participate in formal schools;
- Second-chance opportunities for basic education for older adolescents who are not enrolled in school, or who have dropped out;
- Lifelong learning opportunities for personal fulfilment, acquiring new productive skills and life-skills, enhancing knowledge and skills as a citizen and community member;
- Non-formal training in vocational, entrepreneurship and employment-related skills;
- Dissemination and encouragement of cultural expressions in the community learning centres, multi-media centres, and self-learning and interest groups in the community; and
- Enhancement of the informal learning environment through the wide availability of reading materials, information and ICT resources. (Ahmed *et al.*, 2002)

Determining global, national and contextually specific development challenges, and how these figure in ALE and lifelong learning is clearly a major issue for a national system of adult education and for individual programmes. Priority to ALE and lifelong learning is justified by the extent to which it helps in meeting critical development challenges. Some major common development challenges in the region stand out. These include, broadly: (a) fighting poverty, with the largest concentration in the world of people in extreme poverty in South Asia, and the majority of the world’s two billion people living on US\$2 or less per day being in Asia; (b) promoting sustainable development; the lives and livelihoods of large numbers of people in the island nations and coastal areas of several countries are under threat, and other aspects of the fragile environment are seriously affecting people in all countries; and (c) building participatory democracy and the democratic polity, as people in all countries aspire to build a secure future for themselves and for future generations, with peace, harmony, justice and dignity.

There are other important concerns in each society, which must be addressed in the ALE/lifelong learning educational activities. Without being prescriptive and without attempting to decide what each country (and, to a degree, each community and the learners themselves) should decide, it will be greatly beneficial to share experiences between counties and learn about how the complex dynamics are worked out in different situations.

Once the national developmental challenges and societal concerns are articulated and expectations rise regarding the contribution of the education system in solving these problems, the challenge of the education system is to respond. The implication of the diversity and complexity of ALE and lifelong learning is that establishing the relevance of educational activities for societal and individual priorities is not one well-defined task, or a one-shot exercise. Nor can it be the job of one central agency. There are issues of

determining objectives and priorities in different programmes, designing curricula and materials, and assessing outcome and impact of a multitude of activities.

This is where a national oversight body for policy and strategy in ALE and lifelong learning can provide necessary guidance. The respective units for curriculum, materials, teacher training, assessment and management have to play their role collectively and in each programme. Researchers and academics have to be brought into this process to provide a critical perspective. Countries where a curriculum framework has not been developed are recognising its importance. For example, Pakistan has for the first time developed a national curriculum for literacy which covers basic literacy, functional literacy and income-generating skills. The existence of a curriculum does not necessarily mean that everything in the curriculum will be implemented. This depends on the available economic and human resources, policy support, and effective partnerships with those who are involved, especially where NGOs and community organisations are responsible for programme implementation.

The emergence of a multi-faceted adult learning and education and its role in creating lifelong learning opportunities poses new challenges for curriculum development, establishing mechanisms for curriculum work and building capacities for this purpose. Low-income countries which have concentrated so far on traditional literacy programmes are particularly ill-equipped to meet the challenges. Flexibility and adaptability with diverse objectives, learner groups and delivery modes will demand considerable technical expertise. Countries which have advanced further, especially in East and South-East Asia, can serve as useful models for other countries.

# Adequacy of financial resources

Financing is an important determinant of the quality of adult education programmes. In low-income countries in the Asia-Pacific Region where economic resources are constrained, there is very limited allocation of resources for adult education. It is often not incorporated into resource and budget planning as an important and integral component of the entire education system. Hence, funding for adult education is insubstantial in low-income countries of the Region, even when the need is overwhelming.

There are large disparities within the region. Although the proportion of the education budget spent on adult education is similar for middle- to high-income countries as for low-income countries, in absolute terms it is vastly more money. Furthermore, middle- to high-income countries who have already achieved high adult literacy rates are able to invest in developing and broadening the lifelong learning framework. In contrast, low-income countries, with low literacy rates, seem to find it necessary to invest in literacy-only projects, even though research evidence suggests that these are less likely to succeed or be sustainable (Abadzi, 2003).

## The imperative of resources

Sustainable adult learning and education activities in the Asia-Pacific Region require adequate funding from all who can contribute – government agencies, external donors, the community and the private sector. A multi-sector approach to funding adult education activities is necessary to mobilise resources and to ensure a quality-driven approach to service delivery. Furthermore, a regulatory framework with adequate sanctions and rewards is needed to ensure quality control of adult education provided by NGOs, community-based organisations and the private sector.

In formal primary and secondary education programmes, personnel, mostly teachers, may cost up to 90 per cent of the recurrent budget. In adult education and literacy programmes, teachers and facilitators are more often than not expected to volunteer and serve without any remuneration. If adult education is regarded as a vital component of the education system and essential for meeting the learning needs of individuals and society, the vital function of the teachers/facilitators cannot be dependent on their services being offered as a charity. They have to be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for the hours worked, including the time for training, preparation and follow-up.

Development and provision for learning materials is another essential item for which resources are often inadequate. Governments, when not directly producing these, should take responsibility for stimulating the market for production and distribution of a variety of materials appropriate for literacy and adult education programmes. They may have to work with materials developers, publishers, newspapers and electronic communications media. Governments need to provide funding and encourage local production of materials, some of which may be by learners, facilitators and trainers.

A good quality literacy programme that abides by essential quality benchmarks is likely to cost between US\$50 and US\$100 per learner per year for at least three years (two years' initial learning and then ensuring that further learning opportunities are available for all). Other adult education and skill development programmes may often cost more, depending on the purpose and duration (ActionAid, 2005a).

Given the absence of a sub-sector wide approach to adult education, which is becoming common for formal sub-sectors of primary and secondary education, funding for adult education in low-income countries is project-based, often dependent on time-bound external assistance, rather than based on a longer-term national programme. Project-based funding becomes “sunk costs”, because of the limited duration of these projects without an assurance of sustainability (Abadzi, 2003). Thinly-stretched resources also mean limited content, lowly-qualified teachers and often no monitoring or evaluation mechanisms.

In short, adult education/literacy programmes cannot deliver the expected results and cannot be sustainable if not supported by an adequate financing framework.

## Public funding

Most governments in the Asia-Pacific Region allocate less than the recommended six per cent of national income to their education budgets (UNESCO, 2008). In East Asia and Pacific, the majority of countries spend less than five per cent, and in South and West Asia the majority spend less than four per cent, of national income on education. Most countries in the Central Asian region also have not met the recommended level for education expenditure. Only some of the middle- to high-income countries, such as New Zealand, Malaysia, and Uzbekistan, have met or exceeded the recommended spending on education.

Adult education spending constitutes an insignificant proportion of the public education budget, particularly for low-income countries, as they are trying to cope with the massive expansion of primary education and growing demand for secondary education. India, which runs one of the largest adult literacy campaigns, spends a mere 0.02 per cent of its education budget on adult literacy and continuing education courses (India National Report 2008). The Philippines spends one per cent of its education budget on adult literacy and continuing education projects, which is close to what most of the developing countries in Asia spend, if not less (Reyes and Solivan, 2008). This falls far short of the funding benchmark for high-quality literacy programmes as identified by Global Campaign for Education (2005), which suggested that governments should dedicate at least three per cent of their education budgets to adult literacy with additional contributions being made by other relevant ministries for continuing adult education courses. Currently, governments in low-income countries are handing over a significant proportion of responsibility for adult education financing to NGOs, private sector and communities.

Neither national governments nor international donors have lived up to their commitments to support and promote adult education and lifelong learning in respect of providing adequate financial resources (Box 2).

## Box 2. Commitments unfulfilled

Beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the right to education has been reaffirmed at least once a decade. In 1975, the Persepolis Declaration specifically proclaimed literacy as a right. In 1981, CEDAW reaffirmed the rights of adults to literacy. The Hamburg Declaration of CONFINTEA V in 1997 cited adult education “as more than a human right, the key to 21st century”. In the Dakar Framework for Action for EFA in 2000, Goals 3 and 4 were to meet the learning needs of youths and adults and to reduce adult illiteracy by 50 per cent.

However, the Mid-term Review following CONFINTEA V noted “ a disturbing regression in the field; a decline in public funding for adult education and learning, even as the minimal adult literacy goal set in Dakar is achievable – requiring just US\$ 2.8 billion per year. International agencies and national governments alike have concentrated on formal basic education for children to the detriment and neglect of adult education and learning.”

In the Asia-Pacific Region, the absence of specific constitutional commitment to learning beyond formal primary education is reflected in inadequate and inconsistent policy provisions, insufficient financing, and lack of reliable information about both literacy rates and available learning options. Existing programmes are largely unresponsive to current labour market demand, which is ironic; since many countries in the region have been emphasising marketable skills rather than the transformative and empowering aspects of youth and adult learning. Even this approach is not being practised with due diligence.

The agricultural sector accounts for almost half of total employment in this region, even with recent shifts of employment to industry and services. But developing the required skills to serve agriculture and related processing and marketing has not been a priority. Invisible under-employment arising from skills mismatch has been pervasive. But the creation of more inclusive formal labour markets – for the poor, the massive number of illiterates, women and young people – has not received the attention it deserves. In short, the commitments made nationally and internationally call for strong policies, backed by adequate financing and pragmatic programming.

*Based on ASPBAE’s Asia-Pacific Citizens’ Report Card and Briefing Paper for CONFINTEA VI Regional Consultation*

## Community support

Information on financial contributions made by communities to adult education in the Asia-Pacific Region is scarce and a system of reporting or collecting information in this regard does not seem to exist. However, community participation in the delivery of adult education is fairly widespread in the Region. The contribution and activities of communities range from offering space, volunteers and materials to other in-kind contributions, including organising and delivering courses.

In Australia, there are over 1,200 not-for-profit community education and training providers, some of them local churches and community groups working with excluded groups such as the elderly, disabled and minorities (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). Countries in South Asia such as Bangladesh and India that ran large literacy campaigns are able to mobilise large numbers of volunteers in the initial phase, although this has proved to be unsustainable later on. Realising the full potential of community participation in terms of ownership, relevance and sustainability of programmes remains a problem. Too often community participation is seen in terms of reducing costs of programmes rather than enhancing their quality and outcomes.

Community support is effective when there is a sense of ownership over the design and planning of the programme and when communities are able to identify with the desired learning outcomes. Communities are unlikely to get involved when programmes are costly, short-term, with vague learning outcomes and little or no follow up.

## Private sector

The Private sector is actively involved as a provider of adult education services in Asia, both in developed and developing nations. It offers vocational and technical courses to job-seekers or people in jobs who need upgrading of skills or re-training to further their employment prospects. However, these courses are offered for a fee, and are therefore unaffordable to many of those who may need it most.

For example, in Kyrgyzstan, almost all of the adult education courses are on a payment basis, without any subsidies for people who are unemployed, on low-income or from socially excluded groups (Central Asia, 16 June 2008). Furthermore, in the absence of a regulatory framework, issues of programme quality and the accountability of service providers remain problematic.

There is definitely an opportunity for the private sector to offer education and training courses for which there is a market demand and which are likely to open up employment opportunities or increase earnings. For the private sector to make a contribution to expanding adult education and skill development, regulatory mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that programme quality is maintained and that consumer rights and the interests of the learners are protected. In order to promote equity in access to relevant courses which are in high demand, loans and bursaries can be offered by the government directly or through subsidies to the banking system. These possibilities of expanding educational opportunities have not been explored sufficiently, especially in the low-income countries where market-responsive education and training need to be expanded.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) are much-discussed in the field of adult education. They may help reduce the burden of cost for the government of service provision, and programmes can be designed more effectively with strong content and adequate resources. An example of PPP in India is in Andhra Pradesh, where Tata Consultancy Services has launched a Computer Based Literacy programme. It has donated 450 computers to Continuing Education Centres to impart computer-based functional literacy. However, the potential of Public-Private Partnership in the area of adult education remains largely unrealised in the Asia-Pacific Region.

## External assistance

External assistance constitutes a large part of the budget of many adult literacy and education activities for low-income and fragile states in the Asia-Pacific Region. For example, in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Education's literacy programme has no development budget; the government budget allocations only cover core staff salary. It is funded mainly by external donors such as UNESCO, USAID, UNICEF and JICA (Afghanistan National Report, 2008). In Mongolia, there is no fixed budget for non-formal education and adult learning activities of the government; funding of about US\$9 million in recent years has come from international development agencies and NGOs.



Given the dependence of the low-income and post-conflict countries on external financing, this source for adult education funding needs to be increased massively to meet EFA Goals in literacy, life skills and lifelong learning. According to UNESCO (2008), US\$2.5 billion a year is needed every year till 2015, just for the literacy target, representing a total of 550 million people (nearly half in South Asia). Even when assistance for education is pledged, though not fully delivered, by donors in the context of supporting EFA and MDG, the area of adult and lifelong learning remains neglected with inadequate commitment. For instance, there is no equivalent in literacy and adult education of the Fast Track Initiative to support EFA primary education goals. Even in FTI, alternative second-chance and non-formal complementary approaches to primary education are not included, despite the evidence that these are essential to reach the large numbers who continue to remain outside the formal system.

Based on a survey of 67 literacy projects in 2005 across developing countries, ActionAid suggests that Governments should dedicate at least three per cent of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy programmes – which would amount, on average, to at least a tripling of public expenditure on literacy programmes alone. The survey concludes that international donors should fill any remaining resource gaps that governments of low-income countries cannot meet. This would be in line with commitments already made by the rich G8 countries and similar pledges for assistance to poor countries made in other forums, still unfulfilled (ActionAid, 2005b).

The discussion on international assistance seems to have shifted to aid effectiveness and accountability, while the quantum of aid remains far short of 0.7 per cent of *per capita* income in rich countries recommended as a benchmark almost four decades ago. It is justifiably asserted that if aid is to work effectively for poor people, both rich donor countries and southern governments need to increase radically their levels of accountability and transparency (see Development Assistance Committee, 2008). The donors remain largely unaccountable to those they are trying to help, often ineffective and bureaucratic in the way they deliver aid, and frequently use aid to pursue their own agenda. Donor practices, behaviour and delivery need to change to live up to the many promises that they have made. Meeting these promises, in turn, may allow citizens from the South to better hold their own governments accountable for the effective use of all resources, whether aid or domestic revenues (ActionAid 2005a; 2005b).

# Governance and organisational mechanisms

Good governance is critical for the development of a lifelong learning framework and the delivery of high-quality adult learning and education activities. Good governance is predicated upon flexible and relatively autonomous structures at local levels that adapt to learners' needs, encourage participatory practices, and promote accountability and transparency of its processes. These practices can help to ensure that programmes are inclusive, responsive and open to public scrutiny.

## Organisational provision

The responsible authorities for most adult education and adult literacy programmes are government agencies, usually the Ministry of Education. The responsibility for adult literacy and continuing education activities is sometimes linked with other development activities in health, agriculture, gender issues, social welfare, human rights, economic development and so on. For example, in Malaysia, over 50 adult education programmes in 2007 were run by three ministries: Ministry of Social Welfare; Women, Family and Community Development; and National Population and Family Development (National Social Institute, 2008).

Implementation of adult education and literacy in many countries in Asia occurs at the local level, either through the local government/council, NGO, community or private providers. However, while Ministries may devolve some administrative responsibilities, the locus of power still rests with them in terms of budget control, programme design and planning, as well as programme content, structure and learning outcomes. Accountability is considered to be easier when central responsibility for planning and delivery rests in the control of a single body, namely a central government agency. However, experience suggests that where adult education activities are decentralised, they are often more successful, because communities are empowered (Saldanha, 2007).

When the devolution or delegation of administrative and financial powers is significant and substantive, the community enjoys a sense of ownership and control over the management and co-ordination of activities. Programmes are then likely to be more relevant to the lives of those in the community and therefore more sustainable and effective.

Thailand provides an example of decentralisation. NFE activities are decentralised through regional NFE centres, provincial centres, and community learning centres. Communities have responsibility for identifying learning demand and facilitating access to courses or other learning activities. NFE courses are initiated faster and decisions are taken without delay because the administrative and financial power lies in the hands of the community.

The National Literacy Mission in India was successful where decision-making was relatively more decentralised. For example, a key component of the National Literacy Mission is the Zilla Shaksharata Samitis (ZSS – District Literacy Societies). ZSS, when it was open to collaboration with local NGOs and activists, was successful in garnering broad-based support and recruiting volunteers (Saldanha 2007). However, the National Literacy Mission faltered in many instances when curriculum, methodology and production of learning

materials were not adapted for the different cultural realities of the people they intended to serve, and therefore became inappropriate tools for learning.

The community learning centre (CLC), or continuing education centre (CEC) as it is called in India, can represent a concrete form of decentralisation, when these centres have a high level of community participation in designing learning activities and their management. Where the local government institution is well developed, it can be involved in planning activities, management and mobilising resources for the centres. To function effectively a community-based centre must have technical support in designing programmes, training personnel, and evaluating the effectiveness of activities, as the examples from India and Thailand show. Many countries in the region have adopted the model (Box 3), because of its adaptability to the varied demands of adult learning including the lifelong learning perspective and its potential for sustainability through community ownership.

### **Box 3. Community Learning Centres – a vehicle for lifelong learning and building blocks for a learning society**

UNESCO APPEAL (Asia-Pacific Programme for Education for All) defines CLCs as “*local institutions outside the formal education system for villages or urban areas usually set up and managed by local people to provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of people’s quality of life.*” Through active community participation CLCs are adapted to the needs of all people in the community. The CLC is often located in a simple building. Its programmes and functions are flexible. The main beneficiaries of a CLC are people with few opportunities for education, especially pre-school children, out-of-school children, women, youth, and the elderly.

CLCs are seen as a model for community development and lifelong learning. They operate in the following countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. CLCs adopt different characteristics in each country. Partners include governments, ministries, national and international NGOs, UN Agencies (such as UNICEF and UNDP) and the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU).

*Source: APPEAL and ACCU websites*

The importance of decentralising programme planning and management to make these responsive, adaptive, participatory and accountable to beneficiaries has been underscored, and attempts have been reported by the countries of the Region. It is noted in many instances that the change has not been smooth and has not always produced the desired results. The lessons from the decentralisation experience are that: it has to be promoted in the context of each country’s historical, political and bureaucratic culture; there has to be experimentation and systematic capacity-building of personnel at different levels for decentralisation to be effective; and where local government system has advanced further, it can offer an anchor for decentralisation of management to be instituted. Despite the difficulties in making decentralisation work well, there is no alternative but to go in this direction and to make the best effort.

## **Participatory practices and partnership-building**

The delivery of adult education programmes in many countries in Asia happens through collaborative activities between public, private and NGO service providers as well as communities. The most active collaborations have been with NGOs who provide varied non-formal education activities including literacy, livelihood skills, and IT training. For example, in

Nepal, out of about 100 international NGOs registered with the Nepalese Social Welfare Council, about half operate programmes in various aspects of adult literacy (Dahal, 2008). Many middle- and high-income countries with high adult literacy rates, such as Australia and New Zealand, collaborate with academic institutions to provide courses to re-train workers and upgrade their skills to meet the demands of the modern economy. Academic credentials are awarded for these courses.

South Asia has been at the frontline of developing innovative participatory practices. For example, Pakistan Bunyad Literacy Council, an NGO working on female empowerment, has produced materials developed using participatory research into social practices and local development needs. As a result, the learners engage more deeply with the material and on a more critically conscious level in their interactions inside the classroom as well as within their families (Saleem, 2008).

In India, under the Scheme of Continuing Education launched in 1995, Continuing Education Centres (CECs) are designed as multi-purpose learning centres which are open to all members in the community, and they are involved in the planning and delivery of learning activities.

Especially in the low-income countries of the Region, the effective delivery of adult education programmes through cooperation, coordination and partnerships among multiple service providers is constrained by the absence of a lifelong learning framework. One consequence is the lack of regulatory and facilitative mechanisms for quality, inclusiveness and equity in participation and learning outcomes.

A participatory approach to adult learning and education need not be limited to interaction within programmes. There are forums for interaction among service providers and other stakeholders within and across sub-regions of Asia. Inter-governmental and professional exchanges are supported and promoted by UNESCO, especially through the Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL). Originally launched in 1987 to focus mainly on non-formal adult education, APPEAL has since expanded its programmes to promote the six Education for All (EFA) Goals set in the Dakar Framework for Action. To achieve the EFA Goals, APPEAL emphasises lifelong learning through the integration of all aspects of educational planning, including literacy, continuing education, universal primary education, early childhood care and education, inclusive education, and mainstreaming gender as well as a human rights-based approach to education.

Networks have developed among concerned NGOs, professionals and researchers, and civil society organisations, especially through the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU).

ASPBAE was established in 1964 by a group of adult educators, inspired by the idea of promoting adult education in the region. It has grown into a network of organisations and individuals involved in formal and non-formal adult education, especially in campaigning for the right to education for all. It works with and through NGOs, education campaign coalitions, government agencies, universities, the media and other institutions of civil society. It is committed to building a movement dedicated to advancing transformative adult education. ASPBAE seeks to strengthen the capacities of NGOs and civil society groups – through adult education activities, strategies and programmes – “to assist people and communities improve their conditions, fight for their rights, combat discrimination and participate equally in decisions that affect their lives” ([www.aspbae.org](http://www.aspbae.org)).

ACCU cooperates with government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations in the areas of materials development for literacy and adult education, personnel training/capacity-building and networking to promote Education for All (EFA) and Education for Sustainable

Development (ESD). ACCU was established in 1971 in Tokyo through the joint efforts of both public and private sectors in Japan. ACCU has since been implementing various regional cooperative programmes in the fields of culture, education and personnel exchange in close collaboration with UNESCO and its Member States in Asia and the Pacific ([www.accu.or.jp](http://www.accu.or.jp)).

An example of international cooperation in designing innovative programmes supported by UNESCO is the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), launched in Bangladesh and Pakistan in 2005, and planned for 2008 in Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (UNESCO, 2008). As part of the LIFE initiative, Thailand and Indonesia, which have more developed literacy programmes and experience with community learning centres, are sharing their knowledge with community and non-governmental organisations on how to implement literacy models. NGOs in Bangladesh are using their experience to train government officials in non-formal education, to help with their capacity-building and professional development.

## Accountability and transparency

Advocacy for and mobilising larger resources for adult learning and education will be easier when principles and practices of accountability and transparency are followed and seen to be followed in programmes. Enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes by managing resources optimally and with honesty are critical concerns.

The development of a comprehensive lifelong learning framework provides an opportunity, indeed an imperative, to build tenets of accountability and transparency into adult education programmes. Without these, the goal of decentralised, community-based and participatory methods of programme planning, management and monitoring cannot be realised.

In the Asia-Pacific Region, external assistance from bilateral, multilateral and international NGO sources introduces a degree of accountability in terms of monitoring and accounting for the use of funds. Financial accountability is also applicable when governments provide funding to NGOs for literacy and adult education activities – a practice that is likely to grow further in the region. In this respect, overall problems of corruption and waste in the public sector in some instances have also affected the education sector and have seriously impaired the effectiveness of programme implementation.

The accountability and transparency principles and objectives have to go deeper than compliance with financial rules and reporting requirements. The aim should be establishing accountability to the beneficiaries, local communities and key stakeholders. It needs to be an inherent feature of programme design, management and implementation in line with participatory approaches.

It is said that sunshine is the best disinfectant; in the same vein, the light of transparent and free flow of information at all levels can help to achieve programmes' goals and serve their intended beneficiaries.

# Prospects and challenges: turning the vision into reality

## Resurgent adult education and lifelong learning

Adult education appeared to have lost its emotive force in the last decades of the past century. The transformative and empowering mission of adult education, including literacy as “reading the world,” creating the liberated person envisaged by Paulo Freire, gave way to the view of human beings as capital for the economic production machine to be groomed and trained to be the “grist to the mill”. Education’s contribution was to be measured by calculating the rate of economic return on spending in education.

Even though the declaration in Jomtien made reference to lifelong learning, the focus was on formal primary education. The Dakar Framework’s corrective efforts went only half-way, remaining vague about goals and targets for life skills and lifelong learning. For many EFA thus implied “Except For Adults”.

The new millennium has brought about a revival and renewal of interest in adult education and learning as the core of lifelong learning. The economic imperatives that seem to drive national and global priorities and choices have not disappeared. But the ascendance of the knowledge economy and the information society in the globalised world has redefined the role and character of education and learning. The contribution of education is to be measured by the creativity, innovation and new ideas that it generates for propelling economic growth, improving productivity and advancing human well-being. Human capital development began to be viewed as a dynamic process – developing workers with the ability to produce new ideas and who can transform the technology of production. Education and learning have to be non-stop and cannot be confined to fixed quantities doled out mainly through formal courses (Kennedy and Lee, 2008).

Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has been the proponent of the capability approach as the framework for conceptualising and evaluating the ideas of social justice, individual well-being and education. This approach has emerged as an alternative to standard economic frameworks for thinking about poverty, inequality and human development generally. Sen looks upon education as the means to expand human capabilities, freedom, choice and agency. The capability approach provides a powerful rationale for lifelong learning as the conceptual underpinning for educational development goals and strategies. (See Sen, 1992; 1999; 2005.)

A convergent view of lifelong learning has emerged with new urgency, embracing functional literacy, alternative vocational and technical education, alternative and complementary provision for stages of formal schooling and diverse continuing education for adults. The urgency arises from the continued increase – rather than reduction – of poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, delinquency, migration, social despair and social turmoil. Added to these are the inadequacies of primary and secondary school reforms in the poorer of the developing countries, especially in South Asia, and insufficient attention to the lifelong education perspective in the EFA Goals.

## Adult education advances and challenges

As noted earlier, some countries in the Region, particularly in East and South East Asia, have extended basic education up to the middle level of secondary education and have begun to diversify the scope and range of adult learning and non-formal and continuing education.

In Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore there is universal primary education and secondary education is close to universal. Efforts now are being concentrated on workforce development at post-secondary level and on continuing education at tertiary level.

Progress in adult literacy has been faster in this Region than in any other world region. Many of the countries in the Region which still have to ensure access to basic education opportunities for large proportions of their people, children and adults are beginning to develop systematic approaches guided by a policy framework. These policies, with varying degrees of comprehensiveness, attempt to set realistic priorities within a time-frame.

However, there remain formidable obstacles and challenges. The South Asia sub-region has the highest concentration in the world of adult and youth illiteracy, especially among women and marginalised groups. High population growth, large numbers of non-enrolled children and drop-outs from primary school add to the already large number of illiterates. In spite of the harsh living conditions for many, characterised by extreme poverty, malnutrition, and a number of conflict and post-conflict circumstances in the region, many countries do not have a clear adult education/learning policy and strategy to mitigate these problems. Organisational structure and the professional base are weak, hindering quality in ALE. There is limited or no involvement of higher education institutions in ALE. A disproportionately low resource allocation from government and donors is devoted to adult education and literacy programmes.

In some of the Pacific countries the adult education agenda, including literacy in mother-tongue, deserves greater priority, in line with their diversity of culture and geographical dispersal. There are issues related to capacity, funding, sustainability and dependency on aid for the smaller nations. Recognition of the importance of culture-specific response is a special concern in meeting cultural and lifelong learning aspirations. Educational design and learning content, drawing on indigenous knowledge and values and ensuring survival of cultural identity in the technological world and the global economy, are a particular challenge for the island nations, as in other countries.

**Table 2. Expectations from CONFINTEA VI and perspectives for the future**

Items	Mentioned by reporting countries
<p><b>Promote a new vision of adult learning and education (ALE) and lifelong learning</b></p> <p>Promote new vision through international cooperation and solidarity</p> <p>Develop new perspectives for the 21<sup>st</sup> century</p> <p>Extend the scope of target population of ALE/lifelong learning</p> <p>Expand content of ALE/lifelong learning to cope with globalisation and technology challenges</p> <p>Provide input to national thinking and planning to build lifelong learning</p> <p>Confirm the importance of three pillars of ALE/lifelong learning – self-actualisation, improved employability, and social integration</p>	<p>Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Mongolia, Thailand</p>
<p><b>Bring a new momentum to ALE/lifelong learning</b></p> <p>Essential in the context of the knowledge economy and the information society</p> <p>Bring ALE/lifelong learning to the forefront of international agenda</p> <p>Renewed commitment to the Hamburg Declaration</p> <p>Re-examining how to enhance ALE/lifelong learning contribution to development goals</p> <p>Re-affirming the Sofia call on partnership-building</p>	<p>Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Republic of Korea, Mongolia</p>
<p><b>Help disseminate and share best practices on different aspects of ALE/lifelong learning, for example:</b></p> <p>Preparing adult education teacher trainers, teachers and facilitators</p> <p>National coordination</p> <p>Outreach strategies for rural and remote areas</p> <p>Increasing gender sensitivity</p> <p>Establishing links between adult and school education</p> <p>Developing institutional mechanisms for sharing best practices</p> <p>Joint programmes/projects among countries</p> <p>Public-private partnerships</p> <p>Use of ICT and distance learning</p> <p>Learning how diverse cultural settings influence ALE/lifelong learning</p>	<p>Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Iran, Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, Thailand</p>
<p><b>Promote effective advocacy and awareness raising about ALE/lifelong learning</b></p> <p>Information and communication strategy</p> <p>Sharing of national and international experiences</p> <p>Advocacy on gender equality</p> <p>Engagement of political parties and elected people's representatives</p>	<p>Bangladesh, Mongolia, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, Uzbekistan</p>
<p><b>Help mobilise financial resources</b></p> <p>Persuading rich countries to honour their commitment</p> <p>Increased national public resources for ALE/lifelong learning</p> <p>UN agencies give greater attention to ALE/lifelong learning</p>	<p>Bangladesh, China, India, Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, Solomon Islands</p>



<p><b>Encourage re-examination of how social exclusion can be addressed – for example:</b>  Disadvantaged groups  Ethnic and linguistic minorities  People with disabilities</p>	Australia, China, India, Republic of Korea
<p><b>Emphasise the importance of programme quality and characteristics of quality programmes, promoting a ‘culture of quality’</b>  Upgrading skills and education of the workforce  Responding to skill shortages  Meeting needs of the ageing population  Promoting a lifelong reading habit  Developing and enforcing quality standards  Networking among stakeholders to promote quality ALE/lifelong learning  Improving training of teachers and facilitators  Establishing mechanisms for equivalency with formal education  Developing needs-based curriculum packages  Attention to methodology of teaching adults psychology of adult learning  Link between adult education and other NFE  Use of advances in ICT and distance education  Fostering effective language, literacy and numeracy skills and individuals’ self-confidence  Contents to meet critical needs – sustainable development, intercultural understanding, multilingual education, HIV/AIDS, and so on  Stronger research, evaluation, assessment and monitoring</p>	Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, China, Bhutan, DPRK, India, Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Uzbekistan
<p><b>Develop an international glossary of relevant technologies</b></p>	Thailand
<p><b>Promoting better management and monitoring of programmes</b>  Improve weak documentation of diverse and many short-lived experiences  Improved monitoring and evaluation  Legal and policy framework  Better database and information system  Decentralised management with stakeholder participation  Coordination with other sectors  Making programmes cost-effective  Applying efficiency criteria in programmes  Capacity-building for management</p>	Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan

*Note: Only countries which submitted reports for CONFINTEA VI and mentioned expectations and future perspectives in their report are listed. The items have been paraphrased and clustered into categories. A listed country has not necessarily mentioned all the sub-items.*

Exchanges among scholars and practitioners in the education field, with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) leading some of the initiatives, have helped to clarify concepts and practices and promote commitments. An example is the Hyderabad Statement formulated by practitioners and academics on adult and lifelong learning in 2002. The statement urged that lifelong learning be looked upon “as a horizon and as an active principle for shaping education and learning policies and programmes even in the smallest and poorest countries.” (Annex 1)

The Tashkent Call to Action (2003), in support of integrating lifelong learning with EFA efforts in the Central Asian countries, recommended that governments give “higher priority to the creation of the local, regional and national networks (professional associations) and

structures that are required for the development, co-ordination, funding, quality management and evaluation of AE needs” and allocate necessary resources for this purpose (Annex 2).

The reports submitted by just over half of the countries from the Asia-Pacific Region have attempted to identify policy directions and new perspectives for lifelong learning (Table 2). They indicate, albeit with a varying sense of urgency, an urge to re-affirm the vision of adult learning and education that has emerged in the decade since CONFINTEA V in Hamburg, placing it squarely within the framework of lifelong learning, and critically examining their own efforts to this end.

## Turning the vision into reality: priorities for action

In 1997 CONFINTEA V proclaimed a commitment to a new vision for adult learning. As this synthesis of the reports on the efforts of countries in the Asia-Pacific Region shows, the decade since then has been a story of remarkable progress in many cases, as well as struggle and difficulties in almost all developing countries of the Region. Above all, however, there is expression of faith in the role of adult education and lifelong learning and there are high expectations about the contribution they can make to fulfilling national aspirations. In the decade ahead, with commitments renewed and lessons learned from the past decade’s experience, it is possible to do a better job of turning the vision of adult education and lifelong learning into reality.

The expectations expressed by the countries themselves; the information they provided about successes and difficulties in carrying out the agenda for literacy, non-formal education and adult learning; and the analysis and observations of academics and researchers produce a complex mosaic of needs, constraints and possibilities. Within this rich mosaic lie the elements of a strategy for action that should guide the future development of adult learning and education in the context of lifelong learning in the Asia-Pacific countries.

Drawing on the expectations and perspectives expressed by the Asia-Pacific countries and the analysis and synthesis of their reports, the following eight items are proposed as the key elements for a strategy to raise the profile of adult education and learning in national education systems and, thereby, to create and expand lifelong learning opportunities for all according to their needs and aspirations.

**Re-commitment to a vision of ALE/lifelong learning and creating a learning society and a learning community** – *Creating and being guided by the vision of diverse and widespread adult learning and education (ALE) as the core of the lifelong learning (LLL) approach, to build a rich network of learning opportunities for all throughout life, according to their needs and aspirations.*

**Serving a wide spectrum of learners and their needs.** A wide spectrum of learning objectives and groups of learners have to be served by formal, non-formal and continuing education programmes and through an enriched informal learning environment, all of which are components of lifelong learning. The logical corollary to the idea of lifelong learning is that all citizens benefit from and contribute to learning and society, and communities become learning-friendly and create a learning environment. The content of programmes and learning objectives has to be relevant and meaningful to learners and address the critical concerns of society. (See below).

**Adopting a sector-wide approach and national oversight body to promote and plan for ALE/lifelong learning.** A sector or sub-sector-wide approach for adult education encompassing literacy, non-formal education and continuing education, analogous to the

sector-wide approach being followed in formal education, is needed to promote a lifelong learning approach with ALE as its core and to give the approach an operational form with plans, programmes and resources.

Given the diversity of objectives and clientele of ALE, there has to be a flexible approach with multiple programme components, implementation mechanisms and financing methods. What is important here is not the rigid administrative modality of a sector-wide approach (which may defeat the purpose), but the logic for maintaining an overview, ensuring coordination, assessing priorities, mobilising adequate resources and ensuring the relevance of education to national development priorities.

A high-level oversight body in the form of an Adult and Lifelong Learning Council or Commission is needed at national level as the champion of ALE and lifelong learning and to provide focus and attention to policy and strategy development, assess the implementation of key policy objectives, and serve as a forum of national dialogue on policies and strategies. Such a body should have a secretariat with the necessary professional capacity. It should consist of a combination of respected professionals in the field and committed civil society leaders. It may be a statutory body answerable to the national parliament.

**A multi-pronged approach to promote “critical literacy” and combat poverty –** *Due attention has to be given to functional literacy and promoting critical consciousness as the foundation for lifelong learning, empowering people to help themselves.*

**Adopting a multi-pronged and integrated approach to combat illiteracy.** The lessons from half a century of efforts in this field call for a strategy that combines effective primary education of acceptable quality, non-formal basic education equivalent to primary education for adolescents and youth as a “second chance”, and demand-based literacy courses for youth and adults as a part of a network of adult and non-formal learning programmes.

**Effective programmes to fight poverty have to link literacy skills, skills for work, quality of life components and ancillary support.** Skill training can lead to better earning ability only with ancillary support and necessary conditions such as access to credit, management advice, market information and links with potential employers. Moreover, poverty is not just a matter of income. Fighting poverty effectively through adult learning includes improvement in health and nutrition and protection from disease, and knowledge and practice of family planning. It should also include giving priority to children’s education, the status of women in the family and community and their participation in economic activities outside the home, information and knowledge of government services and people’s claim to these.

**Networks of community learning centres as the vehicle.** Multi-purpose community learning centres with community ownership, as seen in many countries in the region, are effective when they become the base for offering relevant training and knowledge dissemination and for link-up with ancillary support. These, brought together into national or regional networks for technical support, can be a vehicle for education and learning opportunities which have an impact on poverty, and also become the building blocks for lifelong learning in the learning society.

**A culture of quality –** *Inculcating a culture of quality in ALE/lifelong learning, setting and enforcing quality standards, providing for technical support and necessary resources in teaching and management personnel development, curriculum and learning materials, assessment of learning, and management and monitoring with attention to process and results.*

**Multi-faceted approach to develop and apply quality standards.** The diversity of ALE objectives, learners and delivery modes does not allow a common mechanism or process of quality assurance. A multi-faceted approach to developing and applying quality criteria, tools and assessment methods will be needed. In areas where ALE is a substitute or complementary to formal education, as in certain skills training or formal education equivalency, the quality standards and mechanisms in formal education can be adapted. In literacy programmes, assessment based on skills-testing and judging progress in functional and “critical” literacy have to be adapted.

**Due attention to and creative solutions for human resource policy and practice.** The diversity and complexity of the programmes calls for creative approaches – drawing on formal education personnel development arrangements, where appropriate, as in equivalency courses; and developing specialised provisions, utilising existing institutions and creating new ones, as necessary. Overall, the field, so far dependent on voluntarist ethics, needs much greater investment and effort in human resource policies and practices, recognising the critical role of ALE/lifelong learning in the total education and national development context.

**Curriculum and learning materials development and availability.** Creative approaches are needed, given the fact that a typical formal education arrangement will not fit. Multiple mechanisms and approaches are needed, although formal education methods, techniques and materials can be drawn upon. An integrated approach for determining objectives and competencies to be achieved, delivery of instruction, materials development and assessment for each of the major categories of learning domains have to be developed. On the whole, a much higher level of resources has to be devoted to this purpose. Experiences of countries in the region which have advanced further in this respect can provide useful precedents and lessons.

**Assessment of learning outcomes** – The validity of educational programmes has to be judged by clearly-defined learning outcomes, with criteria and a methodology for determining if the outcomes are being achieved. Equivalency frameworks are essential, when formal credentials are expected to be given on course completion. Several of the countries have accumulated experience in this area which others can emulate. Professional capacity and technical mechanisms have to be in place for formative assessment to strengthen the teaching and learning process as well as summative assessment to evaluate outcomes and results.

**Making use of the ICT potential.** Advances in ICT have opened new frontiers in respect of delivering content in creative ways, reaching new groups of learners at a time and place of their own choice, enriching the teaching and learning process, improving management information and upgrading teaching personnel. The potential, however, is very far from being realised in most countries. The “digital divide”, between the rich and the poor and between urban and rural areas, is a major concern as ICT rapidly advances. ALE/lifelong learning, given its legitimate scope and mandate, can play a significant role in bridging the divide, if its own strategies are adapted and resources are mobilised for this purpose.

**Linking ALE/lifelong learning to critical development challenges** – *Enhancing the relevance of ALE/lifelong learning in meeting the critical challenges of development and modernisation.*

**Determining global, national and contextually-specific development challenges, and how these figure in ALE/lifelong learning, by sharing experiences and through participatory decision-making.** Priority to ALE/lifelong learning is justified by the extent to which it helps in meeting critical development challenges. Some major common development challenges in the region stand out: (a) fighting poverty, with the largest concentration in the

world of people in extreme poverty in South Asia, and the majority of the world's two billion people living on less than US\$2 a day being in Asia; (b) promoting sustainable development; the lives and livelihood of large numbers of people in the island nations and coastal areas of Asia are under threat, and other aspects of the fragile environment are seriously affecting people in all countries; and c) building participatory democracy and the democratic polity; as people in all countries aspire to build a secure future for themselves and for future generations, with peace, harmony, justice and dignity. There are other important concerns in each society, which must be addressed in ALE/lifelong learning activities. Without being prescriptive and without attempting to decide what each country (and, to a degree, each community and the learners themselves) should decide, the sharing of experiences among countries and learning about how the complex dynamics are worked out in different situations should be a key strategy.

***Establishing and enhancing the relevance of ALE/lifelong learning to critical development challenges and concerns – a collaborative task of the national oversight body and diverse programme management/professional staff.*** This is not one well-defined or one-shot task, nor can it be the job of one central agency. There are issues of determining objectives and priorities in different programmes, designing curricula and materials, and assessing the outcome and impact of a multitude of activities. This is a continuing process in which, with the general guidance of the oversight body for policy and strategy, the respective units for curriculum, materials, teacher training, assessment and management in different programmes have to engage themselves collaboratively.

***Affirmative action to address inequality – A policy of affirmative action to identify and serve the disadvantaged and marginalised sections of the population with strategies that address their specific needs.***

***Addressing inequality is an overarching principle.*** An overarching strategic principle for ALE/lifelong learning, given its *raison d'être*, is to establish the dimensions of social inequality and disparity in which it has a key role in overcoming. Programmes must be designed and priorities set accordingly. At the same time, work on a national poverty reduction strategy, a formal process in many countries, should underscore the role and contribution of ALE/lifelong learning.

***High priority to overcoming gender injustice and disparity.*** Patriarchal values and culture continue to dominate causing many forms of overt and subtle gender injustice and discrimination. Gender issues need to be addressed in respect of management structures as well as pedagogical aspects. Special attention is needed to ensure that a higher proportion of women than at present are in management, supervisory roles, and as trainers

***Disadvantaged and neglected groups – central to ALE/lifelong learning mission.*** Ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous peoples, slum-dwellers, the ultra-poor, and people with disabilities and special needs continue to be outside most education programmes and are difficult to reach. Specialised and more directly targeted projects are required for these groups. A sensitive approach is needed to make programmes inclusive, responsive and appropriate in learning content and teaching practices. Mobilisation and-awareness raising efforts need to be directed specifically to overcoming traditional attitudes regarding gender, disabilities and ethnic, cultural, and religious difference.

***Governance and management fit for purpose – The governance and management of ALE/lifelong learning should be based on government-civil society partnership and decentralised enough to make it responsive to local conditions and accountable to learners and the community.***

**Partnerships of all actors within a common framework of policy and strategy.** It is neither necessary nor very efficient to have all or most ALE programmes managed by one mega-agency in the public sector. Many of the activities can be carried out, within a common agreed framework, by NGOs, community organisations and the private sector, with appropriate financial incentive and technical support from the government and other sources. There are choices to be exercised regarding who among potential providers of services does what and how all can contribute to meeting the critical and diverse learning needs of people. These choices must be made in a participatory way within an agreed overall national framework of goals and priorities, guided by a national oversight body (see *Recommitment to a vision...* above).

**The government's regulatory, facilitative and public interest role.** A larger role for various non-government actors would mean that the role of national government agencies may be more at policy-level with senior technical professionals developing overall policies and priorities, creating supportive and facilitative mechanisms, providing finances and helping to mobilise resources. Working with all providers of services, they will also set quality norms and enforce these through overall monitoring and assessment, and generally help to promote and protect the public interest, again with overall guidance from a national oversight body (see item 1 above).

**Making decentralisation work.** It is a process that has to be promoted in the context of each country's historical, political and bureaucratic culture. There has to be trial and experimentation and systematic building of capacities of personnel at different levels for decentralisation to work effectively. Where the local government system has advanced further, it offers an anchor for institutionalising decentralisation of planning and management.

**Transparency, accountability and participatory ethic.** These characteristics in an education or development programme also happen to be in line with the philosophy and ethics of adult learning and a lifelong learning approach. These attributes are not always consistent with the bureaucratic culture and practices in many countries in the region and the hierarchy-based social roles and values. Most countries recognise the need for change in the traditional mores and ALE/lifelong learning itself can be a means for promoting this change. Problems of corruption, dishonesty and mismanagement, present everywhere to a degree, are serious in some situations. Principles of transparency and accountability – and their practice – are particularly important in these situations.

**Resources and their effective use – A major increase must be assured in resources for ALE/lifelong learning, with mobilisation from all sources and better use of resources.**

**ALE/lifelong learning – Cinderella of the education system.** With a low profile in the total education scene in most countries, and the potentially strategic role in educational and national development being recognised more in rhetoric than in actual commitment of resources, ALE/lifelong learning is the Cinderella of education. Whether Cinderella's eventual happy ending will also be the fortune of ALE/lifelong learning will depend on the commitment and determination of all to make this happen.

**Over-reliance on voluntarism inconsistent with ALE/lifelong learning role.** There is an urgent need to rethink the levels of resources required and how these are to be used. A major part of any new resources will have to be devoted to incentives for teaching personnel, and their training and supervision. Performance standards and assessment of the results of their work have to be established to justify the incentives. It is hoped that the idealism and ethics of voluntarism can still be preserved in ALE/lifelong learning, even if the teachers are paid a salary for their work.

**Major increase in public resources.** The share of ALE/lifelong learning typically is less than one per cent of the government education budget, and is a microscopic fraction of GDP. With an expected increase in the total government budget for education in most countries in the coming years, it is reasonable to set a target to raise the share of ALE/lifelong learning to 3 to 5 per cent of the education budget by 2015. This increase need not be an undue burden and is certainly consistent with the proclaimed role of ALE/lifelong learning. The enhancement of resources from other sources, including the private sector, communities and external assistance (see below) also should be pursued vigorously.

**Specific and increased external assistance commitment for ALE/lifelong learning.** At least \$2.5 billion a year of external assistance up to 2015 required to meet the EFA and MDG adult literacy goals, as estimated by UNESCO, should be made available to low-income countries globally, with an appropriate share for the Asian low-income countries. With official development assistance of the order of \$80 billion per year, which should surpass \$100 billion if the pledges already made are honoured, the amount needed for adult education is within reach, if due priority is given to ALE/lifelong learning. Meeting these promises, in turn, may allow and encourage citizens of the developing Asian countries to better hold their own governments accountable for the effective use of all resources, whether from aid or domestic revenues.

**Regional and international cooperation.** *Sharing, learning and disseminating lessons through cooperation among countries, organisations and institutions; strengthening existing international cooperation mechanisms; and fulfilling rich countries' pledge of cooperation.*

**Learning from diverse experience and stages of development among countries in the region.** Diversity in development experiences and different levels of progress in ALE/lifelong learning among Asian countries offer a unique opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other. A systematic effort needs to be made through bi-lateral and multilateral channels and the channels of UNESCO and other international agencies as well as international NGOs for learning from the rich pool of experience in Asian countries.

**International and national exchanges among civil society organisations.** Civil society organisations such as ASPBAE and ACCU have made a good contribution in promoting cooperation and sharing experiences. These efforts as well as exchanges among national NGOs and academic and research institutions in the Asian countries should also be encouraged and supported. UIL, in collaboration with institutions in the region, can be a facilitator in this respect.

**Priority to promoting cooperation and exchange through external assistance.** Living up to the pledges of financial support for EFA by rich countries would be a vitally important expression of international cooperation and human solidarity. A small proportion of the promised resources would be well spent on promoting purposefully designed cooperation and exchange on ALE/lifelong learning within the region and sub-regions for mutual capacity building among these countries.

A unique challenge and opportunity lies for the governments and the people of the Asia-Pacific Region. Some are well-poised to make the best of the opportunity, whereas others are less ready to face the challenge. A resurgence of education and learning for all – children, youth and adults – and throughout life is happening. The poor and the disadvantaged must not be left out from this resurgence and the emerging Asian Century. Let all have a stake in it and claim their due through expanding their own capabilities through education and learning. As the ancient and the more modern sages cited at the beginning of this report reminded us – study, reflection and reflection and practice must go together to remake the world, which indeed is the central tenet of lifelong learning.

# Acronyms

A&E: Accreditation and Equivalency  
ACE: Adult Community Education  
ACCU: Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)  
ALE: Adult Learning and Education  
ALE/LLL: Adult Learning and Education/Lifelong learning  
ALR: Adult Literacy Rate  
ALS: Alternative Learning System  
APPEAL: Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All  
AQTF: Australian Quality Training Framework  
ASPBAE: Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education  
BRAC: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee; renamed in 2007 as Building Resources Across Communities)  
CAMPE: Campaign for Popular Education (Bangladesh)  
CE: Continuing Education  
CEC: Continuing Education Centre  
CEDAW: Convention to End all Forms of Discrimination Against Women  
CLC: Community Learning Centre  
CONFINTEA: International Conference on Adult Education  
DIET: District Institute of Education and Training  
DRU: District Resource Unit  
ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education  
EDI: Education Development Index  
ESD: Education for Sustainable Development  
EFA: Education for All  
GDP: Gross Domestic Product  
GER: Gross Enrolment Rate  
GPI: Gender Parity Index  
HELP: Higher Education Loan Program  
HDI: Human Development Index  
ICT: Information and Communication Technology  
ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education  
LDC: Least Developed Countries  
LIFE: Literacy Initiative for Empowerment  
LLL: Lifelong learning  
LMO: Literacy Movement Organisation  
LDC: Least Developed Country  
MDG: Millennium Development Goals  
NER: Net Enrolment Rate  
NFE: Non-Formal Education  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation  
NLM: National Literacy Mission  
NREGP: National Rural Employment Guarantee Program  
OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
PL: Post-Literacy  
PRSP: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper  
PPP: Public-Private Partnership  
RTO: Registered Training Organisation (Australia)  
TLC: Total Literacy Campaign  
UIL: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning  
UPE: Universal Primary Education  
UNLD: United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-12)  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation



UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund  
USAID: United States Agency for International Development  
VET: Vocational Education Training  
ZSS: Zilla Shaksharata Samitis (ZSS – District Literacy Society, India)

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# ANNEX 1

## THE HYDERABAD STATEMENT ON ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING (10 April 2002) Excerpts

Lifelong learning, leading to the creation of the learning society and learning community, offering all the opportunities to participate in and contribute to learning according to the needs and potential of the learners, provides an overarching vision of education for all.

This comprehensive vision of lifelong learning is necessary to empower people, expand their capacities and choices in life, and enable individuals and societies to cope with the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The context of the changing global economy, the new information revolution, imperatives of human development including fighting poverty and the importance of promoting values and the practice of democracy, justice and tolerance define the purpose and content of lifelong learning including formal, non-formal and informal modes of learning. Learning at all levels should aim to achieve the goals of equity, equality, human dignity and gender justice.

Literacy is a critical input and foundation of lifelong learning. The countries in the Asian region have different long-term, medium-term and short-term programme priorities of adult learning, relevant to the specific context and needs in each country. These range from basic life skills and literacy to post-literacy and continuing education.

### **Participants jointly agreed and recommended:**

- To adopt lifelong learning for all countries as a horizon and as an active principle for shaping education and learning policies and programmes even in the smallest and poorest countries.
- Countries in the region, while planning their educational system, must give utmost priority to co-existence, tolerance, living together, peace and democratic participation.
- It is necessary to develop a vision for lifelong learning, based on extensive consultation, information sharing, dialogue and participation, as the basis of the development of a multisectoral policy framework specifying priorities, strategies and institutional support.
- The existing policies on literacy, non-formal adult education and basic education need to be reviewed and recast in the context of lifelong learning.
- Lifelong learning perspective should be incorporated in the National EFA action plans as a part of the Dakar Framework of Action.
- Countries must include both basic, childhood and adult literacy as a priority policy issue in tune with United Nations Literacy Decade planned for 2003-2012.
- Adequate support structures and institutional capacity building should be given priority for creating nation-wide, lifelong learning networks and arrangements which should be participatory, decentralised and adapted to local conditions and learner circumstances.

- It is necessary to build a culture of quality reflected in the learning outcomes and the impact on peoples' lives and well being. This requires periodic outcome and impact assessment with the use of credible and holistic indicators related to the Dakar goals.
- Since ICTs can play a facilitative role in building learning communities, technology-based community learning centres could become an important forum for promoting lifelong learning.
- Civil society and NGOs should enhance their role in adult and lifelong learning as partners of the state which have a critical role to play in the development process.
- The international development partners, including UNESCO, international financial institutions, bilateral agencies and nongovernmental organisations should reassess and redirect their co-operation in the perspective of building capacities and institutional support for lifelong learning and creating learning societies.

## ANNEX 2

### TASHKENT CALL TO ACTION “EDUCATION FOR ALL – LIFELONG LEARNING IN CENTRAL ASIA” (4-5 June 2003, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) Excerpts

*All interested stakeholders are called upon:*

- 1. To put high priority to the efforts being undertaken by UNESCO and National Governments to achieve EFA and LIFELONG LEARNING goals.*
- 2. To give equal emphasis on the delivery of learning opportunities through formal and non-formal education. Partnerships between governmental, international and non-governmental organisations must be fostered.*
- 3. To promote EFA as an explicit and integrated element in LIFELONG LEARNING policies and practices. Governmental institutions, responsible for education, should give higher priority to the creation of the local, regional and national networks (professional associations) and structures that are required for the development, co-ordination, funding, quality management and evaluation of AE needs.*
- 4. To include into the system of basic education the skills developments, which are necessary to advance each person’s ability to participate fully in the social, cultural, political and economic life of their communities.*
- 5. To allocate additional resources to support adult learning s for active citizenship and self-fulfilment.*
- 6. To give priority to the elaboration of educational programmes based on the needs and interest of learners, and to encourage the active participation of learners in the learning process from planning to evaluation of education quality.*
- 7. To set up comprehensive local, regional and national statistical data collection systems for the purpose of needs analyses, planning, monitoring, reporting and assessment of performances, as well as for international comparative studies.*
- 8. To develop quantitative and qualitative measures to monitor the application of gender-sensitive policies in the provision of lifelong learning.*
- 9. To elaborate comprehensive systems for the certification and recognition of formal and non-formal AE needs. Procedures for accrediting prior learning should be considered as the basis for a new system.*
- 10. To extend international co-operation and exchange in the field of values education for the development of tolerance and culture of peace as well as multi-lingual learning programmes.*

*11. To use AE and lifelong learning more intensively in order to overcome existing social problems, especially such as unemployment and poverty.*

*12. To use more effectively the potentials of higher education and science in the region to support lifelong learning policy and practice.*

*Participants from the following countries attended the Conference: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.*



**ANNEX Table 1: Literacy definitions and assessment methods across countries in sub-regions of Asia**

Country	Year	Data Source	Literacy Definition	Mode
<b>Central Asia</b>				
Armenia	2001	Population Census	Literates correspond to those individuals aged 7+ who can read and understand in any language	Household declaration
Azerbaijan	1999	Population Census	Literates are persons who can read and write, with understanding, a text. Literacy is acceptable for any language having written form	Household declaration
Kazakhstan	1999	Population Census	A person is defined as literate if he/she can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his/her everyday life	Household declaration
Kyrgyzstan	1999	Population Census	Literates are those aged 6+ who are able to read	Household declaration
Mongolia	2000	Population Census	Literacy is the ability to read and write simple statements in Mongolian or any other language, with understanding	Household declaration
Tajikistan	2000	Population Census	Literates are persons who can write and read regardless of the language	Household declaration
Turkmenistan	1995	Population Census	Literate are persons aged 7 and over who are able to write and read	Household declaration
<b>East Asia and Pacific</b>				
Brunei Darussalam	2001	Population Census	Literacy is the ability of a person to read and write a simple letter or to read a newspaper column in one or two languages	Household declaration
Cambodia	2004	Inter-censual population survey	Literacy is the ability to read and write with understanding in any language. A person is literate when he/she can read and write a simple message in any language or dialect. A person who both cannot read and write a simple message is considered illiterate. Also to be considered illiterate is a person who is capable of reading only his/her own name or number, as well as persons who can read but not write. Children aged 0–9 were treated as illiterate by definition even if a few could read and write	Self-declaration
China	2000	Population Census	In urban areas: literate refers to a person who knows a minimum of 2,000 characters. In rural areas: literate refers to a person who knows a minimum of 1,500 characters	Household declaration
Indonesia	2004	National Socio-economic survey	A literate is someone who can read and write at least a simple sentence in Bahasa Indonesia	Self-declaration
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2001	National Literacy Survey	A literate person is defined as a person who can read, write and understand simple sentences in Lao, and perform simple arithmetic calculations (numeracy). All household members aged 6+ were asked whether they could read, write and perform simple calculations	Self-declaration
Macao, China	2001	Population Census	A person is defined as literate if he/she can, with understanding, read or write a short, simple statement on his/her everyday life	Household declaration

Malaysia	2000	Population Census	Illiterates are a persons aged 10+ who have never been to school in any language	Household declaration
Papua New Guinea	2000	Population Census	A literate is a person who can read and write, with understanding, at least one language (English, Motu or Tokples)	Household declaration
Philippines	2003	Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey	Basic and simple literacy is the ability of a person to read and write with understanding a simple message in any language or dialect	Household/ Self-declaration
Samoa	-	-	-	-
Singapore	2000	Population Census	Literacy refers to a person's ability to read with understanding, e.g. a newspaper, in the language specified	Household declaration
Thailand	2000	Population Census	Literate persons are defined as persons aged 5+ who are able to read and write simple statements, with understanding, in any language. If a person can read but cannot write, he/she is classified as illiterate	Household declaration
Tonga	1996	Population Census	For a person to be considered as literate in a language, that person must be able to read and write in that language	Household declaration
Vanuatu	1999	Population Census	A person is defined as literate if he/she can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his/her everyday life	Household declaration
<b>South and West Asia</b>				
Bangladesh	2001	Population Census	A literate is a person who is able to write a letter in any language	Self-declaration
Bhutan	-	-	-	-
India	2001	Population Census	A literate is a person aged 7+ who can both read and write with understanding in any language	Household declaration
Iran, Islamic Republic	2005	Labour Force Survey	Literates are all persons who can read and write a text in Farsi (Persian) or in any other language, whether or not they had an educational certificate, and all students including those in the first year of elementary school or in a literacy campaign	Self-declaration
Maldives	2000	Population Census	A literate is a person who can read and write with understanding in any language: Maldivian language (Dhivehi), English, Arabic, etc.	Household declaration
Nepal	2001	Population Census	A person aged 6+ who can read and write a simple letter, with understanding, in any language and have simple knowledge of arithmetic is considered as literate	Household declaration
Pakistan	2005	Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey	A literate is one who can read a newspaper and write a simple letter in any language	Household declaration
Sri Lanka	2001	Population Census	The census schedule provided for recording the ability to speak, read and write Sinhalese, Tamil and English. A person was regarded as able to read and write a language only if he/she could both read with understanding and write a short letter or paragraph in that language. A person who is able to read and write at least one language was regarded as literate	Household declaration

**ANNEX Table 2: Adult literacy rate in countries across sub-regions of Asia, 2007<sup>3</sup>**

	2007 Adult Literacy Rate (%)	Change in Adult Literacy Rate 2000-2001 (%)	2007 Adult Literacy Rate (Male) (%)	2007 Adult Literacy Rate (Female) (%)
<b>Central Asia</b>				
Armenia	99.5	▲ 0.08	99.68	99.3
Azerbaijan	99.4	-	99.70	99.08
Kazakhstan	99.6	-	99.78	99.48
Kyrgyzstan	99.3	-	99.50	99.09
Mongolia	97.3	▼ 0.50	96.82	97.72
Tajikistan	99.6	▲ 0.32	99.77	99.51
Turkmenistan	99.5	-	99.69	99.33
<b>East Asia and Pacific</b>				
Brunei Darussalam	94.9	▲ 2.3	96.46	93.12
Cambodia	76.3	-	85.82	67.71
China	93.3	▲ 2.6	96.46	89.99
Indonesia	91.4	-	94.92	87.98
Lao People's Democratic Republic	73.2	▲ 6.4	80.17	66.57
Macao, China	93.0	▲ 1.9	96.19	90.18
Malaysia	91.9	▲ 3.61	94.18	89.55
Papua New Guinea	57.8	▲ 0.74	62.14	53.36
Philippines	93.4	▲ 0.86	93.12	93.67
Samoa	98.7	-	98.94	98.43
Singapore	94.4	▲ 2.04	97.28	91.57
Thailand	94.1	▲ 1.61	95.88	92.55
Tonga	99.2	-	99.16	99.24
Vanuatu	78.1	-	80.03	76.09
<b>South and West Asia</b>				
Bangladesh	53.5	▲ 12.63	58.67	48.04
Bhutan	55.6	-	67.08	42.19
India	66.0	▲ 8.19	76.88	54.47
Iran, Islamic Republic	84.7	-	86.96	79.36
Maldives	97.0	▲ 0.74	96.97	97.11
Nepal	56.5	▲ 16.27	70.27	43.55
Pakistan	54.9	-	68.70	40.23
Sri Lanka	91.5	▲ 0.91	93.18	89.93

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

<sup>3</sup> The literacy data is based on conventional cross-country data drawn from censuses or household surveys relying on self-assessments, third-party reporting or educational attainment proxies. Conventional literacy data are subject to bias and tend to overestimate literacy and should be interpreted with caution. Data for 2007 are UNESCO Institute of Statistics Estimates using Global-Age Specific Literacy Projections Model, when no national observed literacy data is available.

**ANNEX Table 3: Net Enrolment Rate and Gross Enrolment Rate at primary and secondary level (2006) in countries by sub-regions of Asia**

	NER (Primary)	GER (Primary)	NER (Secondary)	GER (Secondary)
<b>Central Asia</b>				
Armenia	82.16	97.58	85.78	89.54
Azerbaijan	84.79	96.21	77.84	83.02
Georgia	89.10	95.67	78.65	84.89
Kazakhstan	90.11	104.43	87.74	94.77
Kyrgyzstan	85.86	96.72	80.48	86.35
Mongolia	91.44	100.54	81.51	89.47
Tajikistan	97.27	100.26	80.39	82.64
Turkmenistan				
Uzbekistan		98.43		100.30
<b>East Asia and the Pacific</b>				
Australia	96.44	104.84	87.22	150.32
Brunei Darussalam	93.79	106.74	90.06	98.22
Cambodia	89.93	122.18	30.81	38.15
China		111.22		75.50
Cook Islands	74.21*	79.71*		72.23*
Democratic People's Republic of Korea				
Fiji	91.23	99.52	79.07	84.17
Hong Kong (China), SAR	87.93	94.63	77.91	85.28
Indonesia	95.51	11.13	59.00	64.21
Japan	99.78	99.96	98.68	101.40
Kiribati		112.75*	68.27*	87.92
Lao People's Democratic Republic	83.70	115.99	34.93	43.45
Macao, China	91.17	105.56	77.45	97.94
Malaysia	99.87*	100.49*	68.72*	69.07*
Marshall Islands	89.59±	102.66*	74.36±	76.47*
Micronesia (Federated States of)		112.72*		82.84*
Myanmar	99.64	114.44	45.67	49.00
Nauru		88.89		54.47
New Zealand	99.30	101.75	91.94‡	119.56
Niue		104.70*		98.56*
Palau		104.19*		101.60*
Papua New Guinea		55.15		
Philippines	91.44	109.51	60.38	83.11
Republic of Korea	97.58	104.51	93.85	95.64
Samoa	90.41§	99.92*	66.01§	80.56*
Singapore				
Solomon Islands	61.77*	100.51*	27.25±	30.05*
Thailand	94.20	107.86	72.01	78.07
Timor-Leste	68.08*	98.88*	33.78†	53.44*
Tokelau		93.10§		100.57§
Tonga	95.89*	113.09	60.39	93.67

Tuvalu		105.56		84.36†
Vanuatu	87.80	108.26	38.10	40.11§
Vietnam				
<b>South and West Asia</b>				
Afghanistan		101.40*		18.98*
Bangladesh	88.88§	102.86§	40.98§	43.77§
Bhutan	79.03	101.63	38.49	48.80
India	88.66	111.91		54.02*
Iran, Islamic Republic of	93.57	117.78	77.25*	80.95*
Maldives	97.38	116.28	67.14	83.10
Nepal	79.20§	126.28		43.15
Pakistan	65.61	84.12	29.67	30.01
Sri Lanka	96.66§	108.32*		87.18§

\*2005 §2004 ±2003 ‡2002 †2001

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

**ANNEX Table 4: Socio-economic profile of countries in the sub-regions of Asia (2005)**

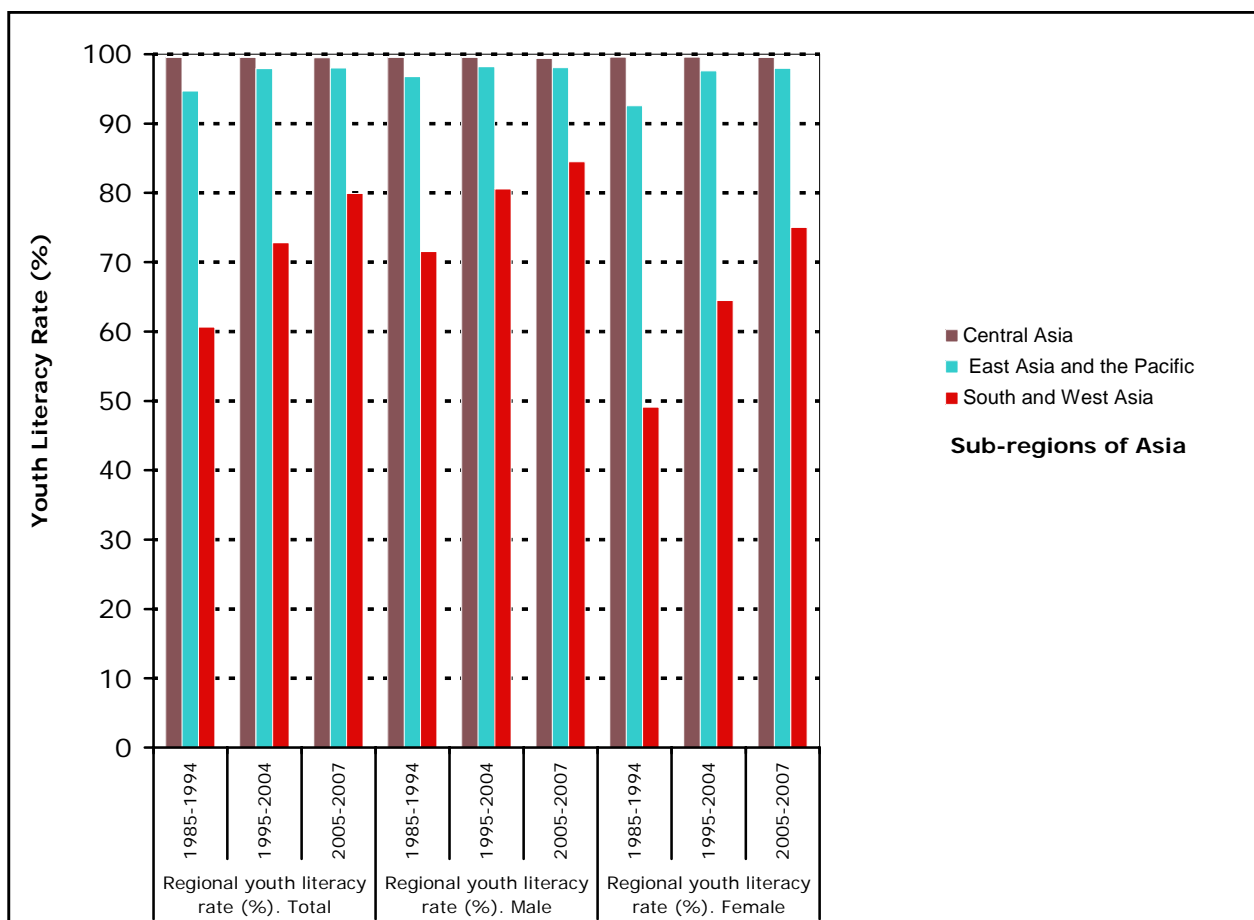
	Total population 2006 (millions)*	Annual population growth rate 2005 (%)	GDP per capita (ppp) US\$ (2005)	GDP growth rate 2005 (%)	Poverty (% of population on less than \$2 a day) 2000-2005
<b>Central Asia</b>					
Armenia	3.00	-0.32	4945.29	14.0	31.07§
Azerbaijan	8.40	0.98	5016.45	26.2	33.41‡
Georgia	4.40	-0.96	3365.03	9.3	25.29§
Kazakhstan	15.30	0.88	7856.80	9.7	16.04§
Kyrgyzstan	5.20	0.99	1926.87	-0.6	21.4§
Mongolia	2.60	1.55	2107.32	6.2	44.58±
Tajikistan	6.60	1.18	1355.93	7.5	42.79§
Turkmenistan	4.80	1.40	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	26.00	1.16	2062.85	7.0	-
<b>East Asia and the Pacific</b>					
Australia	20.50	1.18	31794.13	2.8	-
Brunei Darussalam	0.38	2.19	-	-	-
Cambodia	14.10	1.95	2727.28	13.4	-
China	1320.80	0.64	6757.27	10.2	34.89*
Cook Islands	0.02	-	-	-	-
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	23.70	0.46	-	-	-
Fiji	0.83	0.81	6049.22	0.7	-
Hong Kong (China), SAR	7.10	0.88	34833.00	7.3	-
Indonesia	228.80	1.35	3843.02	5.6	52.42±
Japan	127.90	0.01	31266.74	2.6	-
Kiribati	0.09	1.20	4596.83	0.3	-
Lao People's Democratic Republic	5.70	2.26	2039.08	7.0	74.13±
Macao, China	0.47	0.64	36579.23	6.7	-
Malaysia	26.10	1.80	10881.99	5.2	-
Marshall Islands	0.05	3.29	-	3.5	-
Micronesia (Federated States of)	0.11	0.72	7241.85	0.3	-
Myanmar	48.30	1.02	-	5.0	-
Nauru	0.01	-	-	-	-
New Zealand	4.10	0.92	24996.42	1.9	-
Niue	0.00	-	-	-	-
Palau	0.02	-	-	5.5	-
Papua New Guinea	6.20	1.97	2562.91	3.3	-
Philippines	86.20	1.74	5137.45	5.0	42.96±
Republic of Korea	48.00	0.43	22028.88	4.0	-
Samoa	0.18	0.67	6170.21	5.4	-
Singapore	-	2.39	29662.59	6.3	-
Solomon Islands	0.48	2.53	2030.55	5	-

Thailand	6.30	0.84	8677.47	4.5	25.15±
Timor-Leste	1.10	-	-	-	-
Tokelau	0.00	-	-	-	-
Tonga	0.09	0.32	8176.82	2.3	-
Tuvalu	0.01	-	-	-	-
Vanuatu	0.22	1.92	3225.04	2.8	-
Vietnam	-	1.15	3071.02	8.4	-
<b>South and West Asia</b>					
Afghanistan	26.00	-	-	14.0	-
Bangladesh	155.90	1.85	2053.00	5.9	84.00†
Bhutan	0.64	3.35	-	6.1	-
India	1151.70	1.36	3452.49	9.2	80.35*
Iran, Islamic Republic of	70.20	1.39	7967.85	4.4	-
Maldives	0.30	2.46	-	-5.2	-
Nepal	27.60	2.01	1550.44	2.7	68.53*
Pakistan	160.90	2.41	2370.32	7.8	73.58±
Sri Lanka	19.20	0.83	4594.62	5.3	41.59±

\*2004 §2003 ±2002 ‡2001 †2000

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

**ANNEX Figure 1: Youth literacy rate (15-24-year-olds) across sub-regions of Asia, 1985-2007<sup>4</sup>**

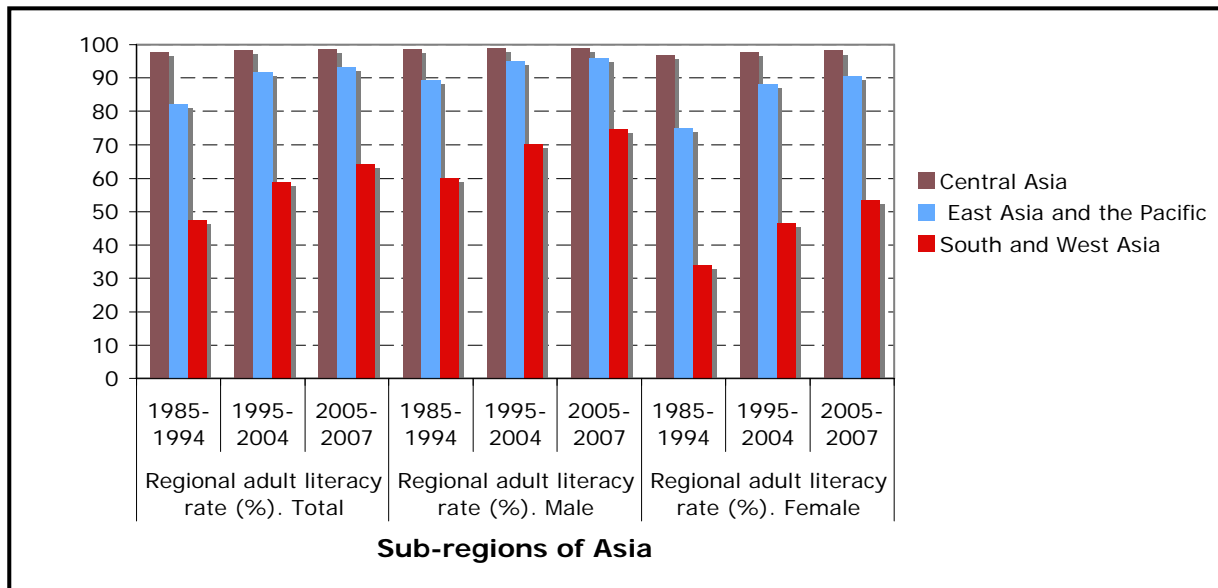


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<sup>4</sup> Regional figures for literacy rates are weighted averages, taking into account the relative size of the relevant population of each country in each region. The averages are derived from both published data and broad estimates for countries for which no reliable publishable data are available. The figures for the countries with larger populations thus have a proportionately greater influence on the regional aggregates.



**ANNEX Figure 2: Literacy Rate across sub-regions of Asia, 1985-2007**



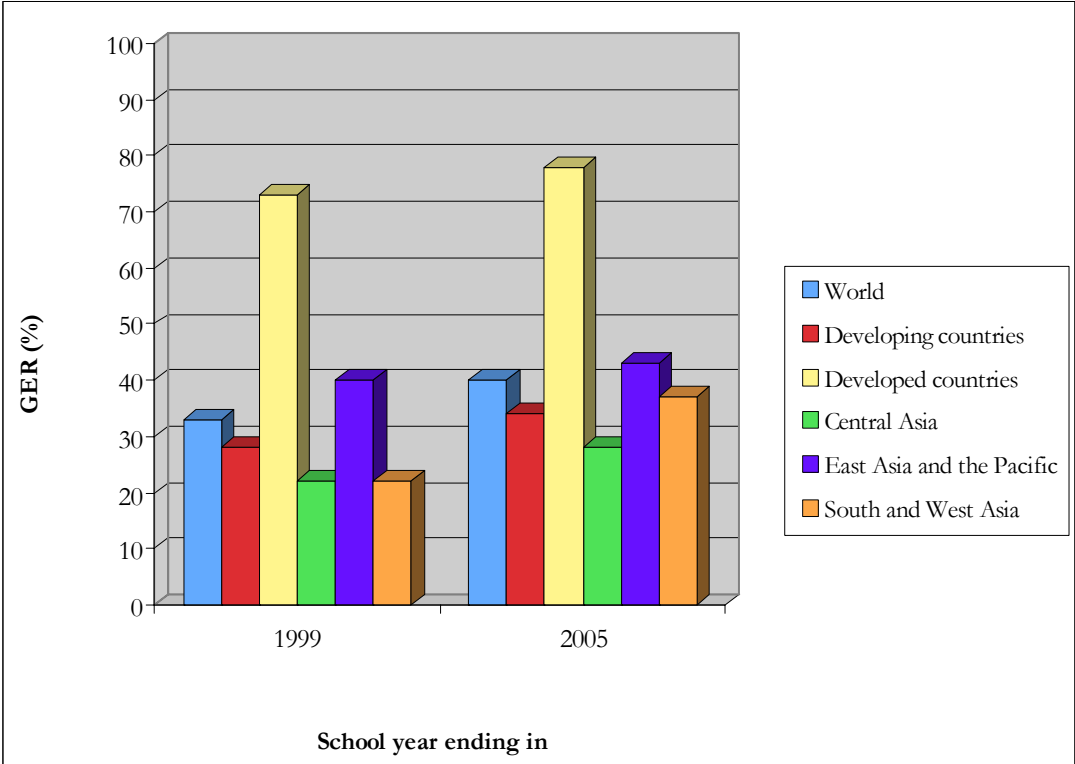
UNESCO Institute of Statistics

**ANNEX Figure 3: Progress of countries across Asia in achieving universal literacy by 2015**

<b>Universal literacy achieved</b> <i>(Adult literacy ≥ 97%)</i> <b>9 Countries</b> <i>Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Samoa, Tajikistan, Tonga, Turkmenistan</i>				
		<b>Adult literacy rate projected for 2015, extrapolating 1995-2004 trend</b>		<b>Total</b>
		<b>Fast performer</b>	<b>Slow performer</b>	
<b>Distance from universal literacy in 1995-2004</b>	Close or in intermediate position (adult literacy rates: 80-96%)	<b>Quadrant I</b> <b>High chance of achieving the target by 2015</b> <i>(Moving towards the goal with steady progress)</i> <b>7 countries</b> <i>China, Indonesia, Macao (China), Malaysia, Maldives, Singapore, Thailand</i>	<b>Quadrant III</b> <b>At risk of not achieving target by 2015</b> <i>(Moving towards the goal, but progress to slow)</i> <b>6 countries</b> <i>Brunei Darussalam, Islamic Republic of Iran, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam</i>	<b>13</b>
	Far (adult literacy rate: <80%)	<b>Quadrant II</b> <b>Low chance of achieving the target by 2015</b> <i>(Moving towards the goal, with rapid progress)</i> <b>1 country</b> <i>Bangladesh</i>	<b>Quadrant IV</b> <b>Serious risk of not achieving the target by 2015</b> <i>(Moving towards the goal, but progress too slow)</i> <b>5 countries</b> <i>Cambodia, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea</i>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Not included in the prospects analysis</b> <i>(Insufficient or no data)</i> <b>20 Countries</b> <i>Afghanistan, Australia, Bhutan, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, Georgia, Japan, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu</i>				

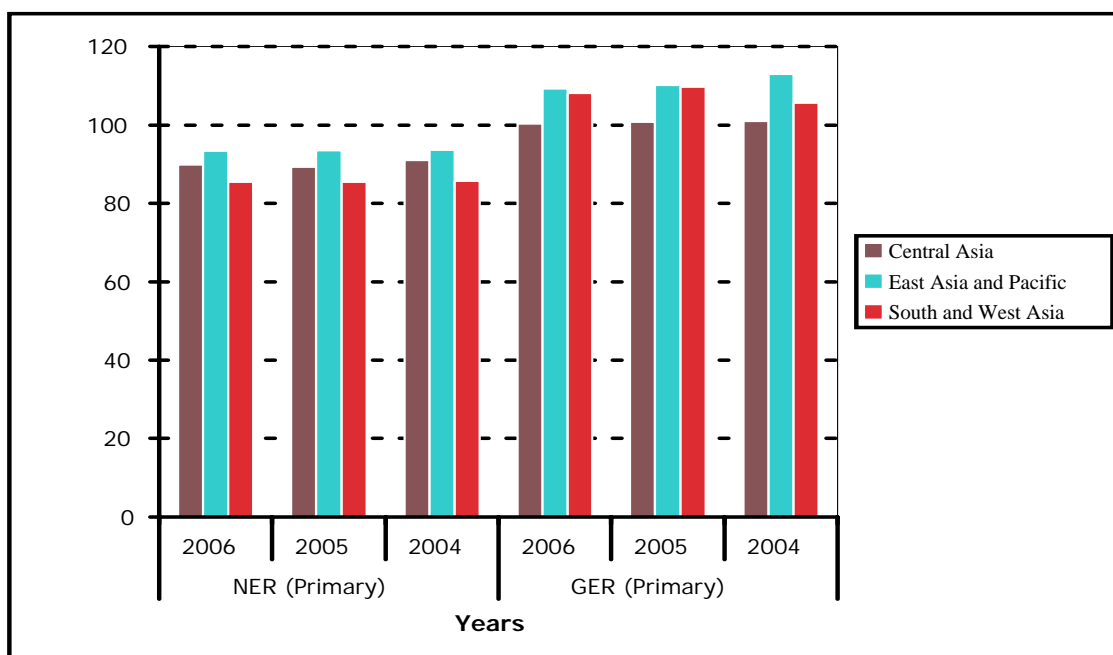
Adapted from UNESCO (2008) *Education For All by 2015. Will We Make It?* EFA Global Monitoring Report.

**ANNEX Figure 4: Pre-primary gross enrolment ratios by region, 1999 and 2005**



UNESCO (2008). *Education for All by 2015. Will we make it?* EFA Global Monitoring Report

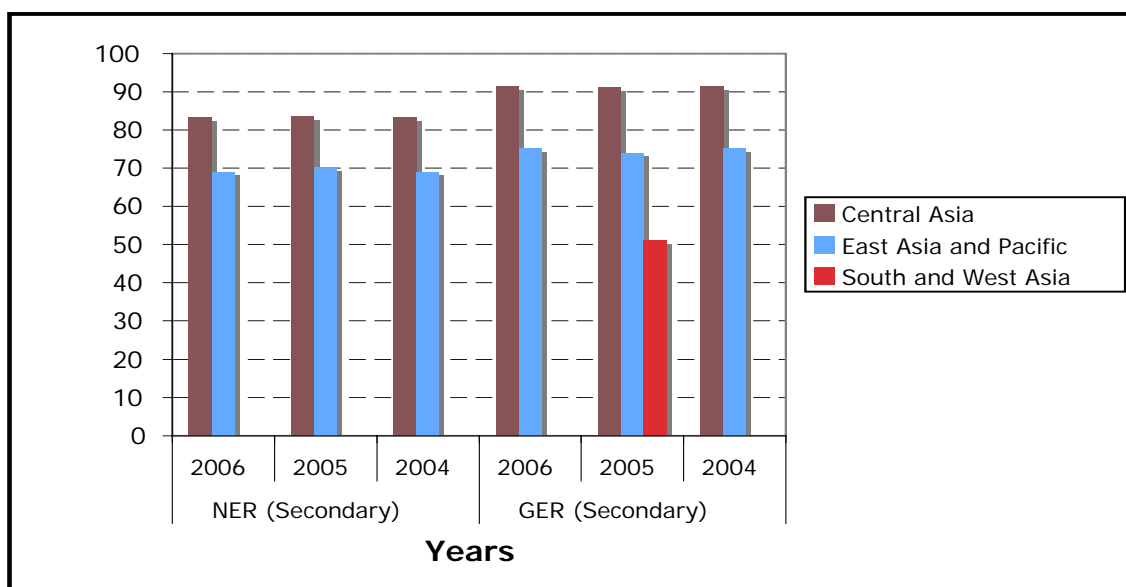
**ANNEX Figure 5: Primary Net Enrolment Rate and Primary Gross Enrolment Rate (2004-2006), across sub-regions of Asia<sup>5</sup>**



UNESCO Institute of Statistics

<sup>5</sup> Regional figures for gross and net enrolment ratios are weighted averages, taking into account the relative size of the relevant population of each country in each region. The averages are derived from both published data and broad estimates for countries for which no reliable publishable data are available. The figures for the countries with larger populations thus have a proportionately greater influence on the regional aggregates.

**ANNEX Figure 6: Secondary Net Enrolment Rate and Secondary Gross Enrolment Rate (2004-2006), across sub-regions of Asia<sup>6</sup>**



UNESCO Institute of Statistics

<sup>6</sup> Regional figures for gross and net enrolment ratios are weighted averages, taking into account the relative size of the relevant population of each country in each region. The averages are derived from both published data and broad estimates for countries for which no reliable publishable data are available. The figures for the countries with larger populations thus have a proportionately greater influence on the regional aggregates.