At a Glance

Basic education provides the foundation for lifelong learning and human development. It provides opportunity to extend one’s knowledge through further education and for active and engaged citizenship. While countries differ in their definitions of basic education, it is increasingly accepted that basic education should include at least nine years of education (progressively leading to 12 years) combining both primary and lower secondary, including a strong foundation of early childhood care and education (ECCE), most often 1-2 years of good quality pre-school education. Both the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have arguably emphasized a rather narrow view of basic education. In view of the emerging economic, social and technological developments and aspirations of the Asia-Pacific region in the 21st century, it is increasingly recognized that the post-2015 education agenda should embrace an expanded basic education agenda. In this context, this thematic session will discuss the challenges, new trends, policy options, priorities and indicators surrounding the basic education target as part of the post-2015 education agenda.

1. Introduction

Basic education is a human right enshrined in a number of international human rights treaties and integrated at the national level through constitutions, legislation, and policies. It provides the foundation for lifelong learning and human development and the backbone upon which countries can build subsequent levels and types of education and training. Basic education prepares learners for further education, for an active life and citizenship. It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn and the acquisition of numeracy, literacy and scientific and technological knowledge. The concept of basic education came to the forefront following the adoption of the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (1990), which proposed an ‘expanded vision’ of basic education to enable everybody, children, youth, and adults, to meet basic ‘learning needs.’ Despite this vision, there is no internationally accepted definition of basic education. UNESCO (2007) defines basic education as the first nine years (progressively extending to 12 years) of formal education, of which the first five or six are often identified as primary and the rest lower secondary. The definition also includes basic learning for youth and adults who did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age. Early childhood education is recognized as the foundation of basic education. Most recently, the UNESCO Position Paper on Education Post-2015 (2014) defines basic education as corresponding to at least one year of pre-primary and the first nine years of formal schooling/education, comprising six
years of primary and three years of lower secondary education, implying 10 years of education.

Although the 1990 Education for All declaration recognized the importance of basic education, both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 and the national implementation of EFA focused on the universalization of primary education. However, feedback from regional and international discussions on the post-2015 education agenda indicates that the international community should recommit to a broader definition of basic education to serve the basic learning needs of learners. Basic education is broader than primary education, and technological and other workplace skills demand stronger foundational skills. It is clear that five or six years of primary education cannot provide the knowledge, skills and competencies that today’s children need to further learn and lead a prosperous life. On the other hand, the narrow focus on Universal Primary Education (UPE) has not kept pace with national changes, where several countries in the region have already extended their basic education to include lower-secondary and secondary education. In this context, both the Muscat Agreement (UNESCO, 2014) that defined an overarching goal and global targets for education and the Proposal of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have emphasized the need for a basic education agenda with expanded scope and duration as part of the post-2015 development agenda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muscat Agreement</th>
<th>SDG Targets (Basic Education)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target 1: By 2013, at least X% girls and boys are ready for primary school through participation in early childhood education care and education, including at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized; Target 2: By 2013, all girls and boys complete free and compulsory quality basic education of at least 9 years and achieve relevant learning outcomes, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized.</td>
<td>Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Thematic Session on Basic Education will explore new trends, policy options, priorities and indicators with respect to basic education targets as part of the post-2015 education agenda.

2. Trends, Issues and Challenges

The Region’s Progress in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

“Learning begins at birth.” This simple yet powerful sentence was introduced into the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990. The EFA goal on ECCE is, however, one of the most neglected goals. Today, thanks to the increase in solid research evidence, particularly in the field of neuroscience, there is increased awareness among policy-makers, practitioners, parents, and development agencies of the critical importance of ECCE. We now know that significant brain development occurs during early childhood, and that the child’s environment, particularly his/her interactions with other humans and stress from conflict, violence and abuse influences how the brain cells connect and thus how children grow and develop. Over time, the brain becomes more resistant to change, and developmental delays before age six are therefore particularly difficult to overcome.
For this reason, participation in quality ECCE programmes is a strong predictor of academic achievement as well as improved social, economic and health outcomes at both individual and societal levels. Moreover, quality ECCE is one of the most productive and equitable forms of educational investment, and investment in early childhood development for disadvantaged children provides seven to ten per cent return each year to society through increased personal achievement and productivity (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003).

There has been steady progress in ECCE participation in the region, but the challenges of inequitable access to many ECCE programmes - and the poor quality of those programmes – remain.

To reflect this increased awareness and national efforts to expand ECCE, some countries of the Asia-Pacific have developed or strengthened national ECCE policies and improved child survival and nutrition. The gross enrolment ratios (GERs) for pre-primary education increased significantly from 2000 to 2012 in all sub-regions of Asia and the Pacific, but particularly in West and South Asia (despite low baselines) (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Gross enrollment ratio for preprimary education (2000 and 2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage point increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the country level data, mixed progress is observed, with some countries reaching more than 80% GER and others struggling to bring a large proportion of children in pre-school programmes (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Gross enrolment ratios (GER) in pre-primary education in selected countries, 2012
Reaching the vulnerable and disadvantaged is a challenge.

Despite this positive general trend, it is clear that there are enormous disparities and inequities in ECCE both between and within countries. A principle challenge is to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged children who would benefit most from quality ECCE yet have little to no access to it. These children include those who reside in remote areas and rural communities and urban slums, those who come from low-income families, have disabilities, and/or belong to ethnic and linguistic minority groups. As Table 2 below demonstrates, children from wealthy families have significantly higher opportunities to attend early childhood education programmes, with the richest and poorest quintiles having the difference of 57 and 47 percentage points in Mongolia and Nepal, respectively. Therefore, many countries in the region face the enormous challenge of expanding and improving ECCE both in terms of quality and equity.

Table 2. Percentage of children 3-4 years old who are attending an early childhood education programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Poorest 20%</th>
<th>Richest 20%</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MICS 2010-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>MICS 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>MICS 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>MICS 2010-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>MICS 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>MICS 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>MICS 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>MICS 2009-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>DHS 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>MICS 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>MICS 2005-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>MICS 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>MICS 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Childinfo (http://www.childinfo.org/ecd_support.php)

Primary and Lower Secondary Education in the Region

Home to 61% of the world’s population, the Asia-Pacific region offers a highly diverse and dynamic socio-economic environment for education development. The region has achieved substantial economic growth in recent decades, and several countries have moved to middle income status. More and more countries are seeking to move to knowledge-based, innovation-rich and creative economies, and learning becomes central to improving an individual’s economic well-being. For poorer communities with limited opportunity to receive quality education and develop the skills and competencies required, there is the risk of being denied access to more knowledge-based job markets, which may eventually lead to their exclusion from such markets, thus further exacerbating their poverty.

In this context, countries are recognizing the need to move beyond primary education and guarantee an ‘extended’ basic level of education to their populations. The extension of basic education will be both downward (to include at least one year of pre-primary education) and upward (to include three years of lower secondary education). While ECCE and primary education provide the initial foundation, lower secondary education extends and consolidates the basic skills learned in early years and prepares children for further education and skills training. The sections below provide a short situation analysis of basic education in the region.
Data shows an increasing trend in the participation of children in primary and lower secondary education in the region over the last decade. However, the progress has slowed considerably since 2005. The net enrollment rate (NER) for primary education barely increased from 87% to 89% since 2005 indicating that many countries are not going to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The rate is even worse for secondary education. At the sub-regional level, South Asia is lagging behind other sub-regions for both primary and lower secondary levels. Especially at the lower secondary level, the NER for South Asia was just over 74% in 2012.

![Figure 2: Net Enrollment Rate (NER) for Primary and Lower Secondary levels](source: UIS Data Centre, Accessed on 16 June 2014)

Progress can also be seen at the national level. Many countries have been reporting improved adjusted net enrolment rates (ANER) during the last decade. Still, there are several countries which will not be able to get all primary aged children in school by 2015 (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Adjusted net enrolment rates in primary education in selected countries, 2000, 2005 and 2012](source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics)
Despite great strides made toward UPE, many countries are facing issues of survival and dropouts. In South Asia the dropout rate for primary level was more than 36% in 2011. There is also no improvement in the survival rate to the last grade of primary level in the region: 63.8% in 2011 as opposed to 62% in 1999.

Moreover, in the Asia-Pacific region, many children remain out-of-school. Across the globe, there were more than 57 million primary school age children out of school in 2011 out of which 52.5% were female. This is progress compared to 2000 when there were more than 102 million primary age children out-of-school. In 2011, however, there were more than 18 million out-of-school children in the Asia-Pacific region. This represents more than 31% of the world’s out-of-school children with 5.9%, 4.1% and 5.8% of primary school age children out-of-school in Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and South and West Asia respectively in 2011.

The rate of decrease in the number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age is much more frustrating and has been stagnating since 2004. In 2011, according to a UIS estimate, there were approximately 64 million (50% female) out-of-school adolescents in the world. In South and West Asia, 26% of the total lower secondary school-age adolescents are not in school. The rates for Central Asia as well as East Asia and the Pacific are 6% and 8% respectively.

A recent study on Out-of-School Children (OOSCI) under the UIS-UNICEF joint initiative undertaken in different countries in East Asia and South Asia also revealed a high level of out-of-school children in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The out-of-school children as a percentage of the total number of primary and lower secondary-age children can reach as high as 34.4% in Pakistan at the primary level and 30.7% in Bangladesh at the lower secondary level.
Table 1: Number and % of out-of-school primary and lower secondary school-age children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Primary school age children</th>
<th>Lower secondary age children</th>
<th>Total primary and L. secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out-of-school primary school age children as a percentage of the total primary school age population (%)</td>
<td>Number of primary school-age out-of-school children (Million)</td>
<td>Out-of-school lower secondary school age children as a percentage of the total L secondary school age population (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor Leste</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OOSCI, South Asia regional report, UIS/UNICEF and draft OOSCI East Asia regional report, UIS/UNICEF

3. Major Issues and Challenges

Poor learning outcomes
In the last few decades, there has been much focus on enrolment and completion rates with less attention paid to learning outcomes. Despite increased enrolments, the evidence of progress on the quality of education, and in particular on student learning is limited. High rates of repetition and low survival rates to the last grade of primary are common, suggesting poor efficiency in education. Data on learning achievement shows a mixed picture. While the Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the world’s best performing systems, average student learning in developing countries in the region is disappointingly low (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012). Disparities between and within countries are serious particularly when it comes to the quality of learning. In fact, The Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All on Quality Education (2012) reported that average student performance in reading and mathematics in the region’s developing countries are near or below basic competency levels set by international standards. In particular, reading levels in the early grades are alarmingly low in many countries.

Low quality education for poor children in NFE classes
A significant number of children in the region attend Non-Formal Education (NFE) programmes because the flexibility and alternative option that these programmes offer are favorable to them as compared to the formal schools that have high financial and opportunity costs. However, the quality concerns of these programmes are serious due to inadequate funding, poor supply of teachers and poor learning conditions (UNESCO, 2013; UNESCO, 2014). Flexible learning programmes often take place without any social or institutional recognition, and it is thus difficult for learners to be recognized for their acquired literacy and vocational skills by prospective employers or to re-enter the formal education system even if their circumstances and subject knowledge qualify them for this transition. One analysis suggests that inadequate understanding of NFE and its potential benefits makes it somewhat invisible in policy debates. Hence, low priority is given to NFE, leading to limited resources allocated to NFE programmes, consequently affecting their quality (UNESCO, 2014).

Inequitable access to and participation in pre-primary and basic education
While in general there is an increase in access and participation in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education across the region, there is still a challenge in ensuring equitable and smooth participation for all children. There is also the challenge of ensuring smooth transitions from pre-primary school to primary school and from primary school to secondary
school. Participation in these levels has been affected by the learners’ socio-economic, geographic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Marginalized groups face disparities while they progress through education systems. The high costs of schooling also make it impossible for children from poor households to attend or continue with their schooling. Even when school fees are not required, other costs (e.g. for materials, uniforms, etc.) can still be significant enough that low-income families forego enrolling their children in school. The opportunity costs of education often present more immediate challenges for low-income families. Many families cannot forego the income that their children would bring if they were to work instead of attend school, and this contributes significantly to low enrolment and transition rates and high dropout rates (UNESCO, 2012; Caillods, 2011).

Exclusion
A key challenge faced by all countries in the region is educational disparities and the systematic exclusion of some groups of learners such as girls and women and other underserved groups (street children and working children; rural and remote populations, nomads and migrant workers; children from indigenous groups and ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic minorities; refugees, displaced persons and people under occupation; and people with disabilities). Children with disabilities are mostly out of school and have lower completion and transition rates to post-basic education; only 5% of all children with disabilities worldwide have completed primary school (UNICEF, 2013). Inadequate state monitoring of the education of persons with disabilities has led to uncertainty around the degree of their exclusion from education. Likewise, ethnic minorities face severe disadvantages in education, partly due to socio-economic disparities but also due to the language of instruction. Using a language of instruction, which is different from the learners’ mother tongue, is a significant contributor to language-based disparities. Children in rural isolated communities may suffer and/or be immensely disadvantaged because schools are either too far or not available at all. These children attend small schools without proper educational facilities and trained and qualified teacher. In many countries, children without citizenship are also at high risk of exclusion from education. Those living in remote and rural contexts, children involved in armed conflict, those forced to work, and migrants and minorities who are discriminated against are some of the marginalized and vulnerable groups often without access to quality education.

Gender inequality
Although the gender gap has narrowed, many countries do not provide equal access to education for girls. The region has seen mixed results on the gender equality goal. In East Asia and the Pacific, the gender parity index (GPI) was 0.99 in 2000 for the primary adjusted net enrolment rate and was 0.95 for the gross enrolment ratio for secondary education. This number increased to 1.00 and 1.03 in 2011 for primary and secondary education respectively, implying the successful achievement of gender parity. In South and West Asia, the GPI for the primary level adjusted net enrolment rate increased from 0.84 in 2000 to 0.97 in 2011. For the gross enrolment ratio, the increase was also important, from a GPI of 0.76 in 2000 to 0.92 in 2011. Nonetheless, gender parity in this sub-region is still not achieved at the secondary level. Although gender disparities generally are to the disadvantage of girls, in more and more countries of the region, enrolment rates for boys at all education levels, are increasingly to the disadvantage of boys.

Gender equality goes beyond simply providing equal access to education for students of both genders. There are gender disparities in teaching and leadership positions in the education system. Teaching in pre-primary and primary education is highly feminized, while male teachers often make up a higher percentage of the teaching force at the secondary and tertiary levels. Gender-based violence in schools undermines the right to education and presents a major challenge to achieving gender equality in education because it negatively impacts girls’ participation and their retention in school.
Underinvestment in education
The Dakar Framework for Action included a commitment that no country with a reasonable plan for achieving education for all should be thwarted in their efforts because of a lack of resources. Increased spending on education has been a significant factor in positive educational outcomes since 2000, with expanding education budgets in low-income countries making a key contribution to education progress. Nevertheless, the lack of political will to invest in education has been raised as a key concern. Sufficient financing and government commitment continues to be key obstacles to making adequate progress in achieving education goals.

Supply of qualified teachers
Teachers play a critical role in enabling students to achieve good learning outcomes. The ability of some countries in the region to recruit, train, and retain teachers has proven to be challenging. Teacher supply remains a large concern throughout the region, and maintaining the quality of current and future teachers presents an additional problem. Teachers’ ability to positively shape a child’s learning experience depends on a myriad of factors. The first step towards good learning outcomes is to ensure that there are enough qualified, motivated and well-trained teachers in classrooms. The issue of qualified teachers will be further addressed in another background paper.

4. Key Priorities and Strategies

a. Expanding the scope and duration of basic education through its downward and upward extension and making it free and compulsory
Basic education is a fundamental human right that has been enshrined in international commitments for decades. A strong basic education is fundamental to the strengthening of achievement at higher levels of education and to lifelong learning. To be able to adapt to the workplace and fast-evolving technologies in competitive economies, all young people need to acquire the skills that a good quality primary and secondary education can offer. The 2012 Global Monitoring Report states that lower secondary education extends and consolidates the basic skills learned in primary school, and secondary education deepens general education and adds technical and vocational skills. Neither is possible without a strong foundation in ECCE and a good quality primary education. Only an extended and broad-based basic education can provide the knowledge, skills and competencies that today’s children need to further learn and lead a decent life. As countries in the region have achieved remarkable progress in universal primary education, there is pressure to increase opportunities for access to both pre-primary education and to secondary education. In an increasing number of countries basic education is being redefined to include secondary education, at least lower secondary level. Therefore, in the new post-2015 education agenda governments should commit to ensure at least nine years of free and compulsory basic education to all children by 2030, including one year of free and compulsory pre-school education. It should be available and accessible to all without discrimination on any ground. The right to free and compulsory basic education should be incorporated in national constitutions, legislation, policies and practices. Without free and compulsory basic education, those who cannot afford going to school will be denied a fundamental right.

b. Improving children’s readiness for learning and schooling
Good ECCE policies and programmes have immediate and long-term impacts on learning and the development of children, as well as, on the socio-economic development of societies. As reported earlier, in many parts of the region a large majority of young children do not have access to good early care and education. Governments should take appropriate actions for developing holistic approaches to ECCE and allocate appropriate funding for this purpose. This will require policy actions to prioritize ECCE especially regarding health, education, poverty reduction. This requires structured national development plans and clear articulation of early childhood development policies, comprehensive strategic plans and legal frameworks. ECCE programmes should ensure children’s readiness for learning and
schooling which entail achievement of development milestones including health and nutritional status and age-appropriate linguistic, cognitive and social/emotional development. It should encompass inclusive strategies such as early detection and interventions for developmental delays and disabilities, as well as integrative, comprehensive early childhood programmes of care, support and learning. In the most disadvantaged communities, governments must promote home-based and community-based ECCE and pre-primary education centres with adequate facilities.

c. Reforming secondary education
Implementing nine years of free and compulsory basic education (primary and lower secondary education) will require major reforms, especially in the developing world where transition to secondary education is a big challenge. Beyond the challenge of universal primary education, in the region’s developing countries there are still significant barriers preventing many children from entering secondary education. Often the costs of secondary education are prohibitive. In many rural and remote areas, secondary schools may not even exist, clearly limiting access of children from rural and poorer communities to education. Social and cultural barriers prevent girls from continuing with schooling once they reach adolescence, and secondary schools may be even less welcoming of learners with disabilities than primary schools – both in terms of inclusive facilities and the lack of appropriate materials such as braille textbooks and sign language at the secondary level. Governments therefore need to carry out reforms in secondary education to address these barriers. To smooth the transition from primary to secondary education, countries will need to improve assessment and examination practices at the end of the primary cycle. Abolishing fees and supporting needy families with targeted interventions should be the important first step to ensure participation. Improving the quality and relevance of secondary education should be a major priority, and links between school and work should be strengthened.

d. Creating conditions for quality education and effective learning
Improving quality and learning should be at the heart of all national education efforts. This will mean providing an enabling and positive learning environment including ensuring minimum facilities and safe, healthy and protective physical and social environments for students and teachers to learn and work, as well as ensure adequate teaching and learning materials. Moreover, conducive learning environments should encompass enabling policies that promote and protect human rights, including effective policies to prevent abuse, physical or psychological violence, homophobic bullying and gender-based violence, to name a few.

e. Improving teacher quality
The qualifications of teachers, their competence, commitment and motivation to deliver quality education are central to improving learning outcomes (GMR, 2014). Many countries in the region continue to suffer from teacher shortages and poor teacher quality. Governments can support and sustain a quality education system for all children by providing the best teachers. To this end, special effort should be made to attract, recruit and retain good teachers in the required numbers. The Global Monitoring Report (2014) provides four strategies for providing the best teachers to reach all children with a good quality education. These include: a) selecting the right teachers, b) training teachers to support the weakest learners starting from early grades, c) overcoming inequalities in learning by allocating the best teachers to the most challenging part of a country and d) providing the right mix of enhanced incentives, working conditions and teacher training. Improving teacher policies and governance should be the core strategy.

f. Improving education system efficiency
In many countries, rising enrolments are accompanied by an increase in academic failure, as evidenced by high rates of repetition and dropout. Improving internal efficiency at primary and secondary levels is a major challenge for most education systems. Many countries are facing the problem of retaining children in school. Low internal efficiency, which is contributed to by several factors, is reflected in high rates of dropout and repetition and low rates of promotion and transition. Addressing internal efficiency calls for a comprehensive
approach to education reform focusing on learning (especially successful early learning provided by good quality ECCE programmes and a smooth transition to well-taught early grades of primary school), financial assistance to students and their families, school management, teacher development and improved learning environments at the school level as well as the use of the information and communication technologies.

g. **Addressing marginalization and promoting inclusion**

To overcome deeply entrenched marginalization and inequalities in education, interventions must be integrated with broader strategies for poverty reduction and social inclusion that go beyond the education sector. In this regard, effective coordination mechanisms should be established to bring various line ministries (such as health, finance, social welfare, and agricultural ministries) together for effective policies that address the complex problems of educational exclusion, particularly barriers resulting from poverty, gender, disabilities, child labor, conflict and other emergency situations, and ethnic, religious and linguistic affiliation. Proven strategies targeting identifiable marginalized groups include: a) social cash transfers, conditional upon children in recipient households attending school; b) targeted subsidies and stipends that eliminate formal and informal financial costs of education, e.g. provision of scholarships, uniforms, materials and transportation; c) interventions that support better health and nutrition; d) other incentives covering opportunity costs linked to school attendance; and e) additional learning support for special populations (e.g., disability sensitive school facilities, multi-grade teaching for remote areas, and mother tongue-based multilingual education. Governments should consider improving the profiling and tracking of marginalized children by developing robust monitoring systems that consolidate and analyse disaggregated data for targeted interventions.

Despite some progress, the inclusive education agenda is still a distant reality. As a result of factors within and outside the education system, many learners continue to be excluded from both schooling and the learning process. Governments should take special measures to integrate inclusion in education policy and practice. Such measures should be designed to embrace diversity and address the unique needs of different categories of learners such as girls and women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, refugees, internally displaced people, and those who are living with HIV and AIDS. Curriculum and pedagogy should be relevant and sensitive to the needs of all, especially marginalized learners. Learning environments should be safe, gender-responsive, inclusive and conducive to learning, and promote mother tongue-based multilingual education.

h. **Eliminating gender disparities in education**

Inequalities in general and gender inequality in particular are deeply rooted in economic, social, cultural and political structures and practices, and addressing gender inequality calls for systematic efforts across multiple levels. Current efforts are geared towards achieving gender parity -- equal enrolment for boys and girls. While gender parity is the essential first step, it is not sufficient to achieve full gender equality. Therefore, ensuring equal access of boys and girls to an extended cycle of basic education and eliminating all forms and types of gender disparities should be the core priority. National education policies should support the prevention of gender-based violence and the creation of a learning environment that is free of discrimination and provides equal opportunities for boys and girls. Key steps towards gender equality in education can include making sure the school environment is safe, improving facilities (for example, ensuring separate toilets for girls and boys), training teachers in gender sensitivity, achieving gender balance among teachers and removing gender stereotypes from school curricula and textbooks.

i. **Strengthening NFE systems**

It is increasingly recognized that formal schools alone cannot provide quality basic education for all. Formal education as it is structured cannot serve specific groups of children. To ensure the right to education of those who are not enrolled in school requires diverse forms of provision through different learning pathways. With a high degree of flexibility and openness to change and innovation in an organization, pedagogy, and delivery modes, NFE can cater to diverse and context-specific learning needs of children, young people and
adults worldwide. Therefore, NFE systems should be strengthened by adopting system-wide approaches to non-formal education and this can include formulating national policies, improving governance, management and coordination of NFE, ensuring adequate financial allocation and developing the capacity of individuals and institutions.

\[j. \text{ An aggressive plan to finish unfinished task}\]

Despite advances over the past two decades or so, the Asia-Pacific region is left with some 18 million children without primary education. These children cannot be denied of their right to basic education. Governments should recommit themselves to finish the unfinished task. This will require an adequately resourced national plan with properly targeted interventions. Addressing this challenge will require a system of identification of out-of-school children at the local level and an in-depth understanding of the reasons for their exclusion. Countries should have good data with a high degree of disaggregation. A proper mechanism needs to be developed to identify and regularly monitor out-of-school children.

5. Proposed targets and indicators

This section provides a set of indicators for Target 1 and Target 2.

Target 1: By 2030, at least x% of girls and boys are ready for primary school through equitable participation in quality early childhood care and education, including at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized.

**Indicators**

- GER in pre-primary education by sex, rural/urban location and socio-economic group
- NER in pre-primary education, by sex and socio-economic group
- % of children enrolled in grade 1 with at least one year of pre-primary education, by sex and socio-economic group
- % distribution of instructional time at ECCE and pre-primary level
- Annual instructional time
- The ratio of pupil to trained ECCE/pre-primary teachers
- % of children who have completed at least 1 year of free and compulsory pre-primary education demonstrating minimum competencies on social and emotional, literacy, numeracy and communication skills based on national standards by sex and socio-economic group
- Share of ECCE/pre-primary education expenditure as % of the total education budget in the country
- Unit cost per learner at pre-primary level

Target 2: By 2030, all girls and boys complete free and compulsory quality basic education of at least 9 years and achieve relevant learning outcomes, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized.
Indicators

- NIR and GIR by level of education by sex, socio-economic group and rural-urban location
- Net and gross enrolment rates in formal education by levels, by sex and region
- Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio by sex, socio-economic group and by region
- Rate and number of out-of-school children in the country at primary and lower secondary level
- % of children with disabilities enrolled in primary and lower secondary education
- Survival rate to last grade of primary by sex and by region
- Survival rate to last grade of lower secondary by sex and by region
- Cohort completion rates of basic education by sex and by region
- Gross graduation rate of basic education by sex and by region
- Effective transition rate from primary to lower secondary and lower secondary to upper secondary
- Annual instructional time
- Share of learners enrolled in alternative learning programmes as a percentage of total learners in primary and lower secondary by sex and by region
- % of children at grade 4 and 8 demonstrating minimum levels of literacy, numeracy, science and communication skills based on national standards by sex and socio-economic group
- Share of basic education expenditure as % of total education expenditure
- Unit cost per learner at primary and lower secondary level, including those attending alternative programmes

Questions for Discussion

- What challenges and obstacles do you foresee in implementing ten years of free and compulsory basic education in the Asia-Pacific region, including one year of free and compulsory pre-school education?
- What policy measures, key strategies and priority actions are needed to achieve the above two targets in the region?
- What benchmarks and indicators are desirable to monitor national progress towards the attainment of the above targets?
- What capacities need to be developed at the country level to monitor and achieve the basic education targets on time?
References