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4th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030)
(12-14 July 2018, Bangkok, Thailand)

FINAL

Regional Recommendations for Action on SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4

Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship

Background

Asia and the Pacific is one of the largest and fastest-growing regions in the world in terms of economic and social development. In line with global economies, this region is experiencing changes associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Despite notable achievements in economic growth in recent decades, equity in growth continues to be elusive, resulting in increasing inequality.[1] The Asia Pacific region is also home to the largest share of the youth population in the world. Building skills for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), sustainability, entrepreneurship as well as 'foundational and transferable skills'[2] are critical to empower learners to become more resilient, adaptable to rapid change and drivers of their own future. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the urgent need to bridge the worlds of education and employment and ensure a solid educational and skills foundation for all, including young people to make that leap to the world of work

Following the decision at the first official meeting of the SDG4 National Coordinators' Network Meeting (7 July 2017), the 4th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030) specifically focused *on target 4.3 (equitable access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training and tertiary education)* and *target 4.4 (relevant skills for work)* and explored progress and challenges towards implementing and monitoring skills development and outcomes through formal, non-formal and informal education and training.

This Regional Recommendations for Action on SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4 serves as the main outcome document of the 4th APMED2030, informed by the diverse perspectives of delegates in the 4th APMED2030 and represents the collective commitment of the members of the SDG4-Education 2030 Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination mechanism.

Context and rationale

As with the previous years, the 4th APMED2030 consisted of two parts, the first part being the technical meeting, focused on SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4 within the context of Asia-Pacific and under the overarching theme of *"Transforming Learning: Meeting the skills demand to achieve the SDGs in the*

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[1] UN ESCAP, 2018, *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*
[2] Add footnote on diversity of reference to skills – 21st century skills, transversal skills, soft skills, foundation and transferable skills, etc.

Asia-Pacific". The second part convened the 2nd National Coordinators' Network Meeting to discuss the regional preparation for the Global Education Meeting (GEM, December 2018) and the global review of SDG4 in 2019.

Three days prior to the 4th APMED, the global Technical Consultation Meeting on the future of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was held in Bangkok. This meeting provided an opportunity for Member States to discuss ways to advance ESD in the region given its crucial relevance to attaining the 17 SDGs, especially SDG4. Being a cross cutting concern, ESD was one of the thematic issues of focus in the technical discussions of the 4th APMED.

The 4th APMED meeting focused on five thematic issues with respect to the overarching concern on "skills" for youth and adults through formal, non-formal and informal approaches: (i) ensuring inclusion, gender equality and equity in learning in the second decade; (ii) digital skills; (iii) school-to-work transition; (iv) strengthening qualification frameworks to promote mobility and employability; and (v) mainstreaming ESD as a key enabler of SDGs.

Participants shared and discussed innovative policies and practices to improve and address skills development. Effective strategies for developing new learning pathways by linking secondary education reform with greater access to quality TVET and tertiary education to improve employability were also identified to enable young people to adapt to changing labour market dynamics across Asia and the Pacific. While young people can drive economies and societies to be more vibrant and productive, it was recognized that this potential could only be realized if they benefit from life-long learning from early childhood to adolescence and adulthood. Similarly, learning pathways are critical for out of school and second chance learners both to ensure gender inclusivity in the labour force and to redress issues of poverty and exclusion.

A need for rethinking of digital skills was raised to ensure the relevance of policy responses to the breadth and depth of the rapidly changing nature of the digital skills demand. While defining future-proof digital skills is important, it should not be forgotten that basic ICT skills are considered as one of the fundamental skills, together with literacy and numeracy, needed to effectively benefit from and participate in sustainable and inclusive social and economic development for all. Provision of quality and equal access to infrastructure and relevant training at all levels, including the need to continuously capacitate and support teachers, were emphasized as critical means to mainstream digital skills.

Monitoring of targets 4.3 and 4.4 was found to be most challenging for various reasons such as, but not limited to: (a) multiplicity of data sources; (b) non-availability and quality of data including lack of disaggregated data; (c) fragmented institutional settings and legal frameworks; and (d) inadequate technical and financial resources available for better monitoring. There is also a significant gap in data linking education and training outcomes with successful entry to the labour markets and/or decent work. Participants highlighted the challenge in accessing the subnational, as well as national, data for evidence-based policy making and resource distribution. While global process of methodological development is very encouraging, there is a need for strategies to translate and contextualize this process at the national level.

Participants also recognized the importance of convergence and forging partnerships beyond the education sector in achieving SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4, in particular with other ministries (for example Labour and Industry), the private sector and employers, and civil society. These partnerships can ensure that education and skills development lead to decent work and inclusive economic growth. Furthermore, countries can also benefit from inter and intra-regional collaboration, as well as south-south-north triangular cooperation as a means to increase financing in education and skills development. Participating countries also identified the need for: 1) increased financing for education; 2) systems change and coherence; and 3) strengthened public-private partnerships.

The outline of the draft outcome document presented at the 2nd meeting of the SDG4 National Coordinators' Network on 14 July 2018, and subsequently shared electronically for review and acceptance by stakeholders, includes the following set of regional recommendations that are to be carried out by all stakeholders, including the private sector, in 2018-2019.

Recommendations for action

The following recommendations are addressed to all key stakeholders of SDG4-Education 2030: governments, international/regional organizations, CSO/NGOs, academia, media, the private sector, teacher education institutions and schools, communities, youth and parents. For effective implementation, it will be necessary to prepare follow-up and monitoring mechanisms in each Member State, as well as integrated national-level plans of action, indicating not only activities, but also shared tasks and responsibilities. Many of the follow-up actions below will require the involvement of several actors.

Action area 1: Inclusion, equity and gender equality

The following recommendations are specifically addressed to the most marginalized, with particular attention to girls and women, adolescents and youth with disabilities, migrants, excluded indigenous groups, refugees, and the poor.

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders[3]
Policies, legal frameworks: 1. Review and establish appropriate legal/normative frameworks to ensure inclusion, equity and gender equality in secondary education, alternative learning pathways and skills development. 2. Improve coordination in the implementation of education and skills frameworks, and policies to ensure community networks and multi-sectoral solutions, including links to health and social protection while also reflecting the country context and values.	Government (Ministries of Education and other Ministries of related to social and human development e.g. health, finance)
Provisions of services: 3. Improve the access and quality of secondary and post-secondary education pathways, services, provision and governance (formal, non-formal, alternatives, flexible models, etc.) with special attention given to the most marginalized group. 4. All secondary education, including TVET, should aim at developing both foundational and transferrable skills linked to basic livelihoods training to encourage a holistic development of the individual and the communities in which they participate.	Government, private sectors, development partners

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[3] "Lead stakeholder(s)" means that one of the key stakeholders identified for the action area will be responsible for/expected to take the action forward with or without other stakeholder partners. This does not exclude the fact that other stakeholders have no interest or responsibility to respond and take action on the recommended point.

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders[3]
5. Greater public and private investments in expanding affordable, accessible, user-friendly, learning opportunities most marginalized groups, who have not completed schooling with recognition of prior learning and bridging courses that lead to decent work.	
Ensure financial support (e.g. scholarships or fee waivers, etc.) 6. Targeted financial support should be made available with special attention given to the most marginalized groups and communities, to access accredited skills development programmes, including through secondary education options and TVET courses. 7. Ministries of education financing to schools, should include a strong equity-based formula, and ministries and partners, including PPPs, should support those education programs to serve the adolescents and youth most at risk of exclusion.	Government (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance), development partners, private sector
Advocacy, political commitment and partnerships: 8. Advocate with communities and parents to ensure that the most marginalized youth have access to quality secondary education and skills development with learning environments (formal, non-formal or informal), which are gender and disability inclusive, including in the most remote areas. 9. Strengthen political will and financing towards making more accessible quality education and skills development to the most vulnerable youth and women in poverty. 10. Establish and implement realistic quotas and targets to increase and maintain enrolments for job-related training for women and girls, especially in emergent and non-traditional jobs, occupations and industries.	National and local governments, NGOs youth, development partners, students, parents and communities

Action area 2: Digital Skills

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
1. Make continuous effort to provide and maintain infrastructure to support the provision, scope and type of digital skills needed for social and economic participation, employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship for youth and adults to ensure relevance to a changing and connected world.	Government, private sectors, development partners
2. Provide inclusive quality access to ICT infrastructure and relevant digital skills training for all, with deliberate attention to avoiding digital divides and empowering the marginalized and vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities (PWDs), girls and women, migrants, elderlies and rural communities.	Government

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
3. Elevate teachers' capacity in mainstreaming ICT in their teaching practices through continuous professional development and support as well as digital skills curricula and assessment packages. Governments need to monitor and coordinate ICT solutions and determine the most relevant and affordable technologies and ensure cost effectiveness.	Government, CSOs, private sector
4. Strengthen partnerships with the private sector to keep the digital skills training in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings relevant to the needs of industry and labour market.	All stakeholders
5. Enhance research capacity on digital skills for girls and women to clearly understand the reasons behind the lack of their engagement with digital technology or in ICT industries and facilitate the data-informed policy intervention to address the issue.	Research institutions

Action area 3. Promoting a smooth transition from School to Work

To address the skills mismatch between school curriculum and the labour market:

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
1. Promote inter-ministerial coordination to ensure a continuum of foundational, transferable and vocational skills development for young people, including in secondary education reform.	Government
2. Promote improved gender sensitive labour market information, career guidance, and job placement including by using digital technologies and social media.	All stakeholders including students, youth, parents and communities
3. Review post-secondary programmes to ensure relevancy to current and future domestic and regional labour markets, job creation and entrepreneurship ensuring engagement with a full range of stakeholders/sectors.	Government, national research/technical institutions
4. Promote systemic cooperation of private sector and workers' organizations in the design (curricula) and promotion of work-based learning (apprenticeship, internship, etc.).	Government, private sector, workers organizations
5. Promote greater public-private partnership to enhance investment in education, skills development and apprenticeship.	Government, private sector
6. Undertake School to Work Transition Surveys including surveys of industry demand and youth aspirations to help shift from supply-driven to demand-driven education and training systems.	National research/technical institutions

Action area 4: TVET

To improve the relevance and quality of TVET and skills training provisions/programmes:

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
1. Reform the teacher development, management and evaluation systems for secondary and TVET teachers in coordination with relevant sectors and upgrade their qualifications.	Government
2. Strengthen the coordination mechanisms and cooperation between TVET and other education sectors, training centers, labour and employment sectors, industry and national organizations to empower the most marginalized and integrate them in the world of work.	TVET Institutions, private sector
3. Develop appropriate policies, programmes and communication strategies to provide women, girls, youth and persons with disabilities, with equal opportunities to learn, develop and strengthen their knowledge, skills and competencies.	Government, youth, CSOs
4. Set standards for sub-regional mutual recognition of skills to facilitate recognition of skills and qualifications, and facilitate mobility of workers across borders.	Government
5. Ensure relevance of TVET provisions to the labour market by establishing TVET tripartite governance mechanisms (government, employers and workers organizations).	All stakeholders
6. Undertake labour market analysis in order to have joint public-private skills foresights, scenarios and forecasts with focus on leading economic sectors and ensure that results inform TVET policies and programmes.	National research/technical institutions

Action area 5: Higher education

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
1. Identify a recognition authority, either governmental or non-governmental that is officially authorized by government, to make decisions on the recognition of national and foreign qualifications.[4]	Government
2. Advocate the importance of integrated qualifications frameworks based on country specific needs. National qualifications frameworks need to link TVET and higher education with the aim to promote the	Government, CSOs

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[4] With reference to the language from the Tokyo Convention is as follows: "Competent Recognition Authority means a governmental or non-governmental body officially authorised by government with making decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications". http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
effective use of learning outcomes and diverse learning pathways and enhance standardisation of qualifications at various levels.	
3. Promote the use of technology to ensure equal access to lifelong learning, including to deliver recognized and/or accredited higher education courses and training from the public and private sector.	Promotion: Government Operational: national institutions (e.g. universities)
4. Develop systems and measures to recognize prior and experiential learning in higher education, including processes for individuals to seek recognition of previous training, work experience, professional development, professional licensing and examinations, and other work-based education and training.	Government
5. Scope different modalities for delivery and assessment (including Recognition of Prior Learning, and secondary-tertiary pathways) to increase access and participation, including outreach to the most vulnerable through bridging courses.	Government
6. Ratify and implement the Tokyo Convention to promote mobility and fair recognition of qualifications.	Government

Action area 6: Monitoring of SDG4 targets 4.3 and 4.4

Recommendations	Lead stakeholders
1. Ensure/strengthen collection, synergies, analysis and full utilization of disaggregated data on marginalized populations to ensure comprehensive and inclusive monitoring of targets 4.3 and 4.4.	All stakeholders
2. Foster practices for, and build capacity in, data literacy, collection and sharing among and between ministries and relevant institutions, including national and local government and communities, to utilize multiple data sources to systematically monitor targets 4.3 and 4.4.	Government (incl. sub-national/provincial)
3. Develop regional frameworks and country standardized methodologies to ensure that the targets 4.3 and 4.4 are properly monitored across the region in coherent, comparable and technically sound manners.	Government Regional and national technical/research institutions
4. Design and implement an appropriate regional capacity programme to set up a well-coordinated national monitoring mechanism for targets 4.3 and 4.4 as part of the comprehensive national SDG-4 monitoring mechanism.	Regional Thematic Working Group (RTWG) – Education 2030+
5. Synergize full utilization of all data sources (e.g. administrative, household survey and assessment data, etc.) to provide policy relevant information to better implement and monitor the progress on targets 4.3 and 4.4.	All stakeholders

Looking ahead: Building new learning pathways for adolescents and youth for lifelong learning in the Asia-Pacific region

National policies and programs related to the achievements of these targets on TVET and tertiary education need to be holistic and within the broad framework of skills for life, work and sustainable development. This means that policies related to 4.3 and 4.4 cannot be developed without the interconnectedness of the other targets, especially 4.1 (including secondary education), 4.5 (gender equality and inclusion), 4.6 (youth and adult literacy) and 4.7 (ESD and Global Citizenship Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). It should be noted that "foundation and transferable, transversal, soft skills" essential for work and life starts with achieving SDG 4.2 (Early Childhood Development).

This set of recommendations is a collective expression of all participants at the 4th APMED2030 to work together in the coming years and use them to guide the national and sub-regional actions to meet the following milestones of the Regional Roadmap for SDG4-Education2030 to advance progress in SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4:

- Revise and update national policies and programmes to ensure a holistic education environment that encompasses secondary education, TVET, tertiary and adult education within a lifelong learning context and to ensure no one is left behind from availing to the diverse learning opportunities and pathways;
- Provide feedback to the national and regional monitoring frameworks of SDG4;
- Report back on the progress made on the actions recommended at APMED2030 in 2020;
- Use as the baseline reference for the Regional SDG4-Education 2030 Mid-Term Review (SDG4-MTR) in 2023.

Finally, in order to move the overall SDG4-Education 2030 agenda forward in the Asia-Pacific region, countries, UN Agencies, CSO/NGO partners and all other stakeholders, agreed to coordinate their efforts with the following principles strongly grounded in all levels and areas of action:

- **Keep the equity agenda** as key driver in the achievement of SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4, to reduce the marginalization of girls and woman, children with disabilities, isolated population, among others, and to enhance female participation in the formal labour force;
- **Involve communities, youth and other partners** to improve targets 4.3 and 4.4 related policies and services;
- **Invest in innovation and quality data** as indispensable means to deliver results;
- **Improve the cross-sectoral and inter-institutional actions**, as critical for effective policy responses; and
- **Increase and improve their financial investments, with effective equity formulas,** to achieving results for all.

These Regional Recommendations for Action on SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4 was formally adopted by the members of the SDG4 National Coordinators' Network by virtual sharing on 3 August 2018.

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