



## Education – an essential link to achieving all the SDGs

**W**ith the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders of 193 countries committed to fight inequality and injustice, end poverty, and protect our planet. The goals seek to incorporate and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social, and environmental - and recognise the interlinkages between them. At the second year of the implementation of SDGs, the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), a central platform for follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will be reviewing the following 6 goals in 2017 - **Goal 1** - End poverty in all its forms everywhere; **Goal 2** - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; **Goal 3** - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; **Goal 5** - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; **Goal 9** - resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation, and; **Goal 14** - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Even though education (SDG 4) is not under specific review in 2017, it is important to recognise in the review process the strong links between education and the given goals, recognising that education is key in meeting many of the most important development challenges that exist today. Education plays a fundamental role



*Education plays a fundamental role in the success of the SDGs as it directly contributes to fighting poverty, ending inequalities, and promoting health and nutrition.*

in the success of the SDGs as it directly contributes to fighting poverty, ending inequalities, promoting health and nutrition, enhancing economic growth and labor market opportunities, as well as peace building and the promotion of democratic institutions.

The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) calculated there would be 171 million fewer people living in poverty if all students in low income countries learnt basic reading skills. It also noted that one extra year of schooling can increase earnings by 10% per individuals. Education is also critical for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. A study by UNESCO (2014) indicated that households in rural Vietnam with higher than primary schooling were 24% more likely not to be poor four

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*The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) calculated there would be 171 million fewer people living in poverty if all students in low income countries learnt basic reading skills.*

years later, compared to households with no schooling. Education, along with other investments, can help in reducing poverty, particularly among disadvantaged children in rural areas and among minority groups.

There is strong evidence that a mother's education improves her children's nutrition, especially as she seeks higher levels of schooling. A research by UNESCO (2013) shows that approximately 22 million fewer children in South Asia would be stunted if all mothers reached secondary education. In India, during the first year of life, children whose mothers reached lower secondary education were 48% less likely to suffer from stunting, compared to children of mothers with no education. A United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) study notices harmful impacts of undernutrition on education outcomes.

Educating girls can also save millions of lives. A literate mother is more likely to be better informed of specific diseases, thus take measures to prevent them. Women with primary education had on average 0.7 fewer live births than women with no education (UNICEF 2015). According to UNDESA (2015), education can protect people from engaging in high risk behaviours; school-based reproductive health education programmes are effective in increasing knowledge and adoption of safe sexual behavior.

Education plays an important role in redefining gender norms. Girls and women with low literacy rates often

face various obstacles. Acquiring and practicing basic literacy skills helps them in greater awareness of rights, increased confidence, and the ability to make their own decisions in their lives. Investments in education are also associated with an increase in women's income and an increase in the range of occupations for which they are employed (Education and SDGs, Educate a Child, FHI360, 2016 and Education Transforms

Lives, UNESCO, 2013).

UNDESA indicates special emphasis on the role of education in influencing innovation capacity and providing the foundation for technology absorption processes and diversification. Educated citizens are more concerned about the environment and inclined to use energy and water more efficiently. Target 4.7 of SDG 4 specifies that education for sustainable development can contribute to all efforts to achieve the SDGs by promoting social, economic, environmental, and political change, as well as by transforming behaviours.

This issue of *Ed-lines* especially highlights experiences on youth and adult education practice and how these impact on the fight against poverty, in advancing gender justice, promoting health, and improving livelihood opportunities for lives with dignity.



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**EDITORIAL**

## Equipping people with competencies to meaningfully contribute to community life

By Eri Yamamoto, Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA, Japan); and ASPBAE Executive Council Member for East Asia

Youth and adult education are critical drivers for eradicating poverty, achieving economic and overall empowerment, especially of marginalised groups, and challenging gender-based inequity and discrimination. Advocates for youth and adult education have therefore welcomed the broad-based endorsement by the global community of SDG 4 which advances a lifelong learning framework and underscores commitment to the promotion of functional youth and adult literacy and skills for work and life.

The first year of the SDG 4 rollout saw countries concretising and contextualising the new agenda in their individual realities – through their plans, programmes, and budgets. Alongside these efforts, the international community and governments were likewise deliberating and building consensus on the indicator framework for the SDGs, including SDG 4, to aid in measuring progress and strengthening accountability. Data gaps, weak data-base systems, and low capacities posed difficulties in forging agreement on an indicator framework that fully captured the wide ambitions of SDG 4. Perhaps predictably, those areas that lend to easier measurement tended to be prioritised for tracking and review, while those such as “skills for life”, especially for youth and adults – essential for decent work, responsible citizenship, and participation in society – tended to be sidelined.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2012 emphasised the importance of transferable skills, including the ability to communicate, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the competencies to take initiative, work well in a team and with others, as crucial to enable people to adapt to different work environments and improve their chances of remaining in gainful employment. Such skills are, thus, necessary to be developed along with foundational and technical and vocational skills to equip people with the competencies to meaningfully participate and contribute to community life, ‘learn to live together’, foster respect for diversity and tolerance, and build strong, resilient communities.

Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA, Japan) established 6 pilot library-oriented Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in rural disadvantaged areas of Cambodia. The centres aim to provide lifelong learning opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy, life skills, and livelihood skills necessary to combat poverty. This literacy programme is focused not only on enabling the participants to acquire reading and writing skills, but also to improve the daily life of each community member by linking literacy classes with livelihood trainings providing technical knowledge and skills.

Participants who completed SVA’s literacy classes and livelihood trainings offered encouraging feedback, “*I felt confident when I started being able to read some words in the advertisements or posters on the street*”. After graduating from the literacy course, Chea Sarry (36), said, “*I dream of being the best farmer in my village*”. Ung Hay (56) said that after the literacy course, he became one of the agricultural mobilisers in his village, teaching others how to improve vegetable cultivation.

SVA’s experience confirms that it is surely not enough to ensure that people learn to read, write, gain numeracy skills, or have access to information about agriculture or disease prevention. Confidence and motivation must be gained along with skills and knowledge, whereby they feel empowered to take



Eri Yamamoto

initiative or timely action to improve their livelihoods and their lives.

Adult education can link knowledge, skills and practice, paving the way to skilled employment. As mentioned in the 2012 GMR, the “pathways to skills” must be ensured where people are equipped to realise their full potential and gain self-esteem through skill development programmes.

Though it is challenging to set statistical indicators for “non-cognitive life skills”, civil society organisations can play an important role in compiling qualitative data from field experience. This would strongly contribute to advancing “lifelong learning”, providing continuous learning opportunities and various forms of education to equip people with the capacities they need to combat poverty and inequity, improve their lives and well-being, contribute well to society, and participate in defining a more sustainable development path.



The community learning centres established in Cambodia by Shanti Volunteer Association (Japan) focus on improving the daily life of each community member by linking literacy classes with livelihood workshops providing basic knowledge and skills.

## How can comprehensive sexuality education help achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality?

By **Samreen Shahbaz**,  
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Asia Pacific is home to the largest youth population (aged between 15-24 years) in the world. One in seven girls in the region has given birth by the age of 18, often in the context of high unmet need for contraception and child marriage, with more than a third of girls married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Up to 63% of adolescent pregnancies in the region are unintended, contributing to a significant, although underreported, burden of unsafe abortion<sup>1</sup>. According to a study, about up to 10% of males and 20% of females report having had a sexually transmitted infection or symptoms in the last 12 months<sup>2</sup>. Less than a third of young people have comprehensive knowledge of HIV and the majority (95%) of new infections occur among young key populations, including young female sex workers, men who have sex with men,



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transgender young people, and people who inject drugs<sup>3</sup>. Yet, young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) needs remain invisible in most health and education related programmes.

When it comes to gender-based violence and discrimination, young women bear the worst burden. A UNFPA report conducted in 6 Asia Pacific countries reveal that 30-50% of the men interviewed for the study admitted to committing "physical or sexual violence against women" at least once in their lifetime<sup>4</sup>. 49% of these respondents reported to having committed violence against women when they were teenagers<sup>5</sup>. Despite new laws and legislations, violence against women persists due to prevalent patriarchal norms and attitudes, as indicated by the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) report<sup>6</sup>.

Health and gender equality outcomes are deeply influenced by factors outside the policy and programmes landscape. In fact, there is a growing amount of evidence demonstrating the strong interlinkages between comprehensive sexuality education and reduced gender-based violence<sup>7</sup>.

Research shows that an education curriculum with comprehensive sexuality education is the most holistic pathway to fight gender inequality and impart skills and knowledge into children for a healthy transition into adulthood<sup>8,9</sup>.

Yet, comprehensive sexuality education remains a much contested issue all over the world. There are divided opinions on whether sexuality education should be imparted to children and, if yes, to what extent and what range of issues should be covered in sexuality education curriculum<sup>10</sup>.



*Exclusion of sexuality education silences and stigmatises any discussion on bodily changes, on positive body images, on managing transition into adulthood, on sexuality and relationships and desire, and on gender norms and attitude.*

1 [http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Young-Peoples-SRHR-in-Asia\\_Policy-Brief\\_2014.pdf](http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Young-Peoples-SRHR-in-Asia_Policy-Brief_2014.pdf)

2 [http://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20SHR%20YP%20AP\\_2015%20for%20web-final.pdf](http://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20SHR%20YP%20AP_2015%20for%20web-final.pdf)

3 Ibid.

4 <http://www.partners4prevention.org/sites/default/files/resources/p4p-report.pdf>

5 Ibid.

6 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/7/discrimination-against-women-persists-around-the-globe-hampering-development>

7 <http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1343/we-want-to-learn-about-good-love.pdf>

8 Ibid.

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*Creating an understanding of patriarchy, gender, power dynamics, and human rights is essential for sexuality education curricula to be truly effective.*

There has been huge outrage expressed by different stakeholders, ranging from governments and parents to even teachers, over inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in the school curricula, especially the rights-based components on sexual diversity and desire. It is important to ask how this silencing and exclusion of sexuality education contributes to promotion and prevalence of sexism, gender inequality, rape culture, unhealthy attitudes towards sex and towards their own bodies, and what our alternatives are if we are so hesitant towards imparting this knowledge to our children.

Exclusion of sexuality education silences and stigmatises any discussion on bodily changes, on positive body images, on managing transition into adulthood, on sexuality and relationships and desire, and on gender norms and attitude. It also prevents young people from seeking information on healthy sexual relationships, and in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education, most young people resort to information sources available online, including pornographic

websites and literature, which may not provide accurate and adequate information all the time. The harm of receiving sexuality information from these ill-informed sources often manifests in the form of gender-based violence and abuse in their real life sexual relationships<sup>11</sup> and negative body image and low self-esteem<sup>12</sup>. Exclusion of comprehensive sexuality education also silences discussions on gender-based discrimination and violence and perpetuates a rape culture which is highly prevalent in our regional context.

In order to effectively address the sexual and reproductive health and rights issues that young people are facing and to address sexism, patriarchal notion, and gender inequality, sexual education needs to be imparted to children at an early age when their attitudes and perceptions are being formed and before they become sexually active. Sexuality education curricula should talk about gender identities and gender roles; sexual and reproductive health, including bodily changes, puberty, body positivity, and sexually transmitted infections; sexual rights

and sexual citizenship, including knowledge on different national and international laws and policies with regards to sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality; pleasure and desire; violence, including emotional and physical abuse and exploitation; diversity, including sexual diversity and gender identities; the many aspects of healthy relationships, including negotiation and communication skills<sup>13</sup>. It should also be age appropriate and based on scientific evidence and should provide room for young people to openly explore their attitudes. It should also take into account prevailing gender norms and how it can put girls on a disadvantage when it comes to accessing/seeking information or negotiating unequal power relationships. Hence, addressing these gender norms by creating an understanding of patriarchy, gender and power dynamics, and human rights is also essential for any sexuality education curricula to be truly effective.

In the era of the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting these interlinkages and intersections between different dimensions of our social issues is very important as our lived realities are connected to many facets of our lives. This is indeed an important learning that comes forward from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well, i.e. addressing the root causes of the issues will lead us towards sustainable solutions<sup>14</sup>. An attempt to work towards resolving the issues without addressing the causes will remain superficial and ineffective.

Today's young people will determine the social fabric and well-being of the region in the decades to come, and hence, it is imperative to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills. An intersectional approach towards policies and programming on education, health, and gender equality will ensure holistic and sustainable solutions to achieve these goals.

9 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/507845/Shifting-Social-Norms-tackle-Violence-against-Women-Girls3.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/507845/Shifting-Social-Norms-tackle-Violence-against-Women-Girls3.pdf)

10 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002150/215091e.pdf>

11 <http://jech.bmj.com/content/early/2015/05/27/jech-2015-205453>

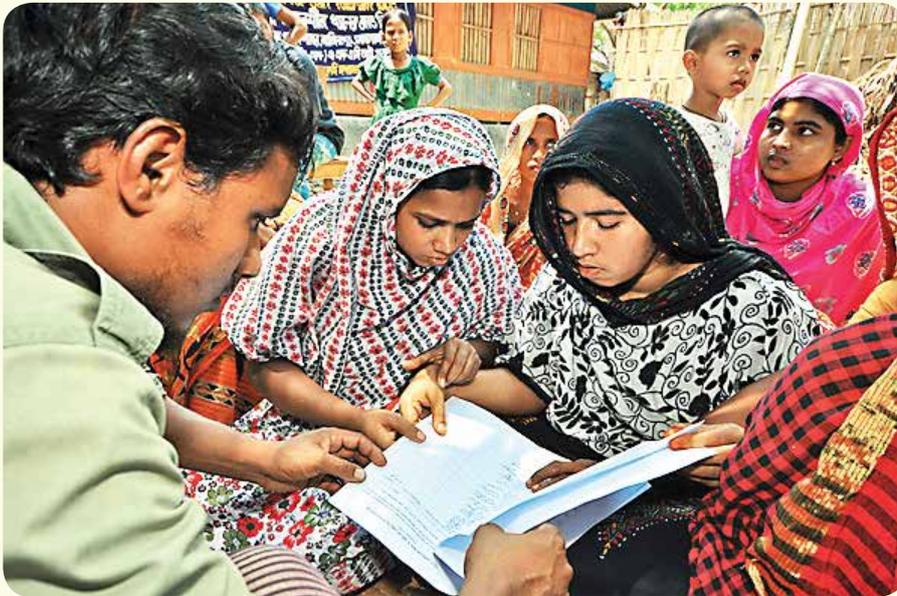
12 [http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/trends/n\\_9437/index1.html](http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/trends/n_9437/index1.html)

13 [http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Programme-for-Young-People\\_Position-Paper\\_2012.pdf](http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Programme-for-Young-People_Position-Paper_2012.pdf)

14 <http://arrow.org.my/publication/srhr-2030-agenda-looking-back-moving-forward/>

## Equipping farmers with adult education to overcome poverty

*By Ehsanur Rahman, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Bangladesh; and ASPBAE Executive Council Member for South and Central Asia*



*In DAM's agricultural project, farmer's learning took place largely through reading relevant information and by participating in courses on innovative technologies.*

the contribution of education towards improved farming in the agriculture sector and access to markets are brought into discussion here.

In the agriculture extension project of DAM, farmers' learning took place through interaction with the extension personnel besides reading relevant information materials and participation in courses on improved and innovative technology. ICT apps such as 'Farmer Query System' developed in the project expanded their learning channel through which farmers could have access to their desired technical agricultural information and solutions. Monitoring data shows that 70% of the farmers had used the application contributing to increased production in their farms.

**E**ducation is the acquisition and use of learning skills combined with required practical (literacy inclusive) and life skills capacitating to take informed decisions that have an enduring impact on life. The effects of education are manifested through changes in the lifestyle and behaviour pattern. This article is to exhibit how and to what extent education, precisely adult learning and education, equips youth and adults in overcoming poverty and improving their living conditions. The discussion is made specifically from the food security perspective, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on poverty, hunger, and food security.

Poverty is a 'hydra-headed' phenomenon comprised of a complicated network of economic, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors. It requires referencing to locality and demography, culture, economic, and social structures. Aligned to that, in SDG 4, education is seen as an empowering tool and has the potential of contributing to various dimensions of poverty. Examples from DAM's (Dhaka Ahsania Mission) experience in

Besides productivity enhancement, the learning domain of farmers is extended to marketing education, enabling them to access market information and enhance their negotiation skills, diversifying their business opportunities, and employment and entrepreneurship development, which are common targets in SDG 1, 2, 4 and 8.



*In DAM's livelihood and training programmes, farmers are offered access to market information and enhanced negotiating skills.*

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A complementary initiative here is facilitating farmers' access to finances through banks for agri-inputs purchase by use of a special credit card known as A-Card. The farmers' skill of using the credit card for purchasing agricultural inputs empowered them to assertively make decisions and move ahead with production plans. *"I am able to buy agro-input at low costs from designated retailers with the A-card whenever I need with flexible re-payment terms"* is the confident voice of a farmer from Faridpur district in Bangladesh.

Such learnings demonstrate that adult learning and education plays a critical role in peoples' capacity enhancement. It can play a significant role in helping people come out of the vicious circle of poverty and be a productive citizen.

However, to ensure effectiveness of that role, an adult learning and education programme framework needs to be designed based on the needs and contexts of adult and youth learners. This demands revisiting the format and contents of education programmes, going beyond a four-wall centre based learning system and confining learning by interaction with the teachers only. DAM's agriculture extension project was effective as it was implemented

with the active engagement of the agriculture extension personnel and the information delivery mode was diverse.

Peoples' access to public services is considered another important parameter to improve the living conditions of vulnerable and marginalised rural communities. In DAM's experience, the Community Learning Centre (CLC) model, locally known as Ganokendra approach, is found as an effective learning platform which facilitates adult learning because of its roots based in communities and its flexible learning process. This approach also offers opportunities for continuous updating of knowledge and skills in the areas of peoples' choice contributing to lifelong learning (SDG 4). Over a period of time, some of the CLCs are turned into Agriculture Extension Service Centres (AESC).

Typically, in these examples, the farmers are 'learners' and extension personnel are 'teachers'. The learners learn at their own pace as per need and convenience. Are adult learning and education proponents ready to call this an education programme and transform traditional adult learning and education programmes accordingly? This is an essential requirement to brand education as vital to the Sustainable Development Goals.



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## Education community offers inputs to the High Level Political Forum 2017

**T**he 2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) will convene under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) from 10-19 July 2017, including a three-day ministerial meeting of the Forum from 17-19 July 2017. The theme is ‘Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world’ and will focus on the following set of goals in 2017: Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, and 17.

One aspect of the HLPF review processes is the conduct of voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of the 2030 Agenda, which are meant to be state-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants’ and should provide a platform for partnerships. It also involves input and submissions from relevant UN entities, inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder platforms, including civil society, through the participation of Major groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS).

In this regard, the Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (part of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders mechanism) and the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee (an international multi-stakeholder forum) provided their submissions to the HLPF 2017 on SDG 4 as education interacts and relates to the SDGs under review, and within the theme of ‘Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world’. Excerpts from these inputs are outlined here:

### Education and Academia Stakeholder Group

#### Summary of Education and Academia Stakeholder Group submission

*“Education is the most sustainable, long-term driver to increase prosperity, and to end poverty for good. Most of the goals reviewed this year by the High-level Political Forum rely on education for their realisation; similarly, poverty, hunger, poor health, gender discrimination and climate-related disasters are detrimental to the realisation of SDG 4.*

*Free, quality education breaks cycles of poverty and exclusion, making SDG 4’s commitment to universal, free, primary and secondary education vital. A 12% cut in global poverty could be achieved if all students in low income countries have basic reading skills. Education addresses discrimination against women and girls, and when women are educated, nutrition, food security, child health and mortality are improved. If all women complete primary school, maternal deaths*



*The Education and Academia Stakeholder Group and the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee provided their submissions to the HLPF 2017 on SDG 4 as education interacts and relates to the Sustainable Development Goals under review.*

*would decrease by two thirds.*

*To implement the agenda, cross-sectoral relationships and interrelated policy-making are necessary – in line with Goal 17. Education civil society has recognised this; networks have broadened, and cross-sectoral dialogues are achieving positive change.*

*Progress has been witnessed on the establishment of focal points for SDG implementation in some countries, along with efforts to align SDG targets with national policies. It is clear that the global infrastructure developed to support the 2000-2015 Education For All goals and the subsequent Education 2030 Framework for Action have facilitated ongoing monitoring of SDG 4 through the Global Education Monitoring Report and the swift establishment of accountability mechanisms, including the Education 2030 Steering Committee.*

*Yet obstacles exist – particularly in a context of protracted and deepening crises, and increasingly insular government policy. SDG financing has proven challenging. To deliver SDG 4, domestic budgets remain insufficient and reductions in ODA have not helped. Domestic resource mobilisation should be a priority, yet there is reluctance from the international community to create mechanisms to support increases to domestic resource bases – for example by establishing a global tax platform. A combination of increased domestic resources, tax justice at national and international levels and increased international cooperation are necessary to make the implementation of the agenda viable.*

*Despite the participatory climate in which the SDGs were developed, doors have since closed to civil society; activists report aggressive action to limit civil society activity, including restrictions on funding and protest, even direct criminalisation. Citizens must have a voice in the decision-making process*

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*Free, quality education breaks cycles of poverty and exclusion, making SDG 4's commitment to universal, free, primary and secondary education vital.*

*– as embedded in the SDGs themselves. A further challenge lies in the measurement and accountability processes. The global indicators framework is not yet finalised, delaying the collection of stronger, disaggregated data which is critical to ensuring that the SDGs deliver for the most marginalised. Civil society can contribute here, with citizen-collected data. However, several proposed education indicators are reducing the agenda to measures of testing, which fails the ambition of SDG 4 to deliver quality education, and of all the SDGs to ensure that everyone enjoys fulfilling lives.*

*These obstacles impede delivery of the goals, and in education this has given rise to increasing privatisation in some countries with reports of for-profit actors taking advantage of gaps in public provision, undermining the responsibility of the state as the duty bearer for the 2030 Agenda.*

*While some progress has been witnessed, there is a*

*sense that it is ‘business as usual’. This agenda is too important to fail; two years in, it is time to deliver.*

*Recommendations include:*

- *Credible roadmaps must be developed for each SDG; for SDG 4 these must explicitly provide for education which is of quality, equitable, inclusive and free.*
- *States must deliver their responsibility to finance the SDGs; for SDG4 this should be as detailed within the Education 2030 Framework for Action.*
- *Citizen participation in accountability at all levels must be enabled.*
- *VNRs should include formal space for representative national civil society reporting.”*

The link to the full submission of the Education and Academia Stakeholder group can be found on the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform website at – <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=746&menu=3170>

### SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee focused its response to articulating SDG 4 within: (a) an assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world” at the global level; (b) the identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges; (c) valuable lessons learnt on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity; (d) emerging issues likely to affect the realisation of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity; (e) areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required; (f) policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication.

*Linkages between education and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals*



*SDG financing has proven challenging. Domestic budgets remain insufficient and reductions in ODA have not helped.*

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*Despite the participatory climate in which the SDGs were developed, many doors have since closed to civil society.*

Improved education attainment and learning achievement increase the earning capacity of individuals and the economic growth of nations, which in turn help reduce poverty. The importance of public expenditure on education (alongside health and social protection) as a percentage of total government expenditure is reflected in its selection as a global indicator under SDG 1. Research and development in agriculture is key to achieving food security and sustainable practices; likewise, education, particularly for women, is an essential ingredient of improved nutrition – both of which come under SDG 2. Education is one of the most powerful ways of achieving SDG 3 on health and of making sure the benefits are passed on to future generations. With respect to SDG 5, achieving gender equality requires an approach which ensures that girls and boys, women and men not only access education and training, but are also empowered equally in and through education and lifelong learning. Good quality education also holds the key for innovation-led economic growth, one of the objectives of SDG 9. In addition to education's role in the achievement of specific SDGs, schools, universities, and the education sector more generally, have a critical role to play in raising awareness of Agenda 2030, and to galvanise commitments by teaching about the SDGs, undertaking research on sustainable development, and supporting local sustainability efforts.

**Poverty as a barrier to education**

Poverty remains a key barrier for educational access, attainment, and achievement and represents a major risk for the sustainable development agenda. The lower a family's income, the greater the effect that the associated costs of schooling will have on a family's ability to ensure the education of their children. This is a vicious cycle, as lack of access in turn limits families' ability to climb out of the trap of poverty. Furthermore, malnourished children living in conditions of poor sanitation are unable to develop to their full potential and benefit from schooling and other learning opportunities. Gender discrimination also perpetuates the exclusion of women from education.

The cost of educating children, youth, and adults is far outweighed by the cost of not educating them. Adults who lack basic skills have greater difficulty finding well-paying jobs and escaping poverty. Education for girls has particularly striking social benefits: incomes are higher and maternal and infant mortality rates are lower for educated women, who also have more personal freedom in making choices.

**The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges**

The sustainable development agenda requires changes in the production and consumption model for continued and shared prosperity in a globalised world, with significant implications for education. Accordingly, education systems must be relevant and respond to rapidly changing labour markets, technological advances, urbanisation, migration, political instability, environmental degradation, natural hazards and disasters, competition for natural resources, demographic challenges, increasing global unemployment, persistent poverty, widening inequality, and expanding threats to peace and safety. Beyond economic imperatives and new skills for changing working environments and demands, as highlighted by the focus of SDG target 4.7, education systems need to prepare the ground for these changes by ensuring that children and youth acquire



*Improved education attainment and learning achievement increase the earning capacity of individuals and the economic growth of nations, which in turn help reduce poverty.*

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the competencies to communicate appropriately with people from other cultures, language backgrounds or countries; to understand other people's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings; to adjust their own behaviours to fit new contexts; and to process information in a critical manner. These skills and competencies are key to responsible citizenship in a more complex and interconnected world.

***Emerging issues likely to affect the realisation of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity***

It is no longer sufficient to aim simply for getting all children and youth to school and ensuring basic literacy and numeracy skills, which were once the ticket for escaping poverty. The extent to which countries can productively employ large numbers of workers will largely depend on their ability to provide other skills. The export-led manufacturing growth model of Asia offers limited guidance. The loss of middle skill jobs, and the unpreparedness of education systems to provide transferable skills, leaves large numbers of people at risk of vulnerable employment and exclusion from further learning opportunities.

The emphasis on lifelong learning in SDG 4 is important for ensuring that individuals' skills and competencies are maintained and improved as work, technology, and skill requirements change. Accordingly, there is a need to re-orient training systems to offer relevant quality training while ensuring equal access to training for the poor. Beyond specialist technical knowledge and skills (enterprise, business know-how, financial skills) vocational education and training should include basic skills (literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills), 'employability' skills (communication, application of numbers, team working, problem solving, learning to learn, etc.), higher order skills (logic, reasoning, analysis, synthesis, statistics, etc.), attitudinal and behavioural skills (initiative, confidence, willingness, perseverance, determination), as well as life skills (social, health, interpersonal skills). While mainstreaming is crucial, targeted programmes are still needed to reach out to the most vulnerable groups and ensure their faster access



*Regarding SDG 5, achieving gender equality requires an approach which ensures that girls and boys, women and men not only access education and training, but are also empowered equally in and through education and lifelong learning.*

to skills and employment. In developing countries with currently low levels of education attainment, policies that promote more equal access to basic education (for example, cash transfers aimed at encouraging better attendance at primary schools, or spending on public education that benefits the poor) and targeted TVET programmes could help reduce inequality by facilitating the accumulation of human capital, and making educational opportunities less dependent on socio-economic circumstances.

Natural and human disasters also strongly affect the capacity of education systems to deliver services for vulnerable populations affected by climate change and conflict. This is especially relevant in the case of refugees considering that more than half of them are under 18, and many unaccompanied by their families. Given the long-term nature of displacement and the magnitude of the challenge in some countries, education systems that receive forcibly displaced children and youth need to adapt to support their long-term integration.

To ensure education is more equitable and focused on the most disadvantaged, learners will require changes in the design of education systems, practices in and out of school, and in the way in which resources are allocated. This may include managing school choice, providing second chance opportunities and alternate pathways, emphasis on inclusion and targeted assistance to marginalised and vulnerable groups, strengthening linkages between school, home, and community, and greater investment in early childhood care and education, in particular targeting the poor.

***Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication***

The recommendations of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to the High Level Political Forum from the perspective of education in the SDGs and its connection to poverty eradication and prosperity are outlined below:

- Countries must ensure that levels of domestic funding for education are in line with the international



*Education is one of the most powerful ways of achieving SDG 3 on health and of making sure the benefits are passed on to future generations.*

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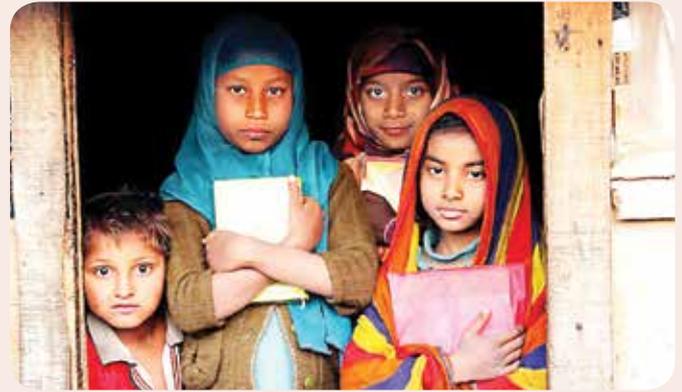
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*To ensure education is more equitable and focused on the most disadvantaged, learners will require changes in the design of education systems, practices in and out of school, and in the way in which resources are allocated.*

benchmarks of at least 15% of public expenditure and 4% of GDP as outlined in the 2015 Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

- More and better-targeted external finance for education in the poorest countries and within countries. Filling the US\$ 39 billion education financing gap for 2015-2030 will require increased and better harmonised external funding.
- Prioritise the commitment to free primary and secondary education and ensure a lower cost burden of education for families. Even where fees are abolished in legislation, the share of total education expenditure borne by households at each level can remain high.
- Achieve universal secondary education completion. In addition to providing financial support to poor families to cover the direct and indirect costs of schooling, policies must support the provision of a complete cycle of quality secondary education for all.
- Promote coherence between sectoral policies, including through integration of the income generating, social protection, and education, health, and nutrition, water and sanitation dimensions of poverty reduction programmes.
- Improve information and statistical analysis of data on children, youth, and adults who are excluded from education opportunities.
- Strengthen role of civil society in delivery of services, as well as in monitoring the local implementation of the SDGs.
- Strengthen policies to reduce inequality.
- Adapt the content of education to develop skills for

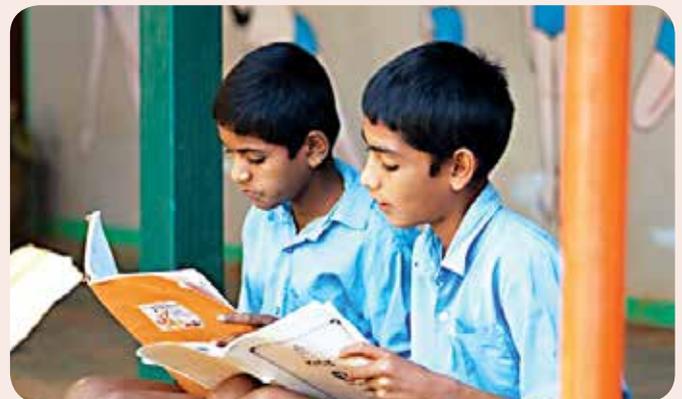


*Education systems that receive forcibly displaced children and youth need to adapt to support their long-term integration.*

sustainability: Develop short-term strategies focused on workforce retraining and upskilling, together with long-term strategies to improve or revise curricula at all levels of education. Reinforce or introduce Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as captured in SDG 4.7 to enable children, youth, and adults to deal with global challenges - extreme violence, climate change, financial crises or health pandemics - collectively in an increasingly interconnected world. In addition to vocational skills, such social and civic skills are paramount in creating stable institutions and societies, which are conducive contextual factors for eradicating poverty.

(The full submission of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee can be found at - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=674&menu=3170>)

*This write-up is based on information appearing on the HLPF website and on the Education and Academia Stakeholder Group and SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee submissions to the HLPF.*



*Policies must support the provision of a complete cycle of quality secondary education for all.*

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