CONCEPT NOTE

Transforming Education and Training Systems to Create Lifelong Learning Societies in the Asia-Pacific

REGIONAL EXPERT MEETING TO DEVELOP REGIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES AND AN ASIA-PACIFIC COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING
19-20 November 2015
Bangkok, Thailand

Rationale
Lifelong learning is integral to building inclusive knowledge-based societies. Key competencies for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are critical to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. In an age characterised by globalisation, regional integration, technological advancements and various socio-economic developments, every Asia-Pacific citizen needs to possess a wide range of key competencies to be able to adapt to a rapidly changing and highly dynamic world.

In many countries, however, education systems are often fragmented and compartmentalised. To reap economies of scale, comprehensive lifelong learning systems are necessary to meet the evolving needs of different segments of the population and provide seamless pathways to learning. This requires a thorough re-evaluation of education and training systems and policies, and consequently, meaningful systemic reform and increased stakeholder participation.

Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are central to lifelong learning. These community-led institutions support the improvement of people’s quality of life by offering education and training that is relevant to local needs and contexts. Catering to those who are at the fringes of society, CLCs have been operating in more than 25 countries in the Asia-Pacific and have become an integral feature of the region’s educational fabric.

However, whilst it is globally agreed that lifelong learning is a critical component of holistic and comprehensive education systems, there is a dearth of evidence in terms of how this concept is being concretely operationalised, particularly in educational settings such as CLCs. This project
attempts to address this gap, and as such, will investigate the extent to which education and training systems in the region foster lifelong learning societies. In addition, this project will also develop regional instruments in the form of standards for CLCs and an Asia-Pacific Competency Framework to promote robust lifelong learning systems in Member States.

**Description of the Project**

The overall objective of the project is to assist countries in the region in reorienting their education and training systems towards building lifelong learning societies.

The specific objectives of the project are:
- To analyse national education and training systems, policies and programmes, with a view to investigate the extent to which lifelong learning is promoted;
- To assess how CLCs and other educational institutions are being leveraged to foster lifelong learning;
- To develop regional standards on the role of CLCs as facilitators of lifelong learning, and;
- To develop an Asia-Pacific Competency Framework for Lifelong Learning.

Concretely, this project will deliver three main outputs:
- **Comprehensive education system reviews in seven countries.**
- **Regional standards on the role of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) as facilitators of lifelong learning.** These standards will provide benchmarks against which to measure CLCs’ effectiveness as full-fledged lifelong learning institutions.
- **Asia-Pacific Competency Framework for Lifelong Learning.** This common reference framework will identify and define the key skills and competencies that are critical to Asia-Pacific citizens’ personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in an increasingly knowledge-based society.

**Comprehensive Education System Reviews**

In the first phase of the project, comprehensive education sector reviews were undertaken to assess how national policies and systems contribute to the promotion of lifelong learning. Moreover, the national reviews explored what specific skills and competencies related to lifelong learning are emphasised in national education policies, plans and practices. The reviews also looked at how different types of educational institutions, specifically CLCs, are mobilised to prepare different groups of learners with the skills and competencies required for a knowledge-based society.

National experts from seven countries in the region (Bangladesh, China, Japan, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam) led the preparation of the education sector reviews.
A regional synthesis report summarising the main findings and recommendations of the seven country reports and incorporating other relevant research (including the UIL publication *Building a Learning Society in Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore*) is currently being prepared and will be published by UNESCO Bangkok.

**Regional Expert Meeting to Develop Regional Standards for CLCs and an Asia-Pacific Competency Framework for Lifelong Learning**

To initiate the second phase of the project, UNESCO Bangkok will organise a two-day expert meeting on 19-20 November 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand. An eminent panel of lifelong learning experts based in the Asia-Pacific region representing various sectors (research and academia, private sector, development partners, UN agencies, CSOs) will be invited to participate in this regional consultation.

The main objective of the meeting is to design a preliminary version of the regional CLC standards and the Asia-Pacific Competency Framework for Lifelong Learning. The meeting will also provide a platform for the national experts to discuss substantive issues related to lifelong learning that could impact the development of these regional instruments.

The regional CLC standards and the competency framework will propose benchmarks and provide guidance to support Asia-Pacific countries in strengthening their lifelong learning systems, particularly at the community level. As reference tools, it is hoped that they will be useful in promoting the harmonisation and quality assurance of education and training across the region.

In order to facilitate the meeting, a draft version of the CLC standards and the competency framework will be developed by UNESCO Bangkok based on a rapid desk review and interviews. The invited experts are expected to contribute to the enrichment and expansion of the initial draft instruments through moderated brainstorming sessions.

Prior to their finalisation and dissemination across the region, the regional CLC standards and the competency framework will be validated in three selected Asia-Pacific countries. Focus group discussions, surveys and interviews will be conducted to obtain feedback from stakeholder groups in the three countries.

The validation process will take place on three levels:
- General validation by policy makers, planners, administrators, employers and employees
- Content validation by experts from relevant sectors
- Validation at micro level by CLC facilitators, instructors, managers, community members and adult beneficiaries in selected CLCs (five per country)

An online consultation will also be organised to gather feedback and comments from UNESCO Bangkok’s CLC networks.