WHY ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION (ALE) MATTERS IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

AN ANALYSIS OF 12 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS (VNRS) FROM THE ALE LENS

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Table of Contents

Background

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) has had a long history. Thinkers of all times were aware that learning should not stop at an early stage, and that learning is an integral part of life. `Once you stop learning, you start dying,' the great Albert Einstein had said. The 20th Century was a glorious time of the adult education movement, with campaigns to eradicate illiteracy in China, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Turkey and several other countries; to social movements inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to educate the oppressed to reflect on their poverty and demand their rights; along with the new paradigms of teaching adults by Malcolm Knowles and others.

At its founding in 1946, UNESCO put literacy at the top of its education and human rights agenda. It was in 1949 that UNESCO convened the Conference on Adult Education or CONFINTEA as a series of high-level conferences. In 1975, the Recommendations on Adult Learning and Education (RALE) were adopted by the 38th UNESCO General Conference, according to which ALE was an integral condition for human development, well-being and democracy. However, in later years, UNESCO remained almost the only international agency champion of literacy. Other international agencies such as the UNICEF and the World Bank focused either on young children and primary schooling or on the formal school system and higher education. For powerful actors such as the World Bank and other development banks or big bi-lateral donors, with their insistence on a human capital approach, literacy- especially adult literacy- was seen as too political and insufficiently linked to direct economic development. As a result, at the eve of the 21st Century, the momentum for ALE somehow disappeared. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused on primary education alone, and many adult educators criticized the Education for All (EFA) framework adopted in the World Education Framework in 2000 as `except for adults.' Many national governments, especially in the developing countries, adopted this view. Today, Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is probably the sub-sector of any education system with the highest impact for the lowest input. In fact, many governments devote less than 1% of their education budget to ALE.

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda opened a window of opportunity for ALE. Although not mentioned explicitly, it was considered an integral part of the Lifelong Learning framework which was declared to be the guiding concept for the education agenda.

ALE represents a sub-sector in the field of education where the percentage of civil society organizations (CSO) in implementation of programs is the highest. Many governments leave it mostly to civil society organizations to provide the necessary services in adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school youth, skills training, financial literacy, or organize various awareness programs. With this background, a strong need was felt for effective advocacy and lobbying for the interests of youth and adults whose rights to education have been neglected by governments. CSOs also called for the scaling up of effective ALE practices implemented by ALE providers who are rooted in civil society and communities. It was felt necessary to capitalize on the high involvement of CSOs in implementing ALE programs for a strong voice on ALE policy and public provisioning. It was considered that questions such as `How could governments be held accountable for financing and delivering on adult education, especially for marginalized communities?' `How could education rights campaigners and education coalitions all over Asia and the Pacific support their members and other actors in their struggle for improving the frameworks for ALE which is the most neglected sector in lifelong learning?' needed to be asked and answered.

The ALE advocacy of ASPBAE is embedded in its monitoring of countries' progress in delivering commitments to the Education 20130+ or Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the full 17 SDGs agenda. Since 2016, every year, countries sign up to present a Voluntary National Review to assess their progress in achieving the SDGs

The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are considered the "cornerstone of the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda." Presented at the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, the VNRs provide

countries with the unique opportunity to report on the progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and share their experiences, including the successes, challenges, and lessons learned. Countries doing their VNRs may be able to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and seek the input of other countries with the aim of strengthening policies and plans on accelerating progress of the 2030 Agenda.[1]

ASPBAE views the VNRs as important documents that will provide data on governments' understanding, policy frameworks and programs for ALE. ASPBAE also considers the VNR processes at the country and international levels as opportunities for ALE advocates to put forward policy and program recommendation on ALE and how this can be integrated as a strategy to achieve the other SDGs.

It was in this context that ASPBAE and DVV International's Regional Office in South East Asia jointly organized a capacity building workshop for advocacy on Adult Learning and Education in Bangkok from 4-6 September 2019. The workshop envisaged strengthening the knowledge and skills of civil society education coalitions and adult education providers to enable a scaling up of ALE advocacy in their countries and in other transnational policy spaces. The workshop aimed at providing a space for exchange, for building a shared understanding of concepts on ALE and the critical global and regional policy debates around ALE. Also, it was an event for ASPBAE members to plan out strategies and activities at the country and regional levels to lobby governments to invest in quality adult learning and education.

Thereafter, ASPBAE commissioned a study to review the VNRs of select countries in the region, through an Adult Learning and Education (ALE) lens. The aim of the review was to use this to build capacities of the national education coalitions to understand what countries had done so far in implementing Adult Learning and Education as part of SDG 4 and accordingly plan out their advocacy to ensure that governments finance lifelong learning opportunities for adults. Twelve countries were selected for the review. These included VNRs from Pakistan (2019), Indonesia (2019), Kazakhstan (2019), Lao PDR (2018), Vanuatu (2019), Timor-Leste (2019), Sri Lanka (2018), and Mongolia (2019). These eight VNRs were reviewed by a Consultant who was commissioned by ASPBAE to undertake the task. In addition, four country VNRs were reviewed by ASPBAE partners namely, Nirantar/NCE-India (2017), National Campaign for Education-Nepal (2017), Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net)- Philippines (2019), and Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA)-Vietnam (2018).

Of all the 17 SDGs, it is only SDG 4 that deals specifically with education. Since the focus of SDG 4 is on Quality Education, each country VNR was critically examined to ascertain whether there was any reference to ALE in SDG 4. It was also ascertained whether there was any reference to ALE in other SDGs in the VNR. The next question related to whether ALE was referred to in Policy issues. What were the ALE organizational structures reported in the VNR, was the next issue of concern. Thereafter, it was ascertained whether there was any mention of financing of ALE. If so, how much? This was the framework under which each of the country VNRs was reviewed.

A synthesis report of the 12 country VNRs was subsequently attempted from an ALE lens. The aim of this review was to ascertain what countries had done so far in implementing Adult Learning and Education as part of SDG 4 and to examine how and in what manner concerns relating to the education of adults- youth, women and men were incorporated in other 16 SDGs. The present document summarizes how some of the countries are actually implementing ALE programs and highlights how most countries understand its importance in achieving SDGs. This document thus makes a strong case for designing and developing ALE programs and integrating them in most SDGs for their effective implementation.

[1]ASPBAE Guidance Note in Engaging in the VNR 2020 Process, 2020

Why is ALE important in achieving SDGs?

There are a large number of countries in the region in which the absolute numbers among illiterate youth and adults, particularly among rural women and marginalized groups, are still high. The problem of adult illiteracy therefore needs to be addressed centrally by these countries. UNESCO has played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse on adult education and literacy ever since 1949. Initially, adult education was limited to adult literacy and was viewed as basic literacy that consists of acquisition of skills of reading, writing and numeracy. This limited view of literacy later expanded to the notion of `functional literacy' which emphasized links between literacy, productivity and overall socio-economic development. Another development involved the ways in which literacy is used and practiced in different social and cultural contexts. Influenced by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, literacy is viewed as an active process of learning involving social awareness and critical reflection, which can empower individuals and groups to promote social change. There was therefore a shift in focus from adult education to adult learning to emphasize an active engagement of the adults in the learning process. The concept of non-formal education also gained ground. In recent years, literacy is increasingly being conceptualized as multiple, socio-cultural, political. Literacy is therefore conceived in the plural as `literacies' and embedded in a range of life and livelihood situations. Thus, the concept of `multiple literacies'- related to technological, health, information, financial, media, digital and other contexts- is considered better suited to life in the twenty-first century.

It is important to recognize that literacy confers a wide set of benefits- human, social, economic, cultural, political- on individuals, families, communities and nations. The first are the human benefits, deeply tied to an individual's self-esteem, confidence, and personal empowerment. Literacy can enable people to access information in a range of areas such as nutrition, health care, agriculture, and even develop their capabilities. Women who acquire literacy skills contribute to improved health, reduce child mortality, and reduce birth rates. Literate parents are known to demand access to education for their children, and even assist them with their school work at home. Since illiteracy and poverty are inextricably linked, literacy can enable individuals to

have access to a wide range of choices for skills development, with a possibility of increased income. By providing access to written culture, literacy can enhance cultural awareness and appreciation, and therefore contribute to safeguarding cultural diversity. Literacy can bring about increased political participation by enabling people to participate more fully in community meetings, locally elected bodies, and national political life. In other words, literacy is crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in today's knowledge economies.

Continuing a series of global UNESCO meetings on adult education and learning, the Belem Framework for Action records the commitment of Member States and presents a strategic guide for the global development of adult literacy and adult education within the perspective of lifelong learning. Adult learning and education are regarded as a key component for a holistic and comprehensive system of life-wide and lifelong learning and education which integrate formal, non-formal and informal learning and which address the learning needs of both youth and adults. Adult learning and education are regarded as important for developing self-reliant, autonomous individuals, building their lives in complex and rapidly changing cultures, societies and economies- at work, in the family, in the community, in the society at large.

It is imperative to integrate ALE in the SDGs. The benefits from ALE abound, debunking the notion that it is only `nice to have.' In SDG 8 on decent work, ALE can help address the needs of people **Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)** for ALE reaches the most vulnerable: the working poor, information sector workers and the unemployed. Through apprenticeships and non-formal training, ALE can provide those in need with on-the-job experience and prepare them for the needs of both formal and informal labor markets. In SDG 16 on Peace and Strong Institutions, ALE can play a role in reducing violence and bring people and communities together. Through its sensitive and learner-oriented methodology, it can help to prevent conflicts by focusing on commonalities rather than differences between people, groups and communities, help in the recovery of conflict affected areas and thereby promote sustainable peace and conflict transformation.[2]

[2] DVVI- Weimar Conference, 2019

Highlights of the Synthesis Report of the 12 VNRs from ALE Lens

01. Context

The 12 countries have varying physical, economic, demographic, and social backgrounds which need to be noted in reviewing them from an ALE lens. These include **India, Pakistan** and **Indonesia** which are high population countries to countries like **Vanuatu** and **Timor-Leste** which are considered Small Island Developing States. While **Mongolia** and **Kazakhstan** are countries with a vast landmass, Mongolia has a relatively small population of 3.2 million people, and is largely homogenous in terms of ethnicity, language, religion and even culture. On the other hand, the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan is diverse, with more than 100 groups and representatives of 18 religions living in the country. The **Republic of Indonesia** is a country that is spread across 17,000 islands, has a population of 264 million people, comprising 1,300 ethnic groups. **The Lao Peoples' Republic (PDR)** is a landlocked, ethnically diverse, and mountainous country with an estimated population of about 6.5 million. **Pakistan**, a country of 212 million people, has rich cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. **Nepal** is a landlocked Least Developed Country (LLDC) that borders India and China. Mountains and hills occupy 83 percent of its area with the remaining 17 percent being the Terai plains. Nepal has a high level of social, cultural, and ethnic diversity with 125 ethnic groups and 123 mother tongue languages, of which more than a dozen are in use by more than 100,000 people. As of 2017, **India** was the fastest growing major economy in the world. Between 1993-1994 and 2003-2004, the economy grew at an annual average of 6.2% and between 2004-2005 and 2011-2012, at the rate of 8.3%. In 2018, the gross domestic product (GDP) of **Philippines** grew by 6.2 percent, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the region. Philippines has made significant progress in achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all Filipinos.

Indonesia is on the way to acquire upper middle-income status, whereas **Lao PDR** has moved from the ranks of low income economies and is likely to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2024. **Vietnam** is a nation that is geographically, ethnically and culturally diverse. Its economy is based mainly on agriculture. However, various disasters due to climate change have affected sustainable agricultural production. The quality of socio-economic development and competitive capacity of the economy remain low, while there is a shortage of high quality human resource in all sectors and professions. **Sri Lanka** and **Kazakhstan** have high levels of human development and have high levels of literacy rates among children, youth and adults. On the other hand, **India** and **Pakistan** are among those countries that have very high levels of adult illiteracy as well as illiteracy among out of school children and youth.

Despite identifying the vulnerable groups in each country and ensuring that they have access to education, health, adequate income, and other basic services, the experience of countries in the region has been variable. Most countries have problems of inequities in relation to people who live in remote rural areas, people with disabilities, old people, women and children. All the countries have been severely affected by climate change. In some countries, the frequency of natural disasters induced by climate change has not only directly affected the livelihoods of the people, but has also exacerbated environmental degradation thereby, impacting economic growth. All these varying physical, social, economic, demographic factors have been considered in reviewing VNRs (Voluntary National Reviews) from an ALE (Adult Learning and Education) lens.

While all the countries endorsed the UN Sustainable Development Goals and accepted the 2030 Agenda, the process of integration of the SDGs in the national development plans and policies varied. Some countries, like the **Lao PDR** held prior national-level consultations that provided inputs from the government, as well as those of the civil society, private sector and citizens from across the country not only before the UN Sustainable Development Summit but also continued the process of consultation after the Summit before incorporating the SDGs into the country's 2016-2020 National Socio-Economic Development Plan. On the other hand, **Vanuatu** held wide-ranging consultations, starting from the village level and going all the way to the provincial and national levels, and thereby building the `Peoples' Plan,' after the adoption of the SDGs and ensured the localization of SDGs and alignment with national policies. In the **Philippines**, a nationwide survey conducted in 2015 led to the preparation of a vision document titled AmBisyan Natin 2040 (literally meaning `Our Ambition and Vision'). AmBisyon Natin 2040 represents the collective long-term vision and aspirations of the Filipino people for themselves and for the country. This was about the time that the Philippines adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and formulated the Philippines Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022 which serves as the implementation mechanism of the SDGs with the 17 goals integrated in the medium-term national development strategy. The PDP subsequently cascaded to the whole of government, including at the local level, following the Executive Order No. 27 s. 2017. Philippines has employed the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to SDG implementation. National plans and programs are grounded in laws to ensure robustness. Cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation are brought about through existing institutional structures. While government is both a catalyst and mobilizer of the policy framework for the SDGs, even non-government stakeholders have taken on the responsibility for the implementation of the SDGs. In the case of **Indonesia**, there was a great deal of overlap between 2030 Agenda and Indonesia's National Medium-Term Development Agenda (RPJMN) 2015-2019 that made the process of alignment of the two quite easy. **Pakistan** adopted the SDGs as it own national development agenda through unanimous National Assembly Resolution in 2016. Following the adoption of the SDGs, the **Mongolian** Parliament adopted the Law on Development Policy and Planning in November 2015. Thereafter, the adoption of Mongolia's Sustainable Development Vision-2030 (MSDV-2030) in 2016, in accordance with the Law on Development Policy and Planning, was an important step towards ensuring SDG localization and alignment of national policies with SDGs. In the case of **Timor-Leste**, the country's Strategic Development Plan (SDP) (2011-2030) is the primary vehicle for achieving the SDGs. In response to the 2030 Agenda, a Roadmap for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was prepared in 2017 that outlines how the country's national plan also aligns with the SDGs. **Sri Lanka**'s current strategic development framework can be examined through its long-term development plan i.e. *Vision 2025*: A *Country Enriched*; its medium development plan i.e. *Public Investment Program*; *2017-2020* (*PIP*), and its short-term plan, i.e. the `*Blue Green'* *Budget of 2018*. The principle of sustainable development underscores the need to bring about a synergy between economic, social and environmental concerns. Sri Lanka's strategic outlook presented in the above documents has integrated these dimensions in varying degrees. **Kazakhstan** began the SDG implementation process from a relatively good starting point. The 2030 Agenda largely coincides with the priorities of Kazakhstan's Strategy-2050 and the 2025 Strategy Plan: 79.9% of the indicators of the SDGs are already reflected in the strategy documents of Kazakhstan and there is a high level of integration of the goals and targets in national programs and projects. According to its VNR, **India** played an important role in shaping the SDGs. This has meant that the country's national development goals are mirrored in SDGs. As such, India has been effectively committed to achieving the SDGs even before they were fully crystallized. `Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,' translated as `Collective Effort, Inclusive Development' enunciated by the Prime Minister, forms the cornerstone of India's national development agenda. In **Vietnam**, the issuance and enactment of the National Action Plan on Sustainable Development (NAP on SDGs) was the

important first step in securing official commitment and engaging different sectors and stakeholders for the achievement of SDG targets. **Nepal** was a monarchical kingdom that was transformed to a multiparty democracy in 1990 and to a Federal Democratic Republic in December 2007. Following the decade-long conflict (1996-2006) and the subsequent peace accord, the Constitution of Nepal came into effect in September 2015 and is the overall guiding document for Nepal's development efforts. The Constitution guarantees inclusive socio-political and economic development and a wide range of basic and fundamental rights, including those to equality, justice, property, freedom of religion, a clean environment, education and rights against discrimination. Nepal's Fourteenth Plan (2016/17-2018/19) which began in July 2016, is consistent with SDGs. As a matter of fact, the various constitutional provisions, along with the enforcing mechanisms, have created a favorable enabling environment to implement SDGs in the spirit of `no one is left behind.'

The SDGs consist of 17 goals. Out of these, only SDG 4 deals with education and lifelong learning. There are, however, explicit educational and awareness raising targets embedded in SDG 3 on health and well being, SDG 8 on decent work, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 13 on climate change. It was therefore decided to review SDG 4 first and thereafter review the other 16 SDGs from the ALE lens.

What is apparent from above is that not all the Parliaments in all the countries first ratified the SDGs. Only Mongolia, Pakistan, Indonesia and India did. In most other countries, governments either passed a new law and/or ensured that the SDGs were suitably incorporated in the existing national policies and plans. Some re-worked their national plans to incorporate the SDGs or else adopted the SDGs as their own national development agenda. Aligning, mainstreaming, and localizing the SDGs into the national development policies and plans was essential for moving forward in the implementation of SDGs.

03.1
Formal Schooling

Since the main focus of SDG 4 is on formal system of education and on improving the quality of educational services, the VNR reports focus on the achievements in the formal system of education that include whether universal coverage in primary enrolment and gender parity at the primary level has been achieved and whether enrolment ratios and achievement levels at the secondary levels and tertiary have gone up.

🔴 As the focus of the High Level Political Forum for 2017 was `Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world,' the VNR of **India** focuses on SDGs 1,2,3,5,9,14,17. What is apparent is that SDG 4 is not included in the VNR of India. This is despite the fact that the U.N. guidelines for preparing the country VNR for 2017 clearly stated that the VNR had to be `people-centered, gender-sensitive, and respect, protect and promote human rights, with a particular focus on the people who are poorest, most vulnerable and left furthest behind.' It was also stipulated that the countries had to acknowledge that the targets did not stand independently in silos but instead were interconnected. This meant that the country's progress on education, health, poverty, employment, economy, etc. had to be given equal importance. Despite this, the VNR for India, while acknowledging that enabling access to quality primary education and affordable healthcare forms an important part of poverty alleviation strategy, does not provide relevant data regarding the status of primary education in the country. Considering that while access to primary education levels have improved significantly over the years, the fact remains that the drop-out rates still remain high. As a result, India has a massive problem of out-of-school youth. No statistics are provided relating to relevant school-related data.

🟢 On the other hand, **Sri Lanka** has an impressive record in terms of its educational achievement, and stands as an over-achiever not only within the South Asian region, but also amongst both middle-income and high-income countries. Sri Lanka achieved all the three MDG targets related to universal primary education well before 2015.

By 2012/13, 100 % of the children who had started grade 1 had completed their primary education, and 96.5 % had completed their lower secondary education. These achievements were recorded across all districts in the country, and for both male and female students. The provision of free education under the Universal Free Education Act of 1945 has largely contributed towards these achievements and has ensured that no one is left behind.

🟡 Gender parity has been almost achieved at all levels of education in **Nepal.** The ratio of girls to boys in primary education increased from 0.79 in 2000 to 1.09 in 2015, with gender parity achieved in primary education in both the gross enrolment ratio (GER) and net enrolment ratio (NER) in 2015. The GER was 1.09 and NER 0.99 in 2015. The enrolment of Dalit and Janajati students in primary education increased, with improvement in gender parity. Primary education completion also improved with 86.9 percent of girls and 86.4 percent of boys completing it in 2015. Likewise, the ratio of girls to boys in secondary education (Grades 9-10) increased from 0.70 in 2000 to 1.0 in 2015. Secondary education completion rates also increased with 90.4 percent of girls and 89.7 percent of boys completing secondary education in 2015. Even in tertiary education, the ratio of women to men increased from 0.28 women to every man in 2000 to 1:1.05 in 2015. However, participation rates in tertiary technical and vocational subjects in science and technology, engineering, and medicine remain low.

🟢 **Indonesia** has made tremendous progress with regard to achieving near universal basic education that includes primary education and junior secondary education. Indonesia has maintained a GER for primary education at higher than 100% since 2000. Also, the GER for junior secondary schooling reached 91.5% in 2018. Gender parity at all levels has been maintained, while access to primary and junior secondary levels is almost equal across income groups. School completion rates have also risen for primary and junior secondary levels- at 95% and 85% for the year 2018.

- Since the VNR of **Pakistan** focuses on a select number of SDGs that does not include SDG 4, there is only mention in the Executive Summary that improving access and quality of education is a key national priority for Pakistan. There is also mention that while the female literacy remains low, rising gross enrolment figures for girls' education show that Pakistan is on track to eliminate gender disparities in education. No statistics are presented to back this claim.

- The VNR of **Lao PDR** focuses on the achievements in the formal system that include universal coverage in primary enrolment, achieving gender parity at primary level, and significant improvement in the enrolment ratio at the secondary level. However, it is acknowledged that there are challenges regarding drop-outs among children in the early grades, their low learning levels, low achievement levels among children and adolescents in remote rural areas and those with uneducated mothers from poor households of remote ethnic groups. Further, it is acknowledged that the literacy and numeracy targets for youth, men and women remain to be achieved and that the quality and efficiency of non-formal education programs for youth who do not continue on to secondary education are of questionable value. There is mention that while Lao PDR has an effective data education management information system (EMIS) that is disaggregated by sex and is robust enough for annual planning, data on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) needs strengthening and linked with employment outcomes.

- In **Mongolia,** nine years of compulsory schooling is nearly universal. In 2017-2018, primary, secondary and high school enrolment rates reached over 98.6 percent. The quality and access to education and training programs, however, vary across rural and urban settlements, district and regional levels. Poor quality and limited access to education of herders' children, children with disabilities, children from poor families, adolescent girls and young mothers remains a challenge. Young graduates often face difficulties finding jobs in the labor market. Higher education does not always provide the necessary skills to meet labor market needs.

- In the case of Vanuatu, the Universal Primary Education Policy (UPE) provides free education and the right to access education for classes 1-6. However, no data is provided regarding school enrolment, retention, and achievement levels at the primary and secondary levels. Even with regard to lifelong learning, it is the learning opportunities to meet literacy and numeracy standards of school going children that is emphasized, for which no statistics are provided.

In the case of **Timor-Leste,** the attendance rate for primary school rose impressively from 65 percent in 2001 to 92 percent in 2015. The percentage of children in the 10-14 age group in schools was at the highest ever at 82.6 percent. School attendance in pre-primary and secondary school doubled in five years, from 2009/2010-2015. Timor-Leste has also successfully managed to narrow the gender gap in education, achieving gender parity in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education in nearly all regions across the country.

Among the problems faced by most countries in formal education include those relating to (i) low access to early childhood education and low enrolment rates, (ii) low learning levels and drop-outs among children at all levels, (iii) low achievement levels among children and adolescents living in remote rural areas and those with uneducated mothers from poor households, (iv) poor quality of education offered in schools, thereby indicating the need to improve the quality of education, (v) poor quality and limited access to education of children with disabilities, children from poor families, young mothers and pregnant adolescent girls, (vi) irrelevance of higher education as it does not always provide the necessary skills to meet the labor market demands.

While the main concern of the governments is to improve the overall efficiency of the formal system of education by ensuring access, retention and completion of education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, there is also recognition of the fact that large sections of the population- children, youth, and adults have to be provided suitable formal, non formal and vocational education so that they can participate effectively as responsible citizens and as productive members of the society. Priorities, however, vary. So also do the overall achievements of the various countries in the region.

- **Kazakhstan** has created the necessary conditions to allow people to continue to learn throughout their lives. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, citizens are guaranteed free secondary education which is compulsory. Kazakhstan has a high ranking in the UNESCO Education for All Development Index due to the country's high level of primary education coverage, a high adult literacy rate, a large proportion of students reaching 5th grade, and gender equality in education. An important aspect of the development of the education system in Kazakhstan is the provision of special education for children with special needs. In this regard, the state educational policy is aimed at increasing the coverage of inclusive education, including equipping schools with special infrastructure, as well as creating special groups for providing psychological, medical and pedagogical consultations. To prevent bullying, abuse and violence against school children, an action plan has been implemented to prevent violence and abuse against children. The country continues to modernize school infrastructure, including the provision of electricity, water, and toilets. The modernization of secondary education has ensured updated content, focusing on the development of functional literacy, critical thinking, cognitive skills and cognitive abilities (soft skills) in students. Considering the importance of digitalization in the educational system, 98.3% of the country's schools now have internet access and more than 10,000 teachers have completed courses on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Kazakhstan has also made significant progress in modernizing the higher and postgraduate education system. Gender equality even in higher education has been maintained: with enrolment rates for women being at 53.9%, compared to 46.1% for men. However, there are gender differences in the study programs being chosen- with women choosing programs that would lead to a gender pay gap in the future. One of the most important factors ensuring the quality of education is the availability of qualified teaching personnel. In Kazakhstan, the educational level of teaching staff is becoming more standardized, thereby ensuring better quality of educational personnel. Despite this progress, however, there are challenges to be met. These include the need to further (i) ensure the accessibility and inclusiveness of education; (ii) expand public-private partnerships and attract private investment in education; (iii) digitalize education and create digital educational content, and expand the use of distance learning methods; (iv) improve the training programs for teaching staff; and (vi) make Kazakhstan the educational hub of Central Asia.

- Pursuing quality education has always been a priority of the **Philippines** government. The Philippines Constitution guarantees the right to education of every Filipino citizen and mandates that education receives the highest budgetary priority. Guided by AmBisyon Natin 2040, the PDP also reiterates the importance of promoting lifelong learning or education and skills development as part of its strong commitment in accelerating human capital development and in the achievement of the SDGs.

Philippines has made great strides in increasing access to basic education, with the net enrolment rate (NER) in kindergarten, elementary, junior, and senior high school continuing to rise. Primary and secondary NERs increased to 94.2 percent and 76.0 percent respectively. From 2015 to 2017, the country's cohort survival rate (CSR) for primary and secondary levels rose to 93.7 percent and 85.6 percent respectively, while completion rates rose to 92.4 percent in primary and 84.3 percent in secondary levels. Despite this progress, there is scope for improving quality of basic education in terms of improving pre-service and in-service training of teachers.

The implementation of Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education in 2018 has made tertiary education more accessible. This landmark policy provides free tuition for students in state-run colleges, universities, and state-run technical-vocational institutions (TVI) regardless of socio-economic status. A Tertiary Education Subsidy is also provided to poor students. However, quality of tertiary education in some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is compromised and needs attention.

03.2
Literacy, Non Formal Education, Vocational Education/Skills Training, and Lifelong Learning

While the main focus of the SDG 4 is on the formal system of education and in improving the quality of services, there are five targets that have relevance to adult learning and education (ALE).
These are stated as-

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

● By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and education and entrepreneurship;

● 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;

● By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy;

● By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

In relation to each of the above-mentioned targets, the following indicators have been specified-

● Participation rate of youth and adults in informal and non formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex;

● Proportion of youth and adults with information and communication technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill.

● Parity Indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available for all educational indicators on this list that can be disaggregated;

● Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills by sex;

● Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights are mainstreamed at all levels in (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education, and (d) student assessment.

A document titled `Handbook for preparation of Voluntary National Reviews' prepared by the U.N. and revised every year, is sent to each country that decides to undertake a VNR for that year. A perusal of this document shows that the term `adult learning and education (ALE)' is not mentioned in the document. Since a country VNR meticulously follows the U.N. guidelines, it is not surprising that the term `adult learning and education' does not find a mention in any country VNR. However, terms such as `literacy,' `non formal education,' `vocational and skills training,' `awareness programs,' `lifelong learning', find a periodic mention in the documents depending on the target group in question.

An attempt is made below to review the country VNRs with respect to the education of youth and adults and to ascertain the kinds of programs that are planned and implemented in each country.

● Despite the problem of massive adult illiteracy in **India,** there is no mention of the need to address this issue in the VNR. Nor is there any mention of addressing the educational needs of various marginalized groups who have been deprived of educational opportunities. Considering that as of 2014, India had 37% (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2014) of the non-literate population of the world, out of which 280 million were women alone, what is disconcerting is that the VNR does not recognize the importance of dealing with the problem of massive adult illiteracy, particularly among rural women. While discontinuing Mahila Samakhya, an educational program for empowerment of rural women, there is no specific literacy program that has replaced the Sakshar Bharat program that suffered from financial and administrative neglect over the years. Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana is a program that ensures that one female member from poor households in rural areas is part of a Self-Help Group (SHG). However, no linkages are established for women in the SHGs with education, thereby denying women an opportunity to explore their capabilities to the fullest possible and become independently self-sustainable. Also, while India is becoming a major player in the Information and Communications technology sphere, and has introduced programs such as Digital India and Skills India, by 2017, there were 295 million internet users in urban India and 186 million internet users in rural India. However, men dominated this sphere with 71% participation and women taking up only 29% of the space. With government's efforts to promote livelihood such as micro-finance and entrepreneurship that are dependent on one's ability to handle digital media and navigate technology to one's advantage, women are at a complete disadvantage due to their lack of literacy, coupled with lack of ability to navigate digital and technology-led platforms and mediums. In a country of 65.4% literate women and only 29% of women using digital space, what the country is heading towards is a new form of illiteracy i.e. digital illiteracy.

● In Mongolia, 98 percent of its population above the age of 15 years is literate. However, despite the near universal literacy levels of the 15+ age group, there is no mention of how their literacy skills would be sustained and promoted so that they would continue their education through lifelong learning programs. Nor is there any mention of planning and implementing non formal education programs for different community groups or for those children who are school drop-outs.

● In the case of **Lao PDR,** it is acknowledged that the literacy and numeracy targets for youth, men and women remain to be achieved and that the quality and efficiency of non-formal education programs for youth who do not continue on to secondary education are of questionable value. Since more than 50% of the population of Lao PDR is under 25 years of age, the government has decided to strengthen technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to address the gap in the supply of skills and qualification in the workforce to meet the changing needs of the economy in consonance with ASEAN standards. Also, since Lao PDR aspires to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2024, there is recognition of the need to provide a bridge into mainstream education by promoting lifelong learning. With lifelong learning being considered a policy priority, MoES is now developing a lifelong learning strategy and plans on making multi-sectoral approach the central tenet of the design and implementation of the policy.

● In the **Vanuatu** VNR, literacy statistics for youth, men and women are not provided. While it is acknowledged that technical and vocational education is a critical part of the overall education system in Vanuatu, no statistics are provided regarding the number and percentage of students trained in vocational skills. Even with regard to lifelong learning, it is the learning opportunities to meet literacy and numeracy standards of school going children that is emphasized, for which no statistics are provided.

● In **Timor-Leste,** literacy levels have risen rapidly among all ages, which is central for promoting sustainable development. The adult basic literacy rate for the 15+ age group stood at 64.4 percent in 2015, and rose rapidly from 57.8 percent in 2010, in just five years. However, there is need to enhance the quality of education and deal with the disparities that exist between rural and urban areas and between municipalities. To equip young men and women for the labor market, investment is also rapidly needed not only in quality secondary, vocational and higher education but also in science and technology. The nascent private sector in Timor-Leste is not sufficient to generate enough jobs for the large number of young men and women who are entering the labor market to drive new areas of economic growth. It is therefore vital to support the growth of productive and labor-intensive industries, in particular, the agricultural sector, in order to absorb the human capital that is being built. Community Learning Centers (CLCs) were recently established in nine municipalities to help people who had dropped out of school to reconnect and complete basic school equivalency. The idea behind these centers is to help people apply themselves to lifelong learning, whether it is developing their land, their business, seeking overseas work or standing for local office.

● While **Indonesia** achieved progress at the primary and junior secondary levels, 7.5% of school age children (7-18 years) were not in school or were not accessing education in 2018. These included those who had never enrolled or had dropped out of school without completing 12 years of schooling. Also, participation rates of students at the higher secondary and tertiary levels needed to improve. In order to provide equitable education, the Government has initiated an affirmative action program that includes cash transfers for the poor and at- risk students, special allocation of funds for educational infrastructure and providing for inclusive education. The Government initiated the Back to School Movement to ensure out-of-school children would return to schools through formal and non formal education. Indonesia Teaches is a non-profit organization that recruits, trains and dispatches the best and brightest young people to various districts in Indonesia to serve as Youth Educators and teach at primary schools as well as in the community in which they are placed. Several NGOs have also initiated innovative school improvement projects. There have been some efforts currently being undertaken to encourage youth to participate in formal education/non formal education/vocational training by setting up Community Learning Centers which would serve as an avenue for non formal education. Entrepreneurship training would also be provided for non-school going population. Sekolah Perempuan (Women's School) is one model of empowering poor women through a lifelong learning program. The members through a process of critical analysis and reflection, develop confidence and courage in taking decisions that affect their lives in their homes and in their communities. They have taken up issues such as elimination of female circumcision, child marriage and domestic violence. These schools have been set up in 69 villages in 6 provinces and will be replicated in more villages and provinces.

● **Sri Lanka** has made notable progress with regard to literacy rate for 15-24 age group. The literacy rate rose from 95.8 % in 2007/2008 to 97.8 % by 2012, the latest year for which data is available-once again across districts and for both male and female learners. The provision of free education since the Universal Free Education Act of 1945 has largely contributed towards these achievements and has ensured that no one is left behind. However, the literacy rate for the 25+ age group is not mentioned. Also, there is no mention of education and vocational skills for the vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and youth and adults in vulnerable situations. While it is acknowledged that there are problems in terms of quality and relevance of tertiary education and of Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET), there is no mention about the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and education for entrepreneurship. Relevance of tertiary education is a matter of concern as job seekers are found to be lacking in job-specific skills as well as soft skills like problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, team work and communication skills.

● **Philippines** has made considerable progress in providing access to education of vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, out-of-school youth, and overseas Filipinos. Institutionalization of these key education inclusion programs through legislation has ensured their continuity and sustainability, regardless of changes in political leadership. These include Alternative Learning System through the governance of Basic Education Act of 2001; Indigenous Peoples' (IP) Education, through the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997; the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013; Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education through RA 10931; and TESDA Online Program and massive open online courses (MOOCs), through the Open Distance Learning Act.

Access to education increased through various Inclusive Education Programs to address the needs of vulnerable groups. Alternative Learning System (ALS), Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs), IP Education and Special Education are some of these initiatives. In 2017, over 600,000 learners across the country had benefitted from the ALS, which is the main strategy for reaching the dropouts and provide them with alternative access to education. Programs on retooling and up-skilling such as special training programs and open distance learning are also being implemented to cater to those who do not have the opportunity to physically attend training due to workload, physical disabilities, or other restrictions.

The Government has entered into partnerships with the private sector and civil society groups to improve access and quality of education in formal education and Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) including skills development and training.

● **Kazakhstan** has created the necessary conditions to allow people to continue to learn throughout their lives. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, citizens are guaranteed free secondary education which is compulsory. In Kazakhstan, providing the citizens of the country with affordable and high-quality vocational education is the key to ensuring the needs of the labor market are met. A project titled `Free Technical and Vocational Education For All' was introduced in 2017, the goal of which is to reduce the unemployment rate among people by providing those interested with free technical and vocational education, while providing scholarship, accommodation, food, travel expenses. This gives the 9th and 11th grade graduates, unemployed citizens, young people without qualifications, and people from vulnerable groups, the opportunity to receive free education. Digitalization is one of the factors that has increased the availability of technical, vocational and higher education in Kazakhstan. It has created the necessary conditions for the promotion of lifelong learning and has also enabled students in remote, rural regions to have the same learning opportunities as urban students. There is also recognition of the fact that there is need to provide for re-skilling and upgrading the skills of its labor force so that every Kazakhstani citizen is able to obtain the competencies necessary for successful adaptation to new global challenges, modern technologies, the changing demands of the labor market and of new professions.

● While **Vietnam** has dealt with the problem of eliminating illiteracy among adults, its literacy rate for ethnic minorities was 72% in 2015, much lower than the overall literacy rate for the country. Adult education and non-formal education have not received the necessary attention in the educational system of Vietnam. Though there are around 11,000 community learning centers for promoting non-formal education, only 5% of these centers actually function. Specific training on non-formal/adult education is not available. In 2013, the government issued a decree on building a Learning Society whereby 7 projects were implemented and monitored by 6 ministries and 1 professional association. However, each ministry and the professional association is responsible for mainstreaming only within its own sectoral activities. In 2015, the Continuing Education centers, under the Ministry of Education and Training, were merged with the Vocational Training centers within the framework of Lifelong Learning and became the Centers for Vocational and Continuing Education. The merged centers have experienced overlap in management and administration that may result in their ineffective services.

While adult learning and education (ALE) is not mentioned in SDG 4, it is apparent that the various components of the term have relevance for the countries in the region. Thus, there is mention in most VNRs of terms such as `literacy,' `non-formal education,' `awareness programs,' vocational and skills training programs,' `lifelong learning,' depending on the educational needs of various community groups. The problem of illiteracy among youth, adult women and men persists in a large number of countries in the region. Literacy is a key component in adult learning and education. It is a necessary skill in itself and one of the foundation skills that allows citizens to participate effectively in the community, workplace and the society at large. Countries that have problems of youth and adult illiteracy include India, Nepal, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Indonesia and Pakistan. While overall literacy statistics have been provided in some VNRs, literacy is perceived as a stand alone skill and its relationship in achieving SDGs is not acknowledged. A common problem that faces all the countries is that the quality of vocational education that is provided does not meet the job market requirements and therefore needs considerable improvement. The VNRs of Lao PDR, Vanuatu, Indonesia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka specifically mention this as a challenge facing the countries. What is evident is that, by and large, there is awareness among most countries of the need to provide non formal, vocational, and lifelong learning programs so that the educational needs of various vulnerable groups can be met and sustained

ALE is an important gender equality strategy. However, it appears that most countries do not have separate literacy/educational programs for women's empowerment. It is crucial to know whether programs have been designed to question patriarchal values that influence men's attitudes towards women and girls in their families and in the society at large. It is also critical to ascertain whether women's issues and perspectives have been integrated in the on-going development programs. Clearly, countries have either failed to report on this or they have not institutionalized ALE as an important gender equalizer

Not all the country VNRs state a clearly felt need to educate youth and adults in the implementation of the other 16 SDGs. While there are countries that have already ensured that educational programs are integrated in SDG implementation, there are indications in some country VNRs of the spaces available for suitably integrating educational programs for achieving SDGs. On the other hand, some country VNRs either make a casual reference or no reference for the need to integrate educational programs with SDGs.

An attempt is made below to cull out relevant sections from the country VNRs to highlight areas in which ALE has been integrated or areas where ALE could possibly be integrated in the implementation of SDGs.

SDG 1 (No Poverty)

● Some countries in the region have adopted a multi-sectoral strategy in dealing with the problem of poverty reduction. ALE is regarded as an integral part of this strategy and providing educational services or improving the quality of the services is considered necessary. Thus, in the case of **Lao PDR,** while acknowledging that tremendous progress has been made in reducing poverty, there is admission that significant proportion of the population is at risk of falling back into poverty. Since lack of access to education, employment/livelihood and low price of agricultural produce are known determinants of poverty, the priority now is to accelerate improvement in education, training, livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and rural infrastructure for the poor. Radio programs on agriculture have been extremely popular among rural communities for this purpose.

● Inequality has deepened and poverty rate has increased in **Mongolia.** One third of the population lives below the national poverty line. Also, there are stark regional, urban and rural variations in poverty. Social protection is provided in Mongolia in terms of essential health services, education, care and nutrition for children, and income security for those of working age, older people, people with disabilities and the unemployed.

● Since Independence, the Government of **Kazakhstan** has focused on reducing poverty and raising income of its population. To this end, the county has created favorable conditions for employment and business development, increasing the access of its people to public health services, education and public utilities. According to national figures, the population with income below subsistence level decreased from 46.7% in 2011 to 4.3% in 2018. Poverty in Kazakhstan is characterized by regional differences and is more prevalent in rural than in urban areas. As a socially-oriented state, the Government allocates a significant part of its state budget to the social sphere. To increase income and support to low income groups, including the disabled and those who live in difficult conditions, the Government has introduced active measures to ensure productive employment. In remote rural areas, where educational institutions do not exist, mobile training centers have been set up to offer short term training for the qualifications and skills that are in high demand. Training for first-time entrepreneur is being provided and micro loans for business projects are also being allocated. The mechanism for providing targeted social assistance (TSA) has been improved.

● **Nepal** made commendable progress in reducing extreme poverty and hunger during the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) era. Extreme poverty dropped from 33.5 percent of the population in 1990 to 16.4 percent in 2013 thereby achieving the target of halving the poverty rate. The rate of reduction of poverty accelerated between 2000 and 2015. Multi-dimensional poverty reduced from 64.7 percent in 2006 to 44.2 percent in 2015. These achievements were largely due to improved health and education and increased remittances from abroad. The government aims to bring down the percentage of people living below the poverty line to 4.9 percent and to reduce multi-dimensional poverty to 10 percent by 2030. The government implements 49 poverty alleviation programs. A separate Ministry of Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation was established in 2012. These initiatives will continue through 2030.

- **India** has implemented several massive anti-poverty programs, mostly for the disadvantaged communities, for ensuring education, health and nutrition security, with a special focus on vulnerable groups such as women and children. Several of the Government's programs would directly contribute to the advancement of the SDG agenda. A noteworthy example is the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) which is the world's largest financial inclusion program. By leveraging PMJDY, Aadhar (biometric identity system) and mobile telephony, the Government has disbursed a cumulative amount of INR 1.6 trillion (USD 25 billion) to 329 million beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfers. This has helped to significantly enhance the efficiency of the Government programs. State governments have also participated in important programs such as digital payments, skills development and the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign). Other large-scale anti-poverty programs include the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee program (MNREGA) which provides a legal guarantee of a minimum of 100 days of wage employment per household per year for unskilled workers in rural areas and generated 2 billion person-days of employment during 2016-2017 alone. Additionally, initiatives have been launched for providing pension and insurance to workers in the unorganized sector, widows, and the differently-abled. In order to achieve the goal of housing for all by 2022, as part of efforts to universalize access to basic services, 3.21 million houses were constructed in 2016 as part of this initiative in rural areas. Other priority areas are drinking water and sanitation. Over 63.7 % of households in rural areas had access to an improved sanitation facility in 2016-2017. Over 22 million families were provided with Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections in order to provide clean source of cooking fuel. There is, however, no mention of integrating educational programs to improve the efficacy of these anti-poverty programs.

- While the percentage of population living below the poverty line, has been declining over the years, the fact remains that in 2015-2016, 24.3% of **Pakistan's** population, or around 50 million people, lived below the national poverty line. Pakistan has followed a multi-sectoral poverty reduction strategy over the years. This has involved targeted interventions such as the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), alongside private philanthropy and improved access to microfinance for rural communities. One of the initiatives includes Waseela-e-Taleem program for education through which over 2.2 million out-of-school children between 5 and 12 years of age, from some of the poorest families, have been enrolled in schools. Aside from providing endowment fund for education, revamping skills development and self-employment schemes through youth business loan initiatives have been effective. Ehsaas, one of the largest programs launched for the poor by the recently elected government, includes human capital development, among multiple initiatives that are all targeted towards the betterment of the marginalized communities.

- While the extreme poverty rate in **Indonesia** has come down from 27.5% in 2006 to 4.6% in 2018, in order to further accelerate poverty reduction, an integrated structuring of social assistance was initiated which includes the Family Hope Program. The reduction in poverty is carried out through two main strategies namely, reducing the burden of expenditure through social assistance, and increasing income. The challenge is to ensure that families with lowest socio-economic status have access to basic services like education and health. The Government intends to empower the highly vulnerable groups such as the people with disabilities and elderly people so that they do not fall back into poverty. Efforts include providing assistance to access capital, capacity building for business skills, entrepreneurship development, partnerships and intermediation.

- In **Sri Lanka,** Universal Free Education Policy, Universal Free Health Policy and access to basic services like electricity, safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as provision of effective social protection services and social insurance for the elderly, have been responsible for the progress made in reducing poverty. However, gaps still remain. These include geographical variations, particularly in the tea estate sector and proper targeting of the vulnerable groups such as the poor, the elderly, the disabled, children and women, for the social protection programs.

In **Vietnam,** the multi-dimensional poverty rate among the ethnic minorities was 35.7% in 2015, 3.5 times more that the multi-dimensional poverty rate of 9.9% for the whole country. This situation puts the girls who belong to ethnic minorities at risk of early marriage, difficulty in accessing educational opportunities as well as having a heavy burden of housework and limited livelihood options. Educating the adults, especially the disadvantaged groups such as women, girls and ethnic minorities is regarded as a way to escape poverty, while reducing disparities in poverty among different regions throughout the country.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)

Stunting and malnutrition are immense problems in **Pakistan,** which persist despite the increase in food production over the past twenty five years. Rising agricultural output notwithstanding, the country's high population growth rate, inadequate distribution mechanism, limited access to food due to poverty, are the underlying reasons for widespread malnutrition. Malnutrition not only adversely affects the country's GDP, it has serious implications for Pakistan's most important asset- its human resources. Malnutrition takes a heavy toll on the population, particularly the infants, children, and women of reproductive age. Recent national surveys reveal improvements in nutrition indicators. Thus, prevalence of stunting among children below 5 years of age reduced from 44.8% in 2012/13 to 37.6% in 2017/18 and prevalence of malnutrition among children below 5 years of age reduced from 11% in 2012/13 to 7% in 2017/18. Several strategies, interventions, programs and projects have been initiated at the national and provincial levels to tackle the problem of endemic hunger. It is also recognized that expanding the coverage and improving the quality of education would offer a vital leverage for effectively addressing malnutrition in the country. Need for country-wide nutrition awareness program is also recognized.

In **Sri Lanka,** severe drought and floods make those dependent on agriculture more vulnerable and exacerbate the risks of food and nutrition insecurity for the people. There is therefore the need to educate farmers on the need to conserve water and use new technology to improve production. Due to the problem of stunting, underweight and wasting, and malnutrition, among children under 5 years of age, nutrition education and counseling for the mothers becomes necessary. There is also the need to educate consumers at large on better nutrition and appropriate changes in food habits.

Nepal made significant progress in reducing hunger, on food security and on improving nutrition during the MDG period. But there are still too many underweight and stunted children. There are disparities in the distribution of underweight children as well as proportion of children under five years of age who are stunted. There are more underweight and stunted children in rural areas as compared to those from urban areas. The children of women with no education are more likely to be underweight and stunted. The government has initiated programs to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutritional status. Some of these programs include Zero Hunger Challenge Action Plan, the Multi-Stakeholder Nutrition Plan, the Agricultural Development and the `Golden 100 Days Program' which is an awareness raising program to improve the nutritional status of pregnant women and children up to 2 years of age.

Hunger is not a problem in **Kazakhstan.** Over 80% of the country's food security on major food products is provided through local products. While a high level of food security has been achieved, there are problems of malnutrition, obesity and micronutrient deficiencies. The challenge for Kazakhstan is to increase labor productivity in agriculture. To address this issue, latest technological and modern productivity methods are being introduced in the agriculture sector. Work is under way to digitalize the agro-industrial sector. It is also envisaged that steps would be taken to promote healthy life styles among its population through appropriate educational programs.

● In **India,** significant progress has been made in improving food and nutrition security. Stunting among children, less than 5 years of age, declined from 48% to 38.4% between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016. During the same period the percentage of underweight children declined from 42.5% to 35.7%. However, since the absolute numbers of stunted and underweight children remain high, a number of schemes are being implemented. Thus, more than 800 million people are covered through the Public Distribution System (PDS) that provides food grains at affordable prices. The Integrated Child Development Program (ICDS) provides nutritional and health services to children in the 0-3 age group and non formal education for their mothers. The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Program provides cooked meals to 100 children in primary schools. Additionally, a comprehensive plan is being implemented for doubling farmers' income by 2022.However, except for the ICDS program, none of the other programs for reducing hunger are linked to educational programs for the youth and adults.

● While treating hunger as a multi-dimensional issue, it is acknowledged that education of youth and adults is vital for dealing with the problem of hunger. The VNR of **Timor-Leste** states that the percentage of children under 5 years of age who suffer from stunting, has started to decline from 58 % in 2009/2010 to 46 % in 2016. The Government, however, is further committed to reducing the high incidence of child stunting which is the result of chronic malnutrition. The evidence on the impact of malnutrition on stunting is clear: children who are malnourished do not reach their intellectual and physical potential, have lower educational attainment and earn less as adults. While there have been notable improvements in breast-feeding rates, the prevalence of malnutrition among women of reproductive age group (15-49 years) is very high at 26 %, anemia also being on the rise. One third of the population (36 %) still suffers from chronic food insecurity. Youth and young mothers have been identified as key stakeholders in efforts to improve nutrition. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries are planning to significantly reform agricultural secondary schools and develop a nutrition sensitive curriculum so that young

farmers are taught not only the skills for rural livelihoods but understand the importance of nutrition in everyday life.

● While **Lao PDR** has already achieved the MDG target of halving the proportion of hungry people, the causes of poor nutrition have not been adequately addressed. These include poor infant and young child feeding practices, poor maternal nutrition, high adolescent birth rates among some ethnic groups, and poor female education.

SDG 3
(Good Health and Well Being)

● According to WHO, by 2015, **Timor-Leste** had made significant progress in improving child and maternal health, bringing down maternal mortality rates by 80 % since 1990. 2011-2030 National Health Sector Plan has played a pivotal role in strengthening the quality and access to free universal health services in Timor-Leste. The progress in child and maternal health is also partly driven by the investment in the health workforce and the strengthening of health systems. While the total fertility rate among women in the reproductive age (15-49 years) is still high (4.5 as per Census, 2015), it is recognized that women with no education have an average of 4.8 children, compared to 3.3 children among women with more than secondary education. Hence supporting young women to access reproductive health education will ensure their inclusion in education and the labor market and help promote gender equality.

● The implementation of the national health care reforms has enabled **Kazakhstan** to achieve significant results under SDG 3. Life expectancy has increased, infant and maternal mortality has decreased. However, Kazakhstan still lags behind the other OECD countries as far as health care services are concerned. One problem facing health care is the lack of adequate medical personnel. While steps taken have improved the situation, the gap between the number of medical personnel required in urban and rural areas still remains. The challenge now is to further improve the health care services by improving disease prevention through non formal education programs, and modernize the medical education system in the country.

● **India** has made significant progress in improving various health indicators. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has declined from 57 in 2005-2006 to 42 in 2015-2016. Likewise, under-5 Mortality Rate fell from 74 to 50 during the same period. Moreover, institutional deliveries increased from 38.7% in 2005-2006 to 78.9% in 2015-2016. The National Health Policy, 2017, has specified targets for universalizing primary health care, achieving further reduction in infant and under-5 mortality, and preventing premature deaths due to non-communicable diseases. However, there is no mention of improving the educational programs to strengthen the health services.

● Maternal and infant mortality rates have been reduced in **Indonesia.** Likewise, there has been an improvement in provision of reproductive health services which has led to decrease in fertility rate. Indonesia has initiated a Universal Health Coverage Program that provides health services to all citizens. By the end of 2018, 78.7% of the population had been covered under the program. Among the challenges for improving the family planning program are the need to increase maternal knowledge on antenatal care and parenting, and promoting health education to include benefits of immunization.

● **Pakistan** has been taking dedicated steps towards improving the health status of its growing population. Thus, its infant mortality rate (IMR) declined from 74 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2012/13 to 62 in 2017/18. The neo-natal mortality rate fell from 55 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2012/13 to 42 in 2017/18. The fertility rate slightly declined from 3.8% in 2012/13 to 3.6% in 2017/18. The National Health Vision Pakistan 2016-2025 (NHV) has been launched, based on extensive consultations at the national level. Alongside legislative initiatives, multiple actions have been taken by Pakistan's federal and provincial governments to address the problem of health nationwide. The VNR highlights that in order to reduce fertility rate and improve the use of modern contraceptives, raising community awareness would be necessary, inasmuch as developing human resources for health by building a cadre of health workforce that would be fully geared for overcoming the health challenges of the country.

● Significant progress has been made in reducing mortality rates and improving health in **Nepal.** The under-5 mortality rate reduced from 91/1000 births in 2000 to 39 in 2016 while the infant mortality rate dropped from 64/1000 live births in 2000 to 32 in 2016. The neonatal mortality rate dropped from 38/1000 live birth in 2000 to 21 in 2016. The total fertility rate of women aged 15-49 dropped from 4.1 children in 2000 to 2.3 in 2016. The proportion of pregnant women having antenatal check-ups by a skilled provider increased from 28 percent in 2000 to 84 percent in 2016. The proportion of births in health facilities increased from 9 percent in 2000 to 57 percent in 2016 while the proportion of births attended by a skilled provider increased from 11 percent in 2000 to 58 percent in 2016. All this led to a large drop in the MMR from 850/100,000 live births in 1990 to 258 in 2015.

While the country still faces many health challenges in terms of access of the poor and marginalized people in accessing health services due to poor availability of health services in remote hill and mountainous areas, the new Health Policy and Nepal's Health Sector Strategy 2015-2020 is attempting to reduce inequality in access to health care serves and address the Constitutional right to health care. The government provides free basic health care in health posts, primary health care centers and up to 25 bed district hospitals. Other services include, 70 types of basic drugs being provided free of cost to the poor and marginalized, free treatment for some acute diseases and transport allowances to all women to give birth in a health facility. There is, however, no mention of supplementing the health programs with effective educational programs for youth, men and women.

● In the case of **Vietnam,** while the health indicators of Vietnamese people are much higher than the average of the countries with the same per capita income, the maternal mortality rate among ethnic minority women is four times higher than that of Vietnamese Kinh women. For ethnic minority women, beside access to health care, special attention would be given to improving knowledge on maternal health to ensure that they are not left behind.

- In **Mongolia,** while the infant, child and maternal mortality rates have been dropping, the fertility rate among girls (aged 15-19) is high. Limited access to reproductive health services and poor awareness is leading to unwanted pregnancies among adolescent girls.

- The VNR of **Lao PDR** enumerates the substantial progress made with regard to this SDG. However, there is a realization that the mortality rates are much higher among children from the poorest and/or most remote areas, those born of mothers with no education from ethnic communities, and adolescent mothers. Hence, the government intends to step up the health education interventions.

- While **Sri Lanka** has achieved the sustainable development goals such as low maternal and child mortality rates, and rising life expectancy rates, there has been a rapid increase in non-communicable diseases, rise of aging population and changes in disease patterns. There is need for sex education information in the school curricula as well as changing the attitude toward sex education among adults and children in order to improve access to sexual and reproductive health care services. There is lack of awareness about communicable diseases such as dengue, HIV, TB, etc as well as lack of multi-sectoral coordination. It is recognized that education and awareness about disease prevention is necessary to ensure healthy living. Need to identify and address detrimental effects of conflicts and violence on mental and physical well being of people, is also recognized.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

- The practice of early marriages is prevalent in **Indonesia** too. However, there has been a decrease in the prevalence of child marriages that has led to increase in the median age at first marriage in recent years. Likewise, women's participation rates in decision-making positions, has improved. Thus, the proportion of women in the House of Representatives at the national level increased from 11.8% in 2004 to 17.3% in 2014. Women's participation in managerial positions also went up as also their access to the use of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). There are, however, challenges that have to be faced such as changing the societal norms and values regarding early marriage, providing greater opportunities to girls to obtain tertiary education and having access to economic skills training programs. Protecting women from various acts of violence, including criminal trafficking, is another major challenge.

- While the Constitution of **Lao PDR** guarantees equality between men and women in all spheres, women are still constrained in livelihood options and economic opportunities. They constitute a majority of workers in the informal sector and among unpaid family workers, largely because they are less educated. There is recognition in the government of the need to provide women and girls with access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes.

- **Kazakhstan** was one of the first countries in the post-Soviet era, which on the basis of the gender policy established by the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopted a number of important policies that formed the basis for promoting gender equality in the country. Kazakhstan has made significant progress in establishing the institutional framework for promoting gender equality. Steps are now being taken to reform the law enforcement agencies, focusing on the prevention of offenses against women, particularly domestic violence. Lectures, talks, training programs, awareness sessions are organized to prevent domestic violence against women.

- case of **Sri Lanka,** there is a large concentration of economically active women in the informal labor market, particularly in agriculture, and in unpaid family labor. Female labor force participation is low at 35 %. Cultural stereotypes regarding women's role in society and child rearing responsibilities are the main causes for low female labor force participation. Women-headed households are particularly prone to poverty and marginalization. Inadequate political participation is another area of gender inequality in Sri Lanka. Need is felt to develop programs to raise awareness of existing legislation to eliminate gender violence, so also awareness about the crisis centers, legal aid, counseling and other services provided by the Government.

- In **Pakistan,** women's participation is limited not just in labor market, but also in decision-making in family planning, property and asset ownership, and access to education. Pakistan recognizes that gender equality is crucial for achieving the overall targets of all 17 SDGs and that more women in leadership positions will play a major role in closing the equity opportunity gap. The importance assigned to combating violence against women and girls is reflected in a range of national and provincial legislations and programs developed in recent years to address this problem and making it a priority for the country.

- The Government of **Timor-Leste** has set up the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion which works under, and reports directly to the Prime Minister and continues to advocate, coordinate, and evaluate gender-sensitive policies, laws, programs, plans, and budgets for the promotion of equality, empowerment of girls and women, and social inclusion. The Secretariat also ensures that all ministries and agencies mainstream gender and allocate enough resources as part of their overall budget submissions. Despite this overall progress, challenges still remain. One of the problems relates to that of child, early and forced marriages. While the government is committed to ending this social practice, it is recognized that investing in sexual reproductive health and rights education can help empower young women to make important choices about their education and about their life.

- In theIn **Vietnam,** despite efforts in ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, more than a third of adolescent girls lack access to information about appropriate contraceptive methods. Access to family planning services is still limited, especially for unmarried young women, migrant women and women who live in remote mountainous areas. Hence, it is intended that education on gender equality and gender-based discrimination issues, and sexual and reproductive health care for unmarried girls, young women and women who live in remote mountainous areas, would be developed.

- In **India,** the literacy rate for women increased from 55.1% in 2005-2006 to 68.4% from 2015-2016. Percentage of women independently using a bank or savings account increased from 15.1% in 2005-2006 to 53% in 2015-2016. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) initiative focuses on providing a comprehensive package of services, including those relating to her education and her security. Several programs are being implemented for enabling greater participation of women in the work force. However, considering the high rate of illiteracy among rural women as also their high absolute numbers, there is no separate literacy program for women nor is there any program to empower women through an educational program.

- Although **Nepal** is on track to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, disparities remain with less equality among poorer women, while discrimination and violence against women and girls is still prevalent. Women's participation in public sector decision making is low. While the government has established institutional mechanism for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, an important development was the introduction in 2007 of reservations for women and marginalized groups including dalits, indigenous people, madhesi communities, and people with disabilities, in the public sector. It is envisaged that the implementation of this affirmative action measure will give a further boost for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal.

SDG 6
(Clean Water and Sanitation)

🔴 Changing attitudes and behavior are a function of ALE. This entails acquisition of information, learning, critical analysis, reflection and is a long drawn out process. But it is a necessary process to enable people to question their attitudes, values and practices so that they can have an altered view that will enable them to accept new attitudes and practices. Access to clean water is a neglected area in most countries of the region, so are sanitary practices. There are cultural and social reasons associated with access to clean water and sanitation. Recognizing the need to change the existing beliefs and practices, the government of **Lao PDR** plans to develop behavior change programs so that the present practices in rural households relating to hygiene and open defecation can be addressed.

🟡 In order to conserve water, the government of **Kazakhstan** plans to raise public awareness on rational use of water.

🟢 In **Timor-Leste,** while considerable improvements have been made with regard to provision of water and sanitation, rural households have not benefitted to the same extent as their urban counterparts. The Government of Timor-Leste and local communities recognize this and understand that improving access to clean water and sanitation will help the country to make significant progress not only in tackling malnutrition and better child health, but will also improve learning outcomes and promote a healthy workforce. Working with women and girls to leverage better outcomes is crucial. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of behavioral change at family and community level for improving water quality, sanitation and hygiene.

SDG 7
(Affordable and Clean Energy)

🟢 The VNR of **Kazakhstan** refers to the need to raise public awareness regarding citizens' responsibilities and the importance of planning and controlling energy consumption and minimizing damage to nature.

🔴 In the case of **Lao PDR,** despite availability of electricity, rural households still prefer firewood and charcoal for cooking purposes. Clearly, a switch to cleaner energy source would require a behavior change program.

SDG 8
(Decent Work and Economic Growth)

🟢 While the overall unemployment rate is below 5 % in **Sri Lanka,** there are wide variations by gender and education levels. Female unemployment rate is double that of male rate. There is higher unemployment among educated youth, particularly among young women. The government is introducing a new technology stream in order to train students with technical skills that are needed for the job market. Government is encouraging youth to follow vocational training courses in line with the labor market demand and is organizing skills training for unemployed youth. Government of Sri Lanka is encouraging volunteering among young people by enhancing their soft skills. The government is also creating enabling conditions for Volunteer Involving Organizations as well as Volunteers who are mainly from rural areas, to join this program.

🟡 In **Vietnam,** employment in general is still unsustainable since a lot of jobs have low productivity and income and are not long-term. Disparities in remuneration between men and women for the same type of work, exist. Women are still heavily concentrated in the informal sector, with inadequate and unstable working environment and low wages. It is acknowledged that vocational training and post-training support need to be strengthened.

🔴 The VNR of **Vanuatu** mentions the need to promote financial literacy to enable people to take advantage of economic and business related opportunities.

In the last four years, economic growth has contributed to a lower poverty level, reduced unemployment and inequalities rate in Indonesia. **Indonesia** is undergoing a structural transformation from agricultural to manufacturing and services economy. There was a significant decrease of employment in agriculture from 40% in 2010 to 28.8% in 2018.The service sector grew rapidly and reached 60%, while the manufacturing sector was more stable at 12-14% in 2018. While the trend of formal employment was upward from 42.2% in 2015 to 43.2% in 2018, a worrying trend was the increase in the share of informal employment among women, which has widened gender gaps in the incidence of informal employment. Women in rural areas have a higher probability of taking up jobs in the informal sector. Informal sector also has a strong correlation with the educational level. 66% of workers with elementary education are employed in non-agricultural sector, whereas less than 20% workers with tertiary education are in informal sector. The government is therefore taking steps to improve education so that longer years of schooling among youth would be a driver of reducing unemployment. Government has increased vocational training budget and is promoting work-based learning, including apprenticeships.

The government is also committed to attaining more inclusive growth and sustainable livelihoods through productive economic community empowerment, access, facilitation, and partnerships. One of the key innovations is village fund which aims at empowering villages with improved infrastructure and development of productive economic enterprises. DESBUMI supports groups of former migrant workers to build joint ventures. It is expected that this program would provide productive employment and decent work for all women and men, include youth and persons with disabilities.

In order to build a competitive and productive workforce, the government intends to (i) increase the participation of vulnerable groups in the labor market; (ii) develop and strengthen social protection schemes for workers; (iii) improve equitable equality education services; (iv) improve health status and access to a good quality of health services; and (vi) improve the quality and relevance of vocational education and training.

In the case of **Pakistan,** sustained, indigenous and inclusive growth is a high priority agenda of the present government. Entrepreneurship and knowledge-economy are also rated high on the national agenda. Pakistan has experienced a steady economic growth in recent years, which reached a rate of 5.4 % in 2017/18. To make businesses `SDG friendly,' a Responsible Business Framework was created in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Through the Prime Minister's Youth Skills Development Program, almost 1,47,000 unemployed youth were trained in different demand-oriented trades. The Prime Minister's National Internship Program secured internships for 8,15,000 unemployed, educated youth in various public and private organizations. This program also envisages getting children who are working, back into schools. In order to address `skills mismatch' between available skills among the labor force and market demands, it is envisaged that upgrading skills development in collaboration with private sector would help upgrade courses in response to market requirements. To address Pakistan's low female labor force participation, it is intended to create an enabling environment for women's employment, including provision of affordable housing, transportation, day care facilities, flexible working hours, and ensuring safe work environment. It is recognized that greater investment would have to be made to develop skilled human capital and demand-based skills development to enhance productivity.

Kazakhstan today aims at achieving a new level of development with inclusive economic growth. Kazakhstan has embarked on increasing the productivity and diversification of the economy, developing human capital, and strengthening the role of the private sector. One of the key areas of the national policy in supporting economic growth is the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, which contributes to the creation of decent jobs. The country plans to achieve qualitative and sustainable economic growth, leading to improvement in the well-being of its people. In Kazakhstan, there are opportunities for productive employment, personal development and improving quality of life.

The **Philippines** is one of the fast-growing economies in the region. In 2018, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 6.2%. To achieve the Filipinos' vision of becoming a prosperous, predominantly middle-class society by 2040, the per capita gross national income (GNI) is being closely monitored in the implementation of the country's medium-term development plan. There has been significant progress in achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all Filipinos. The national unemployment rate further declined to 5.3% in 2018, the lowest recorded unemployment rate since 2005. Disaggregated by sex, male and female unemployment rates were 5.4 and 5.1 percent respectively. The quality of work in the country also improved as shown by the rising share of remunerative and stable wage and salaried employment, as well as the continuously declining share of vulnerable employment such as unpaid family work and being self-employed without any paid employee. Remarkable shifts from part-time to full-time employment were also recorded in recent years. There was also a substantial reduction in the proportion of youth not in employment.

Various acts that have been passed and the policies and programs that have been formulated and implemented have ensured employment and decent work to a very large section of its population. There is recognition of the need for skills development and training and the need for continuing education for addressing the problem of inequality, for empowering disadvantaged groups and for lifting communities out of poverty. Non-profit and social enterprise organizations and the private sector play an important role in implementing such programs. For instance, Messy Bessy, a producer of home and personal care products, has been providing education, employment, and rehabilitation to youth-at-risk.

In the case of **Lao PDR,** since a large proportion of the working age population works in the subsistence level activities, training and skills development of the labor force would have to take place. For workers in the formal sector of the economy, access to social protection laws would have to be ensured.

From 2010 to 2015, employment increased at a rate of 4.8 percent in **Timor-Leste.** Internal migration and migration overseas are important drivers in the Timorese economy enabling Timorese to gain higher education and seek employment opportunities abroad. Currently, there are not enough formal jobs to meet the large number of youth who are entering the labor market. Young persons with disabilities are particularly liable to be unemployed. In 2015, 20.3 percent of youth (15-24 years) were not in education, employment or training- 16.8 percent for males and 23.7 percent for females. According to the government, it is therefore critical to generate decent employment opportunities for new entrants in the labor market and invest in education and skills training.

SDG 9
(Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)

Kazakhstan has been using digital technology to accelerate its economic development and improve the quality of life of its people. Three-fourths of the adult population has acquired basic digital literacy and the level of internet access is growing. However, there is a gap between the urban and rural population, in terms of access and use of ICTs.

All forms of transportation- roads, railways, civil aviation and waterways- are being rapidly expanded in **India.** Road connectivity and electricity are being brought to all the villages. The Bharat Broadband Network Ltd. Initiative is aiming to provide high-speed broadband connectivity to all village councils in the country. The installed capacity in non-fossil fuel sectors has grown by 51.3% and more than doubled in the renewable energy sector (solar, wind, bio- and small hydro power). India is making efforts to become an Information Technology and manufacturing hub through its `Make in India' campaign. Additionally, the `Start-up India' program is helping in promoting entrepreneurship and labor-intensive economic growth. Despite the `Digital India' program, there is no attempt to improve the digital literacy of the non-literate rural men and women. As a result, there is a possibility of a new form of illiteracy, viz. `digital illiteracy' among rural women.

The VNR of **Lao PDR** acknowledges that SMEs and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are major employers but the productivity of the workers is relatively low. This is due to skill shortages and lack of access to technology, finance and markets. Women make up more than half the owners of newly registered enterprises but due to gender discrimination, they are less likely to be successful as entrepreneurs.

The progress made in health and education in **Timor-Leste** is in part due to infrastructure investments on roads, electricity, schools, and health facilities, which have contributed to improved access, and quality of public services. Despite the progress made, the challenges include the need to address the poor quality and maintenance of existing infrastructure with a sufficient budget required for maintenance and rehabilitation of schools. It is recognized that dealing with the problem of over-crowding and the lack of school facilities in rural areas, may contribute to reducing student dropout rate and ensuring that the very poor children attend and remain in school.

SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities)

Inequality is a serious challenge in **Mongolia.** Although Mongolia is globally ranked amongst countries with `high' human development by the Human Development Index, the country's worsening unemployment situation, persistent poverty and deepening inequality have shown that economic growth has not contributed adequately to social investment and improved living standards for all. Even during the years of high economic growth, budgetary allocations for health and education sectors did not increase sufficiently. Along with poverty and inequality, certain groups of people are systematically excluded from being able to benefit from overall development. These include children, youth, elderly, people with disabilities, herders and internal migrants to urban areas.

In the case of the **Philippines,** comparison of the data from the first semester of 2015 with that of the first semester of 2018 rounds of the Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES), shows that the growth rate of incomes of households in the bottom 40 percent of the population was faster (28.3%) than the average income for the entire population (21.2%). This suggests that on an average, Filipinos gained higher relative incomes, implying a more equitable distribution of economic opportunities for all. These gains helped reduce incidence of poverty from 27.6 percent to 21.0 percent during the same period. Income inequalities among Filipinos have declined due to sustained robust economic growth and the implementation of policies and programs that aim at empowering marginalized individuals and communities. The government has passed legislation to ensure that the rights of the vulnerable groups are upheld. Various social protection programs have been adopted to respond to various types of risks and vulnerabilities that confront individuals and households. The cash transfer program is one such program which targets homeless street families, indigenous peoples in geographically isolated and remote areas, and families in need of special protection, as beneficiaries and seeks to improve human capital outcomes relating to health and education. Affirmative measures have been undertaken to provide economic opportunities for marginalized sectors such as persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have also been beneficiaries of livelihood grants and capacity building services.

In **Lao PDR,** while high GDP growth rates have been achieved, inequality has widened. This is due to the non-monetary dimensions of deprivation that have added to the impact of poverty on vulnerable groups. These include low female literacy and education, persistently high malnutrition, high rates of adolescent pregnancies, and lack of access to and uneven quality of basic services. Lao PDR is therefore working with development partners to implement a range of measures that include, among others, empowering communities to participate in decision-making, providing skills training and education, expanding livelihood options, etc..

In **Indonesia,** inclusive economic growth is an integral part of efforts for equitable development. These efforts include reducing inequality between income groups through poverty eradication and improved public services as well as reducing regional inequalities through connectivity and better maritime infrastructure. In order to achieve equitable development to reduce inequalities between income groups, the government policies have endeavored to (i) develop a comprehensive social security system,(ii) improve basic public services for the poor, (iii) develop a sustainable livelihood for the poor through employment distribution and entrepreneurship, (iv) increase access to community health and nutrition, (vi) set up a National Health Insurance program, (vii) provide equal quality education and improve the quality and relevance of vocational education and training, (vii) expand the Family Hope project which is a cash transfer program targeting the very poor families, including pregnant mothers, children, elderly and people with disabilities, (viii) increase access to housing and settlement, and (ix) improve governance of basic services. To reduce regional inequality, the focus is on affirmative policies in underdeveloped regions and rural areas to ensure that development can serve all layers of society.

Vietnam has paid special attention and implemented specific projects to close the socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups. However, gaps still remain with regard to addressing inequality and ensuring access to basic and quality services to people with disabilities, single elderly people, and migrants. There is, however, a realization that the educational needs of the vulnerable groups have not been adequately addressed. It is therefore envisaged that attention would be paid to address these challenges in the future.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)

In **Kazakhstan,** the Government has an action plan to raise public awareness on environmental issues and encourage adoption of environmentally friendly practices. Beside the on-going public awareness and advocacy, efforts are also being made to promote and incorporate information about such environmentally friendly practices in the school curriculum.

The VNR of **Vanuatu** refers to the policies and programs in place for training on food preservation and storage for sustainable consumption and production.

SDG 13 (Climate Action)

Since **Kazakhstan** has been a party to various international agreements and conventions on climate change, the Government has been raising public awareness through educational programs and information services, to prepare an appropriate public response on climate change. Climate education is gradually being introduced in the curriculum of natural science subjects in school curriculum. Likewise, climate issues are being widely reflected in the framework of supplementary education such as elective courses, or courses for special interest groups. The Government intends to complete the on-going process of mainstreaming climate change issues into the school curriculum.

The **Philippines** remains one of the global hotspots for high disaster risks. Recent studies rank the country as the third most vulnerable to hazards and the fifth most affected by the impacts of extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, prolonged monsoon rains, and the El Nino phenomena. To address the growing risks, reforms have been institutionalized and preparatory measures undertaken, including the formulation of guidelines/frameworks in mainstreaming climate and disaster risks; provision of additional financing for adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR); development of vulnerabilities and risk-assessment tools and methodologies; and capacity-building and awareness-raising activities.

- In the case of **Pakistan,** the 12th Five Year Plan (2018-2023) spells out that one of the Government's future priorities is to launch awareness raising campaigns on climate change, enhance skills and institutional capacities of relevant stakeholders, including women.

- **Indonesia** has undertaken several initiatives to reduce risks of disasters due to climate change. These include planning preparedness, institutional strengthening, and community capacity building. In 2018, as a result of the implementation of programs and disaster management activities carried out by 32 Ministries/institutions, in collaboration with local governments, communities, volunteers and business partners, the IRBI (Indonesian Disaster Risk Index) declined to 128.8 or equivalent to 23.9% compared to 2015 figures. In order to reduce the level of vulnerability to disasters, teams of villagers from 594 villages in 186 districts/cities developed the capacity to adapt and deal with the threat of disasters and recover immediately from the adverse effects of disasters. In addition, reducing the level of vulnerability to disasters was also carried out through the installation of a multi-threat disaster early warning system in 58 locations. The Government continuously supports capacity building on regional disaster management through education and training of regional government officials. The Government also provides support to local governments and communities in promoting disaster awareness culture and preparedness in facing disasters. To build a culture of awareness, the Government has provided information system awareness, integrated with operational control centers in 30 provinces and 104 districts/cities, disaster awareness campaigns and climate change adaptation programs which aim at reducing the adverse impact of disasters due to climate change. However, there are challenges to be met. For Government preparedness and policies, programs and projects alone are not enough. It is recognized that the disaster awareness and preparedness of the community and all stakeholders need to be sustained on an on-going basis so that a resilient society that can face disasters can be built.

- The VNR of **Vanuata** refers to the importance of environmental awareness programs for school children.

- In **Vietnam,** due to climate change, natural disasters, drought, saline intrusion, and environmental pollution are affecting sustainable agricultural production. The current development policies and strategies on climate change and risk management are not based on gender analysis that is needed to identify the impact of climate change on men and women, and vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups at the local level need supporting policies as well as resource allocation.

- Climate change has become a major threat looming over economic and social development of **Sri Lanka.** Severe droughts and floods are frequent occurrences. Given the rising environmental challenges faced by the country, especially due to climate induced disasters in recent years, a need is highlighted for awareness raising programs, capacity building programs for the concerned officials, and programs to bring about behavioral changes.

SDG 14
(Life Below Water)

- **India** has formulated a clear agenda for promoting the `Blue Revolution' by tracking the levels of marine pollution along the coastline, as well as oil spill management system. The Integrated National Fisheries Action Plan, 2016, is being implemented to promote the livelihoods of fishing communities, as well as the ecological integrity of the marine environment. However, no educational program is envisaged for the Integrated National Fisheries Action Plan, 2016.

SDG 16
(Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

- **Mongolia** is in the process of reforming its national legislation in line with international norms and standards on human rights protection. This reform is aimed at promoting the active participation of civil society and enhancing institutional capacity to create and improve human rights protection mechanisms at various levels. It is recognized that focusing on the vulnerable groups and raising their awareness about the legal system and of the quality of services provided would be a formidable task.

● The government of **Philippines** recognizes that in order to achieve sustainable development, it is essential to foster a peaceful and just environment where fundamental freedoms are protected and institutions are effective, accountable, and inclusive. One of the innovative initiatives has been the ordinance by which the President created the Participatory Governance Cluster, which aims at enhancing citizen participation in governmental processes. The Cluster formulates mechanisms to enable the public to properly understand, rationalize and implement national government programs and projects based on specific contexts. It also seeks to strengthen consultative mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of national programs and projects at the local government and grassroots levels, and proposes policies, programs, and projects that would foster participatory governance and build the capacities of LGUs (local government units). The Philippines also launched the Open Government Partnership in 2011 which aims to help the government to become sustainably more transparent, accountable, and responsible to the needs of its citizens. Various initiatives have been undertaken to bring down violence and crime in the country and to ensure peace in conflict situations.

● Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions is the overarching theme of the VNR of **Timor-Leste** because it is recognized that they play a pivotal role in nurturing and sustaining a vibrant democracy. At the time of independence, Government facilities were non-existent in Timor-Leste, devastated or severely run-down. There were also severe shortages of human capital. The general level of formal education of the population was very low. Few Timorese had experience in working for the government or possessed adequate skills for professional work or business. Timor-Leste's institutional frameworks were exceptionally weak. Hence, the Government has invested heavily in rebuilding public services and institutions and has made significant progress in strengthening human rights, anti-corruption and electoral institutions. But while the country is at peace, violence against women and children at school are issues that the country is still grappling with. In the case of women with low literacy levels and language barriers, access to justice continues to be a pervasive issue for victims and survivors of gender-based violence. In order to build trust and confidence and foster effective partnerships between the community and the police, the National Human Rights Institution and the UN, in close cooperation with the national police and the army, have been implementing a standardized program of human rights training for both forces. This training has increased the legitimacy of the army and the police within the Timorese population.

● **Indonesia's** commitment to prioritize equality and access to justice is an important part of governance. This is in line with the `Nawacita'- government's vision to implement `strong, inclusive, sustainable development.' Indonesia has been successfully achieving poverty and inequality reduction, human development and economic growth under the sustainable development goals on health, education and decent work. Despite notable progress, disparities persist and there is inadequate information whether vulnerable sections such as women, children, people with disabilities, people with certain religious and ethnic identities, have access to or are being deprived of the existing services. Goal 16 therefore provides a framework so that development is equitable and does not leave any one behind. Access to legal aid and access to justice are necessary for ending inequalities. Other than legal aid, birth certificate is a must-have basic identity for all children as a requirement to obtain health, social and education services. The other characteristics of peaceful and inclusive societies are absence of violence on children and women and the need for people to uphold human rights. Also, there is need to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels which are free of corruption, ensure financial accountability as well as provide public access to information. The government's commitment to this SDG is evident from the various case studies that are provided in the VNR that highlight community awareness programs on various social issues as well as community empowerment programs so that communities develop capacity for advocacy, leadership and organization. Issues such as a Movement to end Child Marriages, preventing trafficking among children, preventing violence and exploitation of children, taken up by the Government in collaboration with civil society organizations, highlight how through an educational process, changes in society can be brought about.

The table below provides a summary statement of the countries that have integrated or could possibly integrate ALE in the implementation of different SDGs

SDGs	Countries that have or could possibly integrate ALE in SDG implementation
SDG 01 No Poverty	Lao PDR, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal
SDG 02 Zero Hunger	Timor-Leste, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka
SDG 03 Good Health and Well Being	Lao PDR, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Vietnam
SDG 05 Gender Equality	Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Nepal, India
SDG 06 Clean Water and Sanitation	Lao PDR, Kazakhstan, Timor-Leste
SDG 07 Affordable and Clean Energy	Kazakhstan, Lao PDR
SDG 08 Decent Work and Economic Growth	Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, Pakistan, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Timor-Leste, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Philippines
SDG 09 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Timor-Leste, Lao PDR, Kazakhstan, India
SDG 10 Reducing Inequalities	Mongolia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines
SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production	Kazakhstan, Vanuatu
SDG 13 Climate Change	Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Vanuatu
SDG 14 Life Below Water	India
SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	Indonesia, Philippines, Timor-Leste, Mongolia

What is apparent from above is that while none of the countries explicitly mention the term adult learning and education in the other SDGs, almost all of them, are implementing or could possibly design and implement a variety of non formal education programs for youth and adults. It is interesting to note that the political commitment and policies determine the nature of educational interventions in the implementation of SDGs. Thus, for example, Kazakhstan has a clearly stated policy for human resource development and as a result, the government is well aware of the importance of developing suitable educational programs to improve the overall performance of the SDGs. As a matter of fact, almost all the SDGs highlight the need for human resource development to complement and supplement the social and economic development of the country. Likewise, in the case of Timor-Leste, there is a policy focus on developing human resources through various educational programs. As a result, considerable attention has been paid in developing suitable educational programs for varied community groups in order to strengthen SDG implementation. The VNRs of Indonesia and Pakistan mention that development of human resources is of prime importance to their governments. In the case of Indonesia, education of youth, adult women and men is considered essential either through awareness programs, skills training and vocational programs, orcommunity empowerment programs so that the SDG implementation can be strengthened. In the case of Pakistan, a multi-sectoral poverty reduction strategy has been followed over the years in order to reduce poverty. Several strategies, interventions, programs and projects have been initiated at the national and provincial levels to tackle the problem of endemic hunger. It is also recognized that expanding the coverage and improving the quality of education would offer a vital leverage for effectively addressing malnutrition in the country. Need for country-wide nutrition awareness program is also recognized. Since access to education, employment/livelihood and the price of agricultural produce are known determinants of poverty, the priority in Lao PDR is to accelerate improvement in education, training, livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and rural infrastructure for the poor. Given the rising environmental challenges faced by Sri Lanka, especially due to climate induced disasters in recent years, the VNR focuses on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15 and reviews them in detail. Each of the SDGs highlight the need for awareness raising programs, capacity building programs for the concerned officials, and programs to bring about behavioral changes. While India has a large number of poverty reduction programs and a wide variety of infrastructure projects to improve the quality of life of people living in rural areas, there is no mention of educational programs that would complement these initiatives and further strengthen them. On the other hand, in the case of Mongolia and Vanuatu, any reference to `skills training,' or `awareness programs' is incidental and sporadic.

Some country VNRs show that issues relating to adult learning and education are not addressed centrally in the policy issues relating to SDGs. These countries include **India, Lao PDR, Vanuatu,** and **Mongolia.** In the case of **Indonesia** and **Pakistan,** there is commitment on the part of the governments to develop the human resources, and each country has a plethora of legislative measures, programs and projects that have addressed the specific educational needs of various community groups. However, it is difficult to figure out whether ALE is the central concern of the policy documents. From the VNR of Sri Lanka, it is apparent that **Sri Lanka** does not address issues relating to adult learning and education centrally in the policy issues relating to sustainable development goals. This is surprising since Sri Lanka, having had a positive experience of strengthening its human resources through its policies of providing free education and health services to all its citizens, should have made ALE its primary focus in addressing SDGs. An important element of **Timor-Leste's** approach to achieving the SDGs is to sequence and focus attention on priority SDG targets and indicators in line with the phases of Strategic Development Plan (SDP). Phase 1 of the SDP is on human resource development, infrastructure development and institution strengthening. In other words, there is a policy focus on developing human resources through various educational programs. As a matter of fact, strengthening human capital is considered a necessary foundation for economic and social development. **Kazakhstan** has sought to introduce the principles of sustainable development in its national planning system and has set clear priorities and goals since the country became independent. The Strategic Kazakhstan-2050 defines the long term strategic goals for the country's development. All short-term, medium, national, sectoral and regional development documents are developed in accordance with Strategic Kazakhstan-2050. The Strategic Kazakhstan-2050 policy document aims at achieving sustainable economic growth. To strengthen human development, the Strategy seeks to transform the country into a diversified knowledge-based economy with strong domestic production and adequate business opportunities, decent conditions of living for vulnerable groups, and provision of modern health care and education.

All the programs and projects are aimed at strengthening human capital, creating a sustainable economy and improving the quality of life of all segments of the population. As a matter of fact, the Government intends to increase the amount of investment in health care and education up to 10% of the GDP in the next ten years. Clearly, the Policy is unequivocal in its commitment to human resource development in order to achieve sustainable economic growth. **Vietnam** has shown a strong commitment in improving education through affirmative action. Vietnam's Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2011-2020) clearly states, `developing and improving the quality of human resources, especially high-quality workforce is a strategic breakthrough.' In 2013, there was an issuance of Resolution 29 on Fundamental and Comprehensive Education Reform that aims at developing education to become an advanced system that meets international standards and responds to the requirement to supply high quality human resource for development. The Education Strategic Development Plan, 2011-2020 (ESDP) sets the direction, targets, and highlights reforms needed for the education sector. The Philippines Constitution guarantees the right to education of every Filipino citizen and mandates that education receives the highest budgetary priority. Guided by AmBisyon Natin 2040, the **Philippines** Development Plan (PDP) also reiterates the importance of promoting lifelong learning or education and skills development as part of its strong commitment in accelerating human capital development and in the achievement of the SDGs. The Constitution of **Nepal** came into effect in September 2015 and is the overall guiding document for Nepal's development efforts. The Constitution guarantees inclusive socio-political and economic development and a wide range of basic and fundamental rights, including those to equality, justice, property, freedom of religion, a clean environment, education and rights against discrimination. Nepal's Fourteenth Plan (2016/17-2018/19) which began in July 2016, is consistent with SDGs. In the case of **India,** the phrase `Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,' translated as `Collective Effort, Inclusive Development,' forms the cornerstone of India's national development agenda. To fast-track this agenda, NITI Aayog (National Institute for

Transforming India), the premier think tank of the Government of India, released a Three-Year Action Agenda covering years 2017-18 to 2019-20. Alongside, work on a 15-year Vision and 7-year strategy document has been prepared. Reflecting the country's long-standing federal tradition, these documents are being prepared with active participation of the State governments. While the government is committed to implementing the Right to Education Act for 6-14 age-group, there is no mention of dealing with the problem of massive adult illiteracy, particularly among rural women. Nor is there any mention of addressing the educational needs of various marginalized groups who have been deprived of educational opportunities.

What is apparent from above is that a clearly stated policy to develop human resources is essential for strengthening SDGs. Countries that have such a clearly stated policy have an advantage over those that do not explicitly spell it out. Countries that have such a policy are more likely to understand the importance of developing human capital and are more likely to look for spaces in the process of implementing SDGs where suitable educational interventions can be made. They are also more likely to understand that the educational needs of various community groups are varied and a `one size fits all' approach in implementing an educational program is not likely to succeed. Since the SDGs insist on the `no one is left behind' principle that ensures that all the vulnerable groups in the country would be identified, ALE would be most appropriate in designing educational programs- formal, non formal, and informal- that would meet the educational needs of each target group. In multi-ethnic and multilingual societies, ALE would have a pivotal role to play in strengthening SDGs.

All the country VNRs show a high level of political commitment in achieving sustainable development goals. The adoption of the SDGs took place at the highest level in most countries. Thus, in **Lao PDR,** the President issued a Decree appointing the Prime Minister to chair the National Steering Committee for SDG implementation. The National SDGs Secretariat, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Department of International Organizations) and Ministry of Planning and Investment (Department of Planning and Lao Statistics Bureau), work with line ministries to track the progress of SDG implementation. In order to implement policy decisions, the Government has assigned various line ministries as focal points for each SDG. Recognizing that the effectiveness of implementing and monitoring the SDGs depends on a wide range of issues relating to local-specific contexts and challenges, the VNR highlights how engaging local administration in systematic implementation and monitoring is critical.

The National Economic Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, is **Pakistan's** highest forum for the approval of plans for the implementation of policies. In 2018, the National Economic Council approved the National SDGs Framework. The Minister for Planning, Development and Reform (PD&R) is the chairperson of the National Advisory Committee on the SDGs. The Committee includes representatives from the federal and provincial government and representatives from the National Assembly, the private sector and professionals. The Committee provides strategic leadership for achieving the SDGs, while guiding effective cross-sectoral and inter-provincial coordination. Provincial governments are also establishing Provincial Advisory committees. Pakistan's national and provincial assemblies have established Taskforces to oversee progress on the SDGs. Effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Pakistan hinges on the effectiveness of the local government system- a potentially viable tool for embedding the SDGs at the grassroots level. The goals' achievement ultimately depends on the ability of the local and provincial governments to promote integrated, inclusive and sustainable development.

In **India,** the NITI Aayog, with the Prime Minister as its Chairperson, is to provide overall leadership and guidance to the SDGs. NITI Aayog has carried out detailed mapping of the 17 goals and 169 targets with Nodal Central Ministries, to implement Centrally–sponsored schemes and major government initiatives. Most State governments have carried out a similar mapping of the SDGs and targets with the departments and programs in their respective states. The Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation has developed a list of draft national indicators in light of the global SDG indicators. Relevant ministries and stakeholders for each of the SDGs have already been identified. Given the interconnectedness of the SDGs, relevant strategies for enabling collaboration among different ministries and departments will be developed as part of the overall implementation process. However, since Ministry of Human Resource Development is a separate stand-alone Ministry, there is no mention of partnerships or of coordination to bring about integration with various development Ministries and departments.

Many stakeholders have taken the initiative to implement the SDGs in **Nepal.** The Government has formed three levels of committees. The Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC) chairs the high-level SDGs Steering Committee, while the NPC Vice Chairman chairs the SDGs Coordination and Implementation Committee, and SPC members chair the nine SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Thematic Committees. Beside the government agencies, the private sector, the cooperative sector and civil society organizations have shown interest in supporting government's efforts. Organization structures for ALE are not mentioned.

Since the adoption of the SDGs, the **Philippine** government has been creating an enabling environment for their implementation, as well as compiling and analyzing data for monitoring the country's progress on the SDGs. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), as the cabinet-level agency responsible for development planning in the country, looks into synergies of the SDGs indicator framework in relation to the monitoring of the country's medium- and long-term development plans. All concerned government agencies have been enjoined to provide the necessary data support for monitoring the Global Goals with the Philippine Statistics

Authority (PSA), an attached agency of NEDA, designated as the official repository of SDG indicators. Organization structures for ALE are not mentioned

After endorsing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, **Sri Lanka** has taken several steps to facilitate and advance the implementation of the SDGs. One such initiative is the establishment of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Sustainable Development. The role of this highest level body is to facilitate the implementation of SDGs by coordinating the activities of the Parliament with various ministries, and providing expert advice. In addition, the Ministry of Sustainable Development was established in 2015 as the line ministry solely responsible for implementing SDGs in Sri Lanka. Subsequently, two other portfolios were added, making it the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Regional Development. Another significant step is the enactment of the Sustainable Development Act No. 19 of 2017 which lays the foundation for a well-organized institutional mechanism to implement the SDGs by utilizing the existing system of public institutions.

From the VNR of **Timor-Leste,** it is apparent that a Working Group, to be chaired by the Prime Minister's Office, has the responsibility for the implementation of SDGs. The SDG Working Group includes representatives from all Government ministries/secretariats to ensure that it remains relevant across political cycles and changes in Government. Even in the preparation of the VNR, the SDG Working Group enabled a wide range of stakeholders from civil society, private sector, academia, media and the Parliament to formally engage in the process of conceptualizing and coordinating the VNR. This consultative process is an on-going one and also encourages citizen partnership. There is mention of ministries at the national level, as also that of municipalities and of local level bodies. But the VNR does not explicitly state what would be the relationship between the Working Group and the concerned ministries and the lower level organizations which are in charge of SDG implementation.

To ensure consistency in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a Coordination Board on Sustainable Development Goals, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, has been set up in **Kazakhstan.** The Ministry of National Economy is the Coordinating

Body of the Board. The JSC Economic Research Institute which provides expert and analytical support, serves as the Secretariat. To ensure the effective organization of the Board's activities, five Working Groups have been set up in five key areas of the 2030 Agenda. One of the Working Groups called the `People' is responsible for analyzing issues of poverty, gender equality, health and education. The Board develops proposals for the creation of a unified policy for achieving the SDGs and for coordinating the activities of the five inter-agency Working Groups. Each inter-agency Working Group includes representatives from government agencies, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, as well as independent experts. The main government body that is responsible for collecting, processing and disseminating data on SDGs is the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Government of Kazakhstan.

Guided by the Presidential Decree on SDGs implementation, **Indonesia** has established the SDGs National Steering Committee led by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. The President is the Chair of the Steering Committee whereas the Minister of National Development Planning/Head of BAPPENAS is the Implementing Coordinator. The Implementing Coordinator is assisted by the Implementing Committee that consists of representatives from the government, philanthropic organizations, private sector, civil society, academics and experts. Replicating the national level, the involvement and role of all stakeholders at the regional level is strengthened by the establishment of the Regional Coordination Team (TKD) which has been formalized through a Governor's Decree. There are 19 TKDs at the regional level out of the 34 provinces of Indonesia.

According to the VNR, **Mongolia** is in the process of creating institutional structures for Sustainable Development. Within the framework of creating appropriate institutional mechanisms, National Council for Sustainable Development was established by the Prime Minister in 2017. The National Development Agency is mandated to provide technical policy support to the Government of Mongolia by mainstreaming the SDGs into long-term strategies and ensuring their coordinated implementation. The task of strengthening SDG indicators and data collection is the role the National Statistics Office.

The VNR of **Vanuatu** mentions that the Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination, in collaboration with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office, is responsible for implementing the NSDP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and completing the Annual Development Report. Annual development Report (ADR) is the principal means of communicating progress against Vanuatu 2030. The NSDP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework provides an outline of the revised ADR analysis format and provides a readily accessible understanding of the status of each of the 15 NSDP Goals, and a summary of the status of each Policy objective. While it appears that the Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination has the principal responsibility for the implementation of the SDGs as well as NSDP Plan, this is not clearly stated in the VNR.

In **Vietnam,** the enactment and issuance of the National Action Plan on Sustainable Development Goals (NAP on SDGs) was followed by the National Action Plan on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal on Education (NAP on SDG 4). While the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) as well as provincial departments of Planning and Investment have been identified as the overall focal point for the implementation of the NAP on SDGs, Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) is responsible for the implementation of SDG 4. Furthermore, each line ministry is tasked with the responsibility for the implementation of specific SDG. However, no department or unit within each ministry has been identified as having the responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the educational inputs in different SDGs.

What is apparent from above is that while the adoption of SDGs has taken place at the highest level, in some cases, a Presidential Decree has been issued and a high powered Committee has been constituted, chaired either by the President, or the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister. A national level Secretariat or a national level organization has the overall responsibility for the implementation of SDGs. The Committee includes representatives from the government, the private sector, civil society, academics, and professionals. While most of the VNRs clearly mention the organizational structure at the national level and in some cases, even at the regional or provincial levels, the organizational structures at the lower levels are not mentioned. While in the case of Lao PDR, a line ministry is the focal point for each SDG, and while local administration is engaged in systematic implementation and monitoring of the various SDG inputs, it is not clear whether in the case of other countries, there is one line ministry that is in charge of one SDG or a cluster of SDGs. It is also difficult to figure out whether there is a separate ministry or a department or a cell within each ministry that is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the ALE inputs in various SDGs. In other words, the country VNRs do not throw any light on the ALE delivery mechanisms. This is indeed strange in the case of Timor-Leste and Kazakhstan since human resource development is a priority concern for their Governments. That being so, there would be need to have organizations for developing curriculum and learning materials, institutions for training functionaries at various levels, for monitoring and evaluation, and the like. While there is mention of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, in the case of Timor-Leste, its function and responsibilities are not delineated. Nor is there any mention of who the front line workers are, how they are trained, which institutions are responsible for training them, etc. Vietnam is the only country that has clearly delineated the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) as the focal point for the implementation of SDG 4 and while each ministry is tasked with the implementation of specific SDGs, no department or unit within each ministry has been identified as being responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the educational inputs in different SDGs.

07. Financing of SDGs and ALE

Financing is a major issue in implementing SDGs, given the extent of new or additional resources required, for example in improving the physical and human resources of existing ministries and departments. With some of the economies graduating to lower-middle income status, access to concessional finance has become comparatively low. There is need to therefore look for other sources of financing and capacity building, both domestic and international. While some country VNRs mention the need to improve domestic revenue collection capacity, some others mention the need to work out new and innovative ways for financing SDGs such as public-private partnerships, involvement of the private sector, of civil society and philanthropic organizations, increased remittances from abroad, maximizing support from bilateral and multilateral agencies like the UN, funds raised through CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), capital market, crowd funding, etc. Except for the VNR of Lao PDR that mentions the figure of USD 21.4 billion that would be required to implement the NSEDP Plan (2016-2010) which is the national plan, as well as the SDGs, none of the other country VNRs mention the budgetary requirements for implementing SDGs. Nor is there any mention of the financial requirements of the ministries/departments that would be developing educational programs and materials for the various SDGs.

Clearly, almost all the governments recognize the inadequacies of financial resources in order to achieve SDGs. There is, however, recognition that in order to achieve SDGS, there is need for effective and cohesive partnerships among various actors such as the national and local governments, civil society groups, the private sector, development agencies and the international community, and remittances from abroad. International agencies would be expected to play an important role in providing finances for the SDGs. India intends to work towards ensuring a greater flow of finances and technology from developed countries- in alignment with their explicit commitment in the context of the 2030 Agenda- to developing and least developed nations. India believes that with combined and sustained efforts at the national and global levels, it would be possible to eradicate poverty and ensure a prosperous world for all.

08. Concluding Remarks

Education is at the heart of the SDGs (UNESCO). Further, the integrated links between education and development have been articulated by several UN agencies way before the SDGs were agreed. The DESA Working Paper No. 146 examined the links between education and the SDGs from the major global reports from the UN system. It reported that the "links between education and economic growth and employment (SDG 8), gender (SDG 5), economic equality (SDG 10), health (SDG 3), peaceful societies (SDG 16), and means of implementation (SDG 17) are the most covered overall" showing the importance of education in these development areas[3]. However, the report also showed that much is to be done in establishing the links between education and agriculture (SDG 2), cities (SDG 11), infrastructure (SDG 9), as well as water (SDG 6) and energy (SDG 7) and education and SDGs 12 to 15, which address sustainable consumption and production, climate change, oceans and marine resources and terrestrial ecosystems. It is no question that embedding ALE in the SDGs is imperative.

Presently, the SDGs have a `stand-alone' approach to adult learning and education. Perceived thus, it is regarded as `good to have' but not essential to the achievement of sustainable development goals. Unlike health which is considered a cross-cutting issue, ALE is not regarded as essential to dealing with problems of poverty, or hunger or reducing inequalities. What this review has shown is the need to recognize adult learning and education as an essential need and as a cross-cutting issue for strengthening the overall success of the SDGs.

It is imperative to integrate ALE in the SDGs. With the SDGs having to be pursued in the context of development plans operating within the neo-liberal framework, an emphasis on economic progress and infrastructure development prevails vs. priority to social development and education, much less, on adult education. The benefits from ALE however abound debunking the notion that it is only `nice to have.' The information from the VNRs supports this, with governments reporting in many instances, the use of adult learning and education strategies in advancing all the different SDGs.

Another key observation is that even in the case of SDG 4 which is the SDG that deals with education, the main focus of this SDG has been on formal education and in improving its quality of services. This, despite there being four targets that have relevance to adult learning and education, indicators provided for each target. These indicators, measured in terms of numbers and percentages, have however bear no relationship with each other. This creates difficulties in better understanding the position with respect to ALE-related commitments and what policy and programme actions need to be taken, correspondingly. The demands of monitoring the SDGs, given that all the SDGs have targets and indicators which need to be tracked, require that each country set up or energize its already existing National Statistics Office. While some countries in the region are geared for this requirement, some others are not. There is mention in the VNRs of the need to set up reliable and efficient data gathering and data analysis systems, so that progress made in the implementation of SDGs can be measured.

Learning needs of adults are varied. As some of the country VNRs are showing, starting from literacy programs, there is need for non-formal education and informal learning programs, financial literacy, digital literacy, vocational and skills training programs, awareness programs, capacity building programs, attitudinal and behavioral change programs, community empowerment programs- all within the lifelong learning framework. Presently, the SDGs focus on the `no one is left behind' principle. While this is essential as it enables each country to identify the most vulnerable groups so that no one is left behind in terms of the access of these groups to various services that have to be provided to them, what is not emphasized is that provision of educational services to such groups is also essential. Since ALE has a variety of components that include formal, non-formal, and informal learning, the learning needs of each of these groups could be met through provisioning of ALE. ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) could play a significant role in strengthening the ALE programs.

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[3]See page 23 of the DESA Working Paper No. 146 on the links of education and SDGs

Lifelong learning is an umbrella term that ensures that learning is a continuous, on-going process throughout life. What is envisaged in the implementation of SDGs is the participation by governments and societies so that SDGs become a societal movement. With the government as primary duty-bearer, what is therefore advocated is the `whole of government' and `whole of society' approach in their implementation. What this review proposes is to also make it `whole of peoples' movement so that the educational needs of all sections of people are met in the lifelong learning framework. While the SDGs focus on three essential dimensions of sustainable development i.e. economic, social and environmental dimensions, what is proposed is a fourth dimension, viz, human resource development. As a matter of fact, human resource development is an essential and a necessary dimension for the achievement of people-centered sustainable development goals. But for this to happen, suitable policies would have to be formulated. There would have to be clarity as to how the ALE programs would be implemented. Going beyond the Ministry of Education, how would each line ministry have a department or a cell whose responsibility would be to plan and implement suitable educational programs for the SDG in question? Likewise, what would be the organizational structures at the regional/provincial and local levels? How would inter-ministerial/inter-departmental cooperation and coordination be brought about? Who would the frontline workers be? Would they be full time workers? How can teachers and educators from different fields contribute to ALE? How would they be trained? How would relevant educational materials be developed? What monitoring and evaluation systems would be put in place? And finally, and more importantly, what budgetary allocations would be made for the ALE programs? These would be some important policy and planning questions that would need to be answered by each country for strengthening ALE in SDGs.

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.