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the People  
of Japan



# Community-Based Lifelong Learning and Adult Education

## Situations of Community Learning Centres in 7 Asian Countries



**Community-Based  
Lifelong Learning  
and Adult Education:**

Situations of Community  
Learning Centres in  
7 Asian Countries

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# Foreword

**I**N LINE WITH **SDG GOAL 4 TO ENSURE INCLUSIVE** and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities, UNESCO Bangkok has implemented the project “Transforming Education and Training Systems to Create Lifelong Learning Societies in the Asia-Pacific”. With the support from Japanese Funds-in-Trust, this project aims to assist countries in the region in reorienting their education and training systems towards creating lifelong learning societies through comprehensive education system reviews on the extent to which lifelong learning is promoted, and how community learning centres (CLCs) are being leveraged to foster lifelong learning. As part of this project, the booklets on the Role of CLCs as Facilitators of Lifelong Learning and the Adult Skills and Competencies for Lifelong Learning will also be developed.

This regional synthesis report is to explore how the concept of lifelong learning has been implemented in seven selected Asia-Pacific countries, based on comprehensive education sector reviews and some relevant documents and data from the countries: Bangladesh, the People’s Republic of China, Japan, Nepal, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam. The education sector review from each country was an output of a thorough investigation by national experts regarding each country’s efforts to reshape its education and training system to create lifelong learning opportunities with the answers to the following two major questions:

- How national policies and systems are developed to enhance lifelong learning and what skills and competencies are emphasised in national education policies, plans and practices?
- How different types of educational institutions are mobilised to prepare different groups of learners with the skills and competencies required for a knowledge-based society?

Providing answers to these questions allows a country to re-evaluate its education and training policies and practices, thereby being in a better position to implement systemic reforms with increased stakeholder participation. Such steps are critical to meet the evolving needs of people in this highly dynamic region.

This report focuses on the role of CLCs to investigate how the concept of lifelong learning is being implemented at community level in a country. UNESCO has emphasised the role of CLCs in the belief that lifelong learning is better facilitated in decentralized settings where the role of these CLCs is central at a grassroots level. The role of CLCs in each country can be the key to understanding how the concept of lifelong learning that a country adopts supports the improvement of people’s quality of life, especially those from marginalized groups, by offering learning opportunities that are relevant to their changing needs. As a result, CLCs play a part in determining how equitable and inclusive a country is. This task, however, is complicated by a dearth of evidence about concrete cases of lifelong learning at the community level in many Asia-Pacific countries.

This report seeks to accommodate the evidence given by the seven selected countries in order to assist policymakers and national experts in those countries by serving as a guide for developing national strategies for lifelong learning throughout society. So as to assist policymakers in gaining a broader understanding from the varied cases of the countries in the region, the report highlights the best practical examples from each country.

## This report contains the following content:

**Chapter 1** introduces the concept of lifelong learning indebted from two important UNESCO documents – Faure (1972) and Delors (1996) – and discusses the global and regional contexts of the Asia-Pacific region in which it has received importance. The chapter then examines some of the selected seven countries' historical, economic, demographic and socio-political contexts vis-à-vis the concept of lifelong learning.

**Chapter 2** investigates the selected countries' current lifelong learning policies and practices, particularly focusing on their legislative frameworks as well as strategic and systematic provisions. The goals of Education for All (EFA) by UNESCO are addressed as a useful indicator to evaluate a country's achievements in the education sector. The role of CLCs in each country and the provisions provided for learning by CLCs are analysed in terms of factors such as evaluation and financing issues.

**Chapter 3** focuses on adult skills and competencies that are articulated in each country's policies, plans and strategies, and explores the expected learning outcomes of adult education programmes to uncover similarities and differences that are highlighted as priority in national documents. Each country's understanding of adult skills and competencies represents how it has prepared itself for a knowledge-based society where all kinds of learning – formal, non-formal and informal – benefit adult learners by providing various pathways and provisions for recognition, validation, and accreditation of prior learning.

Finally, **Chapter 4** summarises the key findings, issues and challenges from the seven countries while sharing their best practices, particularly on the role of CLCs within each country. The chapter provides recommendations and policy suggestions from the gained insights to foster lifelong learning societies in the Asia-Pacific region.

We hope that the comprehensive education sector reviews in this report, together with the sequential booklets on the Role of CLCs as Facilitators of Lifelong Learning and the Adult Skills and Competencies for Lifelong Learning, will assist the policy-makers in developing the policies and systems that support lifelong learning for all towards the SDG Goal 4. **We also would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors, Dr Romee LEE and Dr Jinhee KIM for working closely with the project team and their valuable contribution to this publication.**



Gwang-Jo Kim  
Director  
UNESCO Bangkok





# 01 Introduction

## • *Concept of lifelong learning*

A series of scholarly discourses reveal that learning is an existential process, which is conterminous with life itself. People of all ages respond to life events in creative ways by learning from their experiences (Jarvis, 2010; Illeris, 2009). Learning is a continuous lifelong process of re-constructing human experience (Kim, 2015). As a result, the more rapidly the world around them changes, the more people have to learn and adapt, and the more society at large needs to emphasise the need for their members to learn continuously (Jarvis, 2010, p. 29). This process is a key to knowledge-based societies.

The concept of lifelong learning suggested by UNESCO has been integral to building an inclusive knowledge-based society, which is a form of progressive modern society where the evolving needs of all people are considered and met by help of meaningful learning tools and experiences in their daily lives.

A discussion on lifelong learning and its conceptual development can be best summarised with the themes addressed by two historic UNESCO reports, both of which continue to contribute to national and international discussions. The first one, *Learning to Be* (1972), is often called the Faure Report, which made a cogent case that learning must last “from cradle to grave.” Yet it also emphasised that not only a “lifelong” but also a “lifewide” aspect of learning was necessary through formal, non-formal and informal learning strategies that enhance personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability (Yang & Yorozu, 2015, p. 8). The second seminal report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996), is often called the Delors Report. It sought to erase the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education by stressing the concept of a learning society, one that offers varied learning opportunities and seamless pathways via a country’s education and training system. Such a learning society should enable people to develop a better understanding of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play active roles at their workplace, in their community, in their country, and in the world. Particularly, during periods of extraordinary societal change, learning must add a meaningful and positive dimension to those changes in practice. The countries in the Asia-Pacific region have gone a long way in this regard by investing significantly in efforts to make the concept of lifelong learning an integral part of their education and training systems to foster innovative notions of thinking. However, the outcomes of such initiatives vary from country to country.

## • *The countries in the Asia-Pacific Region and their global, regional, national developments*

The concept of lifelong learning as laid out by the two aforementioned UNESCO reports is directly linked to the issues that this report aims to explore. The purpose of this report is to address the efforts that have been undertaken to transform education and training systems to create lifelong learning societies in the seven selected countries of the Asia-Pacific. The contexts of the countries under discussion vary in term of their historical, economic, demographic and socio-political situations, even though they share some common global and regional contexts. A little explanation, therefore, may be needed concerning a global and a regional context that these seven countries share in view of their efforts to build learning societies.

First of all, globalisation has substantially changed the role of education and training in each country's development processes. A large part of their economic activities has been affected by a globalising region where expertise, enhanced knowledge and up-to-date skills have become more and more important for many people in competing with others. Many studies have emphasised the importance of education and training in economic and social development (Dickson & Harmon, 2011; Psacharopoulos, 1994) and in the continuous development of individuals who want to avoid becoming trapped in low-paying and low-skilled jobs in a changing world (Oreopounlos & Salvanes, 2011; Neupane & Sapkota, 2015). In addition, the rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has changed conventional notions and methodologies of teaching and learning.

Second, rapid regionalisation has resulted in ever closer economic cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region with a growing awareness of the benefits of horizontal cooperation. Middle-income countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, have supported other countries within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region in the education sector. The countries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have likewise increased cooperation in education (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015).

Third, increasing uncertainties and insecurities on the jobs market and changing concepts of employability have led to income gaps and growing inequalities among people, areas and countries around the region. Urbanisation has been markedly rapid particularly in many Asia-Pacific countries, which has created significant changes in employment structures. A large number of people are at risk of losing their jobs and the number of working people in part-time jobs is increasing while local labour markets have become more polarised. This can partly be attributed to the spread of ICT at workplaces (ASEM LLL Hub and UNESCO Ha Noi Office, 2011), a factor that needs to be incorporated into today's learning strategies.

In this shared context, some countries in the Asia-Pacific region have exerted significant efforts in enhancing their capacity to create knowledge economies (Yang & Yorozu, 2015), while some others have been less successful in adapting their strategies effectively despite their efforts for development (Warner, 2002). In many countries in the Asia-Pacific region development has been, more or less, hampered by past and present challenges such as wars, internal conflicts and social problems such as poverty.



Yet despite such difficulties, the Asia-Pacific region remains a dynamic region with huge potential. The region encompasses a vast land area and 4.3 billion people, which constitutes as much as 60 per cent of the world's population (UNESCAP, 2013). In past decades the region has undergone dramatic and transformativ changes. That is why the concept of lifelong learning must take central stage in the face of the rapid spread of new technologies and societal changes. The seven selected countries have all incorporated the concept of lifelong learning in their processes of national development and have achieved successful outcomes.

### • *Countries' historical, economic, demographic and socio-political contexts*

To understand the different motivations and backgrounds of each country's lifelong learning policies and practices, their historical, economic, demographic and socio-political contexts are discussed in this section.

## Historical Context

Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region endured colonialism or exploitation by foreign powers, which often hindered their development and hampered their national aspirations. Many of them also underwent civil wars or equivalent political chaos in the process of becoming independent. For example, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam achieved independence, respectively, from Japan and France in 1945, but soon both underwent civil wars, respectively in 1950 and 1954, that ravaged the two countries. The Republic of Korea remains separated from the People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), a state of affairs that has existed since the Korean War Armistice of 1953. In the case of Viet Nam, a US-led war in the country continued for 11 years until 1975, which caused massive devastation and created severe socio-economic conditions. Following their national traumas, both countries needed to embark on a long process of political reconciliation and economic development. Bangladesh is in turn a relatively new country, which was born in 1971 after gaining independence from Pakistan.

Nepal, Thailand and China, too, have had their share of political and economic upheavals over the past decades. Nepal transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a democracy in 2008 and a measure of political instability remains. Thailand has experienced two military coups over the past decade and remains a politically divided nation currently ruled by a military government. China has had severe internal disturbances since the Communist Party came to be in charge of the country in 1949. The historical context of Japan may differ from the countries addressed above, but it has also undergone significant social, political and economic changes.

In short, overhauling their education and training systems in these countries have been at times beset by external and internal conflicts, which means they had to overcome difficulties on their way to social stability and economic prosperity.

# Economic Context

All seven countries have seen meaningful economic development in a relatively short period of time to a greater or lesser degree. The rapid economic growth of Bangladesh, China, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam are particularly remarkable. For example, Bangladesh succeeded in expanding its economy and income level from US\$110 in 1974 to US\$1,314 by 2015, thereby moving away from the category of least developed country (LDC). China has successfully and radically transformed its economy since 1970, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. From 1980 to 2000, it achieved the goal of doubling its Gross National Product (GNP). Human development as a national policy was a major driving force behind this achievement, meaning that rapid economic development has been in tandem with social development and personal growth. For example, illiteracy rates stood at almost 80 per cent in 1949; by 2010 the literacy rate stood at 95 per cent. Viet Nam, meanwhile, achieved 5.98 per cent GDP growth in 2014, showing a continuous increase over both 2013 (5.42 per cent) and 2012 (5.25 per cent).

On the other hand, Japan has by comparison stagnated. In the late 1980s, the Japanese economy rivalled the best economies in the world. However, the country's economic growth slowed down in the 1990s and has been in long decline since (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).

Undoubtedly, all these transformative changes, for better or worse, in the national economies have brought about rapid changes in employment structures as well as other sectors (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015).

As in China's case, these fast developments are ascribable to nation-wide development projects, which have paid significant attention to human development as a major intervention strategy. Even though these seven countries rank differently in terms of their economic levels with Japan (US\$36,194 in 2014) at the top and Nepal (US\$703) at the bottom when it comes to per capita GDP, they all have striven to shift their economic structures from agriculture to industry and services through education and training reforms so as to re-allocate labour from low-productivity areas to higher ones. In tandem they have undergone noticeable demographic patterns with rapid urbanisation among them in a region-wide trend.

Producing and cultivating an educated and productive labour force has been important to each nation's prosperity. In recent years, many high-income countries have striven to develop a knowledge-based economy and have increasingly invested in education and human resources planning. For example, children and adolescents from the Republic of Korea and Japan consistently achieve high scores in international academic assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) (Schleicher, 2012), which showcases both countries' continued investments in knowledge and skills learning opportunities for citizens (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).

# Demographic Context

With almost 1.35 billion citizens, China has the world's largest population. Bangladesh, Japan and Viet Nam likewise have large populations considering the countries' sizes: around 156 million, 127 million and 90 million, respectively. When all the population numbers from these seven selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region are added, they come to account for more than 30 per cent of the total world population. People in many of these seven countries also tend to be overwhelmingly young, except for Japan and The Republic of Korea, where aging populations have become a major social problem. According to the United Nations' World Youth Report (2013), the Asia-Pacific region comprises the largest share of the world's youth population at approximately 60 per cent.

However, despite the advantages, large youthful populations can also exacerbate existing problems in the equitable distribution of resources if a country fails to manage provisions well. Social problems such as a widespread lack of available jobs can also ensue. While this demographic trend can be an opportunity, there is a risk that younger working populations become underutilised due to a lack of appropriate education and training. For example, in Nepal 39.8 per cent of the population is below 16 years of age and 57 per cent of the population is working age (i.e., people aged 15-59). Every year, around 450,000 Nepalese youths enter into the labour market, mostly without relevant education and skills and most stand little chance of receiving adequate education or vocational training even later on. This lack of education and training for young Nepalese has now become an international issue since many of them migrate across borders to other countries in search of employment opportunities elsewhere and routinely end up in unskilled and low-paying jobs where they are at increased risk of exploitation. Bangladesh also shares similar problems as a result of prevalent illiteracy rates and young people's general lack of proper education and training.

On the other hand, Japan and the Republic of Korea face a different set of problems. Japan is now widely known as the fastest-ageing society on Earth. It is the first big country in history whose population has started shrinking rapidly from natural causes. At the turn of the century, 17 per cent of the population was aged 65 or over. This figure had climbed to 25 per cent by 2013 and is projected to reach 28 per cent by 2020 (Yang & Yorozu, 2015). This trend will create a host of challenges with regard to employment, old-age pensions and healthcare. The Republic of Korea has shown some of the lowest total fertility rates (1.21 per person) and the fastest growth in aged population (age 65 or over) rates (12.7 per cent of the total population) partly owing to the increased participation of women in the labour market (Yang & Yorozu, 2015). All of these trends have implications on the country's family dynamics (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015), and therefore pose considerable social challenges.

**Table1:** Population of aged 65 and above in Japan and the Republic of Korea

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
Japan	5.7	7.0	9.0	11.9	17.9	23.0	26.0
Republic of Korea	3.7	3.3	3.9	5.0	7.3	11.1	13.0
World average	5.1	5.4	6.0	6.2	6.9	7.7	8.0

*Source:* World Bank, 2015

However, certain examples show that a decreasing population does not necessarily mean economic and social decline. The economic effects of population decline can be offset by measures aimed at reforming social systems, restructuring industry, introducing new technology and increasing productivity. Providing greater work opportunities and quality learning for older populations, therefore, has also become an important policy focus (Yang & Yorozu, 2015). In the case of the Republic of Korea, the country's aging is a social phenomenon that cannot readily be measured in real terms, but government-level initiatives are being implemented to better deal with the issues. One of these initiatives is the propagation of lifelong learning. Ongoing education enables senior citizens to gain new knowledge and access to modern technologies that are needed to better cope with the needs of a changing society. At the same time, the need to create high-quality jobs for young adults with higher education has also come into sharper focus.

## Socio-political Context

Inequality happens when there is a disparity in allocating societal resources. Strengthening the quality of education and learning has been an important way that can help a country address this important issue.

In developing countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal, grinding poverty among large segments of the population remains a significant reason of disparity. In these two countries, poverty is often linked with social problems such as a huge gap between urban and rural areas and adverse social stratification structures such as the caste system. People in rural areas are among the most disadvantaged people, especially those from lower castes and other marginalised groups. However, both Bangladesh and Nepal have made considerable progress in fighting extreme poverty. In the case of Nepal, poverty rates declined from 25.2 per cent in 2011 to 23.8 per cent in 2013, which was, however, largely based on the increased remittances sent by Nepali migrant workers from abroad. Even though almost half of the outflow of migrant workers were young people of the age group 15-24, the number of unemployed young people in the country has not decreased. One fourth of the total population still lives below the national poverty line. The most marginalised social group based on the caste system are the so-called "Dalits" among whom the levels of poverty is at 42 per cent, compared to 23 per cent of non-Dalits. Urban poverty is significantly lower (15.5 per cent), compared to rural poverty (27.4 per cent) in this country as well. These figures highlight the different levels of inequality and discrepancy within the country.

A common backdrop to social inequality involves high levels of illiteracy and high drop-out rates among youth. The literacy rate of Bangladesh showed drastic increase from 16.8 per cent in 1971 to 59.82 per cent in 2010, but many of even the people considered literate remain below the functional literacy level. Also, less than half of children aged 11-15 years are enrolled in school and only around 11 per cent of out-of-school youth participate in formal or non-formal education and training. In Nepal, 38 per cent of the adult population (15 years and above) remains illiterate. Overall, both illiteracy and dropout rates impact on the quality of the labour force in both countries, preventing it from being truly productive and efficient.

China, Thailand and Viet Nam have mainly completed their mission to fight illiteracy with high levels of functional literacy. But these countries are now facing other problems. In China, the so-called post-socialist inequality has resulted from market-oriented reforms that have favoured large cities and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) at the expense of the rural hinterland. The gap in average incomes between the coast and the interior, and between urban areas and countryside, began to widen after the mid-1980s, creating new and contemporary levels of social stratification based on location, education and income (Whyte, 2012). China also needs to deal with a massive internal migration of up to 253 million people. They are mostly comprised of villagers who move to cities in search of better opportunities but often face discrimination (Whyte, 2012). Thailand in turn has been beset by persistent political instability as a result of stark disparities between better-off urbanites, especially in and around the capital Bangkok, and rural communities, especially in the country's agricultural heartland in the northeast.

In the case of the Republic of Korea as well, social inequality has been significant. The country's government has established tailored social welfare services for the less privileged but a comparative sense of deprivation is on the increase.



## A. Conceptual definition of lifelong learning

The importance of lifelong learning has widely been recognised in the seven selected countries. All seven countries have either developed or are developing strategies for integrating the concept of lifelong learning into their education and training systems. Analysis of national policy documents in the seven countries makes comparisons of the current state of the integration of this concept in each country possible.

Countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal have made a commitment to ensure that learning continues throughout life and that they should support individuals and communities to meet their basic human needs and maintain their sense of dignity through continuous learning. Bangladesh defines lifelong learning in its Non-Formal Education (NFE) Act (2014) as “knowledge that comes to individuals through formal, non-formal, non-institutional, or informal ways which helps self-actualization, gradual improvement of acquired skills, and continuous improvement of human conditions all over their lives”. Although there is no official definition of lifelong learning in Nepal, the concept is understood in similar terms. Post-literacy and continuing education programmes are the main focus of the discussions of lifelong learning in both countries, which basically target to consolidate, maintain and upgrade the literacy and life skills of people to increase their livelihood and quality of life. To people in both countries, therefore, lifelong learning means literacy development, improved self-sufficiency, social wellbeing and income generation and the governments should aim to offer these provisions to their citizens. Given the socio-economic contexts of both countries, however, there are challenges to transform this idea of lifelong learning into concrete provisions.

China, Thailand, and Viet Nam have demonstrated an evolving capacity for consolidating the concept of lifelong learning in national policies. In the 1980s, China started to officially endorse the term “lifelong education” as one of the main pillars of its education and training system. In the Action Plan for Education Vitalization in the 21st Century in 1998, the need to construct a better continuing education system was emphasised. To some extent, this action plan pinpointed the correlation between lifelong education and lifelong learning. Lifelong education was described as the foundation that serves lifelong learning needs, while lifelong learning was described as learning to grow a person’s capacity and potentials throughout a lifespan.



In the case of Thailand, the concept of lifelong learning has been incorporated into the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan, which states that all Thai citizens should acquire lifelong learning by all modes of education and learning and should have equal opportunities to do so. The term lifelong education is stipulated in the National Education Act of Thailand enacted in 1999 as “education resulting from the integration of formal, non-formal and informal education that people can improve the quality of their lives continuously throughout their lives”. In the Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Act in 2008, decentralisation as an important direction to serve learning needs was stipulated for the first time. In Viet Nam, there is as yet no official definition of lifelong learning. However, it is considered an integral part of Vietnamese culture based on the views of Ho Chi Minh, the late founder of the modern Vietnamese nation, who said: “Learning is endless. Learning for life helps us mature, and the more we mature, the more we must learn”. He did so when over 90 per cent of the population was still illiterate right after the country gained its independence from France in 1945. This cultural spirit for lifelong learning, animated by the philosophy of Confucianism which prizes education, can also be found in other countries in the region, such as China, the Republic of Korea and Japan (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).

Japan and the Republic of Korea are often categorised as advanced countries in that their efforts for transformation into a learning society have produced significant outcomes such as efficient educational pathways and various lifelong learning provisions. In policy documents from both countries, the concept of lifelong learning is often tied to concepts of a knowledge economy, economic productivity and active citizenship in line with the changing milieu of globalisation.

Japan began pioneering efforts to promulgate lifelong learning via its Lifelong Learning Promotion Law in 1990. Social education and lifelong learning became terms frequently used to describe all forms of education activities that take place at all stages of life. In 2009, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) defined lifelong learning as a “concept to review the various systems including education in order to create a learning society”. It served as a comprehensive rationale for the need to create a society that could both compete best internationally and serve Japan’s internal needs.

In the Republic of Korea, too, the importance of lifelong learning has been widely recognised. The Lifelong Education Act of Korea defines “lifelong education” as “all types of systematic educational activities other than regular school education, including: (1) scholastic ability supplementing education; (2) adult literacy education; (3) education for the enhancement of vocational abilities; (4) education for humanities and liberal arts; (5) education for cultural arts; and (6) education for citizenship, etc.” These six major areas of lifelong education overlap with UNESCO’s four pillars of learning, whereby education for the supplementation of scholastic ability and adult literacy can be categorised as “learning to know”, education for humanities and liberal arts, and education for cultural arts as “learning to be”, education for the enhancement of vocational abilities as “learning to do”, and education for citizenship as “learning to live together”. Hence, the four pillars of learning as defined by UNESCO have been incorporated into policy interventions in the Republic of Korea.

In both Japan and the Republic of Korea, the concept of lifelong learning helps to complement long-time preoccupations with formal schooling and academic credentialism (Yang & Yorozu, 2015), which has been seen as a pivotal factor in major cultural and economic transformations.

## B. Status of education development

UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) goals encompass the key education sub-sectors in formal and non-formal contexts for the whole lifecycles of individuals and address issues of inequality and the quality of learning. Based on EFA indicators, the progress of educational development in the seven countries can be seen as largely successful. Guided by the recommendations of the World Education Conference in Jomtien in 1990 and the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, EFA goals have been shared widely across the Asia-Pacific region (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). Six EFA goals from the Dakar Framework for Action are as follows:

EFA Goal 1 - Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

EFA Goal 2 - Universal Primary Education (UPE): Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

EFA Goal 3 - Life Skills and Lifelong Learning: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;

EFA Goal 4 - Adult Literacy: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

EFA Goal 5 - Gender Parity and Equality in Education: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

EFA Goal 6 - Quality of education: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

In case of the Republic of Korea and Japan, all six EFA goals are considered to have been met, some as early as in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as universal primary education (UPE). Both countries boast quality formal education systems. The academic performances of students in both countries are indicators of educational excellence at the global level. Teachers' competency is high thanks to constant provisions of professional development that is linked with promotions and certificate renewals (Yang & Yorozu, 2015). Pre-primary education is one area in both countries where huge resources are being invested. In regards to the third EFA goal, promoting learning for life skills for youth and adults, the universalisation of secondary education and the systematic provision of lifelong education are being actively undertaken by both countries.

Despite the popularity of EFA, it is difficult to monitor progress towards the achievement of all its six goals in many of the seven selected countries, except Japan and the Republic of Korea. EFA Goals 1 and 2 focus on learning in the early part of children's lives and have been the most

urgent targets to meet for most countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly low-to-middle income countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal. Both countries have made substantial progress towards these two goals in recent years. In Bangladesh, for example, the expansion of pre-primary education (PPE) reached to cover 67 per cent of children in 2013, a year before it was approximately 50 per cent. Nepal has also showed considerable progress towards achieving EFA goals particularly in providing universal primary education and literacy for all.

However, this does not mean that these targets have been met. For example, over one-fifth of students in Bangladesh do not complete the five-year primary education cycle due to high dropout and grade repetition rates. Also, fewer than 50 per cent of students who complete primary school move on to secondary education, which means many of them remain functionally illiterate. In both countries, adult literacy also remains far from satisfactory, although youth literacy rates have markedly improved. Consequently, both countries are lagging behind in their achievements of lifelong learning goals. It is noticeable that more focus has been given to the formal education system in both countries while adult literacy, post-literacy programmes, and income generating programmes have received less attention. In both countries, connecting literacy with the development of income-generating skills has not been necessarily embedded in education systems.

China, Thailand and Viet Nam have shown progress towards achieving all six EFA goals. In Viet Nam, education takes up 20 per cent of the national budget and this commitment to education has led to positive results. By 2000, illiteracy had been largely eradicated and primary education universalised. Lower secondary education was also universalised by 2010. In terms of the EFA goals themselves, Viet Nam has achieved four: Goals 1, 2, 4, and 5.

China had also achieved Goals 2, 4, and 5 by 2000. It reached the goal of the universalisation of nine years of compulsory education and the near-eradication of youth and adult illiteracy. The adult literacy rate increased from 90 per cent in 2000 to 95.1 per cent in 2010, which has been one of the main targets of lifelong learning policies in China's national agenda. Despite this remarkable progress, however, there are still more than 50 million adults who are illiterate and who deserve special attention. The pre-primary level gross enrolment ratio also recorded a noticeable jump from 35 per cent to 65.5 per cent during the same period.

Thailand also achieved universal primary education. Opportunities for secondary education have now been a policy focus in Thailand, which has become a basis for extending compulsory education from six to nine years. These countries have also increasingly turned their attention to improving participation rates in secondary and higher education.

### **Gender Parity**

Gender parity is considered important in all EFA goals. Its importance has been highlighted in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well. There has been great progress in improving girls' participation in education.

The Asia-Pacific region on the whole has achieved gender parity at the primary level, but is still lagging behind at the secondary and tertiary levels. Countries are tackling this issue by

introducing targeted measures that aim at promoting gender equity, particularly for primary and secondary education. For example, governments in Bangladesh and Nepal have introduced several initiatives to help improve the participation of girls in school (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). In China, Thailand and Viet Nam, gender parity is regarded as having been almost fulfilled. Viet Nam achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education in 2015. China also has low levels of gender disparity both at primary and secondary levels of education.

However, the gender gap in the upper tier of formal education, adult literacy and other forms of lifelong learning still persists in many of these countries. First, much fewer women participate in secondary education and at higher levels of education. At universities in Bangladesh, for example, the number of women enrolled amounts to only 30 per cent. Second, the literacy rate of women is quite low as compared to men. Even though the Asia-Pacific region as a whole has achieved a reduction in the percentage of illiterate females, according to statistics from 2014 there were still 147 million more women than men in the Asia-Pacific region who are not able to read or write (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015).

National level statistics, too, show striking disparities between males and females in literacy rates. In some countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh, the low priority placed in cases on women's education is a result of culture and religion. Even in China, the female adult illiteracy rate is still 8.61 per cent higher than that of males and the average number of years males spend in formal education is still 1.3 year higher than that of females.

Men also tend to participate more in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes than females in the Asia-Pacific region (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). In the Republic of Korea, for example, women are often expected to be satisfied with lower pay than men, making their educational attainments appear less valued (The Korea Herald, 2011).

With all these in mind, a case can be made that girls and women tend to be at much greater risks of being marginalised in many of the Asia-Pacific countries. Gender parity in learning should be especially made a priority for disadvantaged people: lower-caste individuals in Nepal and ethnic minorities in China, Thailand and Viet Nam, for instance.

## C. Policy framework

Policy frameworks encompass the legal and strategic provisions of a country. While legal provisions stipulate a country's broad understanding and rationales on lifelong learning, strategic provisions such as action plans of lifelong learning in a country specify goals, expected results, and performance indicators that guide the implementation, evaluation, and improvement of strategies of lifelong learning. Overall, a policy framework of a country is a good indicator as to whether a lifelong learning mechanism in a country is in place and works coherently.

Japan and the Republic of Korea have attained both provisions for lifelong learning. In the case of Japan, the loss of lives, poverty, hunger and devastation after World War II motivated educators and people to work together to expand the provision of community education and learning (Noguch, Guevara & Yorozu, 2015). A major turning point for legal advancement came with the

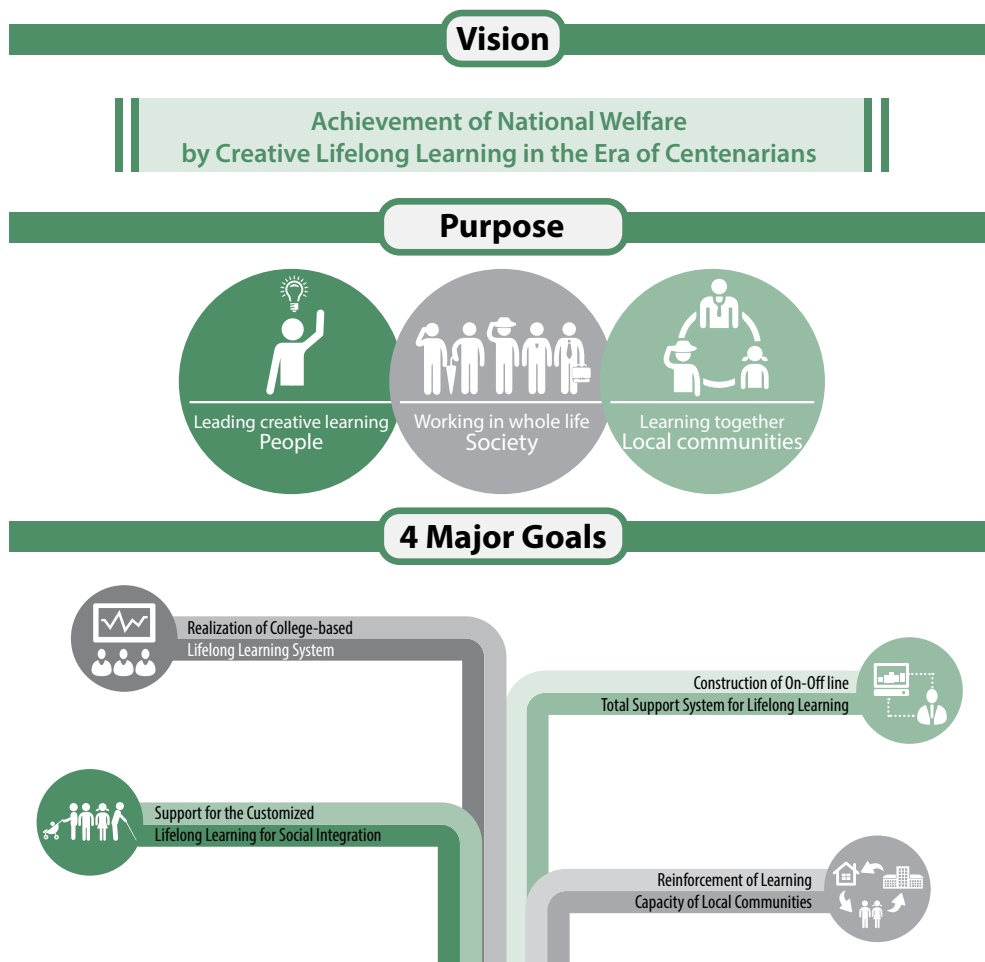
National Council on Education Reform in 1980s. The main recommendation from this council brought a great change to the systemisation of various lifelong learning opportunities under a robust policy framework. In 1990, Japan enacted the Law Concerning the Establishment of Implementation Systems and Other Measures for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning (in short, Lifelong Learning Promotion Law).

With the birth of this seminal legislation on lifelong learning, the Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau was established in MEXT for an administrative body for lifelong learning and the Central Education Council of MEXT conducted a holistic and integrated review of education. The recommendations from this council led to the first amendment of the Basic Act on Education in 2008, which added the principle of lifelong learning and placed emphasis on the enrichment of lifelong learning capacities in local communities. The Social Education Act was also revised in 2008 to include the family's role in building a learning society. There have been criticisms voiced by policymakers, educators and practitioners, in Japan that the Lifelong Learning Promotion Law is centralised at the provincial (prefectural) level and not practical in promoting lifelong learning initiatives at the community level (Yang & Yorozu, 2015). Nevertheless, it is clear that Japan has attained considerably systematic and decentralised operation mechanisms of lifelong learning opportunities for people.

There are several action plans that have been marked as important to promote lifelong learning in Japan. For example, the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education is Japan's first comprehensive education plan, which was designed in 2008 to promote educational reform for 10 years, envisaging the following objectives: (1) nurturing the power to fulfil personal potential and participate fully in society; (2) fostering an innovative workforce that will flourish in the future; (3) developing safety nets for learning; and (4) creating linkages, structures of mutual support and viable communities. Another action plan, the New Strategy for Growth, came in 2010 and also set goals to be achieved by 2020 in important domains, including education and lifelong learning to recover "vigorous Japan". These include increasing the number of adult students in universities and professional colleges to 90,000 and 150,000 respectively, and increasing the number of workers engaged in learning for self-enlightenment to 70 per cent of full-time employees and 50 per cent of part-time employees (Sawano, 2012).

The Republic of Korea is also a leading promoter of legal provision for lifelong learning. Based on the Constitution and the 1982 Social Education Act, the Lifelong Education Act was passed in 1999 and thoroughly amended in 2007. Particularly, the duties of central and local governments in promoting lifelong education were specified in the 2007 amendment that opens up the way to decentralisation of lifelong learning. This act works in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and its Lifelong Education Promotion Committee where related ministries review the Lifelong Education Promotion Plan, a five-year action plan operating since 2002.

**Figure 1:** Third National Lifelong Education Promotion Plan's goals for 2017 (the Republic of Korea)



Source: NILE, 2013

While Japan and Korea have made legal and strategic provisions regarding lifelong learning, China, Thailand, and Viet Nam have also shown good progress towards attaining these provisions under strong central government control. In the case of China, developments in lifelong education were made in tandem with China's Open Door policy. China has not had a legal provision that could be styled a "lifelong learning law" per se, but the country nonetheless introduced the definition of a lifelong education system in its first Education Law in 1995. Also, there are important action plans that are meant to translate national policies into concrete measures. For example, the Action Plan for Education Vitalization in the 21st century, launched in 1998, introduced long-distance learning and information technology to community education in rural areas. The National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) also outlines the strategic goals "to modernize education, bring a learning society into shape, and turn China into a country rich in human resources" (Min, 2011).

At the regional level, legal provisions such as the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act were enacted in Fujian Province in 2005 and Shanghai in 2013. These places also announced themselves as "Learning Cities", which formulate strategic action plans independently. In the case of Shanghai, for example, the Shanghai Commission for the Construction of a Learning Society and the Promotion of Lifelong Learning is in charge of leading and coordinating various projects.



In Thailand, the legal basis for lifelong learning lies in the Constitution and the National Education Act enacted in 1999. While the Constitution broadly stipulates that all Thai citizens should be provided with learning opportunities, the National Education Act proposes lifelong education as the principle of organising the whole education system of the country. Moreover, national economic and social development plans such as the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012–2016) also specify the willingness of the Thai education system to open up lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In Viet Nam, the concept of lifelong learning has been institutionalised in the Law of Education in 1998. The ideal of building a lifelong learning system was launched in 2006 when the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam gave the following directive for education development:

*'To gradually shift the actual education model to that of open education –the model of a learning society with lifelong learning system, continuing training, and connecting all levels and sectors of learning– to build and develop systems of learning for all and flexible modes of learning and practising, responding the needs of permanent learning and to create different possibilities and opportunities for learners, ensuring social equity in education'* (VNCP, 2006, from ASEM LLL Hub and UNESCO Ha Noi Office, 2011).

These ideals have been central in national development and reform agendas such as “Building a Learning Society 2012-2020” project. This project acts as a national action plan and becomes a stepping stone for the legislation on lifelong learning by stipulating flexible pathways between, formal and non-formal education, especially for disadvantaged groups of learners such as ethnic minorities in Viet Nam.

Lastly, Bangladesh and Nepal make for a different case from the countries mentioned above in terms of their level of comprehensiveness in making efforts for legal and strategic provisions for lifelong learning. A legal provision of lifelong learning neither exists nor is formally defined in educational policy documents in Bangladesh and Nepal. However, they have adopted the concept of lifelong learning and applied it mainly to non-formal education (NFE) sectors, particularly in literacy and skill education for young people and adults. In both countries, literacy education is seen as a means of empowering people and regarded as an important step in a continuum of learning that continues for an entire lifespan. Various government policies are therefore linked to plan and implement literacy, post-literacy, and skill education and the outcomes have been significant.

For example, National Plan of Action (NPA) of Bangladesh has concentrated on literacy and skill education to disadvantaged people in rural areas and about two million neo-literates have been provided with literacy and skills training under this NPA during the period of 2001-2013. In Nepal, the concept of lifelong learning is partly incorporated in national plans and policies such as Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Policy (2006), Non-formal Education Policy (2007), TEVT Skill Development Policy (2008) and TEVT policy (2012), all of which have yielded significant outcomes for eradicating literacy and developing skills of youths and adults. Support from international organisations such as UNESCO and the World Bank has been important in launching these initiatives in both countries.

The absence of the comprehensive concept of lifelong learning that is socially discussed and agreed as well as legally and strategically provided, however, becomes a considerable disadvantage to both countries. Policies that provide non-formal education programmes and are often referred as “lifelong learning” are insufficient to act as drivers of a national agenda for lifelong learning due to their disconnected nature, while many of the programmes are often implemented in fragmented or segregated formats. It has been acknowledged that institutional support and policy designs for lifelong learning could enrich human learning in these changing societies.

## D. Access, participation and outcomes

### *Access and Participation*

All seven countries declare that all citizens regardless of age, sex, educational background, occupations, and individual interests should be able to access lifelong learning. However, in reality some people have more access than others in several of these countries. That is because these countries often fail to provide their major target groups of learners with appropriate learning opportunities, although they have also tried to expand access through various ways of learning, including ICT to reach more learners. Situations in each country reflect its target of lifelong learning and related inequality issues, and transformative approaches may be required to enhance lifelong learning in practice.

Bangladesh and Nepal share problems in that many people in the target groups do not actually have access to lifelong learning due to a dearth of opportunities. For example, a large proportion of youths and adults (about 80 per cent) are not covered by any institutional provision in Nepal. In the case of China and Viet Nam, rural communities get special attention. In China, for example, a nation-wide project for rural labour transfer is one of the prominent achievements conducted under the country’s strong push for lifelong learning. However, many people who face various social, cultural and geographical barriers rarely have access to lifelong learning opportunities. Examples of these excluded groups of people include people in lower caste system in Bangladesh and Nepal, people who live along the border or remote areas in China and Viet Nam, or ethnic minorities living in relatively remote mountainous areas in Thailand.

Access issues appear as equally important in high-income countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea as well. Access to lifelong learning has already been expanded in these countries to include all citizens, but disparity issues remain in participation regarding age, education level, regions and income levels and so on. According to the Lifelong Learning Individual Status Survey, young Korean city dwellers with high levels of education and income participate more while people who are older, have lower education and income and live in rural areas participate less in lifelong learning activities. For example, the participation rate of people aged 55 to 64 was 29.2 per cent, which was half the participation rate of adults aged 25-34. Also, the participation rate in higher education in Japan is not high, which has become problematic in the move towards a learning society.

Access issues require various actions to remove barriers. For example, the biggest obstacle for the unemployed or those of lower incomes in the Republic of Korea is educational and training expenses. In rural areas, many people may not have adequate learning opportunities because there are few educational institutions locally. However, the use of ICT in lifelong learning has expanded lifelong learning opportunities to people who have had less access to learning. Forms of self-study through various media have become more and more common in Japan and the Republic of Korea, while China and Viet Nam are speeding up their ICT applications in lifelong learning as well.

For example, in the Republic of Korea an online national lifelong learning portal Neulbaeum (which translates into “always learning” in Korean) has been in operation since its launch in 2014, and a national online contents platform (K-MOOC) is currently under development to provide a quality educational opportunity at a higher education level (Kee, 2015). In China, open universities such as Beijing and Shanghai Open University are widely recognised as valuable new self-learning platforms with multiple provisions for prior learning recognition. Also, hundreds of higher education institutions have recently formed an alliance to establish joint open digital learning resources (Min, 2011).

### ***Lifelong Learning Providers and Networking***

The major providers of lifelong learning include government organisations (GOs) such as central and local/municipal government and their affiliated agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs), employers and some others. In all seven countries, lifelong learning projects have been implemented with networks among these important providers. Overall, the multiple numbers of providers and closer networking among them have yielded significant results in terms of quantity and quality of projects and programmes.

In most of the seven selected countries, the central government of a country is the main driver of lifelong learning systems, thereby setting the tone for the direction and objectives of lifelong learning initiatives, while local authorities are often in a position to facilitate and help implement those initiatives with levels of autonomy according to the needs of residents within nationally determined frameworks. The cases of China and Viet Nam show that the central and local governments are routinely the main providers of lifelong learning and many of the organisations responsible for it are state-owned and therefore the delivery system is significantly top-down. Other providers such as NGOs, NPOs, and employers in private sectors are not fully leveraged in the two countries.

While centralised action to provide learning opportunities has yielded good outcomes so far, there are other models of providing lifelong learning. Among them, the mobilisation of NGOs and NPOs has shown significant outcomes in many countries, ranging from low-to-middle income countries to high-income ones. Community-based NGOs have been prominent in serving community-based learning needs due to improved accessibility. In the case of low-to-middle income countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh, major local NGOs have played pivotal roles in planning and implementing lifelong learning at local levels. A growing number of NGOs have been more and more involved in non-formal education and many bilateral and multilateral donors are supporting these efforts. Therefore, many NGOs have run community learning centres (CLCs)

in Nepal and Bangladesh and have yielded various model practices. International organisations have also taken part in similar projects. In the Republic of Korea, most of the providers of lifelong learning are various types of lifelong education institutions, which are mostly NGOs and other private sector parties such as employers. Combined, these two channels were the most popular channels of access to lifelong learning in the Republic of Korea, and networking among them has led to better outcomes by creating synergies. The case of Japan also shows elaborate networking among NGOs, NPOs and other private sector actors in providing learning opportunities. Diverse channels of networking can provide a wide range of learning resources for people who have different learning needs and life conditions.

### ***Expansion of Community Learning Centres and Learning Cities***

While the central government has a major role to play in macro-level action by setting the national agenda and the vision for building a learning society, it is cities and communities where most of the real actions take place. To put the discourse of lifelong learning and a learning society into practice, UNESCO has emphasised the important role of community learning centres (CLCs), explaining that they can provide equal access to education for different groups of learners to acquire the competencies through literacy programmes, post-literacy programmes, basic education, continuing education, as well as vocational and life skills training to make their lives better. In essence, CLCs enable and empower people to gain better access to learning as well as to fight against a status quo characterised by injustice and discrimination that undermine principles of autonomy.

What is noticeable from all seven countries is that they have continuously expanded the number of CLCs. In these countries, CLCs play a major role as a space for lifelong learning regardless of the existence of robust policy frameworks of lifelong learning. CLCs in each country have country-specific characteristics, but they share a common characteristic in that they are community-based institutions which are generally managed by local communities. They plan and organise programmes that are relevant to local needs and contexts. First of all, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam have been expanding the number of CLCs, in order to reach out to more people in an effort to provide better literacy, vocational and life skills (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015).

In the case of Bangladesh, 7,000 CLCs are in operation, providing post-literacy and continuing education. Among them, CLCs that are managed by influential NGOs number approximately 4,000, which provide various literacy education programmes that are linked with useful skills training for youths and adults. These major CLCs are comparatively well equipped with ICT facilities for open and flexible learning, which increases the effectiveness of teaching and learning. However, networking between GOs and NGOs is often superficial and performance significantly varies among CLCs. In the case of Nepal, promoting non-formal modes of learning through CLCs was initiated during the 1990s and the country has achieved good outcomes as a result. In 2000, CLCs numbered only 20, but their number grew to 205 in 2007. In 2015 the number of CLCs in Nepal stood at more than 2,100. CLCs in both countries have tried to run post-literacy programmes that include skill development and income generation training along with literacy programmes to enhance the capabilities of people and improve their living standards. However, it is hard to say that the delivery of these programmes is decentralised enough since many CLCs have less autonomy than necessary and little expertise for operating

more effectively. Particularly, the lack of budgets for teacher compensation is problematic, let alone their continuous professional development.

While the operation of CLCs in Bangladesh and Nepal is very much in the hand of NGOs' own capabilities, in Thailand, Viet Nam and China the situation is different. In these countries, CLCs are leveraged as the main providers of lifelong learning in communities and provide literacy and post-literacy programmes, organise cultural and sporting activities, manage their own facilities and equipment with funding from their respective municipal governments and other donors. The number of CLCs has risen dramatically in the three countries. For example, the Ministry of Education in Thailand has established around 8,000 District Non-Formal Education Centres as focal points for the provision of all forms of non-formal and informal education services across the country. In addition, the Ministry of Education has initiated a new literacy promotion project to develop 40,000 "Smart Book Houses" to assist people throughout the country in the pursuit of lifelong learning (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013). There are CLCs established in particular target areas, including ones for ethnic minorities such as the Mlabri people (Phi Tong Luang), the Mogan (Surin Islands) as well as *Pondok schools* in southern border areas populated by ethnic Malays (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013).

In Viet Nam, the number of CLCs was 680 in 2002; 7,384 in 2006; 9,990 in 2010; and 10,877 in 2013. The number of participants of CLC programmes increased from 250,000 in 2006 to 13,598,416 in 2013 (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). Also, China's CLCs in rural areas have yielded major achievements in providing skills for rural surplus labour to transfer to other income-generating jobs, which has been an urgent need of China in the context of its rapid social transformation.

Even though CLCs in China and Viet Nam have shown meaningful achievements, there are problems in CLCs in terms of limited budgets and comparatively weak capacity in many aspects of operation, which can range from inability to design tailored programs to lack of networking to the absence of the professional development of instructors and administrators. Most of all, it remains problematic for CLCs in the two countries to be fully fledged community-led grassroots organisations for learning since there is a significant lack of autonomy.

Japan and the Republic of Korea share some of the problems of CLCs with the countries above but the decentralisation of implementation, monitoring, supervision and evaluation of programs have been managed better thanks to the years of accumulated experiences. CLCs in both countries operate in decentralised systems. They are known as *Kominkan*, or lifelong learning centres, and Citizens' Universities in Japan, and as community centres, lifelong education institutions, and Lifelong Learning Centres for Happiness (LLCH) in the Republic of Korea. However, the level of decentralisation of CLCs in the two countries differs due to the difference in social contexts in which they have been developed.

In the Republic of Korea, various forms of lifelong education institutions have been located at the centre of a learning society. The number of these organisations is over 22,000 throughout the country and are operated by NGOs, community centres, cultural institutions and universities. Many of these lifelong education institutions take the form of CLCs since they are mostly community-based learning organisations and have various networks and partnerships with other organisations within a community such as schools, libraries and museums. Among them, CLCs partnerships with schools can be one of the examples for the partnership between schools

and lifelong learning. The Korean Association for Community Education (KACE) has collaborated with schools to plan and implement programmes for parent education. Also, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and local education offices have worked to utilise local schools as CLCs, especially in rural areas (Jo, 2012).

Among various CLCs, “Lifelong Learning Centres for Happiness” (LLCH) has been a recently initiated project by the Korean government since 2013. LLCHs are particularly established in small communities (Eup, Myeon, and Dong administrative regions), which previously had fewer resources to be mobilised for learning. MOE funds were allocated first to these areas. As of 2015, 276 centres in 92 cities/counties/districts (affecting 30 per cent out of the 299 total cities/counties/districts in the Republic of Korea) are in operation. 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 existing lifelong learning centres. To ensure the quality of the service, ordinances are issued to pave the way for managerial and instructional support at the national level. For example, at least one professionally trained manager is supposed to be placed in each centre according to the ordinance. Likewise, shared roles and responsibilities between the central and local governments are parts of the operation. The case of LLCH shows a successfully localised example of CLCs by a national project.

Japan’s system of CLCs has demonstrated a different model. As noted, Japan’s effective CLCs are fully indebted to strong legal frameworks and decentralised delivery, which has supported the promotion of community-based learning over the past 60 years (Noguch, Guevara & Yorozu, 2015). Comprehensiveness in affording community-based learning for all the people in a community has been a hallmark of the system. The operation of *Kominkan*, one of the representative CLCs in Japan, is in the hand of the citizens of a community and is run in partnership with other local organisations such as schools, NGOs and museums. Volunteering is one pillar that makes the system effective. *Kominkan*’s programmes are diverse and intergenerational programmes among them have been initiated due to the increasing number of older people (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).

The other form of community-based learning in Japan is Citizens’ Universities, which were established in the 1970s after the concept of lifelong learning was introduced in the country. Currently, 150 Citizens’ Universities offer lectures and courses to community members of all ages on various subjects. Although the Citizens’ Universities were originally government-run, they are increasingly being managed by the citizens themselves and some of them are run strictly on a volunteer basis (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).



**Table 2:** Basic functions of Kominkan (Japan)

<p><b>1. INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIAL EDUCATION</b> Kominkans are democratic non-formal educational institutions.</p>	<p><b>5. PLACES FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE</b> As places for exchanges between 'contemporary culture' and 'traditional culture' or 'academic culture' and 'life culture', Kominkans must strive to be up to date, yet at the same time hand down the traditional culture of the community to its residents, especially younger residents.</p>
<p><b>2. PLACES FOR BUILDING SOLIDARITY AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b> Kominkans aim to foster community solidarity by strengthening bonds between residents and cultivating a spirit of mutual assistance.</p>	<p><b>6. PLACES TO STRIVE FOR THE POSITIVE COOPERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE</b> Because it is above all young people who should act as the driving force in community development, efforts must be made to encourage their positive participation in the creation and management of Kominkans.</p>
<p><b>3. A DRIVING FORCES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LOCAL INDUSTRY</b> By enhancing residents' culture and knowledge, Kominkans help to advance local industry in the community.</p>	<p><b>7. BASES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</b> Kominkans constitute a fundamental tool for community development. They must therefore meet the everyday needs of their communities.</p>
<p><b>4. PLACE IN WHICH TO LEARN ABOUT DEMOCRACY</b> As what one might call 'training grounds for local democracy', Kominkans must be managed with strict adherence to the principles of equality and respect for basic human rights.</p>	

**Source:** Sasai, 2012, from Yang and Yorozu, 2015

Considering that the ultimate goal of CLCs is closely related with the concept of community education, CLCs should utilise local resources to be dedicated to the articulation of common needs for local people, particularly for the underprivileged. Thus it can respond to certain forms of social inequality in the process of lifelong learning.

### ***Learning Cities Projects in China, Viet Nam, The Republic of Korea and Japan***

Urbanisation has been accelerating in many parts of the world and now over 50 per cent of the world's population already lives in the cities (United Nations, 2014). Considering this trend, "Learning Cities" projects are therefore becoming increasingly important undertakings that make community-based lifelong learning more systematic and effective.

The "Learning Cities" projects originated from the "Educating Cities" project that placed education at the forefront of strategies and policies to improve economic performance and to foster sustainable economic development and better living for citizens (ASEM LLL Hub and UNESCO Ha

Noi Office, 2011, Nyhan, 2007). Due to the smaller scales, cities or regions can better coordinate their planning efforts and therefore come up with solutions of everyday problems. This “bottom-up” approach is one that a learning society of a country can build systematically by incorporating all Learning Cities.

“Learning Cities” projects started with high-income countries but the current trend of the projects is now quite focused in many countries across Asia. Statistics show that most newly built cities are located either in Asia or Africa. Whereas fast-developing countries in Asia, such as China and Viet Nam, are regarded as late starters, Japan and the Republic of Korea show more established practices as early movers of the Learning Cities front in Asia. In the case of Viet Nam, projects of building Learning Cities are closely linked to the *Building a Learning Society 2012-2020* project. In the case of China, Learning Cities projects have been operating in several cultural and economic hubs such as Beijing, Shanghai, Jinan in Shandong Province, and Guangzhou in Guangdong Province, while many other cities are in the process of ongoing discussions to turn their cities into Learning Cities as well. Through an evaluation process in 2008 and 2011 respectively, 68 Learning Cities/districts/counties have been selected (Min, 2011). The first UNESCO’s Conference on Learning Cities in 2013, hosted in Beijing, was a good indicator that China’s efforts on this project have been internationally recognised.

Compared to these, Viet Nam and China, Japan and the Republic of Korea boast more established models of creating Learning Cities. although there are significant differences between the two. On the one hand, Japan’s initiative of Learning Cities goes back to the 1970s when Kakegawa city announced itself to be a learning city in 1979 as one of the seven cities of the OECD’s “Educating Cities” initiative. Since then, Learning Cities in Japan have highlighted the possibility of creating a strong communal identity based on a shared history through learning, in tandem with positive developments both for people and their city.

On the other hand, the Republic of Korea has been actively pursuing the development of Learning Cities since 2001 under the rubric of “Lifelong Learning Cities”. Many governmental initiatives have been incorporated into the project such as enacting regional ordinances regarding lifelong education; preparing the legal grounds for lifelong education projects; encouraging administrative bodies to rearrange dedicated organisations for lifelong education; and helping to establish and operate dedicated bodies in each region. Therefore, this project is regarded as a flagship project of the lifelong education policy in the Republic of Korea. As of 2015, 136 cities, counties and districts have been designated as Lifelong Learning Cities, which comprises 54 per cent of all local governments in the country. Compared to Japan’s model wherein each learning city nominates itself, the Republic of Korea’s model of Learning Cities is rather a centralised mechanism in that these Learning Cities are designated via a centralised evaluation process.

Overall, these cases of Learning Cities in Asia have been based on “community relations model” which focuses more on activities to create social harmony and foster cultural unity (Han & Makino, 2013), which is different from European models of Learning Cities.

# E. National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Learning

A national qualification framework (NQF) and recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) process of learning are integrated approaches to lifelong learning and they are therefore important systemic features in a learning society. In other words, learning opportunities for people become limited without a system to connect formal, non-formal and informal learning that people undertake throughout their lives. National qualification frameworks have a progressive rationale for recognising all forms of learning and therefore providing seamless pathways in that all kinds of learning can be utilised by people in various life situations, such as seeking employment, enrolling in higher education and so forth. Such frameworks therefore can enable and empower learners to follow positive and efficient learning opportunities.

Overall, the development of national qualification frameworks and related features for the recognition of prior learning have been at different stages of development in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Among the selected seven countries, Bangladesh, Nepal, China and Viet Nam are situated at the outset of utilising the National Qualification System and schemes to recognise prior learning. This means that often only formal learning is recognised without difficulties while other forms of learning and their outcomes are not guaranteed to be taken into account yet. Bangladesh has recently introduced a National Technical Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF) and started to expand its use. Nepal is in the middle of its development through international cooperation. Currently, prior learning that is gained from non-formal education or informal learning is recognised by the National Skills Testing Board of Nepal, but done so only for employment purposes. China and Viet Nam have likewise been working on creating national qualification frameworks as part of their national project for building a learning society. Particularly, several “Learning Cities” in China, such as Shanghai, have recently completed to set up the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS), one of the accreditation systems of learning outcomes, as well as a higher education self-study examination system. Also, criteria for accreditation and recognition have partly been used in universities in Shanghai and other big cities between adult education courses and vocational certificates (Min, 2011).

Some countries have understood that there is an urgent need for international discussions to create internationally recognised qualification frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region since these frameworks benefit workers who move across the borders of the countries within the region. Since there is an increasing trend for regional integration in the Asia-Pacific region, such as among ASEAN countries, Thailand, for example, is interested in remodelling its national qualification frameworks towards international standards mainly for the benefits of Thai workers who move to work abroad.

Whereas all these aforementioned efforts are a rather recent development, Japan has long had an established National Trade Skill Testing and Certification System, which began in 1959. This government-endorsed system assesses the knowledge and skills of workers, measures their competencies in 195 different industries, and allows them to be officially recognised by the

Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare as “certified skilled workers”. The other national framework “Certificate for Students Achieving the Proficiency Level of Upper Secondary School Graduates” is also widely used, particularly in admission to formal educational institutions to assess if a candidate has an equivalent educational background and/or competencies.

The Republic of Korea employs several provisions for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning; namely the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS), Bachelor’s Degree Examinations for Self-Education (BDES), and Lifelong Learning Account System (LLAS). Through ACBS, learners can acquire academic credits by: (1) completing approved courses; (2) acquiring national certificates; (3) taking an examination for a self-education bachelor’s degree or taking examination-exempted courses; (4) taking courses at accredited colleges; (5) accumulating educational credits by the hour; and (6) being apprentices or active learners of intangible cultural properties (Jo, 2012). The ACBS allows for a bachelor’s degree to be awarded to an individual with a link of BDES, an independent-learning degree system. Learners who have difficulties attending regular classes at universities can earn the degree through four levels of exams. Currently, the programme provides degrees for eleven majors. In 2013, 17,274 students obtained bachelor’s degrees via the BDES. Lastly, LLAS is a learner-centred online learning account that enables learners to accumulate and manage their learning experiences.

Recently, the Republic of Korea has undertaken the reform of its national qualification framework (NQF) and renamed it National Competency Standards (NCS), linking it with large-scale curricula reform. It is one of the main national agendas of the current administration and is aimed changing the mismatch between what is taught in schools and what is needed in workplaces. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Employment and Labour (MOEL) initiated the development process of NCS, in consultation with other ministries and industries. These sets of policy interventions have been reconstructed with the advent of lifelong learning in a global market.

This is a promising initiative since even adults in high-income countries such as OECD member countries often experience difficulties in gaining fruitful outcomes from their continuous learning since many of these learning opportunities hardly lead to recognised qualifications. In other words, even in the most advanced countries when it comes practicing lifelong learning, learning activities leading to recognised qualifications mainly take place in formal schooling. This needs to be changed.

## F. Relevance and quality

Strengthening the relevance and quality of learning is an important issue across the Asia-Pacific region. Relevance and quality deal with the quality assurance frameworks that monitor, maintain and upgrade the qualities of lifelong learning institutions and their programmes, as well as the learning outcomes of individual learners. Therefore, various evaluation indicators need to be in place. Also, mechanisms to stimulate the quality development of institutions and programmes through the sharing of promising practices are also emphasised due to their effects on “shared growth”. Generally, all seven countries have made efforts to consolidate the quality of their institutions and programmes. However, provisions and guidelines for quality assurance may

vary country from country. Specifically, there is less evidence from the seven selected countries on quality assurance frameworks that encompass institutions and programmes than any other components of lifelong learning.

All seven countries allow various levels of autonomy for institutions to maintain their administrative and instructional qualities. Each institution is recommended to implement various internal and external assessments as a major part of their quality assurance frameworks. To maintain the quality of learning programmes and individual outcomes from them, tests for individual learners and overall programme evaluations are often administered. Institutions mainly submit their annual reports to their umbrella or parent organisations regarding their administration and programme development as well as their implementations for external assessment purposes. However, these quality assurance frameworks in many countries are not efficiently structured in that national level guidelines for evaluation indicators are often lacking. Therefore, standards on quality assurance vary depending on institutions, and outcomes are often subjective, resulting in less evidence to judge quality. For example, Viet Nam has impressive numbers of CLCs, but the proportion of local people attending CLCs is still low and the effectiveness of their operation is often questioned (ASEM LLL Hub and UNESCO Ha Noi Office, 2011). To increase capabilities of CLCs, therefore, assessments of CLC capacities are highly needed in such areas as the professional development of CLC facilitators and the development of a systematic database regarding information on local learning needs and community provisions.

Many countries are making various efforts to ensure the quality of institutions and programmes. For example, Thailand makes internal assessments a responsibility of lifelong learning institutions while external assessments for all institutions are managed by the Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA). In the case of China, the Adult Education Association initiated a research project of “Assessment on lifelong learning for All” in 2009, developed quality assessment indicators in the fields of arts and physical education, and established assessment centres around the country.

High-income countries which strive to transition to knowledge-based economies have emphasised the need to make quality assurance frameworks more objective and learner-oriented. For quality assurance in the Republic of Korea, for example, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has established 14 performance indicators to monitor and evaluate institutions and publishes the results annually. Performance indicators of institutions within a quality assurance framework are also used as a tool in institutional accreditation, public funding competitions for programmes, and performance evaluation. The Lifelong Education Promotion Plan also makes it mandatory for the central and local governments to execute regular analysis and assessments of institutions.

Specific cases indicate whether quality assurance frameworks are used in the field effectively. In the case of the Republic of Korea, the Lifelong Learning Educator system is a quality assurance mechanism for ensuring the quality of administration and teaching and learning in CLCs. The Republic of Korea makes the placement and employment of lifelong learning educators mandatory for city and provincial institutions for lifelong education. To be certified as a lifelong learning educator, one must obtain a predetermined number of academic credits in a related field from a university or graduate school, or else complete training courses provided by designated institutions. Lifelong learning educators are classified into grade levels 1 through 3, based on

the number of credits taken and the amounts of field experience accumulated. To maintain or enhance the professional quality of lifelong learning educators, the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) runs various training programmes as well as advancement courses to provide sufficient contents. Japan has similar national certification courses for social education leaders and specialists.

## G. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation include summative and formative evaluations, which influence policymaking and aid in the improvement of the overall practice. In many countries, implementation results are annually gathered, published and used to understand the current state of lifelong learning in a country. They are also utilised in reforming policies and strategies at the central and local government levels.

In Thailand, the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) publishes an annual implementation report on lifelong learning and presents it at a Ministry of Education meeting. In the Republic of Korea, the Minister of Education and the heads of the metropolitan and provincial governments are required by the Lifelong Education Act to conduct regular statistical surveys in order to collect basic data on the implementation of lifelong learning in their regions. This data collection on lifelong learning provides concrete evidence for either supporting current practices or else making a case for certain policy changes. However, empirical evidence continues to be lacking in several of the seven selected countries.

Sharing good practices is widely conducted in many of these countries as one of the ways to feed into the future policies of a country. For example, Viet Nam encourages sharing best practices through workshops and websites for CLC networks. In the Republic of Korea and Japan, Lifelong Learning Expos and festivals at both central and municipal levels are held to help expand the culture of lifelong learning and share outstanding practices to inform future policies.

Since systemic monitoring and evaluation is critical to producing the best outcomes of lifelong learning as well as relevant policies, countries in the Asia-Pacific region should pay keen attention to monitoring and evaluation. It is advised that governments should establish a relevant system in which national experts of lifelong learning and practitioners in the field meet and share opinions about programmes and policies. Governments also need to heed diverse feedbacks from various stakeholders, including civil society, employers and individual learners, as well as allocating secure budgets for the operation of these feedback systems with quality. At the global level, international collaboration and cross-national comparative research and cooperation on lifelong learning can be informative sources for informing national policies.

## H. Governance

When it comes to governance of lifelong learning, the roles of the state or ministry of education are central in all selected seven countries, except for Japan, which has significantly transformed into a decentralised structure and community-based administration after decades of practice.

Governance of lifelong learning in the other six countries is mainly run in either a top-down mechanism or in a loose structure. While decentralisation in the structure of governance is widely understood as an important aspect of effectiveness, practices show different levels of accommodation of it.

China and Viet Nam are two representative examples for central governments placing great emphasis on lifelong learning for the country's development while adopting a top-down approach in implementing policies. The central governmental bodies of China, such as the State Council (SC) and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCP), take active roles in pursuing lifelong learning objectives, while the Ministry of Education (MOE) and provincial governments are responsible for developing relevant policies, guiding principles and plans as well as supervising the progress of lifelong learning, managing budgets and other related tasks. All local governments and their departments are mandated to collaborate to promote lifelong learning. A Promotion Committee of lifelong learning is formed in such Learning Cities as Shanghai and Fujian. The board director of the committee is the deputy mayor and board members come from various administrative departments. In the case of Viet Nam, the governance structure is handled by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and other ministries/agencies such as the Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Also, governance of lifelong learning is closely linked to the Building a Learning Society 2012-2020 project. The National Department for Renovating Education and Training acts as a new governing body that is in charge of not only building a learning society but also of developing the whole education system. In local governments, an equivalent function is supposed to be carried out by the Department for Renovating Education and Training. Despite the existence of provincial steering boards and departments however, there is no clear mechanism to decentralise lifelong learning governance.

Japan's case shows a quite different example from centralized governance in China and Viet Nam. Japan also has a general governance structure in the central government where the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) establishes overall national direction and policies for lifelong learning, primarily through the Lifelong Learning Council. Other ministries such as the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare are situated at the same central level of administrative functions. The Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau of MEXT is responsible for planning education that fosters collaboration among schools, families and communities. Vocational training for youth and adults outside the school system is the responsibility of the Human Resources Development Bureau within the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. At the prefectural level, various administrative decisions regarding lifelong learning are made through Lifelong Learning Councils, including some strategic or action plans for the promotion of lifelong learning. Though less sophisticated, most local governments have their own Lifelong Learning Councils. These councils decide a municipality's particular goals of lifelong learning and implement needed projects and programmes with the operation of *Kominkans*.

However, the function of this governance has been quite diminished in Japan recently as a result of prolonged economic recession. Practices of neo-liberalism have been introduced in many sectors of the country and financial cuts in lifelong learning have shrunken the governance of lifelong learning considerably. Instead, private organisations such as non-profit organisations (NPOs) and companies have started to be actively involved in lifelong learning projects and



programmes, in which local communities have become more decentralised and community-based, with more participations of citizens in administrative decision-making.

The Republic of Korea shows a case that is located in the middle of the spectrum between centralisation and decentralisation. In terms of governance, the Republic of Korea has been equipped with a decentralised structure, meaning that the central government sets up a basic policy framework and establishes the related systems, after which local governments carry out policy tasks in accordance with goals established at the central level as well as local ones. As in other countries, the centre of the administrative bodies is the Ministry of Education (central government level), and there are metropolitan governments, the metropolitan Offices of Education (provincial or municipal level), the district or local governments, and the local Offices of Education (district or community level). It is the MOE which formulates the national vision for lifelong learning while other ministries provide assistance for financing and promoting lifelong education programmes with respect to the related laws. Particularly, there are expert bodies which provide lifelong learning promotion activities in cooperation with the administrative organisations: NILE (central government level), the municipal/provincial institutions of lifelong education (provincial or municipal level), and the local institution of lifelong education (district or community level). In addition, there are consultative bodies at different administrative levels in order to discuss and coordinate on issues regarding lifelong learning visions, policies and/or strategic plans. The structure of governance to deliver lifelong learning is declared to have been decentralised in the Republic of Korea. However, a top-down approach is still easily discernible in many of the decision-making processes. This approach can be effective but, at the same time, there remain issues of autonomy at the grassroots level.

In terms of effective governance of lifelong learning, much is left to be desired in low-to-middle income countries where a lack of coordination among the ministries and national/local bodies continues to persist. One of the repeated problems caused from less-coordinated structures of governance is fragmentation and/or duplication that happens among ministries and even within a ministry and/or at lower levels of their institutions. In Nepal, for example, literacy and non-formal education in primary and lower secondary level is the responsibility of the Non-Formal Education Centre of Nepal (NFEC) whereas open learning schemes for the secondary level are within the purview of the National Centre of Educational Development (NCED). Both institutions are under the MOE and occasional confusions about relevant mandates and responsibilities continue to persist between the two.

## I. Financing

Overall, budgets for lifelong learning outside formal education are extremely limited in all the selected seven countries. Countries tend to place much higher emphasis on primary, secondary and higher education. For example, the budget for literacy and lifelong learning is just 0.7 per cent of the total education budget in Nepal. High-income countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea are not exceptions. While the Republic of Korea allocates approximately 25 per cent of government spending to education, the amount allocated for lifelong learning in 2015 totalled 37,709 million Korean Won (around 32.2 million USD), which accounts for a mere

0.39 per cent of the Ministry's total operational budget for the year. This means that over 99.5 per cent of the education budget is invested in the formal education sector (primary, secondary and higher education), even as the school-age population rapidly decreases due to low fertility rates across the country.

In Japan and the Republic of Korea regulations are in place to encourage investment from local governments and the private sector. In Japan, for example, a Law Concerning the Establishment of Implementation Systems and Other Measures for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning (the Lifelong Learning Law, in short) introduced the role of the private sector into the planning and provision of lifelong learning for the first time. At the prefectural (municipal) level, this Lifelong Learning Law and the revised Social Education Act are the backbones of financing. Different levels of participation in the private sector result in differences in the quantity and quality of learning that CLCs such as *Kominkans* provide (Noguch, Guevara & Yorozu, 2015).

The Republic of Korea stipulates the responsibilities of local governments to promote and provide funding for lifelong learning in their respective regions while the central government maintains the role of an investor of funding for lifelong learning. Shortfalls in the government budget are often supplemented by innovative funding schemes that mobilise resources from the private sector, such as the Employment Insurance Fund. Introduced in 1995, the Employment Insurance Fund is a social insurance system which helps to prevent unemployment and facilitate re-employment by developing the vocational abilities of workers through the provision of funding for various vocational skill enhancement programmes and unemployment benefits. The Tomorrow Learning Card (also known as the Vocational Training Development Account System) was launched in 2006, which is covered by the Employment Insurance Fund as well. Japan and the Republic of Korea have created alternative funding schemes with the participation of the private sector: 33.6 per cent and 40.4 per cent, respectively, of total expenditure on educational institutions comes from private sources, including individual families. This is much higher than the OECD average of 16.5 per cent (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).

In countries such as China and Viet Nam, where education is a major focus for investment by the government, the educational budget has been rapidly increasing. In the case of Viet Nam, it increased from 15.3 per cent of the national budget in 2001 to 20 per cent in 2010. Alternatives have been explored to find more sources of funding. In China, for example, the government requires that business entities allocate funds equivalent to 1.5 to 2.5 per cent of salaries for employees' training.

In the case of Bangladesh and Nepal, governments mostly cover the costs of adult literacy and continuing education programmes, but this is by no means enough. For example, in Nepal the budget for pre-primary education, vocational and technical secondary education, as well as literacy and non-formal education each is between 1 and 3 per cent of the total education budget, while formal schooling takes approximately 90 per cent of the education budget. These programmes in general, therefore, suffer from lack of donor funding. Both countries have tried to create partnerships with private sector actors, mainly NGOs, to mobilise funding for lifelong learning. Since NGOs also rely mostly on donor funding, however, they cannot serve as long-term pillars in a sustainable model of non-public resources mobilisation.

In addition, international support networks are often initiated to develop and implement programmes. In the case of Nepal, the MOE through its Foreign Aid Coordination Section (FACS) facilitates inter-agency collaboration resulting in pooled funding from EFA partners to harmonise and maximise the effectiveness of foreign resources towards achieving the EFA as well as education-related Millennium Development Goals. In both countries, the need for employers' participation in financing is high since employers benefit from such lifelong learning interventions that keep their employees well trained and motivated with relevant information and technology.

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# Nationally Defined Adult Skills and Competencies Related to Lifelong Learning

Adult skills and competencies need to be consistent in both global and national contexts. Therefore, national policies and programmes should be interactive to respond to these needs appropriately. All seven selected countries have identified lifelong learning in relation with developing adult skills and competencies required for the 21st century (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013). With regard to adult skills and competencies, the seven selected countries mainly considered three areas: 1) Secondary Education; 2) Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); and 3) Non-Formal Education (NFE).

Adult skills and competencies, in a way, are related with EFA Goal 3, which is regarded as a difficult aim as compared to other EFA goals. The wording of EFA Goal 3 has been subject to multiple interpretations by countries in the Asia-Pacific region and acted upon in a variety of ways. Common problems shared by the countries include the low level of detail and lack of clear and quantifiable targets towards the goal, which often hampers the tracking of progress (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2013). Likewise, a lack of information on the achievements of EFA Goal 3 is a common phenomenon across many of the seven selected countries.

Despite a lack of adequate information and data made available by the countries, adult skills and competencies needed by them can broadly be categorised into three domains: literacy skills; life skills that are often interchangeably described as post-literacy or foundational; and occupational competencies. All these are indispensable for creating a learning society. While literacy skills are regarded as a set of functional skills to understand letters and numbers, life skills include essential skills required in the daily lives of adults. Occupational competencies deal with the necessary skills that encompass both hard and soft skills for successful performances in workplaces.

## Literacy skills

All the seven selected countries have shown their interest in increasing literacy skills through lifelong learning. In many national policy documents, the term “literacy skills” is understood in two ways. On the one hand, it represents a set of functional skills that help people understand letters and numbers so they can manage better in daily life. On the other hand, it extends to include some foundational and/or life skills, and, therefore, is often referred as “comprehensive

literacy skills". For example, high-income countries like the Republic of Korea have adopted strategic slogans such as "Literacy for Life", and defined functional literacy as 'the ability to function in daily life in communities and at workplaces,' which surpasses the ability to simply understand letters and numbers.

Many of the seven countries have undertaken major efforts to fight against illiteracy. According to an EFA report, adult literacy rates in the Asia-Pacific region have improved significantly over the past decade; nonetheless, more than a half of illiterate adults in the world live in the Asia-Pacific region. Among the seven selected countries, there are high performers such as China, Thailand and Viet Nam, and there are low performers such as Bangladesh and Nepal. Japan and the Republic of Korea have both achieved near-universal rates of literacy.

Countries regarded as low performers – Bangladesh and Nepal – have difficulties not only in seeking to expand literacy education to all but also in providing neo-literate people with further learning opportunities. It has been noted that many illiterate people are still hard to reach even in high-performing countries. Ethnic minorities, women, and people in rural areas continue to have much lower rates of literacy than the national average in many of these countries. For example, the national average adult literacy rate in Viet Nam was 89.1 per cent in 2012 while the rate was only 73.1 per cent for ethnic minorities.

## Life skills

Life skills are defined to have multiple numbers of domains, covering psychosocial skills, health promotion skills, HIV prevention, livelihood and most importantly, income-generation skills (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2013). Foundational skills and post-literacy skills are interchangeably used to describe skills in the same category. Bangladesh and Nepal have shown great interests in increasing participation rates in secondary education since most life skills for adults tend to be consolidated at the lower secondary level of education. However, a lack of secondary education level participation is prevalent in these countries and this tends to bring unemployment and a lack of opportunities particularly for youth in the Asia-Pacific region. Findings from the EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2012) reveal that many young people in the Asia-Pacific region do not acquire sufficient life skills and are hard to find employment to maintain their livelihood (UNESCO, 2012). Countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal still struggle to provide children and adolescents with increased access to lower secondary education. And a high number of out-of-school adolescents shows that this goal has not been met satisfactorily in these countries.

Therefore, the non-formal education sector has played a major role in increasing life skills in these countries. In Bangladesh, for example, the National Plan of Action (NPA) has focused on the role of CLCs in providing literacy and related income-generating skills together. However, many CLCs still lack capabilities to provide this continuum of learning except for a small number of CLCs operated by some well-funded and established NGOs. The coverage of life skills education is still small, pointing to the need for strong policy interventions towards better programme planning to consolidate the needs for the basic capabilities of local people. In a long-term perspective, the experience of Bangladesh and its emphasis on non-formal education can be utilised to enhance a lifelong learning society.

The countries considered as high performers of fighting illiteracy such as China, Thailand and Viet Nam are not exceptions as regards concerns about the unemployment of unskilled people, particularly youth. Even though they have moved further in achieving EFA Goal 2 (universal primary education), the role of CLCs as a hub for life skills for people has been significant.

The Republic of Korea and Japan have shown no less interest in life skills education. For example, the definition of “literacy” encompasses various aspects of adult life in the Republic of Korea. As has been mentioned, the Republic of Korea has three categories under the term of “literacy”: functional, cultural and family literacy. Functional literacy means the ability to function in daily life in communities and at workplaces. Cultural literacy is the ability to resolve social problems that can arise anywhere in life in a multicultural society. Family literacy is defined as the basic skills required for guaranteeing and enhancing the well-being of family members. Since number of the families from multicultural backgrounds is increasing, cultural and family literacy have emerged as needed literacy skills as well as life skills due to country-specific contextual needs.

The Republic of Korea therefore defines literacy education as “a systematic education program that allows people to be equipped with the basic livelihood ability which is necessary socially and culturally, along with ability of understanding letters, in leading a daily life” and provides an adult literacy education support system by the Ministry of Education and NILE. The databases are also managed through “National Survey of Adult Literacy” by the MOE and “Survey on Adult Literacy” by NILE.

## Occupational skills

Lifelong learning for work means maintaining employability through skilling, re-skilling and upgrading skills. Many countries do not have proper data collection systems for TVET and NFE, which are partly based on their lesser standing than that of formal schooling in these countries (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). Similarly, workplace learning conducted in the private sector is an area that provides little information to the overall picture of education and training for enhancing adult skills and competencies.

Among the efforts to consolidate adult skills and competencies in the NFE sector, China’s Sunshine Project was one of the successful projects regarding its scale and impact on the country. According to the International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (INRULED), the total surplus of rural labour amounted to 150 million and an average increase of 6 million per year before 2004, the year of launching the project (INRULED, 2012). The project started with the cooperation of many government ministries – namely Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Construction, and Ministry of Finance – under the aegis of the State Council. The role of CLCs as a space for this project was significant. Rural vocational schools and adult schools were playing a vital role as CLCs to provide training for rural surplus labour until the project ended in 2010. Table 3 shows the training programmes and contents provided in the Sunshine project.

**Table 3: Training Subjects & Contents in the Sunshine Project**

Subjects	Training Contents
Mechanical Manufacture	Turner, bench worker, miller, grinder, planner, foundry worker, top maker, electrician
Electronics and electrical appliances	Electronic operator, appliance maintenance worker, appliance installer
Welding	Electronic welder, gas welder, etc.
Driving and auto repair	The operation and maintenance of agriculture machinery, automobile driving and maintenance, and motorcycle driving and maintenance, etc.
Garment sewing and processing	(Electric) sewing worker, shoemaker, garment maker, etc.
Construction and decoration	Construction worker, decoration worker, etc.
Catering, tourism and other services	Waiter/Waitress for restaurants or hotels, chef, tour guide, etc.
Community services	Security guard, estate management worker, cleaner, landscaping worker, water heating maintenance worker, etc.
Housekeeping and health care service	Housekeeper, nursing worker for hospitals, nurse, pantry man, hairdresser, beautician, health
Others	

**Resource:** INRULED, 2012

Another case about a country's efforts to define and increase adult skills and competency can be found in the Republic of Korea. There has been an increasing need for highly skilled human resources in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in high-income countries to compete on the global market. Many high school graduates move on to post-secondary education in these countries and there are increasing needs to match the demand and supply in terms of skills required in the labour market. The Republic of Korea shows a good example of efforts to deal with this issue. The third National Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan (2013-2017) includes aligning work, education, and competency development as one of the major aims of lifelong learning in the Republic of Korea. There has been a continuous mismatch between the levels of education and the competencies required in the labour markets and criticism has been raised that qualification systems do not reflect requirements from industries, thereby weakening the effectiveness of TVET as well as the credibility of qualifications. Preference for general secondary or higher education over TVET due to the influence of Confucianism has also often been regarded as a major challenge for the country to move towards a competency-based society. The introduction of the National Competency Standards (NCS) and subsequent curricula reform in TVET and higher education seeks to help the Republic of Korea shift from an academic to a competency-based focus. It is a process that identifies and standardises competencies which are required for successful job performance as well as an innovative form of a national qualification framework in which a person receives accreditation or certification for demonstrating a certain level of performance in a particular job. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Labour are the two main ministries in developing it as well as related curricula with enhanced teaching and learning materials.

Interests in job-related training and the involvement of employers in providing workplace learning have also been among the phenomena seen in many of middle-to-high income countries such as Thailand, Japan and the Republic of Korea. In Thailand, for example, the New Education Law is gradually de-emphasising the role of traditional non-formal education in favour of cutting-edge manpower training (ILO, 2004). In Japan, two laws in lifelong learning, namely the *Social Education*



*Law* and the *Lifelong Learning Law*, have a somewhat contrasting focus from each other and recent direction demonstrates a shift from social (liberal and community-oriented) education to lifelong learning (manpower development and job-related). In the Republic of Korea, adult education in the humanities is making more and more room for lifelong job training. In addition, more and more workplace learning such as on-the-job training is encouraged since many of the soft and hard occupational skills are learned better at a workplace through informal learning than formal or non-formal education and training settings. More and more employers have therefore organised on-site training opportunities.

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# Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive education sector reviews and some relevant documents and data from the seven selected countries, this regional synthesis concludes that the all seven countries are heading in the direction towards lifelong learning societies. Key findings are summarised and challenges are discussed. After best practices from the countries are addressed, recommendations are made to policymakers and practitioners in the countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

## • Summary of key findings

### *1) A concept of Lifelong Learning has partly been embedded in national policies and practices*

The move towards knowledge economies has generated a world of social change and emphasised a significance of lifelong learning. Albeit contexts and motivations may be different, all the seven selected countries have incorporated the concept of lifelong learning in their process of development and in their reform of their education sectors with successful outcomes. However, the countries continue to face further challenges, especially in providing good governance, improving the quality of life, and reducing inequalities; hence, the concept of lifelong learning is likely to serve them as a guiding principle in dealing with arising challenges in often turbulent national, regional global climates.

Outcomes in employing the concept of lifelong learning as an initiative to review and reform existing educational and training systems vary from country to country. While some countries have fully incorporated the concept of lifelong learning and utilised it in a holistic approach to their education and training systems, some other countries have lagged behind at a germinal stage where lifelong learning is often still understood only as a platform for learning projects for adult learners, mostly in the non-formal education sector. For example, the concept of lifelong learning is being utilised to strengthen the current non-formal education system and continuing education in Bangladesh and Nepal.

There are also cases that strong government commitments for lifelong learning as a national vision and a direction towards educational reform makes a significant difference. For example, China and Viet Nam have considered education as the most important factor for national development and, accordingly, created lifelong learning policies to link each education sector

and their outcomes. Legal provisions are created and strategic provisions are experimented as pilots and widely administered to the citizens in both countries.

## **2) Lifelong learning for adults and non-formal and informal learning have received less attention**

Achievements in EFA Goals have contributed in the countries to setting solid and stable foundations for building learning societies. Each country's level of achievement of EFA mirrors the level of incorporation of the concept of lifelong learning as well as indicate the major challenges and obstacles that the country faces on its way to create learning societies.

While EFA Goals include almost all the subsectors of education and training – namely, early childhood care and education, primary education, secondary education, higher education, technical and vocational education and training, adult learning and education – the learning of adults, which is mainly linked to EFA Goal 3, still has received less attention in these countries compared to the learning of children and adolescents. The first four goals of EFA cover an entire lifecycle of people, but many countries have focused largely on the early part of that lifecycle and formal schooling to the exclusion of adults learners. Such shortcomings stand as obstacles in the way of knowledge economies where every kind of learning enhances the skills and competencies of individuals and communities. Since data regarding the programmes, participation rates, outcomes and feedback in adult education and training is insufficiently managed, evidence-based advocacy is rarely made and quality assurance frameworks are largely subjective.

## **3) CLCs have played an important role in the expansion of lifelong learning opportunities**

This report focuses on the role of community learning centres (CLCs) in the seven selected countries to investigate how the concept of lifelong learning is being implemented at the community level in each country. Generally, CLCs in the countries have made remarkable advances both in quantity and quality, in which a learning society can be underpinned better by being able to better serve the needs of people.

There has been a great expansion of CLCs in the countries where the central government has shown a strong will for charting national development through human development. In terms of achieving social equity, CLCs have taken a major step forward as well by increasing access to local people, particularly people in marginalised groups such as women and ethnic minorities. In Nepal, for example, the social exclusion of the lower castes and the marginalisation of women and ethnic minorities hamper their access to learning, despite constitutional guarantees on equality for all. CLCs have contributed to increasing their accessibility to learning. While a decentralised approach is necessary to ensure better outcomes, a top-down approach, however, still takes precedence in operating CLCs in several of the seven countries. A case of Japan with the operation of *Kominkan* demonstrates how planning, administration and evaluation can be naturally and effectively managed at a decentralised level.

“Learning Cities” projects have been effectively expanded and/or set up, particularly in Asia, including China, Viet Nam, the Republic of Korea and Japan. The local governments of these

“Learning Cities” have made efforts to improve the quality of education services and facilitate cooperation among different organisations and sectors in a city so that they are able to implement education that suits regional and city-specific needs and circumstances. As with CLCs, Learning Cities best work in a bottom-up approach and decentralised format.

## • Summary of challenges

### *1) Lack of holistic approaches to lifelong learning*

Due to the absence of a holistic approach to lifelong learning, large numbers of learners in low-to-mid income countries still have little access to indispensable continuums of learning after completing basic literacy education, as a result of which many may relapse into functional illiteracy. They are not likely to benefit from learning. Many of them may also experience that their learning outcomes in NFE are not recognised so their efforts have been in vain.

These failures make people become frustrated with their efforts to learn. Since the concept of lifelong learning can be a powerful solution with which countries’ ongoing demands for skills and knowledge can be addressed, lifelong learning policies and practices should take into account these failures and try to address these issues in educational reforms. A holistic approach, therefore, includes the introduction of legislative and strategic provisions that ensure learning does not become fragmented or discontinued. This is relevant not only to low-to-mid income countries but also mid-to-high income countries such as China, Viet Nam and Thailand, where stakeholders of lifelong learning in the private sector are still inadequately informed and not treated as equal partners, even though they can significantly contribute to the establishment of learning societies.

### *2) CLCs’ lack of competencies and empowerment*

Effective management of CLCs is needed. In many countries, CLCs are not necessarily decentralised while decentralisation is a key to their excellence. On the one hand, countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal have hardly intervened due to non-formal education’s lower priority and lack of resources. On the other hand, CLCs in China and Viet Nam also have difficulties when top-down mechanisms that are prevalent in the operation process may deprive them of chances to improve their competencies. As a result, large numbers of CLCs suffer from a lack of autonomy and insufficient support, which prevents them from enhancing their competencies and may make their programmes unsustainable. The lack of competency in financing makes them largely dependent on external funding, and the lack of professional development for facilitators and teachers leads to failures in operation, including deteriorations in the quality of teaching and learning. Thus there is an urgent need to empower CLCs, which enables them to provide better quality lifelong learning programmes at local levels.

Since decentralisation requires the capacities of communities and their residents, more attention should be given to processes of operation and their quality assurance measures. Creating quality assurance frameworks should be discussed widely among the stakeholders, developed and utilised. The accreditation and professional development of related specialists, such as via national

certification courses, is one of the needed provisions for quality assurance. The importance of monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) also needs to be made clear.

### **3) Marginalisation in adult learning**

Creating conducive environments for adult learning is needed. There is no doubt that adult education has been treated as a marginal area in comparison with regular schooling. In all the seven countries, education and training opportunities for adults still have lesser standing than those of schooling for children and adolescents. Since adults' ability to learn new skills and competencies contributes to creating learning societies, more attention should be focused on this area. Among the many problems, limited budgets for lifelong learning are especially problematic. That is why new financing models for lifelong learning are needed. For example, alternative funding schemes should be explored to increase funding. Under the visions and goals of creating a learning society, the governments of each country and private sectors should effectively collaborate to deliver better outcomes. Particularly, the increased involvement of employers in creating new learning opportunities is needed to ensure that adults can continue to increase their skills and competencies. In doing so, the issue of unequal participation among different groups of adults should be addressed. There is enough evidence, for instance, that women do not participate equally in many learning opportunities such as literacy education, skills education, and workplace learning.

Data of adults' participation in learning should be managed properly to make meaningful changes in planning and delivery of learning for adults. However, there is hardly any statistics collection and data analysis for research-based policy making and research-informed practices for adult learning. These data are needed to be compiled to remove barriers and obstacles to the participation of adults in lifelong learning. Due to the lack of systematic databases, however, there is little empirical evidence on actual implementations.

### **4) Lack of effort for creating NQF & RVA**

One of the notable differences among the seven countries is the differing levels of provisions for lifelong learning, such as qualification frameworks and recognition of prior learning. A learning society needs nationally agreed qualification frameworks and various ways of prior learning recognition. On the one hand, socially agreed frameworks for qualification let people have flexible pathways where they can make their learning from formal, non-formal, and informal situations valuable for their betterment in education and work. However, many countries are still in a germinal stage and learners have difficulties utilising them.

More positively, more and more countries are now introducing these provisions such as Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS) and efforts to match needed competencies at workplaces, while curricula of educational institutions such as universities and colleges are being retooled in a move towards a competency-based society. These efforts strengthen the relevance of education and training to the competency required. Introducing nationally agreed NQF is a bit more difficult. However, NQFs should be incorporated in a country's system of lifelong learning since they promote easier comparability as well as better understanding and transparency of qualifications and therefore enable learners to make more informed decisions in their lives.

Also, there often is a mismatch between skills and competencies that requires attention by policymakers and stakeholders such as employers. It is imperative for governments to carefully examine and invest in skills development to link training systems to the labour market and to ensure that young people have access to opportunities.

## • Examples of national best practices

To provide concrete cases of lifelong learning operations at the community level developed in the different contexts of the Asian-Pacific countries, examples of national best practices are addressed.

### **1) Kyoyama ESD Environment Project (KEEP) for Sustainable Development (ESD) - Japan**

The Kyoyama Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Environment Project in Okayama city shows how mutual learning among people in a community can grow with the networking of organisations within the community such as CLCs. Okayama city is located in the Chūgoku region of Japan. Among its various ESD Projects, this provides opportunities for local primary and secondary schoolchildren to understand, re-think and re-establish the relationship between human life and the local natural environment. The project started by conducting small-scale environmental conservation and learning activities involving local streams and rivers, such as a local ecological study, a water quality survey or a cleaning of water sources.

The strength of the project lies in its use of democratic intergenerational learning principles. To this purpose, citizens are invited to learn to take care of issues affecting the community and this learning naturally allows people to connect to each other to form a “team,” or so-called “learning organisation” whereby ideas from local people are addressed, discussed, explored and transformed through team learning. Therefore, the outcomes of these team learning exercises have impacted significantly on solutions to complicated community problems such as environmental conservation. *Kyoyama Kominkan* has played a significant role in providing the resources for the activities, including space, equipment and staff to coordinate activities and facilitate discussions.

### **2) Lifelong Education Universities for adults – The Republic of Korea**

The university student population tends to be highly stratified by age, and it is rare for students outside ages 18 to 22 to attend university classes (Smith, 1995). Korean universities have as a result remained largely inaccessible to adults. Korean universities have facilitated very limited transfers of previous credits earned at other universities or even in other departments at the same university. However, this state of affairs is being challenged by efforts to turn universities into lifelong learning-oriented higher education institutions. “Lifelong Education Universities” is a project that aims to reorganise an existing university system into “open system friendly to adult learners”. At Lifelong Education Universities, adult learners can continue self-development and improve work competencies. For this purpose, the Ministry of Education seeks to revamp university structures, from a traditional model to an open structure catering to all ages.

The project is implemented in two ways. First, there is a degree programme, which focuses mainly on removing barriers for adult learners in their pursuit of a university education and managing curricula according to adult learners' needs and life styles. Under the government's financial support, some universities have been designated as Lifelong Education Universities, and they establish new departments which provide field-oriented and adult-friendly academic programmes. In addition, the universities offer a variety of counselling and life support to ease burdens on learners in their participation. Second, there is a non-degree programme, which aims to provide vocational training and specialised courses to help learners to acquire licenses and find new job opportunities. The main target group of the non-degree programmes is adults in their 40s and 50s who are willing to prepare for a new career, including business start-ups and overseas employment.

## • The way forward: Recommendations

- 1) Countries should set holistic lifelong learning visions and goals. Fragmented policy interventions and a lack of systemic approaches on lifelong learning hinder the enrichment of a lifelong learning society. Therefore, countries need to establish holistic policies from the phase of baseline study to the monitoring and evaluation in the field of lifelong learning.
- 2) Equity and quality need to be addressed in an inclusive legal and policy framework for lifelong learning. Given the vital importance of lifelong learning, the ethos of Education for All (EFA) should be constantly addressed in a competitive global era. The policies and programmes of lifelong learning need to be comprehensively extended to all disadvantaged groups. Equal access to lifelong learning should be ensured in practice.
- 3) More national commitment to bridging policy and financing is required for the effective implementation of CLCs. Since CLCs are a powerful channel and platform to enrich human learning at the community level, it is imperative to empower CLCs and provide autonomy as well as practical authority to them.
- 4) It is necessary to strengthen the relevance of education to society and intensify approaches to skills development in education through appropriate policies and interventions. As education is the provision of learning opportunities (Jarvis, 2010), it is bound by parameters decided by what the providers wish learners to learn. Systematic approaches of lifelong learning can reduce the mismatch between education and employment.
- 5) International collaboration or cross-national comparative research and cooperation on lifelong learning can be very effective for the capacity development of CLCs. Diverse experience of different CLCs in the Asia-Pacific region could bring about the evolution of lifelong learning society gradually.





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