I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Kyrgyzstan is an intracontinental mountainous country with low population density and relatively small agricultural land. Regionally, the Central Asian countries bordering Kyrgyzstan and the Xinjiang UAR region share challenges due to its remoteness from global economic centres, underdeveloped or insufficient transit of the transport and logistics network, and limited agricultural and industrial resources under growing demographic pressure. The region is highly affected by the negative environmental and climate changes. The country also faces issues due to air pollution, land degradation, and the provision of drinking and irrigation water. Women are often particularly affected by these problems, as they are more involved in domestic work than men. According to the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyz Republic (NSC) calculations, women spend 3.6 times more time on unpaid domestic labour and 2 times more on raising children. Security threats, such as violent extremism and inter-ethnic conflicts, are also among the country’s concerns.

II. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4: ACHIEVEMENTS AND BARRIERS

The Kyrgyz Republic is committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are included in the national policy and reflected in the National Development Strategy (2018-2040) and "Unity. Trust. Creation" Programme (2018-2022).

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

1. Increased coverage of pre-primary education. There is currently a high rate of participation in organised training programmes. The percentages of first grade elementary school students who attended pre-school in the previous academic year were: 80.3 per cent in 2018 (male: 79.3%; female: 81.5%); 43.1 per cent (male: 43.3%; female: 43.0%) in 2014.

2. Digitisation. Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the country’s unpreparedness for distance learning, prompt measures were taken to minimise the damage to the educational process. Lessons for distance learning
COVID-19.

Economic forecasts around the world, including in Kyrgyzstan, have shown a sharp degradation owing to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kyrgyzstan is particularly vulnerable due to its high unemployment rate and dependence on remittances. According to the UNDP, Kyrgyzstan’s GDP dependence on remittances is 33.23 per cent as of 2018. Various experts estimate that the transfers of migrant workers will decrease significantly from 15 per cent to 50 per cent. This will lead to further increases in unemployment and poverty.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated gender inequality in many countries. Women’s workload has increased. They are also more exposed to domestic violence. In Kyrgyzstan, cases of domestic violence have also multiplied. From January to March, Kyrgyzstan’s police authorities recorded 65 per cent more cases of domestic violence than during the same period in 2019. Health and social workers, most of whom are women, are particularly at risk of being affected by the adverse impacts of crises such as this. In 2018, the number of health and social workers was 97,800, of which 81,400 were women (or 83%).

Kindergartens and out-of-school organisations were forced to close temporarily, while schools, vocational colleges, and universities continued to provide distance learning activities. Unfortunately, Kyrgyzstan was not ready for the shift to distance learning as many teachers do not have the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies required to teach remotely, and students do not have the necessary equipment and access to the internet to continue learning. These facts show that it is necessary to improve the education sector to minimise possible risks and prevent potential threats. In particular, attention should be paid to the following:

- Adult education, including vocational training and functional literacy;
- The development of education in a digital environment and increasing digital literacy of the population;
- Improving access to preschool institutions (development of early childhood care and education) to increase employment rates, particularly female employment; and
- Civic education (training on sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, and promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, etc.).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also more exposed to domestic violence. Women’s workload has increased. They are also more exposed to domestic violence. In Kyrgyzstan, cases of domestic violence have also multiplied. From January to March, Kyrgyzstan’s police authorities recorded 65 per cent more cases of domestic violence than during the same period in 2019. Health and social workers, most of whom are women, are particularly at risk of being affected by the adverse impacts of crises such as this. In 2018, the number of health and social workers was 97,800, of which 81,400 were women (or 83%).

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were recorded in a short time and training of teachers were conducted. From 2015 to 2020, there was a significant shift in the digitalisation of educational processes. During this period, several electronic projects were introduced, including an electronic queue to kindergartens, electronic enrolment in school (first grade), and the “Employment” platform and an automated system for calculating teachers’ salaries.

The National Repository of Open Educational Resources (lib.kg platform) has been created to provide an open access platform where learners and teachers can use electronic versions of school textbooks. As of 2019, 453 textbooks and other educational materials used in schools in the Kyrgyz Republic have been published. Platforms for additional educational materials for learners in grades 1 to 7 - Ibilim (www.ibilim.kg) and those in grades 5 to 9 - Bilim Bulagy (www.bilimbulagy.kg) were also created. A portal of education resources was developed to support distance learning during the pandemic.

3. Ratification of international agreements. Since the beginning of the implementation of the SDGs, the Kyrgyz Republic has ratified two important international agreements, namely the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Paris Agreement, which provide direction towards achieving the SDGs.

KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 4

1. Limited coordination (between state bodies; between state and non-state organisations)

The implementation of the SDG agenda in Kyrgyzstan has been raised to the highest level of government within the National Council for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic, chaired by the President. Established in 2016, the Coordinating Committee for Adaptation, Implementation and Monitoring of the SDGs is responsible for the implementation and functions under the direct leadership of the Prime Minister. It includes representatives of legislative bodies, ministries and public institutions, as well as international and non-governmental organisations. The Secretariat of the Coordinating Committee for achieving the SDGs is the Government’s Economic and Investment Department, while the National Statistical Committee has the authority to lead and supervise efforts to collect data and create a database related to the SDGs.

Although responsible authorities have been identified, active discussion around and promotion of the SDG agenda, including discussions with civil society, took place only during the period of adapting the objectives and indicators and developing the Voluntary National Review (VNR). At other times, there was very little interaction with civil society organisations. It is important to involve more civil society representatives so that the voices of all groups, especially those from vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as women and girls, the elderly, persons with disabilities (PWDs), migrants, and others, are heard and considered in the development of SDG-related plans and programmes.

2. Limited financing

Despite the relatively high level of spending on the education sector (26.4% of the actual state budget expenditures in 2019), a number of challenges remain in Kyrgyzstan, which will require significant resources:

- 385 schools require major repairs, while 242 schools have been deemed unsafe in emergency conditions and will require reconstruction;
- The availability of computers is only 42 per cent of the minimum requirement, so it is necessary to equip educational institutions with computers;
- The hygiene conditions in schools need to be improved. It was found that 74.4 per cent of schools have no internal sanitary facilities (toilets), 68.2 per cent of schools are not connected to a hot water supply, and 25.7 per cent of schools have no access to clean drinking water.

Positive changes in the issue of education financing should also be noted. In 2019, a state social order mechanism for preschool education was introduced to increase access to kindergartens. More private kindergartens were made available for families with insufficient income. This program may cover 50 per cent of the cost of private

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kindergarten services from the national budget. In 2020, this norm was implemented only in Bishkek. The budget allocates 6.6 million soms, but this is insufficient in significantly increasing preschool education coverage for learners from vulnerable families. However, this measure is a step towards increasing access to education.

3. Limited statistical data
The limited data available on various SDG 4 indicators affect the quality of monitoring and evaluation. Not all indicators can be analysed by gender or location. Some indicators cannot be tracked now as data is not being collected. To date, there are no (or very limited) statistics on education coverage of vulnerable groups, the exact number of children not attending school is unknown, and no records are kept on the number of adults studying in the informal sector. This complicates the process of monitoring the implementation of the SDG and the adequate adjustment of actions.

To date, out of the 17 indicators on SDG 4 (11 global and 6 national indicators), statistics is available only on 10 indicators.

II. STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATION
The Strategy for Education Development in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012-2020 is the key document that regulates the education sector. The following key documents have been developed over the past two years to narrow the gaps in education enrolment in the Kyrgyz Republic:

- The Programme of Development of Inclusive Education in the Kyrgyz Republic (2018; concept, programme, implementation plan and matrix of indicators for the period 2019 to 2023 are developed and approved)
- Concept of Development of Adult Learning and Education System in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2020-2030 (2019; the concept was developed, presentations were made to stakeholders)
- Concept of the National Qualifications System in the Kyrgyz Republic (In 2019, the concept was developed and approved; in 2020 implementation plan for the period from 2020 to 2021 was developed and approved)

It should be noted that the concept of "leaving no one behind" is not presently reflected in the education development programmes in Kyrgyzstan, the most vulnerable groups are not identified, and strategies to work with them are not outlined. Much more needs to be done to improve the implementation and increase the funding of the social development plans, including national education, health, and gender strategies. The government must act urgently to address the growing violence against women and children during the pandemic, attacks on democratic values and activists, growing religious fundamentalism, anti-gender and homophobic rhetoric by authorities, and promotion of discriminatory laws.

IV. KEY EXAMPLES OF INTERSECTORAL LINKAGES AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4: LINKAGES TO OTHER SDGS
SDG 4 & SDG 8. INDEPENDENT CERTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES FOR LABOUR MARKET DEVELOPMENT
To form and manage the sectoral system of independent certification of professional competencies, the Coordination Council under the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Kyrgyz Republic was established in 2015. The Coordination Council now consists of 17 members. Its structure is based on social partnership, through of delegating representatives from:

- state agencies (i.e. Agency for Primary Vocational Education, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labor and Social Development)
- vocational education institutions
- business community
- civil society
- trade union organisations

The relationship between education and the labour market and its gender aspect should be highlighted. The percentage of youth enrolled in primary vocational education (population aged 15 to 17 years) is lower among girls than boys, but this is because more boys drop out of school at this age while girls continue their schooling. The proportion of girls among students at secondary vocational level is significantly higher in professions such as education, consumer goods technology, health care, culture and arts, and service, but quite low in areas such as architecture, construction, and mining. There is also a gender imbalance in the choice of professions in higher education. Thus, the share of women studying in the following areas is high: education (more than 87% of the total number of students), humanities (about 76%), services (about 69%), natural sciences (about 60%). At the same time, men mainly choose specialties related to architecture and construction (80%), agricultural sciences (76%), technical sciences (74%). To overcome the gender disparities in different specialties, it is necessary to improve the system of professional orientation of youth.

SDG 4 & SDG 2. SCHOOL MEALS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION
Since 2015, the Government of Kyrgyzstan, with the support of development partners, namely the Russian Federation, UN World Food Programme, Good Neighbours International, and Mercy Corps, among others, has been implementing a programme to optimise the school foodservice. Hot meals were organised in 1,571 schools (60%) out of 2,265 schools in the country.
The Voluntary National Review (VNR) Process

In 2020, Kyrgyzstan presented its VNR for the first time. The review covered all SDGs except SDG 14, which is not relevant to the country. The process of preparing the VNR was multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral, based on partnership with all stakeholders. However, engagement issues were not well-developed. Information about the preparation of VNR was distributed through publications on the sites of government agencies and emails. Emails were sent mainly to the participants of the events and the information on the sites was not exhaustive. Thus, the VNR preparation process involved only those organisations that are familiar with Agenda 2030 and knew that Kyrgyzstan will be submitting a report on achieving the SDGs in 2020.

Opportunities for the participation of civil society organisations were limited. While organisations and experts were given the opportunity to review the document and make suggestions, the time for feedback was limited and the interaction between the government and CSOs was lacking. To increase awareness and involvement, it would be more effective to create a stand-alone online platform (website and/or mobile application) for promoting sustainable development and the SDGs in Kyrgyzstan. It should include relevant news, upcoming events, researches, and other information materials. Despite some attempts at unification, a common platform for organisations and experts to promote SDGs has not yet been formed in the country.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cross-sectoral coordination at national and regional levels

The linkages between the SDGs require going beyond a highly specialised approach to education. Any strategy aimed at achieving SDG 4 and all the SDGs should be based on a mechanism for cross-sectoral coordination linked to the wider coordination of the SDGs.

2. Strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships between state and non-state actors for the implementation of the SDG agenda. Partnerships should not be limited to inter-agency cooperation but should also include other governmental levels, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector.

3. Increasing the efficiency and accountability of public funding for education

Better management and accountability can improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of existing resources. The international benchmarks recommend that 15 to 20 per cent of the public expenditure and 4 to 6 per cent of the GDP be allocated to education. Spending on the education sector in Kyrgyzstan falls within this framework, so efficiency and accountability should be vastly improved. In the process of budgeting, it is important to give priority to those who are most in need and to use gender-budgeting principles to ensure gender-responsiveness in plans and programmes related to education.

4. Implementation of mechanisms to monitor the achievement of the SDGs to strengthen the national capacity of the statistical system. This may also include introducing electronic data collection, developing a methodology for the coordination of the National Statistical Committee and relevant NGOs, and expanding access to quality statistical data.

5. Promotion of the concept of LLL (lifelong learning) means strengthening LLL in strategic documents and legislation. The orientation towards lifelong learning requires a system of recognition, validation, and accreditation of learning and competencies acquired outside the formal education system and educational institutions.

Note: As mentioned in the targets of SDG 4, “By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations,” vocational training is a core of equitable education and it establishes linkage between SDG 4 and SDG 8. In the above document though one or two times there is a mention of vocational training, but it is recommended to add a critical analysis of the status of vocational training in Kyrgyzstan. This analysis can include:

Status of the outreach of vocational skill training to the marginalised groups with a gender segregated data (if available).

What are the core skills being taught under the umbrella of vocational training? Are those skills marketable? Is there any effort to ensure skilled people (especially women) to market and ensure a gender inclusive ecosystem in market?

Is there any discrimination between men and women in terms of choices of skills? Can women join any skill training of their choice? Is there any social norm that creates hindrances for women to join skill training of their choice? If so, what is the state’s role to mitigate those social barriers? •

REFERENCES


