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The status of adult learning and education in Asia and the Pacific

 REGIONAL REPORT



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Prepared by Rangachar Govinda



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In reviewing the progress made in implementing the Belém Framework for Action, this report attempts to present an overview of adult learning and education (ALE) in the Asia-Pacific region. I would like to thank the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) for assigning this task to me. Gathering multiple sources of information and bringing together an objective report was an intellectually rewarding experience.

Presenting a credible review required looking for authentic models of ALE. This would not have been possible without support from the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), whose members – and Ms Maria Khan in particular – volunteered to obtain examples of ALE in action from across the region.

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Rangachar Govinda

INTRODUCTION

Adult learning and education (ALE) has made a long evolutionary journey from being merely a second-chance opportunity for illiterate adults to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills to a comprehensive canvas for providing education for all, throughout life, as lifelong and life-wide learning. In 1990, when the international education community adopted the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, nearly one-third of the world's adult population was illiterate, and the means and medium for accessing knowledge were almost wholly dependent on the ability to use print material. Ten years later, recognizing the significant, albeit uneven, progress made across and within countries, the Dakar Framework for Action was produced to reiterate the commitment to further reduce illiteracy by 2015.

Meanwhile, globalization and information and communication technology (ICT) had begun to redraw the contours of education and learning across the spectrum of age groups and modes of learning. The definition of literacy itself broadened under the rubric of 'multiple literacy', taking it beyond

the set of technical skills of reading, writing and calculating . . . to a pluralistic notion encompassing the manifold meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competencies. Such a view, responding to recent economic, political and social transformations, including globalization, and the advancement of information and communication technology, recognizes that there are many practices of literacy embedded in different cultural processes, personal circumstances and collective structures. (UNESCO, 2004)

The deliberations of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) and the ensuing Belém Framework for Action (BFA) (UIL, 2010) reflected this evolving definition of ALE and its corresponding policies and practices, embedding the concept of ALE within the wider notion of 'lifelong learning'. Indeed, the BFA recognized that adult learning and education represents a significant component of the lifelong learning process, which embraces the learning continuum, comprising formal, non-formal and informal learning.

ALE caters to the learning needs of young people, adults and older people. It covers a broad range of content

– general issues, vocational matters, family literacy and education, citizenship and many other areas – with priorities depending on the specific needs of individual countries. As we take stock of the implementation of the BFA in the Asia-Pacific region, it is also necessary for us to recognize the goals and targets for education in general, and for ALE in particular, established by the global community in the Incheon Declaration, which calls on countries to commit to providing education opportunities for all by 2030, and the global agenda for sustainable development.

It is in keeping with these developments that the 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE)* (UNESCO and UIL, 2016) was conceived. It provides an elaborated definition of ALE, distinguishing three core areas of skills and learning: (a) to equip adults with literacy and basic skills, (b) to provide continuing training and professional development, and (c) to promote active citizenship through what is variously known as community, popular or liberal education. *RALE* acknowledges the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting that

[the] aim of adult learning and education is to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments. It fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects of individuals. It is, therefore, a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies. (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 8)

This elaborated definition and the various dimensions of ALE identified therein form the bases in this paper for assessing the progress made in implementing the BFA in the Asia-Pacific region.

THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: IN CONTEXT

The Asia-Pacific region as a geopolitical entity is not a monolith in terms of its historical evolution, political legacies or contemporary development. It is impossible to express the enormous diversity represented by the

more than 40 countries constituting the region.¹ Asia is both one of the cradles of civilization and, today, host to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. The region is rapidly becoming a leader in ICT, yet has the largest number of illiterates in the world; the record in human development of many countries in the region is hardly creditable. Notwithstanding this paradoxical and confounding state of affairs, expectations of what the region could do are very high.

According to a recent report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2011):

Asia is in the middle of a historic transformation. If it continues to follow its recent trajectory, by 2050 its per capita income could rise six-fold ... [thus making] some 3 billion additional Asians affluent by today's standards. By nearly doubling its share of global gross domestic product (GDP) to 52 percent by 2050, Asia would regain the dominant economic position it held some 300 years ago, before the industrial revolution.

Accordingly, some have dubbed this the 'Asian Century'. But the ADB report also points out that, while this promising outcome is plausible, the region's opportunity to rise to glory comes with several conditions and caveats – the main one being the capacity and readiness of the relevant countries to meet the intellectual challenges involved in the revamping of education.

Indeed, as the ADB notes elsewhere, in the last two decades, the region has experienced impressive economic growth, with the average annual growth rate of GDP for Asia-Pacific developing countries reaching 7 per cent; and growing by an estimated 5.8 per cent in 2015 (ADB, 2016). This sustained growth has lifted living standards across the region, enabling hundreds of millions of people to lead more dignified and productive lives. The number of people living on less than US \$1.25 (in purchasing power parity [PPP] terms) per day, for example, decreased by 950 million – or from 52 per cent of the population to 18 per cent – between 1990 and 2011. This economic growth has provided opportunities for countries to invest in education, healthcare and social welfare programmes (ESCAP, 2015).

But, despite this progress, the rich have got richer at the expense of the poor, and inequalities persist. Educational asymmetry is one of the main causes of this inequality trap, tending to produce intergenerational disadvantage. This is particularly true of countries that have recorded significant development of basic education only during recent years and have yet to grapple with the huge backlog of non-literate and semi-literate youth who are already in the workforce.

Asia and the Pacific region has more than half of the world's population, including nearly 900 million of the world's poor, and 30 per cent of the global land mass. Demographic change in recent years, accompanied by what is often called the demographic dividend, is a major issue that is shaping formal as well as non-formal education, its contents and processes.

In economic terms alone, the region's so-called 'demographic dividend' is already significant, varying among subregions, but accounting for about 42 percent and 39 percent of economic growth in developed and developing Asia-Pacific countries, respectively, between 1970 and 2010. These gains have been accompanied in many cases by significant leaps forward in human development. ... Demographic transition in Asia-Pacific not only involves large numbers of people, but also a pace of change more rapid than seen anywhere before, with particular consequences for societies that will be old long before they will be rich. (UNDP, 2016)

A central message arising out of this demographic phenomenon unfolding in the region is the need to focus more effectively on the educational needs of youth and the working-age population, equipping them with relevant productive and life skills. In fact, this is already reflected in the way youth education as well as ALE is being designed and organized in many countries of the region, with considerable emphasis on creating the ecosystem necessary to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

Education in the region, as elsewhere in the world, is also opening up to non-institutional and non-formal approaches with the ascent of ICTs, which have enormously enhanced individuals' capabilities to learn and

1 The Asia-Pacific region comprises 48 Member States and two Associated Members of UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/worldwide/asia-and-the-pacific/>.

develop. The impact on ALE is palpable, demanding that we reckon with and adapt our policies and practices to the increasing and somewhat unpredictable influence of constantly evolving digital technologies.

Adult learning and education policies and practices should be closely aligned with developments in school education. A quick survey of the state of education in the region reveals that significant progress has been made in providing basic education to all children. However, the achievements are noticeably uneven across sub-regions. For example, around 16 million primary-school-aged children and around 34 million lower-secondary-aged adolescents in the Asia-Pacific region are not in school; two-thirds of these are in South Asia (UIS, 2015). Out-of-school children are an important concern as, barring special intervention, they are likely to remain non-literate as they grow into adulthood.

A review of the progress being made with respect to the six Education for All (EFA) goals shows significant achievements with respect to enrolment in, and completion of, the basic education cycle, as well as in reducing gender disparity (UNESCO Bangkok and Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2015). However, the South Asian sub-region, with a significant number of out-of-school children and relatively low completion rates, has to consolidate the gains and ensure that no child is deprived of basic education. Intra-country disparities are also clearly visible. There is a need to tackle persisting inequalities to ensure that educational programmes are inclusive and cover disadvantaged groups effectively. Particular attention needs to be paid to inequity within education arising out of geographical location, poverty, and social and ethnic affiliations. Quality of education continues to be a central concern in all countries of the region, even as many innovative efforts are being made to address the issue.

Throughout the area, there is an increasing realization that universal provision of primary education brings about reasonable improvement in the overall status of literacy and human development. But it is unlikely that the countries will significantly succeed in reducing poverty and creating a more equitable society without adequately focusing on improving transition to higher levels of learning within the framework of lifelong learning. While primary education is seen as a basic enabling factor for participation and freedom, for leading a life of dignity and overcoming basic deprivation, it is necessary to look beyond

this and strengthen post-primary education, formal and non-formal, which opens the gateway for transforming the economy and establishing social justice in any country, enabling young people to be involved in productive work and contribute to the socio-economic development of the community. Again, this has wider and deeper implications for ALE as, in most developing countries of the region, enrolment in formal higher education is still low; it requires high levels of investment to make formal higher education accessible to all aspirants.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The first CONFINTEA was held in 1949 in the aftermath of the Second World War; this was reflected in the recommendations made for pursuing ALE. Since then, successive conferences have responded to global socio-economic changes in addition to the educational needs of the adult population. The Belém Framework for Action was the outcome of CONFINTEA VI, held in 2009. The conference came at a crucial juncture as the world community had pursued ALE as an integral part of basic education in a mission mode for nearly two decades following the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All.

UIL has carried out three biennial global surveys tracking developments in ALE. The latest one, the third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)*, presents an overview of progress made in implementing BFA at the global level and a thematic review on the role played by ALE in health and well-being. This paper is an attempt to present an overview of the progress made in Asia and the Pacific in implementing various elements of the BFA and the action plan that was developed following the region's CONFINTEA VI Regional Follow-up Meeting in 2013.

The action plan recommended (a) developing knowledge-management systems for the collection, analysis and dissemination of both qualitative and quantitative data and good practice reports to inform policy development and practice; (b) making the case for increased policy, governance and funding for adult education: the benefits of learning; and (c) ensuring that adult learning and education are included in lifelong learning policies through (i) developing or improving the structures and mechanisms for recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning, (ii) promoting community learning centres as a potential model, (iii) relevant content and incentives to motivate participation,

and (iv) providing a common understanding of an operative definition of youth and adult education (UIL, 2013a).

This paper largely uses data from the survey carried out for *GRALE III* and the global database of UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Another major source is the National EFA 2015 Reviews, retrieved from UNESCO archives. It also utilizes a selection of case studies and reports received through personal communications with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the region. The Asia-Pacific region is vast, consisting of 48 countries, but data are not available on all aspects of ALE from all of the countries. For instance, not all countries in the region responded to the *GRALE III* survey questionnaires. Also, EFA review reports are not available from all the countries in the region. The attempt in this report, therefore, is to capture an overview of the situation, delineate broad trends, and review practices, problems and prospects that are illustrative of the progress made and initiatives undertaken in the area of ALE. The paper draws its conceptual anchor from the documents of UNESCO and UIL on adult education, literacy and lifelong learning, as elaborated in CONFINTEA and *GRALE* reports and the Belém Framework for Action. The structure of the report broadly corresponds to sections in *RALE* and the contents of the chapter on monitoring and evaluation in *GRALE III*. Accordingly, the paper looks at the status of literacy, policy, governance, participation, quality and financing of ALE in the region.

1. BASIC LITERACY: THE FOUNDATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Literacy is an indispensable foundation that enables young people and adults to engage in learning opportunities at all stages of the learning continuum. The right to literacy is an inherent part of the right to education. It is a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment. Literacy is an essential means of building people's capabilities to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society.

Belém Framework for Action (UIL, 2010, p. 6)

Literacy, unquestionably, is the core building block of education and for meeting the basic learning needs of all human beings. It is a fundamental right. Given this foundational nature of literacy, it is imperative that every society provides adequate opportunities for acquiring literacy skills to every individual. This has to be done irrespective of age, gender or social class, ethnic, linguistic or any other consideration, both as a human right and as a means for personal and social development. Literacy, indeed, is a communicative resource and a social practice, continuously evolving and closely linked with the community context where it is practised. However, efforts to impart literacy skills cannot be viewed in isolation from the larger education development context. For instance, the nature and intensity of efforts to impart literacy skills in any country also relate to the state of development of formal school education and the effective coverage achieved – poor enrolment and completion of schooling implies larger numbers of adolescents and adults without functional literacy competencies. It is in this context that the BFA presents four key elements in assessing the progress of literacy: (a) focusing on literacy as a continuum, (b) focusing on the learning needs of women and highly disadvantaged population, (c) enabling participants to continue as lifelong learners and (d) creating a literate environment. Reflecting on the recommendations of the BFA, *GRALE II* points out: 'Literacy policy must focus on raising and developing basic skills as a whole and include creating rich literate environments and learning societies' (UIL, 2013a, p. 35).

Keeping these considerations in view, this section attempts to capture the quantitative progress made in

terms of adult literacy levels in different sub-regions and countries of the Asia-Pacific region, relating the observations to the creation of a literate environment. References will also be made to strategies adopted in some of the countries in the region to hasten the process of reaching the goal of literacy for all and the persisting challenges. Special attention will be given to youth literacy as well as gender and social disparities in literacy levels. The analysis will be based on Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, and from the survey carried out for *GRALE III*.

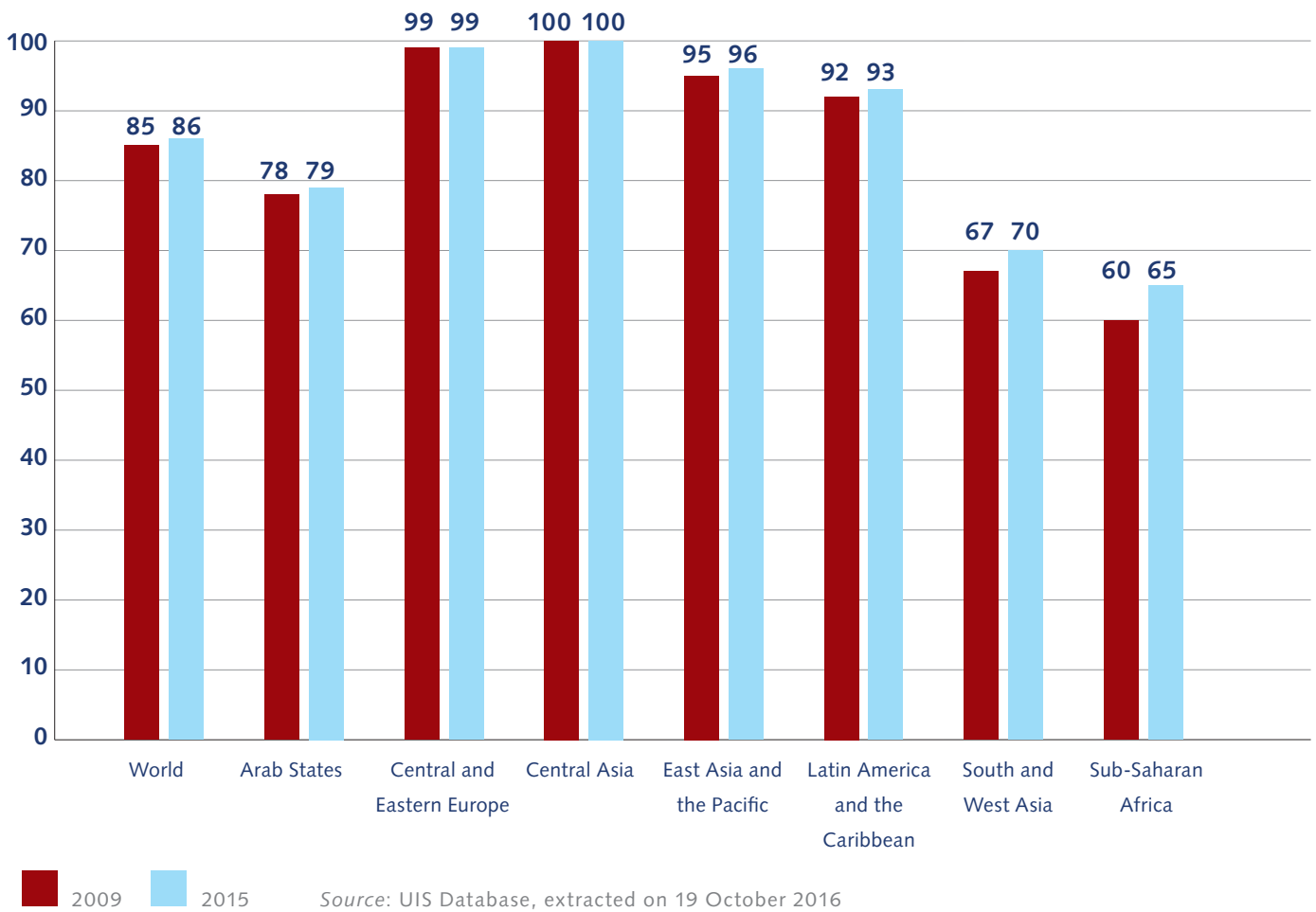
LITERACY RATE

The Dakar declaration on EFA set the goal of achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. Reviewing the situation after 10 years in the Asia-Pacific region, it was observed, 'Despite the necessity of literacy for achieving other development goals, it is the Education for All (EFA) goal that is most unlikely to be achieved by most countries in the Asia-Pacific region by 2015 ... The Asia-Pacific region remains home to the majority of the world's illiterate adult population, accounting for 513 million people, or almost two-thirds (65 per cent). More than half of the world's illiterate adult population (51.8 per cent), or 411 million adults who are illiterate, live in South and West Asia' (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012).

Data for recent years indicate that the number has slightly decreased, and 456 million adults in the Asia-Pacific region remain illiterate. Taking stock of the situation at the global level, the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2015 also points out: 'Since 2000, progress towards EFA's fourth goal has been slower than improvements in other goals, including in primary school access and completion.' A closer look shows that the situation in the Asia-Pacific region remains quite uneven (*Figure 1.1*).

Comparison of the progress made by different regions during the period from 2009 to 2015 brings out two points. First, Central Asia stands out as exemplary, while East Asia and the Pacific sub-region is considerably ahead (10 percentage points) of the world average, which

Figure 1.1: Literacy rates for 15+ population (percentages)



stands at 86 per cent. Data for South and West Asia raise serious concern. It is not only that the sub-region is way behind the world average (by 16 percentage points), but it has also recorded only marginal improvement between 2009 and 2015. Even conceding that the 2015 data are only estimates, it is amply clear that the sub-region has to invest substantially more resources in ALE in general, and adult literacy programmes in particular.

According to UIS estimates, there are still around 758 million adult illiterates in the world, with nearly 63 per cent of them living in Asia – 11 per cent in East and Southeast Asia and around 52 per cent in South Asia. This is a marginal improvement from the previous assessments. In absolute numbers, there has been some reduction. But it still implies that more than six out of 10 illiterates in the world are from Asia. The number in South Asia alone is a whopping 390 million adults. However, the situation is non-uniform across the continent (*Figure 1.2*). If the female literacy rate is taken as the benchmark of progress, 10 countries fall below the world average of 82.6 per cent.

Of these, six, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, are in South Asia, accounting for more than 50 per cent of world illiterates. Seven of the 10 countries are 'least developed countries' (LDCs) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Timor-Leste – even though, in the World Bank classification, some of these are placed in the middle-income category. Even within South Asia, the bulk of the backlog is in three large countries: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Figure 1.2: Male-female literacy rate in Asia-Pacific (15+) 2015 (percentages)

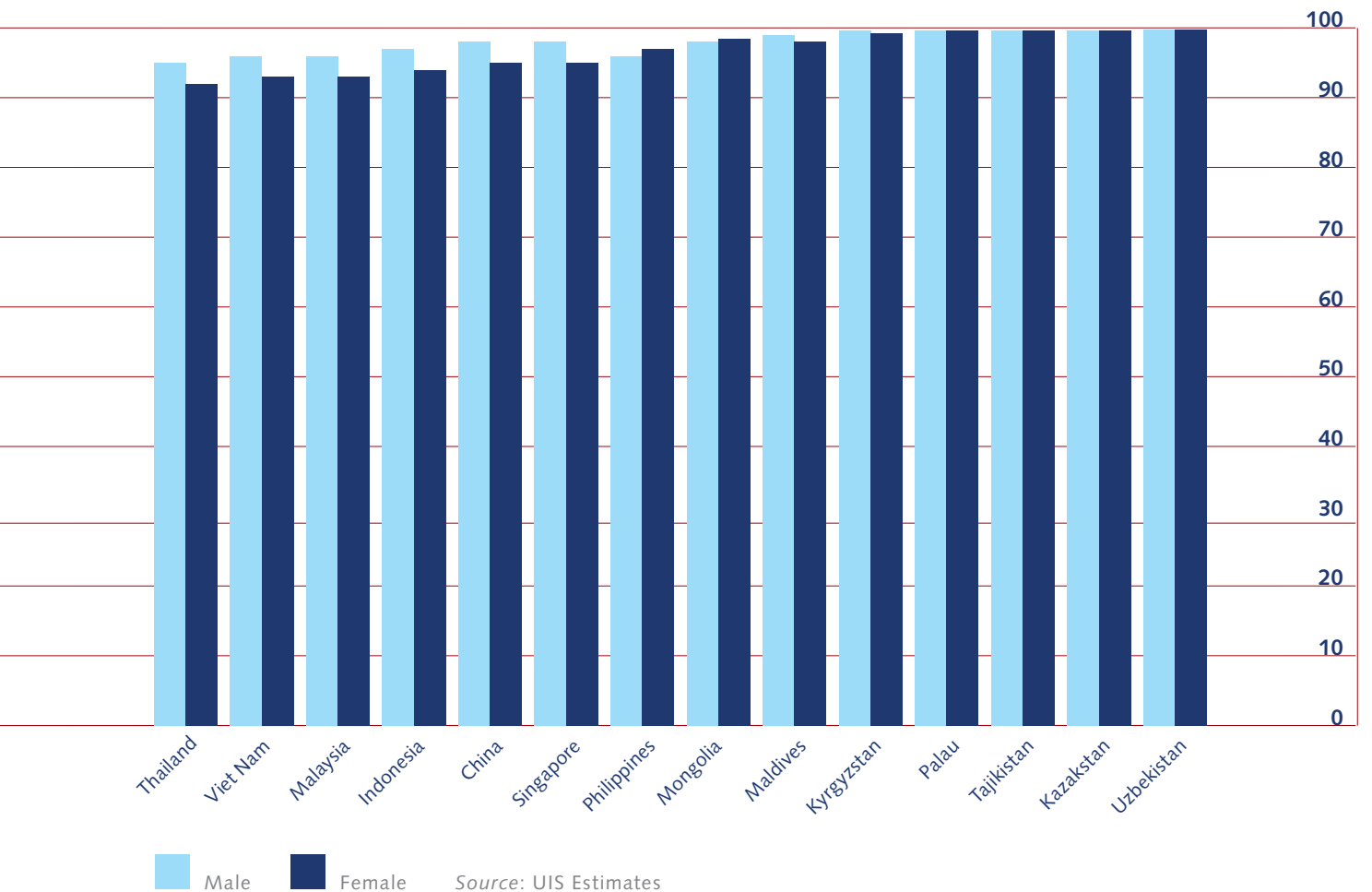
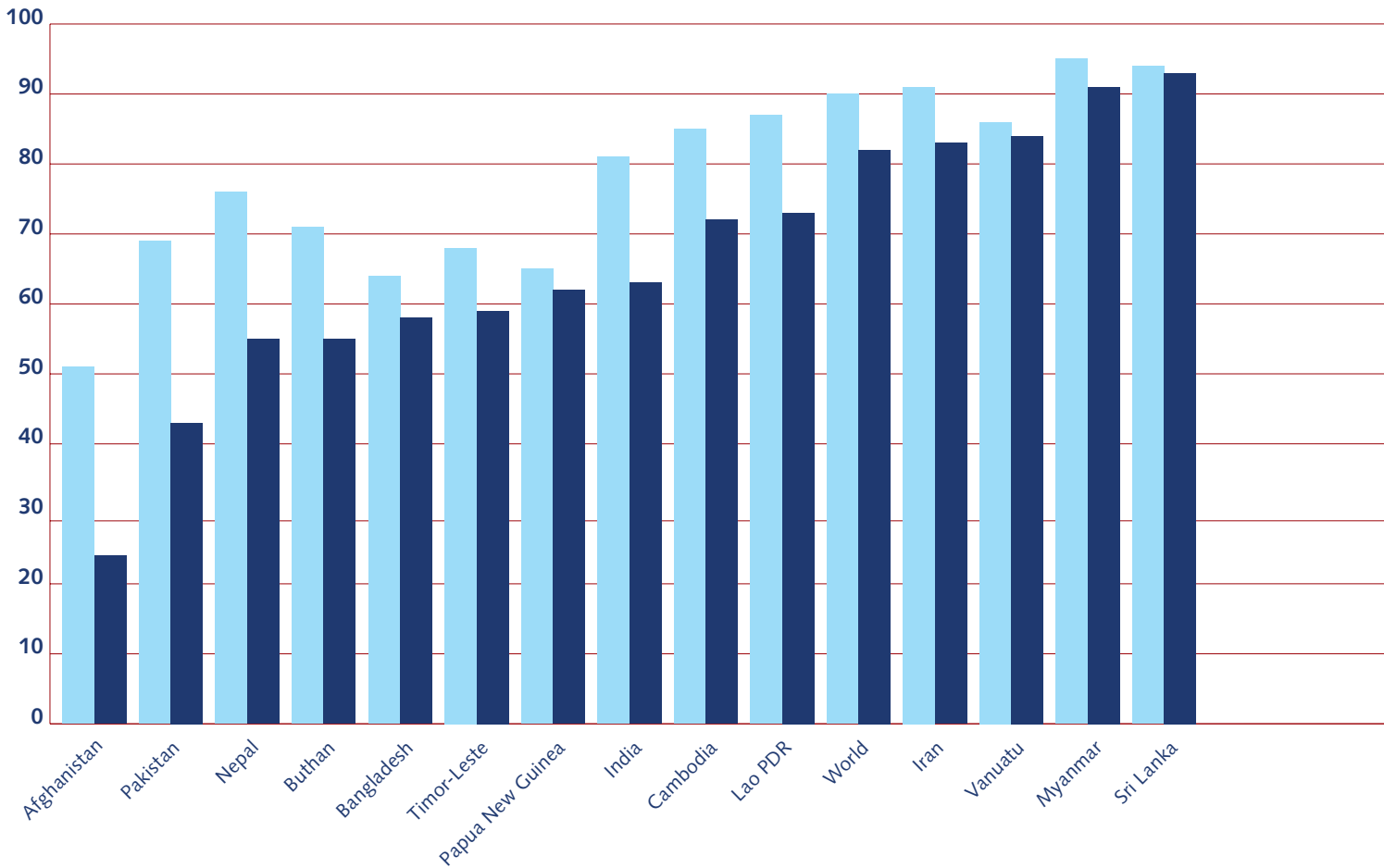
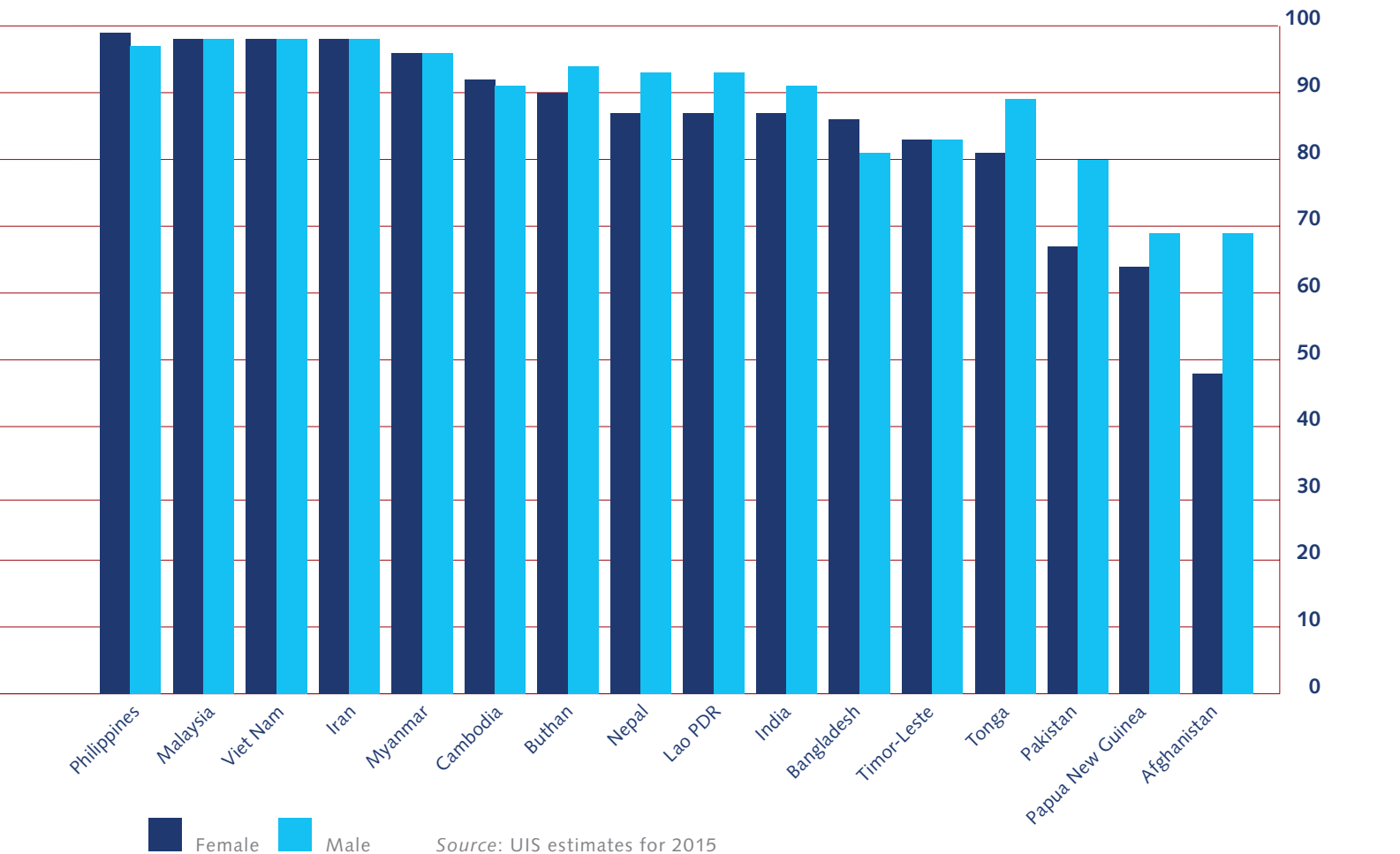
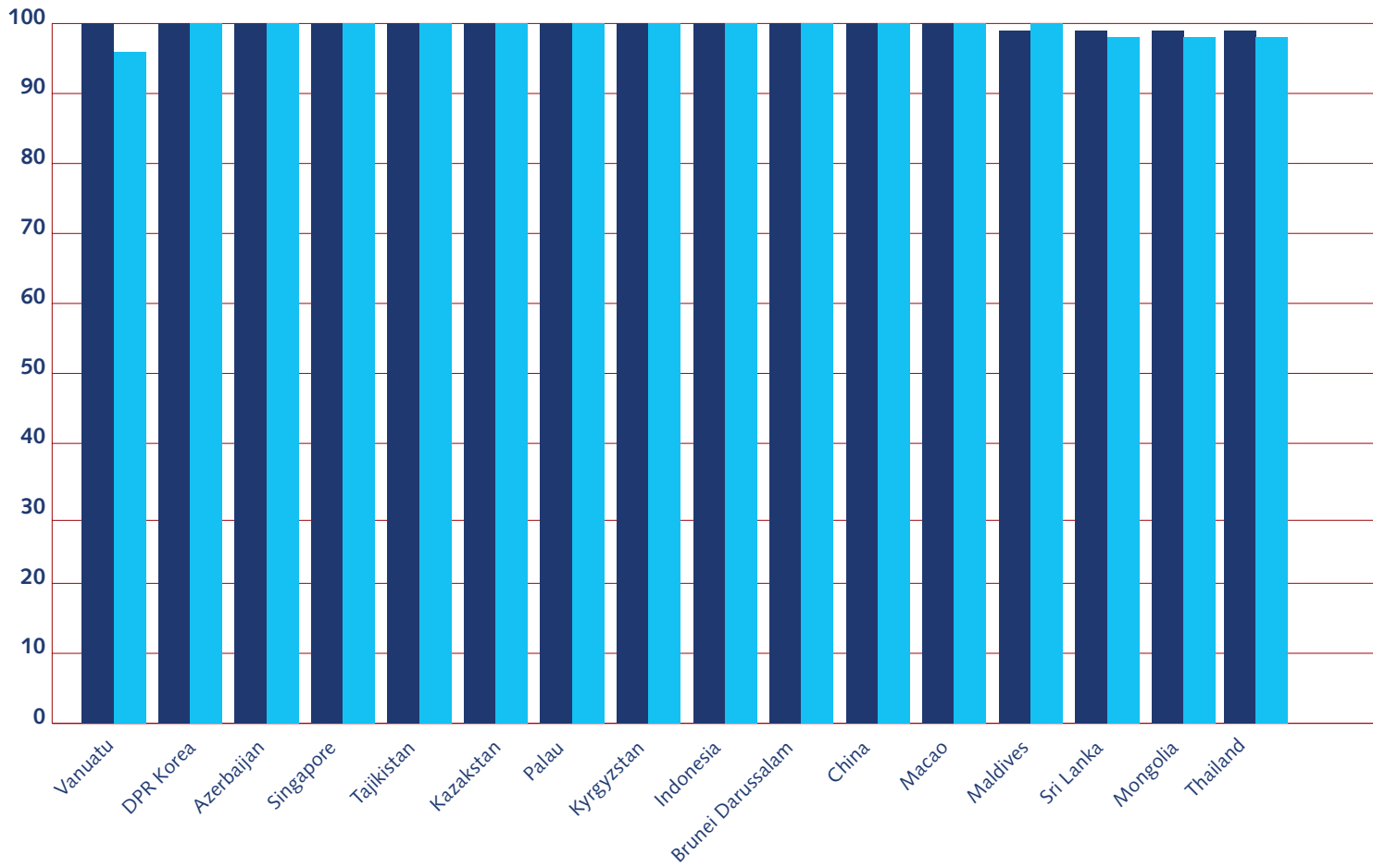


Figure 1.3: Female-male youth literacy rate (15–24 years) in Asia-Pacific



Female Male

Source: UIS estimates for 2015

The Dakar declaration called for the reduction of the illiteracy rate by 50 per cent, and several of these 10 countries have fallen short of the target or have barely made it. Despite this situation, one should not deny the fact that all of these countries have large programmes for imparting basic literacy skills as part of their ALE portfolios, and have indeed made substantial progress during the period under review. However, if the goal is to ensure that every person in the Asia-Pacific possesses basic literacy skills as a foundation for lifelong learning, the burden essentially lies in getting these countries to progress faster.

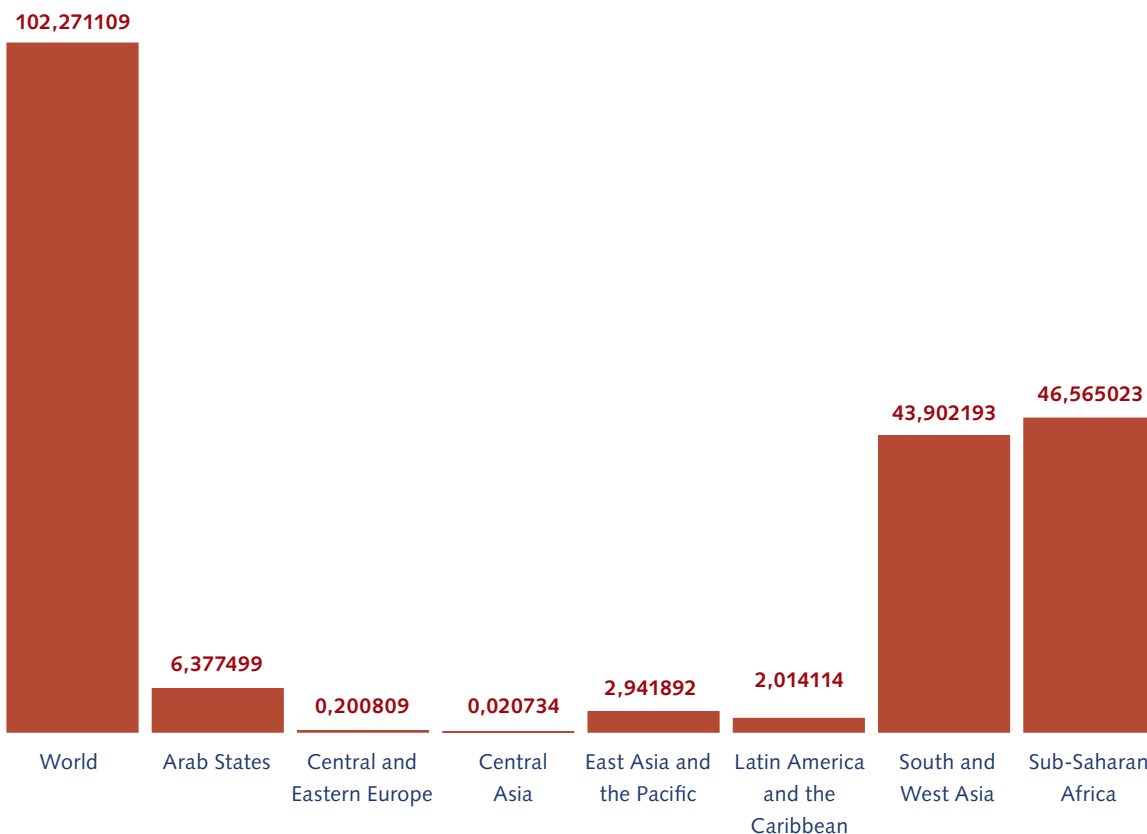
YOUTH LITERACY

Low overall literacy rates could also be linked to the demographic structure of the society in question and the relative importance accorded to specific age groups in organizing literacy programmes. Some countries in the region have given priority to the 15–35 or 15–45 age groups. This may be a strategic move to prioritize the use of limited resources to reach illiterate individuals

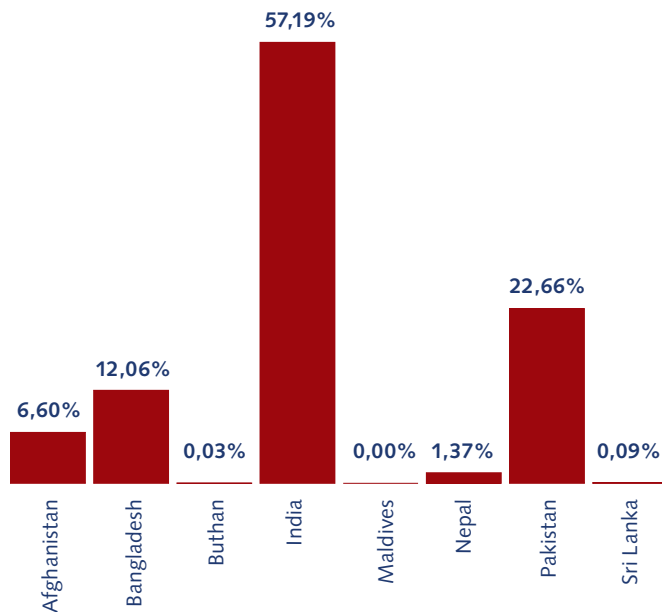
in the productive age group. Further, in countries with poor school-completion rates, the out-of-school children and the school drop-outs will grow to join the literate or semi-literate adult groups if their educational needs are not immediately addressed. It is for this reason that youth literacy rates and the literacy rates of 15 to 25 year olds are good indicators of the effectiveness of the strategies being adopted from a holistic angle spanning both school education and ALE.

It is estimated that around 102 million youth in the world lack basic skills in literacy. This means that around one out of every seven of the 750 million adult illiterates is likely to be a young person who should be in school or college or in early productive working life. It should be a matter of serious concern that such a large number have been left out of the ambit of learning even after the 25 years of intensive advocacy and support for basic education that began with the Jomtien conference in 1990. The Asia-Pacific region hosts a large proportion (46 per cent) of this illiterate youth population (*Figures 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5*).

Figure 1.4: Illiterate youth population (15–24) in different regions



Source: UIS estimate (in millions)

Figure 1.5: Illiterate youth in South Asia

Source: UIS estimate

Within the region, South Asia continues to lag behind in this indicator also. Around 45 per cent of the illiterate youth belong to this sub-region. *Figure 1.5* shows the distribution of the illiterate youth among different countries in South Asia. Again, India has the largest proportion, followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh. Though the share of Afghanistan is relatively low in the region, the literacy rate among the youth in the country is abysmally low. The situation is equally serious in Nepal. The stock and flow of literate youth in any country represents the effectiveness of universal basic education programmes in the preceding decades. In this sense, ensuring that all children enter schools and complete schooling without dropping out is an effective strategy for raising youth literacy levels. In the normal course, youth literacy has to go up with improved school participation and completion, but the situation in the countries that continue to register high levels of out-of-school children warrants special ALE programmes to equip such young persons with the necessary knowledge and skills to enter the world of work and production. Young people who drop out of school early are vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, teen marriage, pregnancy and partaking in risky behaviours. In addition to preventing young people from dropping out of school, alternative learning opportunities that take into account the reasons why they are not in school are needed. These reasons often include income, poverty, gender, disability, family catastrophes, social conflicts and wars, as well as

perceived low market returns for education. The challenge is to give these young people appropriate opportunities to consolidate their basic knowledge and competencies, and equip them with the relevant skills needed to find a job, set up a business or engage in other productive work (UNESCO and UNDESA, n.d).

BRIDGING THE GENDER INEQUITY GAP

Reviewing the progress made during the post-Dakar period, the regional synthesis report on EFA highlights that the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed a substantial reduction in the number of females who are illiterate. Central Asia and East Asia-Pacific succeeded in reducing the size of the female illiterate population by 51 per cent and 31 per cent respectively between 2000 and 2012. Despite this progress, there were still 147 million more women who could not read or write than men in the Asia-Pacific region in 2012 (UNESCO Bangkok and Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2015). While the absolute numbers have come down, data presented in *Figure 1.2* clearly indicate a serious and widespread gender disparity in adult literacy. Several countries with female literacy above the world average still show substantial disparity between male and female literacy rates. In large countries such as China and Indonesia, even when the gender differential is small, it is substantial in absolute numbers. The major problem again lies with 10 countries with female literacy lower than the world average. These countries also show much higher gender disparity. In the case of India, a difference of about 18 percentage points translates into a huge number of female adults without literacy skills.

Progress towards gender parity is quite different among the sub-regions. Central Asia has already achieved gender parity for adult literacy rates, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.00. East Asia and the Pacific had a GPI of 0.96 in 2012. In contrast, the GPI for adult literacy in South and West Asia was very low in 2012 at only 0.70, which has slightly improved to 0.76, according to 2015 estimates. This clearly shows that women continue to be significantly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing and participating in educational opportunities both as children and as adults.

It may be noted, however, that in respect of the youth population of 15–24 years, gender difference is significantly reduced or has disappeared completely. Two countries where gender disparity continues to remain high

even among the youth population are Afghanistan and Pakistan. The performance of Bangladesh in this regard is remarkable, as the male-female difference is reversed in favour of the female youth population. It is difficult to specify precisely the factors that have contributed to significant improvement in gender disparity figures as we move from overall adult literacy rates to youth literacy rates. In their national reports, most of the countries highlight the special attention being paid to disadvantaged groups and women. But some countries, both in East and South Asia, have shown more substantial improvement in reducing disparities in youth literacy figures. This could possibly be the result of increased effectiveness of school education programmes, ensuring higher levels of completion. However, a feature common to countries including Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh in South Asia, and Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia and Thailand in Southeast Asia, is that they have successfully nurtured strong grassroots-level organizations and implemented locally designed programmes through networks of community learning centres.

Even though the data collected at international level do not fully reveal disparities within countries, the disaggregated pictures in several countries reveal significant variation in literacy levels among different social groups, particularly with regard to ethnic minorities and religious and linguistic groups. The majority of those who have remained illiterate belong to disadvantaged sections of society. For instance, despite recent improvements in adult literacy at national level, there are big differences in rates of literacy between social groups and geographical locations in Viet Nam. On average, ethnic minority groups and people who live in rural areas have lower rates of literacy than the national average. The national average adult literacy rate was 89.1 per cent in 2012. However, the rate was only 73.1 per cent for ethnic minorities, which is 16 percentage points less than the national average. A gap is also visible between the rural and urban populations, with an average adult literacy rate in rural areas 7.2 percentage points lower than that in urban areas (UNESCO and MoET, 2015). Similarly, the literacy rate for rural areas in India in 2011 was 62 per cent, as against the overall literacy rate of 69 per cent and an urban literacy rate of 82 per cent.

In order to progress towards creating a literate environment, it is essential that countries carry out programmes that specifically focus on these disadvantaged groups. However, merely achieving basic literacy may not be

enough if the goal is to build a sustainable society with a lifelong learning perspective. Even people who attain literacy in basic education may lose these skills if they cannot access books, newspapers and other written material. Follow-up literacy strategies, such as the expansion of public libraries and of reading and writing practices in daily life, are thus necessary even for young people if they live in remote areas where they risk losing access to reading material addressing their everyday needs (OECD and Statistics Canada, 1995).

MEASURING LITERACY OUTCOMES

The Belém Framework for Action called for 'investing in a process to develop a set of comparable indicators for literacy as a continuum and for adult education' (UIL, 2010, p. 6). Little progress appears to have been made in this regard. Pursuing this agenda involves action on three fronts: first is a conceptual one, involving moving from viewing literacy in dichotomous terms to considering it as a continuum. Most countries in the region, as in other regions, continue to collect information on literacy status using traditional methods such as population censuses, household surveys and educational attainment, which are largely based on conceptualization of literacy in dichotomous terms, classifying persons as literate or illiterate. However, there are increasing efforts at national levels to conduct specific literacy surveys that involve the direct measurement (testing) of literacy skills.

Box 1.1

Assessment and certification of adult learners

India has adopted an innovative concept of 'Certified Literate', based on a transparent assessment and certification system designed and operationalized in collaboration with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). This innovative practice has spurred demand for literacy, made the outcomes of the programme measurable, and significantly enhanced overall credibility of the programme. Under this assessment and certification system, biannual assessments are conducted in Gram Panchayats (village clusters) in the months of August and March every year. On behalf of the National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA), NIOS oversees the integrity of the entire process.

Learners are assessed in reading, writing, arithmetic skills and general awareness, including that of social issues and one's work-life environment, through written summative tests in the local language. Only an adult who conforms to prescribed competency levels is certified as literate and awarded a certificate jointly by NLMA and NIOS. The entire information is placed in the public domain and can be accessed at the NIOS portal: www.nios.ac.in. This system has helped in generating enormous confidence in neo-literates and has opened up to them avenues for vertical mobility in basic education.

The second requirement is technical in nature. This involves identifying indicators and constructing tests that could be used across the multi-linguistic and multicultural terrains that characterize many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Some countries in the region have attempted to address this task, at least in an elementary fashion, by constructing national-level tests and trying them out. For instance, Lao PDR conducted literacy tests and compared the findings to literacy rates from the traditional self-reporting technique in 2015. It was found that the reported adult literacy rate was as high as 98.8

per cent while the outcome of testing showed it to be only 61.3 per cent. Such efforts have brought a greater realization of the need to transit from self-reporting to testing if reliable assessment is to be made. While these are innovative exercises, often supported by external resources as well as expertise, it is unlikely that most countries in the region would embrace this as the standard practice for fixing national literacy rates.

The third requirement is organizational and financial. The logistics of conducting periodic surveys involving direct testing require a large network of institutional arrangements on the ground, with adequate technical capacity to carry out the exercise. Again, many countries lack organizational networks with the technical capability to conduct a literacy test. Besides, this would involve huge expenditure. In this regard, India is trying out an innovative solution involving the National Institute of Open Schooling, which has technical expertise in testing and also a ready-made organizational network in the field (see *Box 1.1*). These are, of course, unique requirements and each country has to find a creative way of addressing the issue. Often, countries that already face difficulties in raising resources for conducting ALE programmes will have to resolve the dilemma of whether to spend resources on testing or in expanding and intensifying field programmes.

2. TRANSFORMATION OF ALE POLICY: A GRADUAL PHENOMENON

Policies and legislative measures for adult education need to be comprehensive, inclusive and integrated within a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective, based on sector-wide and inter-sectoral approaches, covering and linking all components of learning and education. To these ends, we commit ourselves to: (a) developing and implementing fully-costed policies, well-targeted plans and legislation for addressing adult literacy, education for young people and adults, and lifelong learning; (b) designing specific and concrete action plans for adult learning and education which are integrated into MDG, EFA and UNLD, as well as other national and regional development plans, and with LIFE activities where those exist; [...] (d) establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms, such as monitoring committees involving all stakeholders active in adult learning and education; (e) developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning by establishing equivalency frameworks.

Belém Framework for Action (UIL, 2010, p. 7)

ALE POLICY: GLOBAL BACKDROP

From the time of the first CONFINTEA in 1949, ALE has witnessed clearly discernible conceptual and definitional shifts, moving from adult education to adult learning and functional literacy; basic literacy to multiple literacy; literacy rate to literacy as a continuum; and adult education to lifelong learning. The changes have been gradual and overlapping and continue to coexist in global and national policy statements as well as academic discourses. This should not be a surprise. By its very nature, ALE is dynamic and social context-specific; it is continuously shaped and reshaped by changing development perspectives, technological changes and real-life experiences of people.

In this evolutionary process, the definitional statements issued by UNESCO have played a significant role in reforming the ALE scene in many countries, including those of the Asia-Pacific region. In the early periods following the first CONFINTEA, adult education was promoted as a means of achieving international peace and understanding; however, the Jomtien Declaration, adopted 40 years later, made adult literacy and continuing education an integral part of the expanded vision of basic education as a fundamental human right. Ten years later, two of the six goals in Dakar Declaration explicitly referred to education of youth and adults, making universal adult literacy a prominent component of EFA. The continuous monitoring and evaluation process initiated after the Jomtien Conference in 1990, and further institutionalized after the Dakar Conference in 2000 through Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs), have helped reshape ALE with improved understanding of realities on the ground. In this process of drawing and redrawing the definitional contours of ALE, the statistical digests and qualitative assessments made by UNESCO have played a significant role.² Whatever the meaning and definitions adopted in different countries may be, and whatever nomenclature used, 'adult learning and education' has become integral to education policies and practices all over the world.

The BFA's recommendations for formulating national policies on ALE are based not only on contemporary discourses but also on progress achieved and the experiences and concerns of different countries as revealed by the assessment of EFA presented in successive GMR reports. Following CONFINTEA VI in 2009, ALE became subject to further review and re-examination as part of the World Education Forum 2015 (WEF, 2015). This marked the end of the 15-year period following the Dakar Declaration and culminated in the adoption of the Incheon Declaration, a new vision for education that was fully congruent with the goals of the Agenda

² For a comprehensive review of adult education in UNESCO documents, see Juan Ignacio Martínez de Morentin de Goñi, *What Is Adult Education?* UNESCO Answers, UNESCO Centre, San Sebastian, 2006. For a review of changing place of literacy in UNESCO, see Daniel A. Wagner, *What Happened to Literacy? Historical and Conceptual Perspectives on Literacy in International Journal of Educational Development* 31 (2011) 319–323.

for Sustainable Development. The vision states: ‘We further commit to ensuring that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, achieve relevant and recognized functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels and acquire life skills, and that they are provided with adult learning, education and training opportunities.’

This unequivocally endorses the perspective adopted in the BFA and further elaborated in *RALE* (UNESCO and UIL, 2016):

[the] aim of adult learning and education is to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments. It fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects of individuals. It is, therefore, a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies.

As we review the progress made in implementation of BFA recommendations six years after its adoption, it is important to recognize the impact of these historical and contemporary developments in shaping national policies on ALE.

ALE POLICY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

It is self-evident that, to be relevant, ALE policies have to be sensitive to and be closely aligned with national and local contexts in terms of cultural, social and economic characteristics, and responsive to the immediate concerns and problems of the people. As range and diversity increases, variety in national ALE policies also increases. This, indeed, is the reality with regard to ALE policies in the Asia-Pacific region. With this initial caveat, this report will attempt to find some cross-cutting trends in definitions of national ALE policies in different countries of the region.

OFFICIALLY STATED POLICY ON ALE AND LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT

Adult education programmes are an integral part of the education system in almost all countries in the region and, with a few exceptions, all the countries have an officially stated policy on ALE. This is clearly evident from the *GRALE* survey responses as well as the EFA review reports³ prepared in 2015. In the *GRALE III* survey conducted in 2015-16, 71 per cent of countries in the region reported having an officially stated policy on ALE. Some countries have separate policies and legislation related to ALE, while in most countries they are part of the overall education policy documents. For instance, ALE policy appears as part of Afghanistan's National Education Strategy Paper II, 2007–2013. Similarly, it can be found in the Lao PDR Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP 2011–2015) and 20-year Education Strategic Vision (2001–2020) with the handle ‘Non-Formal Education Policy’. India has a separate ‘National Mission’ with a well-articulated policy related to ALE. In Bangladesh, in addition to a national policy, a non-formal education law – the Non-Formal Education Act 2014, which aims to strengthen the legal framework for promoting non-formal and continuing education – has been recently enacted to guide implementation of the policy.

The way in which policy goals are specified is, in most cases, an important indicator of how committed to ALE the political leadership of a country is. When ALE policies are not fully secured through constitutional or legal commitments, ALE programmes tend to be narrowly conceived as short-term projects to be pursued depending on the availability of resources.

POLICY ORIENTATION AND EMPHASIS

A closer look at the policy specifications of different countries reveals varying emphases in the nature and scope of ALE implied by the policies (see *Table 2.1*). One major component of ALE policies across most countries of the region is a continuing emphasis on reducing adult illiteracy. Reference to literacy is found even in an educationally advanced country such as the Republic of Korea,⁴ but reducing illiteracy appears as the major concern in

³ These can be accessed through the UNESCO Bangkok online archives.

⁴ National report submitted for the *GRALE III* (UIL, 2016) survey: <http://uil.unesco.org/adult-education/global-report-on-adult-learning-and-education/national-reports-grALE-3>.

several countries of the South Asia sub-region. This is understandable as several of them, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, continue to have a very large population of adult illiterates. A second policy component, common across many countries, is the emphasis on linking ALE to income-generating activities, employment and entrepreneurship skills and poverty-reduction strategies. While some countries, such

as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Nepal, have aligned their literacy and non-formal education (NFE) policies and strategies with their poverty-reduction strategies, Lao PDR, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea have also developed policies and strategies for promoting literacy and NFE programmes that focus on increasing local participation and linking literacy programmes to other development issues, including income generation.

Table 2.1: Policy statements excerpted or derived from official documents of selected countries in the region

Afghanistan	The Education Law calls for the provision of 'literacy and basic education' for the 'illiterate and less literate' with a view to acquiring vocational skills and as a preparation for continuing education. It urges the state to devise and implement effective programmes to create and foster balanced education for women, improve the education of nomads and eliminate illiteracy in the country. The Education Law emphasizes the right to education: 'The citizens of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan have equal right to education without any kind of discrimination.'
Bangladesh	The National Non-formal Education Policy 2006 and Non-formal Education Act 2014 provide a framework to guide activities and priorities in non-formal education for large numbers of out-of-school children and youth as well as adults in need of literacy and continuing-education opportunities.
Bhutan	Bhutan has developed a policy with multiple objectives to provide ALE to different groups through different programmes, including programmes to: enhance vocational and rural development skills to generate income to sustain rural livelihood; contribute to fulfilling the gross national happiness (GNH) and other conventional goals; institute an equivalency programme for promoting lifelong learning; provide opportunities to enhance academic qualifications and upgrade employment profiles through continuing education programmes; and promote the national language through a literacy programme.
India	The Saakshar Bharat Mission envisions a 'fully literate society through improved quality and standard of adult education and literacy'. The main goals of the mission, to be achieved by 2017, are: (a) raising literacy levels to 80 per cent (from 73 per cent in 2011);
Indonesia	Policy in Indonesia aims to: (a) provide basic and entrepreneurship literacy programmes; (b) increase the availability of literacy services for the adult population without discrimination in terms of age, geographic location, culture, language, race, gender or ethnicity; (c) reach the unreached, particularly those in remote, coastal and mountain communities, as well as ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups; (d) increase literacy for women and communities disadvantaged due to socio-culture, economy and geography; (e) empower literacy learners so that they can adapt to changes in society and the working world; and (f) upgrade the quality of literacy learning integrated with life skills (personal, social, academic and vocational), so learners have a chance to increase their income or gain a dignified profession.

Table 2.1: Policy statements excerpted or derived from official documents of selected countries in the region

Malaysia	Reducing adult illiteracy and continuous adult education is part of an overall effort to eradicate poverty and reduce social and economic inequalities in Malaysian society. Adult learning refers to learning engaged in by people aged 15 and above, with the exception of full-time students. Adult learning and education is synonymous with lifelong learning in Malaysia.
Nepal	The policy framework in Nepal comprehensively addresses literacy, life-skills education and continuous learning through a common set of priorities. The first priority is to ensure literacy for all, especially for girls and women, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged castes and ethnic groups. The second is to go beyond the traditional notion of literacy to equip participants with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to attain quality in life. This includes establishing linkages in income-generation programmes in other sectors as well as addressing the root causes of deprivation and illiteracy. The third priority, as reflected in this policy framework, is to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Non-formal Education Center and community learning centres, with a view to planning and monitoring non-formal education and literacy programmes across the country.
New Zealand	In March 2014, New Zealand's new Tertiary Education Strategy 2014–2019 was launched to guide tertiary education investment and the actions needed from government, tertiary education organizations, business and the wider community to significantly improve tertiary education outcomes. Adult literacy and numeracy is one of the strategic priorities for this strategy.
Philippines	A parallel learning system in the Philippines provides a practical alternative to existing formal instruction. For those who do not have or cannot access formal school education, the Alternative Learning System is an alternate pathway that includes both non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills. It is intended for out-of-school children, youth and adults who lack basic and functional literacy skills and knowledge.
Republic of Korea	In the Republic of Korea, the term 'lifelong education' is, in practice, used as an alternative term for adult learning and education. The Constitution of Republic of Korea states: 'The State shall promote lifelong education' (Article 31.5). The Lifelong Education Act of the Republic of Korea defines 'lifelong education' as 'all types of systematic educational activities other than regular school education, including scholastic ability supplementing education, adult literacy education, education for the enhancement of vocational abilities, education for humanities and liberal arts, education for cultural arts, education for citizenship, etc.' The Lifelong Education Act indicates literacy education as one of the six main areas of lifelong education.
Thailand	The key policy in Thailand promotes the development of life skills, defined as attributes or social and psychological capabilities that aid a person in responding effectively to everyday situations and that enable them to lead a healthy and ethically grounded life. The necessary components of life skills include decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, judgement, developing effectiveness, building inter-personal relations, self-awareness, understanding and sympathy, emotional control and stress management. It defines literacy as the ability to speak, read and write words and sentences with understanding and to apply this ability in various situations. The policy aims to continually raise the literacy level, to ensure that all young people and adults are able to read and write, have basic knowledge of numeracy as well as science and technology, and can use this knowledge in their daily lives.

YOUTH EDUCATION AND ALE

Imparting productive skills linked to the expanding demands of the market economy is another trend characterising policy in several countries; this is particularly focused on addressing the educational needs of the growing population of youth seeking gainful employment, on the one hand, and meeting the changing nature of the workplace in the emerging knowledge society, on the other. For instance, the Indian policy states:

Although the thrust of adult education in India has been on adult literacy, mainly due to the massive numbers of non-literates, the emergence of knowledge economy, challenges of globalization, tremendous expansion of Information and Communication Technology and increasing lifespan of individuals call for a major shift in the adult education policy and programmes. In the present technology-driven knowledge-based competitive economy, even the basic ability to read and write with understanding is not enough; adults need to learn to manage information and knowledge in a critical and reasonable manner, learn to search, identify, evaluate, select, and use information and knowledge wherever they are available: print, mass media, or the Internet.⁵

It is from this angle that many countries in the region view ALE policy and youth education policy as closely linked, even though some of them have independent policy statements on youth education and skill development.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF ALE OUTCOMES

Most of the countries in the region have a policy framework for officially recognizing outcomes of ALE programmes. This is, in general, done through establishing equivalence between the curriculum of ALE programmes and those of specified grades in formal schools and colleges. Combining skill development programmes for youth with ALE has given a further fillip to this trend. Several countries in the region have developed a national-level skill/qualification framework for establishing such equivalence between NFE and formal programmes of learning. In some countries, such as the Philippines,

this has evolved into a fully fledged alternative channel of education alongside the formal system of schooling. The recently adopted NFE Act 2014 in Bangladesh provides clear recognition for such equivalence between formal and non-formal qualifications. This is a critical dimension of ALE policy as it facilitates more inclusive participation, ensures equitable access to learning opportunities for all and helps to overcome possible discrimination in the employment market.

ALE IN A LIFELONG LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

Lifelong learning is gradually emerging as the overall policy paradigm in education in most countries of the region, and the policy documents issued by the respective national governments reflect this. For instance, a policy document titled *Main Directions of Lifelong Education* was officially approved by the Mongolian Ministry of Education and Science in 2013. However, reflection of this perspective in terms of governance mechanisms, curricular programmes, assessment of outcomes and a monitoring framework is yet to materialize. ALE still remains largely isolated from mainstream efforts in the education sector. Ensuring access to lifelong learning opportunities in an integrated perspective still remains a key challenge. Embracing a lifelong and life-wide perspective for addressing the learning needs of all, irrespective of age, social category or mode of delivery, requires more comprehensive policy measures. Legislative measures such as the Lifelong Education Act in the Republic of Korea come close to such an effort (*Box 2.1* overleaf). This, however, cannot be a mere top-down decision. Such a policy has to be crafted and implemented with the full support and participation of all stakeholders.

⁵ National report submitted for *GRALE III* (UIL, 2016)

Box 2.1

**Stakeholder participation in policy-making for ALE:
The case of the Republic of Korea**

Under the terms of the Lifelong Education Law, the Korean government established a number of consultative bodies responsible for developing and implementing national policies for lifelong education. These consultative bodies include the Lifelong Education Promotion Committee (central government level), the Municipal/Provincial Lifelong Education Promotion Committees (provincial or municipal level) and the Local Lifelong Education Promotion Committee (district or community level). The Lifelong Education Promotion Committee is chaired by the minister of education and is composed of vice-ministerial-level government officials, the president of the National Institute for Lifelong Education, and experts appointed by the committee chair. It is given the responsibility to deliberate on, coordinate, analyse and evaluate national lifelong education policies. At the municipal/provincial and district/community level, the Regional Lifelong Education Committee must involve the participation of not only the heads of regional governments but also regional policy-makers, so that each region can discuss and decide its own lifelong education policies. Under the decentralized policy system of the Republic of Korea, even though central government develops the basic policy framework and policy agendas in lifelong learning, it is the local departments that carry out the detailed policy tasks developed by the central government in accordance with local needs. Therefore, various opinions from each level of government and external experts converge through conferences and in-depth discussions with policy advisory committees in the development of national lifelong education policy plans.

Source: UIL, 2016, p. 38.

3. GOVERNANCE OF ALE: TOWARDS CONVERGENCE AND COORDINATION

Good governance facilitates the implementation of adult learning and education policy in ways which are effective, transparent, accountable and equitable. Representation by and participation of all stakeholders are indispensable in order to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of all learners, in particular the most disadvantaged.

Belém Framework for Action (UIL, 2010, p. 7)

It is a common observation that many policy statements merely remain on paper as statements of intent and find no reflection in reality. In fact, the real value of a policy in any aspect of education development can be realized only when it is translated into practicable programme designs supported by an efficient governance mechanism, implemented successfully in the field and monitored continuously for its effectiveness in impacting on the life of the people. While most countries in the region have an official ALE policy, and lifelong learning is emerging as the overarching framework for ALE, the question arises: do they have a governance system with a well-designed organizational structure and adequate financial resources? The BFA underscores the need for creating a robust arrangement for governance of ALE: 'Good governance facilitates the implementation of adult learning and education policy in ways which are effective, transparent, accountable and equitable.' It calls for 'creating and maintaining mechanisms for the involvement of public authorities at all administrative levels, civil society organizations, social partners, the private sector, community and adult learners' and educators' organizations in the development, implementation and evaluation of adult learning and education policies and programmes.'

Building a stable and effective governance system for formulating and implementing programmes of ALE gains special importance as ALE programmes in many countries have traditionally been implemented only through short-term projects, often dependent exclusively on civil society organizations. Adopting lifelong learning as the core idea encompassing the whole education system, as advocated by the Agenda for Sustainable Development, also underscores the need for a stable system to promote ALE. Has there been any effort, post-BFA, to revamp the

system of governance? It is difficult to respond decisively on this as changes in the ALE sector take shape slowly over a period of time in most countries of the region.

Institutional arrangements for governance of ALE in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region at the national level are within the ministry of education, though under different names – non-formal education, adult education and literacy, and lifelong learning. The nature of these arrangements, the organizational set-up under them and the way in which they are created also vary, impinging on the governance framework from national to field level. In some cases, as in Thailand, the Republic of Korea and, more recently, Bangladesh, these bodies are created through legislation that ensures greater stability of the structures and the functions expected of them.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNANCE OF ALE

The education department plays the lead role in governance of ALE in all the Asia-Pacific region countries. However, invariably, several other ministries and government departments, such as labour, health, agriculture, gender, culture, sports and leisure, and social welfare are involved in designing and implementing ALE programmes. In addition, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, social movements, faith-based organizations, social partners, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, and other private actors also are involved to various degrees in many countries, making ALE governance a complex challenge. In many countries, youth education and ALE are considered within a common framework, making it even more complicated, adding more ministries and departments as well as different sets of NGOs. Examining the situation nearly three years after the adoption of the BFA, *GRALE II* distinguished between three types of arrangements: (a) only governmental institutions involved in planning, implementing and evaluating policies for adult literacy and adult education; (b) mixed involvement of governmental and non-governmental bodies; and (c) only non-governmental institutions involved. It was found that a large majority of countries in Asia and the Pacific adopt a mixed model, and a number of countries seem to be primarily

dependent on non-governmental organizations. Japan, Mongolia and Malaysia are examples of countries where the national government plays the dominant role in ALE governance. In Japan, the Ministry of Education, with its Lifelong Learning Bureau and the National Institute for Educational Policy Research, leads policy implementation in adult education. In Mongolia, the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education assumes responsibility, and in Malaysia, the Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Higher Education implements adult literacy and adult education policies at the national level. Afghanistan, Bangladesh and New Zealand illustrate the mixed-model category.

In Afghanistan, in addition to the Ministry of Education, seven other ministries are responsible for national policy implementation in adult literacy. Another example of a wide sharing of responsibilities at both national and sub-national levels is Indonesia, which, in addition to involving several national ministries, has delegated authority for adult literacy to 33 provincial, and many more municipal, governments, and to a variety of non-governmental organizations. In Bangladesh, while there is strong involvement by several ministries in adult literacy, many larger non-governmental institutions play an equally important role in policy implementation (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, the Campaign for Popular Education, Friends in Village Development Bangladesh, Caritas Bangladesh, Nijera Kori and the Centre for Mass Education in Science). In New Zealand, apart from the Ministry of Education and other national ministries, the Tertiary Education Commission, the National Qualifications Authority, the Department of Corrections, the police force and the defence forces are involved in implementing adult literacy and adult education policy with the support of a strong coalition of stakeholders from non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Papua New Guinea is an example of a country where the governance of ALE is predominantly in the hands of non-governmental organizations.

Some countries have further reformed and/or strengthened their governance arrangements for ALE in recent years.⁶ With a view to programme implementation and monitoring, the Indian Government, in collaboration with the National Institute of Open Schooling, has created a

system of assessment of learners (see *Box 1.1*). Korea recently conducted a Lifelong Learning Individual Status Survey to make programme design and implementation more need-specific and to facilitate more effective follow-up and impact assessment.

In Mongolia, where the national government has the main responsibility for ALE, the non-formal educational system has been expanded as lifelong education focused mainly on ALE through non-formal means, human resources for management have been enhanced and the former National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education has been expanded to become the National Centre for Lifelong Education. Also, lifelong education centres have been established in every provincial centre.

Malaysia, meanwhile, has set up both a coordinating technical committee as well as a steering committee on lifelong learning and ALE for the nation which includes 14 other ministries and agencies that provide lifelong learning programmes. These coordinating bodies, chaired by the Secretary General (technical committee) and the Minister of Education (steering committee), set the policy framework and direction for the nation's lifelong learning agenda. In addition, in order to help with monitoring, a nationwide directory on available lifelong learning programmes has been prepared and shared among the relevant ministries and agencies; this also provides the public with easy access to information on lifelong learning programmes according to their demand.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR ALE

With increasing diversity in programmes as well as in participants, many countries are in the process of creating the systematic information base necessary for planning and monitoring the functioning of programmes and their outcomes and impact. Access by the general public to information on the programmes is also considered essential for optimal utilization of the services provided. This is found to be particularly important where the mixed model of governance is adopted, involving a number of NGOs besides government agencies. For instance, as part of strengthening the implementation mechanism at the field level, the Philippines conducted a massive mapping exercise in 2014 through the Abot-Alam Program,

⁶ National reports submitted to *GRALE III* (UIL, 2016)

identifying around 1.9 million out-of-school youth and adults who would be given needs-based educational intervention. In the Republic of Korea, providing learning opportunities and related information to Korean people at all times is considered essential to the construction of a lifelong learning society. Thus, new policies and projects such as K-MOOC for providing nationwide massive open online course (MOOC) services, and Damoa Lifelong Education Information Network, which collects and distributes information on lifelong education from all provincial and municipal governments across the country, are being promoted, and the government budget allocation to these projects is increasing.

CONVERGENCE AND COORDINATION

ALE programmes, unlike the formal system of schooling, do not fit into a monolithic standardized system. In order to be responsive to local needs, ALE has almost always been implemented in the form of short-term projects. However, with the adoption of a lifelong learning framework, countries are gradually moving towards a more stable system with a programmatic approach. But moving from a project management perspective to system-building requires that personnel entrenched in the management practices of the formal school system be reoriented, with new capacities and attitudinal shifts. Further, convergence efforts across ministries have to become a standard feature as monothematic literacy projects give way to multi-sectoral engagements for lifelong learning and skills building suitable for a knowledge-intensive world of life and work. This will definitely be a slow process. However, many countries in the region are making serious efforts in this direction. Some countries address this issue by establishing inter-departmental and inter-ministerial committees, as has been done in Malaysia. Another approach adopted is to create coordination mechanisms for specific projects or programmes. For instance, the Literacy for Life Skills and Entrepreneurship programme in Indonesia has set up an effective mechanism at the national level, guiding the development of networking and partnership across sectors, involving coordination of five ministries, governors of 33 provinces, several civil society partners and the UNESCO National Commission. But, in most countries, this happens only informally through peer interaction among field-workers and implementing agencies. It has to be noted that no standardized framework with pre-specified mechanisms could be imposed, considering the variety and diversity involved in ALE programmes. However, proper coordination mechanisms,

not only at the national level but also at provincial and field levels, are imperative for ensuring efficiency as well as transparency and accountability.

DECENTRALIZATION AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

A basic principle of governance, endorsed by the Belém Framework for Action, is that there should be wide-ranging participation by all stakeholders to guarantee responsiveness to the needs of learners, in particular those in a situation of disadvantage (UIL, 2016, p. 38). Sixty-five per cent of countries from the Asia-Pacific region participating in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey reported that the government has consulted stakeholders and civil society about the formulation, implementation and evaluation of ALE policies since 2009. This is important, as ALE programmes in most of the countries in the region take place at the local level either through local institutions created by the government, or through local NGOs, or through a collaborative arrangement between them. Therefore, participatory decision-making on the nature of programmes and their implementation involving various local stakeholders is essential for effective delivery and impact. For such participation to be meaningful, it becomes necessary to decentralize relevant decision-making authority and responsibility to local stakeholders functioning in a collective manner. When the devolution or delegation of administrative and financial powers is significant and substantive, the community enjoys a sense of ownership and control over the management and co-ordination of activities. Programmes are then likely to be more relevant to the lives of members of the community and, therefore, more sustainable and effective (Ahmed, 2009).

Thailand provides an example of decentralized governance: Non-formal education (NFE) activities are decentralized through regional NFE centres, provincial centres and community learning centres. Communities have responsibility for identifying learning demand and facilitating access to courses or other learning activities. NFE courses are initiated faster and decisions are taken without delay because administrative and financial power lies in the hands of the community (Thai National Commission for UNESCO and Ministry of Education, Government of Thailand, 2015).

In fact, several countries in the region are beginning to decentralize powers to facilitate involvement of local

stakeholders in a substantive manner.⁷ For instance, in Nepal, non-formal education centres are given the authority to formulate NFE curricula to address local needs, based on broad guidelines given along with financial resources. The Lifelong Education Act of Korea gives responsibility to local government to promote and provide funding for lifelong learning in their respective regions. As a direct result of this, local governments in cities, counties and districts have emerged as financial providers for lifelong learning. Bhutan, while being a small country, has nevertheless decentralized NFE instructors' recruitment, establishment and management of budget.

In some countries, national-level institutions with professional expertise in the area are involved to facilitate consultation among stakeholders. For instance, in Nepal, the non-formal education centre is a focal point for policy formulation, implementation and monitoring of non-formal learning activities. It consults civil society and other stakeholders regarding the formulation of policies specifically related to non-formal adult education. The state resource centres for adult education in India play a similar role.

ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

There is a persistent demand by adult learners for certifying their acquisition of new knowledge and skills and establishing their equivalence to formal school qualifications. Several countries have now established procedures for this through evaluation and issue of equivalence certificates. For example, the Philippines has introduced an accreditation and equivalency of non-formal education programme that provides certification of learning and is aimed at providing an alternative pathway of learning for out-of-school youth and adults who have basic literacy skills but have not completed the 10 years of basic education mandated by the Philippine constitution. Through this programme, school drop-outs are able to complete elementary and secondary education outside the formal school system (UIL, 2016). Indonesia has been following the practice of establishing equivalence between formal and non-formal learning programmes for a long time. Such official recognition, granting equivalence between ALE programmes and formal school certification, adopted in several other countries of the region, is particularly valuable in the search for employment.

Another crucial issue in ALE is the increasing demand for the formal recognition of prior learning, particularly where it is linked to employment opportunities. Accreditation of prior learning is an important requirement of ALE in order to overcome the dichotomy between competencies acquired through the formal system and those acquired through other means. Several countries in the region are attempting to develop a national qualification framework with a view to addressing this long-standing demand. For instance, in 2013 the Government of India launched the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), a competency-based framework that organizes all qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. These levels, graded from 1 to 10, are defined in terms of learning outcomes which the learner must possess regardless of whether they are obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning. The framework is implemented through the National Skill Development Agency which has, among others, two important objectives relevant to ALE: (a) mobility between vocational and general education by alignment of degrees with NSQF; and (b) recognition of prior learning, allowing transition from non-formal education to the organized job market.

REFORMS AND INNOVATIONS

There is increased recognition that ALE governance systems have to be revamped if they are to complement effectively the formal educational mechanisms within the overarching framework of lifelong learning. Reflecting on this issue, it was observed in 2003:

In some countries, there is a perceptible movement away from mere basic literacy towards a more integrated view, one connecting adult, non-formal and informal education and lifelong learning opportunities with the Education for All goals. Many are becoming more conscious of gaps in literacy and are beginning to focus more closely on unreached segments of their population. Meanwhile, a large part of adult education work takes place outside the purview of those government agencies directly responsible for education. Community health programs, early childhood care training, environmental education courses and skill training, for instance,

⁷ National reports submitted to *GRALE III* (UIL, 2016)

are often run by a variety of government agencies (e.g., ministries for women and children, ministries of agriculture, ministries of health). Yet there are no procedures for tracking these programs in unified fashion, nor are there any means for their being readily informed by other adult education practices.

(UIL, 2003)

After more than a decade and a half, has the situation improved? While substantial changes have come in policy formulation in several countries of the region, coordinated planning for implementing reforms in ALE seems to be still a remote prospect. The *GRALE III* survey found that only one-third of the countries in the region had prepared an implementation plan for carrying out the recommendations contained in the BFA.

Table 3.1: Illustrative innovations/reform initiatives in ALE governance

	REFORM INITIATIVES
Azerbaijan	Decentralized framework for increasing participation in adult education programmes through the establishment of regional resource centres.
Bhutan	Decentralization of NFE instructors' recruitment as well as of establishment and management budget.
India	Designing and implementing a national-level basic literacy assessment and certification system by the National Literacy Mission Authority of the Indian Government in collaboration with National Institute of Open Schooling.
Malaysia	The country has developed a nationwide directory of lifelong learning programmes available from the various ministries (15) and agencies in the country, giving the public easy access to the information on lifelong learning programmes according to their demand.
Mongolia	The National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education has expanded as the National Centre for Lifelong Education. Also, local lifelong education centres have been established in each provincial centre.
Nepal	The country has devolved authority to local levels for formulating the NFE curriculum with a view to addressing local needs, along with allocation of budget and necessary guidelines.
Philippines	The creation of an alternative pathway of learning for out-of-school youth and adults who are basically literate but who have not completed the 10 years of basic education mandated by the Philippine constitution
Republic of Korea	It is considered important to provide learning opportunities and related information to Korean people at all times in order to construct a lifelong learning society. With this in view, new policies and projects have been launched, such as K-MOOC, for providing nationwide MOOC services. Also, the Damoa Lifelong Education Information Network that collects and distributes information on lifelong education from all provincial and municipal governments across the country is being promoted.

Several countries in the region, however, have initiated innovative efforts to improve governance and implementation of ALE programmes, as illustrated in *Table 3.1*. The initiatives highlighted in the national reports for the *GRALE III* survey are varied in nature. These have to be viewed in the unique context in which ALE is functioning in the respective country. What may, therefore, appear as an innovation may be a well-established practice in some other country. Further, what may seem to be a minor change in administrative procedure in one country may indeed be a major reform initiative in the context of another. Decentralization of ALE management is one of the reforms initiated in several countries of the region. This, in fact, is an evolutionary process in many countries, largely carried out through small, specific aspects of ALE.

4. ALE PROGRAMMES: PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND EQUITY

In the final analysis, the success of ALE depends on the nature of programmes offered on the ground and the extent to which young persons and adults participate in and benefit from them. The BFA places a very high premium on making the programmes inclusive and equitable:

Inclusive education is fundamental to the achievement of human, social and economic development. Equipping all individuals to develop their potential contributes significantly to encouraging them to live together in harmony and with dignity. There can be no exclusion arising from age, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, rurality, sexual identity or orientation, poverty, displacement or imprisonment. Combating the cumulative effects of multiple disadvantages is of particular importance. Measures should be taken to enhance motivation and access for all. (UIL, 2010, p. 8)

The BFA framework, among other concerns, further highlights the need for enhancing a culture of learning by eliminating barriers to participation, by anticipating and responding to identifiable groups entering trajectories of multiple disadvantages, and by creating multi-purpose community learning spaces responsive to the learning needs of women and other traditionally marginalized groups. This emphasis on equity and inclusion is very pertinent. The Dakar EFA goals also explicitly specify an obligation to pay special attention to the learning needs of disadvantaged groups. There is a widespread concern that ‘disadvantaged young people and adults are not being sufficiently supported to access further learning opportunities – for example, through second-chance or adult education programmes. Globally, the adult illiteracy rate has fallen by 23 per cent between 2000 and 2015. However, most of this progress is the result of younger, more educated children reaching adulthood and replacing older, less educated people, rather than effective adult literacy programmes having been rolled out on a large scale’ (UNESCO, 2015a).

Besides these concerns of traditional neglect, ALE has also to contend with expanding pressures of globalization and increasing inequality. The ever-expanding presence of digital means and media in the world of

work and learning adds new dimensions to the issue. This fast-changing scenario directly affects the nature of ALE programmes to be offered and the participation level of learners, the context and conditions in which they operate, the pedagogic processes involved and their impact on the lives of the learners. Some of these issues with regard to ALE in the Asia-Pacific region are examined in this section.

ALE PROGRAMMES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Drawing a generalized picture of the ALE programmes in the region is a risky proposition as they cover a wide range and are closely linked to the different social and economic development profiles of the region’s countries. A review of the national reports indicates that ALE programmes in different countries of the region show great variety, ranging from literacy and basic education for adults and young people to programmes for school drop-outs, political and trade union education, and various kinds of educational work linked with development initiatives, including agricultural extension and training programmes, and health education. They also often include occupational skills-building programmes sponsored by governmental as well as non-governmental agencies. Thus, in terms of its potential, ALE spans a large range of age-groups, target populations and areas of content and skills.

In countries where secondary education has been universalized, as for instance in Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Japan, ALE programmes are more commonly linked to higher/tertiary education initiatives. At the other end of the spectrum are countries, particularly in South Asia, which still host large numbers of non-literate adults, that continue to accord high priority to imparting basic literacy and numeracy skills and for establishing equivalence with formal school competencies. Some of the emerging economies in the region are intensely engaged in building skills in their youth to meet the skills demands of the changing market. Across the region, many countries are preoccupied with the task of equipping the youth and adult population with digital processing skills. While literacy programmes continue to be an integral part of ALE in the majority of the countries

in the region, the nature and level of these programmes vary considerably. In fact, it is difficult to typecast any country with regard to the nature of ALE programmes offered. Every country may be traversing multiple paths, meeting the needs of different sections of the society. For instance, while the National Literacy Mission in India continues to focus on basic literacy and continuing education, especially among women and other disadvantaged groups, a massive effort has been simultaneously launched to impart digital literacy among the general population (see *Box 4.1*).

Box 4.1

National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) in India

NDLM was launched in August 2014, in recognition of the importance of ICT for human development and the economy of the country, and to bridge the existing digital divide. The aim of the project is to provide digital literacy to 5.25 million Indians – that is, one in every eligible household in the selected blocs of every state in the country. In the first phase, one million citizens have been trained under NDLM, while the remaining 4.25 million are slated to be trained in the second phase. The targeted beneficiaries of NDLM are selected from households in which no member in the age group of 14 to 60 years is IT-literate. Adequate representation is ensured for women, persons from disadvantaged groups and poor households. The physical delivery of IT literacy training is designed in the public-private partnership mode, with support from various partner agencies.

The primary objective of the scheme is to enable the beneficiaries to use IT and IT-related applications to participate effectively in democratic processes and enhance their livelihood opportunities. After attending digital literacy training, it is expected that the trainees would be able to use digital devices to access, create, manage and share information; use the internet to browse in an effective and responsible manner; use technology to communicate effectively; and appreciate the role of digital technology in everyday life, in social life and at work. On completion of training, participants undertake a specially designed online evaluation and receive a certificate.

The survey carried out for *GRALE II* elicited information on the following learning areas pursued under ALE in different countries: (a) literacy (reading, writing and numeracy); (b) vocational education (technical, related to income-generation); (c) life skills or health issues; (d) use of information and communication technologies (ICTs); (e) official/ local language; (f) foreign language; (g) human rights or civic education; (h) liberal education or personal growth (i.e., artistic, cultural); or (i) any other area of learning which might be important in a specific context (UIL, 2013a). Responses from 24 countries in the Asia-Pacific region (see *Table 4.1*) showed that provision of vocational education and life skills education occupy the top slots, followed by literacy and human rights education. The data also showed high-level involvement of civil society organizations in providing ALE programmes in the region.

Table 4.1: Number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region providing adult education (by areas of learning and sector)

	PUBLIC SECTOR	PRIVATE SECTOR	CIVIL SOCIETY
Literacy (%)	18	12	21
Technical and vocational education and training (%)	23	14	22
Life skills and health issues (%)	23	13	20
ICT (%)	16	10	14
Official / local languages (%)	17	10	13
Foreign languages (%)	15	11	10
Human rights/ Civic education (%)	17	6	14
Liberal education/ Personal (%)	14	8	12
Other (%)	4	5	4
Total no. of national reports	24	24	24

Source: UIL, 2013a

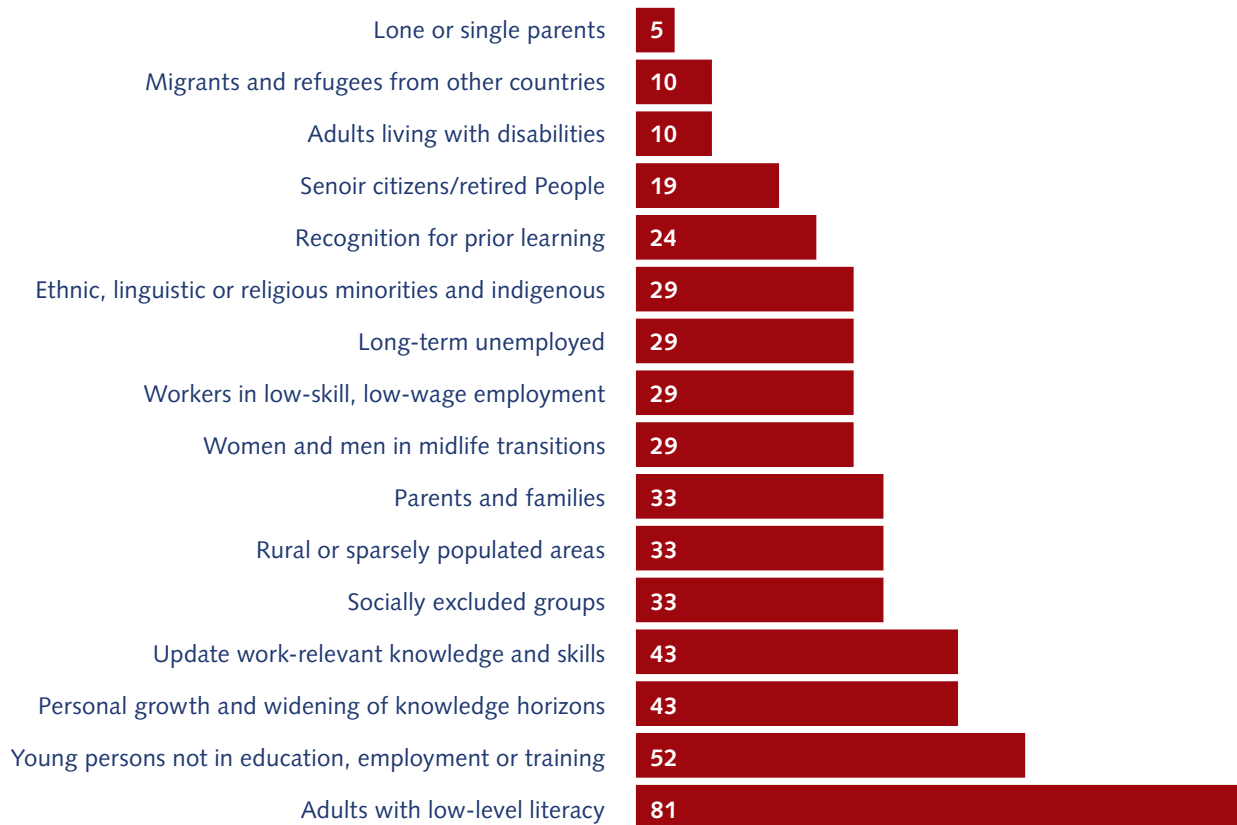
Subsequently, the *GRALE III* survey, linking programmes with participant groups, examined the importance attached by different countries to 16 different target groups of potential learners under ALE policy and programmes (see *Figure 4.1*). The choices indicate the programmes that are given priority under ALE. Understandably, imparting literacy to illiterate adults gets the top priority: 81 per cent of countries in the region indicate this as an important group to be addressed. This is followed by the need to meet the learning needs of young unemployed persons. This is important as even after completing formal education many young people face obstacles in their transition from school to work. Education and training systems often do not match modern labour market demands. The mismatch creates a sub-population of discouraged and excluded youth who are outside the educational system and are unemployed. In Indonesia and

the Philippines, for example, around 25 per cent of youth are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET). This figure increases to almost one-third for young women and girls. This group of young people needs particular attention since they are more prone to entering a vicious circle of poverty and exclusion (UNESCAP, n.d.).

It was found that a number of countries also deal with the learning needs of relatively new groups of learners such as senior citizens/retired people, adults with learning disabilities, and parents and families. It should, of course, be noted that these are non-exclusive categories, as each country identified five important groups of learners to be covered by ALE.

Further review of the situation in the region shows that literacy programmes themselves have undergone

Figure 4.1: Priority groups for ALE in Asia-Pacific



Note: Based on national reports from 22 countries submitted for the *GRALE III* survey

considerable transformation over a period of time. Basic literacy programmes, exclusively focusing on imparting literacy skills, have been replaced by programmes that combine literacy with other social and economic goals. ALE in Bangladesh is blended with vocational/livelihood skills training and involves income-generating activities in order to bring changes in lifestyle. Integration of life skills into literacy programmes can be seen in the ALE curriculum of several countries, including Bangladesh, China, India, Lao PDR and Thailand. Indonesia's Literacy for Life Skills and Entrepreneurship initiative stemmed from the government-initiated National Movement to Hasten Compulsory Nine-Year Basic Education and the Fight against Illiteracy and evolved into a community-based initiative that is advanced at the local level via community learning centres.

Demographic shifts and varying patterns of change have also impinged on the nature of ALE programmes on offer. In 2015, there were 1.2 billion youth aged 15–24 years globally, 60 per cent of whom were in Asia. While Asia as a whole has a large youth population, there are diverse demographic patterns (Kim and Teter, 2016). These

demographic trends have brought into consideration two types of programme. ALE programmes in countries with an expanding youth population, such as India and Bangladesh, have begun to focus more on persons in the limited age range of 15 to 35 or 45 years. The effort is essentially on giving second-chance education equivalent to school certification through equivalence programmes and/or imparting employment-related skills. Such programmes gain greater significance in the context of the high concentration of out-of-school adolescents in the region. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), there were over 34 million out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary age in the Asia-Pacific region in the year 2013, which constituted 53 per cent of the global total. Further, girls, rural children and those from poor households in the Asia-Pacific region are more likely to be out of school, given related barriers they each faced. On the other hand, countries which have a larger proportion of older age-group population, such as China, Japan, Republic of Korea and Thailand, have begun to design special programmes for senior citizens. For instance, strategies and measures for strengthening lifelong learning among senior citizens find a place in the Second

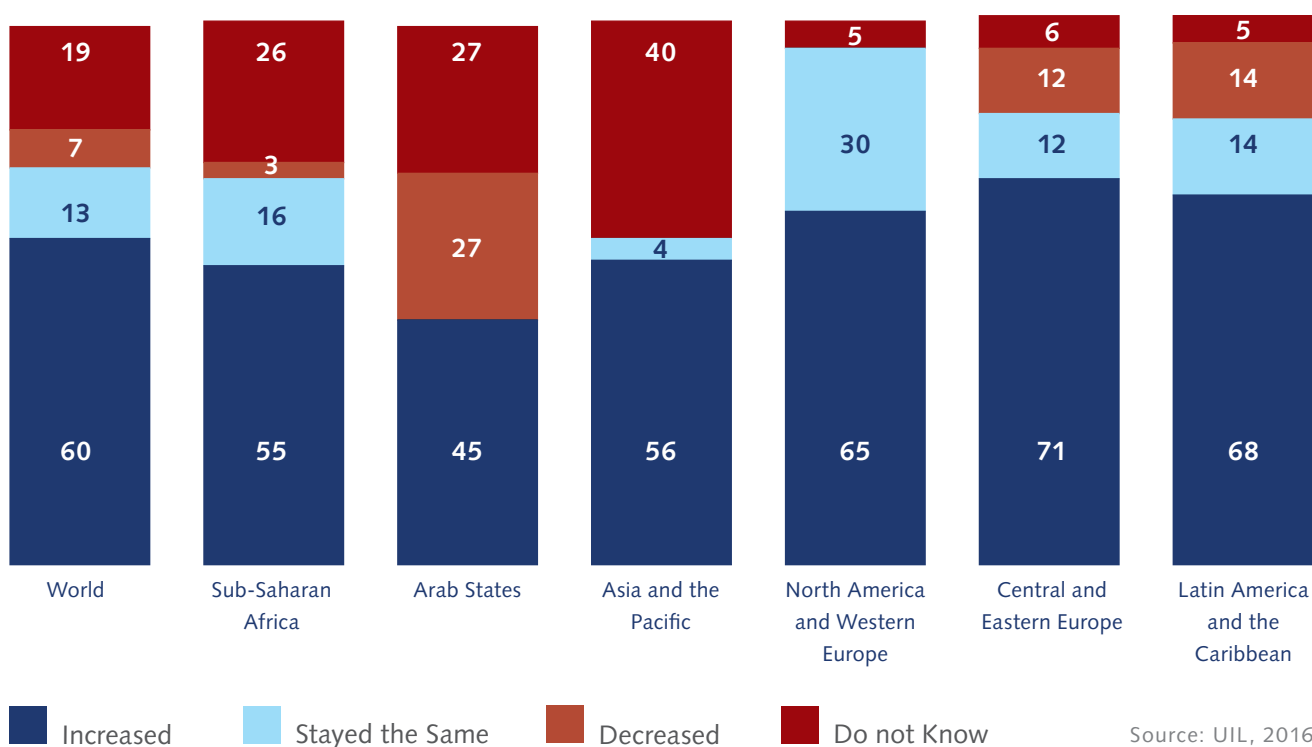
National Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021) of Thailand. This was established with a view to enabling them to receive educational services systematically and continuously, not only through the formal stream but also through the non-formal and informal streams, as well as through diverse modes of training and other means of access to information and learning.

Recognizing the relatively difficult access to educational resources in rural areas as compared to the urban counterparts and also recognizing the specific skill needs of the rural work setting, ALE programmes in most countries give special attention to rural areas. This is important, as around 80 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas; 64 per cent work in agriculture; 44 per cent are 14 years old or younger; and 39 per cent have no formal education at all. There are also wide regional variations in the distribution of the poor across these characteristics (World Bank, 2016). The major focus of the ALE programmes in rural areas is on providing their inhabitants, particularly women, with productive skills for self-employment through income-generation activities, or skills with specific application to agriculture and other related activities. The Sunshine Project in China (National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO and National Centre for Education Development Research, Ministry of

Education, China, 2015), set up to impart skills to rural migrants in linewith market demand in urban areas, illustrates another dimension of the problem of properly equipping people in rural areas for tackling the challenges of the employment market.

While global comparisons show that extreme poverty in the region has been reduced considerably, problems of people working in vulnerable conditions continue to be a major concern. In 2013, 63 per cent of women and 56 per cent of men in the region were in vulnerable employment – that is they were either self-employed or contributing family workers, two employment groups often characterized by higher poverty rates and limited social protection. In Bangladesh, India and Lao PDR, more than 80 per cent of all workers were engaged in vulnerable employment, and in other countries, such as Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu, over 70 per cent of workers were employed under precarious conditions (UNESCAP, 2015). ALE programmes for such working populations are not new but have remained sporadic and need to be streamlined as part of lifelong workplace-based education. The attention being paid to this group in some of the countries in the region should help take forward this agenda under the ambit of ALE. Developing skills is an essential strategy for reducing the inequalities between formally employed

Figure 4.2: Regionwise development of overall participation rate (%) in ALE since 2009



and vulnerable workers. In particular, the development of technology skills represents a key component to decrease skills mismatch in the labour market, which otherwise could lead to inequity and social exclusion.

PARTICIPATION IN ALE: HOW EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE?

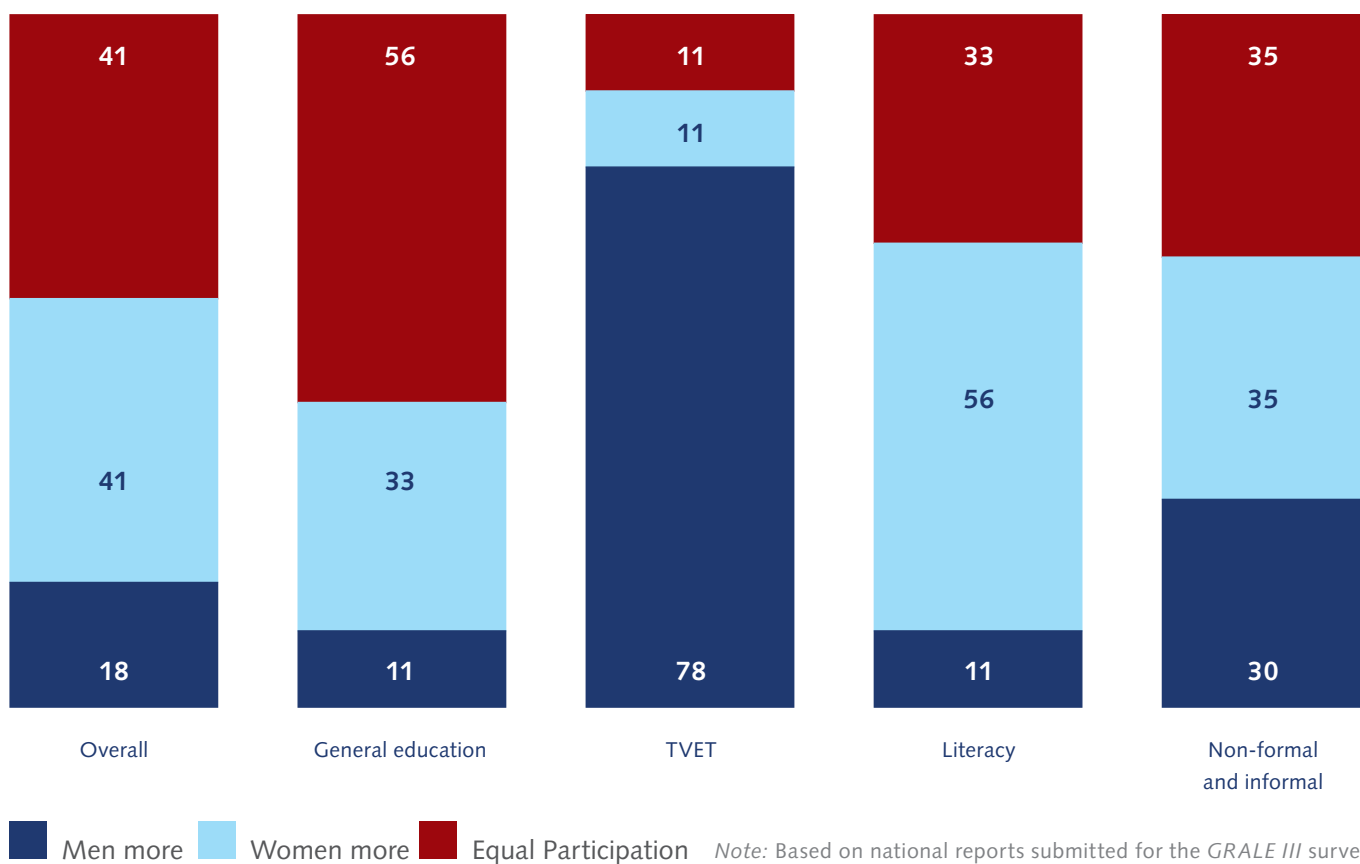
Again, the BFA included guidelines to ensure participation of all learners irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, rurality, sexual identity or orientation, poverty, displacement or imprisonment. But do ALE programmes in the region reach out to all categories of people as highlighted in the BFA? Further, are the programmes comprehensive in their coverage while ensuring equitable access for all? The information from the priority groups for ALE policy in different countries of the region give hope that attention is being paid to the learning needs of a large variety of youth and adult groups. However, it is important to examine, as a follow-up of the BFA, if changes could be observed in the nature of programmes offered and the level of participation of learners in various programmes.

Comparing the development of overall participation in ALE across different regions of the world (*Figure 4.2*), one finds that the Asia-Pacific region witnessed only a modest increase, with only 56 per cent of countries in the region reporting improvement. At the global level, 60 per cent of countries experienced increased participation in ALE programmes. What has hindered participation of adults in the region? The Asia-Pacific regional synthesis report of 2009 highlights a variety of economic, political, social and structural barriers that constrain women, the poor, older adults, ethnic minorities and indigenous groups from participating in adult education (Ahmed, 2009). Unequal participation rates have multi-faceted causes, ranging from those located at the level of the individual learner to those linked to institutional and cultural contexts (UIL, 2009). But barriers and difficulties are not unique to this region. It is advisable for countries in Asia and the Pacific to learn from the strategies adopted by other countries such as those in Latin America and Caribbean.

Another important point emerging from the data is that 40 per cent of countries in the region responded with 'do not know', which indicates poor monitoring and maintenance of information on the participants. There is a need to build a robust system for assessing the participation

level through periodic surveys. The Republic of Korea presents a good example in this regard. The National Report of Republic of Korea emphasizes the value of collecting such information: 'The rate of participation in adult learning is the most significant indicator that shows the progress of the Republic of Korea in ALE. The 2014 "Lifelong Learning Individual Status Survey" showed that the rate of participation in lifelong learning for Korean adults (aged 25–64) was 36.8 per cent. With this, the lifelong learning participation rates from 2009 to 2014 reveal a general trend of an annual increase. The participation rate which was 28.0 per cent in 2009 increased by 8.8 per cent to 36.8 per cent in 2014.' However, a word of caution is warranted in comparing participation levels across countries. The available information on participation in adult education covers different types of learning and different measuring methods; hence the data could be useful in tracking regional progress over time but not in comparing across countries (UIL, 2013a, p. 215).

There is no doubt that increasing the participation level of women is critical not only for addressing concerns of gender equity but also for registering overall progress in ALE as a lifelong learning endeavour. This is particularly important for the Asia-Pacific region, where gender differentials in literacy levels remain considerably high. Furthermore, despite improvement in recent years, women's participation in the formal sector workforce continues to be relatively low while a large proportion of them are engaged in vulnerable employment, as pointed out earlier. Examining the situation at the overall level, *GRALE II* reported that the information from reporting countries in Asia and the Pacific did not show significant differences in overall participation between men and women, either in adult education or adult literacy (UIL, 2013a, p. 118). In fact, the overall gender gap in levels of participation in educational programmes has been consistently diminishing (UNESCO, 2015b). However, recent evidence suggests that gender differences in ALE may be course-specific and may, thus, influence learners' future choices. It is from this angle that the participation levels of men and women in different categories of programmes were examined in the *GRALE III* survey. Findings of the survey for the Asia-Pacific region, presented in *Figure 4.3*, clearly point to significant variations in participation, based on gender. The participation of women in technical and vocational training programmes is very low, although around 80 per cent of countries report high levels of participation for men. In contrast, participation of women is reported to be higher in literacy programmes.

Figure 4.3: Gender difference in participation level (number of countries in percentages) in Asia-Pacific

From the information available, it is difficult to determine the causes of this relative gender imbalance in participation. It could be due to traditional inhibitions, socio-cultural barriers or to gender stereotypes deeply entrenched in a patriarchal society. Higher participation of women in literacy programmes could be due to relatively lower rates of female literacy in several countries of the region. However, it is also important to critically examine the institutional arrangements for delivery of technical and vocational training (TVET) programmes to ensure that these arrangements are not biased in favour of men nor act as barriers to the participation of women.

Even though only a few countries in the region have prepared an action plan for implementing the BFA recommendations, most of them claim increased attention to policy-making in ALE and strengthening of governance and coordination mechanisms as well as organization of capacity-building activities. Is this enhanced attention to ALE reflected in participation at the grassroots level since 2009? What are the programme areas which report greatest increases? The trend observed with respect

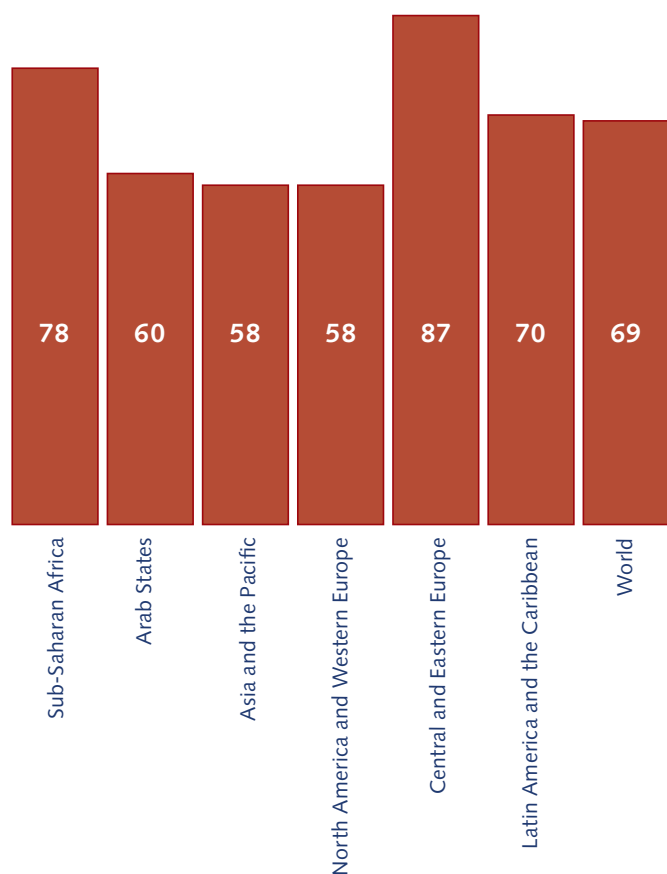
to literacy and employment/work-related programme categories is in congruence with the enhanced attention being paid to these groups of adult learners at the policy level (see *Figure 4.1*). The programme categories are overlapping and the increasing trend in the 'residents of rural and remote areas' category indicates that more adult learners from rural areas are attending ALE programmes. Even though not many countries have reported an increase, it is a welcome trend that participation levels in programmes for senior citizens and persons with disabilities are increasing.

INNOVATIVE METHODS TO INCREASE ALE PARTICIPATION

Besides adopting progressive policies and initiating special measures to strengthen governance and financing of ALE following the BFA, are countries making special efforts to enhance participation in ALE programmes? The *GRALE III* survey attempted to collate information on this issue. Sixty-nine per cent of countries in the world reported that they are making innovative efforts to enhance

Figure 4.4: Countries reporting programmewise increase in participation (percentages)

Note: Based on national reports submitted for the *GRALE III* survey

Figure 4.5: Innovations to improve participation (number of countries regionwise by %)

Source: UIL, 2016

participation in ALE. However, only 58 per cent of countries in Asia and the Pacific (the lowest among all regions of the world) report innovative measures.

Innovative measures adopted in the Asia-Pacific region, nevertheless, are diverse (see *Table 4.2*). A major focus of these innovations has been on making the programmes responsive to the immediate needs of adult learners. Some countries have attempted to recruit hitherto-unreached target groups through novel approaches. For instance, Bhutan has taken literacy programmes to prisons, road workers and army camps; Azerbaijan is trying to achieve that goal through decentralization and establishment of regional resources centres. China is focusing on training of workers moving from rural areas to urban centres. Singapore launched a unique 'Reading Movement' with a view to building a vibrant reading culture in the country. Some countries, such as Iran, have introduced incentives for illiterate persons in the form of cash rewards. Viet Nam established the Centre for Knowledge Assistance and Community Development (CKACD) in 2010 to expand the Books for Rural Areas of Viet Nam initiative with the goal of increasing access to books and encouraging reading habits by establishing a system of civil libraries where books can be accessed without charge. These civil libraries are different from public libraries as they are funded by mobilizing community resources and are managed by community members or volunteers. The programme seeks, in particular, to increase book availability and accessibility for readers in rural and

mountainous areas who have had fewer opportunities to read books. Besides providing improved access, it also organizes group reading activities where readers can practise and strengthen their literacy skills.⁸

Not many innovations were reported by Asia-Pacific countries in the *GRALE III* survey. This could be because the report only refers to activities of government education departments, even though ALE programmes are implemented by multiple ministries and departments.

Table 4.2: New/innovative efforts to enhance participation in selected Asia-Pacific countries (illustrative)

Azerbaijan	Expanded the resource network for ALE programmes through establishment of regional resource centres.
Bhutan	Introduced literacy programmes to prisons, road workers and in army camps for wives of armies and scattered remote villages with few learners (reaching the hard to reach).
China	Establishment of a national community education demonstration area as an experimental area for adopting new programmes and strategies; establishment of national rural vocational education and adult education training institutions for workers; farmer training to actively promote the training of rural migrant workers; rural labour transfer training and new vocational training of farmers.
India	Mobilization of nearly 3 million volunteer teachers across the country; focusing on teaching in mother tongue/local language through preparation and distribution of learning material in 13 languages and 26 dialects.
Indonesia	Launched 'Education as a Community Movement' programme for ALE; also initiated the Indonesia Reading Movement and the Mental Revolution Movement.
Singapore	The National Reading Movement is a five-year campaign by the National Library Board (NLB) to encourage everyone to read more, read widely and read together. NLB will be running programmes to engage more adults to read, promote reading in mother-tongue languages and collaborate with the community to build a vibrant reading culture in Singapore.
Iran	The government has approved a resolution to fulfil the cost of establishing a literacy database, giving a cash reward for illiterate people, vulnerable children education, establishment of CLCs and education of foreigners.
Malaysia	The <i>Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning</i> for Malaysia 2011–2020 seeks to provide lifelong learning stakeholders with a roadmap to promote lifelong learning in Malaysia. To ensure that the strategies are successfully implemented, a set of performance objectives, performance and accountability metrics, strategic targets and sponsoring organizations for each of the initiatives is identified.

⁸ See the Books for Rural Areas of Viet Nam case study in UNESCO's Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database (LitBase): <http://www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=4&programme=239>.

Table 4.2: New/innovative efforts to enhance participation in selected Asia-Pacific countries (illustrative)

Thailand	'Smart Home Books' have been created in villages and communities as a mechanism to promote and broaden reading on a continuing basis among the population, to strengthen capacities and to emphasize the importance of reading. In 2013, a total of 41,800 centres were opened, with a target to open a further 84,000 centres in 2014. The government provides a budget to each centre for the purchase of books and subscriptions to two daily newspapers and two monthly magazines
Pakistan	Use of mobile phones for addressing literacy retention problem among youth and keeping them motivated for further consolidation of their skills.
Philippines	The Accreditation and Equivalency programme aims to provide an alternative pathway of learning for out-of-school youth and adults who are basically literate but who have not completed the 10 years of basic education mandated by the Philippine constitution. Through this programme, school drop-outs are able to complete elementary and secondary education outside the formal school system. It uses radio-based instruction, computer-based instruction and TV-based modalities of learning.
Republic of Korea	The Lifelong Learning Cities project and the Lifelong Learning Centres for Happiness (LLCHs) projects aim to increase opportunities in ALE by constructing educational institutions near residential areas for ease of access, and operating customized learning programmes that reflect specific community needs. LLCHs prioritize supporting residents in rural communities who lack lifelong learning opportunities. LLCHs are created by restructuring existing facilities within the communities such as libraries, community centres, senior citizen centres, and facilities at apartment complexes as well as the lifelong learning centres. All LLCHs are required to have managers on site. The National Institute for Lifelong Education delivers technical support, such as providing training programmes and consulting services to the staff of LLCHs. In addition, ICT has been actively used to expand learning opportunities for people who lack time or financial resources.

Source: National reports submitted for the *GRALE III* survey; EFA 2015 national review reports of Singapore and Thailand.

Invariably, innovative efforts launched by other departments are not adequately documented. Further, innovative efforts of NGOs are not adequately reflected in the national reports prepared by government functionaries.

ICT IN ALE PROGRAMMES

Use of ICT is emerging as a major driver for transforming ALE programmes, both in content and mode of delivery, with significant impact on participation levels in many countries of the region. Some of these are structured efforts by the national government in the form of development projects, while many operate on flexible informal

platforms. In several instances, ICT is embedded into larger programmes. In the Philippines, radio-based instruction, computer-based instruction and TV-based modalities of learning are integrated into the Accreditation and Equivalency Programme, significantly expanding its coverage as well as its effectiveness. The Pakistan experiment in using mobile technology is carried out in association with leading cellular operator Mobilink, in collaboration with UNESCO, to reinforce literacy skills after learners return to a non-literate environment. Thailand has plans for the use of ICT to raise the quality of education and to expand the opportunities for access to quality learning through, for example, the development of 'cyber homes',

where learning materials are delivered directly to learners via high-speed internet, expansion of educational television, mobile learning through portable devices and the creation of 'smart classrooms' to stimulate the imagination and intellect of learners (Thai National Commission for UNESCO and Ministry of Education, Government of Thailand, 2015).

The Commonwealth of Learning's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F), which, over time, is expanding its footprint across several countries in Asia, Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, is a partnership programme designed to bring together farmers, learning institutions, banks and ICT providers to facilitate learning for development in rural areas through open and distance learning (ODL) opportunities (see Box 4.2). In the remote mountains and valleys of Nepal, around 200 community radio stations deliver ODL programming; five of these stations are managed entirely by women. Given the low rate of literacy (56.6 per cent in 2011) and Nepal's mountainous terrain and lack of infrastructure, radio is the medium that is able to reach the most people (86 per cent of the population). In comparison, just 7 per cent are able to connect to the internet (UIL, 2013a, p. 125).

Box 4.2

** Lifelong Learning for Farmers

The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative developed a model linking the capacity-building of the farming community, particularly women, through ODL and flexible and blended learning, and linked the process with social and financial capital. The evidence during the 2012–2015 period showed that the L3F model could reach large number of farmers at a lesser cost and was able to enhance the empowerment and livelihood security of marginalized farming households, particularly women, in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, India, Sri Lanka and Mauritius. Research studies established that every US dollar invested yielded \$9 worth of social returns to farming communities. Financial institutions discovered that they earned eight times more income from L3F participants and the cost of capacity-building using ODL was six times lower than that of conventional face-to-face training. These results have attracted the attention of major government and international agencies,

private sector and financial institutions as a win-win strategy leading to development which includes viable business opportunities. Thus, effectiveness and efficiency have been established and the stage is set for expansion. Until now, the 'development' in L3F was perceived from social, economic and financial angles. However, the experiences during 2012–2015 showed that there is the need to transit to 'sustainable development', emphasizing a process which is socially equitable, economically viable, financially feasible and environmentally sustainable.

During 2015–2021, the focus would be to scale up L3F at the provincial, national and international level, convincing governments, civil society, industries, financial institutions and development institutions/organizations of the viability and advantages of the L3F approach for all stakeholders. They will be encouraged to reach large number of farming communities, particularly marginalized communities, women and youth, and provide them with opportunities for strengthening their livelihoods in a sustainable manner. This period will signify the transition from the local level model to a self-sustaining proliferation and internalization process at provincial, national and international level.

The Kothmale Community Radio Internet project in Sri Lanka also uses community radio as an interface between communities and the internet; the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (<http://www.tnau.ac.in/aabout.html>) extension programmes use broadcasts, cassettes, print/correspondence and one-day contact programmes; and the Education Development Center (EDC) Multichannel Learning Centres in Papua New Guinea provide interactive radio instruction that combines broadcasts in pidgin, drama and audience participation by local clans, who then hold meetings on managing and conserving their rainforest under threat from loggers and land developers. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations is training extension workers in Thailand to use hand-held devices for maize farming. The devices provide farmers with a support programme that guides them on how much fertilizer to use, the optimum planting dates and the expected yield (Latchem et al, n.d.).

** Adapted from:

<http://www.col.org/programmes/lifelong-learning-for-farmers>

COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES⁹

Effectiveness as well as inclusiveness of ALE will finally depend on the nature and functioning of institutional arrangements for delivering programmes on the ground. These arrangements have to function through a participatory process involving all stakeholders. It is in this context that the Belém Framework for Action called for 'creating multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres and improving access to, and participation in, the full range of adult learning and education programmes for women, taking into account the particular demands of the gender specific life-course' (UIL, 2010, p. 8). This, indeed, is recognition of the effectiveness of a large region-wide initiative already underway, under the banner of community learning centres (CLCs), in several countries of the Asia-Pacific region. *GRALE II* observed that CLCs have been rapidly expanding in 24 countries in Asia and the Pacific, and they continue to expand in several countries of the region (UIL, 2013a).

Community learning centres are popular learning facilities that serve as mechanisms for promoting lifelong learning and as gathering places or central venues where various models of learning are available. Activities are organized in these centres under non-formal and informal education schemes to provide opportunities for learning, for the transmission and dissemination of knowledge, as a forum for the exchange of experience, for demonstrating new techniques and for sharing local wisdom. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific have established or expanded the number of CLCs that offer these programmes, which shows the growing demand for NFE programmes and a growing commitment towards NFE in the region. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have significantly increased the number of CLCs in order to reach out to the most disadvantaged groups in order to provide basic literacy, vocational and life skills in many communities (see *Table 4.3*). In Viet Nam, in 2002, there were only 680 centres; this number rose to over 7,384 in 2006 and to 9,990 in 2010. By 2013, the number had increased to 10,877. The number of participants of CLC programmes increased from 250,000 in 2006 to 13,598,416 in 2013.

Table 4.3:
Number of CLCs in Asia-Pacific countries,
2008–2012

	NUMBER OF CLCS
Bangladesh	5,000
Bhutan	885
Cambodia	321
Indonesia	18,439
Iran	3,500
Kazakhstan	7
Kyrgyzstan	147
Lao PDR	300
Myanmar	3,040
Nepal	1,900
Pakistan	150
Philippines	522
Thailand	8,057
Uzbekistan	10
Viet Nam	10,877

Source: UNESCO and UNICEF, 2012; national EFA reports from different countries

⁹ This section is mainly built around excerpts, including quantitative information, drawn from the *Asia and the Pacific Education for All 2015 Regional Review: Final Synthesis Report* (UNESCO Bangkok and Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, 2015, p. 33); and national review reports on EFA 2015 submitted to UNESCO.

In 2000, there were less than 20 CLCs in Nepal; by 2007, the number had increased to 205, and to 1,900 by 2012.

The institutionalization of the community learning centre model as an official continuing education institution in Viet Nam, and the drive to establish centres in every commune, have provided an effective means for reaching previously unreached population groups and dramatically increasing the number of learners in literacy and life skills programmes. Every *tambon* (sub-district) in Thailand has a CLC providing four services: community information and news; opportunities for learning; centres for basic and continuing education, including programmes under the non-formal education scheme as well as informal education activities; and community activities, such as discussion forums, religious activities, art and culture programmes, sports, and democracy-related programmes. Programmes in these centres include basic education courses, vocational training, courses in science and mathematics, disaster prevention, narcotics addiction prevention, environmental preservation and the development of democratic processes. In Cambodia, local communities have found CLCs to be cost-effective and enjoyable way to develop capacity, and have supported them to remain operational even at a time when Ministry of Education funding was limited. Skills training in these centres covered tailoring, traditional music, hairdressing, beauty training, stone carving, weaving, carpentry, use of computers, English, small-scale agriculture and animal health. The delivery mode included a 'Mobile Life Skills' programme, which offered training from a van that travelled around remote rural villages.

5. ALE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: MEETING QUALITY CONCERNS

Carrying out an objective review of quality of ALE in any country is a difficult proposition. Substantial research, with particular focus on quality assessment, takes place on formal school learning. But assessment of the quality of ALE, particularly when it serves poorer communities who mainly depend on non-formal means of learning, has received very little attention from professional researchers. Often one has to depend on anecdotal evidences given by ALE functionaries and learners, descriptive reports from governments and NGOs, and personal narratives of field activists and adult learners. It is in this context that the Belém Framework for Action places high emphasis on professionalizing the programmes of ALE:

Fostering a culture of quality in adult learning requires relevant content and modes of delivery, learner-centred needs assessment, the acquisition of multiple competences and knowledge, the professionalization of educators. ... To these ends, we commit ourselves to: ... improving training, capacity-building, employment conditions and the professionalization of adult educators, e.g. through the establishment of partnerships with higher education institutions, teacher associations and civil society organisations. (UIL, 2010, pp. 8–9)

ALE, by its very nature, takes shape at the intersection of social and economic forces operating in a country at any given point of time. Unlike formal school education programmes and programmes for imparting basic literacy skills, it is difficult to generalize the quality of ALE in terms of standardized and comparable measures of achievement. In assessing the quality of ALE programmes, two characteristics – their contextual relevance and their impact on the quality of life of participants – become the core criteria. Keeping these recommendations in view, this section reflects on three broad dimensions of the ALE that impinge on quality: (a) curriculum and learning material, together with pedagogic processes; (b) professionally trained human resources available for transacting ALE programmes; and (c) outcomes of ALE programmes. With the limited information available, this section will attempt to reflect on these three dimensions of ALE in the Asia-Pacific region.

Quality consciousness is quite high among all countries of the region (see *Table 5.1*). As reported in *GRALE II*, a high level of importance accorded to quality is seen across all relevant areas.

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING IN ALE

Most countries in the region consider local relevance of the curriculum as a critical characteristic that makes ALE meaningful for adult learners. Many countries, therefore, are changing adult educational content and methods to make them more responsive to local needs and demands. In line with this thinking, decentralisation of curriculum has been widely encouraged. In countries such as India, development of curricular inputs and design of methods of teaching and material for learning are invariably left to provincial and district levels. Even in those countries where a national core curriculum is devised, local agencies/authorities are often encouraged to adopt local content for a proportion of the curriculum, ranging from 20 per cent to 40 per cent. For instance, 16 Asian countries participate in UNESCO's APPEAL programme, which supports the development of decentralized adult learning and education provision via community learning centres; yet, even here, many details related to curricula and syllabi are prescribed centrally, thus limiting their responsiveness to local conditions and learners' circumstances (UIL, 2013a, p. 140).

As the Asia-Pacific regional synthesis report (Ahmed, 2009), written before CONFINTEA VI, demonstrates, making the curriculum locally relevant is not a straightforward exercise. It was easier when programmes were designed to meet the literacy needs of the predominantly rural population: the focus was on empowering them socially and economically through organizational efforts supported by training in income-generating activities. But the profile of ALE learners has changed considerably over a period of time in many countries of the region. Graduates of ALE programmes, even those from rural areas, often have to seek employment in urban localities. Attempts to address this dilemma are clearly visible in programmes launched in several countries to reorient migrants from rural areas to the needs of the urban employment market. Increased emphasis on youth programmes

Table 5.1: Number of countries in Asia-Pacific reporting the existence of quality criteria

	ADULT EDUCATION	ADULT LITERACY
Curricula	18	16
Learning materials	16	14
Facilitators' training	17	15
Teaching and learning methods	16	15
Assessment of learning outcomes	16	13

Source: UIL, 2013a, p. 141, based on reports from 24 countries in the Asia-Pacific region

and skills-building for the modern production sector has made the issue more pronounced. Skills-building courses are attended more by men than by women, while women's participation is higher in literacy-linked programmes. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find a locally based curriculum linked to income-generation activities and self-help groups being limited to programmes designed for women from disadvantaged groups, raising issues of equity and equality. It is, indeed, a challenge for the ALE sector to balance demands of quality and standardization of curriculum and learning material, on the one hand, and local relevance and changing livelihood concerns of the poor, on the other. Rural-urban dichotomy in the demand for specific skills further compounds this tension of local versus national and flexible versus standardized.

There is no doubt that standardized curricula make it easy to assess and maintain quality in ALE. Among different kinds of ALE programmes, equivalency programmes are reasonably well-defined in terms of duration of instruction and the contents and outcomes expected. The evaluation system is also largely standardized and linked

to the methods adopted in formal school settings. For instance, under the Alternate Learning System (ALS), the Philippines has revised modules and other learning materials, aligning them with the K-to-12 curricula; strengthened the monitoring and evaluation system for the ALS; and adopted implementation of different modalities in its Accreditation and Equivalency Programme. Thailand has recently specified quality standards for non-formal and informal learning programmes as part of its lifelong learning framework. National reports indicate that several other countries are also aligning their ALE programmes with national standards. The situation is similar with regard to programmes of skills-building, which are, by and large, aligned to the 'national qualification framework' being developed in many countries in the region.

A factor that is closely linked to curriculum and learning material and impinges on the quality of ALE is the teaching method adopted in these programmes. Country analysis reveals a high degree of consensus on the principle of learner-centred teaching and learning. From the country-level data it is evident that a variety of inter-related quality, equity and relevance concerns influence teaching and learning. Some countries rely heavily on national curriculum specifications, while others depend on learning materials, assessment practices and informal exchanges among peers. The professional background of teachers and the local strategy of adult learning are also important influences on teaching-learning standards and practices. The importance of participative methods and the strengthening of mechanisms for receiving feedback from the learner is emphasized in national progress reports (UIL, 2013a).

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ADULT EDUCATORS

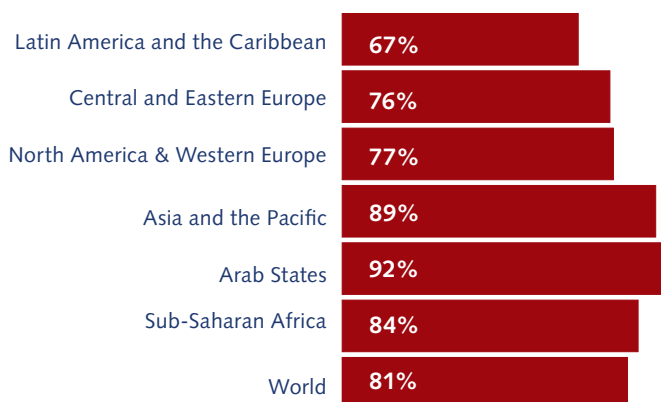
The adult educator is the key player in delivering ALE programmes and determining the quality of outcomes and impact of programmes. It is therefore of utmost importance that adult educators function as a well-organized professional group, possessing the necessary knowledge and skills, adequately equipped with pedagogic competence, and holding the right kind of attitude for engaging with diverse categories of adult learners, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the BFA points out: 'The lack of professionalisation and training opportunities for educators has had a detrimental impact on the quality of adult learning and education provision, as has the impoverished fabric of the learning environment, in terms of equipment, materials and curricula'

(UIL, 2010, p. 13). How are the countries of the Asia-Pacific region addressing this issue? Three dimensions of the concern were identified in *GRALE II*: initial qualifications required to become an adult educator, opportunities for continuing professional development and employment conditions. It is worth examining the current status of adult educators in the region in respect of these dimensions (UIL, 2013a).

The first requirement for professionalizing adult educators is to ensure that everyone entering into the realm of ALE as an educator possesses certain prescribed qualifications that equip him or her with necessary knowledge and competence. Comparing this across different regions of the world, it was found that around 90 per cent of countries in the region require pre-service training for adult educators (see *Figure 5.1*). However, the actual entry requirements vary widely. Within the region, more than 50 per cent of countries require prior qualifications only for some courses; it is only in about 45 per cent of countries that entry qualifications are essential for teaching all ALE courses.

Entry-level requirements, pre- and in-service training courses, accreditation and working conditions (working hours, remuneration and teaching environments) for literacy teachers/facilitators vary greatly across the region. For example, in China, any person with primary education can become a literacy teacher, whereas, in Indonesia and Nepal, secondary education is mandatory. In countries with high illiteracy rates, it is not unusual for community members with low education levels to take over the task of teaching their peers. Some countries, such as Sri Lanka, provide a few days of pre-service training,

Figure 5.1: Countries with pre-service training requirement for ALE teachers



while in Afghanistan the training is of two to three weeks' duration. Yet the expectation levels are quite high. The skills, knowledge and competences required by literacy teachers include an understanding of pedagogical issues, an appreciation of the nature of literacy and its relationship to vocational education and training, and gender sensitivity. To assure the quality of literacy teacher programmes, some countries (e.g. Indonesia and Nepal) have developed a standard curriculum for adult educators that can be adapted to local needs. In other countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, universities and other educational research institutions are engaged in professional training and development of adult educators (UIL, 2012a).

Considering that a number of NGOs are involved in delivering ALE programmes, prescribing one set of entry qualifications for all programmes and all contexts may not be realistic. It demands innovative approaches that meet the requirements of quality and equity. For instance, in the pilot project, Literacy for All: Empowerment and Poverty Reduction in Post-Conflict Nepal, designed to provide innovative, mother-tongue-based literacy programmes for women in rural communities, female facilitators were recruited locally, trained, supervised and supported. The participants' feedback on the training experience was highly positive. Similarly, several studies have shown that literacy teachers' formal qualifications or pedagogical training is less important than their positive attitudes and rapport with the community (UIL, 2013a, p. 145). The point to be noted here is that qualifications alone do not guarantee the professionalism of adult educators; however, ensuring professionalism does entail providing initial and continuing training, employment security, fair pay, opportunities to grow and recognition for good work in reducing the educational gap in the adult population (UIL, 2016, p. 58).

Pre-service and continuing professional development programmes are largely in the form of short courses, work-based learning, induction programmes and in-service training. In some countries, national standards have been adopted, describing the competences required of an adult educator – what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do. In Malaysia, for example, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency has this responsibility; in Palau, adult educators receive professional training that links learning outcomes to the standards defined by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Higher education institutions are involved in capacity-building of

adult educators in New Zealand, while in India this is the responsibility of state resource centres along with some selected university departments of adult and continuing education.

Responses to the question on continuing in-service education and training programmes for adult education teachers/facilitators indicated that provisions for such support is a feature common to all countries in the region. However, capacity to provide such opportunities for professional development was inadequate in 57 per cent of Asia-Pacific countries.¹⁰ Reasons for this inadequate attention to professional development of ALE personnel concern the way the sector is structured and made functional. In many countries, ALE continues to be viewed as consisting of time-limited projects. In some countries, the projects are wholly or partially dependent on international funding and implemented exclusively by NGOs. This is unlike the system created for formal school and university teachers. Further, adult educators come from a variety of backgrounds and are often employed on a temporary contractual basis or as short-term consultants. Some may even be working only as part-time adult educators, earning their livelihood mainly through other sources. Consequently, in many countries, the status, conditions of employment and remuneration of adult education staff are below those of personnel in other education and training sectors.

Generally, teaching and training in adult education is not well-regulated, though measures to improve the situation in this regard are under consideration in some countries. For example, in Malaysia and Thailand, salaries are fixed not according to the sector being worked in – formal or non-formal – but according to profession and qualifications. In other countries, such as Bangladesh and India, it has been reported that there are no set standards or criteria for remuneration and salary of adult educators, particularly when they offer their services as voluntary or ad hoc literacy facilitators. In Mongolia, part-time, non-formal adult educators do not have fixed salaries. Some countries report differences in employment conditions between government and private sectors (UIL, 2013a). It is important to recognize that provision of regular in-service professional development programmes is closely linked to the employment and social status of

adult education personnel. In some countries, such as Thailand, field functionaries in ALE constitute a relatively stable cadre, whereas in countries such as India they work largely on a voluntary basis with nominal financial support. In some others, field functionaries are essentially employed by NGOs implementing ALE programmes.

As improvements in employment conditions have financial implications, countries have to find stable sources of financial support for the sector, preferably from within the domestic budget. With regard to the strengthening of professional development of adult educators, involvement of higher educational institutions will add significant value in terms of quality and credibility. In addition, it is also useful to promote specialized resource institutions in the non-government sector, such as Nirantar Trust in India, the Bunyad Foundation in Pakistan or Women in Enterprise Development in the Philippines. These institutions have been intensely engaged in programmes of women's literacy and empowerment for a long time. Finally, it would also be very useful to establish wider networks of ALE educators by connecting institutions in government and non-government sectors engaged in imparting literacy adult education.

Although the capacity of ALE personnel at all levels remains problematic, there are some visible signs of movement towards improved quality for programme delivery in several countries in the region (UIL, 2012b). The planning, delivery and monitoring of training are also undergoing major changes in countries which have introduced quality standards and accreditation mechanisms for ALE personnel, as in Malaysia, Thailand and the Republic of Korea. Efforts have been made in many countries of the region in recent years to strengthen training units and institutes and to expand training facilities at local level by establishing regional resource centres, as in Mongolia.

INNOVATIONS FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Quality improvement is of prime concern for planners and administrators of ALE in all countries of the region. There is a clear realization that mere expansion of the programme will not improve the status of ALE. Furthermore, quality improvement demands simultaneous action for effecting development on multiple fronts.

10 Compiled from national reports from the region submitted to the *GRALE III* survey.

Several countries have begun to move in this direction, with some having initiated special innovative measures to enhance the quality of ALE. Bhutan, for example, has tried to address the issue by focusing on four aspects; it has: instituted a system of monitoring literacy centres, increased the entry qualification of NFE instructors, increased the supply of computers to community learning centres, and equipped those community learning centres with basic library books for self-learning.

While Bhutan is a case of a low-income country which has recently begun to address these issues, the Republic of Korea is a case of a high-income country that has consistently paid attention to building a quality system of lifelong education. To ensure the quality of ALE, the Korean Government established a national certification system for professional educators working in the lifelong education sector, guaranteeing a high quality of teaching and learning. Under Article 24 of the Lifelong Education Act, a lifelong learning educator is defined as 'a field specialist responsible for the management of the entire lifelong learning process, from programme planning to implementation, analysis, evaluation, and teaching'. To be certified as a lifelong learning educator in the Republic of Korea, one must obtain a predetermined number of academic credits in the related field from a university and graduate school or go through training courses provided by designated institutions, including the National Institute for Lifelong Education. In addition, the Act prescribes 'the placement and employment of lifelong learning educators', making it mandatory for municipal and provincial institutes for lifelong education, as well as lifelong learning centres in cities, counties and villages to employ lifelong learning educators.

The third illustration is of Indonesia, a middle-income country that began promoting non-formal education more than 30 years ago. Over a period of time, Indonesia has initiated a comprehensive set of measures to improve the quality of ALE, covering a range of measures related to capacity-building programmes, qualifications of ALE teachers, building partnerships and financing of ALE (see Box 5.1).

Thailand, another middle-income country, has formulated a comprehensive set of strategies to develop a society of lifelong learning through the development of continuous learning at each stage of life, with a focus on manpower needs. In 2012, a set of standards for non-formal and informal education were defined to ensure quality of all

programmes and their outcomes. It should be mentioned that measures to enhance quality, however innovative they might be, have to be constant and continuous while cumulatively transforming the ALE programmes and practices and taking them to a higher level of performance.

Box 5.1

Comprehensive measures for improving quality of ALE: The case of Indonesia

Various steps have been taken to enhance the quality of adult learning and education, including:

- Implementing the Law on Teachers and Lecturers.
- Increasing the number of capacity-building programmes for non-formal educators.
- Establishing the National Accreditation Council for Non-Formal Education through the issuance of government regulation.
- Developing better financing and fund-transfer mechanisms to improve efficiency, accountability and equity.
- Public funding allocation for education has been increased to 20 per cent since 2009, with 3 per cent minimum allocated for ALE.
- The government continues to encourage multilateral cooperation and private-public partnership to support quality improvement.
- A regulation on quality of ALE in Indonesia was issued in 2014: The Guidelines of Basic Literacy Programme Implementation.
- In 2014, a further regulation was issued on Qualification Standards and Competencies for Non-Formal Education Instructors.

Source: National report submitted to the *GRALE III* survey

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: FOCUS ON OUTCOMES

The provision of quality ALE entails regular monitoring and evaluation of programmes on the ground and assessment of their outcomes through the systematic collection of information. Examining this dimension in 2009, *GRALE I* observed that quality-assurance mechanisms have been established in many European countries, but much to a much lesser extent in the countries

of the South (UIL, 2009). Although governments in Asia and the Pacific recognized the need to develop monitoring mechanisms, their technical and resource capacities to do so were limited. Since then, considerable improvement can be seen in many countries of the region. Objective assessment of ALE programme outcomes in a nationally comparable form may be a difficult proposition in many countries as the programmes are delivered by multiple providers and with largely non-standardized academic resources, both human and material. Many instruments of evaluation may remain inaccurate where programmes operate in multicultural settings and deal with multilingual learners. Nevertheless, collection of information on ALE programme outcomes on a regular basis is of tremendous value in improving the quality of the programmes when accompanied by robust feedback and on-course correction mechanisms.

GRALE III examined whether countries collected outcome information with respect to four critical dimensions: completion rates; certificates or qualifications issued; employment outcomes (or labour market outcomes); and social outcomes in the areas of health and well-being. At the global level, it was found that information related to 'certificates issued' and 'completion rates' was collected in many countries. However, only 40 per cent of countries reported that they collected information on employment outcomes, and an even smaller proportion, a mere 29 per cent, collected information on social outcomes of ALE. The situation in Asia and the Pacific, by and large, resembles the world trend (see *Figure 5.2*). From the data, one can infer that outcome information is collected where it is tangible and does not demand additional effort to collect follow-up information. However, it should be a cause for concern if this indicates that employment and social outcomes are given relatively low importance. In particular, the observation that less than 30 per cent of countries collect information on social outcomes demands careful examination.

Recognition of learning outcomes from ALE, validating them against preset standards and accrediting the concerned programmes is a process that has received considerable attention in recent years. Such recognition of learning outcomes, irrespective of when, where and how learning has taken place, and linking them with national qualifications has become a part of policies and practices in adult education in many countries of the region. Information from the countries in the Asia-Pacific region

shows that eight of the 19 countries had already adopted a national qualifications framework before 2009. Six more countries in the region adopted a policy framework or created such a framework and linked ALE to it subsequent to the BFA in 2009 (see *Table 5.2*).

Besides this policy of validating and accrediting outcomes of ALE, many of these countries are specifically developing national qualification frameworks to introduce equivalencies between formal and non-formal learning, and to align literacy and adult education to vocational qualifications. It is thought that national qualifications provide broader forms of recognizing achievement and can open up routes to further qualification pathways (UIL, 2009).

While the creation of such competence-based qualifications frameworks is generally viewed as a positive step, caution is needed to ensure that competence-based outcomes are complemented by inputs, i.e. the knowledge that a learner needs to acquire if he or she is to be capable of moving beyond their existing performance. Also, 'competence' should not be used in a narrow technician sense to refer only to measurable skills to the exclusion of the intangible social learning which has been integral to ALE programmes and processes (UIL, 2013a). Specification of learning outcomes helps in linking ALE programmes to NQFs, but such specifications for NQFs should not delimit the boundaries of ALE. Outcomes also have to reflect the overall aims or vision underpinning ALE curricula and context-based learning objectives of specific programmes.

Figure 5.2: Countries collecting ALE outcome information

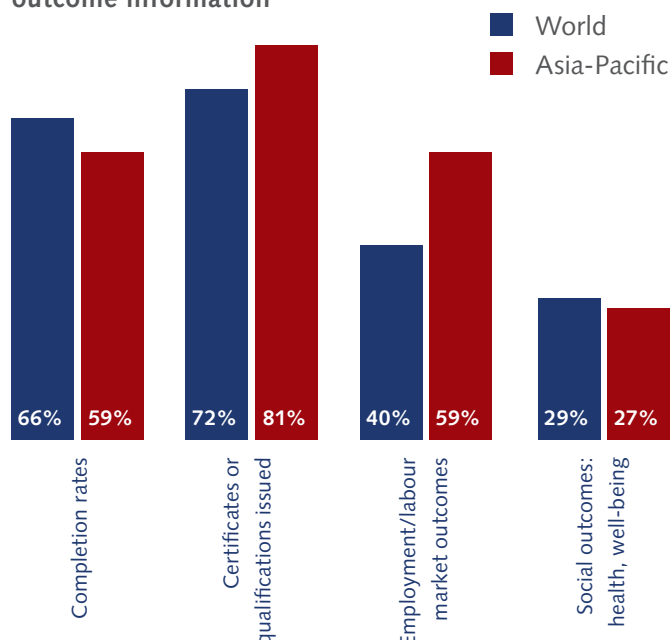
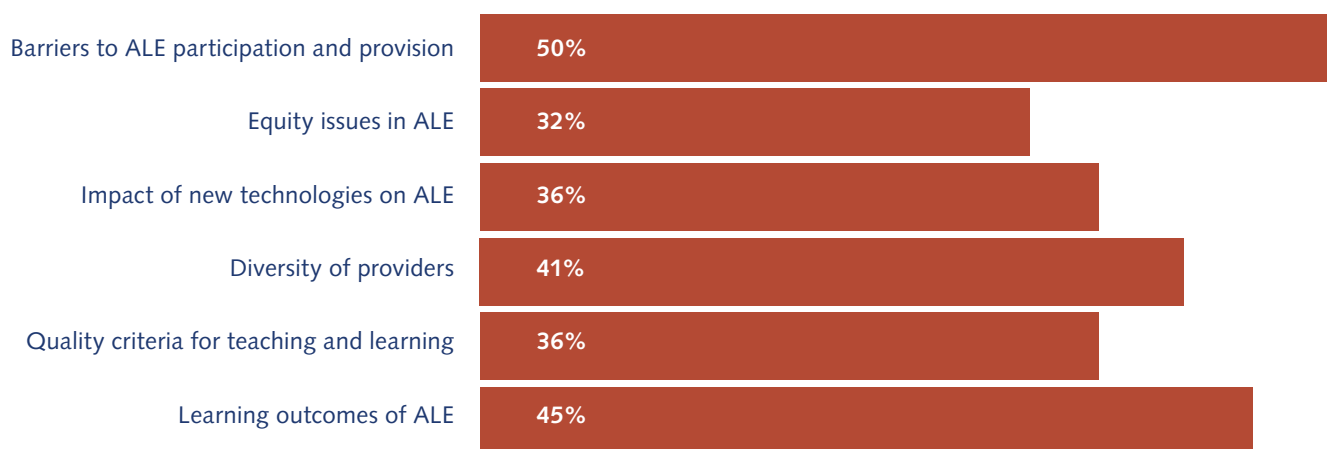


Table 5.2: Policy framework to recognize, validate and accredit non-formal and informal learning

Australia	Policy framework existed before 2009	Maldives	---
Azerbaijan	Policy framework developed after 2009	Federated States of Micronesia	No
Bangladesh	Policy framework developed after 2009	Mongolia	Policy framework existed before 2009
Bhutan	Policy framework developed after 2009	Nepal	Policy framework developed after 2009
China	---	New Zealand	Policy framework existed before 2009
India	Policy framework developed after 2009	Niue	No
Indonesia	Policy framework existed before 2009	Pakistan	No
Islamic Republic of Iran	Policy framework existed before 2009	Palau	No
Japan	---	Philippines	Policy framework existed before 2009
Kyrgyzstan	No	Republic of Korea	Policy framework existed before 2009
Malaysia	Policy framework developed after 2009	Sri Lanka	Policy framework existed before 2009

Finally, the quality of ALE cannot be enhanced by a limited review of specific programmes and assessment of outcomes. Development of quality ALE demands constant engagement with the theoretical as well as empirical aspects of ALE through substantial research. Research has to be holistic, connecting various factors influencing ALE, as well as in-depth, focusing on specific aspects. Finding out if such research is taking place in the Asia-Pacific region will entail extensive study of the work in

various universities and other higher-education institutions. As a means of getting a quick understanding of the situation, the *GRALE III* survey sought responses on whether countries have conducted substantial analysis with regard to six aspects of ALE (see *Figure 5.3*). The situation is not very encouraging. Except for exploring the barriers to participation, possibly carried out as part of need-assessment surveys, very few countries seem to invest in substantial research on adult education.

Figure 5.3: Countries in Asia and the Pacific that have conducted research on different aspects of ALE

6. FINANCING ALE: ARRESTING THE DECLINE

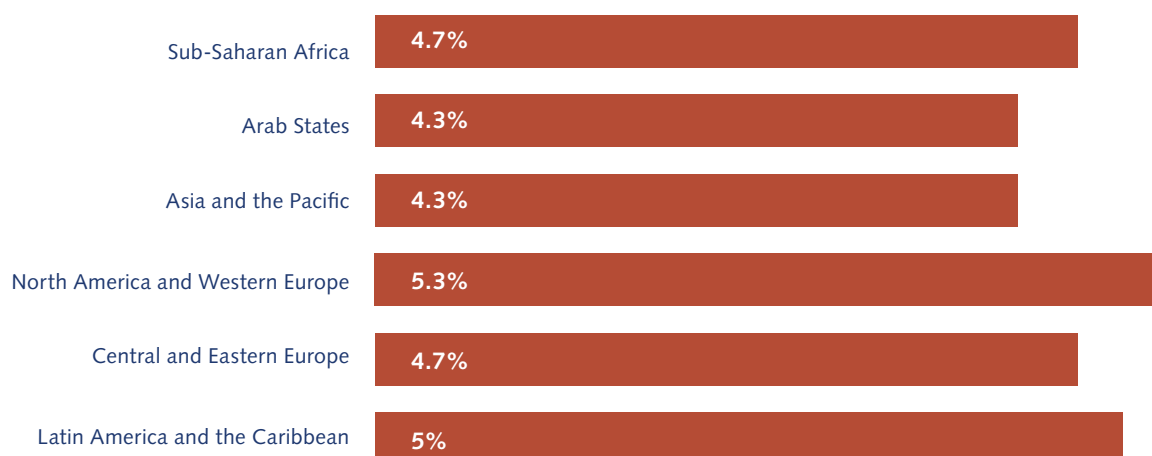
The Belém Framework for Action called upon the international community, as well as national leadership, to view the financing of ALE from a broader perspective. ‘Adult learning and education represent a valuable investment which brings social benefits by creating more democratic, peaceful, inclusive, productive, healthy and sustainable societies. Significant financial investment is essential to ensure the quality provision of adult learning and education’ (UIL, 2010, p. 7). In order to achieve this broad goal, besides reiterating the long-standing commitment to invest 6 per cent of gross national product (GNP) in education, the BFA recommended expanding existing educational resources and budgets across all government departments; considering new, and opening up existing, transnational funding programmes for literacy and adult education; creating incentives to promote new sources of funding, e.g. from the private sector, NGOs, communities and individuals; and prioritizing investment in lifelong learning for women, rural populations and people with disabilities.

Another clear message from the BFA is that countries have to look for additional alternative sources of funding for ALE instead of merely demanding a bigger share in the overall allocations to education development. The

international community is called upon to ‘increase funds and technical support for adult literacy, learning and education, and explore the feasibility of using alternative financing mechanisms, such as debt swap or cancellation’ (ibid., p. 8). This is a particularly important point as in many developing economies, which are still struggling to create a quality primary education system, increasing the level of spending on ALE is seen as unsustainable.

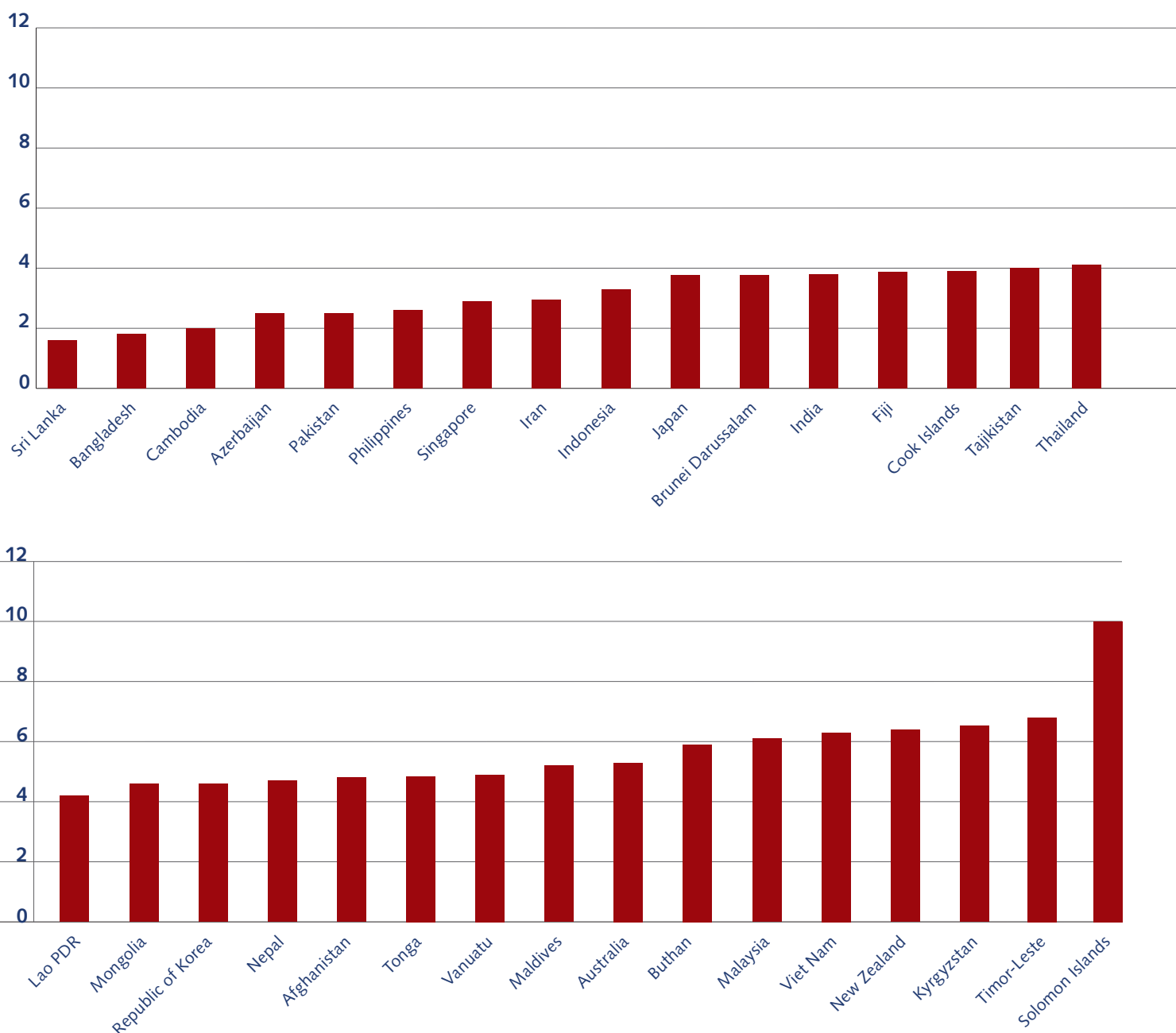
Investing 6 per cent of GNP for education has been a long-standing benchmark advocated in various national and international platforms. Expenditure on education as 15–20 per cent of total public expenditure is another benchmark often emphasized. Expenditure on ALE has to be viewed within this framework of overall public investment in education. There has been a general complaint that ALE does not receive adequate attention and financial support from national planners. Unfortunately, disaggregated and comparable information on this issue is difficult to find. The present analysis is mainly based on information available from the UIS database and the limited information provided by countries in response to the *GRALE III* survey.

Figure 6.1: Education expenditure as % GDP in different regions



Source: UIL, 2016, p. 43

Figure 6.2: Expenditure on education as percentage of GDP for 2014 or latest year in the Asia-Pacific region available from UIS data set



Note: Countries for which no data are available for 2009 or later are not included

EDUCATION EXPENDITURE AS PROPORTION OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP) AND PUBLIC EXPENDITURE

The Asia-Pacific region ranks relatively low among different regions in terms of share of GDP spent on education. *GRALE III* reported that only 26 per cent of countries in the region spent 6 per cent or more of their GDP

on education. Further, the average value, as indicated in *Figure 6.1*, is around 4.3 per cent, which is much lower than even the average for sub-Saharan Africa, where an average of 4.7 per cent of GDP is spent on education.

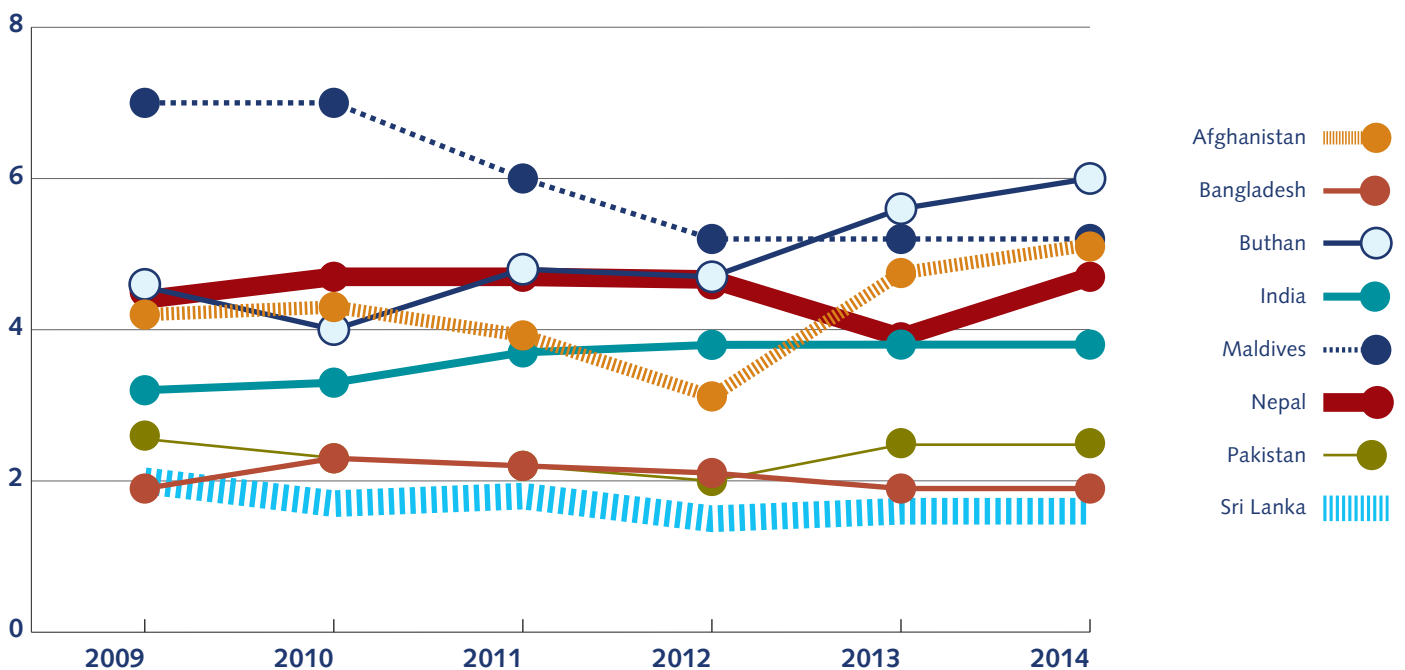
Data given in *Figure 6.2* show a very wide variation among the countries of the region. At one end are countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Cambodian,

which show a figure of less than 2 per cent of GDP being spent on education. At the other end of the spectrum are countries such as Malaysia, Viet Nam, New Zealand and Kyrgyzstan, which have already reached the benchmark of 6 per cent. As the figures for any particular year could be impacted by several extraneous factors, one should also consider the trend to examine whether countries have been consistent, have increased spending or decreased it. As can be seen from *Figure 6.3* and *Figure 6.4*, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries clearly outperform South Asian countries. No South Asian countries have reached the benchmark figure of 6 per cent, while two countries in South-East Asia, namely Viet Nam and Malaysia, have been consistently holding to the level of 6 per cent or more. Among South Asian countries, the progress of Bhutan is commendable as it has shown a consistently increasing trend, almost nearing the benchmark.

Another basis for examining the attention paid to education in a country is to study education expenditure as a share of total public expenditure. This is important, as every international declaration has emphasized that the government is the primary duty-bearer for efficient,

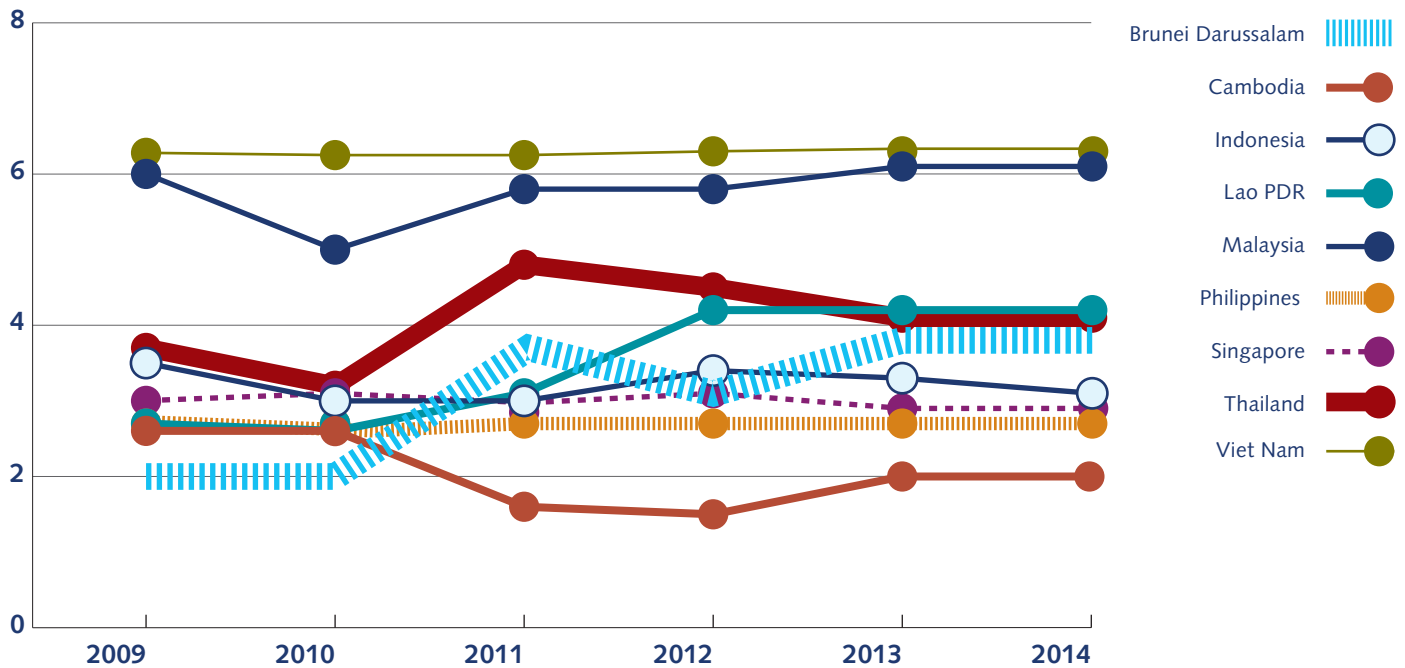
equitable and sustainable financing of education. Public investment should help address the equitable distribution of resources across education sub-sectors and geographic locations, and targeted programmes to support marginalized groups. The Bangkok Statement, issued by the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in 2014, strongly recommended reaching the internationally recognized benchmarks of 6 per cent of GDP and/or 20 per cent of total public expenditure for education (UNESCO, 2014a). This was more than the amount identified in the Muscat Agreement, which was adopted the same year and called for 4–6 per cent of GDP and 15–20 per cent of public spending.

Figure 6.3: Education expenditure as % GDP trend in South Asia



Note: Missing values have been substituted by value for previous/following year from UIS data set

Figure 6.4: Education expenditure as % GDP trend in ASEAN countries



Note: Missing values have been substituted by value for previous/following year from UIS data set

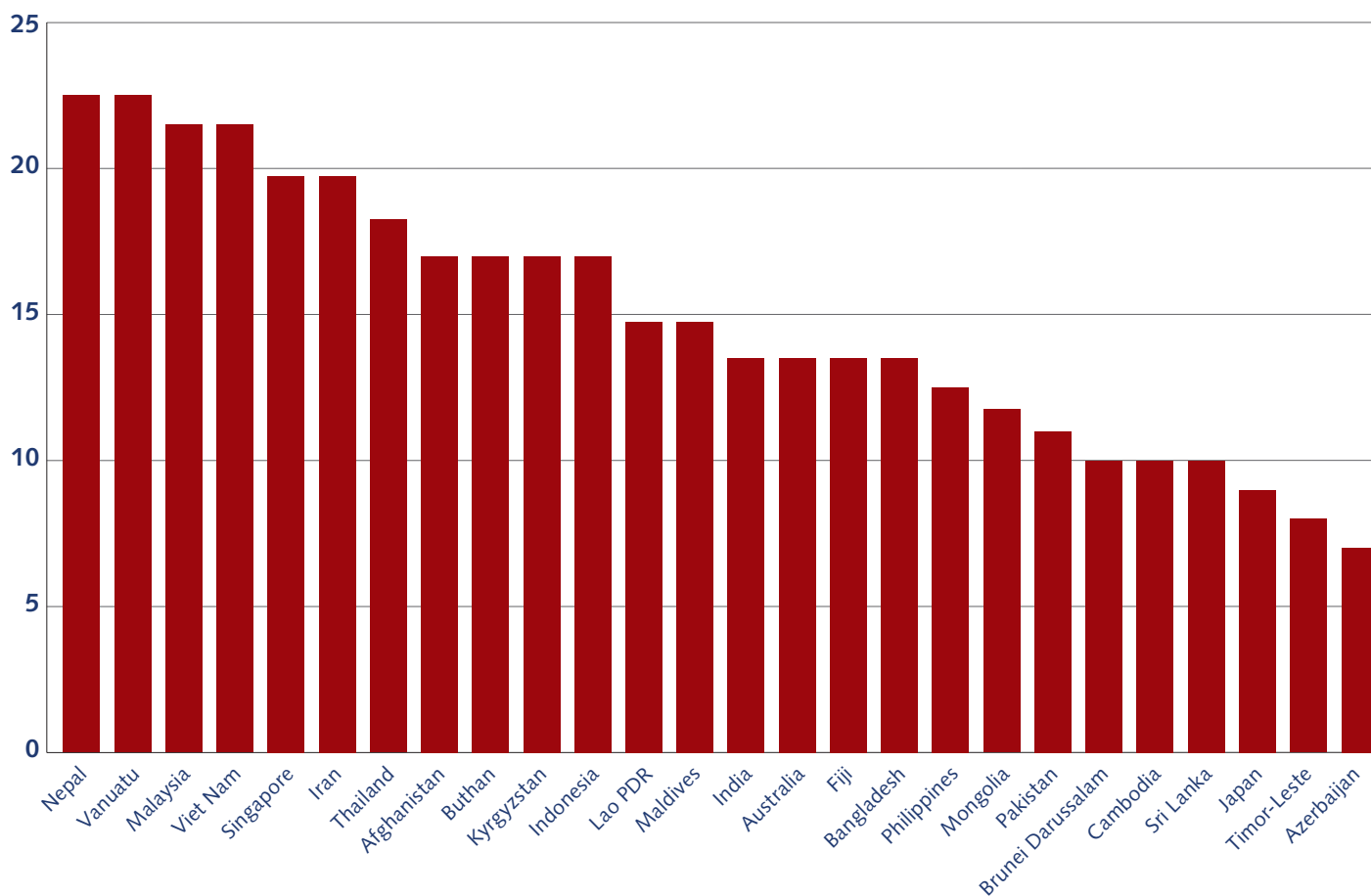
As shown in Figures 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7, again, Malaysia and Viet Nam fall into the top bracket in terms of the quantum of public expenditure in the country devoted to education, accounting for more than 20 per cent. Sri Lanka and Cambodia are positioned at the other end of the spectrum. Nepal not only beats all others with more than 20 per cent of public expenditure devoted to education but has also been witnessing a consistently increasing trend for the last few years even though it falls only in the middle range in so far as education's share of GDP is concerned. Neither of these indicators on education expenditure, individually or together, can, however, be taken as conclusive proof of adequacy of investment in the education sector in general, and for ALE in particular. As pointed out in *GRALE II*, a detailed understanding of the size of GDP and the delivery systems in place for education may be needed in order to provide a more nuanced and realistic understanding of current investment and its adequacy (UIL, 2013a).

INVESTMENT IN ALE

Reviewing the investment made in ALE based on the national reports received for its global survey, *GRALE II* concluded, 'the current investment in adult education does not meet the targets that have been set by CONFINTEA V and VI. This shortage of investment contrasts sharply with the demand emerging in adult education and adult literacy.' The report further highlighted that

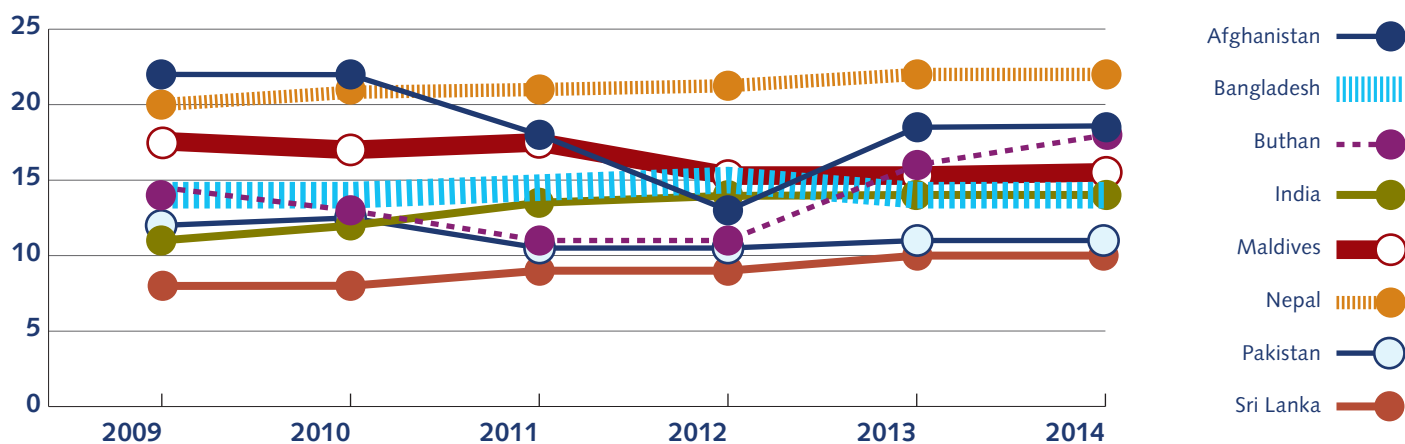
a study from the region of Asia and the Pacific estimated the aggregate cost of achieving EFA Goal 4 on adult literacy for 255.7 million adults without literacy skills (205.8 million females and 49.9 million males) at USD 45 billion, based on a cost per learner of USD 176. Countries in South Asia, in particular, will face a major challenge in mobilising such resources. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan will need to allocate 15–30 per cent of their education budgets for adult literacy. Political will and sustained external assistance are needed to address the literacy gap effectively and achieve the EFA goal for adult literacy. (UIL, 2013a, p. 84)

Figure 6.5: Share of education in government expenditure (%)
2014 or latest year for available Asia-Pacific from UIS data set



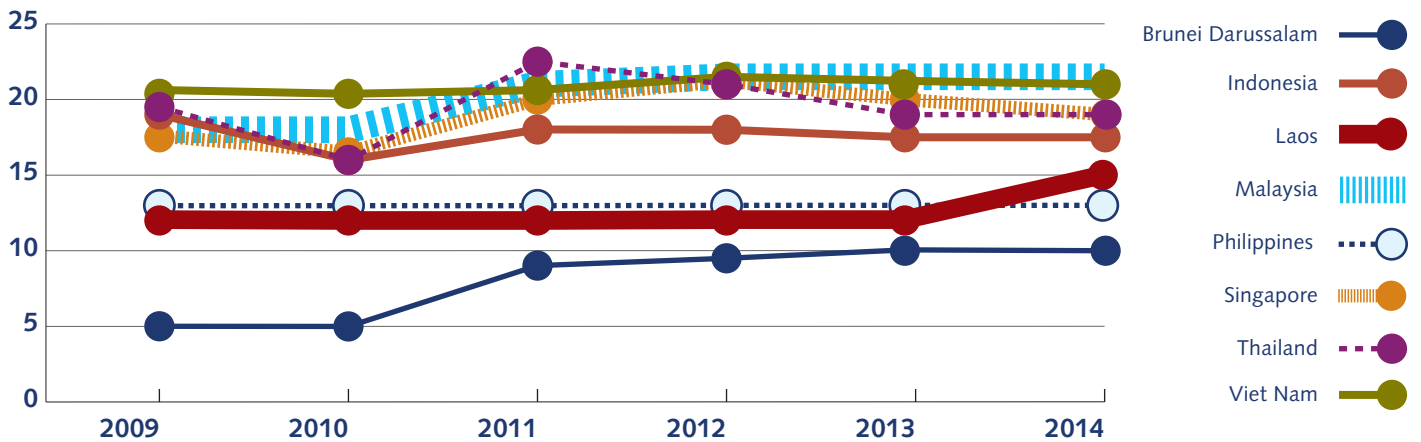
Note: Countries for which no data are available for 2009 or later are not included

Figure 6.6: Share of education in public expenditure (%) trend in South Asia



Note: Missing values have been substituted by value for previous/following year from UIS Data Set

Figure 6.7: Share of education in public expenditure (%) trend in ASEAN countries



Note: Missing values have been substituted by value for previous/following year from UIS data set

What is the situation in the region nearly four years since these observations were made? See *Table 6.1*.

If the limited number of countries giving relevant information is considered to represent the pattern of public spending on ALE in the region, it is too diverse to generalize. While five of the 15 countries reported that ALE accounts for 0 to 0.4 per cent of the total public expenditure on education, in Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and New Zealand the proportion is 4 per cent or more. Low levels of spending on ALE in some countries such as India and Pakistan, with a substantial backlog of illiteracy and a large expanding youth population, should be a matter of serious concern. The figures clearly show that the countries of East Asia are investing in ALE at a much higher level than others in the region. Eight of the 15 countries reported that allocation for ALE within the education budget has increased during the last five years. Again, it is disappointing that it has remained static in India and has decreased in Pakistan.

ALE programmes in several countries do not solely rely on government funding and, consequently, it becomes necessary to analyse funding available for ALE in a more comprehensive manner. Cambodia is an example of this: the non-formal education budget as a proportion of the total education programme budget increased from 6.40 per cent in 2005 to 7.68 per cent in 2009. However, it then steadily decreased to 4.27 per cent in 2013, affecting programme implementation and causing a reduction in the number of contract teachers and other field operations. However, the number of community learning

centres (CLCs) in the country increased. This was because the CLCs were supported by the community and development partners (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia, 2014). Several other low-income countries are also constrained as they depend considerably on external sources to fund education in general and ALE in particular. In Lao PDR, the volume of domestic investment budget in the education sector is still relatively low at 6.2 per cent of all investment (2010-11), and over 80 per cent of the education recurrent budget is for wage-related costs. Thus, the sector is significantly dependent on development programmes.

Domestic investment in ALE may also be constrained by specific preferences among competing claims. For instance, even though public investment has increased in recent years in China, the government preferentially allocated the increased public expenditure to compulsory education, especially to remote schools in the countryside and the western region (National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO and National Centre for Education Development Research, Ministry of Education, China, 2015). In fact, many countries faced with competing claims on limited resources and with an unfinished agenda of providing primary education for all children may find it difficult to convince political leadership and public opinion-makers to allocate additional funds for the education of adults. For planners this is a dilemma that is not easy to resolve. Further, it should be recognized that, in some countries, ALE continues to be seen as a temporary project and so may not find a place in the regular national budget with its own separate

Table 6.1: Public spending on adult learning and education

	Public spending on ALE as proportion of public spending on education	Change between 2009 and 2014	Is there a plan to increase further?
Azerbaijan	0%–0.4%	Increased	Plans
Bhutan	> 4%	Increased	Plans
China	1%–1.9%	Same	Plans to increase
India	0%–0.4%	Same	Stay same
Indonesia	2%–3.9%	Increased	Plans
Islamic Republic of Iran	1%–1.9%	Increased	Do not know
Kyrgyzstan	4% or more	Increased	Do not know
Mongolia	0.5%–0.9%	Same	Plans increase
Nepal	4% or more	Decreased	Plans increase
New Zealand	4% or more	Increased	Stay same
Niue	0%–0.4%	Same	Plans increase
Pakistan	0%–0.4%	Decreased	Plans increase
Philippines	0.5%–0.9%	Increased	Plans increase
Republic of Korea	1%–1.9%	Increased	Stay same
Sri Lanka	0%–0.4%	Same	Do not know

Source: Based on national reports submitted for the *GRALE III* survey responding to the question on public spending on ALE. Only those countries giving information on all the three items are included.

budget head. Though this appears trivial, it may force the sub-sector to depend essentially on extra-budgetary resources from NGOs and development partners. Additionally, this is essential for 'integrating ALE into

financial strategies across government departments and creating an integrated ALE strategy' as committed to under the BFA.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO INCREASING ALE FINANCING

The Belém Framework recognized the difficulty in depending only on traditional sources of funding for ALE, and emphasized the need for innovative ways to mobilize financial resources. Specifically, the BFA called for the creation of ‘incentives to promote new sources of funding, e.g. from the private sector, NGOs, communities and individuals, without prejudicing the principles of equity and inclusion’ (UIL, 2010, p. 8). Raising resources for education, in the midst of an increasing financial crunch in many countries, requires creative approaches to influencing national leadership involved in financial planning. Several countries have taken new initiatives in this regard; among them, the Budget Partnership Agreement in the Philippines for budget advocacy is a unique effort involving a large network of civil society organizations (see *Box 6.1*).

Box 6.1

Budget advocacy: Advocating better educational budgets in the Philippines

E-Net Philippines is a network of 150 civil society organisations (CSOs) that seeks to expand civil society’s influence on effecting positive change in education. One of the areas it focuses on is improving resource allocation in the education sector and addressing inefficiencies in finance management that compound problems with regard to fund shortages. Through the Budget Partnership Agreement, E-Net Philippines has become the Department of Education’s CSO partner in reviewing agencies’ budgets, programmes and projects, and in the crafting of their budget proposals. E-Net’s Task Force on Education Financing focuses on a continuously evolving agenda for key reforms in educational financing. It is tasked to update studies and popularize related issues within and outside the network. At the same time, it is mandated to build the organization’s capability for advocacy on educational financing at the local and national levels and among donor countries and agencies. Concretely, it develops the civil society’s capability to intervene in budget cycles, official development

assistance processes, and Local Government Unit financing. The task force also advocates for the allocation of a bigger budget for training and medical and benefits coverage for teachers and additional maintenance and other operating expenses budgets to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. E-Net’s budget advocacy has been more focused on increasing funds for programmes for marginalized sectors and it has requested a dedicated budget for the national EFA processes and coordinating bodies, from national to local levels, to decentralize and disseminate EFA.

A common trend among all countries is to involve NGOs and the private corporate sector in raising resources: *Table 6.2* is illustrative of innovative efforts undertaken by some countries in the region. These new measures have to be seen in the context of the particular country, as some of them may not be unique and innovative. Further, even though these have been reported as innovative measures for financing ALE, most of them only involve restructuring government funding and not all of them involve enhancement in finances for ALE. Further, one has to guard against the possibility that increased dependence on funding through fees and private sources leads to decreased government financing.

Table 6.2: Innovative measures adopted for financing ALE (illustrative)

INNOVATION	
Azerbaijan	Since 2010, in association with the Ministry of Formation, Azerbaijani adult education funding programmes are carried out in collaboration with non-governmental and other organizations.
Bhutan	Allocated separate NFE budget head by the Ministry of Finance to empower district-level authorities to utilize resources.
China	The government encourages the development of private adult education; encourages schools and enterprises to strengthen cooperation in adult education; encourages relevant departments, industries and enterprises to develop staff education; has increased funding and encouraged the establishment of shared mechanisms among government, industry, enterprises and individuals. The Ministry of Education has issued guidelines for the use of social resources to develop learning cities in a unified fashion.
India	The Saakshar Bharat programme has provision for the setting up of adult education centres (AECs) at village level as the operational arm of the programme for delivering a wide range of activities, including literacy, basic education, vocational education and continuing education, within their territorial jurisdiction. In order to attract learners and to support active villages, the concept of 'Model AECs' has been introduced by upgrading existing AECs as 'model AECs' through provision of additional infrastructure. Since the Saakshar Bharat programme does not have provision for such additional infrastructure, the National Literacy Mission Authority has signed memoranda of understanding with public sector enterprises (PSEs) such as the Container Corporation of India, the Power Finance Corporation and the Rural Electrification Corporation, which in turn have provided financial assistance to various state literacy mission authorities under their corporate social responsibility initiative. These PSEs have so far provided financial assistance to around 1,000 model AECs.
Indonesia	Indonesia implements a competitive funding system. While all non-formal education institutions seek to access some grant income from the government, only those with credible criteria receive the grant. Some of these criteria are: (a) conduct needs assessments; (b) have all necessary legal documents and recommendations from relevant institutions; (c) have online ID; (d) have targets by name and address; (e) have a specific partner in marketing their products. Recently, the government has launched a learner personal allowance through the Smart Indonesia Programme, dedicated to the needy. It is aimed at increasing access to compulsory education and improving its quality. In response to the growing interest from the private sector in investing in the non-formal education sector, the Indonesian Government also introduced an operating licence for delivering non-formal education with foreign investment.
Islamic Republic of Iran	The government has approved a resolution to meet the cost of establishing a literacy database and creating a cash incentive for illiterate people and educationally vulnerable children.

INNOVATION

Malaysia

The National Higher Education Fund Corporation is responsible for giving study loans to students pursuing tertiary education in Malaysia. This agency is under the Ministry of Education. In addition, the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) was established in 1993 with the aim of developing quality human capital and a world-class workforce in order to achieve a high-income economy based on knowledge and innovation. Its vision is to be the driving force in training and development of the workforce while its mission is to enhance workforce knowledge, skills and capabilities through effective management of the fund. The objective of the HRDF is to encourage employers covered under the Pembangunan Sumber Manusia Berhad Act 2001 to retrain and upgrade the skills of their employees, apprentices and trainees in line with their business needs and the development strategy of the country. The HRDF spearheads the up-skilling of the Malaysian workforce by enabling employers to receive financial assistance of up to 100 per cent of the training cost incurred. Employees with no formal education but who have obtained the relevant knowledge, experience and expertise in the workplace will also be certified based on their competency levels under the Recognition of Prior Learning Scheme.

Philippines

The Philippines has instituted the following measures: a) Bottom-Up Budgeting, grassroots participatory budgeting where local government units and civil society organizations are allowed to propose programmes and activities based on their needs; b) the Alternative Learning System (Unified Contracting Scheme), in which the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems implemented two major non-formal education programmes: the Basic Literacy Programme and the Accreditation and Equivalency Programme. These programmes are delivered through a contracting scheme, with qualified education service providers and with the use of government funds for field operations.

Republic of Korea

Reforms enacted in 2007 meant that responsibilities were given to local governments to promote and provide funding for lifelong learning in their respective regions. As a direct result of this, local governments in cities, counties and districts emerged as financial providers for lifelong learning. In addition, Article 8 of the Act dictates that central government, local governments, and heads of public agencies and companies may provide financial support for learning fees in order to expand the lifelong learning opportunities of their employees or other workers. Along with this, it is important to provide learning opportunities and related information to Korean people at all times in order to construct a lifelong learning society. Thus, at present, new policies and projects, such as K-MOOC, for providing nationwide MOOC services, and the Damoa Lifelong Education Information Network, that collects and distributes information on lifelong education from all provincial and municipal governments across the country, are being promoted, and the government budget allocation to these projects is increasing.

INTERNATIONAL FUNDING FOR EDUCATION AND ALE

Recent international meetings galvanizing support for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development generated optimism that the international community stood ready to reverse the stagnating trend in aid to education. This is, especially, critical for the poorest countries, given the enormous ambition of the new agenda in education. However, the latest figures show few signs of renewed commitment: in 2014, aid to education was still 8 per cent below its 2010 peak (UNESCO, 2016). Observations from the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity also do not support any such optimism. The commission laments that:

education has not been a top priority for international actors, whether official donors, emerging donors, or charitable organizations ... Education's share of sector-allocable ODA has fallen from 13 per cent to 10 per cent since 2002 ... Education's share in non-concessional lending has also declined from more than 7 per cent in 2002 to less than 4 per cent in 2014. Data from emerging donors is limited, but of the non-DAC donors reporting their sectoral aid levels, education represented less than 5 per cent of total financing in 2014. (Education Commission, 2016)

The commission further points out that 'there is a lack of multilateral support for the education sector as a whole. Disbursements from multilateral agencies were only 34 per cent of total ODA for education in 2012–2014, compared to 60 per cent for health. Among multilateral donors, education has seen a decline from 10 per cent to 7 per cent of total aid over the past decade, while support for infrastructure has increased from 30 per cent to 38 per cent'. In fact, the data from the period from 2010-11 to 2013-14 show that a share of support to education from the Asian Development Bank, a major development partner in Asia and the Pacific, declined from 13 per cent to 8 per cent while it increased for infrastructure from 42 per cent to 58 per cent.

With regard to international aid, ALE has to compete with the demands from other sectors even within education; overall financial support from development partners to education broadly determines the scope for ALE to receive such support. For many countries in the

Asia-Pacific region, external funding covers a major part of education expenditure. Even in countries where the government receives no bilateral or multilateral funding, a significant part of ALE operations depends on NGOs receiving international assistance. In Asia and the Pacific, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provide support for adult education, though this is quite limited in magnitude and coverage. In the case of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the World Bank and the ADB support the implementation of TVET. In 2010, the World Bank provided funding to the Coalition on Education Solomon Islands to conduct literacy research in two provinces in the Solomon Islands (UIL, 2013a).

When the Education for All goals were adopted at Dakar in 2000, the international community of donors and national governments promised that 'no country seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources'. Unfortunately, donors have not kept this pledge. The largest decline in aid to basic education has affected South Asia, which saw disbursements fall by 26 per cent between 2010 and 2012. The two countries with the largest reductions in aid to basic education from 2010 to 2012 were India and Pakistan. Although both are in the lower middle-income bracket, they are among the five countries with the largest number of out-of-school children who will eventually swell the ranks of the illiterate or semi-literate adult population (UNESCO, 2014b).

This elaboration on declining international financial support for education is pertinent as ALE will have to continue competing with other development sectors as well as within education for both domestic and international resources. As the economic conditions in traditional donor countries are not congenial, should one look for alternative sources? Some policy analysts consider that a source of education finance that should grow after 2015 is the group of emerging economies known as the BRICS: Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa. Their support has received increased attention as they play a greater role on the world stage and traditional donors' aid budgets are constrained by the economic climate (UNESCO, 2013). Even though it is difficult to predict how this grouping would expand its role as development donors, it should be positively viewed as holding significant scope for South-South financial cooperation.

7. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: MOVING TO A NEW PARADIGM

In the developing world, international cooperation has been commonly understood in terms of an asymmetric relationship involving a flow of assistance, essentially in the form of financial aid, from richer countries to poorer countries through bilateral or multilateral channels. Over the years, such a narrow view has come to be replaced with an expanded vision of development partnership, conceived as a mutually beneficial relationship enhancing the capability to pursue activities of common concern and interest. This perspective is underscored clearly by UNESCO's 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*:

Sustained international cooperation implies: a) promoting and stimulating development within the countries concerned through appropriate institutions and structures adapted to the particular circumstances of those countries; b) creating a climate favourable to international cooperation with a view to capacity building in developing countries in different areas of adult learning and education and encouraging mutual cooperative assistance between all countries regardless of their state of development, as well as making full use of the advantage presented by mechanisms of regional integration to facilitate and strengthen this process; c) ensuring that international cooperation does not merely involve the transfer of structures, curricula, methods and techniques that have originated elsewhere. (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 13)

As the BFA points out, regional and supranational bodies and agencies could play crucial and transformative roles, influencing and complementing the efforts at the national level.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Regional and international cooperative endeavours involving sovereign nations evolve over a long period of time. This section, therefore, briefly presents the current nature of such cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region with regard to ALE and may not necessarily be a follow-up of the BFA. Viewed from this perspective, sustained support and cooperation in the field of ALE in Asia and the

Pacific has come mainly from UNESCO, with UNESCO Bangkok's Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) having an enormous influence on the nature and trajectory of development of ALE in the region over the last three decades. UNESCO has made unique contribution in promoting 'lateral infusion of innovative ideas' across the region through advocacy, dissemination and technical support.

Three initiatives may be mentioned as illustrative of such efforts in the region. It was more than two decades ago that UNESCO identified equivalence programmes as an important category of adult literacy programmes, an idea that had been pioneered by Indonesia. This helped in benchmarking competency levels in acquisition of literacy and other related competencies with reference to formal school certification and recognized non-formal means of learning as an acceptable mode of learning. Now, ALE programmes in almost all countries have adopted the concept of equivalence in their ALE framework. Another effort was linked to the successful experiments of empowerment of women through the microcredit initiatives of the Grameen Bank and BRAC (Building Resources across Communities) in Bangladesh, linking literacy with income-generation. UNESCO incorporated this concept into adult and non-formal education as part of income-generation programmes. Subsequently, self-help groups and microcredit initiatives have become integral to literacy and women empowerment programmes in many countries of the region. The third illustration is the creation of grassroots organizations under the banner of community learning centres (CLCs), in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (APCCU). These centres exemplify the participatory principle that underlines all ALE programmes. As already mentioned, CLCs have become part of the ALE portfolio in many countries of the region. That they have been singled out for reference in the BFA is testimony to the success of this effort.

As well as UNESCO, almost all major bilateral and multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNDP and UNICEF, are present in countries across the region supporting various education development programmes through financial aid and/or

technical assistance. These are, by and large, based on agreements involving national governments and development partners in support of EFA goals in a broad sense. With very few exceptions, such as those in Lao PDR and Afghanistan, these agreements do not make any explicit reference to ALE. It is not clear if this is due to the low priority attached to ALE by the development agencies or whether the countries concerned have not sought assistance specifically for ALE.

REGIONAL/SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION

Regional and sub-regional development blocs such as ASEAN and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which engage in cooperative action in various areas of development including education, have also contributed to regional and sub-regional cooperation. For instance, the ASEAN roadmap for the attainment of Millennium Development Goals, adopted by ASEAN countries, facilitated closer intra- and intersectoral collaboration among these countries, whereby they collectively helped each other in accelerating progress towards the MDGs (UNESCO Bangkok and Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2015, p. 102). The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Council (SEAMEO), comprising the ministers of education of 11 Southeast Asian countries, has been playing a central role in capacity-building, and the promotion and dissemination of innovations in the region. The establishment of the SEAMEO Centre for Lifelong Learning in Viet Nam in 2013 has enabled more focused engagement with all stages of ALE, from policy-making to dissemination. The centre aims to cater to the regional needs in promoting lifelong learning and providing opportunities for cooperation in the field of lifelong learning among SEAMEO member countries and associate member countries, and help strengthen the relationship and increase mutual understanding among educational researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers of the region in a spirit of mutual respect and partnership. In addition, SEAMEO and ASEAN-China Centre (ACC) signed a memorandum of understanding in 2013 for the establishment of a general framework for cooperation on the development and promotion of education and culture in Southeast Asia and the People's Republic of China. This, again, shows tremendous potential for developing cooperation in the field of education among the ASEAN countries and China.

Unfortunately, other sub-regions, particularly South Asia, which faces enormous challenges in education, lack any

such common institutional platform. The value of such regional inter-governmental platforms is immense, particularly for influencing policies and financing of ALE. They also contribute to capacity-building, research and knowledge management, and to establishing evaluation and monitoring systems compatible across different countries. An important dimension of such South-South collaborative efforts is that they involve countries with shared development challenges and suggest more equal partnerships between donor and recipient countries. Recently, China and India have started supporting developing nations in Asia and Africa, both bilaterally and through international cooperation. Countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have also supported countries within the ASEAN region in the education sector.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTORS

The Asia-Pacific region has a vibrant set of civil society organizations specially working in the field of ALE. Many of them operate through multiple coalitions, depending on the programmes they are engaged in within the country or across selected countries of the region. Special mention here has to be made of the pan-Asia-Pacific platform, namely the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). ASPBAE is a network of more than 200 organizations involved in formal and non-formal adult education, working with and through NGOs, community organizations, government agencies, universities, trade unions, indigenous people, women's organizations, the media and other institutions of civil society across Asia and the Pacific. The organization was established in Sydney more than 50 years ago by a group of adult educators inspired by the idea of promoting adult education in the region, and has grown into a major force at regional and international levels for articulating the voice of grassroots institutions and people on various aspects of ALE. ASPBAE has, over the years, offered a unique pan-Asian platform for capacity-building and shared learning through participatory research in ALE among the governments as well as NGOs in the region.

Besides ASPBAE, several large multi-country non-profit organizations, including Plan International, OXFAM, Action Aid and DVV International, have also been supporting education development programmes in Asia-Pacific countries, though on a small scale, working with already-present national NGOs and encouraging them to learn from the experience of other countries and

sub-regions. Long-term engagement with field-based local NGOs helps them to observe and ensure cumulative changes and contribute to transforming the field as well as promoting inter-country exchanges and the sharing of innovative ideas. For instance, the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International) has been working in Lao PDR for a fairly long time and established a regional office for South and Southeast Asia in 2009 for better cooperation in the subsequent decade (Duke and Hinzen, 2014). These non-profit platforms also facilitate knowledge-sharing between scholars from the North and the South.

COOPERATION FOR CAPACITY-BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

Development cooperation has to move in tandem with the changing economic reality of the region. With several Asian countries emerging on the global economic landscape as significant players, with several low-income economies moving into the middle-income category and with large economies such as India and China assuming the role of donor countries, the conventional North-South paradigm of international cooperation has to be substantially transformed. The calculus of funding that dominated the relationship has to be replaced with a system that recognizes the educational needs of emerging knowledge economies in Asia and the Pacific. It is necessary to recognize enhanced capabilities of the region's governments and the evolution of strong civil society movements promoting education development. Development cooperation in the region has to be built on a foundation of collaboration in knowledge development and management. As Torres argues, '[t]he North interested in assisting development in the South needs to learn together with and from the South, and assist the South to document, translate and disseminate its own knowledge production. This is also a contribution to the fundamental South-South exchange' (Torres, 2002).

In this context, the observations made at the International Working Group on Education meeting on more effective use of global financing of education, arguing for investing in the creation of more global public goods in education, is pertinent. 'Education finance is not used as effectively as possible for the simple reason that there is insufficient knowledge about what works and insufficient access to such knowledge as does exist. The new heads of the multilateral agencies, concerned with education in developing countries, could explore mutual collaboration on a joint programme to provide more global public goods in education, particularly statistics, cross-country experience sharing, research evidence, research funding, and support for developing country research institutions and CSOs engaged in education sector monitoring' (Burnett, 2010). But this cannot be a one-way transformation. Inter-governmental meetings of the ASEAN and SAARC forums continue to reiterate the commitment to actively engage in research and development programmes. However, the current level of engagement with research in ALE, as well as the attention given to generating a reliable empirical information base on ALE, is quite inadequate. In order to benefit from a changed paradigm of international cooperation, governments and other knowledge and research centres, particularly universities and higher education institutions, should reciprocally participate in transnational knowledge generation and management in ALE supported by adequate financial and human resource investment. Specifically, as a follow-up of the Belém Framework, the Asia-Pacific region should establish an institutional focal point on good practice and innovations in adult learning and lifelong learning policies along the lines of the Observatory for Adult Education for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, which provides feedback to policy-makers and other stakeholders as well as to academics and participants in the field, through the integration, analysis and dissemination of information.¹¹

11 APREC: <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/conference/asia-pacific-regional-education-conference-aprec>

8. OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS AND THE WAY AHEAD

Adult learning and education play a critical role in responding to contemporary cultural, economic, political and social challenges. Our globalised world has paved the way for many opportunities, among them the possibility of learning from rich and diverse cultures that transcend geographical boundaries. However, widening inequalities have become dominant features of our era. ... We are confronted with unequal access to food, water and energy, and ecological degradation threatens our very existence in the long term. Alongside material privation is the all-too-frequently observed poverty of capabilities that prevents effective functioning in society. An unacceptably high number of today's children face the prospect of youth unemployment, while a growing number of socially, economically and politically 'detached' young people feel that they have no stake in society.

We face structural shifts in production and labour markets, growing insecurities and anxieties in everyday life, difficulties in achieving mutual understanding, and now a deepening world economic and financial crisis. At the same time, globalisation and the knowledge economy force us to update and adapt our skills and competences to new work environments, forms of social organisation and channels of communication. These issues, and our urgent collective and individual learning demands, question our tenets and assumptions in this area and some aspects of the foundations of our established educational systems and philosophies.

Belém Framework for Action – Statement of Evidence (UIL, 2010, p. 10)

In 1990, when the world community took the Education for All pledge at Jomtien, nearly one-third of the adult population in the world were illiterate, and the means and medium of accessing knowledge were almost wholly dependent on the ability to use print material. The EFA movement placed adult education, with particular focus on literacy, as integral to the concept of basic education for all. During the last quarter-century, the development scenario in the world has changed as never before. Information and communication technology is transforming the field of education and learning in an

unprecedented manner both in formal and non-formal sectors. The meaning of literacy itself has broadened under the banner of 'multiple literacy', viewing literacy beyond its simple notion as the set of technical skills of reading, writing and calculating to a plural notion encompassing the manifold meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competencies. The CONFITEA VI deliberations and the ensuing Belém Framework for Action were framed in this context of evolving policies and practices, placing the concept of ALE in the wider canvas of lifelong learning. While taking stock of the implementation of the BFA, it is also important to bear in mind the goals and targets for education set in the Incheon Declaration as well as under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

RALE (UNESCO and UIL, 2016) takes these developments into consideration while defining ALE, and points to three core areas: (a) equipping adults with literacy and basic skills; (b) providing continuing training and professional development, and (c) promoting active citizenship, through what is variously known as community, popular or liberal education. The *Recommendation* refers to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and stresses that the 'aim of adult learning and education is to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments. It fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects of individuals. It is, therefore, a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies' (ibid., p. 8).

THE CONTEXT

The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed impressive economic growth during the last two decades, significantly impacting the living standards of people across the region. This has also provided opportunities for the countries to invest more in social development, including education. In fact, most countries in the region have made substantial progress in all sectors of education. But several challenges remain. For instance, the region has the largest number of illiterates in the world. Notwithstanding

this paradoxical state, there is high optimism as to what the region could achieve.

It is uniquely placed with regard to its demographic profile. With more than half of the world's population, the region has nearly 900 million of the world's poor, and is spread over 30 per cent of the global landmass. The demographic shift in recent years is a major issue that is shaping formal and non-formal education, its contents and processes in the region. Consequently, there has been increased focus on the educational needs of the youth and the working-age population. This is reflected in the way ALE is being designed and organized in many countries of the region, particularly focusing on creating an eco-system that will foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

Adult learning and education policies and practices have also to be closely aligned with the state of development of school education. The region has indeed witnessed substantial progress in giving basic education to all children. The achievements, however, are quite uneven across countries and sub-regions, and in some countries the progress is far from satisfactory. For instance, around 16 million children of primary-school age and around 34 million lower-secondary age adolescents are still out of school in Asia and the Pacific, and of them, two-thirds are in South Asia (UIS, 2015). ALE has also to contend with inequity within formal education arising from geographical location, poverty and social and ethnic affiliations, coupled with widely varying quality.

Besides these concerns, there is increasing realization that while primary education is a basic enabling factor for participation and freedom, for leading a life of dignity and overcoming basic deprivation, it is necessary to look beyond this and strengthen post-basic education, formal and non-formal. This is essential for transforming the economy and establishing social justice in any country, enabling its youth to be involved in productive work and to contribute to the socio-economic development of the community.

PROGRESS OF ALE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: MAIN OBSERVATIONS

The Belém Framework of Action was the outcome of CONFINTEA VI held in 2009. The conference came at a crucial juncture as the world community had pursued ALE as an integral part of basic education in a mission mode for nearly two decades following the Jomtien

World Declaration on Education for All. The following are the main observations emerging out of the present review with regard to progress made in the Asia-Pacific region in implementing the various elements of the BFA.

LITERACY STATUS: UNEVEN PROGRESS

1. **Adult literacy.** According to UIS estimates, there are still around 758 million adult illiterates in the world, with nearly 63 per cent of them living in Asia – 11 per cent in East and Southeast Asia and around 52 per cent in South Asia. This is a marginal improvement from the previous assessments. In absolute numbers, there has been some reduction. But, it still implies that more than six out of 10 illiterates in the world are from Asia. The number in South Asia alone is a whopping 390 million adults. However, the situation is not uniform across the continent, as can be seen from *Figure 1.1*. Ten countries have a female literacy rate below the world average of 82.6 per cent. Of these, six – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan – are in South Asia, accounting for more than 50 per cent of the world's illiterates.
2. **Youth literacy.** It is estimated that around 102 million youth lack basic skills of literacy. This means that with around 750 million adult illiterates, one out of every seven of them is likely to be a young person who ought to have been in school or college or in early productive work life. Of this young population lacking literacy skills, the Asia-Pacific region is the host for a large proportion (46 per cent). Within the region, South Asia continues to lag behind in this indicator also: around 45 per cent of the illiterate youth belong to this sub-region.
3. **Reduction of illiteracy among women.** Reviewing the progress made during the post-Dakar period, the regional synthesis report on EFA progress highlights that the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed a substantial reduction in the number of females who are illiterate. It is observed that Central Asia and East Asia and the Pacific have succeeded in reducing the size of the female illiterate population by 51 per cent and 31 per cent respectively between 2000 and 2012. Despite this progress, there were still 147 million more women who could not read or write than men in the Asia-Pacific region in 2012.
4. **Gender parity.** Progress toward gender parity is quite different among the sub-regions. Central Asia has already achieved gender parity for adult literacy rates with a GPI of 1.00. East Asia and the Pacific had a

GPI of 0.96 in 2012. In contrast, the GPI of adult literacy in South and West Asia was very low in 2012 at only 0.70, which has slightly improved to 0.76 according to 2015 estimates. Two countries where gender disparity continues to remain high even among youth population are Afghanistan and Pakistan.

5. **Measurement of literacy skills.** The Belém Framework for Action called for ‘investing in a process to develop a set of comparable indicators for literacy as a continuum and for adult education’ (UIL, 2010, p. 9). Not much progress appears to have been made in this regard. However, there are increasing efforts at national levels to conduct specific literacy surveys that involve the direct measurement (testing) of literacy skills. While these are innovative exercises, often supported by external resources as well as expertise, it is unlikely that most countries in the region would embrace this as the standard practice for fixing national literacy rates.

POLICY INITIATIVES: IN A TRANSFORMATIVE FLUX

1. **Official ALE policy.** Adult education programmes are an integral part of the education system in almost all countries in the region and, with a few exceptions, all the countries have an officially stated policy on ALE. Continuing emphasis on reducing adult illiteracy is an important component of ALE policies across most countries of the region. A second common policy component is the emphasis on linking ALE with income-generation activities, employment and entrepreneurship skills and poverty-reduction strategies. Imparting productive skills linked to expanding demands of the market economy is another trend characterizing the policy in several countries; this is particularly focused on addressing the educational needs of the growing population of youth seeking gainful employment on the one hand, and meeting the changing nature of the workplace in the emerging knowledge society on the other.
2. **Recognition of ALE outcomes.** Most of the countries in the region have a policy framework for officially recognizing outcomes of ALE programmes. This is, in general, done through establishing equivalence between curriculum of ALE programmes with those of specified grades in formal schools and colleges. Combining skills development programmes for youth with ALE has given further fillip to this trend. Several countries in the region have developed a national-level skills/qualifications framework for establishing such equivalence between NFE and formal programmes of learning.
3. **ALE and lifelong learning.** Lifelong learning is gradually emerging as the dominant policy paradigm in education in many countries of the region; the policy documents issued by the national government in most countries of the region allude to lifelong learning. However, reflection of this perspective in terms of governance mechanisms, curricular programmes, assessment of outcomes and monitoring framework are yet to materialize. In practice, ALE still remains largely isolated from mainstream efforts in the education sector.

GOVERNANCE OF ALE: TOWARDS CONVERGENCE AND COORDINATION

1. **Convergence efforts.** Countries are gradually moving towards a more stable programmatic approach to ALE, changing from a project management perspective to system-building. This requires ALE personnel entrenched in management practices of formal school system to be reoriented with new capacities and attitudinal shifts. Convergence efforts across ministries have also become a standard feature. This will definitely be a slow process. However, many countries in the region are making serious efforts in this direction.
2. **Stakeholder consultation.** Sixty-five per cent of countries from Asia and the Pacific participating in the *GRALE III* monitoring survey reported that the government has consulted stakeholders and civil society about the formulation, implementation and evaluation of ALE policies since 2009. This is important, as field implementation of ALE programmes in most of the countries in the region happens either through local institutions created by the government or through local NGOs or through a collaborative arrangement between them.
3. **Certification of equivalence.** There is a persistent demand by adult learners for certification of their acquisition of new knowledge and skills and establishing equivalence with formal school qualifications. Several countries have now established procedures in this regard through the issue of equivalence certificates. Such official recognition, granting equivalence between ALE programmes and formal school certification, is particularly valuable for seeking employment.
4. **Recognition of prior learning.** Another crucial issue in ALE is the increasing demand for the

formal recognition of prior learning, particularly where they are linked to employment opportunities. Accreditation of prior learning is an important requirement of ALE: overcoming the dichotomy between competencies acquired through the formal system and those acquired through other means. Several countries in the region are attempting to develop a national qualification framework with a view to addressing this long-standing demand.

5. **Lack of coordinated planning.** There is increased recognition that ALE governance systems have to be revamped if they are to effectively complement the formal educational mechanisms within the overarching framework of lifelong learning. But changes are slow to come. While some improvements have been made in policy formulation in several countries of the region, coordinated planning for implementing reforms in ALE has yet to be done.
6. **ALE information base.** With increasing diversity in programmes as well as participants, many countries are giving attention to creating a systematic information base necessary for planning and monitoring the functioning of the programmes and their outcomes and impact. Access to information on the programmes to the general public is also considered essential for optimal utilization of the services provided. This is particularly important where the mixed model of governance is adopted, involving NGOs as well as government agencies.

PARTICIPATION IN ALE: FOCUS ON INCLUSION AND EQUITY

1. **Responding to diversity.** ALE spans a large range of age groups, target populations and areas of content and skills. In countries where secondary education has been universalized, as for instance in Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea and Japan, ALE programmes are most often linked to higher/tertiary education initiatives. At the other end of the spectrum are countries, particularly in South Asia, which host a large non-literate adult population and so continue to attach high priority to imparting basic literacy and numeracy skills and establishing equivalence with formal school competencies. Some of the emerging economies in the region are intensively engaged in building skills among their youth population to meet the skill demands of the changing market, particularly seeking to equip the youth and adult population with digital processing skills.
2. **Priority on programmes.** Imparting literacy to illiterate adults gets the top priority: 81 per cent of countries in the region indicate this as an important group to be addressed. This is followed by the need to meet the learning needs of young unemployed persons, which is important as even after completing formal education, many young people face obstacles in their transition from school to work. It was found that a substantial number also deal with the learning needs of relatively new groups of learners such as senior citizens/retired people, adults with learning disabilities, and parents and families.
3. **Responding to demographic changes.** Demographic shifts and varying patterns of change have also influenced the nature of ALE programmes on offer. While Asia as a whole has a large youth population, there are diverse demographic patterns. ALE programmes in countries with an expanding youth population, such as India and the Philippines, have begun to focus more on persons in the limited age range of 15 to 35 or 45 years. The emphasis is, essentially, on giving second-chance education, equivalent to school certification, through equivalence programmes and/or imparting employment-related skills. On the other hand, countries which have a larger proportion of older age-group citizens, such as China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, have begun to design special programmes for senior citizens.
4. **Focus on rural areas.** Recognizing the relative difficulty of access to educational resources in rural areas as compared to urban counterparts, and also recognizing the specific skill needs of the rural work setting, ALE programmes in most countries give special attention to rural areas. The major focus of the ALE programmes in rural areas is on providing their inhabitants, particularly women, with productive skills for self-employment through income-generation activities or skills, with specific focus on agriculture and other related activities.
5. **Attention to vulnerable groups.** While global comparisons show that extreme poverty in the region has been considerably reduced, people working in vulnerable conditions continues to be a major concern. In 2013, 63 per cent of women and 56 per cent of men in the region were in vulnerable employment: they were either self-employed or contributing family workers. ALE programmes for such working populations are not new but have remained sporadic and need to be streamlined as part of lifelong workplace-based education. Attention being paid to this group

- in some of the countries in the region should help take forward this agenda under the ambit of ALE.
6. **Overall participation levels.** Comparing the development of overall participation in ALE across different regions of the world, one finds that the Asia-Pacific region witnessed only a modest increase, with a mere 56 per cent of countries in the region reporting improvement. At the global level, 60 per cent of countries experienced increased participation in ALE programmes. What has hindered participation of adults in the region? It is difficult to answer the question from the existing information. In fact, around 40 per cent of countries indicated that they do not know if there had been an increase in participation, which points to poor monitoring and maintenance of information on participation. However, most countries report lack of resources as the biggest challenge for expansion of ALE activities, despite increasing demand.
 7. **Improving participation of women.** There is no doubt that increasing the participation level of women is critical not only for addressing concerns of gender equity but also for registering overall progress in ALE as a lifelong learning endeavour. This is particularly important for the Asia-Pacific region, where gender differentials in literacy levels remain high. Also, despite improvements in recent years, women's participation in the formal sector workforce continues to be relatively low, and a large proportion of them are engaged in vulnerable employment, as pointed out earlier. Significant variations are found in participation in different programmes based on gender.
 8. **Avoiding gender stereotyping.** Participation of women in technical and vocational training programme is very low, though around 80 per cent countries report high levels of participation for men. In contrast, participation of women is reported to be higher in literacy programmes. From the information available, it is difficult to determine the causes for this relative gender imbalance in participation. It could be due to traditional inhibitions, socio-cultural barriers or to gender stereotypes deeply entrenched in a patriarchal society. Higher participation of women in literacy programmes could be due to relatively lower rates of female literacy in several countries of the region. However, it is also important to critically examine the institutional arrangements for delivery of technical and vocational training programmes to ensure that these arrangements are not biased in favour of men and act as barriers for participation of women.
 9. **Inadequate planning.** Only a few countries in the region have prepared an action plan for implementing the recommendations of the BFA; however, most of them claim to have increased attention to policy-making in ALE, and strengthened governance and coordination mechanisms as well as organization of capacity building activities.
 10. **ALE and ICTs.** The use of ICTs is emerging as a major driver for transforming ALE programmes, both in terms of contents and in the mode of delivery, with significant impact on participation levels in many countries of the region. Some of these are structured efforts by the government in the form of development projects while many operate on flexible informal platforms. In several instances ICT is embedded into larger programmes.
 11. **Strengthening institutions of delivery.** Effectiveness as well as inclusiveness of ALE will finally depend on the nature and functioning of institutional arrangements for delivering the programmes on the ground. These arrangements have to function through participatory processes involving all stakeholders. It is in this context that the Belém Framework for Action called for 'creating multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres and improving access to, and participation in, the full range of adult learning and education programmes for women, taking account of the particular demands of the gender specific life-course'. This is recognition of the effectiveness of large region-wide initiatives already under way under the banner of 'community learning centres' in several countries in the region. *GRALE II* observed that CLCs were rapidly expanding in 24 countries in Asia and the Pacific, and they have continued to expand.

MEETING QUALITY CONCERNS

1. **Curriculum and teaching in ALE.** Most countries in the region consider local relevance of the curriculum as a critical characteristic in making ALE meaningful for adult learners. Many countries, therefore, are changing adult educational content and methods to make them more responsive to local needs and demands. It is in line with this thinking that decentralization of curriculum has been encouraged in many countries: in general, while a national core curriculum is given, local agencies/authorities are encouraged to adopt local content for 20 per cent to 40 per cent of the curriculum. For instance, 16 Asian countries participate in UNESCO's APPEAL programme,

which supports the development of decentralised adult learning and education provision via community learning centres.

2. **Local relevance and national standards.** Making ALE content locally relevant is not a straightforward task. It was relatively easier when the programmes were designed to meet the literacy needs of a predominantly rural population, but the profile of ALE has considerably changed over a period of time in many countries of the region. As was noted above, skills-building courses are attended more by men than by women, while women's participation is higher in literacy-linked programmes. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find locally based curricula linked to income-generation activities, and self-help groups, being limited to programmes designed for women from disadvantaged groups, raising issues of equity and equality. Indeed, it is a challenge for the ALE sector to balance demands of quality and standardization of curriculum and learning material on the one hand against local relevance and changing livelihood concerns of the poor on the other.
3. **Equivalency programmes.** Among different kinds of ALE programmes, equivalency programmes are reasonably well defined in terms of duration of instruction and the contents and outcomes expected. The evaluation system is also largely standardized and linked to the methods adopted in formal school settings. This resembles the situation for programmes of skill-building which are, by and large, aligned to the national qualification frameworks being developed in many countries of the region.
4. **Professionalisation of adult educators.** The first requirement for professionalizing adult educators is to ensure that everyone entering into the realm of ALE as an educator possesses certain prescribed qualifications that equip him or her with necessary knowledge and competence. Comparing this across different regions of the world, it was found that, with the exception of around 10 per cent, all countries in the region require pre-service training for adult educators. However, the requirements vary widely. In countries with high illiteracy rates, it is not unusual for community members with low educational levels to take over the task of teaching their peers.
5. **Quality of literacy teachers.** The skills, knowledge and competences required by literacy teachers include an understanding of pedagogical issues, an appreciation of the nature of literacy and its relationship to vocational education and training, and gender sensitivity. To assure the quality of literacy teacher programmes, some countries (e.g. Indonesia and Nepal) have developed a standard curriculum for adult educators that can be adapted to local needs. In other countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, universities and other educational research institutions are engaged in professional training and development of adult educators. However, in countries with high illiteracy rates, it is not unusual for community members with low educational levels to take on the task of teaching their peers. Considering that a number of NGOs are involved in delivering ALE programmes, prescription of one set of entry qualifications for all programmes and all contexts may not be realistic. It demands innovative approaches that meet the requirement of quality and equity.
6. **Entry requirement of adult educators.** Pre-service and continuing professional development programmes are largely in the form of short courses, work-based learning, induction programmes and in-service training. In some countries, national standards have been adopted describing the competences required of an adult educator – what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do.
7. **Professional development opportunities.** Continuous in-service education for adult educators is a feature common to all countries in the region; however, the capacity to provide such opportunities for professional development was almost always inadequate. Reasons for this lack of attention to professional development requirements of ALE personnel lie within the way the sector is structured and made functional. In many countries, ALE continues to be viewed as consisting of limited-time projects. In some countries, the projects are wholly or partially dependent on international funding and implemented exclusively by NGOs, unlike the system created for formal school and university teachers. Further, adult educators belong to a variety of backgrounds, often employed on temporary contractual basis or as short-term consultants. Some may even be working only as part-time adult educators, earning their livelihood mainly through other sources. Consequently, in the majority of countries, the status, conditions of employment and remuneration of adult education staff are below those of personnel in other education and training sectors.
8. **Employment conditions of ALE personnel.** It is important to recognize that provision of regular in-service professional development programmes is

- closely linked to the employment and social status of the adult education personnel. In some countries, such as Thailand, field functionaries in ALE constitute a relatively stable cadre. On the other hand, in countries such as India, field functionaries work largely on a voluntary basis with nominal financial support. In yet others, field functionaries are essentially employed by NGOs implementing ALE programmes.
9. **Involvement of higher education institutions.** As improving employment conditions will have financial implications, countries have to find stable sources of financial support for the sector, preferably from within their domestic budget. With regard to strengthening of professional development of adult educators, involvement of higher educational institutions will add significant value in terms of quality and credibility. In addition, it is also useful to promote specialized resource institutions in the non-government sector. It would also be very useful to establish wider networks of ALE educators by inter-connecting institutions in government as well as non-government sectors engaged in imparting literacy adult education.
 10. **Innovations for quality enhancement.** Quality improvement is of prime concern for planners and administrators of ALE in all countries of the region. There is a clear realization that mere expansion of the programme will not improve the status of ALE. Further, quality improvement demands simultaneous action for effecting improvement on multiple fronts. Several countries have begun to move in this direction, and some have initiated special innovative measures to enhance the quality of ALE.
 11. **Monitoring and evaluation: Focus on outcomes.** *GRALE I* observed that quality-assurance mechanisms had been established in many European countries, but much less so in the countries of the South (UIL, 2009). Although governments in Asia and the Pacific recognized the need to develop monitoring mechanisms, the technical and resource capacities to do so were limited. Since then, considerable improvement has been seen in many countries of the region. Still, objective assessment of ALE programme outcomes in a nationally comparable form may be a difficult proposition in many countries as the programmes are delivered by multiple providers and with largely non-standardized academic resources, both human and material. Many instruments may remain inaccurate where programmes operate under multi-cultural settings and deal with multilingual learners.
 12. **Recognition of learning outcomes.** The process of recognition of learning outcomes from ALE, validating them against pre-set standards and accrediting the concerned programmes, is now receiving considerable attention. Such recognition of learning outcomes, irrespective of when, where and how learning has taken place, and linking them with national qualifications has become a part of policies and practices in adult education in many countries of the region.
 13. **Standardization through NQFs.** Many countries had already adopted a national qualifications framework before 2009 and several more adopted a policy framework for the creation of such a framework and linked ALE after that date. In addition to this policy of validating and accrediting outcomes of ALE, many of these countries are specifically working on introducing equivalencies between formal and non-formal learning, and aligning literacy and adult education to vocational qualifications. While creation of such competence-based qualification frameworks is generally viewed as a positive step, 'competence' should not be used in a narrow technical sense to refer only to measurable skills to the exclusion of intangible social learning which has been integral to ALE programmes and processes.
 14. **Poor research support.** Finally, quality of ALE cannot be enhanced merely by limited review of specific programmes and assessment of outcomes. Development of quality of ALE demands constant engagement with the theoretical as well as empirical aspects through substantial research. Finding out if such researches are taking place in the Asia-Pacific region will entail extensive study of the work in various universities and other higher education institutions. The situation does not seem to be encouraging. Except for exploring the barriers to participation, which is possibly carried out as part of need-assessment surveys, very few countries seem to invest in doing substantial research in adult education.

FINANCING OF ALE: THE NEED TO ARREST THE DECLINE

1. **Wide variation in financing of education.** The Asia-Pacific region ranks low among different regions in terms of share of GDP spent on education. *GRALE III* reported that only 26 per cent of countries in the region spent 6 per cent or more of their GDP on education. Further, the average value is around 4.3 per cent, which is much lower than even the average for sub-Saharan Africa, where an average of 4.7 per cent of GDP is spent on education. In fact, within Asia and the Pacific, 13 of the 32 countries for which data could be gathered spend less than 4 per cent of GDP. ASEAN countries clearly outperform South Asian countries. No South Asian countries have reached the benchmark figure of 6 per cent, while two countries in Southeast Asia, namely Viet Nam and Malaysia, have consistently held to the level of 6 per cent or more. Among South Asian countries, the progress of Bhutan is commendable as it has shown a consistently increasing trend, almost nearing the benchmark.
2. **Investment in ALE.** If the limited number of countries giving relevant information is considered to represent the pattern of public spending on ALE, it is too diverse to generalize, ranging from 0.4 per cent of the total public expenditure on education to 4 per cent or more. Low-level spending on ALE in some countries in South Asia, with a substantial backlog of illiteracy and a large expanding youth population, is a matter of serious concern. The figures clearly show that the countries of East Asia are investing in ALE at a much higher level than others in the region.
3. **Need to integrate ALE with mainstream education budget.** Many countries, faced with competing claims for limited resources and an unfinished agenda of providing primary education for all children, may find it difficult to convince political leadership and public opinion-makers to allocate additional funds for education of adults. This represents a difficult dilemma for planners. Further, in some countries, ALE continues to be seen as a temporary project and may not find a place in the regular national budget, with a separate budget head. Though this appears to be trivial, it may force the sub-sector to depend essentially on extra-budgetary resources from NGOs and development partners. Further, creation of a separate allocation for ALE in the national budget is essential for 'integrating ALE into financial strategies across government departments and creating an integrated ALE strategy', as committed to under the Belém Framework.
4. **Searching for alternative means of financing.** Raising resources for education in the midst of an increasing financial crunch in many countries requires creative approaches to influencing national leadership involved in financial planning. Several countries have taken new initiatives in this regard. A common trend is to involve NGOs and the private corporate sector in raising resources. Even though these have been reported as innovative measures for financing ALE, most of them only involve restructuring government funding and not all of them bring about enhancement of financial allocations for ALE. Besides, one has to guard against the possibility that increased dependence on funding through fees and private sources lead to decreased government financing.
5. **Decreasing funds from external financing.** There is a lack of multilateral support for the education sector as a whole. Disbursements from multilateral agencies were only 34 per cent of total ODA for education in 2012–2014, compared to 60 per cent for health. Among multilateral donors, education has seen a decline from 10 per cent to 7 per cent of total aid over the past decade, while support for infrastructure has increased from 30 per cent to 38 per cent. In fact, the data from the period from 2010–11 to 2013–14 show that share of support to education from the Asian Development Bank, which is a major development partner in Asia and the Pacific, declined from 13 per cent to 8 per cent, while it increased for infrastructure from 42 per cent to 58 per cent.
6. **Competing for resources from limited external financing.** As with domestic funding, for international aid, too, ALE has to compete with the demands of other sectors even within education. Therefore, overall financial support from development partners to education broadly determines the scope for ALE to receive any such support. The Asia-Pacific region has several low-income countries which depend heavily on external resources as, in many cases, this covers a major part of their education expenditure. Even in countries where no funds from bilateral or multilateral sources flow through government channels, a significant proportion of ALE operations depend on NGOs receiving international assistance. In fact, there are not many cases where earmarked funds for ALE flow through government channels.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: MOVING TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM

1. **The role of UNESCO and lateral infusion of innovative ideas.** Regional and international cooperative endeavours, involving sovereign nations, evolve over a long period of time. Sustained support and cooperation in the field of ALE in the Asia-Pacific region has come mainly from UNESCO. The APPEAL programmes of UNESCO Bangkok have had enormous influence on the nature and trajectory of development of ALE in the region over the last three decades, and the engagement continues through a variety of modes and means. In particular, UNESCO has made a unique contribution in promoting ‘lateral infusion of innovative ideas’ across the region through advocacy, dissemination and technical support.
2. **The expanding role of regional development blocs.** Regional and sub-regional development blocs, such as ASEAN and SAARC, which engage in cooperative action in various areas of development including education, have also contributed to regional and sub-regional cooperation. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Council (SEAMEO), comprising the ministers of education of 11 Southeast Asian countries, has been playing a central role in capacity-building, and promotion and dissemination of innovations in the region. The establishment of the SEAMEO Centre for Lifelong Learning in Viet Nam in 2013 has enabled more focused engagement at all stages of ALE, from policy-making to dissemination.
3. **Non-governmental actors.** The Asia-Pacific region has a vibrant set of civil society organizations specially working in the field of ALE. Many of them operate through multiple coalitions, depending on the programmes they are engaged in, within the country or across the countries of the region. Special mention here has to be made of a pan Asia-Pacific platform, namely the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). ASPBAE has, over the years, offered a unique pan-Asian platform for capacity-building and shared learning through participatory research in ALE among governments as well as NGOs in the region. In addition to ASPBAE, several large multi-country non-profit organizations, such as Plan International, OXFAM, Action Aid, DVV International and others, have also been supporting education development programmes in several countries.
4. **South-South collaboration.** Development cooperation has to move in tandem with the changing economic reality of the region. With several Asian countries emerging on the global economic landscape as significant players, several low-income economies moving into the middle-income category, and large economies such as India and China assuming the role of donor countries, the conventional North-South paradigm of international cooperation has to substantially transform itself. The calculus of funding that dominated the relationship has had to be replaced by a system that recognizes the need of emerging knowledge economies in Asia and the Pacific. Development cooperation in the region has to be built on the premise of mutual support and assistance in financial as well as knowledge-sharing.
5. **Cooperation for capacity-building and knowledge-generation.** Development partners concerned with education in developing countries could explore mutual collaboration in a joint programme to provide more global public goods in education, particularly statistics, cross-country experience sharing, research evidence, research funding and support for developing country research institutions and civil society organizations engaged in education sector monitoring. But this cannot be a one-way transformation. The current level of engagement with research in ALE as well as attention given to generating a reliable empirical information base for ALE is quite inadequate. In order to benefit from a changed paradigm of international cooperation, governments and other knowledge and research centres, particularly universities and higher education institutions, should reciprocally involve themselves in transnational knowledge-generation and management in ALE, supported by adequate financial and human resource investment.

POSTSCRIPT

Adult education and adult educators have been identified historically with an activist, social-transformational spirit that questions the status quo. Empowerment has been adult educators' watchword. Questioning entrenched hierarchies, including patriarchal relationships, giving voice to the people and their aspirations, countering the established formal systems that perpetuate social inequalities and instilling a participatory democratic spirit constitute the vocabulary that has defined the contents and contours of adult education. As one examines the nature of official dialogues and discourses, policies and programmes of adult education, change is clearly discernible. The people's empowerment perspective seems to have been replaced by a more utilitarian vision of adult education, which is essentially complementary to the established formal system of education, focused on adjusting to the dominant paradigm of economic development, benefiting from and contributing to the all-pervasive market. This transition has been gradual and neither decisive nor complete. The two perspectives, of course, continue to co-exist in several places even though the latter seems to be more dominant and prevalent in the contemporary world. Some may attribute this to the ideological ascendancy of neo-liberal tendencies. Irrespective of the ideological debate, one has to accept that education is indeed a sub-system of the political economy that determines the nature and substance of educational activities. Therefore, it should not surprise anyone that ALE is also subject to the influence of economic liberalization along with forces of globalization and technological advancement sweeping the world.

The phenomenon unfolding in Asia and the Pacific eminently illustrates this transition of the praxis of adult education from an area of social empowerment to one of skill-building for the market economy. A quick look at recent history shows that in Southeast Asia, educational progress in general, and adult and non-formal education in particular, have gone hand-in-hand with economic liberalization. In fact, education development rode on the crest of economic growth. Within ALE policies and programmes, entrepreneurship development was given equal if not more importance compared to empowerment. Involvement of the private sector was encouraged and programmes were designed in tune with market demand. In contrast, the policy documents in South Asia during the 1970s and 1980s or even during 1990s

continued to emphasize empowerment and participation and highlighted the transformative potential of literacy and adult education. The programmes at field level, through literacy campaigns and beyond, continued to advocate Freirean pedagogy as an important instrument for giving voice to the poor and achieving social transformation. Even though adult education programmes mainly targeted the poor, education for economic uplift was only a minor narrative. As we review the ALE policies and programmes across the Asia-Pacific today, with economic liberalization sweeping the whole continent, one can see a great degree of consensus in perspectives across the sub-regions. Countries across the Asia-Pacific region seem to be pursuing a similar agenda for ALE. The shift in the emphasis in ALE seems to be firmly on course, moving from a socio-political agenda of transformation and human development to an economic agenda of skill-building, market orientation and economic growth.

Does this convergence of policies, witnessed across the region, signify adoption of a particularistic perspective of ALE, influenced by economic liberalization and globalization embraced by the Asia-Pacific region? It is true that, ultimately, ALE is about providing opportunities, contexts and conditions of learning that are responsive to the needs of adults. As long as this criterion is met, it is difficult to fault the direction in which ALE is moving. However, it is pertinent to remind ourselves of the cautionary note sounded by the BFA Statement of Evidence:

Although we are witnessing an increasing variety of adult learning and education programmes, the primary focus of such provision is now on vocational and professional education and training. More integrated approaches to adult learning and education to address development in all its aspects (economic, sustainable, community and personal) are missing. Gender mainstreaming initiatives have not always led to more relevant programmes for greater participation by women. Similarly, adult learning and education programmes are rarely responsive to indigenous people, rural populations and migrants. The diversity of learners, in terms of age, gender, cultural background, economic status, unique needs – including disabilities – and language, is not reflected in programme content and practices. (UIL, 2010, pp. 12–13)

The caution is especially pertinent for the Asia-Pacific region, where economic liberalization has brought with it increasing inequalities that are tending to disrupt social cohesion and harmony. In a diverse socio-cultural setting that characterizes the region, group or horizontal inequalities are reinforced by the lack of voice and power and impede the full and free participation of all persons in civic and political life. This, in turn, undermines good governance and the capability of all people to be agents of sustainable development. Beyond individual and group exclusion, these types of inequalities threaten economic growth and national stability by weakening social bonds, undermining environmental sustainability and feeding disengagement and dissent. It is important to address horizontal inequalities because they constitute a large component of overall inequalities within countries. In the region, women, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities and international migrants are particularly susceptible to social exclusion (UNESCAP, 2015).

ALE in Asia and the Pacific is at a critical juncture as the countries embark on realigning their education policies and programmes with the long-term 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It has to consolidate the gains made in recent decades and envision a new agenda, one which is more holistic and built on the three overlapping principles of lifelong learning, global citizenship and sustainable development. Education is at the heart of this process. Youth education and ALE have to go beyond employability and foster the values of active citizenship, strengthen personal growth and secure social inclusion. They have also to imbibe values that underscore the inevitability of interdependence and collaboration, concern for environmental sustainability and the need for a new ethics combining enterprise and environmentalism, and learning to live together in a world of increased diversity and inequality.

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The **Sixth International Conference on Adult Education** (CONFINTEA VI), held in Brazil in December 2009, closed with the adoption of the Belém Framework for Action, which recorded the commitments of Member States and presented a strategic guide for the global development of adult learning and education from a lifelong learning perspective. The third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III)*, published in 2016, drew on survey data to evaluate progress made by countries in fulfilling the commitments made in Brazil, while also highlighting some of the contributions adult learning and education can make to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The CONFINTEA VI Mid-Term Review, in Suwon, Republic of Korea, in October 2017, takes stock of progress made by Member States in the past eight years, looking ahead to *GRALE IV* in 2019. This regional report, one of five produced for the Mid-Term Review in cooperation with the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), examines progress in **Asia and the Pacific**, exploring the contribution of key policy agreements and frameworks and offering recommendations in advance of CONFINTEA VII in 2021.