RESEARCH FRAMEWORK
Comprehensive Education Sector Reviews

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

Participating Countries: Bangladesh, China, Japan, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Viet Nam

Duration: 1 May – 31 July 2015 (3 months)

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.
**Project Background**

Within the framework of the extrabudgetary project “Transforming Education and Training Systems to Create Lifelong Learning Societies in the Asia-Pacific”, UNESCO Bangkok will assist countries in the region in reorienting their education and training systems towards creating lifelong learning societies.

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 Sector Reviews**

Comprehensive education sector 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 national reviews 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 equip 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.

The national reviews will be synthesised and published by UNESCO Bangkok.

The final product will be a comprehensive country report (approximately twenty (20) pages plus a list of references and annexes). The report should not be a general description of lifelong learning in the country, but rather focus on how the concept is being concretely operationalised, particularly at the CLC level.

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.

**Main Tasks**

The specific tasks involved are as follows:

1. **Prepare a comprehensive and analytical country report.** See Annex I for the indicative outline of the country report.
2. **Identify adult competencies that are emphasised in national education policies, plans and strategies.**
3. **Collect necessary data and information to support the preparation of the country report.**
4. **Provide input and advice to UNESCO Bangkok regarding the development of the reviews’ research framework and methodology.**
5. **Ensure that all data and information are valid, reliable and referenced (where appropriate).**
6. **Notify the APPEAL Unit, UNESCO Bangkok in a timely manner of any questions regarding the completion of the country report.**
7. **Submit the first draft version of the country report to UNESCO Bangkok by 30 June 2015.** The report will be subject to a peer review process.
8. **Revise the draft country report in light of UNESCO’s feedback by 31 July 2015.**

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1 Whenever appropriate and feasible, national experts are encouraged to conduct face-to-face interviews and/or small in-country consultations to gather pertinent data and information.
Definitions

The following section provides some basic definitions relevant to the Education Sector Review.

- **Policy**
  Policy is defined functionally to mean an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions which may set out directives for guiding future decisions, initiate or retard action or guide implementation of previous decisions. Policies differ in terms of their scope, complexity, decision-making environment, range of choices and decision mechanisms, and whether they tend to be issue-specific or more comprehensive.

- **Governance**
  Governance is concerned with how the funding, provision, ownership and regulation of lifelong learning systems are coordinated, which actors are involved, and what are their respective roles and responsibilities and level of formal competence – at the local, regional, national and supranational level. Whilst in many countries government continues to play the most significant role in coordinating lifelong learning, the distribution of these responsibilities has been changing in response to calls for greater efficiency and effectiveness, particularly to engage employers.

- **Formal education and training**
  Education and training that is typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

- **Non-formal education and training**
  Education and training which takes place outside the formal system, either on a regular or intermittent basis.

- **Informal learning**
  Learning resulting from the daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. Informal learning is part of non-formal learning. It is often referred to as experience-based learning and can, to a certain degree, be understood as accidental learning.

- **Qualifications framework**
  The structure into which accredited qualifications are placed, allowing learners, training providers and employers to gain information about the broad equivalence of qualifications.

- **Recognition of prior learning**
  Acknowledgment of the knowledge and skills that an individual has acquired in previous training and through work experience.

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2 Adapted from UNESCO Guidelines for TVET Policy Review.
Research Framework

Chapter I: Historical and Sociopolitical Context

- What is the country’s historical and sociopolitical context (including political situation, system of government, economic context, demographic trends, etc.)?

Chapter II: Context of Lifelong Learning in the Country

A. Conceptual Definition of Lifelong Learning

- How do the country’s national vision document for education and/or major educational policy documents define lifelong learning?
- How does this definition reflect the holistic and integrated vision of education based on the four pillars of learning? (Learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together, as defined in the UNESCO Delors Report)

B. Status of Education Development

- Where does the country stand in terms of education development? As much as possible, please use a system-wide approach in your analysis, taking into consideration the key education sub-sectors in formal and non-formal contexts (early childhood care and education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, technical and vocational education and training, adult learning and education).
- How much progress has been achieved in terms of achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals? What are the government’s explicit targets vis-à-vis the EFA goals and lifelong learning? What are the indicators used to measure progress against the targets?
- What are the major challenges and obstacles facing the country’s education sector?

C. Policy Framework

- Does the country have a national policy to promote lifelong learning? Are there legal and constitutional provisions to provide lifelong learning opportunities?
- Please describe the policy mechanisms in place to ensure the coherent management of lifelong learning and its alignment with the government’s broader socio-economic policy goals, objectives and priorities at the national, regional and local level.
- Does lifelong learning have an enabling role in national development and reform agendas? Do national reform agendas impact on priority setting in lifelong learning and funding?
- Does the country have a national lifelong learning strategy or action plan in place? What are its vision, strategic objectives, principles and target groups?
- Describe policies that promote partnerships with stakeholders such as industry bodies, NGOs, regional authorities, community organisations, provider representatives. To what extent are foreign partners involved? Do partnership approaches impact the way lifelong learning priorities are made, decision-making processes, financing, and planning?
Has there been any systematic analysis conducted in the country to identify the bottlenecks related to lifelong learning provision? Do they explain why well-intentioned policies are not yielding concrete results?

D. Access, Participation and Outcomes

- Please identify the segments of the population who have access to lifelong learning.
- What is the demand for continuous learning (personal, social, economic, labour, etc.)? Is there demand at present which is not effectively met through existing forms of provision (formal, non-formal, informal)?
- Please describe and analyse to what extent access policies (formally and in real terms) have opened up lifelong learning to marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as women, early dropouts, persons with low levels of literacy, rural communities, the unemployed, the poor, people with learning difficulties, etc. What is the role of non-formal and informal learning in this regard?
- Please assess whether there are groups excluded from lifelong learning due to existing policy frameworks and practices. What could the underlying causes be (e.g. lack of flexibility, high costs, access constraints, etc.)?
- **Who are the major providers of lifelong learning (public, private, NGO)?**
  - What programmes do they offer? Please highlight innovative ICT-related initiatives.
  - Who do they specifically target?
  - How do they enable different groups of learners to acquire the competencies required for a knowledge-based society?
- **What is the role of Community Learning Centres (CLCs)?**
  - How are they being leveraged as providers of lifelong learning?
  - How is the concept of lifelong learning operationalised at the CLC level? Please provide concrete examples of existing programmes and activities.
  - How are the CLCs managed?
  - Who are the main actors involved in the management and operation of CLCs?
  - Who are the main target groups served?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of CLCs as lifelong learning providers?
  - How do they enable different groups of learners to acquire the competencies required for a knowledge-based society?
- Aside from the Ministry of Education, are other ministries (e.g. Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Science and Technology, etc.) or government agencies involved in providing lifelong learning? Do they offer relevant education and training courses and programmes?
- Does the country actively promote ‘learning cities’? What is the role of local government in this effort? Please identify the nationally or internationally-recognised (UNESCO) learning cities in your country and describe their key features.
- Please describe any measures taken to expand vulnerable groups’ access to lifelong learning (non-formal and informal), and whether such measures addressed basic skills deficits and illiteracy.
What are the policies aimed to expand access through partnerships with the private sector or NGOs?

Do industries and companies provide opportunities for work-based learning? What mechanisms are in place to link work-based learning with formal training? Are there any barriers to scaling?

Please describe the various channels of access, including the role of ICT in improving access through flexible and open learning environments, as well as more traditional approaches like face-to-face interactions, internet, TV and radio.

Please describe policies and initiatives to improve access to lifelong learning in rural communities or other hard-to-reach groups (e.g. mobile learning, ICT or other forms of distance education, etc.). Please comment on the impact of these policies and initiatives.

What are the barriers hindering access? What policy measures have been taken to address these barriers at the national, regional and local levels?

To what extent do access policies build on any form of evidence base (e.g. statistics, case studies, comparative surveys, analyses of the size and characteristics of the economy, etc.)?

Are there mechanisms in place that enable promising practices to be shared and feed into policy making?

E. National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Learning

Does the country have an NQF? Is it transparent, well-articulated and outcome-based? How does it facilitate an integrated approach to lifelong learning by recognising prior learning and promote lifelong learning approaches?

Are diplomas and certificates aligned to a set of reference levels which allow individuals, employers, training providers, etc. to situate where specific qualifications fit in comparison to others in the form of a qualification framework or competence-based assessment methods? Are individuals’ competencies assessed against criteria of competence, regardless of how or where they obtained these competencies?

Are there flexible pathways that link education sub-sectors with one another and facilitate the progression of learners to higher levels of education? Please also describe the coherence and links between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Does the regulatory framework of lifelong learning stipulate the inclusion of broader social, personal and entrepreneurial competencies, with a view to improving employability, community participation and sustainable local development? Are these competency elements fully integrated?

Are all forms of education and learning – formal, non-formal and informal – recognised, validated and accredited to meet the demands of individuals and communities throughout the country? What mechanisms are in place to achieve this?

Have policies on the recognition of prior learning been implemented to expand access? What are the scope and modes of use, and who benefits?
F. **Relevance and Quality**

- How are lifelong learning programmes designed in consultation with the local people?
- Are there systemic features in place to assess impact and relevance in the implementation of lifelong learning policies?
- Is there an explicit quality assurance framework in place? Is it applicable to different contexts (formal, non-formal and informal)?
- Who have been involved in defining current quality assurance mechanisms?
- How widely used are the existing quality assurance approaches? Are they used for accountability purposes or to enable a shared view about quality issues pertaining to the relevance and value of lifelong learning?
- How are employers involved in ensuring that lifelong learning provision corresponds to labour market demand? Are they primarily involved in a consultative role or are they involved in defining competence outcomes, assessments and certifications?
- To what extent are lifelong learning providers required to have an explicit quality assurance system in place as a precondition to accreditation or public funding? To what extent do quality management approaches allow for a certain level of autonomy at the institutional level so as to align to specific local contexts?
- Are indicators in place that can guide the development and monitoring of lifelong learning? How widely are they used, and are they:
  - Input-oriented (expenditures per student, pupil/trainer/teacher ratios;
  - Processes (collaboration with employers, labour market forecasting, leadership patterns, etc.);
  - Outcomes (completion of qualifications, placement in related occupations or self-employment earnings in the short and long-term)?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure quality in pedagogical approaches? For example, regarding the way generic skills such as problem-solving and communication are taught, and more widely the relevance of teaching to prepare learners for the world of work?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure the quality of teaching and learning materials? Who are involved in this process?
- Are there existing monitoring and feedback mechanisms to stimulate quality development through the sharing of promising practices and through systemic feedback loops between promising practices and policy formulation at national, regional and local levels?

G. **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Are policy reforms in general accompanied by summative and formative evaluations, and if so how do they feed into policy making and the improvement of practice?
- Have measures been taken to improve the evidence base of lifelong learning as the basis for policy making? If so, what are the mechanisms, and are there specific funds set aside for such purpose?
What mechanisms are in place at the national, regional and local levels to learn from, share and scale promising practices, and to feed these experiences into policy making? Do these occur formally or informally?

Are data collected on lifelong learning participation patterns and outcomes, with a view to inform policy making?

To what extent does the country have access to and learn from other countries?

**H. Governance**

List the major national line ministries/agencies responsible for developing lifelong learning policy, including their mandates and responsibilities. How is the work of the various line ministries coordinated? Please describe any recent or planned changes in governance, e.g. drivers, processes and impacts.

What is the relationship between the ministries involved, and between the central and local authorities?

Is there a formulated vision and strategic direction for lifelong learning at the national level? Which actors and agencies are involved and/or influencing its strategic direction, the level of ownership among key stakeholders and the impact on policy making and planning?

Please describe whether measures have been taken to build strategic governance capacity at the national, regional and local levels. Examples may include the distribution of responsibility for funding, strategic policy development, partnership with employers and employer organisations and the delivery of various public services.

How has the governance of lifelong learning been decentralised?

**I. Financing**

Please describe the financing regime for lifelong learning.

Does the education budget of the country include funding for lifelong learning? How was this budget allocated? Please provide data and information regarding the government’s funding mechanisms, including the share, trends and focus of government budget.

Does the country have a National Education Account (NEA) or has it conducted education financing mapping exercises to identify the different sources of lifelong learning funding (i.e. government, private and donors) and what it is being spent on (salaries, other current expenditure such as teaching materials, infrastructure, etc.)?

Please describe the key non-public funders of lifelong learning (e.g. NGOs, domestic and foreign enterprises, individuals, donor agencies, etc.) and describe the nature and extent of their contributions in terms of the overall funding of lifelong learning. What are their funding priorities, and what types of projects do they support?

What is the level of reliance on donor funding (if applicable), and are there strategies in place to reduce possible dependency on donor funds?

Please assess the effectiveness of government policy to mobilise non-public resources, especially for expanding access to lifelong learning (formal, non-formal and informal). Please also identify areas for improvement.
• Please describe the alternative innovative finance to improve sustainability in the funding of lifelong learning (processes and outcomes). What are these policies’ strengths, weaknesses? What are the key challenges involved?
• Please describe any non-financial inputs (donated or loaned) to lifelong learning and their importance (e.g. school leaders, teachers and trainers, other personnel, buildings, materials, infrastructure, etc.).

Chapter III: Adult Skills and Competencies
• What are the adult competencies that are emphasised in national education policies, plans and strategies?
• Do national policy documents make any reference to or define the desired skills and competencies for a knowledge-based society?
• If these skills and competencies are not clearly articulated in national policy documents, please provide an overview of expected learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) of adult education programmes.

Chapter IV: Conclusion and Recommendations
• Summary of key findings
• Summary of issues and challenges
• Examples of national best practices
• The way forward: recommendations
Annex I: Indicative Outline of National Report

- All photos used must be properly captioned and credited where appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Number of Pages (Indicative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cover Page</td>
<td>1 page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms</td>
<td>1 page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter I: Historical and Sociopolitical Context</strong></td>
<td>1- 2 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter II: Context of Lifelong Learning in the Country</strong></td>
<td>8 - 10 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter III: Adult Skills and Competencies</strong></td>
<td>1 - 3 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter IV: Conclusion and Recommendations</strong></td>
<td>2 - 3 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>1 - 2 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annexes</strong></td>
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