

## CSR ASIA Weekly

### The role of business in supporting education amongst vulnerable children

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Girls out of school: 13.7 million (55%)  
Boys out of school: 11.4 million (45%)



As part of their Community Investment strategies many companies have looked at ways in which they can support education through philanthropy, in-kind donations and employee volunteering activities. Many of those activities can have significant positive benefits but unless well designed, initiatives around education can often fail to have the impact that companies imagine they might. Moreover, it should never fall to businesses to provide basic education when governments fail to do so. But there is a role for the private sector in addressing education amongst particularly vulnerable groups and this includes putting a greater emphasis on children who do not even go to school.

Despite the substantial strides made towards achieving universal primary education and the commitment to providing basic education in developing countries, data still shows that progress towards providing education for all has stalled in the past decade. At the end of 2015, almost 60 million children worldwide were not enrolled in primary or secondary schooling, and 18 million children remained out-of-school in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, a key challenge for governments in the region is how to ensure that out-of-school children, who often cannot be served by formal school systems have access to learning opportunities.

Though constitutional and legal provisions are in place to provide education for all children in South East Asia, at least 3 million children remain out of school. In addition, there are a number of stateless, migrant and undocumented children who are out-of-school. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there are several million stateless children in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. Those without national identification and citizenship will rarely have access to education.

UNESCO has begun implementing a project on Strengthening Education Systems for Out-of-School Children to assist nine South East Asian Countries that continue to face challenges in addressing the educational needs of out-of-school children. These countries are: the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Timor-Leste. The goal of the project is to enhance the target countries' institutional capacities and education systems in order to better address the educational needs of vulnerable children, regardless of their nationality and ethnicity, by utilizing new and innovative flexible learning strategies. A three pronged approach forms the basis of the project and includes regional policy advocacy, regional capacity building, and the design and delivery of flexible learning strategies.

As part of this initiative, UNESCO Bangkok, in collaboration with its partners, will organise a regional Education Summit on Flexible Learning Strategies for Out of School Children, in order to provide a forum in which policy makers, practitioners, private sector partners and academics can share their creativity, innovation, and experience in education so as to enhance the situation of vulnerable children. The event will bring together policymakers and practitioners that have attempted to address the issue by providing different methodologies and resources to support learning opportunities for out of school children. There are several promising practices and innovative educational initiatives will be shared.

Objectives of the Asia Education Summit on Flexible Learning Strategies for Out-of-School Children are as follows:

1. To Serve as a platform for presenting and disseminating innovative programmes related to education for out of school children;
2. To Provide an opportunity to build and foster networks and partnerships on education for marginalised children and youth;
3. To Create technical collaboration and share innovative financing practices for education for vulnerable children; and
4. To Develop an online course by using information and data derived from the Summit.

With the objectives above, the [Asian Education Summit](#) will take place on February 24-26, 2016 in Bangkok. On 25 February the focus will be in examining the role of the private sector in supporting educational initiatives for vulnerable children and businesses are invited to workshops on examining ways it can support access to education and alternative delivery of learning to children outside the traditional schooling system. This provides the private sector with an opportunity to do something a little bit different from the traditional support of schooling. It aligns with a new emphasis on closing the gap between those in formal education and those who, for various reasons, remain excluded.

If you are working on Flexible Learning Strategies and want to showcase your best practices in a publication that will be launched at the Asian Education Forum, contact Clelia Daniel at [cdaniel@csr-asia.com](mailto:cdaniel@csr-asia.com).

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