PART II:
SOUTH ASIA SUB-REGIONAL PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES
7. Introduction to the Data

All seven countries of South Asia included in this report have made progress towards the achievement of the six EFA goals. Each one also continues to face challenges and constraints, as is evident in the synthesis reports of each country which make up Part III of this report. In Part II each goal is presented with an analysis of common trends and patterns in South Asia, based on information from the seven national reports and correlated data from the UIS.

The discussion of each EFA goal follows a general outline which starts with a statement of the goal. Common definitions and variations in the definitions across the countries are discussed. Relevant national policies, strategies and programmes are highlighted. The main section for each goal is the presentation of the progress achieved for selected EFA MDA core indicators that compare the available baseline data (preferably for 2000) and the latest data (generally for 2005) for the countries of South Asia. Variations across and within countries are highlighted. Trends are also analyzed on the basis of sex-disaggregated data, and to the extent possible, differences in progress based on other factors are presented and analyzed to identify disparities and inequities within the populations of the countries. The efforts countries are making to improve quality and to address other cross-cutting issues are discussed, and some of the best practices and promising approaches in the region are presented. The chapter on each goal concludes with a consideration of the remaining challenges and the prospects for achieving the goal in the countries of South Asia.

8. Goal One: Early Childhood Care and Education

Goal One: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Dakar Framework for Action Expanded Commentary on ECCE

All young children must be nurtured in safe and caring environments that allow them to become healthy, alert and secure and be able to learn. The past decade has provided more evidence that good quality ECCE, both in families and in more structured programmes, have a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. Such programmes should be comprehensive, focusing on all of the child’s needs and encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and psycho-social development. They should be provided in the child’s mother tongue and help to identify and enrich the care and education of children with special needs. Partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities and families can help ensure the provision of good care and education for children, especially for those most disadvantaged, through activities centred on the child, focused on the family, based within the community and supported by national, multisectoral policies and adequate resources.
Governments, through relevant ministries, have the primary responsibility of formulating ECCE policies within the context of national EFA plans, mobilizing political and popular support, and promoting flexible, adaptable programmes for young children that are appropriate to their age and not mere downward extensions of formal school systems. The education of parents and other caregivers in better child care are important elements in achieving this goal.

8.1 Background and Development of ECCE in South Asia

8.1.1 Definition of Goal One

Although not always recognized, ECCE is the right of every child in accordance with the 1989 CRC, which has been ratified by all the countries of South Asia. The CRC guarantees the rights of the young child for survival, development, protection and nondiscrimination. The EFA Dakar Framework stresses the need for all children to have a good start in life, to be nurtured in safe and caring environments that allow them to become healthy, alert and secure and able to learn. Supportive environments are needed both within and outside the home for the child’s maximum development. ECCE provides the foundation for the fulfillment of the other EFA goals.

In South Asia, there is no common definition of ECCE and in a number of the countries the terms “early childhood care and development” (ECCD) or “early childhood development” (ECD) are more commonly used. In most cases there is a recognition that early childhood covers the full age range from birth to entry into formal primary school (age 6 in most countries of South Asia). While recognizing the importance of appropriate multi-sectoral interventions for children at all stages of early childhood, amongst educational planners and practitioners there is a tendency to focus on pre-school type interventions.

In India, according to the national policy and the major national strategy, the emphasis is on holistic early childhood development with the basic premise that education and care are inseparable issues and must be considered as one. In Nepal, under the EFA NPA various forms of early care and education programmes that include school-based, community-based and privately run pre-primary and kindergarten schools have been brought under the one title ECD. Nepal’s Tenth FYP has highlighted ECD as the main initiative to prepare children for enrolment in primary schools and for holistic development. Sri Lanka uses the term ECCD to describe programmes that support children’s development, learning, health, nutrition and other attributes. Services are similar in ECD centres, pre-schools and Montessori schools, while in day care centres and crèches children are taken care of for longer hours in the absence of their working parents. In Bangladesh, the NPA promotes an integrated approach combining all aspects of child care and development including health, nutrition and sanitation as well as pre-primary education.

8.1.2 National Policies and Legislation for Provision and Coordination of ECCE

Because of its cross-sectoral nature, policies and plans for ECCE in South Asia are generally included in a number of different documents. In addition to policies under the education sector, there are elements relevant to ECCE in the policies and plans of the health sector as well as of ministries and departments of women’s and children’s affairs. In general few countries have comprehensive policies which cover the full gambit of ECCE.
India is the only country in South Asia in which a clear constitutional provision for ECCE exists. According to the 86th Amendment to the Constitution (2001), “the State shall endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years.” ECCE is recognized as a constitutional provision but not as a legal right of every child. The provision of ECCE services is governed by a plethora of policies and related action plans beginning with the National Policy on Education (1986) which viewed ECCE as “an integral input in the human resource strategy, a feeder and support programme for primary education and a support service for working women.” The National Policy for Children promotes holistic early childhood development and is supported by a national strategy for implementation.

Early childhood education is an important part of the General Education Reforms enacted by the Government of Sri Lanka in 1997. The Reforms detailed the actions to be taken for ECCD and pre-school education. The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (2004) is being introduced in the provinces by the Children’s Secretariat, which functions under the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Empowerment (MCDWE).


**Aims:**

- to assure, for every child, the best start in life by ensuring access to adequate health and nutrition services along with the opportunities for responsive psycho-social stimulation;
- to promote the importance of the integrated approach that brings together health, nutrition, psycho-social stimulation, safe water, hygiene and sanitation services;
- to develop standards and guidelines that regulate the development and implementation of ECCD programmes, i.e. home based programmes, child development centres, etc;
- to clarify the roles and responsibilities of central, divisional and local government authorities in the provision and support of the ECCD services indicating their commitment to the care and development of the young child;
- to clarify the relationship between governmental, non-governmental agencies, the private sector, communities and families in the provision of ECCD services;
- to synchronize and coordinate the services provided by the different stakeholders in ECCD so as to maximize the availability and use by all sectors of the population;
- to mobilize and allocate increasing financial resources for and investment in ECCD programmes;
- to promote the importance of the roles of parents, caregivers and the community in the development of children; and
- to enhance the capacity of parents/caregivers and communities to be able to adequately support their children’s development.

**Areas of Action:**

- build knowledge and skills of caregivers to promote optimal child survival, growth and development;
- improve and expand training opportunities for service providers;
- support community-based child development centres; and
- identify and support children with special needs.

In other countries of the region the policies are not as comprehensive, but most have some type of strategic framework. In Nepal, based on the ECD Strategic Plan (2004), an ECD Programme Implementation Guideline was prepared by the Department of Education under the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) in 2005. In Bangladesh, the NPA recognizes that a number of government ministries must be involved in the implementation of the integrated approach which is advocated, particularly those responsible for education, social welfare, women and children’s affairs, health nutrition, water and sanitation. The MOPME has approved an Operational Policy Framework for Pre-Primary Education. Under the framework, national standards are being set for monitoring developmental readiness in early childhood and learning programmes with age-based criteria. In the Maldives, while there is no separate policy for ECCE, pre-primary education is an integral part of the overall education policy and strategy. ECCD was included in the Fifth and Sixth NDPs, the Education Sector Master Plan (1995-2005), and has a clear focus in the Seventh NDP.

In Bhutan, there is no specific policy for ECCE but a pre-primary class is compulsory for all 6-year-olds when they enter school, and pre-primary is fully integrated into the education system. In Pakistan, provision has been made in the National Education Policy (1998-2010) to reintroduce pre-primary as a formal class in primary schools, a practice which had been discontinued in the 1980s.

8.1.3 Strategies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Children

In most South Asian countries, a key strategy is to recognize the provision that already exists from the private sector and NGOs, to encourage the continuation of such provision and to extend the reach of ECCE through both public and private programmes. There exists a variety of programmes for ECCE in the region, but many of them are small scale and the combination of programmes does not provide full coverage for the eligible children. Most governments have not addressed their responsibility as duty bearers under the CRC to ensure ECD for all children.

In the Maldives, prior to the introduction of modern pre-schools, the traditional ‘edhuruge’ (a home-based education system provided by respected community members) discharged the function of developing basic literacy, numeracy, religious knowledge and awareness in children. Today, modern pre-schools co-exist with ‘edhuruge’ in most island communities. The overall strategy in the Maldives is to strengthen and expand ECCD, enhance enrolment and encourage and sustain community initiatives and participation. The MOE provides assistance for community initiatives and also promotes alternative non-formal ECCD programmes.

The strategy of the Government of Pakistan is to extend ECE into all public schools and to continue to encourage the private sector and NGOs to operate pre-schools. In Bhutan, pre-primary classes are already included in the education system from the age of 6, and the private sector is encouraged to make provision for children under the age of 6. In Nepal, there are two different modalities. There is partial support by the Government of Nepal for urban and accessible areas, and special support for the establishment and operation of ECD centres in deprived and disadvantaged communities. In Sri Lanka, the majority of centres are operated by the private sector including NGOs and religious groups, some for profit and some as charitable operations.

In India, there are three distinct channels for ECCE services – public, private and NGOs. Government sponsored programmes are largely directed towards the disadvantaged communities, particularly those residing in rural areas. There are over 130 programmes under the auspices of various departments and ministries which target the development of children aged 0-6 years. As a sequel to the adoption of the National Policy for Children, the Government of India initiated the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS) which has emerged as a major national strategy for promoting holistic ECD through one community-based service provider for all children from prenatal to 6 years, as well as for pregnant and nursing mothers. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme operates centres for the children of working mothers. Under SSA, the national education sectoral programme, strategies have been adopted for greater convergence of pre-school education initiatives, especially of ICDS, with that of primary schooling. There is also provision for setting up pre-school centres in areas with no coverage.
The Government of Bangladesh has adopted a partnership approach for ECCE. In addition to pre-primary classes already in operation in formal schools (which are allowed but not funded by the Government), NGOs, CBOs and other groups and individuals are encouraged to establish and operate pre-primary classes in schools as well as to operate ECCE centres through community-based programmes. The NPA envisages three types of ECCE: school-based pre-primary education classes, community-based ECCE centres located within primary school catchment areas, and home-based ECCE programmes. In Bangladesh, there are also arrangements by local mosques and communities for pre-primary Islamic instruction, which is a widespread practice in Muslim communities in Bangladesh and most other countries of South Asia.

In all the countries there are a variety of providers, and the private sector plays a major role. While this may reduce the burden on public resources, it may also promote inequitable provision such that children from poor and disadvantaged families are either excluded from services altogether or are provided with a separate service which may be inferior in terms of quality and accessibility.

8.2 Progress Achieved in Selected EFA MDA Core Indicators

8.2.1 Progress of Countries in the Sub-Region

Major efforts have been made throughout Asia to improve child well-being, resulting in a decline in under-5 mortality rate of 22% in South and West Asia between 1995 and 2005. Rates declined by more than one-third in Bangladesh and the Maldives during this period. There are large differences in the under-5 mortality rate. The rate of deaths per 1,000 live births ranged from 16 in Sri Lanka to 100 in Pakistan in 2005. Very few children below age 3 in South Asia have access to ECCE programmes that comprehensively address their health, nutrition and learning needs.38

None of the countries in South Asia have set targets for the full range of ECCE. Most have set either no targets or modest targets for an increase in the provision of ECCE services, mainly pre-schools. Nepal has been the most ambitious aiming to provide ECD services to 80% of children aged 3 to 5 by 2015. In contrast, Pakistan has set a target of 50% coverage by 2015, which hardly exceeds current participation rates. Bangladesh has set a target to enrol 1.3 million children in the formal sector and 1.2 million through non-formal channels by 2015, resulting in a total of 2.5 million which is only 22% of the projected population of 3-5 year olds. In the Maldives, the target is to maintain a net enrolment of over 85% with a special emphasis to start pre-schools on the small islands where none currently exist.

Figure 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Pre-Primary Education, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: ** indicates UIS estimate. * indicates national estimate.

Countries have charted uneven progress in the area of ECCE since 2000, as is illustrated by the gross enrolment ratios (GER) in Figure 1. As is the case for most of the goals, comprehensive comparisons of progress across countries cannot be made based on the available statistics. The criteria for what is considered ECCE provision varies greatly across countries, and in some cases within countries and for different reporting periods. For Sri Lanka, which along with the Maldives probably has the highest coverage, data is not available for a national rate, but coverage is about 80% in areas for which statistics have been collected. In Pakistan, it is unlikely that coverage has actually decreased, but there may be differences in how the data has been collected or in the definition of provision over the reporting period.

It is clear that ECCE has not been recognized as a right, and provision remains limited. No country has reported universal coverage, and, according to Figure 1, by any criteria, coverage is less than 50% of the age group in the majority of the countries. Generally low participation is also reflected in the information provided in the individual country reports on the percentage of children with ECCE experience upon entry in primary school. Of those that reported on this indicator using national data, only Sri Lanka and Pakistan recorded that more than half the children had ECCE experience before starting Grade 1. In Sri Lanka, national data showed that ECCE experience was reported for 90% of primary school entrants in districts for which data is available. It is likely that in the Maldives the percentage is also quite high based on the GER.

In most of the countries the private sector rather than the government is the main provider of ECCE services. In Sri Lanka, the majority of pre-school centres are operated by private providers, including NGOs and religious groups. In the Maldives, the other country with relatively high participation rates, only 12% of the children are enrolled in government operated pre-primary centres. According to the Maldives national EFA MDA report, there are 54 government-run pre-schools in the country, 48 community schools and 76 private schools. In India, about 10 million children are enrolled in fee charging initiatives, and there is also fairly large-scale coverage by NGOs. In Bangladesh, besides the commercial sector, which is relatively small-scale and limited mainly to urban areas, coverage by initiatives of NGOs exceeds the coverage through the formal sector. In Nepal, the highest proportion of pre-primary education is in Kathmandu Valley where private institutions dominate. In Pakistan, about 39% of ECE provision is through the private sector, compared to 33% involvement of the private sector in education overall.

8.2.2 Variations within Countries

In addition to the differences in ECCE coverage across countries, there are also wide variations in rates within countries. Where the information is available, there are notable differences in participation rates by geographical location with particularly high differentials between urban and rural areas in some of the countries. There are also major variations in the rates for different sub-groups of the population.

8.3 Analysis of Disparities in Goal One

8.3.1 Progress in Achieving Gender and Social Equality in Goal One

ECCE appears to be the area in which South Asia is closest to achieving gender parity in enrolments in all the countries, although enrolment rates remain low except for in the Maldives. As can be seen in Figures 2, the enrolment of girls is almost equal to or exceeds the enrolment of boys in every country except Nepal and Pakistan. The gap between the sexes also narrowed significantly in Pakistan from 2000 to 2005, although enrolment rates for boys dropped significantly. In Sri Lanka, where complete data is not available, the enrolment of girls and boys in ECCE is reported to be approximately the same. This does not necessarily mean that girls have full equality within the classrooms, but gender parity in enrolment is an important first step.
Significant variations in GER were recorded in Pakistan for the four provinces and three administrative areas, and in some areas the gap between girls’ and boys’ enrolment was quite startling. For example, in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), the GER for boys was nearly double that of girls. In contrast to most of the other countries, Pakistan reported that gross enrolment in ECE was slightly higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In urban areas, private schools account for 73% of the enrolment compared to 22% in rural areas. No further breakdown is available to identify sub-groups of the population not participating in ECE activities.

In Nepal, there are regional differences in ECD coverage. The highest concentration of pre-schools is in the Kathmandu Valley. The overwhelming majority of institutional schools with pre-primary classes are located in urban areas. A number of districts have particularly low participation rates, mostly mountain, hill and some terai (plains) districts. There are 12 districts in which less than 5% of the children in Grade 1 had prior ECD experience.

In Sri Lanka, the national data available for 2005 has been disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, medium of instruction and geographical location. The percentage of Tamil children (80%) with ECCE experience at entry in Grade 1 is less than the Muslim children (85%) and both are lower than the majority Sinhala children (93%). The percentage of girls and boys is approximately the same for all three groups. The percentage of children with ECCE experience in Tamil medium (81%) is considerably lower than that of Sinhala medium (93%).

In India, the children uncovered and unreached by ECCE programmes are found in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, many of them are located in isolated and remote hamlets, dalit hamlets and fishing hamlets and in temporary settlements of seasonal migrant workers. In urban areas, many of them live on the pavements and in unauthorized settlements and slums. Children living in difficult circumstances, such as children of long-term patients, children with special needs, children of sex workers and women prisoners, riot and disaster affected children, refugees and displaced children have been identified as children uncovered and unreached by ECCE programmes.

In Bangladesh, there is an emphasis on the provision of ECCE for the poorest and most vulnerable children, and this has been the focus of most of the work by NGOs. However, data is not available to identify geographical areas or sub-groups of the population in which participation in ECCE is particularly low.
In Bhutan, except for the pre-primary class required of all children entering school at the age of 6, ECCD is a small, urban initiative. It is recognized that interventions need to be developed to extend ECCD activities to rural areas and to the poorest and most disadvantaged.

In the Maldives, ECCD activities are very widespread, but there is a higher concentration in urban areas. Through intensive government efforts, modern pre-schools have been established on all but 12 of the inhabited islands.

Besides the variations across geographical locations, in most of the countries of South Asia there are also significant differences in the provision of ECCE according to the social and economic status of various sub-groups within the population. Because many of the services depend on the private sector, very poor and vulnerable groups are disadvantaged. Some governments have tried to address the balance by establishing programmes specifically for disadvantaged groups. NGOs have also been encouraged to set up initiatives for children who would otherwise miss out on ECCE.

8.3.2 Progress in Improving Quality of Goal One

In most of the countries very little has been done in terms of quality control and improving the quality of ECCE provision. Even in Sri Lanka, where the majority of children are enrolled in ECCE prior to admission in primary school, the quality of the programmes has not been evaluated. It is recognized that assessment is needed on how children experience child care and pre-school education, including the responsiveness of the caregivers, individualization of care and the use of language in the classroom. To improve and standardize quality, more training and support is required. Most of the other countries have made similar observations.

8.3.3 Cross-Cutting Issues in Addressing the “Unreached” and “Underserved”

Because ECCE coverage remains low in most countries of South Asia, there is a need to advocate for increasing the general coverage and particularly for governments to establish and implement policies ensuring ECCE provision throughout their countries. At the same time, most of the countries have recognized the need to target interventions, particularly for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Areas in which there is no ECCE provision, often the poorest and most remote areas of a country, are in particular need. In most of the countries there are ethnic and linguistic minorities for which programmes need to be tailor-made in order to enrol children and to give them relevant and appropriate learning experiences, which will prepare them adequately to enter the primary school system.

In India, government-sponsored programmes are largely directed towards the disadvantaged communities, particularly those residing in rural areas. Under SSA, pre-schools are being set up in areas with no coverage. The Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme was set up especially for the children of working mothers. Uncovered districts and tribal areas are given highest priority to ensure a balanced regional coverage. The ECCE services of NGOs play a vital role in providing education for young children in socially and economically deprived areas. The NGOs work primarily with special communities in difficult circumstances, such as tribal people, migrant labourers and rural children not accessing services.

While universal coverage is not planned for ECCE, the Government of Bangladesh has recognized the need to target activities to reach the poorest and most vulnerable. Most of the NGO interventions are designed to reach children from families who are disadvantaged and marginalized. The Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is implementing a project under which pre-school classes are run in neighbourhood centres. Most of the children are from linguistic minorities and do not speak Bangla prior to going to school. In the centres, both Bangla and mother tongue are used. A number of NGOs have similar programmes in the CHT and the northern parts of Bangladesh to facilitate the transition of children from linguistic minority groups into primary schools.
8.3.4 Best Practices and Promising Approaches for Achieving Goal One

Sri Lanka and the Maldives have the most firmly established ECCE programmes in South Asia providing coverage to the majority of children aged 3 to 5. For other countries in the region, there are a variety of providers including the government, the commercial sector and NGOs. Some training is available for teachers and caregivers.

For South Asia, as the universal provision of ECCE is not considered a state responsibility, partnerships between governments and civil society are particularly important to ensure that services reach the poor and vulnerable. In Bangladesh, the Government has authorized two NGOs to organize pre-primary classes in government and government-registered primary schools. By the end of 2006, the NGOs had organized over 22,000 pre-primary classes covering over 650,000 children in the premises or vicinity of schools. The pre-primary centres have strong links with the primary schools with the aim of having all the children admitted to Grade 1 of the formal schools upon completion of their ECCE classes.

Box 10: First Steps Pilot Initiative for ECCD in the Maldives

The First Steps programme was initiated by UNICEF in 1999 as a three-year complement to and extension of the Government of Maldives Fifth NDP. First Steps involved capacity-building designed to foster print, radio, and television media for and about children up to the age of 5.

Simple and practical information on ECCD that emphasized the right of all children to basic needs, participation and learning opportunities was provided in the materials, many of which featured children and adults with disabilities. The implementation process involved respecting and drawing on the indigenous culture and practices of local people. A larger goal was to raise the status of ECCD so that it might become both a key indicator for assessing progress and development within the country as well as a project belonging to and positively affecting all Maldivians.

Communication Strategies

A central strategy was building the capacity of local ECCD initiatives to advance positive and non-stereotypical images of children and their caregivers that were developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive. To this end, First Steps sought to reach directly into the household (rather than depending on already burdened service delivery channels). To initiate the project, a baseline Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey was conducted. After a number of briefings, field visits and a workshop, a set of 12 core ECCD messages was developed.

The Institute for Health Sciences and the Institute of Teacher Education were trained in ECCD, which equipped them in turn to train local educators and media in sessions that emphasized the programme messages. This local team then designed a core curriculum for a proposed 52 week multi-media campaign and developed a wide range of prototype materials for and about children.

Several key components of the project were vital for the success of the initiative. Some of the key activities included:

- A multi-media campaign integrated numerous implicit and explicit messages about disability. People with disabilities were featured in the materials as much as possible as part of an effort to help address the absence of images of disabled persons and accompanying feelings of shame.
• Weekly ECCD radio and television spots featured caregivers in short dramas or simple stories demonstrating practical interactions and activities with children from birth to 3 years of age.

• In the final phase of the project, a group of pre-school teachers were trained to educate parents.

• Curriculum developers, textbook writers and producers of nonbroadcast educational media were also trained.

Directed by a five-member National ECCD Council formed by the President of the Maldives, First Steps was inter-sectoral, implemented under the joint auspices of the MOE and Information/Arts/Culture and represented and supported by the Ministries of Health, Atolls Administration, External Affairs, Planning, Women’s Affairs and Social Security. The experience of the First Steps programme has informed the development of the ECCD strategy in the Maldives.


8.4 Remaining Challenges and Issues in the South Asia Sub-Region

There are numerous challenges which are common across the countries of South Asia. The most obvious is the lack of political will to universalize ECCE. While a number of the countries have supportive policies and strategies for extending the coverage of ECCE, none have committed to the right of every child to ECCE. As a result there are gaps in provision in every country. Even in countries with the widest coverage, it is mainly dependent on parents paying for their children to attend pre-schools. In some countries, the government deliberately extends services to children whose parents cannot afford to pay for ECCE, and NGOs also play a key role in reaching the poor and disadvantaged, but there are still many children who are not accessing services.

Partly because services are provided primarily by the private rather than the public sector, there is a lack of reliable data on the type, scope and coverage of ECCE in most of the countries. While overall statistics have been provided, there is little scope for comparing data across countries, and even within countries comparability of data is a major problem. Effective planning is constrained by the poor quality of the data. The need to address this issue has been identified by a number of the countries.

The absence of a regulatory framework has also been noted as a major challenge to be addressed. In most countries there are no standards or norms established to assess the quality of the physical environment, teaching-learning methods, qualifications of facilitators/teachers, or expected learning outcomes. ECCE providers and the quality of the centres and pre-schools are not regulated at all in most countries of the region.

Several of the countries highlighted the need for appropriate training for caregivers, facilitators and pre-school teachers. In most cases there is very little in the way of appropriate training available, and there is no standardization or regulation of the type or quality of training provided. If ECCE is to be the foundation of every child’s education, it is imperative that teachers and others involved in their care and learning are appropriately trained. A thorough understanding of child development is particularly important, but the requirement for this is largely unrecognized.

Although all countries in the region have renewed their efforts and considerable progress has been made in a number of the countries, in the absence of more strategic commitments, it is unlikely that ECCE will be comprehensively implemented across the region in the foreseeable future.
As part of the EFA MDA process, countries should reassess their commitments and strategies in order to strengthen ECCE as the foundation for the fulfilment of all the other goals, particularly universal primary education.

9. Goal Two: Universal Primary/Basic Education

Goal Two: Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Dakar Framework for Action Expanded Commentary on UPE

All children must have the opportunity to fulfil their right to quality education in schools or alternative programmes at whatever level of education is considered ‘basic’. All states must fulfil their obligation to offer free and compulsory primary education in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international commitments. The international agreement on the 2015 target date for achieving UPE in all countries will require commitment and political will from all levels of government. For the millions of children living in poverty, who suffer multiple disadvantages, there must be an unequivocal commitment that education be free of tuition and other fees, and that everything possible be done to reduce or eliminate costs such as those for learning materials, uniforms, school meals and transport. Wider social policies, interventions and incentives should be used to mitigate indirect opportunity costs of attending school. No one should be denied the opportunity to complete a full cycle of good quality primary education because it is unaffordable. Child labour must not stand in the way of education. The inclusion of children with special needs from disadvantaged ethnic minorities and migrant populations, from remote and isolated communities and from urban slums, and others excluded from education, must be an integral part of strategies to achieve UPE by 2015.

While commitment to attaining universal enrolment is essential, improving and sustaining the quality of basic education is equally important in ensuring effective learning outcomes. In order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly, providing relevant content in an accessible and appealing format. Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners. The EFA 2000 Assessment suggests a wide range of ways in which schools can respond to the needs of their pupils, including affirmative action programmes for girls that seek to remove the obstacles to their enrolment, bilingual education for the children of ethnic minorities, and a range of imaginative and diverse approaches to address and actively engage children who are not enrolled in school.
9.1 Background and Development of UPE/UBE in South Asia

9.1.1 Definition of Goal Two

The common terms used in South Asia are primary education, basic education and elementary education. The countries vary on the exact definition of terms as well as on the age range covered by each category. Table 4 illustrates the categories for each of the countries.

Table 4: Categories and Age Groups of Primary, Basic and Elementary Education, Sub-Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Primary Education</th>
<th>Basic (B) or Elementary (E) Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>6 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Pre-Primary - 6</td>
<td>6 - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>6 - 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>1 - 7</td>
<td>6 - 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
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<td>5 - 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: “n.a.” indicates not applicable.

Generally, primary education covers Grades 1–5 in five years starting from the age of 5 or 6. However, in Bhutan primary also includes a one-year compulsory pre-primary class and extends up to Grade 6, making it a seven-year cycle, and in the Maldives primary is also a seven-year cycle covering Grades 1–7. All the countries except Bangladesh also have a category of basic or elementary education extending past the primary cycle. In India, Nepal and Pakistan, basic or elementary education goes up to Grade 8, while in Sri Lanka it extends up to Grade 9. In Bhutan and the Maldives up to Grade 10 is included in the country’s definition of basic education.

In addition to the basic education provided through schools, all the countries have provision for education outside the formal system. Various types of NFE and literacy programmes are also defined as basic education. The length and content of courses vary considerably, but as a minimum, basic literacy and numeracy is taught, often complemented with other topics.

9.1.2 National Policies and Legislation for Provision and Coordination of Goal Two

All the countries in South Asia are signatories of the CRC and thereby obligated to provide free education for every child. Accordingly, all the countries have included targets for achieving universal primary education in their respective NPAs. Some have extended the targets up to the basic or elementary education level. In general there is a positive policy environment in the region supportive of the achievement of universal primary education.

Sri Lanka has the longest history of policies that support universal basic education. The Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939 provided enabling legislation to enforce compulsory attendance of the 5-14 age group but at the time, the government did not take the necessary steps to introduce regulations to enforce the policy. The Constitution of Sri Lanka (1978) provides “the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels.” Regulations to enforce compulsory education for the 5-14 age group were introduced with effect from 1998. The regulations require parents to ensure admission of their children to school and their continued attendance. The Maldives also has a long history of universal primary education and has extended the universalization of basic education to 10 years of schooling.
In India, the universalization of elementary education has been a national goal since 1950, and the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002) made education a fundamental right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing that “the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.” The Bangladesh Constitution (1972) also recognizes the fundamental right of education and requires the state “to adopt effective measures for establishing a universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children.” The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (1990) made primary education compulsory.

In Nepal, the Education Act (2001) provides for all children free access to quality basic education and acknowledges the national obligation to fulfill this goal. The Interim Constitution (2007) enshrines the right to basic and primary education, and this is being implemented through a phased approach. In Bhutan, education is viewed as one of the basic elements to achieve the national philosophy of development, “gross national happiness,” and has accordingly provided for free education up to the basic level (11 years of school).

In Pakistan, the Compulsory Primary Education Act has been enacted in three out of four provinces and in one out of three administrative areas. Although enforcement of the act is still pending, significant efforts are being made to get all children into school.

**Box 11: Pakistan - Participation of Society in Policy Formulation**

Education policy formulation, implementation and monitoring in Pakistan had remained invariably apolitical. It was confined to policy makers, consultants and government officials. It had never been placed into popular political discourse. Policy making embraced a top-down approach without consultation of stakeholders, i.e. civil society, teachers, communities and parents.

During the post-Dakar era, the Government of Pakistan decided that discourse about education policy making must be held in mainstream politics with commitment and dynamism. This paradigm shift at government level brought education policy making into popular public discourse involving civil society, teachers, experts, communities and parents. One can see the reflections of a shift in the policy formulation process during the course of the new education policy development. A thorough consultative process has been adopted since 2005. A team of consultants along with MOE officials visited 31 districts and consulted with stakeholders in detail. A series of roundtable discussions and national consultations were held spreading over a time span of two years. Green and white papers based on the inputs gathered from field visits and focus group discussions have been published for further input. Based on this detailed consultative process, a new education policy was formulated which will be endorsed by the cabinet from 2008.

Under the devolution of power initiative, financial management of the education sector has also been shifted to the district level from the provinces. Now it is the discretion of district governments as to where and how money is spent. School management committees are in place to manage school affairs with the participation of local communities. The Government has also ensured the presence of EFA forums and focal persons at national, provincial and district levels. The Government has achieved a substantial degree of success in ensuring the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of educational development programmes and projects in the country.

9.1.3 Strategies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Children

All the countries in the region have made massive efforts to extend the provision of primary education to all children. There has also been in the last decade a greater emphasis on improving the quality of education to raise the general level of achievement as well as to retain children in the system. These measures are generally beneficial for most children, but it has been increasingly recognized that there is also the need for specific strategies and initiatives targeting children who are not enrolled or being retained in school.

In four of the countries of the region, a comprehensive sector (or sub-sector) wide approach (SWAP) has been adopted for the effective implementation of primary education. India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have national programmes which cover all aspects of primary education, its expansion and qualitative improvement. Such programmes allow governments to plan for the overall development of their education systems as well as to implement effective strategies to address specific issues such as equity and inclusion.

As discussed in Part I (see "Incentive Schemes for Disadvantaged Groups"), most countries in the region have introduced various financial incentive schemes to enrol and retain disadvantaged children in school. Nearly all the countries provide free tuition and free textbooks for all children and some provide additional incentives such as free meals, school uniforms, stipends and/or stationery for all children or for children categorized as having some type of disadvantage.

9.2 Progress Achieved in Selected EFA MDA Core Indicators

9.2.1 Progress of Countries in the Sub-Region

Overall there was impressive growth in primary education with improved performance on most of the indicators in the countries of the region. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, the number of new entrants into primary education in South and West Asia grew by more than 9% between 1999 and 2005 to 44 million, and there was a significant increase in primary enrolment by 35 million. This was a somewhat more rapid increase than for all developing countries. Although there were still 17 million out-of-school children in 2005 in South and West Asia, this represented a dramatic decline from 31 million in 1999. More than half the children not in school (59%) have never been in school, and it is recognized that they may never enrol without additional incentives.39

The percentage of children entering primary school increased in all the countries for which data is available. As can be seen from Figure 3, the gross intake rate (GIR) exceeded 100% in all countries of South Asia.

Except for Sri Lanka with 97.5% net intake rate (NIR) in primary education, the high GIRs are not reflected in correspondingly high NIRs for the other countries. As illustrated in Figure 4, for many of the other countries, the NIR is much lower than the GIR, indicating that most children are entering school but many, at the time of entry, are either above or below the expected age. Bhutan for example, had a GIR of 103.2% in 2005 but its NIR was only 32.1% in the same year translating to difference of 71.1 percentage points. In Bangladesh, the difference between the GIR and NIR in primary education was 37.6 points and in Pakistan 24.9 points indicating high under- or over-age entry to school. In Bhutan, only 32% of children are enrolling in school at the designated age.
Most countries in South Asia recorded an increase in the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary education, as shown in Figure 5. The GER in India jumped 21 percentage points in 2005 from 2000, 18 points in Bhutan, 15 points in Pakistan, and a modest increase in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also retained GERs of over 100%, indicating under- or over-age enrolment. The GER for the Maldives dropped from 133.7% in 2000 to 118.7% in 2005. This most likely represents an improvement in getting more children into school at the designated age rather than a decline in enrolments.

**Figure 5: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education, 2000 and 2005, Sub-Region**

![Gross Enrolment Ratio Chart](chart.png)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: "**" indicates national estimate.

Except for Sri Lanka and the Maldives, the high GERs did not translate into having all children in school. However, as illustrated in Figure 6, the net enrolment ratio (NER) in the South Asian countries posted increases in 2005 from 2000. In most cases, the improvement in NER was noteworthy, signifying that most children in South Asia are now in school. The NER for primary education increased 15 percentage points in Bhutan and nearly 9 points in Nepal. However, most of the countries still have a long way to go to achieve universal primary education. Even with the increases, Nepal's NER was 79.2% and Bhutan's 73.9%.

Pakistan's NER for primary education improved only 8.4 points from 57% in 2001 to 67% in 2005, the lowest NER in the region. India, the second most populous country in the world, saw NER improve 9 points in five years, bringing the NER in 2005 to 88.5%. Bangladesh showed a modest improvement of 5.5 points in four years, bringing the NER to 88.9%. However, even for the countries with high NERs, it has to be remembered that enrolling and retaining the last 10% of children is usually the most difficult task of all.
Across South Asia, enrolments in secondary education are much lower than in the primary level, as shown in Figure 7, which gives the GER for secondary, and Figure 8, which shows the NER. Although data on the NER is not available for all the countries, looking at both graphs, it can be seen that in five countries less than half the secondary age cohort is enrolled in secondary school. The exceptions are Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In the Maldives and Bhutan, secondary enrolments have increased remarkably during the last few years as a result of strategies to expand the sub-sector and to make secondary education more accessible to greater numbers of children, particularly those in remote areas. In each of the other countries, at considerably less than 10 percentage points, the increase in enrolment percentages in secondary education has been remarkably low.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: “*” indicates UIS estimate. “**” indicates national estimate.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: “***” indicates UIS estimate. “**” indicates national estimate. Data for Sri Lanka are provisional as of 4 June 2008.
Information on expenditure for primary education compared to a country’s total educational expenditure is only available for five of the countries, and data which can be compared over time is only available for three countries: Bangladesh, India and Nepal. For these three countries, there was a decrease in the percentage of expenditure for primary education in Bangladesh and India, while Nepal registered a marginal increase. Only in the Maldives and Nepal is there an indication that expenditure for primary education exceeds 50% of the total educational expenditure of the country.

9.2.2 Variations within Countries

Within each of the countries there are also variations in the indicators. Where the information is available, in general, urban rates tend to have favourable rates, and the gender disparity is less in urban areas than in rural areas. The areas where the very poor live in the mega-cities are an exception to the usual urban-rural divide, and in some cases the rates for urban slums are lower than for rural areas. Most of the countries noted regional variations and differences across states, provinces and districts, but in many cases there is insufficient breakdown in statistics to locate accurately the areas of greatest need.

Pakistan can be used as an example of tremendous variations across the provinces and administrative areas. For instance, the NER for primary education is nearly 20 percentage points higher than the national average in one administrative area and over 20 percentage points lower in one of the provinces, giving a difference of more than 40 percentage points between the two. However, there was no reporting on indicators below the level of provincial or administrative area, and from the data it is not possible to compare different linguistic, ethnic and/or socio-economic groups.

9.3 Analysis of Disparities in Achieving UPE/UBE

9.3.1 Progress in Achieving Gender and Social Equality in Goal Two

For most of the indicators, there was substantial progress in bringing more girls to school relative to the number of boys, but disparity against girls prevail in Pakistan (GPI of 0.80) and India (GPI of 0.95). Only Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have achieved gender parity or ratios in favour of girls for most of the indicators. For the three countries, this had been achieved for most indicators by 2000 and the ratios were maintained or further increased in favour of girls during the past five years.
A favourable sign, as shown in Figure 9, is that the differences in the GIRs of girls and boys in primary education have been considerably reduced in several countries. The most remarkable was Nepal, where the gender disparity in GIR was 26.5 percentage points in 2000 but had narrowed by 2006. In India, the disparity between the GIR for girls and boys was reduced from 18.1 points in 2000 to 7.2 points in 2006, and in Bhutan during the same period the difference decreased from 8.7 points to 2.3 points. However, at least in some of the countries, this trend may mask a preference for boys’ education in that the boys enrolled in private schools may not be included in the official figures.

![Figure 9: Gross Intake Ratio in Primary Education, by Sex, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: "**" indicates UIS estimate. "***" indicates national estimate.

From Figures 10 and 11 it can be seen that boys’ GER and NER in primary education are still higher than those of girls in four out of the seven countries of the region. In Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka the GERs and NERs for girls are equal to or higher than those of boys. In three of the other four countries, the gap has narrowed considerably.

![Figure 10: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education, 2000 and Latest Year, by Sex, Sub-Region](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: "**" indicates UIS estimate. 
In Bhutan, the primary education NER for girls in 2005 was almost equal to that of boys compared to a difference of 6.2 percentage points in 2000, but there is still a gap of 2.8 points in the GERs between the sexes. In India, the NER for girls increased by 14.5 points from 2000 to 2006 compared to an increase of only 5 points for the boys NER during the same period. This reduced the difference in NERs for girls and boys to only 3.3 points compared to 13.1 points five years before. In Nepal, from 2000 to 2004 there was an increase of 7.2 points in the NER for boys and of 10.4 points for girls, reducing the difference somewhat from 13.7 points to 10.5 points. In Pakistan, UIS data show that from 2001 to 2006 the NER for boys increased 5.7 points while the NER for girls increased by 11.3 points, but the difference in the NERs of girls and boys in 2006 remained at the regional high of 16.2 points.

As can be seen from Figures 12 and 13, girls’ enrolment in secondary education exceeds that of boys in Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka (no data is available for NER). In Bhutan, the GER is lower for girls than boys, but the NER is equal. However, in India, Nepal and Pakistan, the available data show major disparities persist in favour of boys. For both girls and boys, less than half the cohort is enrolled at the secondary level except in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In Nepal and Pakistan, the enrolment of girls at the secondary level is particularly low at below 40% GER. In Pakistan, only a quarter of girls of secondary school-age were enrolled in 2006 compared to a third of boys.
Although remarkable progress has been made in increasing the number of girls in school, it must be remembered that gender parity is only one aspect of gender equality in education. Qualitative as well as quantitative measures are needed to assess how countries are progressing in relation to overall gender equality in education. It is clear that other social disparities tend to exacerbate the disadvantage that girls are facing in general, with the effect that for most disadvantaged groups, girls are most likely to be excluded or given an education of poor quality.

In general, there is insufficient collection and analysis of data on sub-groups of the population based on ethnicity, language, socio-economic status or other categories. But most country reports note that the available information suggests wide disparities exist when the population is divided by the categories. The groups which are most disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic factors are also the ones with the lowest rates for most indicators.
Some of the countries are beginning to collect and analyze data based on factors that might affect children’s access to quality education. For instance, Nepal has listed seven categories of children who have been identified as deprived of educational opportunity, i.e. girls, children in remote rural areas, dalits, disadvantaged ethnic groups, children of IDPs, children with disabilities and the extremely poor. It has been found that dalits and other disadvantaged groups have lower participation rates in all levels of schooling. Children in two or more of these seven categories are not likely to attend school or, if they do, it is very unlikely that they will complete the cycle. India has also noted the relatively lower participation rates of children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and has highlighted that there has not been a significant change in their share in enrolment during the past five years, although the increased participation of girls from these groups was noted.

Several countries noted that children with disabilities have in the past been excluded from school, but most countries are now making efforts to include them in educational activities. In India, about 1.62 million children with disabilities have been enrolled in elementary classes across the country. Even with the special efforts, however, children with disabilities make up only 1% of the primary enrolment. For most of the countries, if data is available at all, it indicates that the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in school is considerably lower than the percentage of children with disabilities which would normally be expected in the population.

9.3.2 Progress in Improving Quality of Goal Two

Following the rapid expansion of primary education in South Asia in the 1980s and 1990s, it was recognized that in most cases, the quality of education did not keep pace with the increase in enrolments. For this reason, most countries are now putting emphasis on quality improvement as well as on increasing equitable access. This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on EFA Goal Six, which focuses on the quality of education.

There are several indicators that point to the need to improve the quality of education. Excessive repetition of grades and low completion rates characterize several of the countries’ systems. For instance, in Bangladesh the number of years input per graduate of the five-year primary education cycle is 8.2 years (7.9 for girls and 8.6 for boys). In countries in which there are measures of achievement, the results have been disappointing, indicating poor learning outcomes and the system's failure to prepare children for education at higher levels or for employment and life in general.

In general, countries are strategizing to improve the infrastructure of the school system as well as the quality of the teaching-learning process. There is a renewed emphasis on lowering pupil-teacher ratio and in ensuring that teachers are appropriately trained and have opportunities for continued professional development and support. In some cases, child-friendly, gender-sensitive, rights-based schools are being promoted in order to create the supportive environment needed to maximize learning. Children are encouraged to become active learners and to develop analytical skills in addition to mastering content and basic skills.

9.3.3 Cross-Cutting Issues in Addressing the “Unreached” and “Underserved”

It is recognized in most countries that multi-pronged strategies are required to effectively reach those not yet enrolled and those who have not been retained by the education system. Various incentive schemes are being used to attract and retain children from the poorest and most vulnerable families, as well as from disadvantaged communities. Such schemes are being operated in most countries in the region.

Ensuring access to children in remote areas has been a major effort in a number of countries, particularly the mountainous countries of Nepal and Bhutan, and the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In Sri Lanka, small rural schools have been established all over the island giving
access to basic education to a substantial portion of the population. There have also been efforts to improve schools and education in the conflict areas. In the Maldives, special attention is being given to ensuring access and enhancing transition to the higher secondary level. This is particularly difficult on islands that are sparsely populated. The provision of residential schooling facilities is being considered as a possible solution. In Bhutan, boarding schools have been established to provide educational opportunities to isolated and nomadic communities, but it is planned that extensive dependence on boarding, which is expensive and difficult to manage, will be reduced by establishing additional smaller schools in remote areas. In Pakistan, detailed school mapping is to be undertaken to identify unreached localities, and mosque schools will be opened in smaller settlements.

In addition to making every effort to include all children in the formal school system, it is recognized by most countries that, as a transitional measure, alternative arrangements need to be made available for children who cannot or will not enrol in formal schools and for those who have dropped out of the system and returning to school is not a viable option. There are special projects undertaken by NGOs and by governments to provide alternative schooling for working children, for children in urban slums where formal schools are not available and for children who have never enrolled or dropped out of the formal system.

9.3.4 Best Practices and Promising Approaches for Achieving Goal Two

Comprehensive programmes have replaced projects in four of the countries of the region. Through coordinated planning exercises, the programmes in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka have the potential to cover all the educational needs of a country. For maximum effectiveness, flexibility and dynamic strategies are crucial, which form the cornerstone for changes to make systems more responsive and efficient to meet the needs of all children.

In India, the SSA, the Government’s education flagship programme, is being implemented by the Government in partnership with state governments with a long-term perspective on cost-sharing and a district-level decentralized management framework involving local bodies. It is envisaged that the campaign will achieve four goals, namely providing access to all children in the 6-14 year age group through formal primary schools or through other equivalent alternative delivery means, completion of five years of primary education by all children, completion of eight years of elementary education by all children and provision of elementary education of satisfactory quality for all by 2010. The programme provides opportunities for NGOs and the private sector to contribute towards the achievement of the goals. The programme leads towards a community-owned initiative for universalizing elementary education. Efforts under the SSA are to be underscored by effective decentralization, sustainable financing, cost effective strategies for universalization, an interesting curriculum, community-owned planning and implementation, and a focus on girls, marginalized caste groups and ethnic minorities.

9.4 Remaining Challenges and Issues in the South Asia Sub-Region

Reaching the goal of universal primary education is the area in which all countries of South Asia have put in their most efforts and where they have concentrated their funding. The efforts are showing some promising results, but a number of challenges are evident which must be addressed if universal primary education is to be achieved.

Despite efforts to enrol all children, in most countries (except Sri Lanka and the Maldives) there are still children who have never been enrolled in school. They are usually from the poorest families, often socially as well as economically deprived. They may live in remote locations or in the very poor areas of the mega-cities where basic services have not kept up with the rapidly increasing populations. Often they are from ethnic, linguistic and/or social minority groups. All countries have been effective in getting the majority of children in school, and many studies suggest that
parents of even very poor and disadvantaged families are eager for their children to attend school. However, there remain groups of children who are not accessing education. General motivation campaigns will not be sufficient to enrol them in school. To enrol and retain the children who are currently unreached and unserved, well targeted interventions must be implemented which effectively address barriers both within and outside the school.

In order to achieve universal primary education, children must be enrolled in school and retained for the full primary cycle. This is an area in which most countries are having more difficulties. As will be seen in the chapter on EFA Goal Six which discusses the quality of education, survival rates remain low in many of the countries of the region. While there are factors outside school which affect retention, in general it is the poor quality of education which seems to be the primary reason for high drop-out rates in South Asia. Retaining children for the full primary cycle continues to be a major challenge in most of the countries of the region. Effectively addressing this issue is imperative if countries are to fulfil EFA targets and the MDG of universal completion of primary education.

While tremendous progress has been made at the primary level, in general secondary education has not kept pace. It is obvious that most children are not making the transition from primary to secondary schooling. Except for Sri Lanka and the Maldives, less than half the secondary age cohort are enrolled in secondary schools, and for several of the countries it is considerably lower than half.

The percentage of girls enrolled is particularly low. Bhutan and the Maldives have implemented a number of strategies to increase secondary school enrolments, and these have proven effective. However, in Nepal, India and Pakistan the secondary education enrolments are increasing very slowly. If the full benefits of education are to be available for girls and boys in South Asia, there must be a renewed commitment to address this challenge and to implement strategies to increase participation at the secondary level.

While notable progress has been made in nearly all countries of South Asia, achieving gender parity in basic education continues to be a challenge for four of the countries. Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka achieved the EFA goal for gender parity for most indicators related to primary and secondary education by 2000 and the favourable situation for girls has been maintained in these countries. There have been significant gains in narrowing the gender gap in India, Nepal and Bhutan, but continued, concerted and targeted efforts will be required to finally close the gap in these countries in as short a time as possible, bearing in mind that the EFA goal and the MDG for gender parity in primary and secondary enrolments by 2005 has already been missed by four of the seven countries in South Asia. In Pakistan, progress in this area has been insufficient. A major drive is needed to narrow and eventually close the gender gap. In all countries, challenges remain to achieve full gender equality within the education systems and in the greater society.

For all countries except Sri Lanka and the Maldives, universal primary education can only be achieved by 2015 if efforts are greatly intensified. Both India and Bangladesh are nearing 90% NERs, while Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan are lagging behind. In these three countries one-quarter to one-fifth of the children are still out of school. Intensified efforts must include targeted approaches to bring the remaining unreached and unserved children into the education system. Then they must be retained, and this is where each of the countries must exert their most intensive efforts. The goal of 100% enrolment implies 100% retention, and this is specifically stated in the EFA goal and MDG of universal primary completion. This can only be achieved if the quality of education is significantly improved. To achieve the goal of universal primary education, the education systems of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan must become fully inclusive and the efficiency of the systems must be significantly improved.
**10. Goal Three: Life Skills and Lifelong Learning**

Goal Three: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.

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### Dakar Framework for Action Expanded Commentary on Life Skills and Lifelong Learning

All young people and adults must be given the opportunity to gain the knowledge and develop the values, attitudes and skills that will enable them to develop their capacities to work, to participate fully in their society, to take control of their own lives and to continue learning. No country can be expected to develop into a modern and open economy without a certain proportion of its workforce having completed secondary education. In most countries, this requires an expansion of the secondary system.

Young people, especially adolescent girls, face risks and threats that limit learning opportunities and challenge education systems. These include exploitative labour, the lack of employment, conflict and violence, drug abuse, school-age pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Youth-friendly programmes must be made available to provide the information, skills, counselling services needed to protect them from these risks.

All young people should be given the opportunity for ongoing education. For those who drop out of school or complete school without acquiring the literacy, numeracy and life skills they need, there must be a range of options available for continuing their learning. Such opportunities should be both meaningful and relevant to their environment and needs, help them become active agents in shaping their future and develop useful work-related skills.

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### 10.1 Background and Development of Life Skills and Lifelong Learning in South Asia

#### 10.1.1 Definition of Goal Three

How Goal Three is defined and understood in South Asia varies greatly. In India, the goal is presented as the education of adolescents and young people. While other countries have maintained the title as life skills and lifelong learning, for most of the countries the emphasis is on adolescents and the youth. In Bhutan, the aim is to continuously improve the quality and relevance of education to ensure holistic development, while in Nepal the emphasis is on skills-based training and on learning of life skills. The Maldives defines the goal as ensuring that young people’s learning needs are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.

Bangladesh has adopted a comprehensive and detailed definition. Life skills and lifelong learning are defined as the development of individual capacities to cope with one’s needs at social, mental, physical levels and to achieve established and recognized rights. It also encompasses the enhancement of individual negotiation capacity through training, in problem-solving and in developing expertise and capabilities to tackle various circumstances and handle core responsibilities.

In Sri Lanka, the goal of life skills and lifelong learning envisages the development of three skills sets, namely basic skills such as literacy and numeracy which enable a person to acquire the skill
of learning to learn, psycho-social skills that help to develop one’s personality to successfully face problems and challenges confronted in day-to-day living, and practical and technical skills which equip a person to earn a living. In Pakistan, three types of skills have also been identified, which are the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, psycho-social skills and practical or functional skills.

10.1.2 National Policies and Legislation for Provision and Coordination of Goal Three

None of the countries reported having a comprehensive policy for this goal. For instance, it was noted that in India there are a number of policies that have a bearing on the education of adolescents, but none of them refer to holistic development or to the provision of education. Other countries in South Asia are in a similar situation. Most of the countries have adopted some strategies and are implementing important programmes but this is generally in a policy vacuum.

10.1.3 Strategies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Children

None of the countries reported having specific quantifiable targets for this goal. In most of the countries, there are a number of strategies and programmes, most of them of a limited scale, which are addressing various aspects of the learning needs of adolescents and youth. Some of the programmes target adolescents still in school particularly in the area of life skills education and technical skills training, while most countries also have projects for youth who have never enrolled or dropped out of school.

In most of the countries, there is the intention to introduce life skills into the formal curriculum, usually at secondary level, as well as in the curriculum of NFE programmes. Several country MDA reports mentioned the prevention of HIV/AIDS as a specific area to be addressed through life skills education. Most of the countries also reported on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. Along with generic life skills, there is also an emphasis on adolescents and young people learning specific skills which will help them to earn a living and to progress economically.

There is also a great variety in providers, as the area is not confined to the MOE in any country. There is extensive involvement of NGOs as well as CBOs. In both Bangladesh and India, at least 17 different ministries and national bodies are sponsoring initiatives that fall within this goal.40

10.2 Progress Achieved in Selected EFA MDA Core Indicators

10.2.1 Progress of Countries in the Sub-Region

NFE and skills training for the youth are extremely diverse throughout South Asia and differ widely in objectives, target groups, content, pedagogy, scale and type of providers.41 This is an area in which it is difficult to assess progress mainly because of the variety of programmes and activities. Most of the intended participants are not in formal institutions and in most of the countries there are no standardized mechanisms for collecting and reporting data to a central body.

As illustrated in Figure 14, while neither comparative nor recent data are available on the youth literacy rate for most of the countries, the indications are that it has continued to improve across South Asia. This is largely the result of more children enrolling in and completing primary education. Due to the very limited scale of programmes targeting the youth who had not become literate in school, it is unlikely that such programmes have made a noticeable impact on youth literacy rates.

41 Ibid.
Most countries support the policy of keeping adolescents in school through the secondary cycle. However, as was noted under EFA Goal 2, the majority of children of the secondary age group are not in secondary education. Except for Sri Lanka and the Maldives, all the countries have secondary net enrolments considerably below 50%. The transition rates from primary to secondary, shown in Figure 15, are encouraging in this context. All the countries except Pakistan have recorded transition rates from primary to secondary of above 75%, and Sri Lanka has maintained a rate of almost 100%. However, when the low GERs are considered as well, it is obvious that large numbers are dropping out before completing their secondary studies. In many countries in the region, students are transitioning from primary to secondary, but they are not transitioning from lower secondary to upper secondary.

One of the core EFA MDA indicators is the percentage of students at the secondary level who are enrolled in some type of TVET programme. Most of the countries have TVET alternatives at the secondary level, but as can be seen from Figure 16, the percentage enrolled in these programmes is extremely low. All the countries recorded rates of less than 4%.
Several of the countries reported on the number of students enrolled in TVET programmes. In Bangladesh, there are approximately 2,728 TVET institutions in operation with a total enrolment of 241,336. Of this number, 80% were enrolled in private institutions. In Nepal, there are 15 public technical schools, two vocational training centres for community development and one training institute for technical instruction. There are also over 160 private technical institutes. The total enrolment in all the institutes is about 12,000. In Bhutan, there are seven vocational workshops in boarding schools, five vocational training institutes and two handicraft training institutes with an enrolment of about 1,166 students. In Pakistan, the number of students enrolled in TVET institutions increased from 75,000 to 163,000 in four years, but it remained a tiny fraction of the total secondary enrolment and was less than 1% of the age group.

In Sri Lanka, it is recognized that a good general education includes an orientation to the world of work which fits the outputs from the school system to the work opportunities that are available. Practical and technical skills are compulsory subjects from Grade 6 to 9. The post-secondary courses of the TVET system encompass various forms and levels of training, which generally start after completion of the senior secondary level of schooling (Grade 11, age 16 years) and go up to the diploma level.

Another of the core EFA MDA indicators for this goal is the extent to which countries have designated curriculum time in education systems to develop children’s and young people’s knowledge, skills and attitudes for health. All the countries reported on efforts to include some form of life skills or related topics in the formal school curriculum. However, in most of the countries, initiatives seem to be in relatively early stages and in many cases, the extent to which life skills are given importance in the national curriculum of the countries is not clear.

In Nepal, the school curriculum has recently been revised to incorporate life skills and is currently being piloted in 50 schools in 10 districts. Knowledge, skills and attitude related competencies have been integrated into the primary school level curricula of health education. Grade-wise curricular objectives were revised to include knowledge, skills and attitude level objectives.

The contents related to life skills are incorporated throughout the curriculum providing scope for topics such as personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, nutrition, diseases, first aid and health services.
In Bhutan, the curriculum and textbooks for most subjects have values education embedded in them, but for this to be translated into reality a curriculum framework and teacher guide would need to be developed. A comprehensive school health programme is being implemented through a collaborative effort of the Ministries of Education and Health. In Bangladesh, some efforts have been made to include life skills in both non-formal and formal secondary curricula. In the Maldives, life skills have been introduced in secondary schools and for young people in different sectors, but in formal education most sessions are held outside school hours. The Maldives also has an integrated adolescent sexual and reproductive health and life skills project, which aims to empower young people to make informed decisions. In Pakistan, health and life skills lessons are included in the curriculum from Grades 1 to 10.

Sri Lanka probably has the most fully developed life skills curriculum for formal education in South Asia. The subject of life competencies was introduced in 1999 into the junior secondary curriculum under the education reforms programme. The emphasis was on developing skills and attitudes relating to life situations in children by engaging them in especially designed participatory activities rather than by teaching them in the traditional manner. In 2004, the MOE integrated life competencies with civics education. The ongoing curriculum revision is giving more attention to improving life competencies education. Life skills have been integrated into the health and physical education curriculum, and initiatives are being taken to integrate psycho-social competencies into Grade 3 and 4 of the primary school curriculum. However, even in Sri Lanka, according to the country report, insufficient progress is being made towards the goal of life skills and lifelong learning. It was reported that poor understanding of the subject matter and misinterpretation between technical skills, psycho-social skills and basic educational competencies are the main weaknesses in the system. The time allocated for the subject is not adequate, and most teachers are still using traditional lecture methods in teaching.

Closely aligned with the teaching of life skills is a focus on the use of education for the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Most of the countries reported that efforts are being made to include HIV/AIDS prevention teaching through either formal or non-formal means, but for the most part initiatives are very limited in both scale and scope. Several countries also reported on surveys or studies which have been carried out on the extent of young people's knowledge of issues related to HIV/AIDS.

In Bangladesh, according to a baseline HIV/AIDS survey among youths undertaken in 2005, 85% of females and 93% of males were aware of HIV/AIDS with awareness being higher among urban youth. Knowledge of ways to prevent HIV/AIDS was 22% for females and 23% for males among those with secondary or higher education.

In Nepal, according to a recent report, 58% of the population aged 10 years and older has heard about HIV/AIDS. About 65% of males reported having heard of HIV/AIDS compared to 51% of females. The percent of the people who have heard of HIV/AIDS was higher in urban (83%) compared to rural (53%) areas.

In Sri Lanka, HIV/AIDS prevention education was initiated in the education system in 1994, but the knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) is poor, as demonstrated by recent studies which found that only 57% of adolescents were aware of the existence of STDs in general, although the knowledge of transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS was relatively better compared to knowledge of other STDs. The knowledge of HIV/AIDS was marginally higher among out-of-school adolescents compared to those in schools.

### 10.3 Variations within Countries

As with other goals, there are wide variations of coverage across provinces and districts within the countries. As this is a particularly poorly documented area, the information on differences within countries is also very limited. But given the nature of the coverage, which is a mix of many different
providers, it is inevitable that some areas of a country would benefit more than others. The type of variations can be illustrated by the youth literacy rates for different areas reported by Pakistan, where the gap between the province with the highest youth literacy rate and the province with the lowest rate was 23 percentage points.

10.4 Analysis of Disparities in Achieving Life Skills and Lifelong Learning

10.4.1 Progress in Achieving Gender and Social Equality in Goal Three

As is illustrated in Figure 17, in all the countries for which the data is available, except Sri Lanka, the female youth literacy rate is lower than that of males. Even in Bangladesh, a country which has had gender parity in enrolments in primary education for a number of years, the female youth literacy rate is 7 percentage points lower than the rate for males. The difference between male and female rates is even greater in other countries, 16 points in India, 21 points in Nepal and 24 points in Pakistan. In Pakistan, where youth literacy rates for provinces and administrative areas have also been reported, there are even more stark differences in some areas of the country. The female rates in every province were lower than the lowest provincial rate for males. By sex, the highest rate was 77% for males in Punjab and the lowest was 26% for females in Balochistan.

![Figure 17: Youth Literacy Rate, by Sex, After 2000, Sub-Region](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: All data are national estimates. Data for the most recent year available.

Mostly, the gap has narrowed in transition rates from primary to secondary for males and females, as shown in Figure 18. According to the latest data, more girls proceed to secondary education than boys in Bangladesh, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The rate was approximately the same for both sexes in Bhutan in 2000. In India and Nepal the rates for boys slightly exceed those for girls. This is clearly an area in which progress is being made. However, from an examination of the data on GERs and NERs in secondary education reported under EFA Goal Two, it seems that girls are not being retained in secondary school after enrolment. The overall secondary enrolment rates mask disparities between the two levels of secondary education. Generally participation is much higher in lower secondary than in upper secondary. The gaps between the two levels are above 30 percentage points in Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives.42

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Most of the countries did not report on participation rates in the various activities under this goal in terms of geography, ethnicity, language, disability, socio-economic status or other factors which might affect access to provision. It seems that there is little targeting in the areas of TVET and life skills through formal education. However, NFE programmes are generally for disadvantaged groups.

10.4.2 Progress in Improving Quality for Goal Three

In most of the life skills and lifelong learning programmes, quality and relevance are major concerns. Because of the diverse nature of activities, there is little in the way of standardization or quality control by the respective governments. There are a number of areas where improvements are necessary in order to ensure quality provision in life skills teaching and in TVET and NFE initiatives. Efforts need to be taken to improve the quality of teaching, of the curriculum and of textbooks and other learning materials. All programmes must be relevant to the learners, teaching skills that they can apply in their own lives - an area where improvement is needed.

10.4.3 Cross-Cutting Issues in Addressing the “Unreached” and “Underserved”

The TVET sector in most countries, while much too small to meet the technical needs of the countries, also does not seem to be reaching the disadvantaged groups. In some countries there are new initiatives under the general term “livelihoods training” which are designed and implemented specifically for adolescents and youth from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Such programmes are generally aligned with market needs so that the training leads to employment. Most of the programmes are being implemented on a small scale, but this is an area that merits further attention by governments as well as other providers.
Box 12: Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children

Working Children in Bangladesh

According to the ILO’s Child Labour Survey of 2004, an estimated 7.9 million children aged 5-17 are working in Bangladesh. Most of them are employed in the informal sector. Around 1.5 million children are working in urban areas. In Bangladesh, 47 sectors have been identified as hazardous work. Children are involved in a wide variety of work, many with little or no pay, and some work under highly hazardous conditions. A large proportion of girls’ work, particularly domestic work, is unrecorded in Bangladesh, and most of the informal sector operates outside any regulatory framework.

Addressing the Needs of Working Children

From 1997 to 2004, the Government of Bangladesh with the assistance of UNICEF, Sida and DFID, undertook the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children (BEHTRUC) Project, which provided two years NFE to over 300,000 children in six divisional cities. Based on the lessons learned from the BEHTRUC Project First Phase, the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) Project Second Phase was designed and is being managed by the BNFE under the MOPME with technical support by UNICEF. The learning centres are operated by 20 NGOs which were selected based on their past experience and competency. Sida, CIDA and UNICEF are the main donors of the project.

The project’s aim is to provide 200,000 urban working children aged 10 to 14 (60% girls) with appropriate life skills based education. About 20,000 of the adolescents will also receive livelihood skills training to expand their employment horizons.

Since August 2006, a total of 82,750 learners have been enrolled in 3,310 learning centres in six divisional cities. Around 3,000 more learning centres will be opened during April to July 2008. This will bring the total coverage in 2008 to about 167,500 learners in around 6,646 centres operated through the partnership between BNFE and the 20 implementing NGOs.

Life Skills Based Education

One of the lessons learned from the first phase is the importance of developing strong literacy and numeracy skills as well as life skills to ensure that the learning is practical, useful and sustainable in the learners’ lives. In order to provide a solid foundation, the basic education course was revised and lengthened. The course has been made more child-friendly and is activity-based with clearly defined learning competencies and a strong life skills component.

The course is for 40 months divided into five learning cycles. Each cycle runs for eight months and roughly corresponds to one academic year. Bangla, maths and life skills are introduced in the first learning cycle. English starts from the second learning cycle. Social studies is integrated into the life skills component. Livelihood related topics are included in the life skills component from the fourth learning cycle.

Core life skills are introduced and then practiced throughout the basic education course to equip the adolescents to apply the skills to simple everyday situations and to a number of issues.
The issues which are discussed are closely related and have immediate relevance to the learners' lives. Topics covered include early marriage, domestic violence and abuse, conflict resolution, puberty, drugs and relationships. The core skills covered in the course are:

- self-awareness
- empathy
- independent thinking
- creative thinking
- decision-making
- problem-solving
- communication
- interpersonal skills
- coping with emotions
- coping with stress

**Livelihood Skills Training**

One of the key findings from the first phase project was that working children want to increase their technical skills to access better employment opportunities and ultimately more options in life. Based on this, a provision for livelihood skills education has been kept in the second phase of the BEHTRUWC Project for urban working children. Under the livelihood skills component, provisions have been kept to provide two types of livelihood skills (technical and non-technical) training to the urban working children. Technical skills will include vocational skills training, apprenticeships, job placements, and opportunities for self employment. Non-technical skills will consist of job counselling, curriculum vitae writing, communication skills, job searching, entrepreneurial skills, marketing skills, business skills and other relevant skills.

The design of the technical livelihood skills education component will be based on the needs and capability of the learners as well as on labour market demands and opportunities for wage-employment or self-employment. Technical livelihood skills education will be provided directly by the project to 5,000 children of 13+ years who successfully complete the third cycle of the basic education course. The learners will also continue the last two learning cycles of the basic education course simultaneously. Another 15,000 children of 13+ years age will also be provided with livelihood skills training through linkages with the existing skills training activities of other organizations/service providers/NGOs.

From the fourth learning cycle, the contents of the non-technical skills training will be incorporated into the curriculum of the basic education course and accordingly teachers will be trained to impart these skills to the learners of the project. All the learners will be introduced to the non-technical livelihood skills as part of the basic education course.

10.4.4 Best Practices and Promising Approaches for Achieving Goal Three

A number of countries have been working to find ways to extend opportunities for education to young people through programmes which would ensure equivalency to the respective formal systems within countries. Some of the best examples of these approaches are through distance education modes and through the setting up of community education programmes.

In India, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) provides opportunities for continuing education to interested learners through its 2,945 accredited academic and vocational institutions across the country. Initiated as a project in 1979, open schooling is now recognized as an independent system of education in India. The NIOS, with approximately 1.4 million learners on roll, is the largest open schooling organization in the world. Courses of study include an open basic education programme for children (up to 14 years), adolescents and adults at levels that are equivalent to Classes 3, 5 and 8 of the formal school system, a secondary education course, a senior secondary education course, vocational education courses and life enrichment programmes. The Bangladesh Open University, amongst its many courses, also has a programme which leads to obtaining the SSC.

In the Maldives, the aim of the Centre for Community Education (CCE) is to establish community education in each island using informal education strategies to provide educational opportunities for children who do not have the chance to study in the formal education system, school drop-outs and youth and adults in general. The current focus is vocational education and continuing education opportunities for young adults. In Bhutan, young people are able to advance their academic qualifications through the Continuing Education Programme, which was recently established. This is a joint partnership with the Government and private schools. While the evaluation is done by the Government’s examination board, the space and teachers are provided by private schools.

10.5 Remaining Challenges and Issues in the South Asia Sub-Region

Across South Asia there are many challenges which make it difficult to achieve this goal. The first and most obvious is the lack of quantifiable targets. This makes it impossible to accurately gauge the extent to which countries are progressing towards the goal. Also, the EFA MDA indicators are varied, covering a number of inter-related but also quite distinct areas. Since the targets are not set, it is impossible to assess the prospects of achieving the goal. However, it is worthwhile to note some of the challenges and to ascertain what needs to be done to produce a favourable environment for adolescents and youth, both those in school and outside, to access education which will be relevant to their lives and give them skills that will help them to advance both socially and economically.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is the sheer numbers. As has already been noted, most adolescents and youth are not in formal schools. Yet they need to be given educational opportunities, particularly to gain life skills, which will help them to advance personally and socially, and livelihood skills, which will help them to progress economically. In addition to implementing programmes suitable for the general population, there is the need to develop life skills education programmes to meet the learning needs of children and adolescents from ethnic and linguistic minorities, from disadvantaged groups, and of those with disabilities.

For all the various types of education programmes under this goal, there is the need for effective coordination. This is not for the purpose of control but rather to help ensure that all adolescents and youth have equal opportunities to be involved. It should help reduce unnecessary duplication and promote the sharing of ideas and replication of appropriate models. To provide the bedrock for this type of coordination, information systems need to be improved so that data on the respective programmes can be collected, analyzed and used appropriately for better coordination and management.
11. Goal Four: Literacy and Continuing Education

Goal Four: Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Dakar Framework for Action Expanded Commentary on Adult Literacy and Continuing Education

All adults have a right to basic education, beginning with literacy, which allows them to engage actively in, and to transform, the world in which they live. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009, there are still some 776 million people globally who cannot read or write; two-thirds are women. The fragile levels of literacy acquired by many new literates compound the problem. Yet the education of adults remains isolated, often at the periphery of national education systems and budgets.

Adult and continuing education must be greatly expanded and diversified, and integrated into the mainstream of national education and poverty reduction strategies. The vital role literacy plays in lifelong learning, sustainable livelihoods, good health, active citizenship and the improved quality of life for individuals, communities and societies must be more widely recognized. Literacy and continuing education are essential for women’s empowerment and gender equality. Closer linkages among formal, non-formal and informal approaches to learning must be fostered to respond to the diverse needs and circumstances of adults.

Sufficient resources, well-targeted literacy programmes, better trained teachers and the innovative use of technologies are essential in promoting these activities. The scaling up of practical, participatory learning methodologies developed by NGOs, which link literacy with empowerment and local development, is especially important. The success of adult education efforts in the next decade will be essentially demonstrated by substantial reduction in disparities between male/female and urban/rural literacy rates.

11.1 Background and Development of Literacy and Continuing Education in South Asia

11.1.1 Definition of Goal Four

Definitions of adult literacy vary across South Asia both in terms of age, and of type and level of skills. Within countries there are often widely varying definitions used by different departments, agencies and organizations. Usually, the census definition is used for official adult literacy rates, while more comprehensive definitions may be used for planning purposes and for assessing levels of functional literacy. For example, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) considers a person literate if he or she can read and write a letter in any language. However, according to the Government’s NFE Policy Framework, literacy is the ability to read, understand, interpret, communicate and compute in verbal and written forms in varying contexts, and it involves a continuum of learning that enables individuals to develop their potentials and knowledge-base, and to participate fully in community affairs and wider social and developmental contexts.

The age group may also form part of the definition. In India, a person aged 7 years and above who can read and write with understanding in any language is considered literate. In Pakistan, the definition is the same except that the specified age is 10 years and above.
The language of literacy is an issue in some countries. While Bangladesh, Pakistan and India simply specify that literacy can be in any language, other countries qualify this. In Sri Lanka, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write in one's first language. Literacy in the Maldives is defined in terms of the national language Dhivehi and the Thaana script. In Bhutan, a literate person is defined as someone who can independently read and write for communication and solve new problems using literacy skills, but the Bhutan EFA NPA goals specify literacy in the national language Dzongkha for those aged 15 and above. In Nepal, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write daily life related short and simple sentences written in his or her mother tongue or national language and also the ability to do simple calculations. Nepal seems to be the only country in South Asia which includes numeracy in the official definition. Bangladesh includes numeracy in the broader framework definition but not in the criteria used for the census.

11.1.2 National Policies and Legislation for Provision and Coordination of Goal Four

There is a constitutional mandate for the promotion of literacy in some but not all of the countries of South Asia. The constitution of Sri Lanka has among its goals “the complete eradication of illiteracy and assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels.” The Bangladesh constitution recognizes literacy as a fundamental right of all citizens and enjoins on the state to take measures to remove illiteracy speedily. The Government approved a national NFE policy framework in 2006 which provides the overarching principles for conducting NFE programmes including adult literacy initiatives and continuing education activities. The age group may also form part of the definition. In India, a person aged 7 years and above who can read and write with understanding in any language is considered literate. In Pakistan, the definition is the same except that the specified age is 10 years and above.

In India, the eradication of illiteracy has been one of the major national priorities since independence. The National Policy on Education 1986 and its Programme of Action (POA), which was also revised in 1992, accorded qualified priority for literacy. The national policy urged that “the whole nation must pledge itself to eradication of illiteracy, particularly in the 15-35 age group.”

In Pakistan, a Literacy Ordinance was approved by Parliament in 1987 which included provisions for making literacy a prerequisite for participation in economic and social activities. However, a date for enforcement of the act has not yet been set. The current education policy (1998-2010) envisages democratization of education through the expansion of elementary education including formal and non-formal methods and expanded programmes of adult education, literacy and functional literacy programmes.

Pakistan has set the ambitious goal of increasing the literacy rate for the 10+ age group from 43% to 86% by 2015. According to Nepal’s NPA, interventions will be undertaken to raise the adult literacy rate from 48% in 2001 to 75% by the year 2015 and 95% for the 15-24 age group and 90% for the 6+ age group. Bhutan’s national literacy goals are to eradicate illiteracy by 2015 and to make the adult population aged 15 years and over functionally literate and numerate in the national language. Since the Maldives already had near universal literacy in 1990, it has concentrated efforts on the promotion of literacy in English in order to strengthen communication with the rest of the world.

11.1.3 Strategies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Groups

In general, adult literacy efforts have been erratic and short lived. A number of countries have taken up initiatives at different times since Jomtien, but most of these have been poorly funded and have not been sustained over time. In many of the countries, the main implementers of literacy programmes have been NGOs and CBOs with governments taking an occasional rather than a long-term interest.
India is the one country in the region which has had a comprehensive policy and a sustained approach, and the initiative was started even before Jomtien. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was set up in India in 1988 to impart functional literacy to 80 million adult illiterates by 1995, which was subsequently revised to cover 100 million. After trying out different models, the NLM adopted a modified mass campaign approach known as the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) as the dominant strategy for adult literacy.

Most of the other countries in South Asia have included plans to expand adult literacy and continuing education programmes in their NPAs. Acknowledging that literacy is not simply a skill to be learned in isolation, broad strategies integrating literacy with other skills and activities are advocated. In a number of countries, the strategy is to forge partnerships with NGOs and other departments and agencies already active in the field. In Nepal, according to the NPA, a number of activities are to be undertaken, including the implementation of adult literacy programmes in an integrated manner and in coordination with other development programmes with the involvement of local bodies, governmental organizations and NGOs.

In Bangladesh, the NPA seeks to provide opportunities and facilities to meet the learning, life and livelihood skills needs of adolescents, young adults, adults and neoliterate adults to survive and thrive in a competitive world. The plan aims to contextualize EFA and MDG targets under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in a harmonized approach with realistic targets and shared responsibilities. The BNFE has the responsibility to establish appropriate standards and to promote NGO/CBO capacities to achieve quality in programme formulation, implementation and monitoring. NGOs and CBOs are to play the primary role in implementing programmes based on a public-private partnership approach for planning, implementation and monitoring of activities.

BNFE is to ensure effective coordination of activities within the government (relevant ministries) and between government and other partners. Appropriate linkages with other relevant programmes (skills training, micro-finance, employment generation) and organizations are to be established to assist NFE participants to put their new-found learning, job skills and knowledge to work towards poverty reduction and income generation. There are to be separate initiatives targeted at selected age specific groups. The groups are the post-primary age group (ages 11-14); out-of-school adolescents and youth (ages 12-19); young adults (ages 15-24) targeting 50% of the illiterate group; and adults (ages 25-45) targeting 25% of the illiterate group. Post-literacy and continuing education initiatives are also part of the plan.

In Bangladesh and Pakistan, the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) has been launched in collaboration with UNESCO. In Pakistan, a number of other adult literacy projects are being implemented by the Government and by NGOs. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, a national curriculum for literacy has been developed and launched. The curriculum covers the areas of basic literacy, functional literacy and income-generating skills.

In Sri Lanka, a draft action plan has been developed for the period from 2007-2010. It has identified four objectives related to literacy, namely the development of basic literacy among youth and adults from 91% to 100% by 2010, functional literacy among youth and adults, life/practical skills, and both practical and technical skills required to succeed in life through the school system.

The focus during the Ninth FYP in Bhutan is to expand the NFE programme using the existing teachers and space in primary schools, to recruit promising Class XII graduates to teach in the NFE centres and to foster greater collaboration with other ministries to support post-literacy programmes. The aim is to increase the number of participants in the NFE programme from 1,000 to 4,800 every year.
Box 13: Literacy Through Non-Formal Education in Bhutan

The National Women’s Association of Bhutan and the Department of Education initiated the Non-Formal Education Programme with the establishment of six pilot centres in 1992, serving approximately 300 women learners. The objective was to empower illiterate youths and adults who had either dropped out of, or never attended formal schools, and to help improve their quality of life by providing relevant life skills through literacy. The NFE programme was then subsequently expanded in the Eighth FYP as a means of remedying low adult literacy levels. In a little over a decade, the programme has grown exponentially, due to both increasing popular demand for NFE and the high policy priority that adult literacy has received. The programme has now expanded from basic literacy classes to include both post-literacy and self-learning courses.

NFE classes are usually held in the evenings. Within the core curriculum, participants are taught topics covering health and nutrition, hygiene, birth control, the importance of education, and other important health and social themes, with a practical view to directly improve the conditions of their everyday lives. IT resources for NFE students are soon to be introduced in several centres. This is expected to facilitate learning and add another dimension to adult education.

The NFE programme has made a significant impact on the rural population, particularly on women. Some have become members of the National Assembly. Their contribution towards the creation of social capital has been substantial, and they have become agents of change, discussing development issues and the needs of their village communities in relevant meetings. As representatives of their communities, they are regarded as role models. As such, they have motivated many other women to become literate.

The programme has been highly regarded by local communities and its benefits widely acclaimed by the participants themselves. In the words of Karma, an NFE learner in Monggar:

“I did not know anything before. Now I can read and write. I am not confused while travelling, I can read vehicle numbers and signboards, do some basic calculations, and am independent. We are thankful to our teacher and to the Royal Government for this chance.”


11.2 Progress Achieved in Selected EFA MDA Core Indicators

11.2.1 Progress of Countries in the Sub-Region

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, South and West Asia was home to half of the world’s 774 million illiterate adults during the period 1995-2004. Although literacy rates rose by 25% to an average of 60% literacy rate for the sub-region from 48% in the previous period (1985-1994), the number of adults lacking basic literacy skills had declined only slightly by 1.6% to 387.8 million. The increase in the literacy rate was higher than any other area in the world, but at 60%, the adult literacy rate for South and West Asia remains well below the average of 77% for all developing countries.43

The countries in South Asia with data for the 1990s as well as for the first decade of this century recorded substantial improvements in adult literacy rates, as can be seen in Figure 19. Bangladesh

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improved its adult literacy rate by 18.2 percentage points to 53.5% in 2007 based on UIS estimation. India saw its literacy rate improve to 66% in 2007, according to the UIS estimation, from 48.2% in 1991.

Other countries in the region have also made progress in literacy or have maintained high literacy levels. UIS estimates show that the Maldives maintained its almost universal literacy status of 97% in 2007. Sri Lanka’s adult literacy rate also stood at 90.8% in 2006. According to the UIS, Nepal saw an increase in its adult literacy rate by 23.5 percentage points to 56.5% between 1991 and 2007. According to a population and household census undertaken in Bhutan in 2005, the adult literacy rate for the 15+ age group increased to 53%. According to the Pakistan EFA MDA Report the adult literacy rate had increased by 9 points in four years. Data from UIS show Pakistan’s adult literacy rate at 54.2% in 2006.

Although progress has been made, adult literacy rates for all the countries except Sri Lanka and the Maldives remain at comparatively low levels. Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal have rates of less than 60%. India’s literacy rate was at 66% in 2007 according to UIS estimation. Given the huge populations of some of these countries, this represents a substantial percentage of the world’s illiterate population. India alone accounted for nearly 35% of the world’s adult illiterates in 1995-2004.44

As was noted under EFA Goal 3, indications are that the youth literacy rate continued to improve across South Asia during the past decade. Generally, youth literacy rates are substantially higher than adult literacy rates, and this can be seen as a positive factor for improved adult literacy rates in the future.

11.2.2 Variations within Countries

There are wide variations in literacy rates within countries, particularly in the countries with literacy rates below 65%. India has noted that although the gap between the educationally advanced and disadvantaged states has been narrowing over the years, inter-state and intra-state disparities still continue. Bangladesh recorded variations in literacy rates of the six divisions within the country, and Nepal noted disparities across regions. In Pakistan, the difference in the province with the

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highest literacy rate and the province with the lowest rate was 17 points. Most countries noted considerably higher rates for urban areas than for the rural population.

11.3 Analysis of Disparities in Goal Four

11.3.1 Progress in Achieving Gender and Social Equality in Goal Four

As can be seen from Figure 20, except for the Maldives, the literacy rates for females are substantially lower than the rates for males. Although for the countries for which data is available the gap is narrowing, the disparity by gender remains extremely high.

Based on adult literacy rates for the 1999-2004 period, the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 identified South and West Asia as the region with the strongest gender disparities. Striking gender disparities prevailed in India, Nepal and Pakistan, where literacy rates for females were less than two-thirds of those for males. Besides gender, poverty and place of residence also influence literacy rates. Generally illiteracy rates are highest in the countries with the greatest poverty. The link between poverty and illiteracy is also observed at household level with the literacy rates of the poorest households substantially lower than those of the wealthiest.45

When literacy rates are compared using both the factors of gender and geographical location, the differences within countries are even more striking. For instance, in India the literacy rate for urban males was 30 points higher than the rate for rural females. In Pakistan, for which a national male literacy rate of 68.7% was recorded, some districts had female literacy rates lower than 10%.

The literacy rates of a number of social and cultural sub-groups have been noted as considerably lower than the national rates. In India, a number of low literacy districts have been identified. The literacy rate among tribal groups is the lowest compared to all other sub-groups of the population. The literacy rates for Muslims is lower than the national average in almost all the big states where there is a large Muslim population, and female literacy rates among Muslims are lower than the female literacy rates of all other religious communities in 21 states and union territories. Disability has also been recognized as a factor aligned with low literacy rates in India.

Note: *** indicates UIS estimation. Data are for the most recent year available.

Based on adult literacy rates for the 1999-2004 period, the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 identified South and West Asia as the region with the strongest gender disparities. Striking gender disparities prevailed in India, Nepal and Pakistan, where literacy rates for females were less than two-thirds of those for males. Besides gender, poverty and place of residence also influence literacy rates. Generally illiteracy rates are highest in the countries with the greatest poverty. The link between poverty and illiteracy is also observed at household level with the literacy rates of the poorest households substantially lower than those of the wealthiest.45

When literacy rates are compared using both the factors of gender and geographical location, the differences within countries are even more striking. For instance, in India the literacy rate for urban males was 30 points higher than the rate for rural females. In Pakistan, for which a national male literacy rate of 68.7% was recorded, some districts had female literacy rates lower than 10%.

The literacy rates of a number of social and cultural sub-groups have been noted as considerably lower than the national rates. In India, a number of low literacy districts have been identified. The literacy rate among tribal groups is the lowest compared to all other sub-groups of the population. The literacy rates for Muslims is lower than the national average in almost all the big states where there is a large Muslim population, and female literacy rates among Muslims are lower than the female literacy rates of all other religious communities in 21 states and union territories. Disability has also been recognized as a factor aligned with low literacy rates in India.

Nepal has noted wide discrepancies in literacy rates among different caste and ethnic groups. The lowest literacy rates are found among the dalits living in the plains. Available statistics indicate that the literacy rate of economically and socially privileged groups ranges from 60% to 94% whereas literacy rates of some of the most disadvantaged castes and ethnic groups are as low as 3.7%. There are also disparities among development regions and ecological zones. Literacy rates are lowest in the mountainous region.

The countries of South Asia have made some gains in reducing the gap in male and female literacy rates, but much remains to be done. Although some countries have noted some improvements in the rates of various sub-groups of the population, overall the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups remains unacceptably high. More progress in this area is needed.

### 11.3.2 Progress in Improving Quality for Goal Four

Most of the adult literacy and continuing education programmes in the region are fairly small scale, and there is a diverse range of activities. While some programmes are intensively monitored, overall, the assessment of literacy initiatives has been very weak. For this reason it is difficult to evaluate the quality of most programmes. Unlike in primary education where quality has become a major concern, in adult literacy there has not been a strong emphasis on quality improvement. However, there are some promising initiatives. Pakistan has noted that for the first time a national curriculum has been developed for adult literacy. This can be used to set standards for diverse programmes.

In Bangladesh, the NFE policy framework provides the opportunity for the Government to play a role in setting standards and monitoring quality while encouraging NGOs and other agencies and departments to take the lead in implementing literacy and continuing education programmes.

Improving the quality of primary education is also very relevant to increasing overall literacy rates. Formal schooling is a driving force for literacy expansion, provided that children complete school and receive an education of good quality. Completion rates are low in a number of the South Asian countries, and studies have indicated that, even among those who complete primary education, large numbers possess weak literacy and numeracy skills. Such poor results of formal schooling along with limited opportunities to use literacy skills could result in large numbers of adults who have attended primary school, but who are not functionally literate.

### 11.3.3 Cross-Cutting Issues in Addressing the “Unreached” and “Underserved”

Most of the countries reported the targeting of specific disadvantaged groups. Nearly all the countries reported a focus on adult literacy programmes for women. In Pakistan, more than 80% of literacy centres are for women. In India, the Tenth FYP recognized that without giving a specific thrust to improve female literacy rates, particularly in states with very low rates and large disparities between male and female rates, it would be impossible to eliminate the gender disparity. A number of innovative programmes have been undertaken to provide literacy for women in disadvantaged areas.

Nepal reported that although efforts are being made, accessibility of the most disadvantaged groups to literacy programmes under the Government and NGO’s sponsorship has been inadequate. Available resources are not sufficient for the monumental task. Bhutan also noted the need for increased resources to reach all adults who have not had an opportunity to become literate.

According to Bangladesh’s NPA, special efforts are to be made to extend the coverage of literacy and NFE programmes to educationally, socially and economically disadvantaged groups who missed schooling or dropped out of school. Specifically, the clientele groups to be covered by literacy and NFE programmes include primary school drop-outs, never-enrolled adolescents and young adults, illiterate adults, children living in remote locations, people with physical disabilities, ethnic minorities and populations suffering social exclusion.

11.3.4 Best Practices and Promising Approaches for Achieving Goal Four

LIFE was launched in October 2005 by the UNESCO Director-General during the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO. It is a collaborative framework for action, in which national governments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, UN agencies and bilateral and multilateral agencies work together to combat illiteracy and empower disadvantaged groups, especially rural women and girls. It is being implemented in three phases from 2006 to 2015. In Asia, Bangladesh and Pakistan were selected to participate in the first round of LIFE, beginning in 2006. Five more Asian countries will join as LIFE Round 2 countries in 2008: Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Round 3 begins in 2010, with Iran and Nepal joining. Each LIFE country receives US$1 million in funding toward literacy initiatives.

In both Bangladesh and Pakistan, the LIFE initiative has worked to increase systematization of literacy programmes and coordination among actors. LIFE has assisted in developing standardized curricula where programmes were previously ad hoc. Moreover, LIFE has facilitated knowledge-sharing and cooperation among Asian countries, with countries such as Thailand, Viet Nam, and Indonesia that have more developed literacy programmes and experience with Community Learning Centres (CLCs) sharing knowledge with LIFE countries that are just beginning to implement this model.

LIFE, with the support of UNESCO, has built on such experience to increase systematization. The CLC workshop in Pakistan in February 2008, for example, worked to establish national guidelines for CLCs (which were previously run by NGOs in an ad hoc fashion). An important success for the LIFE initiative in Pakistan has been to significantly increase coordination among the central government, provincial governments and NGOs.

Bangladesh’s experience of LIFE differs from Pakistan’s as a result of the strong and long-standing NGO presence in Bangladesh. LIFE funds in Bangladesh have helped support capacity-development, as NGOs now use their expertise to help train the Government in NFE at both central and provincial levels. Acknowledging that NGOs have greater capacity for delivery, the Bangladesh Government now encourages NGOs to become involved in NFE and literacy training.

11.4 Remaining Challenges and Issues in the South Asia Sub-Region

Without giving attention to youth and adult literacy, the EFA goals cannot be achieved. A diverse range of literacy and continuing education programmes is required. There is also the need to give strong attention to establishing and maintaining a literate environment, particularly the availability and use of written materials and information and communications technology. All these encourage literacy acquisition, a reading culture, improved literacy retention and access to information.

Literacy efforts in South Asia have traditionally been implemented by NGOs rather than by governments. This has led to a great diversity of programmes and often to strong integration with other development activities. While NGOs, CBOs and various government departments should continue to play a major role in literacy, there is the need for coordination and leadership by the governments in the region if EFA targets are to be met. Governments should take the lead in setting high quality standards, in setting-up effective data collection and analysis systems and in general coordination of activities.

Across all the countries of South Asia there are sub-groups of the population which have particularly low literacy rates. These groups should be identified with special programmes tailor-made to fit their needs. In many cases this will involve fighting discrimination and promoting the rights of minorities and socially excluded groups.

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47 Information for this section was taken from UNLD Mid-Decade Progress Report on Literacy in Asia, 2008.
Adult literacy is the area in which gender disparities remain the highest for all the indicators in South Asia. While countries have recognized the gender factor and are making efforts to address the issue, concerted and sustained efforts will be required to remove the gender gap.

Expanded and improved primary education systems have been the greatest contributor to increased literacy rates in the countries of South Asia. However, reliance on formal education systems alone will take several decades to produce a literate South Asia. Governments must pursue a two-pronged strategy of support for effective primary education systems and for relevant adult literacy and continuing education programmes for those who have missed the opportunity for formal schooling.

The prospects for achieving the EFA goal for adult literacy for most of the countries in the region are not strong. Unless governments throughout South Asia show a renewed commitment to adult literacy and allocate resources accordingly, this will be a goal which will remain unfulfilled.

### 12. Goal Five: Gender Parity and Equality in Education

**Goal Five: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl’s full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.**

**Dakar Framework for Action Expanded Commentary on Gender Equality in Education**

Gender-based discrimination remains one of the most intractable constraints to realizing the right to education. Without overcoming this obstacle, EFA cannot be achieved. Girls are a majority among out-of-school children and youth, although in an increasing number of countries, boys are at a disadvantage. Even though the education of girls and women has a powerful trans-generational effect and is a key determinant of social development and women’s empowerment, limited progress has been made in increasing girls’ participation in basic education.

International agreement has already been reached to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. This requires that gender issues be mainstreamed throughout the education system, supported by adequate resources and strong political commitment. Merely ensuring access to education for girls is not enough. Unsafe school environments and biases in teacher behaviour and training, teaching and learning processes, and curricula and textbooks often lead to lower completion and achievement rates for girls. By creating safe and gender sensitive learning environments, it should be possible to remove a major hurdle to girls’ participation in education. Increasing levels of women’s literacy is another crucial factor in promoting girls’ education. Comprehensive efforts therefore need to be made at all levels and in all areas to eliminate gender discrimination and to promote mutual respect between girls and boys, women and men. To make this possible, change in attitudes, values and behaviour are required.

12.1 Background and Development of Gender Parity and Equality in Education in South Asia

12.1.1 Definition of Goal Five

None of the countries specifically defined gender parity or gender equality. However, gender parity generally refers to being quantitatively equal, i.e. to the number of girls being equal to the number of boys for any given indicator. The gender parity index (GPI) is used to measure gender parity. The GPI is the ratio of the female to male indicator value. A GPI value between 0.97 to 1.03 indicates parity between the sexes, whereas a GPI below 0.97 indicates a disparity in favour of boys while a GPI above 1.03 indicates a bias in favour of girls. However, gender equality should not be equated with mere gender parity. Gender equality is a much broader goal which focuses on genuine equality between the sexes in all spheres of education and life. Usually, qualitative methods are needed to assess the extent to which countries are moving towards gender equality.

12.1.2 National Policies and Legislation for Provision and Coordination of Goal Five

All the countries of South Asia have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This is the basic document that expresses the commitment of countries to work in all areas to enhance the rights of girls and women and to progressively move to a society in which there is full equality of the sexes in every aspect of life. The role of education is considered paramount in the fulfilment of the aims of CEDAW.

Most of the countries in the region have enacted national policies to promote equality in education. Sri Lanka has a long tradition of promoting the rights of girls and women. The 1978 Constitution not only guarantees equal rights without discrimination on the basis of sex but also provides for policies of affirmative action to remove sex discrimination. In India as well, long before international commitment to girls’ education was expressed as a follow-up of the EFA goals, the policy environment had recognized the necessity of educating girls if universal elementary education were to be achieved. This was evident from the pro-girls/women constitutional stance that empowered the state to make special provisions for women and children notwithstanding the fundamental obligation of non-discrimination on the basis of sex. This provision has enabled the state to draw up special policies and programmes to benefit girls and women to overcome their disadvantages and to address gender disparities. The National Policy on Education 1986 put special emphasis on the removal of disparities and the equalization of opportunities.

In Pakistan, the Women Protection Bill 2006 is considered an important step for the empowerment of women and girls. Pakistan’s Perspective Plan 2001-11 envisages raising female literacy from 29% to 69% by the end of the plan. Emphasis is on the economic, social and political empowerment of women.

In Bangladesh, the Constitution (1972) guarantees equal opportunities for all women and men in the country. In the NPA, gender is identified as a cross-cutting theme with targets implicit within each of the other five goals. In Nepal, the EFA plans for each goal were devised separately with little linkage with the overarching goals of equity and quality. However, equitable quality education is a key principle and a major policy focus of the Government’s sector programme (EFA 2004-09).

In the Maldives, successive development plans have reaffirmed gender mainstreaming as a priority and have incorporated gender as a cross-cutting issue. Starting from the Sixth NDP, a separate section on gender as a cross-cutting policy issue has been incorporated. The National Policy on Gender came into effect in 2006. The Seventh NDP for 2006-10 has incorporated all aspects of the policy including targets to eliminate gender disparity in tertiary education and to increase female participation in the labour force from 52% to 60%.
Box 14: Education Policy for the Advancement of Girls and Women

India’s National Policy on Education (1986) articulated the intent to “lay special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far.” The policy was a turning point in Indian education as it brought the issue of women’s equality to centre stage in all discourses on education and development.

“Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. . . This will be an act of faith and social engineering. . . The removal of women’s illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting time targets and effective monitoring…”


12.1.3 Strategies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Children

In order to mainstream equity and inclusion concepts in Nepal’s education sector programme (EFA 2004-09), several strategies and activities have been devised and are being implemented. Strategies have been undertaken to achieve equity in access through school construction and rehabilitation, alternative-flexible schools, free school education, free textbooks, school feeding, and scholarships. Strategies undertaken to achieve equity in quality include curriculum improvement, teacher training, professional support, improvement of the school environment and reforms in school examinations. Measures to increase the number of female teachers are strategic from both access and quality perspectives. Increasing institutional capacity and enhancing school autonomy are also the major strategies which may have a direct bearing on equity in education.

In India, the national commitment to girls’ education gained momentum through several initiatives in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first generation basic education programmes all emphasized the focus on girls’ education. This intent was taken to scale through the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) which made the female literacy rate a selection criterion for project districts and set goals of reducing gender disparities in enrolment, retention and learning. Continuing in the same vein, the SSA, India’s current education sector programme, reiterates the need to focus on girls’ education to equalize educational opportunities and eliminate gender disparities.

In Bangladesh, a number of pro-girl policies and strategies have been adopted to enhance the enrolment and participation of girls in the system. In primary education, 60% of new teacher recruits is reserved for women candidates. There have been massive social mobilization campaigns to motivate parents to send their daughters, as well as their sons, to school. Separate toilets for girls are being constructed in primary schools. Under the primary education development programme, PEDP II, a gender action plan has been adopted to address issues of not only quantitative parity but also equity in all areas of school life.

In Pakistan, emphasis is placed on female secondary school education. Scholarships and subsidies for girls’ education are provided to low-income households to encourage continuation of education beyond the primary level, with particular emphasis on provision for girls residing in geographic regions with high poverty concentration. Scholarships are given to girls to enhance their professional educational qualifications to become teachers. The content of education is being made more relevant to the practical needs of rural girls through the inclusion of subjects such as agriculture, health and hygiene in the curriculum. The portrayal of women in various
developmental contexts is being introduced to minimize stereotypes in textbooks. The revamping of science education is a major initiative targeting rural areas and encouraging female students to follow the science stream with the aid of scholarships.

In Bhutan, the national goal is to increase the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education and bring a special thrust on enhancing female literacy and opportunities for life skills, vocational education and employment for women, especially young women. A key strategy is to increase the enrolment of females in higher secondary and tertiary education through easier access to schools and better hostel facilities and to expand NFE and skills training in rural areas.

In Sri Lanka, it is recognized that free primary, secondary and tertiary education since 1945 has been a major factor that has contributed to the achievement of gender parity in access to education at all levels. Sri Lanka will continue to implement these positive strategies. The Maldives has followed similar positive policies and strategies resulting in high participation rates of girls as well as boys.

12.2 Progress Achieved in Selected EFA MDA Core Indicators

12.2.1 Progress of Countries in the Sub-Region

Although there is still a long way to go towards achieving gender equality, or even gender parity in most countries, South Asia has made significant progress in reducing gender disparities in education. All countries in the region showed increased GPIs for every indicator for which data is available. Having started the decade with some of the lowest GPIs in the world, the region has moved towards gender parity in a number of areas.

As can be seen in Figure 21, Bangladesh and the Maldives have achieved gender parity in pre-primary education with a GPI of 1.01 and 1.00, respectively. The gender gap has been reduced remarkably in Nepal and Pakistan, the only two countries in South Asia which had low GPIs at the beginning of the decade. The lowest GPI in the region for this indicator is 0.90 for Pakistan, followed by Nepal with 0.91.

Figure 21: GPI for GER in Pre-Primary Education, 2000 and 2005, Sub-Region

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: "**" indicates UIS estimate. "*" indicates national estimates. "+n" indicates data refer to n years after the reference year. "-n" indicates data refer to n years before the reference year.
Gender disparities in primary education stem first and foremost from disparities in enrolment in the first grade. As illustrated in Figure 22, all the countries in the region for which data is available showed healthy increases in the GPIs for this indicator. Moreover, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka have achieved gender parity in primary education with GPIs within the range of 0.97 and 1.03. Pakistan is lagging behind the most with a GPI of 0.80, indicating a bias against girls. However, a bias against boys is also showing in the Maldives where the GPI for GIR is at 1.07.

**Figure 22: GPI for GIR in Primary Education, 2000 and 2005, Sub-Region**

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database Centre.
Notes: **“** indicates UIS estimate. *“* indicates national estimates. *“+n”* indicates data refer to n years after the reference year. *“-n”* indicates data refer to n years before the reference year.

South and West Asia was the region that made the greatest progress towards gender parity in primary education GERs between 1999 and 2005, having started the period in the worst situation of any region. The post-Dakar trend was even steeper than that registered between 1991 and 1999. As shown in Figure 23, all countries in South Asia, except Nepal and Pakistan, have achieved gender parity in GER in primary education, with Bhutan and India posting significant gains of 0.10 and 0.13 respectively, from 2000 to achieve gender parity in 2005. Nepal also recorded an improvement in the GPI of 0.16. Although Pakistan’s GPI increased by 0.10 to 0.78 in 2005, it is still the lowest in the region indicating much more needs to be done to bring more girls to primary school.

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As can be seen in Figure 24, the percentage of female enrolment in primary education increased in the countries in the region, except for the Maldives. Although none of the countries had 50% or more enrolment of females, this can be somewhat misleading. In most of the countries of Asia, the male population for this age group is higher than the female population. For this reason, even in countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka which have achieved gender parity in enrolments, the actual number of girls enrolled is less than the number of boys. As was noted in the chapter on EFA Goal 2, the GERs for girls in both of these countries are higher than the GERs for boys.

Once girls have access to school, they often do better than boys. In all the countries in South Asia with data on repetition, girls repeated less than boys.\(^{50}\) Although data for 2000 is not available for most of the countries, as can be seen in Figure 25, in 2005 all South Asian countries for which data
was available had GPIs above 1.0 for survival rate to Grade 5 in primary education, except for India. In every case, girls were more likely than boys to reach Grade 5 of primary education. While it is noteworthy that girls are doing better than boys when given the opportunity, effective gender policies should also address the issue of the under-achievement of boys. The causes may include the poor quality and the limited relevance of education as perceived by adolescent males.

Figure 25: GPI for Survival Rate to Grade 5 in Primary Education, 2000 and 2005, Sub-Region

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Notes: "*" indicates national estimates. "-n" indicates data refer to n years before the reference year.

Girls were more likely to transition to lower secondary education from primary than boys in Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan, as illustrated in Figure 26. Only Bhutan and Nepal showed gender parity in the transition rates in 2000.

Figure 26: GPI for Transition Rate from Primary to Lower Secondary Education, 2000 and 2005, Sub-Region

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Note: "-n" indicates data refer to n years before the reference year.
Unfortunately, once in secondary education there are many barriers that prevent a significant number of girls from continuing. As can be seen in Figure 27, the GPIs for GER in secondary education are considerably lower than the GPIs for transitioning to secondary school. Only Bangladesh and Sri Lanka achieved gender parity with GPIs of 1.03 and 1.02, respectively. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are the only South Asian countries that achieved the EFA goal and MDG of gender parity in both primary and secondary enrolments in 2005. The Maldives is expected to achieve gender parity in both levels in 2015. However, the Maldives’ GPI of 1.14 is also worrying from the standpoint of boys’ participation in secondary education. In this case, more needs to be done to equalize enrolments in favour of boys.

Figure 27: GPI for GER in Secondary Education, 2000 and 2005, Sub-Region

As can be seen in Figure 28, there has been an increase in the percentage of girls’ enrolment in secondary education in most countries in South Asia. However the increases have not been as significant as in primary education. Considerably less than half the students in secondary schools are female in Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan.
The participation of female students in TVET is low in all countries in the region, as shown in Figure 29. In 2005-06, only two counties in South Asia had more than 30% enrolment of females in TVET programmes. In India and the Maldives, the percentage of female students in TVET appears to have declined, while in Pakistan it increased dramatically to almost 40%.

As shown in Figure 30, the GPIs for the youth literacy rate have increased in all three countries for which there is comparative data. However, only Sri Lanka and the Maldives have achieved gender parity for youth literacy. Significant progress has also been achieved in Nepal, Bangladesh and India to improve female youth literacy rates compared to that of males.
The GPIs for adult literacy are considerably lower than for youth literacy, as can be seen in Figure 31. Only the Maldives has achieved gender parity in adult literacy, while Sri Lanka is very close. In Nepal, the GPI increased by 0.27, but this brought it up to only 0.62. With 0.71 and 0.59 for India and Pakistan, respectively, it is clear that major efforts are needed to raise the literacy levels of women and girls.

The presence of female teachers can help ensure girls’ active participation in education. Ideally, the percentage of women teachers should be at least half of the total number of teachers. As illustrated in Figure 32, while the percentage of female teachers is increasing in every country in South Asia, female teachers make up less than half of the teaching force in most of the countries. In the Maldives and Sri Lanka, however, female teachers dominate the teaching force.
As can be seen in Figure 33, the percentage of female teachers in secondary education is even lower than in primary. Only in Sri Lanka and Pakistan do female teachers make up more than half the teaching force at the secondary level. In Nepal and Bangladesh, the proportion of female secondary teachers is less than 20%.

In addition to the quantitative indicators, for the wider goals of gender equality it is important to assess other qualitative aspects of education as well with a gender lens. In South Asia, textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes continue to reinforce stereotypes on gender roles in society. For
instance, however measured, in lines of text, proportions of named characters, mentions in titles or citations in indexes, girls and women are underrepresented in textbooks and curricula.\textsuperscript{51}

12.2.2 Variations within Countries

As with the other indicators, gender disparities within countries are often as great within a country as across the countries of the region. Urban-rural differences are present in most of the countries, generally with higher GPIs in urban than rural areas. There are regional differences in GPIs as well as significant differences in sub-groups of the population.

12.3 Analysis of Disparities in Achieving Gender Parity and Equality in Education

Gender is often a contributing factor to disparities that exist based on other types of disadvantage. For instance, a poor, ethnic minority girl in a rural area is much less likely to have access to quality education than a middle-class urban girl of the same age. At the same time, she is less likely than a boy from the same sub-group as herself to have access to quality education. Gender in this case is an additional factor which compounds the other factors of disadvantage. The countries across South Asia generally exhibit gender discrimination as well as disparities based on social, cultural, religious and/or economic factors.

In India, the GER of both scheduled caste girls and their scheduled tribe counterparts crossed the 100% mark in 2004-05, signifying a high level of participation. However, the girls’ ratios were very low at the upper primary stage. The drop-out rate of both scheduled caste and scheduled tribe girls showed a declining trend at the primary stage. At the upper primary level it was still disturbingly high. Gender disparity still persists and a relatively high proportion of girls do not complete the eight-year cycle, reflecting the weakness of the system to retain them. A number of national and state level initiatives targeting girls and women have been the hallmark of educational interventions for improving the educational status of girls and women. The programmes are important, particularly for the poorest and the most vulnerable girls and women in the country.

In Bangladesh, the biggest gender gap is in adult literacy rates. This is a reflection of the limited access to education of girls in past generations. The higher GPI in youth literacy, although not yet indicating full parity, is an indication that the gap in adult literacy rates will gradually lessen. However, in addition to the natural increase in the number of adult literate women as a result of the school system, targeted initiatives are needed to address the needs of illiterate women to fulfil their right to education. The low GPIs for higher secondary education and the low proportion of girls enrolled in TVET are also major causes of concern. An analysis of the SSC examination, the terminal exam at the end of Grade 10 in Bangladesh, reveals that despite continuing in school until Grade 10, considerably fewer girls than boys sit and pass the SSC exam. As a result, they do not make the transition to higher secondary or to tertiary education. This greatly limits their future employment opportunities and disadvantages them in a number of ways both socially and economically.

While large gender differentials are not immediately apparent in Bhutan, gender disparities are clearly evident in participation in higher secondary, university and vocational education. The proportion of female teachers is also low in higher levels of education and in TVET. The decline in girls’ participation as they go up the educational ladder may be indicative of cultural and social constraints that inhibit full participation of girls and women. While gender discrimination is not easily detectable in Bhutan, deepseated social barriers to women’s mobility and participation in the public domain need to be analyzed to inform the development of appropriate strategies.

\textsuperscript{51} UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 Regional Overview: South and West Asia.
Despite the positive status of gender parity in the Maldives, there are indications that work is still needed to attain full gender equality in education. While the GPI for higher secondary NER is 1.16, the GPI for GER is 0.93, indicating that for overall numbers, girls are under-represented at the higher secondary level. It is also reported that the number of girls going abroad for tertiary education is lower than the number of boys. Cultural expectations regarding young women living away from home impact upon the numbers of female students studying abroad and hence female attainment of tertiary qualifications. From 2001 to 2005, for those studying abroad, only 39% of undergraduate scholarships, 38% of post-graduate scholarships and 22% of doctorate scholarships went to girls.

In Nepal, marked progress has been made in moving towards achievement of gender parity in primary education enrolments. However, there is still a significant imbalance in some districts and among some marginalized groups. There remains a huge gender gap throughout the country in all literacy statistics, especially in disadvantaged districts and among marginalized groups. Capacity development activities to mainstream gender and other forms of social equity are needed to address issues of social inequality and gender imbalance. Furthermore, to address issues of gender and social exclusion in education from a holistic perspective, inter-institutional arrangements and interministerial collaboration are required.

Women and girls in Pakistan face many problems related to poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, discrimination and exclusion from decision-making processes. It is recognized that without developing gender-friendly environments and resolving these issues, women in Pakistan cannot become fully productive members of society. To realize women's potential in society, initiatives are being taken to reduce gender disparities in all walks of life. Education is seen as a major vehicle for eliminating gender inequalities within society, but addressing inequalities within the education system itself is also a tremendous challenge. Although in general there has been more progress in rural areas than urban areas during the last four years, the GPIs for most indicators are still higher for urban than rural areas. There are significant regional differences with some of the areas of the country having very low GPIs for most indicators. These are areas where even more concerted efforts must be made to achieve gender parity and eventually equality. There has not been an analysis of gender disparities in sub-groups of the population based on language, ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status, but it is likely that the gender gap is greatest amongst the most disadvantaged groups in society.

In Sri Lanka, the adult literacy rate of women in all districts is lower than the men's rate, although the disparities are relatively low. This is an area that needs concentrated action in order to identify women not accessing education and to provide them with opportunities to become literate. It is encouraging that in the case of youth literacy, the female literacy rates match or exceed the men's rates.

12.4 Remaining Challenges and Issues in the South Asia Sub-Region

Throughout South Asia, gender-based discrimination continues to be perpetuated both within society and in educational systems. Social restrictions on girls' and women's mobility, early marriage, patriarchy and the dowry system all contribute to low participation of women and girls in education. Consequently, self-perceived roles combined with social norms and economic structures reduce girls' chances of being schooled. For girls and women from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, the situation is exacerbated by exclusion and poverty.

Most countries have made significant progress in terms of collecting and analyzing data disaggregated according to sex. For all the indicators, information has been available for both males and females. However, work still needs to be done to produce data on all the indicators disaggregated by other factors such as location of residence, religion, ethnicity, language and socio-economic status.
The main focus of the data is on quantitative measures of progress towards gender parity. There are many other issues related to gender equality which also need to be addressed if education is to fulfill its role of bringing about a more equal society. Besides the quantitative indicators related to gender parity, emphasis must be given to the achievement of gender equality in the education system and in society as a whole. This is a much bigger challenge as gender stereotypes and perceptions are abundant.

Given the patriarchal nature of most of the societies in South Asia, remarkable progress has been made towards gender equality. However, there is still a long way to go, and there is no room for complacency. Policy makers and practitioners must work together to continue to break down prejudices and to fight discrimination. Only in this way can true gender equality be achieved for this and the coming generations.

13. Goal Six: Quality of Education

Goal Six: Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Dakar Framework for Action Expanded Commentary on Quality of Education

Quality is at the heart of education, and what takes place in classrooms and other learning environments is fundamentally important to the future well-being of children, young people and adults. A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living.

Evidence over the past decade has shown that efforts to expand enrolment must be accompanied by attempts to enhance educational quality if children are to be attracted to school, stay there and achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Scarce resources have frequently been used for expanding systems with insufficient attention given to quality improvement in areas such as teacher training and materials development. Recent assessments of learning achievement in some countries have shown that a sizeable percentage of children are acquiring only a fraction of the knowledge and skills they are expected to master. What students are meant to learn has often not been clearly defined, well-taught or accurately assessed.

Governments and all other EFA partners must work together to ensure basic education of quality for all, regardless of gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin. Successful education programmes require: (1) healthy, well-nourished and motivated students; (2) well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; (3) adequate facilities and learning materials; (4) a relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a local language and builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners; (5) an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe; (6) a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; (7) participatory governance and management; and (8) respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures.
13.1 Background and Development of Quality of Education in South Asia

13.1.1 Definition of Goal Six

All the countries identified quality as a high priority cross-cutting issue. Most of the countries did not give specific definitions, but what is meant by quality in each country can be inferred to some degree by the statement of the goals and/or by aspects of the strategies adopted. The exception is Sri Lanka which has given a comprehensive definition of quality as the acquisition of information with the promotion of personality attributes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, team work, responsibility and human values that are essential to ensure effective performance in the work place as well as a multifaceted quality life.

Bangladesh has stated the goal as improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. The Maldives has defined the goal as ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender, ability and location, have access to good quality basic education. Bhutan has identified the goals related to quality as a reduction in the annual drop-out rate at the primary level from 10% to 5%, a reduction in the repetition rate from 21% to 10%, the universalization of coverage of the new curriculum and new activity-based teaching methods and the full adaptation of the secondary school curricula to the Bhutanese context.

India has identified basic norms – physical, human and academic – which act as guiding principles. Alongside the provision of improved facilities, attention is focused on the learning levels of children who attend school. In Pakistan, the goal is to improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. Quality improvement and school effectiveness have been identified as the key elements of the NPA. In Nepal's NPA, the indicators of quality primary education have been broadly categorized as enhanced efficiency in the management of education, an improved primary curriculum and assessment system, improved physical facilities and learning environments, and increased education expenditure.

13.1.2 National Policies and Legislation for Provision and Coordination of Goal Six

Ensuring quality education is a cornerstone for the fulfilment of the CRC. Children will have their rights to education fulfilled through education systems that not only ensure their enrolment but also their active participation and effective learning.

In Sri Lanka, the changes introduced as part of the General Education Reforms in 1997 had as their main purpose to improve the quality and relevance of education. The vision of the Education Sector Reforms in Pakistan is to provide quality education enabling all citizens to reach their maximum potential, to produce responsible enlightened citizens and to integrate Pakistan into the global framework of human centred economic development.

In India, a number of policy and programme initiatives have been taken up with a focus on quality improvement in school education. A new National Curriculum Framework (2005) has been developed that exposes teachers to important issues such as the aims of education, how children construct knowledge, how children’s learning can be best facilitated through suitable activities and the role of teachers in school and society. In Bangladesh, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has established a competency-based primary education curriculum with 50 terminal competencies. In Nepal, a national curriculum framework has been developed and approved, and the curriculum was revised in 2004.

In Nepal, a major new policy direction is the promotion of teaching in the mother tongue of children and adults. This is recognized as one of the most important aspects of providing quality education for all children. The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) makes specific provision for imparting primary education through mother tongue, and ensuring quality education for
indigenous children and linguistic minorities has been included as a seventh goal in Nepal’s NPA for EFA. The government’s Tenth FYP, which is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Nepal, identifies human development and social inclusion as the main pillars of the poverty reduction strategy. For education, the two major aims for the five-year period are improving access to and quality of primary education and providing education in the mother tongues of the various communities through primary level.

Box 15: Nepal’s Goal Seven - Ensuring Quality Education for Indigenous Children and Linguistics

Nepal is a multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic country where most of the 102 castes and indigenous groups speak more than 92 languages as their mother tongues. According to the School Level Educational Statistics of Nepal (2005), of 4,502,697 students at primary level 1,602,047 (35%) are from indigenous groups. In addition, it has been found that most of the school drop-outs belong to the non-Nepali speaking communities. A large number of children from vulnerable groups have no access to school and are debarred from the right to receive basic education.

It has been widely accepted that all children have the right to receive basic and primary education through their mother tongue. If primary education is provided through mother tongue, children’s learning will be enhanced. Children can engage in learning activities more actively because they can easily understand what is being taught. Education in mother tongue can also help to attract out-of-school children from indigenous and minority language groups to join school as they will feel more comfortable with the use of their mother tongue in the school.

Taking cognizance of this situation, the Government of Nepal has envisaged a policy to introduce mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the primary level of education. The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007), which ensures equal status to all mother tongues spoken in Nepal including Nepali, makes a provision of imparting primary education through mother tongue.

To achieve the goal, strategies which are being implemented include:

- use of mother tongue as a subject of study and the medium of instruction;
- bilingual education;
- teacher recruitment, training and deployment; and
- special programmes for endangered languages and cultures.


13.1.3 Strategies and Programmes for Disadvantaged Children

All the countries have developed strategies and interventions to address the issue of quality. The education sector programmes, which are being implemented in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, have a major focus on quality improvement, particularly in terms of learner achievement.

In Bangladesh, under PEDP II, Primary School Quality Level Standards (PSQLS) are being established to ensure that every child has access to the minimum inputs necessary for an acceptable quality of primary education. The programme also has the aim to reduce the number of double-shift schools through ambitious building and teacher recruitment initiatives. It is anticipated that this will result in substantially increased teacher-student contact hours and thereby improve the quality of learning in primary schools.
Quality improvement is the main thrust of India’s SSA. To improve the quality of education the Government is pursuing a five-fold strategy which consists of improving the provision of infrastructure and human resources; improving the provision of better curriculum and teaching learning materials; improving the quality of the teaching-learning process; giving attention to teacher capability building; and increasing the focus on specification and measurement of learner achievement levels.

Nepal’s EFA Core Document (2004-09) has set principles and strategies to improve the quality of education. These include raising the competence and qualifications of teachers, improving the learning environment in classrooms, enhancing the quality of curricula and textbooks and ensuring their timely distribution, developing school-based autonomous supervision and monitoring and ensuring decentralized management of schools.

In Pakistan, the main quality interventions which have been identified to achieve EFA are reforms in curricula (focusing on basic learning needs of children, adolescents, youth and adults), textbook development, teachers’ training and a literacy curriculum. The quality improvement plans are intended to ensure the development of a more relevant learner-centred curriculum, which is supported by and linked with the development of higher quality textbooks, teacher training processes and assessment methods.

In Bhutan, a number of strategies have been adopted to improve the quality of education. As a follow-up to Dakar, the Maldives prepared a detailed plan of action that spelt out the priority areas that need to be addressed if the goal of ensuring quality basic education is to be realized. For each of the priority areas, strategies have been developed and are being implemented.

### 13.2 Progress Achieved in Selected EFA MDA Core Indicators

#### 13.2.1 Progress of Countries in the Sub-Region

As can be seen from Figure 34, the survival rate of children to Grade 5 is low for all countries in South Asia except for the Maldives and Sri Lanka, indicating problems in retaining children in school. The data available shows that while there have been improvements in the survival rates since 2000 in some of the countries, Nepal has shown a dramatic increase. In Bangladesh, for example, around 35% of children who start primary education do not reach Grade 5. The survival rate is one of the most important indicators of quality. Often high drop-out rates are associated with poor teaching and poor learning in the classrooms. If parents find that their children are not achieving at least the basic competencies, they are much less likely to continue sending them to school.
Aligned with low survival rates are high repetition rates. Many children spend several extra years completing their primary schooling, while others drop out due to discouragement of having to repeat the same grade and not being able to progress through the primary cycle. The combined effect of low survival rates and high repetition rates is very inefficient systems and a waste of public resources.

Learning achievement is the best indicator of the quality of education systems. Unfortunately, most of the countries do not regularly monitor learning achievement, and realistic standards for measuring acceptable levels of learning have not been set. Since 2000, four of the seven countries in South Asia have conducted at least one national learning assessment to monitor education quality. Results from national and international learning assessments indicated poor learning outcomes for the region.52

Other than the survival rate of children to Grade 5, the measures used to assess quality are proxy indicators. They assess some of the inputs which are recognized globally as important for the delivery of quality education. While the indicators do not describe the outcomes of the system, they are important for assessing the extent to which education systems are providing the necessary inputs for quality to be achieved.

Of the proxy indicators, one of the most important is the percentage of trained teachers in primary education. The goal for most countries is the deployment of trained teachers only. As is shown in Figure 35, this is an input which is far from satisfactory, particularly in at least Nepal and Bangladesh.53 Although nationwide data is not available for Sri Lanka, it is recognized that most teachers in the country are trained. In India, the percentage of trained teachers varies by state.

53 Some of the countries have programmes for pre-service and in-service training which do not lead to certification or accreditation but do contribute to equipping teachers with useful skills.
The same countries have a low percentage of trained teachers in lower secondary education, as illustrated in Figure 36. The only country that recorded a slight increase in the percentage of trained teachers from 2000 to 2005 was the Maldives. However, the small decrease in the number of trained teachers in Nepal at this level can be attributed to a change in definition. The duration of training required before being considered a trained teacher was extended from 2.5 months in 2000, to 10 months in 2005.
Most of the countries are aiming to reduce the Pupil/Teacher Ratio (PTR) in order to ensure more time and attention is given to each child in primary school. This improvement, combined with the number of contact hours, to a large degree determines the amount of time spent on tasks by pupils during each day. As illustrated in Figure 37, all the countries except India and Pakistan recorded a decrease in the PTR in primary education from 2000 to around 2005. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009, there is a broad consensus that a 40:1 PTR is an approximate ceiling for a primary school learning environment of good quality. Most countries in South Asia, except for Bangladesh, have PTRs of under 40:1. However, the ratios mask huge differences in the country as it might be higher or lower when looking at various administrative geographical breakdowns within the country. Very low PTRs may also indicate inefficient distribution of teachers in the country.

**Figure 37: Pupil/Teacher Ratio in Primary Education, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region**

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.

As can be seen in Figure 38, the PTRs were lower in lower secondary than in primary in five of the seven countries. In Bhutan, the PTR for lower secondary and primary were about the same, while in Nepal the PTR in lower secondary schools was substantially higher than in primary schools.

**Figure 38: Pupil/Teacher Ratio in Lower Secondary Education, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region**

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Note: *** indicates UIS estimate.
Of all the levels, the PTRs were lowest in upper secondary education in all the countries. As illustrated in Figure 39, all countries in South Asia for which data is available have PTRs in upper secondary of less than 30:1. In some countries they are remarkably low. While this may create favourable learning environments, such low ratios raise questions about the efficiency of the systems. A positive point is that all the countries of the region should be able to substantially increase their enrolments in upper secondary education without causing unacceptably high PTRs. There is still room for growth in terms of student numbers.

![Figure 39: Pupil/Teacher Ratio in Upper Secondary Education, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.

Public expenditure on education as a percentage of a government’s total expenditure is one of the most effective ways to measure a country’s actual commitment to EFA. Following the renewed commitments at Dakar, it was expected that expenditure on education would increase in order to fulfil the goals. However, in South Asia that does not seem to have been the case. While time comparative data are only shown for Bangladesh and India in Figure 40, the picture is not encouraging. Both countries recorded moderate decreases in the percentage of government’s total expenditure on education. All six countries for which data are available recorded percentages of considerably less than 20%.

![Figure 40: Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of Total Government Expenditure, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region](image)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Note: **“** indicates UIS estimate.
Of the four countries for which comparative data is available on public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, Figure 41 shows that Nepal and Pakistan recorded moderate increases, Bangladesh showed a very slight increase and India recorded a decrease, from 2000. Except for the Maldives and Bhutan, the other four countries in South Asia which reported on this indicator recorded percentages of less than 5%.

**Figure 41: Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GDP, 2000 and Latest Year, Sub-Region**

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre.
Note: *** indicates UIS estimate.

### 13.2.2 Variations within Countries

The most significant variations within countries which were reported in the individual country EFA MDA reports were in the area of PTRs. A number of the country reports noted that the average PTRs for a country mask huge differences within the country. Nepal noted that there are big differences in PTRs in different regions. Both India and Pakistan noted variations in different areas of the countries. In the Maldives, the gap between the capital Malé and the rest of the country is substantial. In Bhutan, PTRs are particularly high in community and primary schools in urban and very remote areas.

### 13.3 Analysis of Disparities in Achieving Quality of Education

#### 13.3.1 Progress in Achieving Gender and Social Equality in Goal Six

As can be seen in Figure 42, in five of the six countries for which statistics are available, the survival rate of girls in primary education exceeds that of boys. The exception is India, which recorded equal rates for both sexes. This is the one area which in nearly all the countries of the region, girls are in a more favourable position than boys.
A number of disparities with regard to different sub-groups of the population were reported by countries. India noted that achievement surveys reveal wide variations across and within states. Bhutan noted disparities in the distribution of teachers. Sri Lanka reported that there are still serious disparities in the provision of resources to schools, including the placement of teachers.

Nepal’s EFA MDA report included a detailed analysis of sub-groups of the population who are missing out on quality education. They are the ones least likely to enrol and, if they do enrol, the most likely to drop out. Most of those who drop out belong to the lowest economic quintile, mainly the disadvantaged ethnic minorities and the dalits. It is clear that the ones who suffer most from the poor quality of education are the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Girls from these groups are the most adversely affected.

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13.3.2 Best Practices and Promising Approaches for Achieving Goal Six

Quality improvement has been identified as the top priority for all four of the sector or sub-sector programmes which are being implemented in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Sector-wide approaches provide the opportunity to make genuine sectoral reforms and systemic changes and to plan and implement them in a comprehensive and systematic way. However, at this point it is not clear that SWAPs in the region are being utilized in the most effective way to bring about quality improvement. The commitment of each of the respective governments is needed in order to radically change the way systems work in order to make schools more effective, efficient and accountable to the communities they serve.
Within the programmes, the professional development of teachers has been identified as one of the major areas to address with effective interventions. In India, under the SSA, provision has been made for 20 days of annual training for each teacher. Institutional arrangements have been made at the district and sub-district levels for the in-service education of primary school teachers. The emphasis is on decentralizing the training arrangements and providing guidance and support to teachers on a continuous basis. In the Maldives, considerable resources have also been allotted for the training of teachers.

In order to assess the extent to which interventions are effective in improving the quality of education, robust monitoring and evaluation systems are necessary. In many countries of the region, such systems are weak or not functioning. In Pakistan, an overriding issue in the education sector was the unavailability of high quality, reliable and standardized data. Through a National Education Census vast quantities of information are now available covering all categories of educational institutions. The availability of educational data from the census and from the National Education Management Information System was extremely valuable for the preparation of Pakistan’s EFA MDA report.

Although teaching in mother tongue and bilingual education programmes are found in a number of countries, Nepal is the only one in which serious efforts are currently being made to promote the use of mother tongue as a national policy as part of the national plan to improve the quality of education. In Nepal, a number of studies on bilingual education and mother tongue interventions at primary level have been completed. Mother tongue and bilingual schools have been identified in 25 districts. Textbooks to use for subject teaching have been developed in 14 languages with scripts. The feasibility of transitional bilingual education programmes is being studied. A total of 30 textbooks for Grade 1 have been translated into various languages and nine supplementary readers in mother tongue have been developed and distributed. A template has been developed which includes guidelines for preparing mother tongue textbooks. Adult literacy courses have also been developed in a number of languages, and there are pilot projects for both adults and children in which mother tongue is being used as the medium of instruction combined with bridging materials to ensure the acquisition of Nepali literacy as well.

13.4 Remaining Challenges and Issues in the South Asia Sub-Region

Most of the countries of South Asia face the same major challenge. They are plagued by inefficient and ineffective systems with excessive wastage characterized by high repetition rates, low completion rates and poor achievement levels. Each country has to face this challenge and implement major changes in order to bring the quality of education to a level which will enable the country to fulfill the EFA goals. Without improved quality and efficiency, there will never be universal enrolment and completion, and certainly universal literacy will remain an elusive dream.

The recruitment, professional development and retention of a cadre of capable teachers are major challenges for most of the countries in the region. Many of the countries have recognized that poor teachers adversely affect the quality of learning, and they are applying corrective measures, but much more needs to be done as quickly as possible. Effective pre-service and in-service training needs to be a part of the overall professional development of teachers.

Teachers should be accountable to the communities they serve, and at the same time they should be enabled to perform well through decentralized and supportive supervisory systems. Supervisory visits should be seen as part of teachers’ professional development. Adequate remuneration, effective professional development and career advancement opportunities are also important.

While many countries in South Asia are still struggling to collect and analyze the quantitative data necessary to monitor progress towards the EFA goals, in the area of quality the situation is even more dismal. A major challenge is to come up with qualitative indicators which can be used not only to monitor progress in the area of quality but also to promote and encourage the use of techniques and methods which will produce high quality teaching-learning in the classroom.
While progress has been made by the countries of South Asia, most of the goals will not be met unless efforts are accelerated and intensified. While there has been an increase in the number of children participating in ECCE activities and enrolled in pre-schools, in many countries it is the poor and disadvantaged who are being left out. Primary school enrolments have greatly increased in every country, but as long as the high drop-out rates and low survival rates persist, there is little likelihood of achieving the EFA goal and MDG of universal completion of the primary education cycle. Youth and adult literacy rates are increasing, but this has been primarily due to the number of children and adolescents who are becoming literate in formal schools. While enrolling and retaining children in school must be given the highest priority as the most effective way to build literate nations, this alone is not sufficient to reach the EFA goals of adult literacy, continuing education and lifelong learning. Without concentrated efforts to provide opportunities for adults as well as children to become literate and numerate and to maintain the skills through meaningful activities, there is no hope that the countries will reach the EFA targets for adult literacy.

In the area of gender parity, notable progress has been made. In most of the countries, the GPIs for pre-primary education and for intakes into primary schools are nearing or have reached parity. In primary enrolments, gender parity has been achieved in three of the countries and others have made remarkable progress. However, as students progress to higher levels, the number and percentage of girls tend to decrease. The highest disparities, which exist for nearly every country in the region, are in the adult literacy rates. There is still a long way to go to achieve gender parity throughout the education systems and in the wider society. Even more must be done to achieve meaningful gender equality.

While countries have made progress generally the efforts to ensure the participation of the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized have been insufficient. As a result, there are still pockets of children outside the system, and in some of the countries they represent sizeable numbers. Recognizing the right of every child to education, countries must find innovative ways to enrol and retain the children who are most difficult to reach. Only in this way can universal basic education be achieved.

There is still a gigantic task ahead for most countries of South Asia to achieve the EFA goals by 2015. Improving quality is crucial for the fulfilment of each and every goal. In order to take the momentum forward, governments must show their commitment by increased resource allocations. By making the necessary resources available and by forming partnerships and alliances with other stakeholders at every level of the process, governments could still fulfil the goals and targets which have been set. However, time is short. No country currently is on track to fulfil all the goals, but that could change dramatically through a renewed commitment to the EFA cause.