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Status, Trends and Challenges of
Education For All
in South Asia (2000 – 2015)

A Summary Report

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Preface

This summary report has been developed as a sequel to analytical study of Status, trends and challenges of EFA in South Asia (2000 – 2015), conducted by the National University of Education Planning and Management (NUEPA), India, with the technical and financial support from UNESCO New Delhi and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA).

I am delighted to present the summary of the study containing hard facts and figures, on early childhood care and education, primary and secondary schooling, literacy level, skills development, vocational education, quality of learning, etc. Covering all six EFA goals, the summary also highlights achievements and challenges.

It is expected to help map out future educational interventions in the South Asia region to attain Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 (SDG4) on “equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all”. Although education is by itself a goal of SDG, it is also recognized as a fundamental contributor for attaining the other 16 SDG goals.

South Asia showcases both complexity and diversity in socio-economic status, culture, history, ethnicity, religion and language with huge population spread over a large geographical area. This being a phenomenon both within and across the countries in the region, it is not easy to bring quality learning to all girls and boys, women and men overnight. All the same, tireless, seamless, and collective endeavors of all stakeholders including students, parents, teachers, head teachers, managers, researchers and academics, civil society organizations, private sector, governments, international organizations, and UN agencies are committed to usher a brighter

tomorrow for the next generation. To this end, we have to literally work together, not just among countries, but also across all education and development stakeholders to bequeath the future they want to our children.

This report would not have been realized without the contributions of numerous people and organizations. At the outset, I would like to express our sincere appreciation, on behalf of UNESCO and UNICEF, to Professor R. Govinda, former Vice Chancellor of NUEPA and Professor Ramachandran from NUEPA, for accepting our offer for developing a comprehensive report on “Education for All (EFA) 2015: South Asia Regional Review”.

The summary is the result of elaborate effort and collaborative work of a UNESCO team headed by Shailendra Sigdel, Statistical Advisor of UNESCO New Delhi, and supported by Nitya Agrawal, Rekha Beri, Ragini Chaurasia, Vrinda Gupta and Anisha Samantara. My deep appreciation goes to the entire team. My sincere thanks is also extended to Urmila Sarkar, Regional Education Adviser, and Leotes Helin, Education Specialist from UNICEF ROSA, for closely working with UNESCO New Delhi and providing excellent technical support for realizing this publication.

It will be great pleasure of mine, if those who are concerned with education refer to this summary and use it for their noble actions for bettering education and achieving SDG4 for entire South Asian region.



Shigeru AOYAGI

Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka





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A photograph of a woman and three children in a rural, arid setting. The woman stands in the center, wearing a vibrant orange and blue sari. She is flanked by three children: a girl in a red sari on the left, a young boy in a dark shirt in the center, and a girl in a light blue patterned dress on the right. They are sitting on the ground in front of a large pile of dry sticks and branches. The background shows a dry, hilly landscape under a clear sky. A yellow triangle is in the top left corner, and a blue triangle is in the bottom right corner.

0.1% improvement in a country's education equality can, over forty years, raise its per capita income higher by **23%**

Overall Development context of South Asia

The purpose of the current publication is to analyse the EFA goals and the way forward for the South Asian region covering eight countries, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Together, they have formed an economic and geopolitical organization known as South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The policies formed aim to promote welfare economics, collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia, and accelerate socio-cultural development in the region. Besides being extremely large in terms of land and population, the region appreciates huge diversity in culture, ethnicity, religion, history and language within and between the countries. It has experienced high population growth compared with some other regions of the world (UNPD), and is presently home to about 1.6 billion people, representing nearly 22% of world population.

In terms of GDP at PPP, the combined economy of SAARC is the third largest in the world, and fifth largest in terms of nominal GDP. The region is experiencing high economic growth, increasing per capita income. Yet, the region is still facing problems related to acute poverty, social and political inequality, poor health and nutrition, besides rapid urbanization. The biggest bottleneck faced by the region, however, is illiteracy, large number of out-of-school children, low enrolment rates, gender inequalities and poor quality of education.

For addressing and understanding these issues, it is important to look at what has already been achieved, the targets which have been missed, the new goals that are to be achieved, and the challenges and problems that lie in way of achieving these goals. The key idea of the report is, therefore, to study the region from the lens of finished and unfinished Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and carry out the education agenda forward through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in general, and SDG 4, in particular, that aim to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education as well as promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

UNESCO, along with UNICEF, has been mandated since 2011 to initiate and lead deliberations with Member States on the post-2015 education agenda at global level. The broad-based and inclusive consultations have been conducted at sub-regional, regional and global levels. These culminated in the Muscat Agreement, adopted at the 2014 Global EFA Meeting in Oman, representing a shared vision of the global community of education for the future. This important standalone goal along with targets on education proposed by the UN Open Working Group and decided by the UN General Assembly is the basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda. The 2nd SAARC Education Ministers Meeting held in New Delhi in October 2014 adopted the 'New Delhi Declaration on Education' which agreed on the formulation of the 'SAARC Framework for Action'

for the post- 2015 education agenda.

The World Education Forum 2015 organized by UNESCO (Inchon, Republic of Korea, May 2015) deliberated upon both the EFA unfinished and post-2015 education agendas. The Forum took stock of achievements and shortfalls in the implementation of the 'Dakar Framework for Action'. It also agreed on the incorporation of education goals and targets in SDGs, and the basic elements of a comprehensive 'Framework for Action for Education 2030' to guide and support

the implementation of future education agenda.

The UNESCO New Delhi Office and the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) have expressed interest to work with the SAARC Secretariat and the countries in the domain of education in line with the Kathmandu and New Delhi declarations as well as the UNESCO-SAARC MoU and the UNICEF-SAARC Cooperation Agreement.



Education Development context and challenges

The report on 'Education for All (EFA) 2015: South Asia Regional Review' developed by the National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA) in 2015, shows common achievements and challenges of the SAARC countries, since the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. Since then the region has substantially increased access to primary education and is close to achieving universal target. The pace of access to lower secondary and secondary education is, however, not the same for each country. Sri Lanka and Maldives have achieved targets for both primary and secondary education with relatively small number of out-of-school children. In contrast, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh account for majority of out-of-school and illiterate population in the region, largely because these are the most populous countries in South Asia.

EFA, therefore, remains a continuing challenge in South Asia. The EFA national reviews conducted in 2014 by the countries in South Asia indicated that some EFA goals would not be met by the year 2015, and would remain an unfinished agenda. Despite free and compulsory education provision in all South Asian countries, adult and youth illiteracy and out-of-school children (OOSC) in high population countries in the region remain critical problems since they reflect inequality and inequity

in access to education. The latest report of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF¹ pointed out that there were nearly 57.8 million primary school-age children and 62.9 million lower secondary-age children, who were out of school in the world. The South Asia region contributes 9.8 million (17%) and 25.3 million (40.2%) out-of-school primary and lower secondary school-age children respectively.

Along with illiteracy and OOSC, some of the other unfinished agenda relating to EFA include inequity and inequality in participation in education including in pre-primary education, unsatisfactory education quality, poor learning outcomes, insufficient teacher supply and poor quality of teaching-learning process, and inadequate learning opportunities for youth and adults, and lack of adequate and appropriate opportunities for children and youth to improve skills for life and for work. National assessments and community-led assessments show low learning achievement in primary and lower secondary education (UIS database on learning outcomes, 2015).

Inequalities based on region and society, and issues and challenges relating to governance, management financing and implementation of education are some of the other challenges faced by the SAARC countries.

¹UIS and UNICEF- Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All, *Finding from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children*, 2015



A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past the age of

5

than a child born to an illiterate woman

Shortage of qualified and trained teachers is hampering efforts in most of the region to enhance the quality of education. On the one hand, recruiting qualified, trained and committed teachers is one challenge the countries are facing, on the other, distributing recruited teachers in an equitable manner is another challenge. UIS has estimated that, to achieve universal primary education: additional 196 thousand teachers have to be recruited in South and West Asia².

Addressing EFA-related unfinished agenda has emerged as a high priority task in all South Asian countries to ensure fundamental human right to education, learning and knowledge to children and youth in the region.

²South and West Asia includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Iran is not included in SAARC. SAARC level data is not available in UIS website and it combines South (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and West (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) Asia.

Goal 1: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

“Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.”

Background:

Early childhood refers to the period between birth and eight years of life. The widely used term ‘early childhood care and education’ (ECCE) refers to a range of processes and mechanisms that support and sustain development during early years of life: it encompasses education, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, health care and nutrition. It also includes the support of a family and community needs to promote children’s healthy development (Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All, 2012). ECCE is also widely recognized as a significant pathway to inclusiveness and social equity in education, provided that the programmes are accessible to all sections of society. Children who have participated in high quality ECCE demonstrate considerable gains in social, educational, health and intellectual spheres, distinctively different from those who have not participated in ECCE programmes.

Achievement

It has been widely recognized that support to children’s development at the earliest stages of life contributes substantially to better educational and wider societal outcomes.

Since 2000, considerable progress has been made in the number of children enrolled in

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes in all countries in South Asia. The region has programmes that are committed to improving child health care, nutrition, living environment, primary education, and also train teachers. In Bangladesh, the National Education Policy includes early childhood provisions, with three ministries involved in oversight of related services, particularly pre-primary education, while in India, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is a holistic early childhood development programme catering to ECCE. In Pakistan, the development of standards and guidelines for better quality education in the government-run katchi programmes has advanced the cause of early childhood initiatives in the country (Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All, 2012).

However, children from marginalized groups still lack access to ECCE due to lack of funds, structural inequity and lack of attention to issues relating to quality of ECCE.

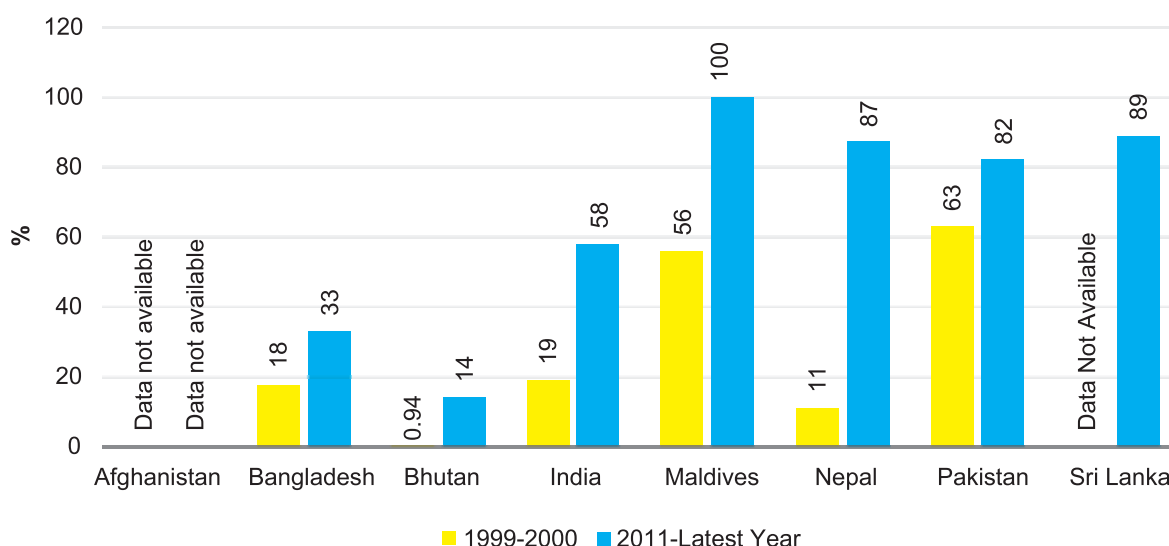
Infant mortality rates: All countries in the region have made progress in reducing child mortality. Since 2000, infant mortality rates declined substantially in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal. Afghanistan has, however, the highest infant mortality rate with 63 per 1000 live births, as compared to Sri Lanka which has the lowest, with 8 per 1000 live births (GMR, 2015).

Under-five mortality rates: Under-five mortality rates also improved noticeably in the region, falling from 116 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990, to 86 in 2000, and 55 in 2013. However, the decline is not uniform even though there is a declining trend. Since 2000, under-five mortality rates have declined substantially in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal, but they have not been substantial in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It shows that SAARC countries were not on track to achieve the MDG target. Afghanistan (85 per 1000 live births) and Sri Lanka (10 per 1000 live births) are respectively the countries with highest and lowest under-five mortality rates.

Enrolment in pre-primary education: Since 1999, access to pre-primary education has expanded considerably and countries have tried to provide better accessibility to schools with certain incentives³.

Participation in early childhood education: The available data indicates that India and Nepal substantially increased Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary education from a low baseline in 1999. For South Asia, enrolment in pre-primary education has increased by about two and half times to reach 53.8 million according to the data for the most recent year available during the period 2011-2014 (UIS database, July 2014; GMR, 2015). Data available for the most recent year during the period 2011-2014 indicated that GER for India increased by around 30 percentage points, while for Nepal, GER increased by 76 percentage points (from 11 to 87 per cent between 1999 and 2014). Despite progress, participation in pre-primary education remains low in Bangladesh and Bhutan, the GERs in 2013 being 33 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.

FIGURE 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Pre-Primary Education by country



Source: UIS Database, July 2015⁴

³Enrolment in pre-primary education is for children between 3-6 years of age while participation in ECCE concerns children between 0-6 years of age that includes mother and child care. Hence enrolment in pre-primary education and participation in early childhood care are not the same. The latter is a broader concept which actually includes pre-primary enrolment.

⁴Despite pre-primary education not being provided freely by the government in Maldives, it seems to have 100% enrolment in pre-primary education. It can be indicated by high enrolment in private institutions as a percentage of total enrolment in pre-primary education which was around 94% for the country in 2012 (UIS). This explains a large role played by private institutions in pre-primary education in Maldives.

Challenges

Access to pre-primary education is not universal except in two countries, namely, Maldives and Sri Lanka. However, the progress is remarkable in other countries of South Asia. Quality-related deficiencies in ECCE services remain a major challenge in most of the countries in the region, with significant proportion of children not ready cognitively for primary schooling and neither the schools are ready for children.

The need to formulate and implement appropriate interventions, required to remove quality-related deficiencies in ECCE services, has emerged as a high priority task in all countries in the region.

In most of the countries in South Asia, a significant proportion of ECCE teachers are inadequately prepared. Poorly prepared teachers struggle to transact effective curriculum prescribed for pre-primary education. The curriculum for pre-primary education in many cases continue to be a downward extension of the primary education curriculum.

Key messages

- Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal are likely to meet the MDG 4 target of reducing the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015. Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan are not on track to achieve the MDG 4 target. Afghanistan has the highest under-five mortality rate (85 per 1,000 live births) and Sri Lanka has the lowest rate (10 per 1,000 live births) in the region.
- Access to pre-primary education has expanded considerably. In 2012, nearly 54.3 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education across the region. Enrolment in pre-primary education increased by more than two and half times since 1999. However, the expansion is not the same for all countries of SAARC region.
- Quality-related deficiencies in pre-primary education remain a serious issue. Issues related to the appropriateness of pre-primary education curriculum and preparation/training of pre-primary teachers need greater attention.



↑ 10%

One extra year of schooling
increases an individual's
earnings by up to 10%.

Goal 2: Universal Primary Education

“Ensuring that 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, by 2015.”

Background:

EFA Goal 2 is concerned with access and completion of free and compulsory primary education of good quality, particularly for girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities. It has three primary components – i) universal access and participation, ii) universal retention and progression, and iii) universal achievement and completion (End of Decade Notes 2)⁵.

As per the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 1997 and 2011), all SAARC countries have passed the legislation on free and compulsory education and most of the countries, other than Afghanistan and Pakistan, have already or almost reached universal enrolment at primary level. However, retention and completion are common problems of the region. The national review of EFA 2015 shows low education attainments of marginalized population (such as child labourers, children with disabilities and special needs, children from disadvantaged ethnic or religious minorities, migrant populations, remote or isolated communities or urban slums) compared with the general population. Poor delivery of commitments, shortage of qualified and trained teachers, and equitable distribution of

resources are some common issues in the region. At the same time, conflicts, civil strife and natural disasters are also setting back the education advancement in the region.

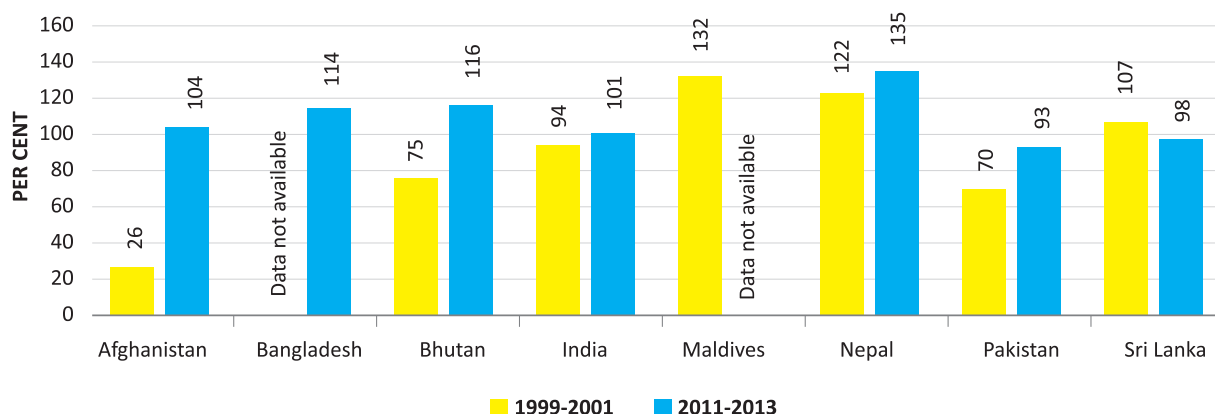
Achievements

Enrolment in primary education: The increase in the number of children enrolled in primary education in the region, from 1999 to 2013, is impressive. It has increased from 131 million to 189 million with 2.6 per cent average annual growth. However, the growth patterns are not the same for each country, as Maldives has experienced negative growth during 1999-2013. It could be due to demographic changes or improving internal efficiency. Afghanistan has experienced the highest growth in the enrolment at primary level.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at primary level: South Asia has shown significant improvement in education participation at primary level. The GER in primary education increased by 78 percentage points between 1999 and 2013 in Afghanistan, 41 percentage points between 1999 and 2013 in Bhutan, 7 percentage points between 1999 and 2014 in India, 13 percentage points between 1999 and 2014 in Nepal, and 23 percentage points between 2000 and 2013 in Pakistan. (UIS database, July 2014; GMR 2015).

⁵UNESCO, UNICEF

FIGURE 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary education

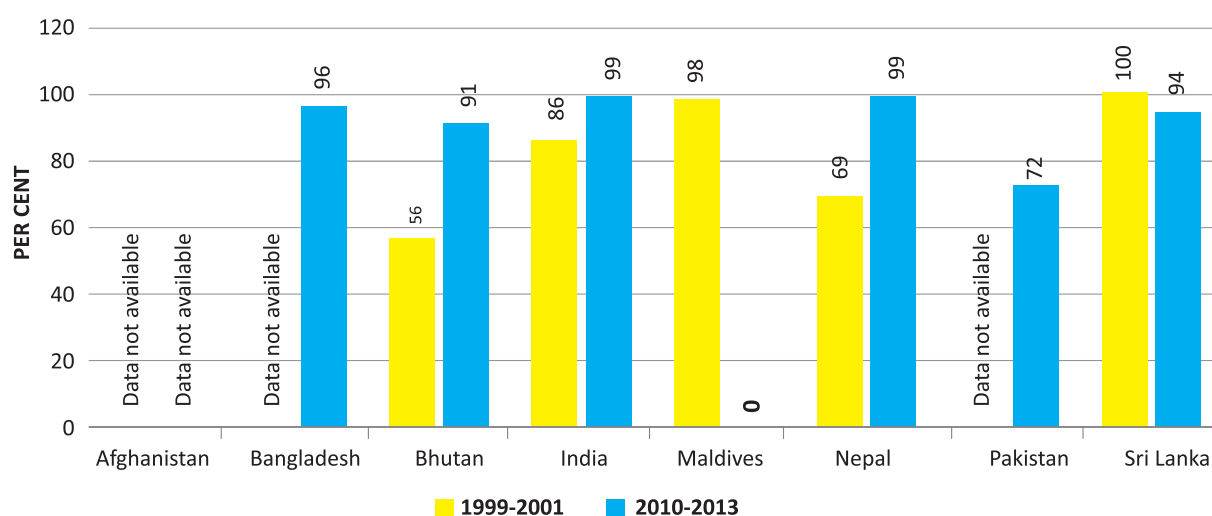


Source: UIS database, July 2015

Primary education adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER): South Asia has registered one of the world’s largest increases in the primary education adjusted net enrolment rate, which increased from 78 per cent to 94 per cent between 1999 and 2013. During the period, it increased, on average, by 16 percentage points with 1.3 per cent average

annual growth rate. Most of the countries have made considerable progress in universal primary enrolment since 1999. Bhutan and Nepal recorded the most rapid improvement in primary ANER, with 35 and 30 percentage points respectively. It is noticeable that most of countries have reached more than 90% ANER except few countries of the region.

FIGURE 3: Primary Education Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (ANER) (%)



Source: UIS database, July 2015

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in ANER shows almost parity except in Pakistan.

The GPI for primary education ANER in the South Asian region has increased from 0.82 to 1.00 during the period 1999-2012. Data for the most recent year available during the period 2010-2013 indicates that Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have achieved gender parity for primary education adjusted net enrolment ratio (ANER) with a GPI of 1.05, 1.03 and 1.00 respectively. Nepal with a GPI of 0.99 is close to achieving gender parity for ANER. The lowest GPI for GER in the region is 0.89 for Pakistan.

Enrolment in lower secondary education: The number of students enrolled in lower secondary education in SAARC countries has increased by 53 per cent between 1999 to 2013. Countries whose base was low have experienced high growth, while those whose base was already high e.g. Sri Lanka, have experienced low growth of enrolment. The enrolment growth rate is 675 per cent for Afghanistan, whereas for Sri Lanka, it is 3 per cent only. Bhutan and Nepal have experienced more than 100 per cent growth from 1999. Among the

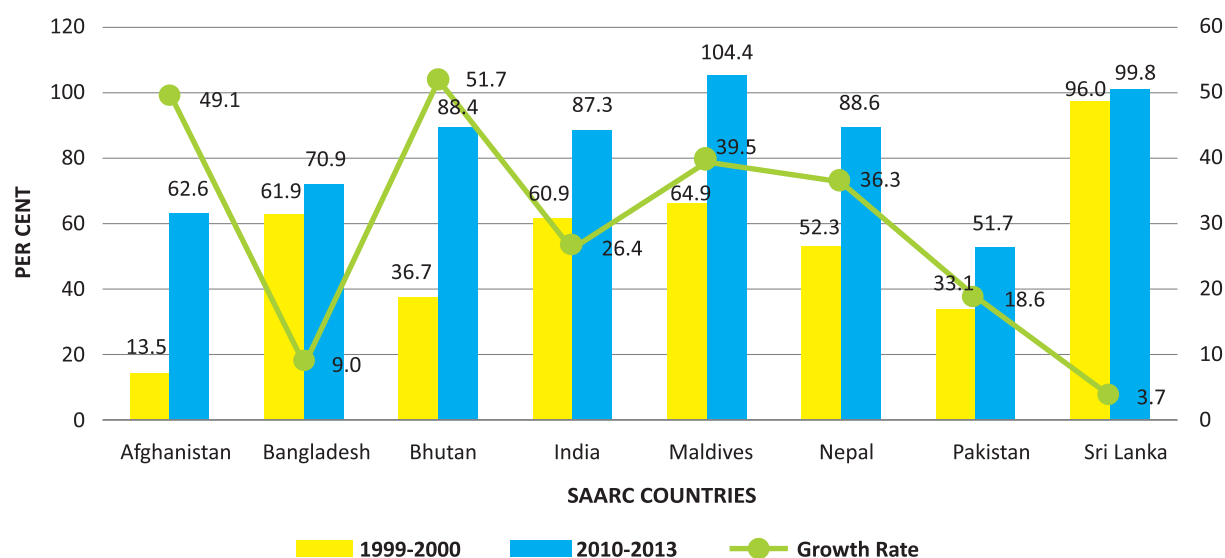
member of E9 countries⁶, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan’s growth of enrolment at lower secondary level is 19, 54 and 60 per cent respectively.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at lower secondary level: Out of eight SAARC countries, only Maldives and Sri Lanka reached almost 100% GER in 2013. For other countries, the lower secondary level GER varies widely.

Decline in the number of out-of-school children-primary and lower secondary: The increase in participation in primary and lower secondary education has resulted in substantial reduction in the number of out-of-school children in the region during the period 1999-2013.

The number of primary age out-of-school children declined by 73 per cent, from 37.7 million to 9.8 million during this period. South Asia, which had 35 per cent of the world’s out-of-school children in 1999 accounted for only 17 per cent of the total in 2012, with India and Nepal making marked progress. The number of out-of-school children in India reduced by 15.2 million (from 16.9 million to

FIGURE 4: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in lower secondary education



Source: UIS database, July 2015

⁶E9 is a forum of nine countries, which was formed to achieve the goals of UNESCO’s Education for All (EFA) initiative.

1.7 million) during the period 2000-2012 at primary level. The number of out-of-school children in Nepal reduced from 906,000 to 45,000 during the period 1999-2013.

The increase in participation in lower secondary education has resulted in substantial reduction in the number of out-of-school children of lower secondary school age during the period 1999-2012. Similarly, the number of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age has declined around 30 per cent in South Asia between 1999 and 2012.

Challenges

Relatively higher drop-out rates in some countries: Despite significant progress towards universal primary education in South Asia, retention of students in school remains a crucial issue. The percentage of children who reached the last grade of primary school remained constant, at 64 per cent, between 1999 and 2012. In other words, 36 per cent of the students were dropping out too early without completing primary education, putting the region still far away from the goal of universal retention.

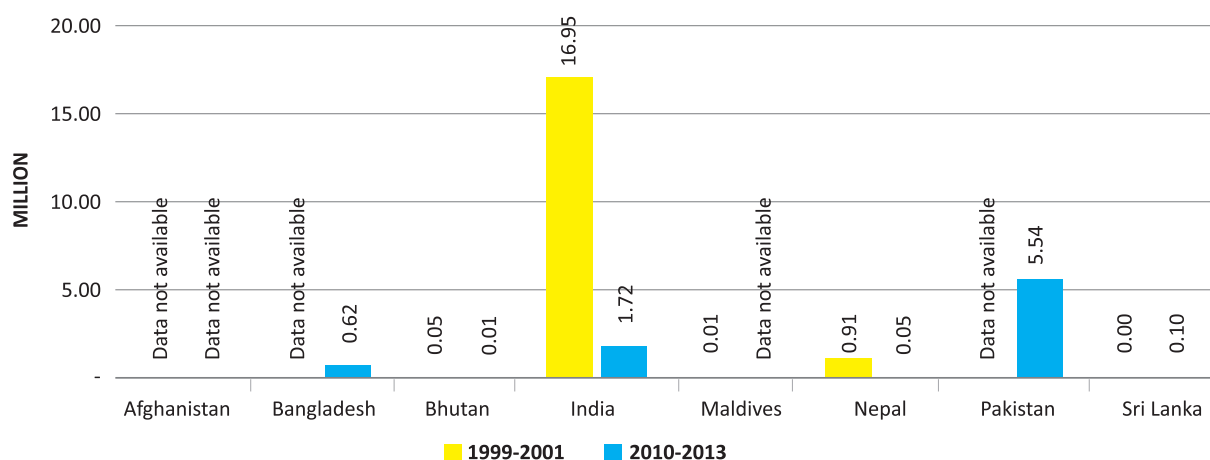
Approximately one-third of the students enrolled in primary education in Bangladesh dropped out

before completing primary education, four out of 10 students in Nepal as well as Pakistan, and two out of 10 students in Bhutan and the Maldives. Sri Lanka is the only country that has reached very close to the goal of universal retention, with nearly 98 per cent of primary school students reaching the last grade, in 2012. The survival rate to the last grade in Pakistan was among the lowest.

Out-of-school children: Though the increase in participation in primary education has resulted in substantial reduction in the number of out-of-school children in the region during the period 1999-2013, the absolute number of out-of-children still remains high, especially in the three high population countries in the region, and universal access to primary education continues to be an unfinished agenda in the region.

Estimates for 2012 indicate that 57 per cent of the region's out-of-school children in South Asia were not expected to ever go to school. Pakistan had the largest number of out-of-school children in 2012, at 5.5 million, followed by India at 1.7 million, and Bangladesh at 0.62 million. One of the factors responsible for large OOSC is stagnation in the reduction of OOSC in the region. Thus, if countries do not accelerate their efforts to reduce OOSC numbers, the region might continue to have huge numbers of OOSC post 2015.

FIGURE 5: Out-of-school children



Source: UIS May 2015

Key messages

- The goal of attaining universal enrolment at primary level has been attained by almost all countries of the region, except Pakistan. However, enrolment at lower secondary level remains a key challenge, attributing to large numbers of out-of-school students.
- The increase in enrolment has resulted in a decline of over 70 per cent in the number of out-of-school children in the region.
- In South Asia, except Maldives and Sri Lanka, Gross Enrolment Ratios at lower secondary education are much lower than in primary education.
- Despite sustained efforts in most countries, a substantial number of children lack access to education because of disadvantages such as poverty, gender, location and disability. Major efforts must be made to ensure that disadvantaged and marginalized children, especially girls, and children with disabilities and those living in remote areas also have access to education.
- South Asia has registered one of the world's largest increases in the primary Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (ANER) since 1999. Bhutan and Nepal made the most rapid improvements in primary ANER. Except Afghanistan and Pakistan, other South Asian countries have almost reached the goal of universal enrolment in primary education.





“Children should
have pens in their
hands not tools”
— Iqbal Masih



Goal 3: Youth and Adult Skills

“Ensuring that the learning needs of all children and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.”

Background:

This goal emphasizes the need to expand secondary education and to make youth friendly programmes available to protect young people, and in particular adolescent girls, from risks of exploitative labour, unemployment, conflict and violence, drug abuse, school-age pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. It also emphasizes the need to provide opportunities for every young person to continue learning, in particular those who dropped out of school or completed school without acquiring core literacy, numeracy and life skills.

Analysing how learning needs have been interpreted globally, one can define what learners are expected to know, understand and be able to apply as a result of learning (knowledge, skills and competencies). These learning outcomes are acquired not only in formal education environments, but also in non-formal and informal settings. Ministries of education across the region are continuing to improve the way they identify the need to improve learning opportunities while also reducing inequalities in access to and quality of education.

Achievements

The transition rates from primary to secondary education have been increasing for the most recent

year between 2010-2013. All countries, except Nepal and Pakistan, have recorded transition rates from primary to secondary education of above 90 per cent, while Sri Lanka has maintained almost 100 per cent rate.

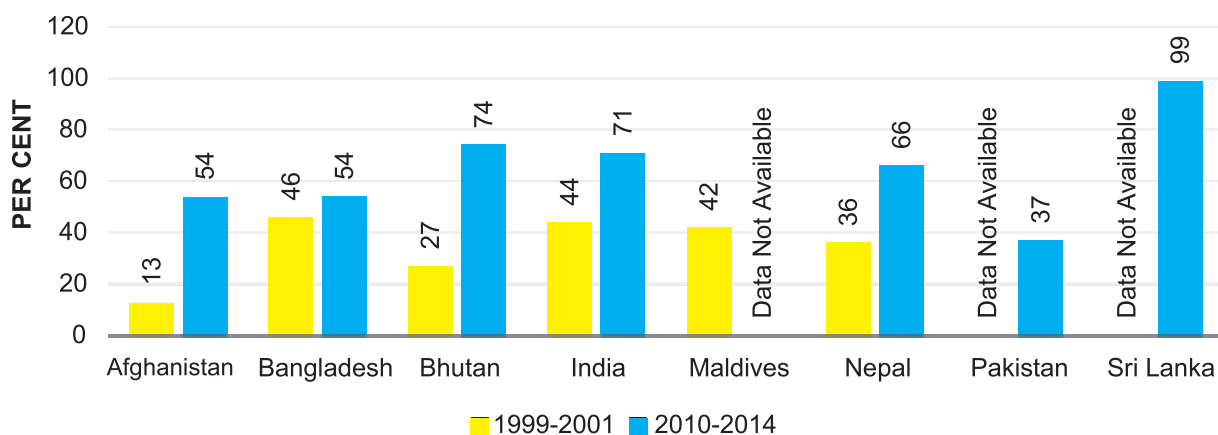
Available data for the most recent year between 2012-2014 indicate that the total enrolment in secondary education in the SAARC region reached about 150.5 million during this period. Enrolment in lower secondary education (upper primary and secondary education in the case of India) increased nearly seven times between 2001 and 2013 in Afghanistan, more than three times between 1999 and 2013 in Bhutan, and about two and a half times between 1999 and 2014 in Nepal. In Pakistan, total enrolment in lower secondary education reached 10.8 million in 2013, while in Sri Lanka it reached 2.6 million in the same year.

Enrolment in secondary education increased by about 23 per cent, between 1999 and 2012, in Bangladesh, while in India, it increased by about 78 per cent between 1999 and 2012. To a very large extent, Adult Education programme has contributed to enhancing literacy rates, resulting in significant improvement in enrolment of children in schools in India. It has been coupled with social awareness regarding the importance of education and empowerment of the girl-child to achieve expected educational outcomes.

Participation in secondary education (lower and upper/higher secondary education) has increased since 1999 in the region. The strategies adopted to reach the objectives of Goal 3 were taken up on a large scale by governments in the SAARC countries.

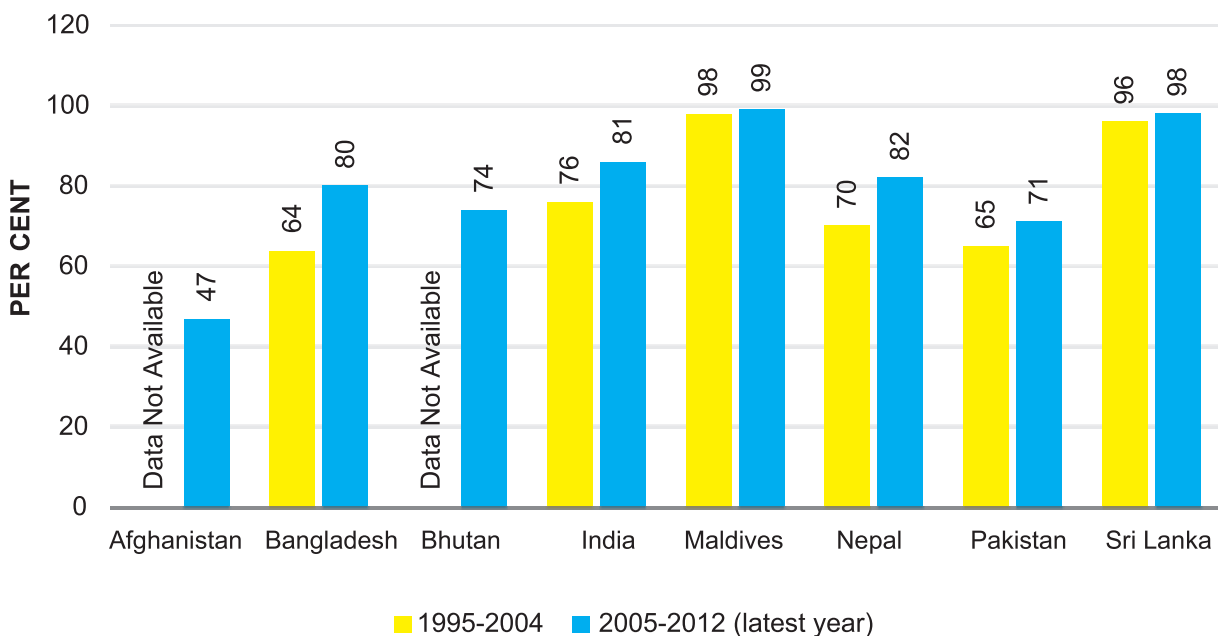
The designing of a curriculum appropriate for imparting basic skills, psycho-social skills and technical and vocational skills (Lifelong skills) in schools were major steps undertaken.

FIGURE 6: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in secondary education (secondary and upper secondary education) (%) by country



Source: UIS Database, July 2015

FIGURE 7: Youth literacy rate (Age 15 and over) by country



Source: UIS Database, July 2015

According to data available for the most recent year during 2010-2014, GER in lower secondary education was less than 60 per cent in six out of eight countries in South Asia. GERs in upper secondary education ranged between 29 per cent in Pakistan to 99 per cent in Sri Lanka.

Adult literacy in most countries is progressively increasing but not at satisfactory pace, even though between 2001 and 2012, Bangladesh registered an increase of 16 percentage point, India registered 10 percentage points, and Nepal registered 12 percentage points between 2001-2011, which are still low compared to Maldives and Sri Lanka. These two countries continued to maintain high level of youth literacy rates because of near universal basic education.

In recent years, there has been greater attention to vocational education and training in order to promote acquisition of work-related skills by the young generation. The data shows that Technical and Vocational Education enrolment compared with total enrolment at upper secondary level is low in all countries except in Maldives.

TABLE 2: Percentage of students enrolled in TVE out of total enrolment at upper secondary level

| Countries | % of student enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training out of total enrolment at upper secondary level by country |
|-------------|---|
| | Latest Available Data |
| Afghanistan | 3.0 |
| Bangladesh | 8.2 |
| Bhutan | 4.1 |
| India | 1.8 |
| Nepal | 1.7 |
| Pakistan | 8.0 |
| Sri Lanka | 11.9 |
| Maldives | 40.7 |

Source: UIS database August 2015

The percentage of student enrolment in technical and vocational education out of total enrolment at upper secondary level remains low for most of the SAARC countries. It is relatively high for Maldives, and very low for Nepal and India.

Key challenges

Lower enrolment rates in lower secondary and upper/higher secondary education: Data available for the most recent year between 2010-2014 indicate that enrolment and enrolment ratios in lower secondary education in all countries of South Asia, except the Maldives and Sri Lanka, is low. It also indicates that many children do not move on to upper/higher secondary education thereby not mastering enough skills to gain better employment.

Out-of-school adolescents: Lower GERs at the lower secondary stage indicate that a significant proportion of students in the region do not transit from lower secondary to upper secondary stage and therefore, remain outside the secondary education system. According to the UIS database, there are 26.6 million out-of-school children at primary and lower secondary levels in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. For all eight South Asian countries, UIS estimates a total of 7.57 million out-of-school children, at primary level, between ages 5 to 10 years.

Limited access to vocational education and training: Enrolment in vocational education and training programmes is only a small proportion of the total enrolment in secondary and upper/higher secondary education. Also, the existing vocational education programmes in most countries of the region continue to be characterized by several limitations such as lack of provision for vertical and horizontal mobility for students of vocational education programmes, inadequate linkage of schools with industry, paucity of trained vocational education teachers, low quality teaching-learning material, and course contents not in tune with the requirement of industry and other employment sectors.

Key messages

- Secondary level enrolment is far from universal in most of the countries other than Maldives and Sri Lanka.
- Enrolment at Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is very low.
- Youth literacy is increasing, but at low pace.



Goal 4: Adult Literacy

“Achieving 50 per cent improvement in adult, especially women, literacy level, along with an equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults, by 2015.”

Background

Literacy is a fundamental requirement for participating in society. The focus of EFA Goal 4 is to bring global illiteracy down by half, by 2015. It seeks to improve literacy rates so as to ensure that individuals can read, write, communicate, express and connect. The goal not only aims to increase literacy rates substantially, but also achieve gender parity in literacy. It also aims to provide education to the unprivileged section of the society comprising mostly poor women, who are often discriminated against, for providing

them better opportunities so that they come out of their succumbed situation.

Achievements

With an average increase of 18 per cent in adult literacy rate, as a percentage of population above 15 years, between 2001 and 2015 (estimated data by UIS), the eight countries in South Asia recorded impressive improvement in adult literacy, although the change and rate of growth varied considerably between these countries.

| Adult literacy rate (age 15 and over) (%) | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------|------|--------|------|-------|------|--------|
| Country | 2001 (earliest year of data availability) | | | | 2015 | | | |
| | Year | Total | Male | Female | Year | Total | Male | Female |
| Afghanistan | 2011 | 32 | 45 | 18 | 2015 | 38 | 52 | 24 |
| Bangladesh | 2001 | 47 | 54 | 41 | 2015 | 62 | 65 | 58 |
| Bhutan | 2005 | 53 | 65 | 39 | 2015 | 65 | 73 | 55 |
| India | 2001 | 61 | 73 | 48 | 2015 | 71 | 81 | 61 |
| Maldives | 2000 | 96 | 96 | 96 | 2015 | 99 | 100 | 99 |
| Nepal | 2001 | 47 | 63 | 35 | 2015 | 64 | 76 | 53 |
| Pakistan | 2005 | 50 | 64 | 35 | 2015 | 58 | 70 | 46 |
| Sri Lanka | 2001 | 91 | 92 | 89 | 2015 | 93 | 94 | 92 |

Source: UIS database, July 2015

Maldives achieved a near universal literacy rate of 98.6 per cent during 10 years between 1980 and 1990. It is now focusing on bringing universality in the use of English language in the society, increasing use of technology as a part of services in daily life, together with maintaining its literacy level.⁷

Next to Maldives is Sri Lanka, which has achieved an adult literacy level of 93 per cent, and is progressing towards creating employment for all⁸. Other countries in decreasing order are India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Regarding gender disparity, there are on average 15 per cent more male literates than female literates in South Asia. Since Maldives and Sri Lanka have met the target of Education for All Goal 4, the gap between literacy levels of genders is smaller for Maldives (about one per cent) and for Sri Lanka (about two per cent). However, in 2015, Afghanistan

has a strikingly high gap between literacy level of genders at 28 per cent, followed by Pakistan with a gap of 24 per cent, Nepal with a gap of 23 per cent, India with a gap of 20 per cent, and Bhutan with a gap of 18 per cent.

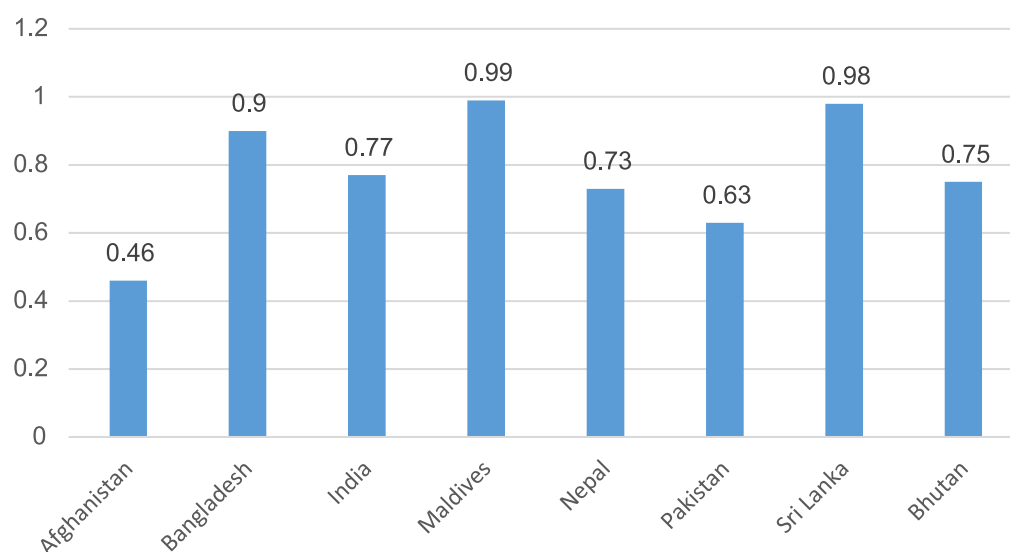
Adult Literacy Rate of population above 15 years of age, and Gender Parity Index correspond to latest data available for 2015 as per UIS estimates.

The Adult Literacy Gender Parity Index (GPI) reiterates that adult GPI is in favour of males in all SAARC countries. While Maldives and Sri Lanka are close to parity, Afghanistan and Pakistan still have a long way to go to reach gender parity.

Key challenges

Large Numbers of Adult Illiterates: The most recent data which is available for the period 2005-2012, indicates that South Asia is home to about half of the world's illiterates. The number of adult

FIGURE 8: Adult Literacy Rate, GPI



Source: UIS Database, August 2015

⁷Education for All National Review Report for Maldives 2014

⁸Education for All National Review Report for Sri Lanka 2015

illiterates in five countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan) is comparatively very high. Despite favourable conditions that could increase the demand of literacy among individuals seeking jobs in these countries, the programmes have not been sufficiently linked to employment opportunities. Teacher training, recruitment, and insufficient infrastructure are some of the biggest hurdles in carrying out literacy programmes.

High Gender disparity in adult literacy rates:

South Asia continues to be the region with high level of gender disparities in adult literacy, with adult literacy rates for male and female population (age 15 years and over) being 74 per cent and 52 per cent respectively. Striking gender gap in adult literacy rates prevail in Afghanistan and Pakistan. With adult GPI at 0.46 and 0.63 for Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively, it is clear that major efforts are needed to raise the female literacy level for these countries, in particular, and the SAARC region in general.

Key messages

- Persistence of large number of adult illiterates is the most critical challenge faced by the SAARC region. Barring Sri Lanka and Maldives, all the other six countries have a long way to go to achieve the EFA goal on literacy.
- Gender Disparity in adult literacy in SAARC region is high, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Maldives and Sri Lanka are the exceptions, having achieved almost universal adult literacy rate.





Goal 5:

Education of Women and Girls, and Elimination of Gender Disparities

“Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on girls’ full and equal access to, and achieving basic education of good quality.”

Background

For a variety of reasons, many of which have a gender dimension, millions of girls and boys around the world are still facing considerable difficulty in getting access to, attending and progressing in school and learning in school. The realization of gender equality in education remains a serious issue of social justice. It involves moving beyond counting the numbers of boys and girls in school, by exploring the quality of their experiences in classrooms and schools, their achievements in educational institutions, and their aspirations for the future. EFA Goal 5, therefore calls for reducing such discrepancies in both primary and secondary education so as to ensure that women do not lag behind in getting opportunities that lead to development of an individual.

Achievements

Although there is still a long way to go towards achieving gender equality, most countries in South Asia have made significant progress in reducing gender inequalities in education. All countries in the region showed increased Gender Parity Index (GPI) for key indicators. GPI measures the relative access to education of males and females which is indicative of girls not going to school as compared

to boys. The region had some of the lowest GPIs in the world in the year 1999-2000. Since then, the region has made substantial progress towards gender parity.

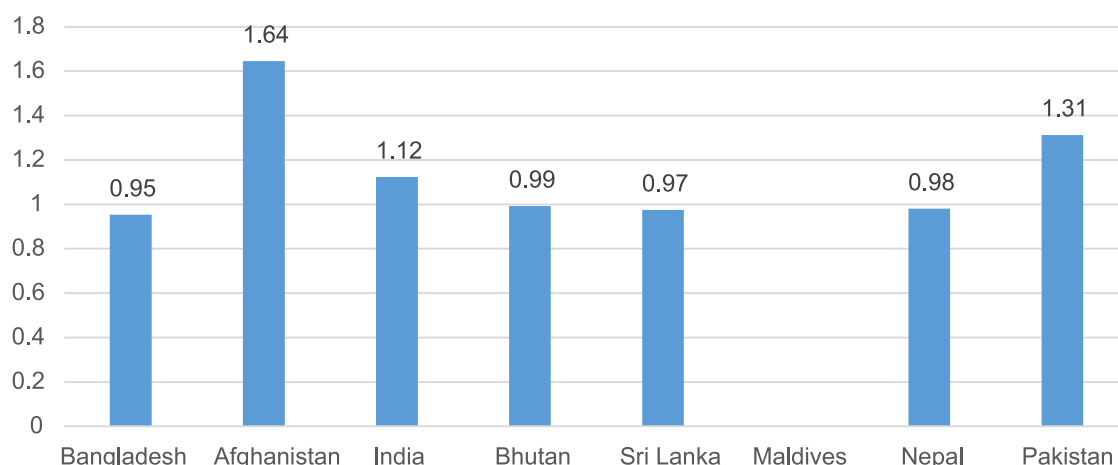
Gender disparities in enrolment in pre-primary education in the South Asian countries declined from an average of 14 per cent in 2000, to 7 per cent in 2013.

Gender disparities in enrolment in primary education declined from an average of 21 per cent in 2000, to 6 per cent in 2013, representing more than 70 per cent decline, but higher than EFA’s goal of removing gender disparities completely.

Gender disparities in enrolment in secondary education declined from an average of 23 per cent in 2000, to 6 per cent in 2013, representing more than 54 per cent decline, but higher than EFA’s goal of removing gender disparities completely.

According to the latest data available for the period 2011-2014, SAARC countries seem to be close to having a favourable sex ratio in enrolment in primary, lower secondary, secondary and tertiary education. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal seem to have a favourable sex ratio for corresponding age groups in enrolment while Afghanistan seems to be a laggard in this regard among all other SAARC countries.

FIGURE 9: Sex Ratio on enrolment on all levels of education by latest year available



Source: UIS Database, July 2015

According to the latest data available on adjusted net enrolment ratio gender parity index for primary education for the period 2010–2013, most of the SAARC countries seem to be close to acquiring gender parity. At lower secondary level, most of the SAARC countries, except for Afghanistan, seem to have acquired or are close to acquiring gender parity.

Key challenges

High Gender disparity in enrolment rates: The region has been successful in reducing gender disparities in enrolment in primary education, but Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to have high gender disparities. Gender disparity is more pronounced among the poor rather than rich



households. Despite reducing gender disparity in primary education enrolment, poor girls are still facing hurdles in starting and completing primary education. Gender disparity in secondary education has, no doubt, declined for all SAARC countries except Pakistan, it is still higher as compared to the universal EFA targets, and seem to be more pronounced for the poor households.

Discriminatory social norms: Entrenched discriminatory social norms and attitudes to gender equality negatively affect the demand for girls' education and restrict their access to education and its benefits. Serious efforts have, therefore, to be made for promoting the importance of education as a human right and increasing demand for schooling, particularly for girls, which is linked with improving awareness about education's impact on economic and socio-cultural values.

Key messages

- Countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to show high gender disparities in enrolment in primary education.
- Gender disparity in secondary education has declined in all SAARC countries except Pakistan.
- Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal seem to have a favourable sex ratio for females in education, while Afghanistan seems to be a laggard in this regard among all other SAARC countries.





Goal 6: Quality of Education

“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.”

Background

It is widely recognized that expanding access alone to education is not sufficient for full development of individual and society. The EFA goal 6 seeks to ensure more than just access to education to children worldwide irrespective of their class, gender, race and so on. It aims to provide good quality education which imparts knowledge and skills to ensure better learning to help them grow and attain measurable learning outcomes.

All countries in South Asia have developed strategies and implemented programmatic interventions for fostering quality education. They have also come up with various indicators to ascertain quality of education. Key indicators include: learning achievement of students, and their survival rate to last grade of primary education. In addition, certain proxy indicators are used to assess the inputs that are considered important for the delivery of quality education. Two of these proxy indicators are: the percentage of Trained Teachers in Primary/Secondary Education, and the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) that reflect the time and attention that is given to each pupil in school.

Achievements

Survival Rate

Global survival rate to last grade of primary education was 75 per cent in 2011, in South Asia, with fewer than two out of three children, who enter primary school, managing to reach the last grade.

The average survival rates for South Asian countries stood at 64 per cent in 2011, with wide variation among the countries.

Trained Teachers

Insufficient number of trained teachers is a key issue faced by all SAARC countries. The median percentage of trained primary school teachers was 82 in the region in 2012. In Bangladesh, pupil to trained teacher ratio was 70:1. In Nepal, the dramatic increase in the percentage of trained teachers from 15 to 95 between 1999 and 2013 led to a sharp decline in the pupil/trained teacher ratio from 260:1 to about 28:1.

Pupil/Teacher Ratio

South Asia had about 5.5 million primary school teachers in 2012, an increase of 26 per cent since 1999. Despite this increase, the primary school

pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) for the region remains more or less the same, at 35:1 over the period. At the country level, most countries reduced their PTR with the largest reductions occurring in Nepal and Bhutan, where PTR decreased from 42:1 to 24:1 (GMR 2015)

Learning Achievement:

Learning achievement is a key indicator for assessing the outcomes of the education system. India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh have conducted national level learning assessments at primary

and lower secondary levels. The frequency and grades of national assessment are not the same for all SAARC countries. Most SAARC countries are not conducting high stake examination at the end of primary and lower secondary levels. However, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are conducting it regularly. Bangladesh conducts it annually, while Sri Lanka conducts it once in every three years.

The learning assessment results across the region are not encouraging; average score is lower than expected, and is not improving over the period.

Status of Learning Achievement tests in SAARC countries

| Countries | Average Marks in Mathematics | Average Marks in Other Subjects | Highest Score/ Maximum Marks | Average Score of Girls | Survey Details |
|------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Bangladesh | 50.00 | 67.00 | 100.00 | NA | National Language and Mathematics, Grade III, DPE 2011 |
| Bhutan | 23.10 | 26.00 | 100.00 | NA | Numeracy and Literacy, Grade IV, MOE, 2013 |
| India | 251.00 | 249.00 | 500.00 | 252 (Maths) | Mathematics and Environmental Studies Grade V, NAS:NCERT, 2013 |
| Maldives | 39.59 | 47.98 | 100.00 | 40.30 (Maths) | Mathematics and English, Grade IV, Longitudinal Study on the Impact of Curriculum Reforms (2012-2013) |
| Nepal | 43.00 | 49.00 | 100.00 | NA | Mathematics and Social Studies, Grade VIII, National Assessment, NASA, 2011 |
| Sri Lanka | 74.00 | 53.50 | 100.00 | NA | Mathematics and English, Grade IV, National Assessment, NEREC, 2007 |

Source: Various publications of national assessments

Key Challenges

Unsatisfactory level of student learning: One of the key challenges facing the education system in South Asia is the unsatisfactory level of student learning underscoring the fact that fostering quality education and improving learning outcomes should be the key focus in the coming years.

Shortage of trained and qualified personnel for education management: The school education system in most countries in South Asia also suffers from shortage of trained and qualified personnel required for policy development and effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education sector development programmes. With large populations which is still growing in some of the countries in South Asia like

India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, it continues to be an uphill task for these countries to keep pace with the expanding demand for primary and secondary education.

Key Messages

- Where the global survival rate to last grade of primary education was 75 per cent in 2011, in South Asia, fewer than two out of three children who enter primary school manage to reach the last grade.
- Insufficient number of trained teachers is a key issue faced by SAARC countries.
- Primary school pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) for the region remains more or less the same, at 35:1 over the period.
- Learning assessment results are not encouraging: average score is lower than expected, and is not improving over the period.

Conclusion

The EFA goals set benchmarks to provide for early childhood care and education, provide free and compulsory primary education, promote learning and life skills for the youth, increase adult literacy, achieve gender equality in education and enhance quality of education by 2015.

The evidence shows that significant progress towards EFA goals has been made by SAARC countries, particularly in terms of universalizing primary education, reducing gender disparities resulting in increasing participation of girls, and enhancing access to secondary and tertiary education.

At the same time it highlights that SAARC countries face several challenges and even today the EFA goals are far from being achieved by any country. Challenges relate particularly to youth and adult illiteracy, out-of-school children of primary and lower secondary school ages, low access to early childhood care and education, inadequate opportunities for skill development and unsatisfactory quality of education and student learning outcomes.

Countries should, therefore, take Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an opportunity to move forward the education agenda post 2015, including fulfilling the unfinished EFA agenda in South Asia. The SDGs also present an opportunity to transform the education systems of countries in the region to meet requirements of a fast-changing, globalized and knowledge-based societies and to promote their sustainable development.



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Nepal and Sri Lanka

