CONCEPT NOTE

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

REGIONAL RESEARCH WORKSHOP
29-30 April 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 citizen needs to possess a wide range of key competencies to adapt to a rapidly changing and highly dynamic Asia-Pacific region.

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.
**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 creating 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 regional competency standards for lifelong learning for adults.

Concretely, this project will deliver three main outputs:
- **Comprehensive education system reviews in seven countries.** These reviews will explore which competencies associated with lifelong learning are emphasised in national education policies and practices. Additionally, the reviews will also look at how CLCs and other education providers are being leveraged to foster lifelong learning.
- **Regional standards on the role of CLCs as facilitators of lifelong learning.** These standards will provide benchmarks against which to measure CLCs’ effectiveness as full-fledged lifelong learning institutions.
- **Regional competency standards for lifelong learning for adults.** This common reference framework will identify and define the key competencies that positively impact Asia-Pacific citizens’ personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in an increasingly knowledge-based society.

**Comprehensive Education System Reviews**

Comprehensive education system reviews will be undertaken in seven countries (Bangladesh, China, Japan, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam) to investigate the extent to which national policies and systems are developed to enhance lifelong learning.

The reviews, which will be published by UNESCO Bangkok, will explore what competencies related to lifelong learning are emphasised in national education policies, plans and practices and how different types of educational institutions, specifically CLCs, are mobilised to prepare different groups of learners with the competencies required for a knowledge-based society. The reviews will also assess the strengths and weaknesses of different types of educational institutions, specifically CLCs, in providing lifelong learning.

Analysis will be derived from a thorough examination of countries’ historical, economic, demographic and sociopolitical context; current lifelong learning policies and associated legislative frameworks; strategies and challenges; target groups served; funding systems; programmes and delivery mechanisms, stakeholder engagement (government, CSO and private sector), and other important issues.

As a practical manual explaining various approaches for the delivery of lifelong learning in diverse contexts, the booklet will benefit both education ministry officials working in this area as well as
researchers and analysts in national research institutions, universities and development agencies who are examining issues of lifelong learning.

**Regional Research Workshop to Develop the Research Framework**

UNESCO Bangkok will organise a two-day regional research workshop inviting the experts involved in the study to design a research framework for the national education system reviews. The meeting will take place on 29-30 April 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The event will allow for a detailed discussion of the emerging issues and challenges in lifelong learning, including issues of access and participation, quality, policy advocacy and financing. It will also provide the national experts with the opportunity to brainstorm other critical aspects that could be added to the country reviews.

A presentation on regional and international trends on lifelong learning will open the workshop. This will be followed by a brief sharing of the country cases, which will provide context and set the stage for the brainstorming sessions.

In order to facilitate the meeting, a draft research framework will be prepared by UNESCO Bangkok which the experts can jointly revise, enrich and expand.