Asia-Pacific

Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries

■ Adolescent girls raise issues on school attendance during a community consultation in Nepal

ENSURING EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATION
LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

A Civil Society Spotlight Report on the SDG 4 Implementation Status in the Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), along with national education coalitions and other ASPBAE members across the Asia-Pacific region, have actively participated in the follow-up processes of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, specifically the Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 (SDG 4) on ***Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All.*** With SDG 4 being one of the goals up for review in the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), national and thematic regional spotlight reports were prepared to present the perspectives of civil society and the marginalised sectors on the status and implementation of the 2030 Education Agenda.

ASPBAE affirms the right of every individual to quality education and recognises the fundamental role of education and lifelong learning as key drivers of sustainable development. Education harnesses the full potential of every individual, to live in dignity and equality, ensuring personal fulfilment. It is a powerful tool that empowers all children, youth and adults with the relevant knowledge and skills for decent work and livelihood and a fulfilling life where prosperity is shared. It promotes social awareness, critical thinking, gender sensitivity, and respect for cultural diversity. ASPBAE firmly believes in the power of education as a critical agent for social change that contributes towards transforming our world to one that is just, inclusive, peaceful and resilient.

The year 2019 is an important landmark in the SDG 4 timeline because education will be reviewed for the first time during this year's HLPF. Moreover, the UN General Assembly, during its Summit Meeting in September 2019, will review the overall SDG progress and introduce key reforms to accelerate its implementation. ASPBAE recognises the central role played by education in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Agenda and in meeting all the SDG targets. Apart from SDG 4, the 2019 HLPF will also review five other goals under the theme, "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality." These goals are all strongly linked to education: Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Goal 17 (Partnership) is reviewed every year.

ASPBAE believes that civil society must actively engage in the SDG process since we all have a stake in making sure that all the goals and targets are realised by 2030. Drawing on the spotlight reports of various national education coalitions in the Asia-Pacific region, this report is ASPBAE's modest contribution to present the civil society analysis and perspective in the SDG/SDG 4 progress and implementation. At the same time, it highlights the concerns and aspirations of the most marginalised and excluded groups. In this regard, we urge the United Nations and all Member States to collectively reaffirm the earlier commitment made to reach the furthest behind first, ensuring that no one is left behind by 2030.

■ Preschool condition in Omelai, Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

SDG ROLLOUT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Four years after the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had been essentially rolled out in nearly all countries in the Asia-Pacific region, albeit at varying stages. In these countries, SDG committees had been set up, some at the highest level directly under the Office of the Prime Minister or President. Policy frameworks and implementation plans for the SDGs have been developed and, in most countries, have been integrated into and aligned with existing development plans, including the Education Sector Plans (ESP). Most countries have also developed their respective SDG indicators framework and have identified specific indicators that are applicable in their context.

Fourteen (14) Asia-Pacific countries have volunteered to report on the progress of their SDG implementation to the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).[1] Twenty-three (23) countries from the region have previously prepared and reported on their respective Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). This brings to a total of 34[2] of 52 countries in the region that would have reported on the SDG progress by the end of the 2019 HLPF – a notable accomplishment for the region.

The review of the SDG rollout in 16 countries[3] in the Asia-Pacific done by ASPBAE jointly with the national education coalitions in these countries showed the following findings:

- All countries reviewed have basically rolled out the SDGs and SDG 4
- SDG committees/working groups/task forces have been set up in all countries
- Five (5) of 16 countries reviewed had committees set up at the highest level, directly under the Office of the Prime Minister or President
- Twelve (12) of 16 countries reviewed have adopted a national SDG policy framework; four (4) with a clear and comprehensive implementation strategy and action plan
- The countries reviewed were in varying stages of aligning SDG 4 with their Education Sector Plans
- Most countries (14 of 16 countries) have developed their respective SDG indicator framework and corresponding SDG 4 indicators
- Education Ministries have been playing critical roles in the SDG 4 rollout; 7 of 12 Ministries have designated focal units/persons
- Only a few countries have legislation (4 of 16 countries), and with parliamentary committees on SDGs (3 of 16)
- Critical indicators were not included; most countries have no disaggregated data and no baseline; numerical targets are still being worked out
- Only five (5) of 16 countries have institutionalised Government-CSO coordination mechanisms on the SDGs/SDG 4
- Most countries have no clear estimate on the financial requirements for achieving SDG 4

In **Cambodia**, for example, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) led a task force of senior education officials, key line ministries, development partners, and civil society representatives to formulate the Cambodia Sustainable Development Goal 4 (CSDG4) Education 2030 Roadmap. This roadmap outlines the localised priorities and strategies to achieve the SDG 4 targets based on numerous consultations with education stakeholders at the national and provincial levels.

1 The High-level Political Forum is the main UN platform for the follow-up and review of the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitments made by Member States on the SDGs. The Ministerial segment of the Forum is highlighted by the presentations of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) by Member States who report on the SDG implementation. The VNRs are prepared officially by the governments on a voluntary basis to facilitate the sharing of experiences within and among countries, including the successes, challenges and lessons learned in the SDG implementation. The VNRs are presented by Member States during the annual HLPF held in New York around July of each year.

2 Three countries from the region will be reporting in 2019 for the second time.

3 ASPBAE jointly reviewed the SDG rollout with national education coalitions in 16 countries: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam.

The Government of **Timor-Leste**, shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, established the SDG Working Group directly under the office of the Prime Minister and mandated that the SDGs should be reflected in the annual plans and budgets. The SDGs processes in the country have been open to the participation of CSOs and other education stakeholders.

In **Bangladesh**, the Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) has developed the National Indicator Framework (NIF) for education and also identified additional indicators for the localisation of SDG 4 and the facilitation of data-driven policy decisions in education.

Australia takes a 'whole of government' approach to the implementation of the SDGs and has developed a 'Data Reporting Platform' that aims to provide a single point of access to data pertaining to Australia's progress on the SDGs.

In **Vanuatu**, the government launched its National Sustainable Development Plan dubbed as 'Vanuatu 2030 The People's Plan' which fully aligns the education plans with SDG 4.

In **Viet Nam**, the government has reiterated its earlier commitment to allocate 20% of the national budget and 6% of its GDP to education. This reflects the high priority it gives to the achievement of all SDG 4 targets.

WHAT NATIONAL EDUCATION COALITIONS REGARD AS MOST SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES MADE BY STATES TO ACHIEVE SDG 4*:

- 13 of 16 coalitions cited the adoption of laws, policies, and plans on the SDGs and SDG 4
- 9 coalitions cited the setting up of organisational mechanisms to locally concretise the SDGs, such as SDG committees, platforms, fora, and others
- 6 coalitions mentioned aligning their country's education sector plans with SDG 4
- 4 coalitions mentioned localisation of the SDGs to states, provinces, and districts
- 4 coalitions mentioned indicator system, data generation and information management

** Based on the survey undertaken by the Global Campaign for Education [GCE] participated in by national education coalitions in the following Asia-Pacific countries: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam*

ASPBAE notes, however, that serious challenges remain in the SDG rollout and localisation. While most countries have developed a national SDG indicator framework, another challenge lies in the availability of data and the omission of some important indicators in the monitoring system. Few countries have established the baseline with clear numerical targets for the SDG indicators.

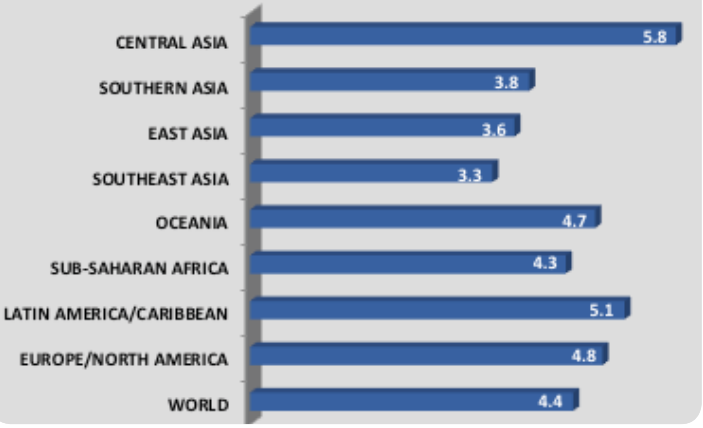
Financing the SDGs, including SDG 4, emerges as one of the most critical issues in the SDG rollout. Most countries have no clear financing strategy and no estimate of the financial requirements needed to achieve

GLOBAL AND ASIA PACIFIC DATA

	GLOBAL	ASIA PACIFIC
TOTAL POPULATION (2019)[1]	7.715 billion	4.060 billion
POPULATION AGED 14 YEARS & YOUNGER (2019) [1]	2.006 billion (26% of total)	973 million (24% of total)
EXTREME POVERTY, $1.90 PER DAY (2015) [2]	766 million	400 million (10.3% of total)
ADJUSTED NET ENROLMENT RATE, PRIMARY (2017) [3]	91.1%	96.1% (East Asia/Pacific) 93.7% (South/West Asia)
TOTAL NET ENROLMENT RATE, LOWER SECONDARY (2017) [3]	84.4%	91.6% (East Asia/Pacific) 82.8% (South/West Asia)
OUT OF SCHOOL (2017) [3]	262 million	128 million (49% of total)
CHILDREN (PRIMARY-SCHOOL-AGE)	64 million (8.8%)	19 million
ADOLESCENTS (LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE)	61 million (15.6%)	26 million
YOUTH (UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE)	137 million (35.8%)	83 million
YOUTH LITERACY RATE (2016) [3]	91%	98.7% (East Asia/Pacific) 88.6% (South/West Asia)
LITERACY RATE, 15 YEARS & OLDER (2016) [3]	86%	96% (East Asia/Pacific) 72% (South/West Asia)
TOTAL	750 million	446 million (60% of total)
FEMALE (2/3 OF TOTAL)	473 million	288 million
MALE (1/3 OF TOTAL)	277 million	158 million

1 UNFPA World Dashboard
2 UN ESCAP
3 UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)

GOVERNMENT EDUCATION EXPENDITURE AS PER CENT OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS)

the SDG 4 targets. There are mere verbal commitments to generate resources for the SDGs and limited action, with most countries admitting that current resources are insufficient to deliver on the promise of leaving no one behind.

South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia are the least spenders in education in relation to the total public expenditure and the size of the domestic economy. Globally, 43 out of 148 countries with data for 2017 (or

latest year available) did not meet the global education spending benchmarks of at least 4% to 6% of the GDP and at least 15% to 20% of the total public expenditure. Sixteen (16) of these countries are in the Asia-Pacific region. Only two of all countries in the region spent over 6% of GDP and 20% of the total expenditure for education, while ten countries met both of the global spending benchmarks. Among the least spenders in education in the region are Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka in South Asia, and Timor-Leste, Myanmar, and Cambodia in Southeast Asia.

While governments in the region have convened SDG-related consultations with stakeholders, CSOs noted that the spaces for meaningful participation and engagement in the SDG processes were limited. In most countries, there are no institutionalised partnership and coordination mechanisms between the government and civil society on the SDGs. Except for a few countries, consultations on the VNRs were tokenistic without opportunities for substantive inputs and debates. Reforms are thus needed to ensure that the SDGs and VNR processes are inclusive, collaborative, participatory, and transparent, providing ample space and institutionalised mechanisms for meaningful civil society engagement.

WHAT NATIONAL EDUCATION COALITIONS REGARD AS MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION FINANCING:

- 12 of 16 coalitions identified "inadequate financing, inefficient utilisation, and underutilisation of available funds" as major challenges.
- 6 coalitions recognised that "privatisation of education and the increase of public funds allocated to private schools" also pose serious challenges.
- 5 coalitions noted the "much of the education budgets are spent on teachers' salaries, leaving only meagre resources for teacher training and materials development, and for the overall improvement of the education system"

** Based on the survey undertaken by the Global Campaign for Education [GCE]*

Meanwhile, broad national civil society platforms on the SDGs have been set up in several countries across the region where different groups come together for SDG planning, monitoring, and engagement with the government, development partners, and UN agencies. They have actively participated in SDG processes at national, regional, and global levels. These networks, which include ASPBAE members and national education coalitions, have produced and disseminated spotlight or parallel reports to highlight the perspective of CSOs and marginalised groups.

National education coalitions in 16 countries in the Asia-Pacific region have prepared spotlight reports on SDG 4 that discussed and highlighted issues of equity, inclusion, financing, quality, and governance that are critical to achieving universal access to inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.

EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENT-CSO SDG PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

- The Government of **Timor-Leste** has created an open space for CSOs to monitor the implementation of programmes, particularly on the SDGs, through a Social Audit Partnership between the government and CSOs represented by the Forum NGO Timor-Leste (FONGTIL) that was formalised in a signed Memorandum of Understanding. CSOs have actively engaged in the government's VNR processes with the latter committing to include CSO representatives in its delegation to present the country's VNR during the 2019 HLPF.
- In the **Philippines**, the Department of Education initiated the formation of the Multi-Sectoral Committee on SDG 4 to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of SDGs. The committee is currently being formalised with defined terms of reference and includes as members other government agencies and education-focused CSOs, child rights networks and youth groups, among others.
- In **Bangladesh**, the government has provided ample space for the meaningful participation of civil society in SDG processes. It organised several consultations with CSOs and extended recognition to the Citizen's Platform for SDGs as a partner in the SDG rollout and localisation in the country.
- Since 2017, the Government of **Mongolia**, through the Ministry of Education, has convened annual national conferences on SDG 4 in cooperation with UNESCO Beijing Office, the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO and UNICEF Mongolia. Different units of the government and several CSOs participated in these consultations where discussions revolved around SDG 4 implementation progress and challenges, and the ways forward.
- In **Nepal**, the government recognises and appreciates the role played by CSOs in localising the SDGs through community consultations, training, workshop, information dissemination, and monitoring. Working as a watchdog of the SDG implementation, CSOs come out regularly with the Civil Society Education Report (CSER) that tracks the progress towards the SDGs.
- There are also country cases where the role of CSOs in the SDG processes has been limited and unappreciated. In **India**, for example, much of the feedback and proposals coming from the NGO community were ignored by the government. This is similar to **Pakistan** where CSOs are rarely invited to participate in SDG processes organised by parliament and other government agencies. The cancelation of the registration of some 3,000 NGOs and non-profit organisations (NPOs) over suspicion of money laundering is an indication of the shrinking space of civil society in the country. In **Papua New Guinea**, the government provides no formal space and little opportunities for local CSOs to engage and participate in the SDG rollout and monitoring. ·

WHAT COALITIONS REGARD AS MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN CSO ENGAGEMENT ON THE SDGS

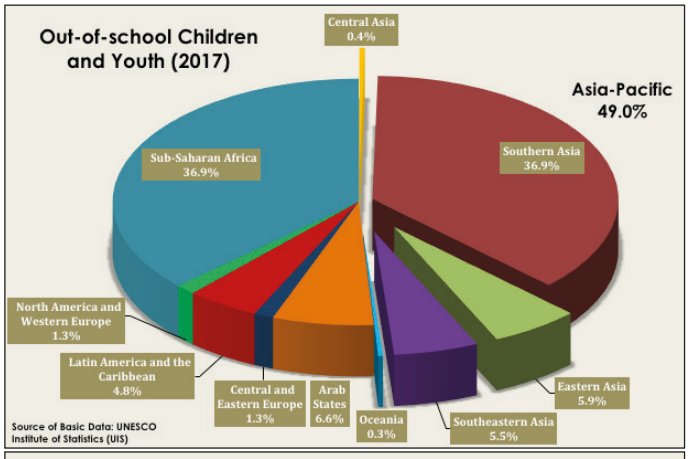
- 7 of 16 coalitions highlighted the "lack of systematic consultation or partnership with CSOs"
- 7 coalitions also observed the "limited or shrinking spaces for the engagement of CSOs, which are sometimes even excluded"
- 5 coalitions noted the "absence of an institutionalised mechanism for CSO engagement in policy-making processes, strategic planning, and SDG localisation, implementation and monitoring"

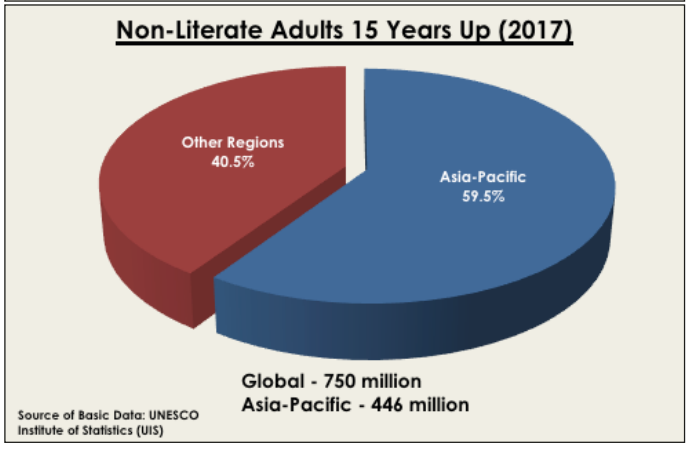
** Based on the survey undertaken by the Global Campaign for Education [GCE]*

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN SDG 4 IMPLEMENTATION

From 2000 to 2016, primary school enrolment in the developing world rose from 85% to 91%, while secondary school enrolment rose from 75% to 84% during the same period.[4] The Global Education Monitoring Report[5] noted that according to a 2013-2017 household survey data, completion rates were 85% for primary, 73% for lower secondary, and 49% for upper secondary education. Data also found that the world average participation rate in organised learning one year before the official primary entry age reached 69%. This indicates that seven out of ten children attend preschool the year before entering primary education. The global literacy rate among people ages 15 to 24 also significantly increased from 83% to 91%, with the gap between women and men narrowing.

4 UNESCO Institute for Statistics global databases, 2018
5 UNESCO. 2018. Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, not Walls. Paris, UNESCO





Despite some progress, it is disheartening to note that given current trends globally and in the Asia-Pacific region, the world is not on track to achieve SDG 4 by 2030. This is consistent with the findings of the Global Education Meeting as synthesised in the Brussels Declaration of 2018. Some 262 million children and youth did not attend school in 2017, including 64 million children of primary school age, (or 9% of total), 61 million adolescents of lower secondary school age (16% of total), and 137 million youth of upper secondary school age (36% of total). About half (49%) of the out-of-school children and youth are in the Asia-Pacific region, most of them in South Asia with 37% of the global total.

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, the world literacy rate reached 86% in 2017, although it remained as low as 72% in South Asia and 65% in sub-Saharan Africa. There were still 750 million illiterate youth and adults in 2017, two-thirds of whom were women. Asia-Pacific hosts the largest concentration of illiterates with a share of 60% of the global total. The Brussels Declaration of 2018 also raised the issue of 617 million, or 58% of children and adolescents, who are not able to read and do basic mathematics. About half of pre-school age children are not enrolled in early childhood education programmes.

Inequity in education remains a serious challenge and has actually widened in a significant number of countries. Varying significantly across countries and within countries, key education indicators disaggregated by economic status, location, disability, ethnicity, and residency status, among others, illustrate the wide disparities in education. Many countries tend to overlook the magnitude of inequity and gloss over the impact of such disadvantages on access and quality of learning. Decisive policy measures and accelerated efforts must therefore be taken to get back on track, and to fully achieve all SDG 4 targets within the agreed time. In doing so, it is crucial to analyse the barriers to quality education and the principal drivers that perpetuate and exacerbate inequity in education.

Recent household surveys (Demographic and Health Survey or DHS) conducted in several countries across the Asia-Pacific region indicate persisting problems of inequity in education. The surveys show that rural women from the poorest income group continue to be the furthest behind in terms of educational achievement. Unfortunately, there is practically no comparable data available for other marginalised groups, particularly for persons with disabilities, ethnic groups, migrants and refugees. The analysis specifically looked at secondary completion since most studies indicate that this level of education is critical to lift individuals and families out of poverty.

Timor-Leste has one of the lowest completion rates in the region with only 17.7% of the population 15 to 49 years old completing secondary education or higher. Disparities by gender, location and income level are also wider. About

9.3% of rural women in this age group completed at least secondary education while 36.6% of urban men achieved this level of education. This indicates that urban men in this age group are four times more likely to complete at least secondary education compared to rural women. By income group, only about 4 in 100 persons in the same age group from the poorest quintile (or poorest 20% of the population) completed at least secondary education. The corresponding figure from the richest quintile (or richest 20% of the population) is 41.5 out of 100 persons. Individuals 15 to 49 years old in the richest quintile are thus ten times more likely to complete at least secondary education compared to their counterparts from the poorest 20% of the population. (DHS, 2016)

In the **Philippines**, females fare better than males in education completion. Some 41.5% of persons 15 to 49 years old completed secondary education or higher, with more females (44.1%) achieving this level of education compared to males (38.9%). There is a large disparity in educational attainment of individuals in urban and rural areas. About half (51.2%) of the urban population in this age group completed at least secondary education. In comparison, only a third (33.4%) in the same age group achieved this level of education. The disparity is even greater across income groups, with 66.1% in this age group from the richest quintile completing at least secondary education, while only 13.5% achieved this level of education among the poorest quintile of the population. (DHS, 2017)

In **Pakistan**, as in much of South Asia, there are huge disparities in educational attainment by gender, location, and income groups. Some 22.8% of persons 15 to 49 years old completed secondary education or higher. Only 11.0% of rural women in this age group completed at least secondary education, while 38.6% of urban men in the same age group achieved this level of education. This means that urban males are over three times more likely to complete at least secondary education compared to rural females. About 55.8% of urban men 15 to 49 years old from the richest quintile completed at least secondary education. In contrast, only 1.0% of women in the same age group from the poorest quintile achieved this level of education, which indicates that only 1 of 100 women in this age group coming from the poorest quintile is able to complete at least secondary education. The corresponding figure for women in the next quintile is also low at 4.9%. (DHS, 2017-18)

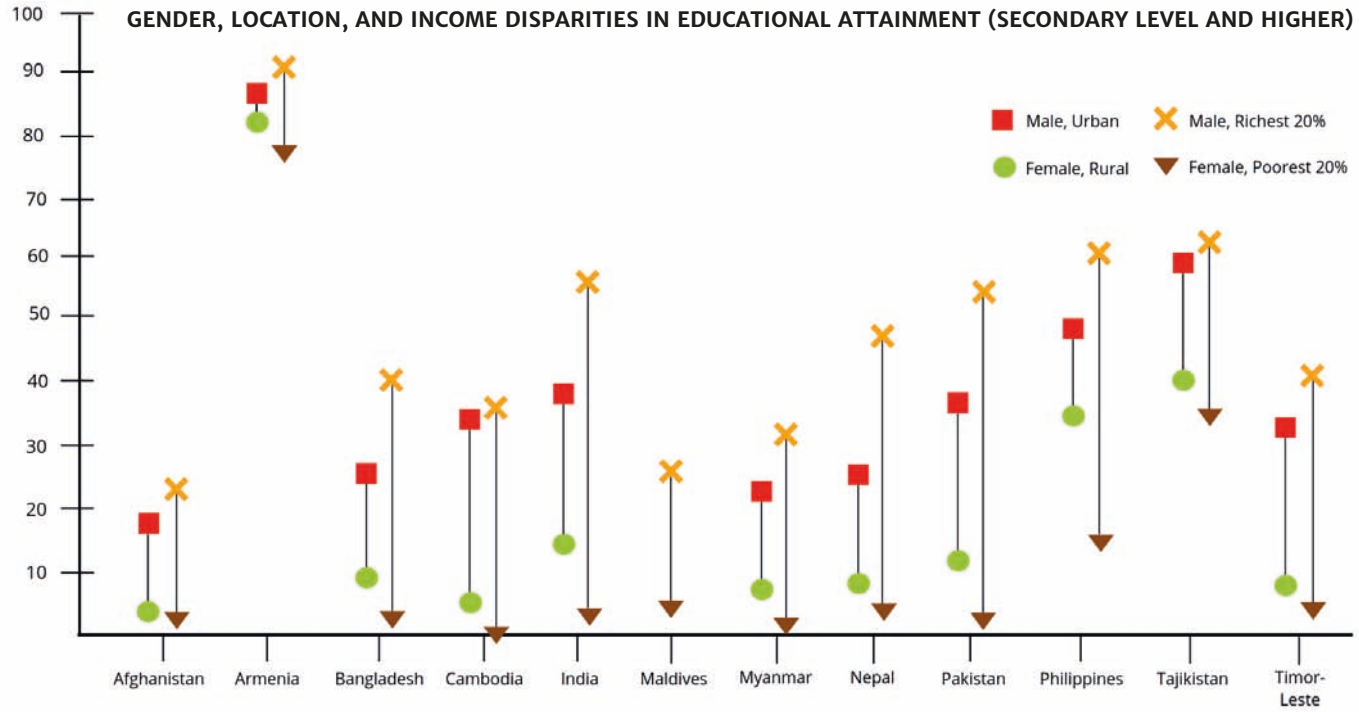
Tajikistan has better completion rates with lesser disparities compared to most developing Asian countries. Some 50.4% of persons 15 to 49 years have completed secondary education or higher – 54.8% among males and 46.6% among females. The corresponding figures in urban areas are 56.1% and 48.4% in rural areas. By income group, 59.2% of the richest quintile in the same age group completed at least secondary education, while only 40.9% has the same level of completion among the poorest quintile. Men in this age group from the richest quintile are nearly twice more likely to complete secondary education or higher compared to women from the poorest quintile. (DHS, 2017)

- Poverty has been cited as a major barrier to quality education and as a key factor that widens disparities in education. In South, East, and Southeast Asia, primary-school-age children from the poorest quintile are four to five times more likely to be out of school compared to children from the richest quintile.[6] In the Philippines, extreme poverty contributes to the high number of out-of-school youth, depriving them of the right to education and access to development and economic opportunities. Illiteracy rates among youth and adults are highest among the poor in rural communities. Poor girls and women in rural areas, indigenous people, and people in urban slums confront multiple barriers in accessing quality education. Apart from gender, disparities persist within and across countries by economic status, location, migration status, ethnicity, language, and disability, among many other factors. In Viet Nam, in particular, ethnic minority children have less access to schools than others because of language barriers, poor school infrastructure, economic constraints, and limited transportation. Persons in fragile states, armed conflict areas, and disaster-prone communities face multiple disadvantages and continue to be left behind in education and learning.

- The low budget for education and recurring spending cuts affect children, youth, and adults from marginalised and excluded backgrounds. Among all global regions, the Asia-Pacific has consistently been the lowest education spender in relation to the GDP. From 2017 to 2018, the allocated funding for education in Pakistan was around 2.83% of the GDP. The government's various commitments to the right to education remain unfulfilled. Timor-Leste is among the countries in the Asia-Pacific region with the lowest education budget, allocating only 2.69% of the GDP.

  Unfortunately, education expenditure relative to the GDP has actually decreased between 1999 and 2017 (or latest year available) in about half of the 29 countries with data in the Asia-Pacific region. However, it is not only the size and share of the budget that matter. The lack of sensitivity in allocating resources is also a critical factor that perpetuates and widens inequality, especially when it becomes politically expedient to favour already privileged sectors. Such is the case in Cambodia where the education budget has not been properly allocated to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities, as seen in the limited physical infrastructure, weak teaching capacity, and the lack of special education learning materials. The continuing neglect and marginalisation of adult education, non-formal education, and literacy programmes are also other factors that further discriminate against the poor and disadvantaged groups. For instance, in Vanuatu, technical and vocational education has not received sufficient attention, which contributes to high dropout rates, and the lack of opportunity for continuing education and skills development.

6 Basic data from the Global Education Monitoring Report and UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Data Centre



Source: Basic data culled from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), 2014 to 2017. Data processing and graph developed by ASPBAE

- Harmful tax incentives or tax holidays accorded to local and foreign businesses constitute huge revenue losses which could cover the financing gaps in education for many developing countries in the region. Similarly, huge amounts of public resources are lost to large-scale and institutionalised corruption. Young participants of youth consultations held by the education coalition in Nepal saw rampant corruption as a major obstacle to the country's development. Education coalitions in Timor-Leste and Bangladesh are also deeply concerned with the issue of corruption and its array of negative impacts on the right to education. It is thus crucial for CSOs to play the role of a watchdog to ensure that governments are held accountable for their spending and embrace zero tolerance for corruption.

- The proliferation of the largely unregulated, fee-paying private schools across the region, including the expansion of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements in education, has been observed. For instance, in Nepal, private schools continue to grow unabated even with existing policies and guidelines for the regulation of private actors in education. Australia has seen increased funding of private schools, with the increased marketisation of the education system becoming a driver of inequality. Privatisation discriminates against the poor, widens gender disparities, undermines the public education system, and leads to segregation. The push towards education privatisation and commercialisation globally and in the Asia-Pacific region is a major concern that has been noted by the UN Human Rights Council and various UN HR treaty bodies, and continually raised by numerous CSOs.

- Gender inequality is deeply entrenched in all countries across the region. Patriarchy, caste system, communalism, and institutionalised racism pose major challenges that undermine the right to education and have extreme impacts on excluded groups, particularly in certain countries such as Timor-Leste where cultural barriers and early marriage severely limit girls' access to obtaining and continuing quality education, and Pakistan where girls are disadvantaged in access to education due to societal restrictions and the shortage of schools. Undocumented migrants and refugees suffer from the adverse impacts of having virtually no access to education such as the case of Rohingya children and youths in Bangladesh.

- Given the lack of consensus and long-term institutionalised education sector plans, political instabilities and changes in the government disrupt education policies and services. These are also compounded by the geographical location, distance, and isolation of Island States, as well as island communities without adequate transportation and communication infrastructures, which hamper prompt and effective education governance and even equal access to schooling. In Indonesia, for instance, the world's largest archipelago, disseminating and raising awareness on the SDGs to the state civil apparatus and the community proves to be a difficult task.

- Finally, the lack of transparency and participation, and bureaucratic processes restrict public scrutiny of education policies, financing and budgeting, and lead to bad governance. In particular, we note with concern the shrinking space for civil society engagement in education governance and SDG 4 processes at national, regional, and global levels. This is in sharp contrast to international commitments

and charters that mandate consultation processes with civil society and other stakeholders. In India, for example, consultations with CSOs were considered more of a 'tick-box' activity and the government took little account of their feedback in the government plans. This is only one of the many cases in which CSO participation is a cherry picking, ad-hoc engagement. These present barriers for transparency and accountability in governance, and limit meaningful contribution towards addressing key education issues. The resurgence of autocratic and repressive regimes is rolling back the gains towards a more open government system. Instead, the effective participation and influence of all relevant stakeholders in education must be encouraged for their meaningful contribution towards addressing the key issues, particularly on equity, inclusion and financing for quality education.

It is against this backdrop that we propose the following priority recommendations as most urgent to get back on track and decisively address inequity in education. We affirm that education is a fundamental human right for all children, youth, and adults that enables the enjoyment of other rights, and impacts strongly on the other SDGs towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Education is essential for promoting peace, human rights, gender equality, cultural sensitivity, and sustainable development. If we are to ensure universal, quality education and lifelong learning for all children, youth, and adults, the government, alongside civil society actors and other stakeholders, must take swift, collaborative, and well-targeted actions that are in alignment with the 2030 Agenda principle of leaving no one behind. We then call on all States to take account of our recommendations for action.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

INTENSIFY AND INCREASE THE REACH OF EFFORTS TO OVERCOME ALL BARRIERS TOWARDS ACHIEVING EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATION, ENSURING THAT NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.

Continuing situation analysis and policy review towards strengthening legislation and policy measures are required to make education and training systems truly equitable and inclusive. Strategic approaches must be set in place to reach out to those left behind, including those affected by conflicts, disasters, and other emergencies. The identification of the vulnerable and excluded children, youth, and adults is essential to address equity issues. In this regard, relevant equity indicators should be further developed and the generation of disaggregated data given priority at national and local levels. In addition, SDG 4 and relevant equity and inclusion education targets must be integrated into the Education Sector Plan with clear, action-oriented strategies and a realistic timeline. Policies that promote accountability, transparency, and participation should be enhanced for the effective monitoring and public scrutiny of policy measures and programme implementation.

The national education coalition in **Indonesia** underlined the importance of aligning education policies, programmes, and affirmative actions with the specific needs of vulnerable and excluded groups, such as persons with disabilities, indigenous groups, women, urban poor groups, poor families, orphans, students who are prisoners, and child refugees and migrants due to natural disasters or conflicts, who are the furthest behind. In **Mongolia**, the coalition recommends the use of a parity index that will show the existing parity and disparities in school enrolment, school participation, and learning outcomes among marginalised groups of students in the country, such as children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, children of herders, children of internal migrants, and children in dormitories.

The **Pakistan** Coalition for Education calls for increased investment in infrastructure and free transport services to ensure girls' access to education, particularly the safety of those in inhospitable or distant terrains. The education coalition in **Vanuatu** recommends providing additional school grants per student and hiring an adequate number of qualified teachers and assistants for persons with special needs. It also recommends that successful pilot inclusive education initiatives in other countries be disseminated for potential replication in the context of Vanuatu.

■ Training for youth on action research at Port Vila, Vanuatu, May 2019

PROGRESSIVELY INCREASE INVESTMENT IN QUALITY EDUCATION, ADHERING TO THE INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS OF AT LEAST 4-6% OF GDP AND 15-20% OF TOTAL PUBLIC EXPENDITURE TO EDUCATION, ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY, AND PRIORITY ALLOCATION TO THE MARGINALISED AND MOST EXCLUDED GROUPS.

Financing is critical to accelerate progress and ensure that all SDG 4 targets are met – in particular, giving priority to the provision of free, accessible, and quality education and learning for all, especially the marginalised and most excluded. Due attention and priority should be given to the neglected targets, particularly non-formal education, adult learning and education, and early childhood education in a lifelong learning perspective. Funding allocation should deliberately correct inequalities and discrimination in education and ensure that parity is achieved by gender, disability, location, ethnicity, caste, and migration status.

As such, we call for the enhancement of domestic resource mobilisation through progressive tax reforms, curbing illicit financial flows, and having zero tolerance for corruption. At the same time, we also recommend more and better-targeted aid to improve education quality, equity, and inclusion.

The civil society education coalition in **Kyrgyzstan** proposed the search for alternative sources of financing and the increase in transparency of the budget allocation and funds of international organisations and trustees. In the **Philippines**, the education coalition saw the need for locating additional revenues, for example, by expanding the tax base and ensuring corporations contribute their fair share of taxes, while the coalition in **Sri Lanka** stressed that human and financial resources should be equally distributed to urban and rural areas to narrow disparities across regions. The education coalition in **Japan** recommends the allocation of ample, consistent, and well-targeted resources to ensure the education rights of children, youth, and adults, especially migrant workers and those who could not complete lower secondary education.

WE CALL FOR A STRONG, ADEQUATELY FUNDED AND QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT ENSURES EQUITY AND INCLUSION, EFFECTIVELY REACHING OUT TO THOSE LEFT BEHIND AND PROVIDING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO LEARNING THROUGH FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION.

Stronger policy measures must be adopted and decisive action taken to reach out to children, youth and adults in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, women and girls from marginalised communities, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. Appropriate policies and concrete actions must be taken up to ensure a child-friendly, gender-sensitive, accessible, and safe public schools and alternative learning systems.

The education coalition in **Viet Nam** recommends increasing budgets through tax reform and advocating for allocating income from a specific source of tax to the education sector, for example, by charging an additional one thousand Viet Nam Dong tax for every litre of beer or alcohol and allocating that additional tax amount to the education budget. The coalition in **Sri Lanka** highlighted the need to provide scholarships or subsidy to students from marginalised communities to increase their opportunities to enter universities and obtain quality higher education.

PREVENT THE PRIVATISATION AND COMMERCIALISATION OF EDUCATION, AND STRENGTHEN REGULATORY AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES TO ENSURE THAT PRIVATE PROVIDERS OF EDUCATION DO NOT DISCRIMINATE AND UNDERMINE THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION.

Effective regulatory mechanisms must be established to monitor the compliance of private educational institutions with national educational standards, curriculum requirements, teacher qualifications, and admission policies that do not discriminate against the poor and other disadvantaged groups. Expressing concern on the rising commercialisation of education, the UN Human Rights Council urges States "to put in place a regulatory framework to ensure the regulation of all education providers, including those operating independently or in partnership with States, guided by international human rights law and principles, that... addresses any negative impact of the commercialisation of education."[7]

The **Australian** education coalition asserted that one of the biggest drivers of this inequity is the under-funding of public schools relative to the funding of private schools which runs against the spirit of equity and inclusiveness called for by SDG 4. In line with international human rights law, the **Pakistan** education coalition emphasised the need to address the challenges of privatisation by strengthening public education and regulating the private sector in education. Similarly, the education coalition in **Timor-Leste** recommends reducing incentives or subsidies to private schools and increasing support to public schools.

PUT IN PLACE AN ADEQUATE NUMBER OF HIGHLY MOTIVATED, SECURED, QUALITY, AND PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS WHO ARE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOOL MANAGEMENT, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, AND EDUCATION GOVERNANCE.

The teacher's role as a contributor to policy development and the fulfilment of national education goals is highly recognised. It is imperative to guarantee their rights, welfare, security, professional development, and empowerment. Greater resources must be allocated to support the continuing training and development of teachers, and to ensure fair compensation, decent working conditions, and opportunities for further education and career development, including

7 Human Rights Council, 38th session, 3 July 2018 (A/HRC/38/L.13).

orientations on social justice and gender sensitivity, preparation for the world of work, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Teachers' education, recruitment, and deployment must also be improved to effectively contribute to school management, curriculum development, and education governance. The UNESCO and the ILO jointly recommend upholding the status of teachers as well as their responsibilities and obligations. Hence, a teachers' policy at the country level must be developed and complied with to improve the teaching profession.

In **Bangladesh**, the education coalition calls on the government and relevant education departments to ensure the adequate supply of competent, professionally developed, and motivated teachers and academic supervisors. The education coalition in **Cambodia** recommends a cohesive strategy to develop an integrated programme for teacher professional development, linking pre-service, in-service, and on-the-job training, and including the training in special and inclusive education.

WE CALL FOR SUSTAINED AND ACCELERATED EFFORTS TO ERADICATE YOUTH AND ADULT ILLITERACY THROUGH HIGH QUALITY AND ADEQUATELY-FUNDED FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

Programmes must ensure functional literacy, including media and digital literacy, and the development of skills, acquisition of knowledge and use of appropriate technology for decent work. The government should fund, encourage, and support the establishment of community learning centres and libraries, as well as programmes for second chance learning, enhancing literate environments, and addressing socio-cultural and environmental issues.

The coalition in **Timor-Leste** highlighted the need to support non-profit organisations to expand non-formal and vocational training for the youth throughout the country. In **Vanuatu**, the education coalition proposed that a nation-wide literacy assessment of youth and adults be conducted to determine the particular needs for literacy and educational programmes.

■ Development Education Association and Resource Center (DEAR) conducts a workshop on global issues to students of a lower secondary school in Japan

> *"In Bangladesh, the education coalition calls on the government and relevant education departments to ensure the adequate supply of competent, professionally developed, and motivated teachers and academic supervisors."*

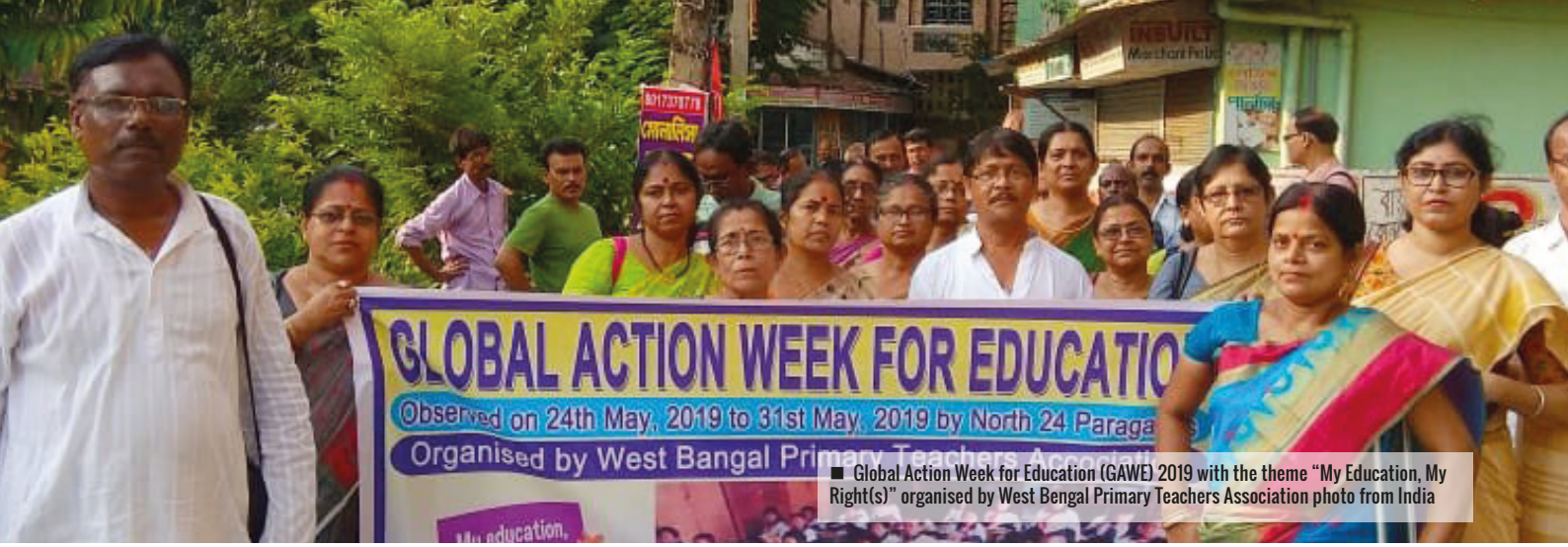
PROVIDE INSTITUTIONALISED VENUES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE; ENSURE AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP THE FOUNDATIONAL, TECHNICAL, AND TRANSFERABLE SKILLS OF THE YOUTH, PARTICULARLY THOSE FROM HIGHLY MARGINALISED AND EXCLUDED GROUPS. THE SKILLS FOR WORK AND LIFE OF BOTH YOUNG AND ADULT LEARNERS CAN BE DEVELOPED AND IMPROVED THROUGH TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET). HOWEVER, PARTICIPATION IN TVET PROGRAMMES IS VERY LOW IN MANY COUNTRIES IN THE REGION AND IS OFTEN UNDERMINED AS A PROGRAMME TARGETED TO THE POOR. IT IS THUS IMPERATIVE TO ILLUSTRATE THE VALUE OF THESE PROGRAMMES AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL IN ORDER TO CHANGE THIS MISLEADING NOTION AND ENCOURAGE THE PARTICIPATION OF BOTH YOUNG AND ADULT LEARNERS.

The education coalition in **Mongolia** asserted that the quality standards of TVET and higher education institutions should be improved, and corresponding online courses should be made available to the young people and adults with appropriate financing and technology utilisation. In **Sri Lanka**, the coalition recommends that institutionalised mechanisms be put in place to ensure active and meaningful youth participation in education governance both at the national and local levels.

In **Papua New Guinea**, the education coalition highlighted the need to establish TVET schools in each district to meet the current and future demand, develop the TVET curriculum within the PNG National Qualification Framework and Standard, and provide scholarships for TVET teachers to upgrade their trade skills, acquire teaching qualifications, and learn the techniques of competency-based training. Similarly, the coalition in **Vanuatu** recommends expanding the TVET Programme in both scale and scope and providing additional courses for skills development programmes.

MAINSTREAM SDG 4.7 ON GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (GCED) AND ESC BY SCALING UP AND FUNDING THE GOOD PRACTICES OF COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES WHICH SERVE AS HUBS FOR INFORMATION SHARING, DIALOGUES, INNOVATIVE LEARNING APPROACHES, AND COMMUNITY ACTIONS FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL COHESION IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.

The coalition in **Bangladesh** calls for strengthening efforts to promote peace, tolerance, and pluralism, so as to support social coherence and societal harmony.



■ Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) 2019 with the theme "My Education, My Right(s)" organised by West Bengal Primary Teachers Association photo from India

STRENGTHEN THE MONITORING OF SDG 4 AND EDUCATION 2030 THROUGH ADEQUATE, UPDATED, AND DISAGGREGATED DATA THAT CLEARLY IDENTIFY AND LOCATE THE MARGINALISED, EXCLUDED, AND VULNERABLE GROUPS.

The participation of all stakeholders, including parents, students, and CSOs, is critical in the development of the SDG 4 indicator system. Quality and disaggregated data must be generated for evidenced-based policy-making, planning, monitoring, and evaluation at national, regional, and global levels. States should allocate more funds for surveys and data processing, placing emphasis on producing disaggregated data to track progress systematically and address persisting inequalities in education access, performance, and management.

The national education coalition in **India** has called attention to the need for improving data collection by engaging and strengthening the statistical capacity of the local government to address the lack of reliable data. The coalition in **Vanuatu** stressed the importance of conducting research to determine the actual number of children and adults with disabilities and to identify their particular needs. Likewise, in **Viet Nam**, the education coalition recommends explicitly identifying, targeting, and responding to the circumstances of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, especially those who face discrimination based on their age, class, race, ability, ethnicity, gender identity, and other social, economic, cultural, and geographical factors.

FINALLY, WE CALL FOR STRONG AND INSTITUTIONALISED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN ALL SDG PROCESSES AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS, ENSURING THEIR EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING, MONITORING, AND REPORTING AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND GLOBAL LEVELS.

The formal engagement of CSOs is necessary for holding governments accountable for their commitments, guaranteeing the fulfilment of the SDGs, and upholding the spirit of the Paris Declaration for Harmonisation and Busan Partnership Agreement. Critical reforms must be done to ensure that the VNR processes are inclusive, participatory, and transparent, and provides ample space for civil society engagement and recognition.

"*"The coalition in Nepal calls on the government to establish sound partnerships with the CSOs and acknowledge their meaningful contributions."*"

We further recommend the inclusion of civil society representatives in the official delegation of the States during international meetings and conferences related to SDG 4 and the overall 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The **Australian** education coalition recommends establishing a multi-sectoral reference group to advise the government, as well as a small grants scheme for resource community organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the purpose of engaging with the SDGs. In **Mongolia**, the education coalition recommends regular consultations with the main stakeholders on education issues at the provincial and local levels to localise the SDGs. The coalition in **Nepal** calls on the government to establish sound partnerships with the CSOs and acknowledge their meaningful contributions. It is also recommended that civil society's capacity building be improved in order to enable them to contribute to data collection, monitoring, producing alternatives and community mobilisation.

The education coalition in **Pakistan** urges NGOs and citizen's forums to play the role of a watchdog on governance matters. In **Papua New Guinea**, the coalition calls on the government to take the necessary efforts to genuinely involve all stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations working in the education sector, and ensure inclusive and meaningful participation in the policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. This is similar to the recommendation of the education coalition in **Timor-Leste**, which emphasised that achieving the SDGs and SDG 4 in full will require more meaningful and institutionalised spaces for CSOs. Doing so will also enable CSOs to participate in policy development, to conduct research and consultations, and to monitor the SDG implementation. •

School children in Jamshoro, Pakistan

ABOUT ASPBAE The **Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)** is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning. It strives to forge and sustain an Asia-Pacific movement dedicated to mobilising and supporting community and people's organisations, national education coalitions, teachers' associations, campaign networks, and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments, ensuring the right of all to education, and upholding education as an empowering tool for combating poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, pursuing sustainable development, enabling active and meaningful participation in governance, and building a culture of peace and international understanding. ASPBAE publications form an integral part of ASPBAE's information, education, and advocacy activities and efforts, and seek to support sharing and learning among education stakeholders, advocates, practitioners, analysts, and policymakers. The reader is therefore encouraged to write to ASPBAE if they wish to use the material contained herein for reproduction, adaptation, and translation and to provide feedback that could help in further improving these publications.

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