1. Introduction

Asia-Pacific is a vast region covering close to 50 countries and territories. These range in area and population from among the biggest in the world, China and India, to landlocked Himalayan countries like Bhutan and Nepal, and Pacific islands such as Kiribati with less than 100,000 people in a group of 33 coral atolls scattered across more than one million square miles of ocean. Home to 61% of the world’s population, the region’s progress has a huge impact on the global achievement of internationally agreed development goals (IDGs), including the Education for All (EFA) goals (UNESCAP, 2011). Advances made by China and India, the two most populous countries in the region, can significantly influence both regional and global achievements of EFA.

The region has seen substantial economic growth since 1990, with Asia-Pacific’s combined economy accounting for 29% of global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008, making it the world’s second largest aggregate economy after Europe. Middle-income economies registered the highest growth, with some graduating to higher-income status (UNESCAP, 2010). According to the World Bank, East Asia and the Pacific led the global recovery from the economic crisis in 2009-10 with China driving most of the economic expansion.

However, the gloomy world economy in 2012, linked to protracted sovereign-debt crisis in Europe and the fiscal cliff in the United States poses spill-over effects to the region. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) lowered economic growth forecasts for Asia from 7.2% in 2011 to 6.2% in 2012. The region’s two giants – China and India, together with other East and South Asian economies have experienced slow growth. China’s economy, for instance, is forecast to slow down to 7.7% this year compared to 9.3% in 2011. India will see its GDP growth slow to 5.6% in 2012 from 6.5% in 2011. Asian exports are declining due to these impacts. While weak external demand is dragging down China and the export-oriented East Asian economies, internal factors such as slowing investment and stagnating consumption are also contributing to slow growth. In this context, maintaining or increasing domestic funding for education is likely to be a challenge for most countries in the region. Many countries are faced with reducing reliance on exports to rebalance sources of growth and need to focus on increasing productivity and efficiency. This, for the most part, depends on the creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship of the country, lack of which can lead to ‘middle income trap.’ Education, especially skills training, therefore, has a key role to play in facing this challenge (ADB, 2012).

Several countries in Asia are in a favourable demographic position. As fertility falls, some countries in the region are experiencing the so-called ‘demographic dividend’ of a proportionately large workforce, coupled with a relatively small dependent population. This produces a large tax base which can be used for investment in infrastructure and education. To capitalize on this, governments should invest in education and training in order to enhance the productive capacity of this workforce. On the other hand, as this large workforce, grows older and leaves work, the ‘ageing’ of the population will eventually result in increased dependency and the need for larger social spending, as currently experienced by Japan (UNESCAP, 2010). In this context, lifelong learning can be critical not only for preventing cognitive decline and furthering personal development of elderly populations, but also for upgrading their knowledge and skills, which can be used in paid employment, voluntary work, or to manage one’s own affairs. In order to expand lifelong learning opportunities for elderly populations, countries will need to make changes to existing education and training policies with greater investments on retraining and continuous education programmes for older workers taking into account their potential contribution to the economy.

The Asia-Pacific region has made significant gains in reducing the number of people living on less than US$1.25 a day. The number of people in the region living in extreme poverty has shrunk from 1.5 billion to

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1 Asia-Pacific, for the purpose of this report, covers the sub-regions of Central Asia, East Asia, South and West Asia, and the Pacific. It is acknowledged that the sub-regional groupings of countries maybe defined differently in other contexts.
2 Asia-Pacific based on the UNESCAP country groupings.
Income inequality remains a major problem in the region, and has increased in some countries (e.g. Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan). Hunger and malnutrition are still widespread. About one person in six suffers from malnourishment and one child in three is underweight. A significant portion of the region’s population continues to face multiple deprivations: access to education and basic sanitation, food and health security. Asia-Pacific has a significant share of the developing world’s deprived people and the numbers are expected to rise due to the global economic crisis (UNESCAP, ADB and UNDP, 2010, Figure 1). Different types of deprivation, disadvantage, and marginalisation interact with each other to lower quality of life more than they would alone. Governments need to create appropriate mechanisms to protect the poor and vulnerable. Education should remain at the frontline of any national effort to address inequalities and disparities.

While the region has a history of discrimination against girls and women, economic, social and political developments in recent years have brought historic changes to the status of women. Conditions for women have in general improved as a result of increased education and policies favouring gender equality and individual rights. Education levels of girls and women are rising and the traditional gender gap in primary and secondary schooling is disappearing. Likewise, women’s participation in the labour force has increased steadily in many countries and in some countries, more females are attending university. However, less than 65% of these graduates go on to join the work force. With strong traditions of male domination, women continue to experience discrimination both within and outside the home. Continued efforts are needed to promote girls’ and women’s education in the region.

Over 3,500 of the world’s 6,000 languages are spoken in Asia-Pacific. Because only a few of these languages are actually used in classrooms, many, especially ethno-linguistic minority children, struggle to learn in a language they do not understand. This leads to poor learning outcomes, high repetition and dropout. A key challenge for governments is to address disparities in education based on language and ethnicity through targeted education policies, in particular, language policies.

Of all the regions in the world, Asia-Pacific is the most vulnerable to natural hazards. In particular, the countries of the Pacific and Insular South-East Asia are frequently affected by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, flooding and tsunamis. Education suffers both directly and indirectly from natural calamities. In the aftermath of a disaster, schools are often used for shelter and education is delivered under extremely difficult conditions. Large-scale disasters also divert investments away from key development sectors in favour of recovery and reconstruction efforts. Education for Sustainable Development can mitigate both the immediate impact of such events and the long-term sustainability of livelihoods in the areas which are commonly affected.

Armed conflict and war tactics have far-reaching consequences for education. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, school infrastructure and girls’ schools in particular, have been repeatedly attacked. According to the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report, in conflict areas, it is more dangerous to be a civilian than a combatant. Likewise, conflict affected areas such as those in the Philippines (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) are prone to lag behind the rest of the world due to intensified disparities linked to wealth and gender. Apart from human costs and physical damage, armed conflicts in the region have undermined economic growth, reinforced poverty, displaced populations and diverted resources from productive investment in classrooms into unproductive military spending (UNESCO, 2011).

Over the past decade there has been significant growth in information and communications technology (ICT) access and usage in the region, in particular mobile telephones. In 2009, there were 61 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people and the number of Internet users in 2009 was more than 5 times higher than

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in 2000. (UNESCAP, 2011). The increasing trend of internet access and mobile ownership indicates the growing prospect for educational use of ICTs.

This report provides an overview of what has been achieved in the Asia-Pacific region in relation to the EFA goals since Dakar (2000). The regional EFA movement has witnessed many developments since the last global EFA meeting. This report highlights recent developments and new trends, and introduces the various acceleration programmes and innovative solutions countries have adopted to speed up EFA progress. A separate section is devoted to regional preparation for shaping the post-2015 agenda. The report concludes with recommendations for speeding up progress towards meeting the EFA goals.

2. The Present State

Unique to the region, active EFA coordination mechanisms and networks at regional, subregional and national level have proved beneficial to key EFA players, providing open communication platforms and venues to connect, collaborate and implement a full range of EFA-related initiatives. Involving regional and sub-regional solidarities in collaboration with EFA partners in the region, UNESCO Bangkok has co-organized and participated in meetings of EFA flagships, working groups, and networks, including the East Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (EAP UNGEI), the Multilingual Education Working Group (MLE-WG), and the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC). These partnerships have resulted in numerous joint advocacy efforts including regional photo contests, drawing contests, joint statements, videos, publications, and national and regional launches of the Global Monitoring Report, in support of EFA.

In July 2011, UNESCO Bangkok and the Korean National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU), with support from UNICEF Regional Offices, organized the 12th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators in Seoul. UNESCO and EFA partners learned about programmes Member States are undertaking to accelerate progress in EFA and the additional support needed at the country level. Drafts of the UNESCO-UNICEF publication entitled Asia-Pacific End-of-Decade Notes (EDNs) on EFA were presented, commented on and endorsed by country participants. To date, EDN on EFA Goal 1: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been launched and the other Notes will be published and launched at appropriate functions during the course of 2012.

With the 2015 target for achieving EFA fast approaching, UNESCO Bangkok organized a high level regional expert meeting in May 2012 (see Section 4) to discuss the vision of a post-2015 education agenda for the region. In the face of dismal progress vis-a-vis some EFA goals, the meeting not only found EFA to be an unfinished agenda in the region, but of continued relevance. Experts advised that to achieve these education goals, efforts to address disparities must be strengthened, and a vision for the future, which encompasses learning, equity, quality of education, teachers, and skills development, be conceptualized.

Developments towards EFA goals in the Asia-Pacific region

**EFA Goal 1: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action defined EFA Goal 1 as: “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.” The early years are increasingly recognized as a critical period for optimizing children’s development through the combined impact of education, care, health, nutrition, protection and stimulation. Following historic neglect and fragmentation of ECCE services, the region is promoting a holistic concept of ECCE, with encouraging developments that encompass education, health and wellbeing of young children. Several countries including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Thailand, are moving towards integrated and coordinated early childhood services. While some countries have established new laws and legislative
frameworks for the provision of ECCE, compulsory attendance at the pre-school level is a distant reality (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, 2012).

Access to pre-primary education in the region has been increasing steadily since 2000 with variations at the sub-regional level. East Asia and the Pacific and South and West Asia have posted the most rapid improvements in the world since 2005. Over the five year period, these two regions’ enrolment grew by more than 9 percentage points.

Box 1: The status of ECCE in Central Asia

After a decade of slow growth and a low starting point resulting from the budget crisis that followed the disintegration of the Soviet Union, 70% of children in 2009 were not enrolled in ECCE programmes. Nevertheless, there is reason for optimism as recent pre-primary enrolment has been climbing in many Central Asian countries.


Analysis of regional averages conceals a reality of inequity between countries. Drilling down to the country level in Figure 1, distinct disparities become visible. Some countries, including Japan, Thailand, and Republic of Korea, boast gross enrolment ratios of over 80%. Conversely, a number of countries are faced with dismal figures; including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia and Myanmar, where less than 20% of children are exposed to ECCE programmes. Goal 1 progress can also be measured as the percentage of new entrants into primary schooling who have ECCE experience. However, data for this measure are sparse; out of 49 Asia-Pacific countries and territories, only 19 have any data for the last 10 years.

Figure 1: Pre-primary gross enrolment ratios in selected Asia-Pacific countries, 2010

Source: Statistical annex, UIS, October 2012.

First proposed in Jomtien in 1990, the core idea behind EFA Goal 1 has evolved over the years. What was originally a vague focus on expanding childhood care has become a clear commitment to child development, both mental and physical. The choice of the phrase Early Childhood Care and Education acknowledges that physical development is a prerequisite for learning. The need for holistic childhood care programmes is especially pronounced in Asia-Pacific.

Without multisectoral coordination and improved governance, the concept of holistic ECCE will be difficult to operationalize. Cognizant of this, countries such as Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea, the

Philippines, and Thailand have taken steps to integrate the delivery of ECCE by establishing multisectoral coordination mechanisms at the national level. Most countries in the region now recognize the importance of national standards and nationally guided frameworks in advancing the quality of ECCE programming. This has led to the development of early learning development standards (ELDS) in many countries, including, but not limited to: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.

Figure 2 shows a strong negative relationship between pre-primary enrolment and infant mortality in the region. Countries in the region in which less than 20% of children are enrolled in ECCE programmes exhibit high infant mortality rates.

**Figure 2: Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio and infant mortality rate, in Asia-Pacific, 2010**

![Graph showing the relationship between pre-primary enrolment and infant mortality rate in Asia-Pacific, 2010](image)

**Sources:** UIS Data Centre and Statistical annex, UIS, October 2012.

**EFA Goal 2: Universal primary education**

EFA Goal 2, as defined by the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, is a commitment to “ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education.”

Of the six EFA goals, Goal 2 on Universal Primary Education (UPE) has received the most attention in terms of policy intervention, funding and delivery. Asia-Pacific is the world’s largest region, in terms of its share of primary enrolment, accounting for 56% of the global total in 2009 (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 2, forthcoming). The region is on track to achieve the goal of universal participation in primary education by 2015. However, different types and forms of disparities persist at the sub-regional level and targeted efforts to address disadvantaged children in the region will go a long way to determining whether the goal of universal primary education can be achieved.
Despite great strides towards UPE, many children remain out of school. Goal 2 is most commonly measured as progress towards an adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER) of 100%. Figure 3 indicates that, by this measure, Asia-Pacific is keeping pace with the rest of the world. East Asia and the Pacific and South and West Asia have both reached an ANER of over 90%. Out of two sub-regions with data, South and West Asia stands out as a success story: since 2000, the ANER has risen by over 15 percentage points. Growth in East Asia and the Pacific, however, has been much slower, with the ANER increasing by only 1 percentage point in the last ten years. Enrolment improvements in Asia-Pacific have reached both male and female students. In the entire region, gender disparity in participation is only a major issue in Pakistan, where eight girls attend primary school for every ten boys. Still, the recent slow-down in ANERs indicates certain groups continue to be left out of the education system (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 2, forthcoming).

This stagnation reflects a sombre reality for many countries: efforts to provide access to the majority of school-aged children have been successful, but reaching the most disadvantaged children has proven much more difficult. Leaders must avoid thinking that 98% or even 95%, is good enough. All children, up through the final percentage, must be enrolled in and helped to complete basic education if this EFA goal is to be achieved (UNESCO, 2011a).

As of 2010 there remained over 60 million primary school aged out-of-school children (OOSC) (UIS and UNICEF, 2010). Especially in large countries, figures of just 1 or 2% of primary school aged children conceal a huge amount of young individuals. Of the E-9 high population countries, five (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan) are located in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite their recent success in bringing children to school, the number of out-of-school children in these countries remains very high, and marginalized groups are overrepresented (see Box 2). In order to successfully reach the unreached, leaders need to directly address the needs of remaining out-of-school groups and the barriers they face. Alongside UNICEF Regional Offices, UNESCO Bangkok promotes alternative learning schools, which provide intensive literacy and numeracy classes for underprivileged children who are out of school and or missed starting school at the right age. Alternative learning schools are equivalent to primary education in Asia-Pacific. Children who graduate are qualified to enter national lower secondary or secondary schooling.
Heightened Focus on Internal Efficiency. In the region “nine countries have already achieved universal participation in primary education, and 11 countries are very likely to achieve the goal by 2015, if the past trend in the adjusted net enrolment rate continues” (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 2, forthcoming, p. 12). With the majority of children enrolling in primary school, regional focus has shifted to the second facet of EFA Goal 2: ensuring that children complete their education.

At the same time, the region has seen a shift in attention towards addressing low levels of student learning. Evidence reveals that increased schooling is not accompanied by improved student learning. Countries acknowledge educational attainment is necessary, but it is not sufficient to support growth and competitiveness. Private and social returns must also be taken into account to more accurately determine if quality learning has taken place. In Asia-Pacific, the educational discourse is changing from access to quality and learning. Countries are taking an interest in assessing student learning through classroom assessment, national learning tests or participation in international assessments.

Figure 4 shows which countries in the region have problems in getting children to complete the full primary cycle and continue to the next level, as evidenced by the huge gaps in the relevant indicators (countries are ranked in ascending order of expected intake to lower secondary). Children who start primary school in Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu are facing a great challenge in reaching the last grade of primary. Further, a sizable number of children who manage to reach the last grade of primary often do not continue on to secondary education; such is the case in Myanmar, Pakistan and Timor-Leste, where less than 40% of students make the transition from primary to secondary school.

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Box 2: Profiles of out-of-school children in India

India’s 2012 report on its national Out-of-School Children Initiative indicates that some 14.6 million primary school-aged children (aged 6–10) do not attend school. To put this figure in perspective: it is more than twice the population of Lao PDR, and roughly equal to the population of Cambodia. India’s impressive ANER of over 96% leaves many children without access to education.

Gender and socio-economic status pose barriers to school access. Looking at the Indian population as a whole, male children outnumber females. This relationship is reversed within the sub-population of OOSC; females make up the majority of children not attending school. Poor children are similarly disadvantaged; around 70% of out-of-school children aged 6–13 years in rural areas and 90% in urban areas come from the two lowest income quintiles.


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5 Expected intake to lower secondary is calculated as the gross intake ratio to primary (as proxy for the probability that a child starts primary education) multiplied by the survival rate to the last grade of primary (proxy for the probability to complete primary education once started) multiplied by transition rate to lower secondary (proxy for the probability to continue to lower secondary once completed primary)
Over the years, political commitments to the EFA movement have increased substantially across countries, with governments recognizing the critical role of education in their socio-economic development, social cohesion and national prosperity. This is reflected in the increased spending on education as a percentage of the total government expenditure in East Asia and South and West Asia during the financial crisis. Furthermore, regional and national partnerships are emerging across the region, bringing established and new partners to support the EFA movement.

Table 1: Total public expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure (2007 and 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America and Western Europe</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and West Asia</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GMR 2009 and 2011.

Countries are also increasingly engaged in carrying out the monitoring, evaluation and assessment of EFA progress. Recognizing the need for disaggregated data, countries are designing and strengthening their EMIS systems (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 2, forthcoming). The Asia-Pacific EFA Mid-Decade Assessment (MDA) undertaken in 2006-2007 by UNESCO has been instrumental in building country ownership and national capacity for EFA monitoring and assessment.

**EFA Goal 3: Life Skills and Lifelong Learning**

The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action specified Goal 3 as: “Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.” In the years following 2000, these words have spawned a range of interpretations. The 2003 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) focused on the ill-defined concept of ‘life skills.’ But the following year’s GMR changed direction, focusing instead on the equally vague phrase ‘learning needs of young people and adults’ (UNESCO Bangkok, 2011). A lack of consensus continues to plague Goal 3 to this day. The authors of the 2011 GMR stated that the goal “combined a high level of ambition with a low level of detail. Monitoring progress is difficult, not least because of the absence of quantifiable targets” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 54).
Challenges of definition notwithstanding, the core principles of Goal 3 are fundamental to the Education for All agenda: the learning needs of young people and adults, if met, are vital for their life and work.

The learning needs of young people and adults cannot be confined to the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy knowledge. These are better acquired at the education levels beyond primary schooling and involve life and work skills development, be they at formal, non-formal and informal settings. Gross enrolment ratios in secondary education have increased across the region since the turn of the century. East Asia and the Pacific exhibited a jump in gross enrolment ratio (GER) from 63% in 2000, to 80% in 2010; the gross enrolment ratio in South and West Asia has risen from 46% to 59% over the same time period. Individual countries have made corresponding strides: Cambodia nearly tripled its enrolment over the ten year span, although with the GER in 2010 at 46.2%, many students remain out of secondary school; countries such as Bhutan, China, India, and Indonesia also made dramatic increases to their enrolment figures. Figure 5 displays the change in secondary enrolment from 2000 to 2010 for selected Asia-Pacific countries and territories.

Figure 5: Gross secondary enrolment ratios by country, 2000 and 2010


Since 1998, UNESCO Bangkok has been promoting community learning centres (CLC) to directly address these challenges. CLCs aim to entrench learning opportunities in community life by exploiting local resources and delegating responsibilities to local managers. According to available data, as of 2009, CLC programmes have been introduced in more than 24 Asia-Pacific countries. The scope of these programmes varies throughout the region: Thailand has over 9,000 CLCs, whereas Kazakhstan has only seven. Depending on countries, community learning centres (CLCs) design and implement programmes such as literacy, life skills training, basic education equivalency, income generation training, ECCE, as well as drug and disease awareness campaigns. Because rapid expansion of the number of CLCs can sacrifice quality, a set of standards and a system for quality assurance need to be developed in those countries (UNESCO, 2012a). UNESCO Bangkok annually organizes a CLC regional conference with more than 25 countries to exchange innovative approaches and methodologies.

There are promising signs that a move towards consensus building is under way, both in terms of education interventions for students and health interventions for high risk populations. A focus on standardization is also visible in UNESCO’s Asia-Pacific Regional Strategic Framework for HIV and AIDS, Adolescent Reproductive and School Health, an initiative dedicated to “improving coordination and strategic information and enhancing jointly agreed standards of quality for HIV prevention programmes for those most at risk of HIV […]” (UNESCO, 2009, p. 5).
The final element of Goal 3, as described in the Dakar Framework, is a declaration that: “All young people should be given the opportunity for on-going education. For those who drop out of school or complete school without acquiring the literacy, numeracy and life skills they need, there must be a range of options for continuing their learning. Such opportunities should be both meaningful and relevant to their environment and needs, help them become active agents in shaping their future and develop useful work-related skills” (UNESCO, 2000, p. 16). This aspect of the goal is often measured by participation in both formal and non-formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes.

Identifying a trend in technical and vocational education participation is difficult. Since 2000, there is no evidence that participation in TVET programmes has much increased in the Asia and the Pacific region as elsewhere in other regions. Countries seem to have succeeded in strengthening TVET programme standards, quality assurance and relevance, rather than increasing enrolment in this subsector.

A growing number of countries in the region have either established, or are in the process of establishing some form of national qualifications framework (NQF) as a means of ensuring the consistency and equivalence of academic and vocational qualification systems. The NQF development in Asia-Pacific has been led by Australia and New Zealand since the 1990s, and more countries in the region have since introduced qualifications that are related to competency standards. Another important initiative is the development of the ASEAN Regional Qualifications Framework, which came about due to the need for governments to develop common and transparent regional standards to enhance student and labour mobility and to facilitate the integration of national and international labour markets. Since 2009, UNESCO has worked with the Lao government and the Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Centre (ESQAC) to develop a quality assurance system for TVET. This partnership culminated in the 2011 publication of the first ever quality assurance manual in TVET. It is hoped that the document will precipitate a move towards coordinated monitoring and evaluation efforts in the region. UNESCO Bangkok has also produced the publication School-to-Work Transition Information Bases with a view to promote robust information systems to guide policymakers, planners and managers in making their TVET systems more responsive.

With regards to TVET, the region has seen a growing interest in the “vocationalization” of secondary education. UNESCO Bangkok is undertaking a study to examine countries that have vocationalized secondary education, including China, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Uzbekistan. A regional meeting will be held and a synthesis report will be produced by the end of 2012.

Given that many Member States in the region have already achieved universal primary education, they now face challenges in extending access and increasing the quality of secondary education as well as mobilizing adequate resource allocations. In 2011, UNESCO Bangkok conducted a survey and a desk review on financing of secondary education in the region to collect more refined data at the country level and to better understand different country contexts. A meeting was held on the issue, where participants exchanged and discussed good practices on how to finance secondary education—including decentralization of governance, formula funding methods, optimizing current activities and cost-sharing with households and the private sector. A regional synthesis report on the topic will be published.

EFA Goal 4: Improving Adult Literacy

In her message on International Literacy Day this year, Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, reiterated that “literacy is a fundamental human right, and the foundation of all education and lifelong

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6 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002166/216661e.pdf
7 Vocationalized secondary education can also include more cohesive ways of delivering TVET such as providing both general and vocational streams in the same school premises, allowing students to easily switch streams without the necessity of transferring to another school).
learning. Literacy transforms the lives of people, allowing them to make informed choices and empowering individuals to become agents of change.”

EFA Goal 4 aims to cut these numbers by: “achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access and basic continuing education for all adults.” In contrast to other EFA goals, progress towards the literacy goal has been disappointing. Asia-Pacific remains home to 506 million adults who are illiterate. Fifty-eight per cent of the world’s illiterate people live in just 5 Asian countries: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 4, forthcoming).

The global adult literacy rate was 81.9% at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To reach the EFA Goal 4, this must be raised to 90.3% by 2015, requiring a 9.1 percentage point increase. In light of recent trends, this challenge may be daunting; the world’s literacy rate increased by only 2.2 percentage points from 2000 to 2010. Although the literate share of the population has been increasing steadily across all sub-regions, progress has failed to keep pace with population growth; the total number of illiterate people in the world has decreased since 2000 by 7.5 million. But, the illiterate population has risen in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 4, forthcoming).

**Figure 6: Progress towards EFA literacy goal in selected Asian and Pacific countries, 2005–2009**


Figure 6 illustrates progress towards the EFA literacy goal in selected Asia-Pacific countries. Based on their current level of achievement, countries fall roughly into 3 categories: countries exhibiting high, medium and low adult literacy rates.

The first group contains 11 countries that had greater than 90% adult literacy rates in 2009. Of these, 9 are very close to achieving EFA Goal 4; the remaining 3 countries, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand have made great progress but need to scale up efforts if they are to reach the goal by 2015.

The second group contains five countries whose literacy rate is between 77 and 86%. Among them, the Solomon Islands and the Islamic Republic of Iran will probably fulfil their EFA literacy goals. On the other hand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vanuatu need to speed up literacy actions in the coming years.

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The third group includes eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste) that exhibit low literacy rates and very little recent progress. Unless universalization of primary education and the spread of adult literacy are accelerated in these countries, they are likely to miss their 2015 EFA literacy target. Members of this group have been unable to overcome a very low base literacy level at the time when the EFA goals were set in 2000. Countries at risk of missing the EFA literacy goal must identify breakthrough solutions to overcoming the obstacles preventing individuals from achieving literacy.

National-level analysis shows that gender represents a significant barrier to literacy in Asia-Pacific countries. Disparities in adult literacy rates range from 0.8 percentage points in favour of women in the Philippines and Mongolia, to over 25 percentage points in favour of men in Pakistan. Along with Pakistan, Cambodia and Nepal each have gender gaps greater than 15 percentage points in favour of men.

In addition to gender, inequalities in literacy exist along lines of socio-economic status, geography, ethnicity, and language (see Box 3). Only by overcoming these obstacles can countries reach literacy targets for 2015. EFA Goal 4 is indeed “a huge but not impossible task” (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 4, forthcoming, p. 51). Governments will need to strengthen their literacy policies, and speed up deployment, if they are to reach the millions of illiterate people in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Box 3: Language as a Barrier to Literacy**

In Lao PDR in 2006, the literacy rate was 75.7% among persons living with heads of household whose mother tongue was the national language – Lao. Literacy levels were much lower among other linguistic groups: Khamu (47.5%), H’mong (38.8%) and only 34.5% among other language speakers.

**Literacy rate, by mother tongue of household head in Lao PDR, 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Status</th>
<th>Mother tongue of household head</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>Khamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Lao Statistics Bureau, Lao PDR, 2006.*

Despite the challenges that envelope EFA Goal 4, many countries in the region are actively participating in the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), and the Capacity Building for Education for All (CapEFA), all of which have created a new momentum for the promotion of literacy and lifelong learning.

To promote literacy in a sustained manner, appropriate national policies and strong political commitment are essential. In view of this, the region has seen greater drive towards the development of national policies and strategies that link literacy with poverty-reduction and other development initiatives such as skills training and income generation. Both LIFE and UNLD have contributed significantly to the promotion of political commitment and policy development for literacy. Consequently, literacy programmes in the region have assumed diverse, flexible and needs-based characteristics. Locally adapted initiatives are being implemented, as can be seen in some countries where mother-tongue based literacy initiatives are under implementation to reach the marginalized ethnic minority populations. The High Level International Round Table on Literacy: “Reaching the 2015 Literacy Target: Delivering on the promise”, was held on 6-7 September 2012 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France. From Asia and the Pacific, 11 countries,
Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, participated to develop the national action plan to accelerate towards EFA Goal 4.

As mentioned earlier, the region has witnessed the rise of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) as ‘venues’ that provide local communities with learning opportunities and community-development programmes. In recent years, CLC networks have emerged both at the national and regional levels to promote exchange and sharing of practices amongst CLCs. The community learning centre model has proven to be effective in providing literacy and community education programmes at the grassroots level.

**EFA Goal 5: Eliminating gender disparity and achieving gender equality in education**

The EFA goal 5 set at the Dakar conference was, “eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education *2005* and achieving gender equality in education by *2015*”. The removal of gender disparity is a prerequisite for achieving gender equality, a much broader concept.

Gender parity aims to provide equal access to education for boys and girls. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) of the East Asia and the Pacific region, which calculates the female-to-male ratio of enrolment, was 0.89 in 1990 when taking both primary and secondary education into account for the entire region. This number increased to 0.97 in 2000 and 1.02 in 2010 (UNESCO, 2011).

At first glance, these numbers imply a successful achievement of gender parity. But disparities within sub-regions, as well as within countries, remain a concern. Parity in enrolment at the national level does not necessarily mean that no disparities exist in the provincial and local levels. For example, in one province boys might be significantly disadvantaged, while in a neighbouring province the bias may be against girls.

Another disparity emerges when viewing gender parity at separate levels. In some countries, girls are under-represented in primary education while boys are under-represented at the secondary level due to factors beyond access, such as drop-out rates and issues with transition. This is the case in Mongolia, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam. Some points in Figure 7 displays how overall GPI can be misleading without taking separate levels of education into account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GPI Primary</th>
<th>GPI Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macao, SAR of China</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran, Islamic Rep. of</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender equality goes beyond simply providing equal access to education for students of both genders. A country may be on the path to achieving equal enrolment figures between genders, but more steps need to
be taken in order to address social inequalities within the classroom. The differential treatment of boys and girls shown by teachers can affect student learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2008).

To encourage gender equality in the classroom, it is important to eliminate gender disparities in teaching and leadership positions in the education system. Teaching in primary education is highly feminized, while male teachers often make up a higher percentage of the teaching force at the secondary level. Such is the case in Indonesia, where females make up more than half of the primary teaching staff and less than half of the secondary teaching staff (UNESCO, 2008).

The importance of achieving gender equality stretches far beyond the classroom. Education, alongside a range of societal factors, is the foundation for obtaining a career. As long as gender disparities occur in education, they will continue to exist in employment as well. As of 2008, women in the Asia-Pacific region were more likely than men to be unemployed (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 5, forthcoming). Studies reveal that women tend to face more vulnerable employment circumstances, have higher rates of part-time work, and receive lower wages (even in comparable roles) (UNGEI, 2012). In the developing world (including in the Asia-Pacific region) women are also believed to constitute the majority of the informal labour market, which comes with attendant implications for labour standards and access to social protections linked to employment status (UNESCAP, 2010a).

Although more women than men move on to tertiary education, in 2008, less than 20% of graduates in engineering, manufacturing and construction throughout East Asia and the Pacific were female (UNICEF, 2009a). An effort to alter gendered perceptions of skills and professions among all people involved in the education system is contingent upon eliminating gender stereotyping and questioning normative gender roles. Through this process, gender equality in education can become a means for achieving gender equality through education.

A myriad of factors underlie unemployment and gendered perceptions of skills and professions. Among them are inadequate job and skills training programmes for girls and women. Girls and young women are often not accessing programmes (e.g. skills training, apprenticeships) that can equip them with employable skills, and it is important to understand why (UNGEI, 2012). Similarly, the different career interests and choices of girls/women compared with boys/men merit deeper analysis to assess how education systems and structures may be influencing these choices. It is also important to examine the disparities in learning achievement between boys and girls. In the PISA 2009 reading assessment (15-year olds), girls outperformed boys in every participating country by an average of 39 PISA score points.

At the same time, boys tend to outperform girls in mathematics (by an average of 12 PISA score points in the PISA 2009 mathematics assessment) and science subjects, and to opt for careers in fields such as computing and engineering (Borgonovi and Jakubowski, 2011). These differing patterns of achievement may also play a role in perpetuating gender inequality in society as a whole. To better understand disparities in access to skills/job training, career orientation and learning achievement, UNESCO Bangkok will be undertaking a research initiative in partnership with the Korean Women’s Development Institute (KWDI) during 2013-2015.

**EFA Goal 6: Quality Education**

While progress is being made in regards to enrolment, gender parity, and literacy, there is little evidence to suggest quality in education has improved in the Asia-Pacific region. This is due in part to the ambiguity of EFA goal six: “improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all”.

However, what is evident is the growing interest around the world in the issue of learning and in specific areas such as measurement of learning outcomes and learning of 21st century skills. Increasingly, governments in the region are focusing their attention on the learning that happens, or does not happen, in
the classroom and in schools. For example, both the Prime Minister’s Science Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) in Australia and the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) in the Republic of Korea have both been actively considering how learning works, and what it entails.\(^9\) Concern in this area has also been echoed at the highest levels including by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon whose new “Education First” initiative includes improving the quality of learning as one of three priority areas.

Although instruction time, pupil-teacher ratio, and availability of technology and textbooks are useful indicators of education quality, teachers are the most important tool in helping students succeed. The ability of certain countries in the region to recruit, train, and retain teachers has proven to be challenging. Simply obtaining a suitable number of teachers by 2015 remains a large concern in select countries throughout the region (see Box 4), and maintaining the quality of current and future teachers presents an additional problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 4: Addressing Teacher Shortages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 2006, UIS developed a forecasting model in order to project the global demand for primary teachers. Forecasts take into account indicators such as future school-aged population, current stock of teachers, and attrition rate, an estimated per cent increase in primary teachers needed on an annual basis was established for each observed country worldwide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Asia-Pacific region, the two most severe teacher gaps were found in Kazakhstan and Pakistan. In order to reach universal primary education by 2015, the countries would require an annual expansion in teaching forces of over 3 percentage points each year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: UIS eAtlas Projecting Teacher Demand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Minimum education and training qualifications for obtaining teaching jobs range between countries in the region, as well as between levels. Enforcement of these standards, however, is a universal issue that needs to be addressed in several countries. The change in proportion of trained teachers from 2000 to 2010 has been modest, with only Cambodia, Fiji, Iran, Mongolia, Myanmar, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam having 98% or more primary teachers trained (see the Statistical annex).

In addition to pedagogical training, there is evidence pointing to a need for building teachers’ knowledge of the subject matter they teach. Figure 8 displays a positive correlation between teacher and pupil provincial mean scores in grade 5 math in Viet Nam.

Figure 8: Correlation between teacher and pupil provincial mean scores in grade 5 mathematics in Viet Nam, 2004

Although Figure 8 only displays data from one country, issues with teachers’ knowledge of subject matter affect several countries throughout the region. In most developing countries in the region, teacher education systems are generally weak.

The increase in the number of countries from Asia-Pacific participating in large-scale international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in recent years is evidence of the interest and commitment to monitor the quality of schools (Table 2).

### Table 2: Trends in participation in major international assessments by countries in Asia-Pacific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam</th>
<th>PISA</th>
<th>TIMSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of participating countries/jurisdictions in Asia-Pacific region</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning outcomes are quantified in order to measure the success of teachers and other factors affecting students’ performance in the classroom. Figure 9 displays the performance of children in the 2009 PISA from thirteen Asia-Pacific countries in reading, math, and science.

As shown in Figure 9, Shanghai (China) scored the highest in the world by a wide margin. Australia, Hong Kong (China), Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and Singapore also returned favourable results. However, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Thailand all scored well below average in all three subjects. Stagnating improvement in learning outcomes for developing countries is a major concern.

A 2011 survey administered in the region showed that while many governments were interested in measuring learning outcomes, and recognized it as an important process, they admitted that a crucial lack
of knowledge and capacity to monitor education quality was limiting their efforts to monitor learning
outcomes of students in their countries. To this end, UNESCO’s Regional Bureau in Bangkok has been
involved in capacity building activities, research undertakings and publications such as booklets in its Asia-
Pacific Education System Review Series on *Examination Systems* and *Student Learning Assessment*.10 In
addition, there has been interest expressed in increased regional and sub-regional collaboration on
assessment issues, as evidenced by the nascent South Asia regional initiative on measuring learning
outcomes.11

Essential life skills, especially new and emerging skills and competencies needed for students to be work-
ready and future-ready, are not firmly established in formal education systems. Currently, only certain
Member States such as Japan and Singapore have begun integrating the teaching of such skills in the
national curriculum through such reforms as the *ikiru chikara* (Zest for Living) and the 21st-century
competencies framework respectively. In recent years, research interest has grown in regard to
empowering students through skills including collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, and social and
cultural competencies, as well as measuring the learning of these skills. This includes work done by the
Assessment and Teaching of 21st-Century Skills (ATC21S), headquartered in Australia, and the Korea
Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE). UNESCO regional bureau in Bangkok recognizes the impact
of general development trends on educational quality and proactively addresses relevant issues. This can
be illustrated by the 2012 UNESCO-KEDI regional policy seminar, where policy-makers and researchers
came together to discuss migration and its implications for education policy-making.

3. Accelerating Progress towards 2015

3.1 Marginalized groups in the Asia-Pacific region

As the EFA target year approaches, it is imperative for countries to focus their efforts and resources on
reaching the unreached. Past reviews in the region, including the EFA MDA (2006-2007) and Mid-Term
Review (2007-2008), have confirmed that marginalization has been the key reason for holding back
progress towards achieving the EFA goals. The first step in accelerating progress towards EFA is identifying
who these groups are, where they are, and why existing policies are not effective in targeting them. In the
region, the most excluded groups are rural and remote populations; ethnic/linguistic, religious and
indigenous groups; migrants, internally displaced persons, refugees and stateless persons; persons affected
by HIV and AIDS; women and girls; street children/slum dwellers; the extremely poor; children affected by
natural disasters; and other groups such as orphans, nomadic populations, working children, and persons
discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.

3.2 Obstacles in the Asia-Pacific region

The road to EFA acceleration in the region is beset by multiple obstacles and challenges. It is critical that
each country analyzes its unique and specific obstacles and challenges to be able to tackle them.

**Socio-cultural, Economic and Geographical Obstacles**

Many socio-cultural, economic and geographical obstacles prevent children from joining schools and
learning. In some parts of Asia, there is a history of social exclusion of certain social groups and castes from
education. In particular, the education of girls is valued less than that of boys. In parts of South Asia so-
called ‘untouchable’ groups face severe discrimination and are excluded from the school system. In certain
countries in the region, linguistic/ethnic minorities face significant obstacles to learning. Often, they are
denied the opportunity to learn in their own languages. Poverty continues to be a major obstacle to

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10 See [http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001878/187826e.pdf](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001878/187826e.pdf) and

11 UNESCO New Delhi (2012). Draft Workshop Report: Consultative Workshop on Education Outcomes in South Asia, 7th and 8th
December 2011.
participation. Children with physical disabilities face more restricted opportunities because of the lack of inclusive education policies and social stigmatization. In addition, in some countries armed conflicts and natural disasters affect access to services, including education. Exclusion is the product of many interrelated factors. Policies need to address underlying causes such as social inequalities, gender disparities, ethnic and linguistic disadvantages and gaps between geographic regions.

**Lack of Data and Tracking Systems**
A major challenge in reaching excluded groups is the absence of reliable data, disaggregated by gender, economic status, disability, ethnicity, location, language and a number of other attributes. Most countries do not have the mechanisms to generate disaggregated information. In cases where data is available, central and local planners may not have the capacity to analyze and use it in planning and many systems do not gather and analyze information regarding student performance. In some countries, the national definitions of ‘marginalized’ and ‘disadvantaged’ groups do not capture the broad spectrum of marginalization. Data gaps can be even more serious in countries facing civil conflicts or natural disasters. Children who travel with their migrant families are often hard to track or simply ignored.

**Poor Governance**
Good governance is critical in creating enabling conditions for addressing marginalization. Some examples of poor governance include large funding gaps in provision of services to poor areas, services that are unaffordable for the poor, mismanagement and diversion of funds, teacher absenteeism, school management that is unresponsive and unaccountable to local communities, and ineffective parental and community participation in school management. Some countries in the region lack ownership of educational development as well as institutional capacity to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate educational policies and programmes. In particular, those who work at the district, local or community level are seldom provided sufficient support and capacity in the planning and management of education provision. In some countries, governments have yet to adopt innovative mechanisms and broad-based public-private partnerships to allow CSOs, NGOs, faith-based organizations, community groups, and the private sector to become involved in the provision and financing of education. Lack of accountability systems, transparency, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms and social audit provision also make it difficult to monitor the distribution and use of resources.

**Weak Analytical and M&E Capacity**
Education ministries lack the built-in system of creating knowledge about what works and what does not work in terms of improving schooling and improving student learning. Many countries seriously lack analytical capacity to carefully measure how various education interventions and strategies are increasing participation in education and address the critical impediments to quality learning. Policy decisions are often made without strong evidence. Limited allocations on policy research and development, lack of trained personnel, overreliance on external consultants and weak capacity of national research institutions contribute to weak analytical capacity.

**Funding Gaps and Inefficient Allocation of Existing Funds**
There are serious funding gaps in some countries in the region which make it difficult to further accelerate progress. Some countries in the region spend close to 6% of gross national product (GNP), whereas others spend less than 3% (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 2, forthcoming and UNESCO, 2012). Pakistan for example, has globally the second largest number of out-of-school children in primary education – 7.3 million children in 2009 (UIS, 2011) – yet its spending on education is less than 3% of GNP. There are countries where higher education receives more funding than primary education. The way available funds are distributed, managed and used has implications for quality learning outcomes. In most countries, a large share of the education budget goes to teacher salary, with limited budget available for meeting non-salary expenditures such as teaching learning materials, teacher training, library development and ICT based education (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 2, forthcoming).
3.3 What is realistically possible?

To address the remaining obstacles, countries can look to the following feasible strategies:

- **Enactment of Acts and other legal frameworks**: There is increasing realization that addressing exclusion requires enforcement of legal processes. Countries are taking measures to make primary education free by abolishing formal and informal fees.
- **Improving governance systems and adequacy of financing mechanisms**.
- **Strengthening data systems**: Many countries are seeking to strengthen their data systems to identify and track children and youth at the risk of exclusion. National surveys and monitoring systems are being put in place to ensure that government initiatives are reaching the poor. It is important to strengthen national capacity in using data for policy formulation and learning enhancement.
- **Proper targeting of excluded groups**: Some countries have committed to formulate more targeted interventions in an attempt to reach and protect excluded groups.
- **Capacity building in evidence-based policy making and education planning**: Good analytical capacity is crucial for evidence-based policy making and education planning. Some countries are committed to building sustainable and institutional capacity in their own countries and reducing technical dependence on external partners. UNESCO Bangkok has been actively supporting those countries through capacity development activities.
- **Alternative schooling**: Governments are increasingly committed to initiating and scaling up alternative provision of learning in order to reach the unreached.
- **Institutionalizing CLCs**: Countries are taking steps towards institutionalization of CLCs into the education system to help meet the diverse learning needs of different types of learners at the community level.
- **Mobilization and diversification of domestic and external resources**: Some governments have shown commitment to mobilizing additional resources for EFA through internal and external resources. National capacity in efficient allocation, management and use of resources should be enhanced for better results.
- **Very few of the major issues surrounding EFA can be tackled within education alone**. Progress in EFA depends on the progress in other sectors. Hence, countries are increasingly recognizing the need for multi-sectoral interventions involving education, health, labour and women’s affairs. In particular, ECCE, gender equality, life skills and quality issues call for holistic and multi-sectoral interventions.

3.4 What regional approaches are taken into account for accelerating progress?

A number of regional approaches are being undertaken to accelerate progress:

- The Regional Bureau in Bangkok has developed its Education Support Strategy 2010-2013 that outlines the programmatic priorities and strategic directions for achieving EFA and moving beyond. The strategy emphasizes looking farther than notion of basic education linked to EFA by tackling emerging educational needs of the region, such as skills development, higher education and effective use of ICTs.
- In order to support countries to adopt a holistic/systems approach to educational reform, EFA planning and implementation, UNESCO Bangkok created the Education System Profile (ESP) in 2010. This provides a one-stop-shop overview and comparison of education systems in the region, including structure, priorities and policies.
- UNESCO Bangkok supported governments in identifying financing gaps which were contributing to them lagging behind EFA goals and targets and devising innovative, sustainable policies and strategies to achieve them (Cambodia, Mongolia, Viet Nam)
- UNESCO Bangkok is developing a toolkit to support education planning at the local level (micro planning) to strengthen local stakeholders’ planning and delivery capacity.
Regional cooperation can make a substantial contribution to reducing differences in EFA progress between countries. Actions at both the regional and sub-regional levels will be needed – facilitated by regional and sub-regional comparative analysis and benchmarking – to help lagging countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The World Bank’s Systems Approach for Better Educational Results (SABER), first pilot-tested in collaboration with UNESCO Bangkok in 14 economies in East Asia in 2010/11, provides an important platform and comparative framework in response to such demand.

Action needs to be taken to strengthen the institutional and individual capacity of education systems ranging from policy makers, to administrators, managers and teachers to ensure better education services are provided to all. This can be achieved through sensitization, dissemination of best practices and lessons (e.g. through news articles, newsletters, regional syntheses of issues and lessons of common topics).

Innovative solutions and acceleration programmes to reach the last 5 per cent
The following innovative solutions have been introduced or are being explored to reach the unreached and marginalized groups in education.

Education policies and strategies: In addition to passing and implementing more targeted policies and strategies to reach the unreached and overcome challenges in EFA, countries’ capacity for policy development is being strengthened to develop interventions and policies that can be integrated into the broader national policies. ECCE policies are moving towards a holistic approach, as governments are more cognizant of the need to address the health and well-being of young children. Several countries have national policies or laws concerning early childhood. As part of ECCE policy, Malaysia establishes KEMAS pre-schools, which are located in rural and suburban areas and are set up at the request of the local community. As part of Viet Nam’s Education Law 2005, the country prioritizes the construction of adequately equipped kindergartens and classes in remote and ethnic minority areas. In China, literacy policies and strategies for ethnic minorities and women are enforced and implemented by 12 ministries, and led by the MOE (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 4, forthcoming). Meanwhile, literacy policies in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal and Thailand encourage local participation and link literacy promotion with strategies to reduce poverty. To improve students’ learning outcomes, there is growing attention given to strengthening student assessment systems, as manifested in policies, practices and instruments to derive and use information on learning and achievement (UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF, draft EDN 6, forthcoming).

Private sector involvement: Increasingly, countries in the region are encouraging the involvement of private sector in the provision of education. As a result of liberal policy, the affordable private school movement is gaining momentum in the region. As a result, the proportion of enrolment in private schools is quite high in some low income countries like Bangladesh (40%) and Pakistan (31%), whereas it is around 18% in Thailand and 10% in Nepal.

Public-private partnerships: A number of public-private partnership models have emerged in the region in an effort to better serve the unreached groups. The Government of the Philippines uses an Education Service Contracting scheme in which private schools are encouraged to enrol children when public schools run out of space. In Pakistan, under a scheme local NGOs are allowed to manage public schools and in return enjoy public funds. The 2009 Right to Education Act in India requires all private schools to open up at least 25% of the total admissions to children associated with disadvantaged groups. Nepal piloted voluntary transfer of school management of public schools to school management committees.

Use of ICTs: In recent years, there have been numerous attempts to promote the educational use of ICTs in the region. In Pakistan, mobile phones have been used to promote literacy. In Bangladesh, rural teachers are provided in-service training and support through mobile phones. In India, the Tata Computer-Based Functional Literacy programme uses ICT to develop literacy. Reading skills are taught using computer
software, animated graphics and multimedia presentations. Nokia Bridge-It India Project supports teachers by increasing their access to educational contents through a simple mobile phone.

Legislative/legal frameworks: In the absence of legal measures to enforce the constitutional provision of free and compulsory schooling, many countries have not been able to increase student enrolment in primary school. India took a bold step by introducing the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009, which guarantees education for all children aged between 6 and 14 years. Similarly, Pakistan passed a constitutional amendment in 2010 to recognize access to free and compulsory education as a fundamental right of all children of age 5 to 16 years. These historical steps provide an important milestone, paving the way towards achievement of EFA Goals. Some countries have extended the duration of schooling or compulsory years.

Alternative schooling: In recent years, alternative schooling has been effective in reaching the excluded groups. Philippines’ Alternative Learning System, which is an equivalent and parallel delivery system of formal schooling, provides education to out-of-school youth, children living in remote areas and other marginalized groups. The ‘floating classrooms’ in Viet Nam provide schooling to children of fishing communities. In Bangladesh, ‘school boats’ provide education to a community that lives on boats in groups of ten to fifteen families. Teachers are recruited from the community and given basic training. Indonesia has also introduced community boat schools for children in fishing communities. Pakistan has planned to support 10,000 non-formal schools to reach the unreached. Lao PDR has piloted Mobile Teacher Programme in 114 remote villages that offer equivalent primary education. It is exploring possibilities of expanding this programme to another 119 remote villages. The Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education of UNESCO Bangkok is associated with this programme.

Boarding schools: Children of remote and rural populations in Nepal, China, India, Viet Nam, Mongolia and countries of Central Asia have benefitted from education in boarding schools. In an attempt to effectively deploy resources and ensure the quality of educational services to rural children, China intends to replace small schools operating in rural, scattered areas with boarding schools in a phased manner. Nepal plans to establish boarding schools across the northern hilly districts. Boarding schools have been a major strategy to provide education to nomadic and rural populations in Mongolia and Central Asia.

Targeted interventions: Without targeted interventions, it is not possible to reach excluded groups. Under the Education Guarantee Scheme, the Government of India ensures that small and remote communities are provided with primary schools. The programme offers residential bridge courses, noon meals, scholarships, free textbooks and uniforms to make schools barrier free for children with special needs. In Nepal, a targeted scheme provides stipends to low-caste children and girls to enable them to attend school. Another targeted grant provides a cash transfer to children from households in which no member has completed a primary education. A nutrition project funded by the central government of China provides daily lunch to 26 million primary and middle school students in 700 counties. The Government of Laos targets the most educationally disadvantaged districts that are identified based on girls primary NER and female survival rate to grade 5.

Addressing teacher shortage: Countries in the region have adopted various measures to address teacher shortage. Many governments are hiring contract teachers or para-teachers who receive comparatively lower salaries than permanent teachers. In other countries additional benefits and incentives are offered to recruit new teachers. India has widely used para-teachers to meet teacher shortage. In 2005, there were estimated 500,000 para-teachers. China introduced the Special Teaching Post Plan for enhancing the rural teaching force under which graduates of universities are recruited to work in rural schools for three years in poor counties of western China. In Bangladesh, 60% of new teacher recruits are reserved for women candidates.
4. Preparation for Beyond 2015: Processes of Emerging Actions

Regional processes
UNESCO Bangkok, in its role as the Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, has commenced work to stimulate region-wide reflections and consultations on the future of education development and cooperation, in order to prepare regional contribution to the global debate around post-2015 agendas and their education-related goals. This process has been undertaken through, amongst others, organization of a series of regional dialogues, networking of regional education and research institutions, conducting and facilitation of analytical work.

The first regional high-level expert meeting on the future of education, ‘Towards EFA 2015 and Beyond – Shaping a new Vision of Education’ (Bangkok, May 2012), was organized with the support of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the regional UNICEF offices. Participants included government representatives, academia and research institutions, NGOs, international and regional organizations. This meeting was the starting point for further work in this area in the region, to be pursued jointly by all partners and stakeholders. The information contained in this chapter mainly stems from the outcomes of the meeting.

The second high-level expert meeting on the future of education ‘Beyond 2015 – rethinking learning in a changing world’ will be organized again in Bangkok on 26 – 28 November 2012. The meeting will discuss cutting-edge insights on learning from the perspectives of educationalists, learning scientists and economists as well as learning requirements for the future. It will develop recommendations on possible responses to these requirements and what may be required to build effective learning systems from a life-long learning perspective, as well as in view of the post-2015 agenda.

UNESCO Bangkok has been mobilizing its regional Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-net) to support reflection on the future of education. In a meeting organized in July 2012 in Bangkok, a panel on the 4 pillars of learning of the 1996 Delors report was featured as part of UNESCO’s ongoing work to re-examine the continued relevance of the report as well as in recognition of the growing importance of learning for education for the future and the post 2015 agenda. The topic of learning and more specifically ‘Learning to Live Together’ will also be the focus of the upcoming APEID Conference, to be held in November 2012 in Bangkok.

As recommended by the aforementioned May meeting on Towards EFA 2015 and Beyond, the process of formulating post 2015 goals for the Asia-Pacific region requires wide consultative agenda-setting processes at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels which should be inclusive and bring in voices from a range of stakeholders including civil society, youth, students, parents and teachers and representatives of marginalized groups. In this view, UNESCO Bangkok has started to initiate to bring in voices from young people from the region, starting with an “Asia-Pacific Film/Article Contest: Better Learning, Better Life”. The contest is requesting young people from the region to provide their thoughts and ideas on what kind of learning is required to provide them with the skills needed for an increasingly connected and constantly changing world. The winning video and articles will be featured at the November meeting on Beyond 2015 – Rethinking Learning in a Changing World.

An important component of the work towards developing a post 2015 agenda is research and analytical work. Some desk research has commenced on Learning to Live Together, which will also feed into the reflections on the future of education and further studies are planned to be initiated as a follow-up to the high-level expert meeting on Beyond 2015 - Rethinking Learning in a Changing World.

Partnerships
Key partners collaborating with UNESCO in the development of a post 2015 agenda have so far been UNICEF, Japan, Republic of Korea, Thailand, academia, research institutions and research networks such as ERI-net, and regional NGOs. Other international organizations including the World Bank, ILO, FAO and
regional agencies such as ADB and SEAMEO have been associated to the process in the region. In the future, partnerships will be broadened to include a wider range of stakeholders.

Approach to the development of a post 2015 agenda and a new vision for education for the region
The reflections on a possible future education agenda must be based on a comprehensive and robust assessment of past experiences and building on lessons learnt. Moreover, the future of education and any post 2015 agenda cannot be discussed in isolation and should be seen within the broader development context as well as in relation to other global and regional development agendas and ongoing processes of consultation, dialogue and research initiated in this area. The following sections provide further information on what has transpired so far from discussion held in the region.

Which issues have been addressed in the discussion on the post 2015 agenda?
The following summarizes the discussion and key findings of the first high-level expert meeting, organized in May 2012, as well as the analytical work conducted so far by UNESCO Bangkok.

Achieving Education for All remains a key, yet unfinished agenda for basic education in the region; meeting its goals requires strengthened efforts including addressing persistent disparities between and within countries. Issues of particular concern are persistent disparities in access, participation and learning outcomes at various levels of education, particularly for the most vulnerable groups and minorities. At the same time, the future education development and cooperation agenda needs to go beyond current EFA goals. Key education issues such as learning, equity, teachers, and skills development should be areas of emphasis in post-2015 agendas. Education should be addressed across the life-cycle and future approaches to education need to be underpinned by a lifelong-learning approach.

The need to reflect the requirements of the changing world in discussion on post 2015 agenda for education
There is a need for rethinking learning and reorienting education in light of emerging trends and changing requirements of the broader socio-economic development in the discussion on the future of education. Much change has occurred since the establishment of both the EFA goals and the MDGs with serious ramifications for education. The Asia-Pacific region is characterized by rapid and dynamic economic growth and a growing number of middle-income countries, the deepening of trade, strengthened innovation and technological advancements. Progress in improving access and quality of education has contributed to economic and technological growth. However, despite these overall improvements, there are vast disparities between and within countries, and the highest prevalence of extreme poverty in the world is found in the Asia-Pacific region. This phenomenon has underscored the need for development models that incorporate a wider range of considerations as regards quality of life and respect for diversity. Education for the future requires revisiting the purpose of education from an ethical and social perspective, and not simply an economic one. A more appropriate model of human development would be one that is characterized by increased attention to social participation, equity and cultural diversity including the use of local languages, the inclusion of traditional knowledge as well as values, ethics and transparency in education policy and planning. These are key considerations for the Asia-Pacific region with its rich and diverse cultures.

In addition, societies in the Asia-Pacific region are rapidly changing. Ageing populations in some countries, youth bulges and large migrant populations in others raise questions of how education systems and policy responses should adapt to these changes. Population pressures and environmental challenges, including the prevalence of natural disasters, will require increased attention to education for sustainable development and consumption. Issues of globalization, compounded with the need to maintain regional and local identities, are also on the agenda. The ubiquity of technology has raised questions about how the education system should be reoriented. Increasing global competition has also intensified discussion on the role of education in not only responding to but leading social and economic change.
Implications for education for the future and the post 2015 agenda
Rethinking learning and reorienting education is needed to respond to the new skills and competencies required in light of rapidly changing and increasingly globalized economies, technological advances and increased labour mobility and migration. Education systems for the future should train learners to be innovative, able to adapt to and assimilate change and be able to continue learning. Young people require a new set of skills to be competent in the connected and constantly changing world which include critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication and technology literacy. The concept of lifelong learning therefore underpins future approaches to education policy. People will need not only to learn, but learn to continue learning, and to re-learn. Moreover, education for the future has to go beyond achieving knowledge and cognitive skills and to acquire non-cognitive skills and competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, and social and emotional development. Therefore, a new and broadened conceptualization of learning is required, which should be reflected in the discussion on the development of a possible post 2015 education agenda, and eventually the broader post 2015 agenda.

Considerations relative to possible post-2015 scenarios
During the May high-level expert meeting, participants discussed and formulated a few options on the form and content of the post-2015 agenda, which are summarized below.

How should education be situated within the broader development agenda/discourse?
Education should feature in any future development agenda on the basis both of its intrinsic value, as well as an enabling or facilitating factor for the achievement of other development goals. Increased attention should be given to the fact that there is cross-fertilization between education and other areas of development when progress in one area is both a condition and a contribution to progress in other areas.

Should there be an education-specific or a broader post-2015 agenda?
There must be both an education-specific development agenda beyond 2015 and explicit featuring and high-profiling of education in all development agendas. The need to maintain an education-specific agenda in any post-2015 international effort stems from the importance to retain the focus on the specific challenges facing the sector as well as in recognition of the unfinished goals of the EFA agenda. The explicit positioning of education within the definition of the broader development agendas beyond 2015 is required to put education high on policy agendas, given the fundamental role that education plays in achieving any other development goals.

Should there be a universal or a context-specific post-2015 agenda or both?
There is need for a universal agenda for education post-2015 which should be relevant to all countries, while ensuring that the processes for their implementation are context-specific, given that target-setting and approaches for implementation are best defined at the national level (with due consideration given to sub-national disparities).

What should be key areas of the post 2015 agenda?
There are several key areas which should be given special attention in both on-going work in EFA and the post 2015 education agenda. These are: quality, equity, learning, teachers, skills development, ECCE and post-basic education including higher education. Moreover, there is a need to adjust the approach to education and focus on:

- Widening the scope of measurements and moving toward the use of output and outcome indicators;
- Strengthening education from the systemic perspective, rather than focusing only on sub-sectoral issues;
- Adopting a broader and more holistic view of education and training, with quality of learning outcomes at its heart; and
• Ensuring a shift in focus from schooling to increased attention on learning; from time-bound education concept to a lifelong learning perspective; and from a purely economic/utilitarian perception of education to a more humanistic one.

5. Next steps

Quality of education and learning as well as equity in education have been identified as key concerns that must be addressed not only within the framework of the present education agenda, also to feature predominately in future education agendas. The issue of quality education and learning has also increasingly been recognized as a core theme in the global discussions on the role of education in post-2015 agendas as well as in the context of UNESCO’s on-going efforts to stimulate reflections on education for the future and the development of a post-2015 education agenda. This will be reflected in UNESCO Bangkok’s future work on post 2015 and education for the future.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis presented in this report, the Asia-Pacific region has made significant advancement towards attainment of the six EFA goals. There is, in particular, visible progress in three of the six areas - universalization of primary education, gender parity at primary level, and expansion of early childhood care and education. Progress remains uneven across goals, social groups, geographical locations, income levels and gender. Due to multiple disadvantages and discrimination a significant number of children from ethnic/linguistic minorities, migrant children, children with disabilities and children in difficult circumstances are still outside the school system. The region is lagging behind the EFA literacy target, despite marked improvements in some countries. So too is progress in skills development. Despite national efforts to improve conditions in schools, quality continues to be the biggest challenge. Children are not learning enough and there are serious discrepancies in the quality of education children receive. Addressing disparities in learning outcomes is the key challenge for countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in all low and middle income countries.

Building on the achievements made so far and taking account of the short timeframe available, countries in the region, especially underperforming education systems, are advised to take the following steps to accelerate progress in order to achieve the EFA goals:

• Heightening the sense of urgency and placing greater priority on a collective effort to speeding up progress towards meeting the EFA goals by 2015;

• Increasing commitments to equity and inclusion through measures such as better targeted funding and interventions, accounting and tracking, public-private partnerships, coordinated multisectoral efforts and alternative education arrangements to better serve marginalized and excluded groups;

• Adopt and implement legislation and policies that support the expansion of pre- and post-primary education with targeted policies to help marginalized groups successfully transition from home to primary school and from primary to lower secondary education;

• Scaling up support to local stakeholders, through strong capacity building of subnational service providers in planning and management, improved local governance and strengthened school leadership;

• Strengthening the emphasis on learning through improved teaching and learning conditions, learning assessment and increased monitoring and accountability;
• Improving the supply and quality of teachers through better teacher policies, especially improved recruitment and deployment strategies, standardization and regulation of teacher qualifications, more attractive incentives, improved working conditions, creative teacher development/training strategies, teacher performance monitoring schemes; and

• Improving knowledge management with the increased national capacity to analyse deep-rooted problems of marginalization and exclusion and formulate inclusive and equitable educational policies and strategies, including capacity in planning, management and data systems.

While the region is NOT on track to achieve EFA in its entirety, national and international efforts over the last 12 years have provided impetus for creating varying degrees of ownership of the EFA goals at the national level. Education, in particular EFA, forms the core of national development strategies and countries are taking steps to increase funding for educational development. New national (e.g., Education Sector Working Groups, Local Education Group, Education Journalists’ Group) and regional partnerships and alliances (e.g., UNGEI, ARNEC, MLE–WG, FASPPED\textsuperscript{12}) have been established to support EFA. Particular to Asia-Pacific, there has been increased involvement of parliamentarians (FASPPED) and civil society in pushing the EFA agenda forward.

Throughout the region, there is unprecedented recognition of the crucial role of education for addressing development challenges. The recent launch of the UN Secretary-General’s “Education First” initiative will further enhance the region’s recognition of the instrumental role of education in development. There is mounting pressure on schools to perform and produce results in terms of student learning. A new awareness is emerging of the need to place ‘learning’ at the heart of education and to focus on developing cognitive capacities as well as on building character. The importance of early years in shaping these capacities is gaining greater recognition in the region.

Beyond EFA and its deadline, there is heightened interest in the road map for the post-2015 period and moving towards a unified vision for education taking into account new realities and trends. The Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in UNESCO Bangkok is strategically positioned to lead the shaping of educational development and cooperation in the region and support Member States to reform their education systems in convergence with the requirements of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

\textsuperscript{12} Forum of Asia Pacific Parliamentarians for Education
References


