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From Education to Employability: Preparing South Asian Youth for the World of Work

By Sabina Dewan & Urmila Sarkar

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Cover Photo: "Young trainees in the leather sector at the Centre of Excellence for Leather in Gazipur, Bangladesh"
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CONTENTS

Figures, Tables, and Boxes

GLOSSARY

ADAP - Adolescent Development and Participation
ALECSO - Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
ALP - Alternative Learning Pathways
BRAC - Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CPF - Conceptual and Programmatic Framework
CTE - Career and Technical Education
ECD - Early Childhood Development
FAO - Food and Agricultural Organization
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GEM - Global Education Monitoring
GER - Gross Enrolment Ratio
ICT - Information and Communications Technology
ILO - International Labour Organization
LSCE - Life Skills and Citizenship Education
MDGs - Millennium Development Goals
MENA - Middle East and North America
NEET - Neither in Employment, Education or Training
NGO - Non Governmental Organization
NSS - National Sample Survey
OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment
RMSA - Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
RPL- Recognition of Prior Learning
SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals
STEP - Skills Toward Employment and Productivity
TVET - Technical Vocational Education and Training
UIS - UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI - United Nations Girls Education Initiative
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA - United nations Relief and Works Agency
US - United States
USD - United States Dollar
TREE - Training for Rural Economic Empowerment
WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

FOREWORD

South Asia has the largest youth population in the world. Indeed, young people can drive economies and societies to be more vibrant and productive. At the same time, this potential can only be realized if children benefit from quality learning pathways from early childhood to adolescence. Growing insecurity in the region underscores the need for much greater investment in solid educational and skills foundation for our young people so that they can cope and adapt to changing labour market dynamics. The Sustainable Development Goals recognize this urgent need to bridge the worlds of education and employment.

The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia is happy to partner with the JustJobs Network on this joint report entitled: *From Education to Employability: Preparing South Asian Youth for the World of Work*. UNICEF is increasingly working on improving skills for learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship and employability which now features prominently in the organization's next Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2021. This report addresses the important question of how education systems in South Asia contribute to the employability of young people and what can be done to improve their transition from school to work.

Authors Sabina Dewan, President and Executive Director of JJN and Urmila Sarkar, Regional Education Adviser of UNICEF South Asia, examine how education systems can better prepare youth for a 21st century world of work. As they argue, developing capacities of young people at the critical junctures in their lives, is essential to harnessing their potential as economic and civil agents, and building more just and equitable societies.

The report provides snapshots of government spending and key trends in education in South Asia and makes a case for increasing public and private financing in education and skills interventions. It discusses the need for alternative learning pathways and expanding evidence-based research on the alignment of education to the labor market.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to the Advisory Committee of this report including Anil Kakani (Vikasa Holdings), Anurag Behar (Azim Premji Foundation), Gemma Wilson-Clarke (UNICEF HQ), Lay Cheng Tan (UNESCO), Michael Ettlinger (Carsey School of Public Policy), Natalie Fol (UNICEF ROSA), Nomaan Majid (ILO), Shabnam Sinha (World Bank), and Shashank Vira (Hearth Education Advisors).

Jean Gough
Regional Director, UNICEF South Asia

Introduction

South Asia[3] is home to the largest share of the world's youth population.[4] With 48 percent of its population below the age of 24,[5] South Asia's young people offer the potential to drive its economies to be more vibrant and productive. Yet optimism over the region's so-called demographic dividend is tempered by questions about whether existing education systems are adequately preparing young people to make the leap from education to a 21st century world of work.

Optimism over the region's so-called demographic dividend is tempered by questions about whether existing education systems are adequately preparing young people to make the leap from education to a 21st century world of work.

Substantial progress has been made in achieving universal primary education. And it is true that more young people are entering the labor market with higher levels of education than in the past.[6] Yet, education systems in South Asia are fraught with several challenges ranging from deficient resources and poor quality to high drop-out rates. What's more, changing demographics, conflict and disaster, rapid urbanization and new technology are altering labor markets[7] at a scale and pace that already strained education systems are struggling to keep up with.

Box 1: The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World

Precisely at the same time that jobs demand more education, new skills and greater adaptability from our young people, governments worldwide are underinvesting in education.[1] This is a key finding that the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity highlights in its seminal report, *The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world.* The Commission notes that developing countries, with fewer resources and higher proportions of young people, are likely to face the greatest challenge. By 2030 only one out of two young people[i] in middle-income countries, and only one in ten in low-income countries, will be on track to achieving basic secondary education.[2] This will stunt economic growth with far-reaching social and political consequences.

[i] *Youth are defined as those young people between 15-24 years of age. At the same time, those under the age of 17 years are also referred to as children. Adolescence comprises of a smaller age group of 10-19 years, and "young people" are a combined set of adolescents and youth. In its narrative, this paper uses the terms youth and young people interchangeably referring to those between the ages of 10 and 18. Where data and table uses specific age-bands, it is specified.*

The outcome is that many with an education are struggling to find work. Some, because their education cannot keep up with the changing demands of the labor market, others because they are over or under qualified for the available position. And those that cannot afford to remain unemployed until the right job comes along often end up in informal and precarious work arrangements. These factors make fixing the education system an urgent, but complex and long-term, proposition.

In the interim, pressured by the need to enable their growing youth populations to find work and reap the demographic dividend before it expires, and to supply their changing and/or growing industries with workers, governments are instituting technical and vocational training programs. Training programs aimed at providing technical information related to specific work activities can run anywhere from three months to a couple of years.

These programs have their limitations. First, they are intended to build on education, but many end up trying to compensate for the lack of foundational education. Second, a plethora of training providers have emerged in countries across the region, which makes it difficult to oversee the quality of training and provide credible certification while ensuring that training is linked to market demand. As a result, despite receiving training, many young people continue to be unemployed or underemployed across the region. Third, employee retention rates are low. One-time, and often short-term, skills training programs may allow entry into a low-skilled job, but prospects for growth or mobility to a better and/or higher paying job are limited. After receiving training, young people expect that their career prospects will improve significantly. When this turns out not to be the case, they tend to leave their job to look for alternatives. This fuels a vicious cycle of low retention rates. There is often a misalignment between a young person's aspirations and expectations, and those of the employer and the job.

While the quest to improve education endures, it now shares the spotlight with skills training. But the evolution of education and skill systems as silos does a disservice to the youth they aim to serve.

While the quest to improve education endures, it now shares the spotlight with skills training. But the evolution of education and skill systems as silos does a disservice to the youth they aim to serve. Education systems must start grappling with laying the foundation for young people to become employable, and skills systems must be able to rely and build on that foundation rather than try to compensate for it. As envisaged by the Sustainable Development Goals, there is an urgent need to bridge the worlds of education and employment to better prepare young people for the world of work.

Research methodology and key research questions

At what point in a young person's life does the school-to-work transition begin? How do education systems – specifically secondary education – in South Asia contribute to the employability of young people? The issue of employability at the secondary education level is one that has received insufficient attention. Studies assessing the relationship between education and skills interventions at the secondary level are especially scarce. This is because it is a reasonable expectation that children complete K-12 education before entering the labor market.

To assess whether and the extent to which secondary education systems contribute to the employability of young people, this report prepared by the JustJobs Network in partnership with UNICEF South Asia relies on existing data with a focus on secondary education. It also draws upon insights of several seasoned experts in the areas of education and skills development that formed the peer advisory group for this research. Since data on education systems and secondary education curricula, skills interventions and employment outcomes is limited for South Asia, the researchers conducted primary quantitative and qualitative research in one country – Bangladesh. Bangladesh serves as a case study that explicates the nuances of employability cultivation at the secondary education level, and the silos of education and workforce development.

The value of education is enshrined in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is the focus of Goal 4 in the Sustainable Development Goals.

As data presented in section five of this report reflects, the reality is that many don't finish; they enter the labor market before and it is thus important to study how secondary education systems cultivate employability.

Education scholars and practitioners focus on education reform, skills experts focus on post-secondary education and beyond. This research examines the extent to which secondary education systems help build capacities that make South Asian youth more employable, and better suited to avail the benefits of skills training systems to ensure a lifelong learning continuum.

This study consists of seven sections. Following this introduction, section two of this report provides an overview of the literature and data on the school-to-work transition, looking into some specific projects undertaken by multilateral organizations. Section three examines key trends in South Asia that affect education and labor markets in the region. Section four examines

government spending on education. The next chapter provides a snapshot of education and training followed by an examination of the secondary school curriculum. The study concludes with a set of recommendations intended for policy makers, practitioners and researchers active in this field covering a) public and private financing b) education sector policy and planning for changing global markets c) improving the school-to-work transition d) alternative learning pathways for marginalized adolescents and (e) suggestions for expanding the evidence on the nexus of education, skills and employability.

The Benefits of Education

Education, Skills and Labor Markets

The importance of school-to-work transition is widely acknowledged, yet the literature studying it is thin, especially for South Asia. Much of the literature on developing countries discusses either how to improve education, or skills for employment; few sources explore the nexus of education and skills for employment, and even fewer for South Asia. This report contributes to the literature by explicating the existing landscape of the nexus of secondary education, skills and employability in the region.

Box 2: Education in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since the year 2000 have guided the growth and development of children and youth around the world. However, this progress proved to be uneven in terms of reaching out to the children and communities that were hardest-to-reach and in appropriately addressing important and transformational global issues such as inequality, regional conflicts and mass migration. Taking lessons from the MDGs, leaders from around the world from various stakeholder groups including governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and the UN system crafted the Sustainable Goal Agenda in 2015, aimed at adopting a more holistic and inclusive course for the future of human development. Bolstered by the idea that quality education forms the foundation of enhancing the quality of lives of people, Goal 4 of the SDGs commits nations to: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." The targets set under the goal encompass: ensuring access to quality early childhood development, free and equitable primary and secondary education, equal access to affordable technical, vocational and tertiary education, with the focus of technical and vocational skills on making youth more employable and driving entrepreneurship. The Goal also strives to ensure that all youth and significant proportion of adults become literate.

The emphasis of Goal 4 is on right to education, coupled with the principles of equity and inclusiveness, aimed at quality and importance of lifelong learning. In relation to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), the goal commits nations to equal access to such training programs and increase the number of youth with skills relevant for decent jobs. Following on to this is the Goal 8 of the SDGs, which aims to "Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all." The accomplishment of these and other SDGs that indicate high relevance for the youth and sustainable economic development – including Goal 3: good health and well-being and Goal 5: gender equality – would require nations to ensure skills relevance that supports lifelong learning and inclusion. Education forms a part of goals on health,

What capacities, and when?

Goal four of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the need to "[E]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." And targets 4.3 and 4.4 highlight the need for access to "affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education" and for "substantially increasing the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship."[8] The linking of education, lifelong learning and skills in the SDGs paves the way for deeper investigation into what capacities should be developed, and when.

Capacities and skills typology

While different organizations and agencies have varying frameworks to define skills development, listed below is a categorization of the main types of skills which have broad consensus and are embedded in the SDGs drawn from the 2012 UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report on Youth and Skills (UNESCO, 2012: 171-173) and the 2016 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (UNESCO, 2016: Chapter 13)

- **Foundation skills**[ii]**:** literacy and numeracy, and (increasingly) ICT skills and digital literacy skills.
- **Transferable skills**[iii]: including perseverance, self-control, social skills, problem-solving, communication, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration skills (coordination, communication, conflict resolution, decision-making and negotiation), leadership, financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills and the ability to transform and adapt knowledge and skills in varying work contexts.
- **Technical and vocational skills**: these are job-specific skills and associated with specific occupations.
- **Citizenship skills:** these skills intend to inculcate a sense of belongingness to a broader community and common humanity, including knowledge about global, regional, national and local issues, and acting responsibly at global, national and local levels for a more sustainable and peaceful world.[9]

These skills or transversal competencies of the 21st century are broad based skills that aim to meet challenges such as technological advances and intercultural communication.

[ii] Also referred to as basic cognitive skills in the 2016 GEM Report in "Improving Work Outcomes among Young People: What Role for Skills?" UNICEF HQ/Education Development Trust, March 2017
[iii] Also referred to as non-cognitive or social and emotional skills in the 2016 GEM Report. Others use terms like soft skills, 21st-century skills, non-cognitive skills or life skills (3ie, 2016; Brown et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2012).

Skills are acquired via multiple pathways in the home, in school, in social spaces and at the work place. While this study focuses on the school-to-work linkages, it is important to have a holistic view which also encompasses skills for learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship as they all work in synergy to improve the employability of young people. While it is generally perceived that skills development starts in adolescence, international evidence has demonstrated how significant foundational and transferable skills acquired from early childhood improve later work outcomes.

Understanding the nexus between education, skills and labor markets: Need for data

There are not many sources that make quantitative data – that is, time series of performance indicators for national education systems such as access, participation and progression in education, financial and human resources investment in education, learning environment and organization of schools and impact of learning on social and economic outcomes – publicly available for South Asian countries.[iv] Exploring time series is crucial to understanding time trends in education indicators and putting them into the context of economic and social development.

OECD's data platform provides access to these indicators for the OECD countries, India and China, but not for other countries in South Asia or for the whole region. Likewise, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international survey designed to evaluate education systems by testing the performance of 15-year-old students, has had no participant countries from South Asia.[10] Only the Indian states Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu participated in previous cycles. Still, studies of countries for which PISA results are available show that low PISA results have an adverse impact on one's capacity to leverage vocational training to ultimately improve employment outcomes.[11]

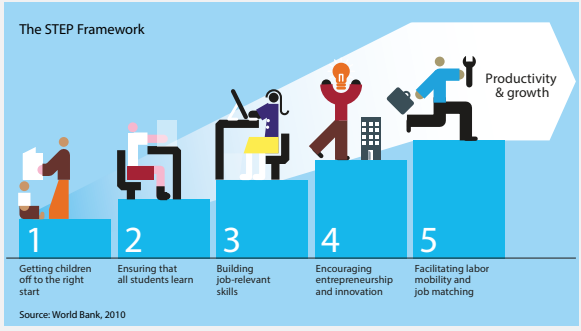
A key source for insights over time is the *UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database (UIS*), which this report refers to, but getting complete time series remains a challenge.

[iv]India has a national survey – National Achievement Survey – that collects similar data up till grade 8. This data, however, is not regularly used to inform improvement of teaching methods and curriculum.

Research Studies by Multilaterals on Secondary Education and Youth Employability:

Box 3: The World Bank's STEP Framework

The World Bank's Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP) framework[12] comes closest to examining the need for developing capacities that help prepare young people for the world of work during their school years and into adulthood. It lays out five interlinked stages extending from Early Childhood Development to matching skills with labor market demand at later stages in life. The framework is intended to help policymakers, analysts and researchers design systems that enable individuals to ultimately obtain jobs.



The STEP Skills Measurement Program also deploys household and employer surveys to assess the labor market's skill requirements, but Sri Lanka is the only South Asian country in their dataset so far. This data lends itself to an analysis of the factors that drive the demand for workers, where current skills fall short of demand, and skills mismatches finding that skill shortages have a significant role to play in constraining firm growth and development in Sri Lanka. As in other parts of the region, the demographic transition makes the skills challenge in Sri Lanka more acute, but large population of displaced refugees further complicates the challenge. The data highlight that greater investment in education and TVET is needed.

Box 4: OECD's Employment Outlook Report

The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) has done extensive work on skills. Its *Employment Outlook Report (2016)* discusses how skill utilization at work affects productivity, wages and job satisfaction. It also studies trends on youth that are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) and the risk that they are left behind by the labor market, especially the most vulnerable youth. While the OECD focusses on its member countries, the findings of its studies carry relevance for understanding the importance of education and skills in the South Asian context as well.

Box 5: ILO's School-to-Work Transition Surveys

The ILO developed a household survey of young people aged 15-29 that examines the strengths and weaknesses of youth labor markets, and seeks to answer why the transition of youth from school-to-work is generally a long and difficult process. However, Bangladesh and Nepal are the only two South Asian countries that the survey was fielded in. There is therefore scope to expand this exercise to other South Asian nations. The ILO's school-to-work surveys also do not address the question of how lower and upper secondary school systems are preparing young people – especially adolescents and their specific needs – for the world of work.

The ILO's school-to-work transition surveys are part of a broader ILO strategy aimed at promoting productive employment and decent work for youth. This includes a series of initiatives from ensuring that youth related employment challenges are integrated into national employment policies to developing school-to-work transition programs, along with better labor market information and career guidance.[13]

Box 6: UNICEF's Adolescent Development and Education Initiatives

UNICEF is working across 190 countries and territories with governments and civil society to advance children's right to survive, thrive and fulfill their potential – to the benefit of a better world. Adolescent development and education have emerged as a priority for UNICEF's work in recent years. UNICEF South Asia strives to address the persisting challenges of out-of-school children and learning along with linked cross-cutting priorities of early childhood development and gender equality through primary and secondary education and alternative learning pathways. In addition to supporting data, research and evaluation in the sector, the organization has extensive field experience with governments and partners in the design and implementation of education policy and sector plans as well as supporting programmes which have the potential to improve teaching and learning practices at scale. Building on the achievements in universal primary education, UNICEF is increasingly working with partners on improving skills for learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship and employability which now features prominently in the organization's next Strategic Plan for 2018 -2021. This has resulted in global guidance on improving work outcomes among young people and the role of skills. This study aims to contextualize the guidance for South Asia.

Box 7: Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa: A Four-Dimensional and Systems Approach to 21st Century Skills

The Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative for the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) is a regional endeavor, which provides a comprehensive conceptualization and definition of life skills, along with programmatic guidance towards mainstreaming life skills and citizenship education in all learning settings. The LSCE Initiative has two main components:

(i) the development of a Conceptual and Programmatic Framework (CPF) on life skills and citizenship education that will serve as a guide to vision/strategy development and programming at country level, and

(ii) the organization of technical support to countries on planning and implementation

The CPF is being developed by UNICEF together with the International Youth Foundation and in partnership with ALECSO, ILO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNRWA, World Bank, Arab Institute for Human Rights, key NGOs and think tanks in the region and beyond.

The CPF addresses the lack of clarity and confusion around 21st century skills. As such it provides a shared definition of life skills and citizenship education that is framed within an integrated, transformative, gender-sensitive and life-long vision of quality learning.

As part of the CPF a set of twelve core life skills have been identified representing a holistic approach to quality learning along four interrelated dimensions: cognitive (related to critical thinking, problem solving, etc.), instrumental (related to employability skills), individual (related to personal empowerment), and social (related to human rights and social cohesion). All these four dimensions are interrelated and indivisible. The CPF further provides programmatic guidance towards mainstreaming life skills and citizenship education through multiple pathways and a systems approach.

Within the framework of the LSCE Initiative an evidence-based methodology is being developed together with the World Bank to enable the measurement of the twelve core life skills on children and youth. While providing useful information about the level of learners' proficiency, the methodology will further support the operationalization of twelve core life skills and improve teaching and learning.

Transformations in South Asia: Implications for Education, Skills and Employability

South Asian nations continue to grapple with high levels of poverty and informality, natural disasters and man-made conflict. This is in addition to the large-scale transformations – demographic change, rapid urbanization and technology adoption – that are drastically altering the way people live and work. It is this complex milieu that South Asia's young must learn to navigate.

Basic capacities that education develops are even more important in an era of rapid change and uncertainty – over a lifetime of employment, the nature of people's jobs will change. They may also need to change sectors that they are employed in. In such a circumstance, the basic capacities such as problem solving, analytical abilities, critical thinking, are even more important. Strong foundational and transferable skills form the basis of an individual's ability to cope with rapid transformations in the environment around them.

The region's youth must grapple with these big transformations in their education and learning to have a chance of success in the labor market. This section delineates how these challenges affect nations in South Asia and how these challenges bear on the education and skills systems.

Photo credit: 'Young male trainees in Bangladesh's shipbuilding sector, Western Marine Institute, Chittagong, Bangladesh' by *ILO in Asia and the Pacific. Under NonCommercial-NoDerivs License*

Demographics

A demographic dividend is accelerated economic growth in a country that can result from a change in the population age structure, social investment, and appropriate economic policies that absorb labor productively. When families have fewer children they need to take care of, and a larger number of family members who have decent jobs, the family can save and invest more money. When this happens on a large scale, economies can benefit from a boost in economic growth. The labor force temporarily grows more rapidly than the population dependent on it, releasing resources for investment in economic development and family welfare and resulting in faster per capita income growth. This dividend period is not permanent and it does not necessarily translate into growth.

Countries that do not capitalize on the opportunity may be faced with the problem of a youth bulge. Combined with limited employment opportunities, this may contribute to increased poverty, hunger, malnutrition, poorer health, lower educational outcomes, child labor, unsupervised and abandoned children, and rising rates of domestic violence.[14]

Table 1

Youth Population in South Asia, 2015

Country / Region	% Population under 24	% Total Population (15-24)	% of Youth (15-24) Employed
South Asia	48%	19%	–
Afghanistan	65%	21%	–
Bangladesh	49%	19%	44%
Bhutan	47%	20%	30%
India	47%	18%	31%
Maldives	47%	19%	31%
Nepal	54%	21%	63%
Pakistan	55%	20%	–
Sri Lanka	40%	15%	26%

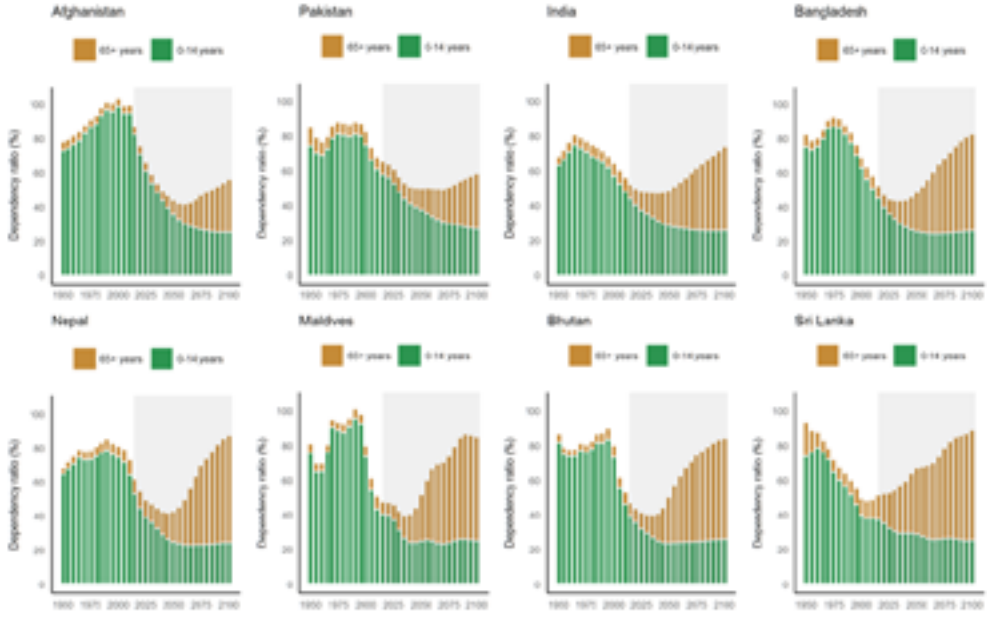
Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, custom data acquired via website and World Bank Data

Over 600 million people are below the age of 18 in South Asia.[15] Almost one out of every two South Asians is under the age of 24 (Table 1).[16] Of the population under 24, a majority are below the age of 15 in all eight countries of the region. A striking 65 percent of Afghanistan's population, 55 percent of Pakistan's and 54 percent of Nepal's population is below the age of 24. At 40 percent, Sri Lanka has the smallest share of the population under 24 years of age among South Asian nations.

With dependency ratios[v] still falling in most South Asian countries, there is still the potential for further gains in demographic dividend – particularly in the next 5-10 years. But the window of opportunity is closing rapidly. The coming increase in the total dependency ratio at around mid-century and beyond will be driven almost entirely by the expansion of the elderly population in almost all countries of the region.

Figure 1

Total Dependency Ratio, Projections



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, United Nations, New York, 2015 (medium variant).

[v] *Total dependency ratio: Number (economically) dependent population – children under 15 and elderly 65+ per 100 persons of working age (15-64)*
Child dependency ratio: Number (economically) dependent population – children under 15 per 100 persons of working age (15-64)
Old age dependency ratio: Number (economically) dependent population – elderly 65+ per 100 persons of working age (15-64)

A country's potential for demographic dividend can be:

- Pre-dividend: large number of children and small number of working-age population
- Early-dividend: decreasing base, slowly increasing working-age population
- Late-dividend: smaller cohorts entering working-age population
- Post-dividend: strong cohorts graduating into older age

For South Asia, the population structure as per the potential for demographic dividend is depicted in Figure 2.

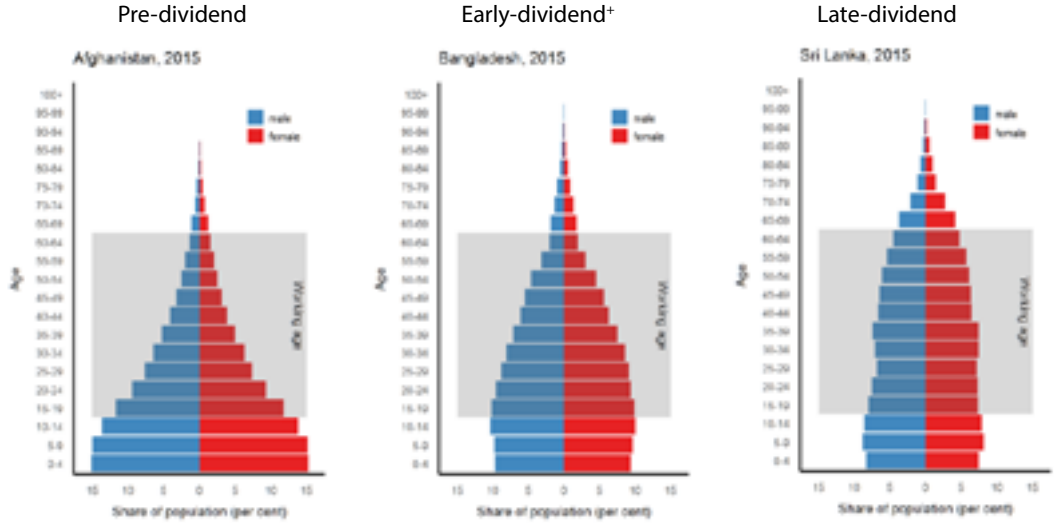
Because South Asia is nearing the peak of its demographic transition, it has the highest share of working-age population of all regions. However, this will rapidly change as total fertility hits and goes below replacement rate.

These facts offer both a warning and an opportunity. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal, the countries with the largest share of the population under 24, are also the nations with some of the weakest economies.[17]

Yet, the fact that a majority of those under the age of 24 are still below the age of 15 means that there is still time to improve education and strengthen the links between learning – education and skills – and the job market.

Figure 2

Population Structure: Potential for Demographic Dividend, 2015



+ Also: Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, United Nations, New York, 2015 (medium variant).

Poverty, development outcomes and informality

Poverty is pervasive in South Asia. 33 percent of the South Asian population lives below the international poverty line of US$ 1.25 per day. One in every two employed people in Afghanistan, a third of the employed in Bangladesh, and a fourth in India, earn less than USD $1.25 per day.[18] 60 percent of the estimated 1 billion extremely poor in the world live in India and Bangladesh.[19]

If one examines the Gini coefficients for per capita consumption, South Asia appears to have less inequality relative to other parts of the world.[20] Yet examining the non-monetary indicators of well-being reflects an entirely different picture.[21] South Asia, and especially the poorest quintile, has some of the worst human development outcomes in the world. One out of every two children under the age of five in Bangladesh and Nepal's poorest quintile is stunted. This figure is 60 percent in India.[22]

Children living in extremely poor households are concentrated in certain parts of the developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of children living in extreme poverty at just under 49 per cent. But South Asia has the second highest share at nearly 36 per cent. India with its large child population stands out in particular – over 30 percent of children living in extreme poverty live in India alone.

At the same time, a majority of South Asia's labor force works in the informal economy. A significant share of non-agricultural employment in South Asia is informal, accounting for 62 per cent of non-agricultural employment in Bangladesh, 72 per cent in India, 73 per cent in Nepal and Pakistan, and 45 per cent in Sri Lanka.[23]

Poverty and informality weighs disproportionately heavily on the young and their healthy social, mental and physical development. In the absence of social safety nets, young people with little or no work experience are often compelled to take informal jobs characterized by difficult working conditions, low productivity and wages.

Poverty and informality weighs disproportionately heavily on the young and their healthy social, mental and physical development. Against the backdrop of economic insecurity, in the absence of social safety nets, young people with little or no work experience are often compelled to take informal jobs characterized by difficult working conditions, low productivity and wages. As the ILO report contends, there is "empirical evidence to confirm that informal employment, a category considered as 'non-standard' in traditional literature, is in fact 'standard' among young workers in developing economies."[24]

Urbanization

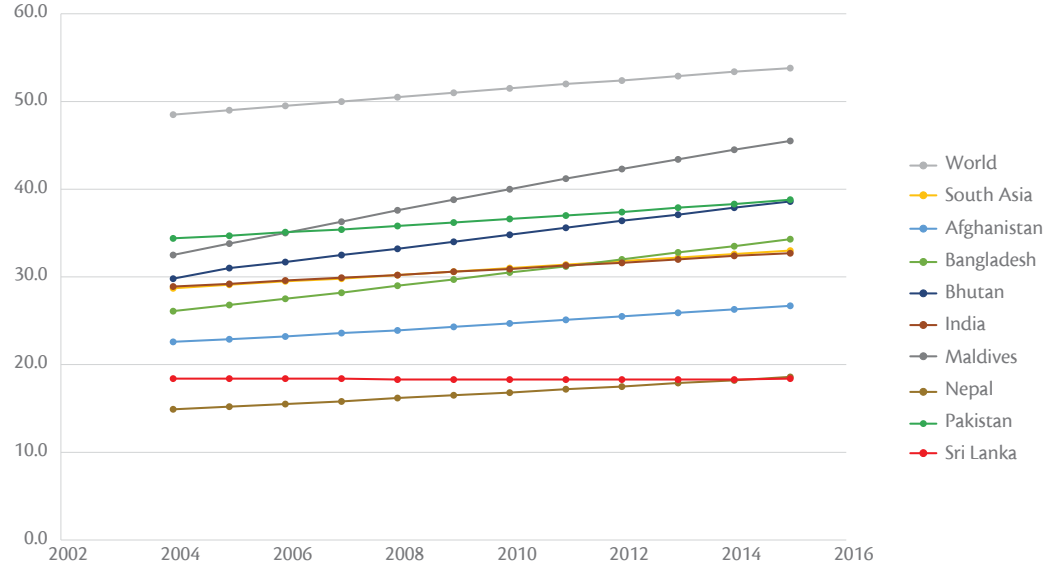
Asia is home to half of the global urban population. Except Sri Lanka, all South Asian countries are seeing their urban populations grow.

Not only urbanization but also the trend of increasing numbers of people living in megacities (urban agglomerations with 10 million inhabitants and more) is observed in Asian countries. This is a truly continental phenomenon. In 2015, one out of every 7 urban persons is in an Asian megacity (> 10 million inhabitants). In 2030,this is expected to rise to one out of every 6 persons. In 2015, three of the world's largest megacities were in Asia. By 2030, world's 7 largest megacities will be in Asia and about 25 megacities in Asia will be home to 1 out of 10 persons living in Asia.[25]

Analyzing data from 29 developing countries, the World Development Report, 2007 found that young people are 40% more likely than older people to migrate internally from rural to urban areas or move across different urban areas. Several factors from climate change to the search for more productive and better paid work drives this migration into urban areas.[26]

Figure 3

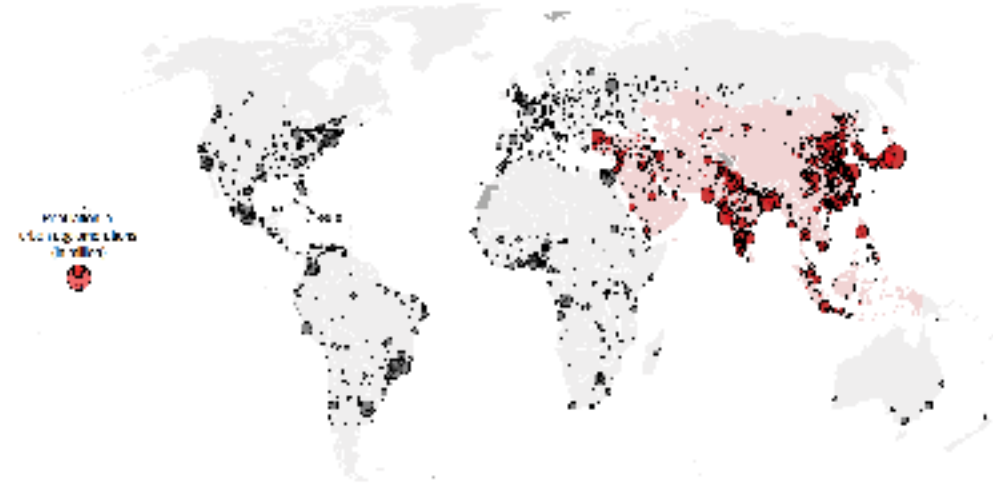
Percentage of Urban Population, 2004 - 2015



Source: United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects

Figure 4

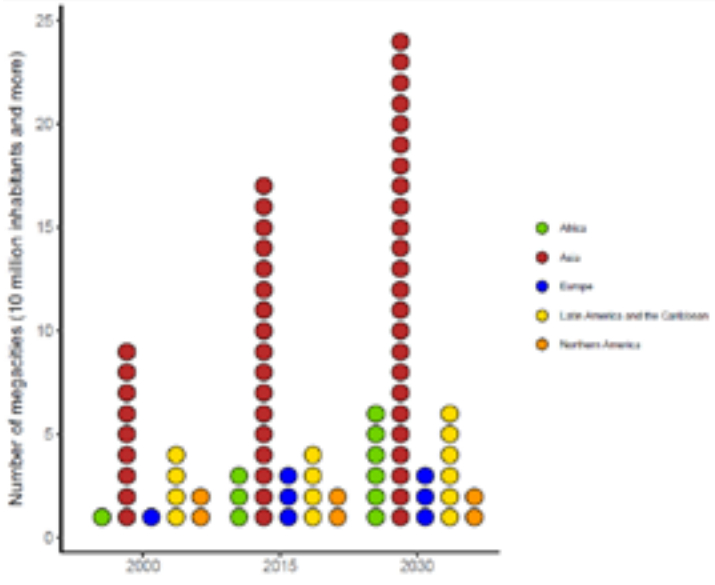
Population in Urban Agglomerations, in Million, 2015



Source: United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects

Figure 5

Projection of Number of Megacities, by Continents



Source: United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects

Two specific aspects of the rural-urban migration make this different from such waves in decades past. First, whereas urbanization in the past was driven by the pull of factory jobs, many of the fastest-growing cities today are not productive industrial hubs. Second, youth moving out of rural areas tend to engage more frequently in temporary forms of migration. The implications of these for young people, their economic trajectories and long-term earning potential are significant. Such migration frequently separates them from their families and communities. It disrupts their education. And when already saturated urban labor markets are unable to support the influx of new workers, the results are chronic informality, underemployment and discouragement.

Urban youth stuck in patterns of temporary, circular migration, caught between their aspirations for better economic outcomes and the inability of today's over-crowded cities to deliver, are yet to receive adequate attention.

Governments across the region have instituted programs aimed at providing better education and skills training to rural youth. The ILO helped the Pakistan government institute the Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) methodology.[27] In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act recently added a skills training component. Still, much work remains in this regard. A joint study by UNESCO, FAO and the ILO on *Training and Employment Opportunities to Address Poverty Among Rural Youth* recommends strengthening coordination across government ministries, diversifying livelihoods in rural areas, improving formal education and disseminating more information on available training opportunities among rural youth and their families.[28]

But urban youth stuck in patterns of temporary, circular migration, caught between their aspirations for better economic outcomes and the inability of today's over-crowded cities to deliver, are yet to receive adequate attention. The discourse on the growth of cities is frequently limited to developing infrastructure and the provision of basic services – sanitation, electricity for instance. Not enough attention is given to job creation at the city level. What's more, the institutions to govern cities are woefully inadequate. Thus policies aimed at improving the employability of urban youth, especially migrants, are sorely lacking.

Technological change

From the Industrial Revolution beginning in the 1700s to the advent of the internet in the 1990s, technology has had sweeping effects across the globe for centuries. But today, new technologies – many enabled by the digital revolution – are advancing at an unprecedented pace and scale. South Asia is no exception. Like most countries around the globe, South Asian nations are seeing a rapid rise in their mobile phone and internet penetration. In the decade between 2004 and 2014 mobile subscriptions per 100 people went

from 4.2 to 75. Internet users per 100 people went from 2.2 to 16.[29]

A detailed discussion about the pros and cons about using technology for education and training, the work opportunities it creates and those it destroys, and what specific technology skills young people should develop and when is beyond the scope of this study. But what is relevant to this discussion is first acknowledging that technology is altering the way people live and work, and there is a need to consider what technological skills young people should develop, and when, to successfully participate in an increasingly technology oriented workplace. The OECD's report: Skills Matter lays out the importance of learning how to manage information and solve problems using computers as ICTs permeate classrooms, lecture halls, the work place, home and social interaction more broadly.[30] A study by UNESCO: ICT Transforming Education emphasizes the need for integration of technology in curriculum and instruction design, learning environment and pedagogy, standards and assessments and professional development.[31] Governments can also use technology to help define monitoring standards for education and to address poor quality.[32]

It is important to view technology as a vehicle by which to improve teaching and learning in conjunction with face to face delivery since the role of the teacher is still central to the student's overall learning experience.

Compounded by conflict and natural disasters

South Asia is prone to violent conflict, political instability and natural disasters which make it difficult to deliver education and training on the one hand, and to have a functioning labor market on the other.[33] These countries that need more and better jobs for their sizeable youth populations the most, are also the ones with economies that are least able to supply them.

The situation is most acute in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan where creative solutions are urgently needed, especially to reach adolescent girls. Insecurity exacerbates the social and cultural barriers that girls already face in accessing education. Alternative learning pathways and community-based education in the most fragile and insecure areas is one avenue to facilitate education in such crisis-afflicted geographies, but how can these be better linked to promoting livelihoods in the local labor market economy? The on-ground research in Bangladesh suggests that non-formal education or alternative learning pathways continue to be an important channel for providing education for marginalized adolescents who do not have foundational literacy and numeracy. Given the significance of alternative learning pathways in the social fabric of these countries, their ability to facilitate transition of youth into further education and training or the labor market is essential.

Insecurity exacerbates the social and cultural barriers that girls already face in accessing education.

Government Spending on Education

It is important to take a systems-wide perspective when examining South Asian investments in the education and training sector. This means thinking about financing from ECD to primary, secondary, technical-vocational and tertiary education. Such a perspective enables a better understanding of the trade-offs or opportunity costs built into the current system as well as the overall efficiency and effectiveness of spending. It is crucial that governments invest in universal quality basic education in order to ensure that young people have the foundational and transferable skills needed in order to successfully acquire and utilize skills later in life. As South Asia is the region with the highest numbers of illiterate children and youth in the world, it is clear that governments still need to urgently prioritize the completion of the unfinished business of the 2015 "Education For All" Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary completion.

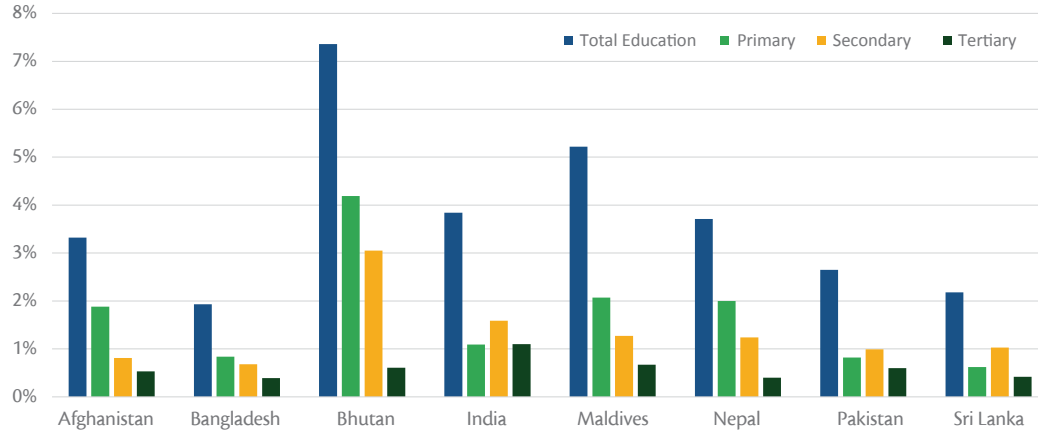
Government expenditure on education expressed as percentage of GDP stagnated in many South Asian countries.

However, government expenditure on education expressed as percentage of GDP stagnated in many South Asian countries. For Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, it has been below 3 percent of GDP since 2009. For Afghanistan and Nepal, it has moved around 4 percent, and slightly decreased in 2015 compared to 2014. India has slightly increased public spending in relative terms from 3.3 percent in 2009 to 3.8 percent in 2013, while newer numbers were not available at the time of the study. On the contrary, Bhutan and the Maldives followed a similar trajectory since 2013: both increased the share of public spending on education between 2013 (5.6 and 4.5, respectively) and 2015 (7.4 and 5.2, respectively) relative to their GDP. This is interesting to consider against the background of many South Asian countries having had robustly high GDP growth rates in recent years. India's economy has grown by more than 7 percent in the last two years. Similarly, Bangladesh has had economic growth rates ranging around 6 percent in recent years. What this means is that spending on education has increased at a robust rate if the share of GDP has remained constant, but GDP has grown and education spending, in contrast, has not.

In examining government expenditure on education as a share of GDP, one can clearly see that only Bhutan and the Maldives spend the highest: 7.4 percent and 5.2 percent respectively. Despite investing less than the recommended share on education, Sri Lanka is very close to achieving primary completion. Bangladesh and Pakistan are investing worryingly low levels on education. India is not investing enough on primary education, and is shifting focus to secondary and tertiary education. Pakistan spends 3.3 percent of its GDP on its military but

Figure 6

Government Expenditure on Education as a % of GDP, 2015+



+ Data for India and Bangladesh are for the years 2013 and 2016 respectively.

Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Date Accessed: 10th August 2017

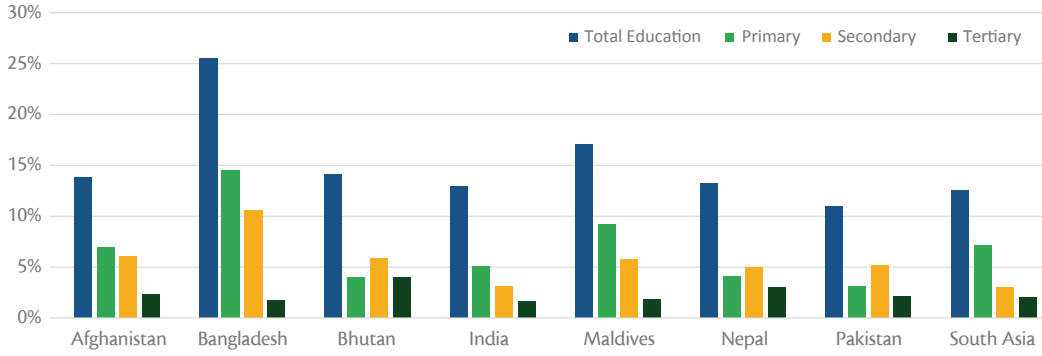
only 2.7 percent on education. And Sri Lanka spends 2.5 percent as a share of its GDP on the military and 2.1 percent of GDP on education.[34]

Financing the secondary education sector will require much greater initial and long-term investment than primary education due to the infrastructure and subject-wise teachers and competency based curriculum required. The priority assigned to spending on secondary education relative to the government's total spending has increased overall in Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Bhutan assigned 10.6 percent in 2015, up from 7.4 in 2011 and 8.5 in 2013. The same share went up from 5.1 in 2011 to 5.8 in 2013; however, newer values are not available. Pakistan's public spending on secondary education increased from 2.9 in 2013 to 4.9 in 2015. Bhutan has had by far the largest share allocated to secondary education in relative terms. It is somewhat worrying that Afghanistan's share decreased from 4.2 percent to 3 percent since 2011. The Maldives' allocation to secondary education is similarly low at around 3 percent of total expenditure where financing of secondary education could be greater since they have achieved universal primary education and have passed free and compulsory education legislation from K-12. This is also true for the southern states of India.

On the other hand, with regard to the budget allocation on education, Bhutan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka place relatively high priority for secondary education (41 percent, 37 percent, and 41 percent of total government budget assigned to education, respectively).

Figure 7

Government Expenditure on Education, as % of Total Government Expenditure, 2015+



+ Data for India and Bangladesh are for the years 2013 and 2016 respectively.
Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Date Accessed: 10th August 2017

It is important to note that while public expenditure reviews on education is a useful resource, it primarily relates to the development of foundational and transferable skills rather than the larger domain of Technical and Vocational Education and Training which is provided by multiple ministries and private training markets. Looking specifically at government expenditure on secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education as percentage of total government spending, one notices that again data scarcity limits the possibility to gain a complete understanding of how much attention governments pay towards this element of education. For the countries for which data is available, it is evident that shares spent on secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education are extremely low. India is an anomaly here, however, as the Government has allocated US$ 465million to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in its 2017-2018 Budget, a 67 percent increase from its previous budget of US$ 272 million in 2016.[35]

Afghanistan's public spending in that respect, relative to total public expenditure, increased from 0.34 percent in 2012 to 0.53 percent in 2014, but then fell again to 0.44 percent in 2015. India had spent 1.49 percent of its total public expenditure on vocational education in 2013, the only recent year for which data is available. In Nepal, spending on vocational education has been moved between 0.3 and 0.4 percent since 2012. Similarly, Pakistan's allocation of resources to vocational training has gone up from 0.24 percent in 2013 to 0.34 percent in 2015. Considering that budget allocation to education was well above 10 percent in most South Asian countries since 2009, this exemplifies the low priority given to vocational training.

Governments must prioritize universal quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education to build the foundation for employability for young people. Enrolment in TVET is low, but there is an opportunity to cultivate capacities that will help young people enter and be successful in the world of work at the secondary school level. These interventions should have strong links to the private sector, engaging them in curriculum development and in providing opportunities for learning on the job. For TVET, especially for marginalized youth without foundational literacy/numeracy, it is important to ensure that students receive a combination of foundational, transferable skills alongside specific trade-related TVET.

Enrolment in TVET is low, but there is an opportunity to cultivate capacities that will help young people enter and be successful in the world of work at the secondary school level.

South Asia's Education & Training Landscape

Following the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All initiatives, international focus and government investments have seen remarkable success in boosting education enrolment and achieving gender parity in basic education. Enrolment in primary and secondary schools has steadily increased in South Asia since 1999.[36]

Yet despite these positive trends in enrolment, the numbers of children out of school, especially those that drop out, continue to be high. The prevailing, conventional perspective is that school and work are discrete phases in a young person's life neatly divided by graduation from twelfth grade followed by either higher education or a first job.

In reality, the school-to-work transition for many starts much earlier. South Asia has the highest number of out-of-school children and adolescents in the world.[37] 31.9 million children in the region were out-of-school in 2014; 11.3 million of primary age and 20.6 million of lower secondary age.[38] Projecting to 2017, estimates suggest that nearly 29.3 million children remain out of school this year.

Economic reasons can be that a family cannot afford the direct or indirect (e.g. textbooks, uniforms, transport) expenses for a school, or that the young person is expected to work to contribute to family income, or that a family questions the relevance of education and its economic returns.

These are aside from social norms and traditions including child marriage, child labor, discrimination and social exclusion that push children out of the education system. Dropping out of school sets back the economic and social trajectories for these children. Not only does dropping out put an end to learning, but it also means that the school is the last site at which a child can develop some capacities that will help them in employment.

Even though some South Asian countries are attempting to make skill qualification frameworks and occupational standards more systematized, and they are adopting Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programs within their respective countries, the ability to transfer credit between academic and vocational streams is limited making it even more challenging for those that drop-out to re-join the education or skill training systems. Perhaps if education was aligned to the needs of the labor market, then there would be fewer drop outs. This makes it even more important that education serve its function of helping young people become employable that much better.

This section provides an overview of the enrolment rates in education in the region, and it surveys the landscape of out-of-school children in South Asia.

[vi] *Data for Afghanistan is missing*

Enrolment

The net enrolment ratio in primary education in South Asia is just under 90 percent with significant variation across countries.

Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka have net enrolment rates higher than the regional average. At 97.2 percent, Sri Lanka is the closest to achieving the universal primary education for all target set forth by the MDGs. Pakistan is the furthest with a net enrolment ratio in primary education of 73 percent.[vi]

The net enrolment ratio decreases as one moves to higher levels of education. Just over one out of every two secondary-school aged child is enroled in secondary education. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka have net enrolment ratios above the regional average. Sri Lanka has the highest net enrolment in secondary education, while Pakistan has the lowest net enrolment in secondary education and Afghanistan in tertiary education. At the same time, it is important to note that Sri Lanka has a high number of graduate unemployed which highlights the skills mismatch between the education system and the labor market.

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Table 2

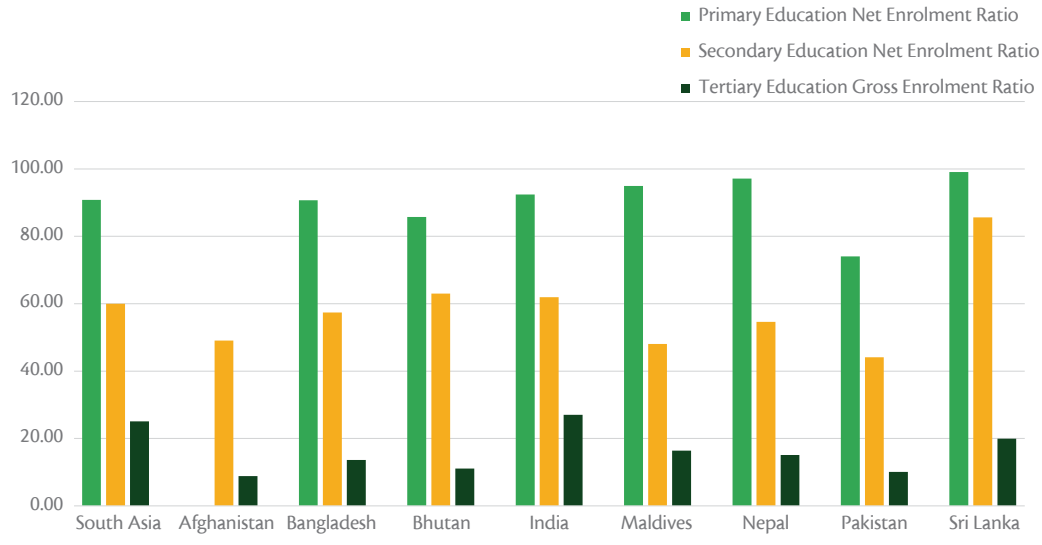
South Asia: Enrolment Data, 2015 - 2016

Country / Region	Primary Education		Secondary Education		Tertiary Education	
	Net Enrolment Ratio	Gross Gender Parity Index	Net Enrolment Ratio	Gross Gender Parity Index	Net Enrolment Ratio	Gross Gender Parity Index
South Asia	90.67	1.06	59.85	0.99	24.90	0.95
Afghanistan	–	0.69	48.88	0.56	8.66	0.28
Bangladesh	90.51	1.08	57.24	1.13	13.44	0.74
Bhutan	85.58	1.00	62.84	1.07	10.93	0.74
India	92.26	1.12	61.76	1.01	26.87	0.99
Maldives	94.80	1.01	47.90	1.13	16.23	1.63
Nepal	96.96	1.08	54.43	1.07	14.94	1.02
Pakistan	73.85	0.85	43.96	0.79	9.93	0.87
Sri Lanka	98.94	0.98	85.43	1.05	19.80	1.54

Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Date Accessed: 18th July 2017

Figure 8

Net Enrolment Ratio, 2015 - 2016



Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Date Accessed: 18th July 2017

Gender parity in enrolment

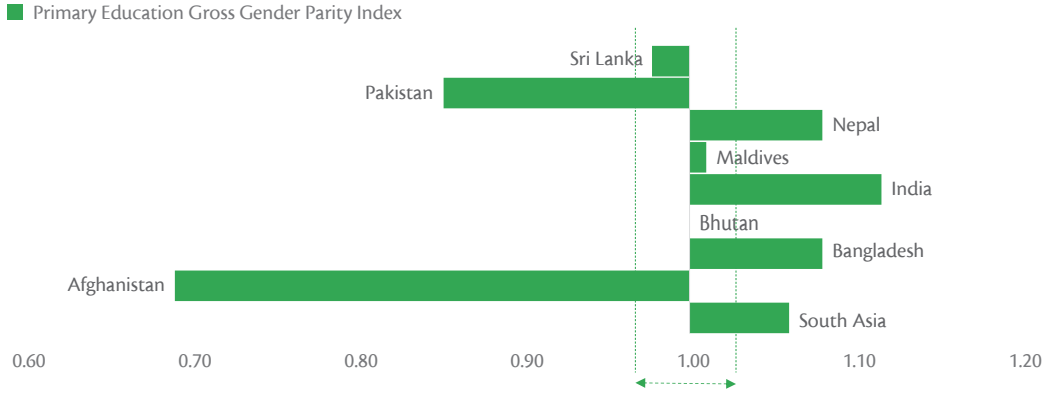
While girls in Nepal, India and Bangladesh have a greater propensity to be enroled in primary education than their male counterparts, they lag behind boys in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Girls in these countries continue to face numerous challenges, including security, distance to school, lack of female teachers, lack of separate WASH facilities and other cultural barriers, inhibiting their participation in education.

However, when it comes to gender parity in secondary education, there is a reversal in Sri Lanka and Maldives. Girls have a greater propensity to be enroled in secondary education than do boys in these nations. Bangladesh and Nepal have a high incidence of child labor, and the fact that boys start work early contributes to this finding. While more research is needed, rising urbanization and migration are linked to early entry into the labor market in these countries.

In Sri Lanka and Maldives, more girls than boys are also likely to be enroled in tertiary education. But in all other South Asian countries, girls are less likely to be enroled in tertiary education than their male counterparts. Some studies report that cultural biases in these countries, in a variety of forms, demotivate girls from pursuing tertiary education and thereby accessing high value jobs in the labor market. For instance, in Bhutan, enrolment in higher education is strictly based on merit, which makes girls, who are historically underprivileged, less likely to compete with their male counterparts.[39, 40]

Figure 9

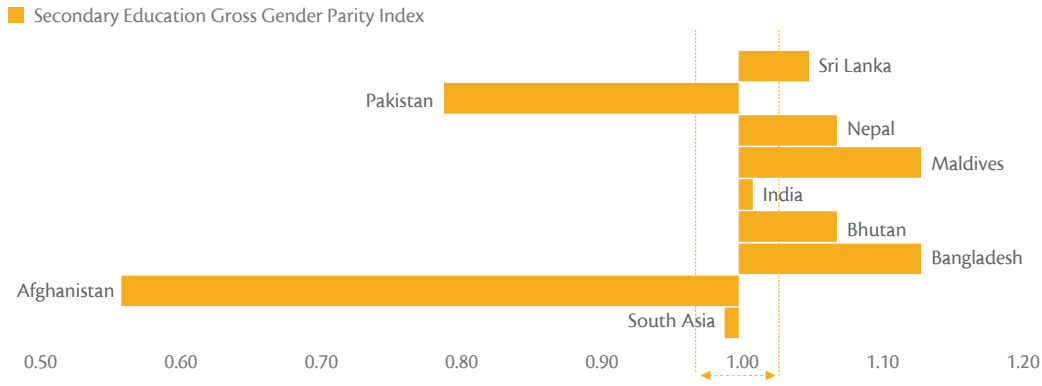
Gender Parity Index: Primary Education, 2015 - 2016



Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Date Accessed: 10th August 2017

Figure 10

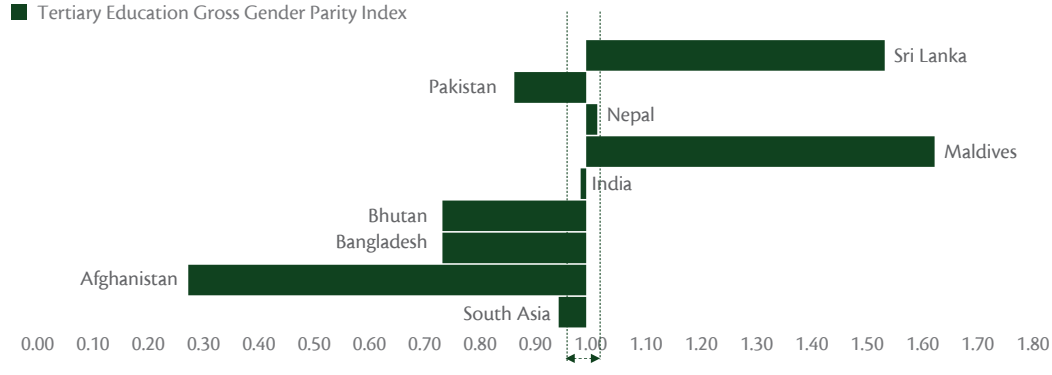
Gender Parity Index: Secondary Education, 2015 - 2016



Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Date Accessed: 10th August 2017

Figure 11

Gender Parity Index: Tertiary Education, 2015 - 2016



Source: Data Centre, UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Date Accessed: 10th August 2017

Box 8: Improving Access and Vocationalization of Secondary Education in India

In order to match India's high economic growth, there is a pressing need for enhancing the access to secondary education and revised vocational education and training.

Government of India launched a program in March 2009 called the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA). The objective of the program was to improve the access to and enhance the quality of secondary education in the country. Implementable at the state level, the program envisages building a secondary school within a reasonable distance (5 kilometers) of any habitation to improve enrolment rates. In terms of quality, the government aims to prescribe quality norms for school administration in addition to removing gender, socio-economic and disability barriers.

Since the implementation of the program in 2009, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) and access to secondary schools across different states in the country has improved. But in addition to basic infrastructure, it is important to invest in quality subject-wise teachers, lab facilities and curriculum development. Integrating the RMSA with programs at the primary education level (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) in terms of curriculum/ pedagogy, teacher education and monitoring would make the education system more coherent and improve quality.

RMSA is the vehicle to address gender and socio-economic biases in providing quality secondary education. The RMSA has also been restructured into becoming an umbrella scheme that has subsumed other centrally sponsored programs such as ICT at schools, Girls' Hostel, Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage and Vocational Education. There is scope to increase access and reach the most excluded by integrating and exploring convergence with other adolescent initiatives, for instance, in health, nutrition and protection. The program has the capacity to play the dual role of providing a supportive learning environment and preparing adolescents for work in the future, for which it is essential to revise the vocational education and training system.

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education was first implemented by the Indian national government in 1988, and the Scheme has undergone multiple rounds of revision since its conception. Implementation of the Scheme has not been even across all states in India, and lack of collaboration with industry specialists has led to a disparity between the supply and demand of skilled labor. The Department of School Education & Literacy is currently working to address this disconnect with the addition of 100 job roles to the vocational education curriculum. Without adequate access to equipment and training materials for currently offered job roles, however, teachers have emphasized theory and certification above practical skill acquisition. Proper development and distribution of up-to-date curriculums and courseware will remain a major challenge for the Government of India as it expands vocational education in secondary schools.

Source: REVISED CENTRALLY SPONSORED SCHEME OF "VOCATIONALISATION OF HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION" and List of Job Roles Memo.

Out of school children: NEET, completion and cumulative drop-out rates

South Asia has the highest number of out of school children and adolescents in the world.[41] Recent estimates of children that are neither in education, nor in employment or training (NEET) are hard to come by for South Asia. However, the Asian Development Bank estimates that in 2013, 62 percent of all youth worldwide that were not in education, employment or training were in South Asia.[42] The last available estimates suggest that 56 percent of the youth population in the Maldives in 2010, 29 percent in Bangladesh in 2015, 27 percent in India in 2010 and 9.2 percent in Nepal in 2013 were neither in education nor in employment or training.[43]

Completion rates for lower secondary education vary across the region. The lower secondary completion rate is highest in Sri Lanka, followed closely by Maldives. It is lowest in Afghanistan where less than one out of every three children complete their lower secondary education. The completion rate for females is also one-third of that of males in the country.

The cumulative drop-out rate to the last grade of lower secondary, general education is highest in Bhutan at just under 17 percent, followed by Bangladesh at nearly 16 percent. It is lowest in the neighboring India at 4.3percent. Since school education tends not to be aligned with the labor market or prioritize skills for employability, high drop-out rates indicate that these students are entering the labor market without relevant skills. These students are also unable to access any vocational training programs as they require a minimum level of school education.

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Box 9: Out of School Children & Alternative/Accelerated Learning Centers

Some children face barriers in entering education. For instance, in some countries such as Afghanistan, socio-cultural norms pose acute problems for girls to obtain even a primary school education. Other children in the region start school but then drop out for reasons ranging from early marriage to the need to work and contribute to the family's income. UNICEF is working with Afghanistan's Ministry of Education to run Accelerated Learning Centers in Afghanistan, especially aimed at reintegrating girls into the education system. Access to learning opportunities through regular school system is not an option in many areas. Hence ALPs have been introduced as a part of the formal Ministry of Education system.

Table 3

Secondary Education Completion Rates, South Asia

	Lower secondary completion rate, both sexes (%)	Lower secondary completion rate, female (%)	Lower secondary completion rate, male (%)	Lower secondary completion rate, gender parity index (GPI)
Afghanistan (2011)	23	12	35	0.33
Bangladesh (2014)	55	56	54	1.03
Bhutan (2010)	39	38	40	0.94
India (2006)	59	53	66	0.8
Maldives (2008)	78	83	72	1.15
Nepal (2011)	60	55	66	0.83
Pakistan (2012)	46	41	50	0.82
Sri Lanka (2006)	88	90	86	1.05

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Table 4

Cumulative Drop-out Rate to the Last Grade of Lower Secondary General Education Alone (%)

Country	Year	%
Afghanistan	–	–
Bangladesh	2010	16
Bhutan	2013	17
India	2014	4
Maldives	2013	5
Nepal	2015	6
Pakistan	2014	10
Sri Lanka	2014	8

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Technical, Vocational Education and Training

UNESCO defines TVET as 'those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic life.' In addition to vocational skills, TVET equips people with a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are now recognized as indispensable for meaningful participation in work and life. Examples of the benefits include self-awareness and self-esteem, and strengthened interpersonal, citizenship, communication and entrepreneurial skills.

TVET comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning for the world of work. Young people, women and men learn knowledge and skills from basic to advanced levels across a wide range of institutional and work settings and in diverse socio-economic contexts.

Broadly, the entire range of learning experiences that are relevant to the working world form a part of TVET, also including such experiences that occur in varied learning contexts, like educational institutions and work places.

The definition set by the UNESCO underlines the diversity of TVET across countries. As TVET does not clearly distinguish between formal, non-formal and informal learning, it is difficult to gain a better understanding of advantages and disadvantages of specific TVET programs, and to what extent they are comparable across countries. In addition to that, the concept TVET diverts from the fact that such activities often take place under the umbrella of different ministries, and can be part of the formal education system or may function outside of it. When the children entering skills development programs outside of the formal education system do not have a foundation of basic education to build on, then skills development becomes a "quick fix" for a sub-optimal formal education system.

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Terminology varies according to context: the terms TVET, VET, and Career and Technical education (CTE) essentially convey the same meaning and hence are used interchangeably, despite the limitations of the concept of TVET mentioned above.

A series of country studies published by the Asian Development Bank in 2015 highlights that the systems for TVET of many South Asian countries have not been equal to the task of developing a skilled labor force ready to adapt to dynamic regional and international labor markets. In addition, the development of modern TVET plans and programs has been insufficient as a result of intermittent efforts in research and little attention

to the role of new technology. These findings fit the previous analysis of government spending on vocational education in section three. Only about 1.6 percent of adolescents receive TVET services in Nepal – an indicative example, especially when compared to East Asian countries (43 percent in South Korea and 26 percent in Japan).

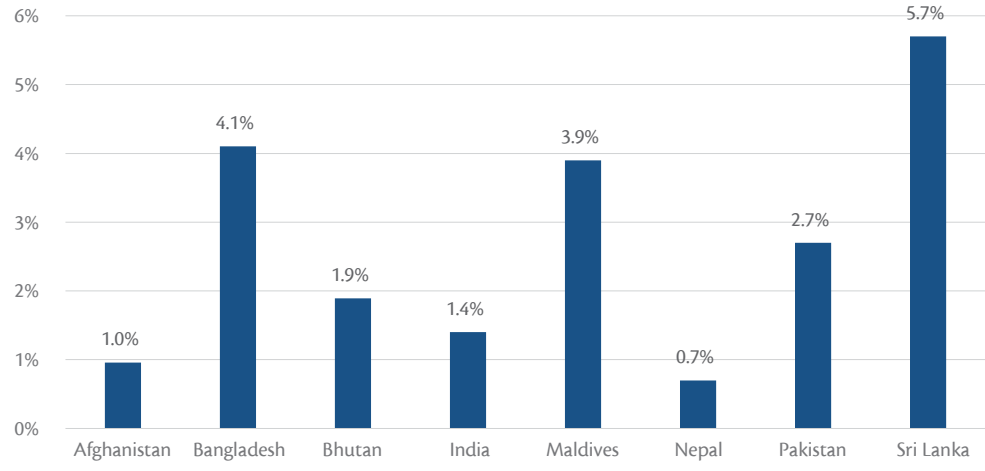
This tendency is also reflected in data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. The percentage of students in secondary education enroled in vocational programs continues to be very low across the region. At 5.7 percent, it is the highest in Sri Lanka. In Afghanistan and Nepal, about one percent of students in secondary education are enroled in a vocational program. (Figure 12)

Only about 1.6 percent of adolescents receive TVET services in Nepal – an indicative example, especially when compared to East Asian countries (43 percent in South Korea and 26 percent in Japan).

A look at the percentage of young people of the relevant age group (15-24) enroled in vocational secondary education reveals that the shares are very low in general. For many South Asian countries, percentages are considered to be negligible and not shown in the data tables. In Afghanistan, 0.47 percent of young people were enroled in 2013, compared to 0.35 in

Figure 12

Percentage of Students in Secondary Education Enroled in Vocational Programs, 2014 - 2015



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics
Note: Data for Maldives and Nepal are for 2004 and 2008 respectively

2015. Similarly, 1 percent of Pakistan's adolescents were enroled in 2013. This value decreased to 0.88 percent in 2015. Interestingly, the share of 15 to 24 aged participating in vocational training increased from an estimated 0.92 percent in 2013 to 1.85 percent in 2015 in Bangladesh.

An assessment[44] of the curricula of vocational and secondary education in South Asian countries reveals that all the countries in the region have at least some pre-requisite for enrolment, for example, knowledge of basic subjects including mathematics, science, social science, mother language and a foreign language.

Separate studies conducted by the British Council and the Economic Intelligence Unit have highlighted the missing link between theoretical concepts and practical application in the vocational training curricula of these countries. Further, the study highlights that practical training often does not lead to sizable employment prospects, due to lack of standardization of qualifications and a robust accreditation framework which are widely recognized by the general public and by the labor market in particular. This is also related to the fact that vocational training programs are highly fragmented, and not well integrated into or not synchronized with mainstream education.

South Asian economies are characterized by a high degree of informality ... This implies that TVET needs to gain in quality and attractiveness so that students and their parents recognize that in the long run, TVET provides a more sustainable alternative to leaving school early and entering the (informal) labor market.

For instance, in Bangladesh the governance of the skills landscape has become complicated with involvement of 23 ministries as authorities in charge of skill development in the country at present. This has led to changing mandates and standards in training. Consequently, reputation and attractiveness of TVET remains low, potentially giving rise to a dwindling spiral of decreasing demand for vocational training offers and neglect in public budget allocation.

Another important aspect plaguing TVET programs is the missing alignment of training initiatives with the informal sector. As it has been mentioned earlier, South Asian economies are characterized by a high degree of informality. That is why it cannot be ignored that a majority of young people get absorbed in this sector while the organized sector cannot always provide sufficient employment. In that sense, a potential and challenge of TVET programs is to incorporate this reality. This implies that TVET needs to gain in quality and attractiveness so that students and their parents recognize that in the long run, TVET provides a more sustainable alternative to leaving school early and entering the (informal) labor market.

Gender dimension of TVET

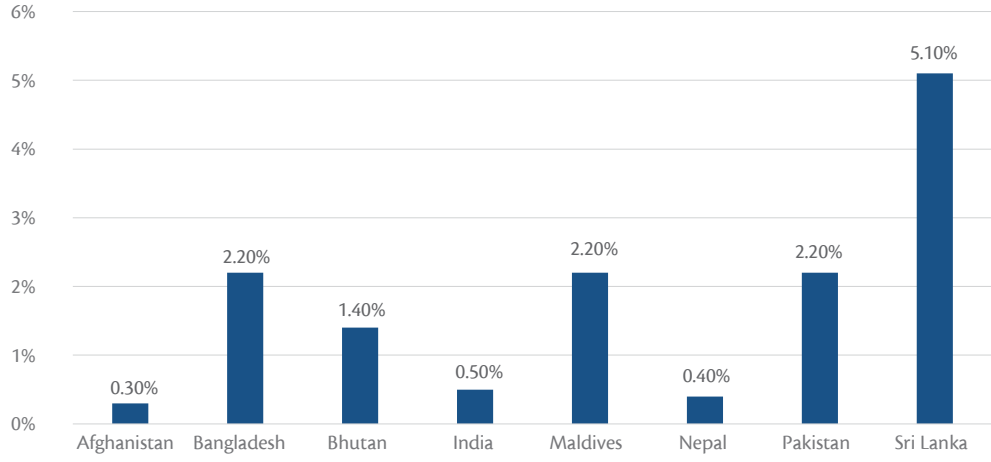
In all South Asian countries vocational training in schools is heavily biased towards men. The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) delineated the barriers women face in accessing training, as well as a bias in the type of training they receive. Both these factors leave females at a disadvantage with lower wages and precarious working conditions relative to their male counterparts.[45] Even in Sri Lanka, where the percentage of female trainees is the highest, it is only 5.1 percent of those enroled in secondary education.

Policies in many countries in the region make an explicit effort or set a target for women's participation in training. For example: India's National Policy for Skill Development aims to have 400 million trained youth in India by 2022. The policy sets a target of at least 30 percent female participation in skill development programs for employment by 2017. Similarly, Bangladesh has adopted a National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality in TVET, which aims to raise female participation in Technical and Vocational Training to 40 percent by 2020. And the Adolescent Girls Education Initiative in Nepal was set up to provide training and employment services for 4,500 young women between 16 and 24 over a three-year period.

Unfortunately, a large proportion of the skills training still reinforces cultural and social norms that limit women to low-value added sectors, low wages, and restricted economic mobility. Especially in the training programs that focus on

Figure 13

Percentage of Female Students in Secondary Education Enroled in Vocational Programs, 2014 - 2015



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics
Note: Data for Maldives and Nepal are for 2004 and 2007 respectively

low-income, informal sector women, females are typecast as homemakers; they are taught basic sewing or beautician skills. And even when a variety of programs are made available, women tend to self-select into sewing or beautician courses. However, some initiative has been made to alter this trend. For example, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) with the support of UNICEF initiated a program in the Sathkhira district of Bangladesh that focused on training marginalized adolescent girls in male -dominated trades like refrigerator maintenance and mobile repair to break traditional gender and social norms and prevent child marriage.

Section 3 traced the major trends that are shaping the South Asian context in which young people must operate. Sections 4 and 5 provided a snapshot of the state of education and TVET in the region. The next section discusses how secondary schools prepare young people for the world of work in such an environment.

Photo credit: 'Solar Home Servicing Course', Bogra, Bangladesh by *ILO. Under Creative Commons License*

Preparing Young People for the Job Market

Analysis of the school-to-work transition

The transition from childhood to adolescence is a period of physical, psychosocial, cognitive and behavioural maturation for young women and men. This means that secondary education curriculum must not only equip them with knowledge and skills in traditional subject matter but also in life – that is health, protection, civic – and for work. Schools must cultivate social and life skills from the early grades, and transferable livelihoods training at higher levels of schooling. This can be followed by a transition into more in-depth skills training programs for specific employment skills.

Lower secondary education is part of compulsory basic education in Afghanistan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, although in Sri Lanka there is no free legal guarantee.

Free and compulsory education from pre-primary through primary and secondary education helps provide all children with opportunities. Further,

Table 5

Structure of National Education System and Official School-Age Population, for School Year Ending in 2014

Country	Age Group					Official School-Age Population (in '000)				Compulsory Education includes Lower Secondary	Legal Guarantee of Free Education
	Pre-primary	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Tertiary	Pre-primary	Primary	Total Secondary	Tertiary		
Afghanistan	3-6	7-12	13-15	16-18	19-23	3,996	5,564	4,676	3,035	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh	3-5	6-10	11-13	14-17	18-22	9,237	16,034	22,895	15,389	No	Yes
Bhutan	4-5	6-12	13-16	17-18	19-23	29	100	88	78	–	Yes
India	3-5	6-10	11-13	14-17	18-22	76,420	1,27,694	1,74,269	1,18,681	Yes	Yes
Maldives*	3-5	6-12	13-15	16-17	18-22	...	...	32	38	Yes	Yes
Nepal	3-4	5-9	10-12	13-16	17-21	1,221	3,255	4,732	2,897	No	Yes
Pakistan	3-4	5-9	10-12	13-16	17-21	9,326	20,768	27,106	18,656	No	Yes
Sri Lanka	4-4	5-9	10-13	14-17	18-22	349	1,756	2,633	1,564	Yes	No

* School-age population data are not presented for some or all levels of education due to inconsistencies in population data.

Source: Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016

more efficient and equity-based domestic financing will result in improved education and labor market outcomes.

At the same time, it is crucial to improve the transition from primary to lower secondary schooling across South Asia and tackle the barriers that limit the access to lower secondary education especially for marginalized adolescents. Secondary education is an important determinant of a young person's employment trajectory later in life. Career counseling, entrepreneurship education linked to financial literacy embedded in the curriculum itself can help bolster future prospects. Formal apprenticeship or short-term internships and greater public-private partnerships in curriculum design can also help enhance the school-to-work linkages.

Drawing on the good experiences of learner centered pedagogy, teacher education and community participation in education from primary into secondary schooling will ensure the continuity of quality education for youth. Education sector planning which promotes strengthened coordination of different ministries and development partners addressing education, skills development and livelihoods will ensure the type of convergence required to enhance the skills and employability of young people.

Since technical and vocational training tends to be dominated by disadvantaged youth, in the longer term, a more diversified and competency-based curriculum with technical, vocational and general education at upper secondary level will ensure equal opportunities and choices for all students. Diversifying curriculum in South Asian countries will require much greater investment and public-private partnership.

All South Asian countries have some form of a national requirement for secondary schools to combine academic and vocational training. All countries offer the minimum requirement of basic subjects including mother tongue, foreign language, mathematics, science and social science.[46] Nonetheless, vocational education curricula are not designed to promote aspects like positive attitude towards work, discipline, and employee-employer relationship – the so- called soft skills or life skills. The countries in the region, to the extent possible, are integrating ICT literacy and skills into their curriculums. Of course, implementation depends on resources and connectivity.

Secondary education is an important determinant of a young person's employment trajectory later in life. Career counseling, entrepreneurship education linked to financial literacy embedded in the curriculum itself can help bolster future prospects.

Box 10: Nepal Adolescent Empowerment Programme

The Nepal Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) programme targets the 6.4 million strong adolescent population of Nepal in the age group 10 to 19 years. The situation of adolescents is such that child marriage, early pregnancy, gender inequality and child labor are major problems that keep children from quality education. On the other hand, seven percent of adolescents are members of youth clubs and nearly 60 percent of adolescents in the age group 15-19 possess a mobile phone.

The programme intervenes both in the immediate environment of adolescents and at the national level. Through a social and financial skills training package it seeks to encourage participatory learning and civic engagement. Spread across 15 thematic areas, the programme involves both government and non-government support. The goal is to ensure systematic, ethical, meaningful and regular participation of adolescents on important platforms to inform them about adolescent-sensitive national policies, plans and budgets. At the same time the programme seeks to empower adolescents to enable positive change in their surroundings, as well as help them realize their rights.

Within the community the focus is on both in- and out-of-school adolescents, especially girls and marginalized groups. For school-going adolescents, the intervention also includes non-formal education and gender-violence free initiatives, as part of an after-school programme. In addition, there is a weekly radio programme with and for adolescents called "Chatting With My Best Friend" which is geared toward providing a feedback mechanism for adolescents, enhancing self-esteem and disseminating life saving and life skills information.

One of the key lessons from the ADAP programme is the importance of government endorsement, ownership and strategic partnership, for successful implementation. Boys' involvement and engagement should be given adequate focus especially to reduce gender based violence and improve overall attitude toward gender equality. The programme requires that linkages with health and education services be strengthened, and that coordination between relevant sectors – households, schools, local community and national government bodies – be enhanced. Finally, the ADAP programme highlights the importance of ensuring that the transition from education and life skills lessons to livelihood skills and quality employment be established, to further strengthen the impact of the programme.

Box 11: From Education to Employability: A Case Study of Bangladesh

To facilitate linkages between education and skills training to ultimately make Bangladesh's youth more employable, this case study used secondary and primary research to examine the extent to which education and training systems in the country prepare young people for the world of work. It provides an overview of the education and skills landscape in the country, highlighting gaps, to ultimately make some recommendations on how the government might improve these systems to enhance the employability of its young people.

Methodology

This study first lays out the context in Bangladesh using secondary data and then delves into the findings of the primary research. The JustJobs Network, with support from UNICEF, collected primary data from secondary education and vocational training providers, currently enroled students, employers and policymakers. In the first phase the team conducted informal qualitative interviews with stakeholders to understand concerns pertaining to the education and training systems and the state of current and future initiatives. In the second phase, the JustJobs Network used survey data from a subset of students as well as workers in industries with a high proportion of secondary school graduates.

Key Findings and Recommendations

1) Less than 3 percent of the surveyed firms provide training to their employees. 82 percent of the worker respondents reported not having received any on-the-job training. This points to the need for greater private sector participation and allocation of more resources to education and training by providing them appropriate incentives to engage in the process.

2) 98 percent of the worker respondents were not required to complete any industrial training or apprenticeship as a part of their curriculum, with only 9 percent of the school administrators admitting to having vocational training in addition to regular academic courses in their curriculum. It is important to revise the core education and training curricula to align better with labor market requirements, especially emphasizing on-the-job training and practical experience, ensuring standard in quality of education that builds strong foundational and transferable skills.

3) Increasing the efficiency of placement agencies will prove significant in reducing the demand-supply mismatch in the labor market.

4) There are multiple government ministries and agencies involved in vocational training in the country. The coordination between these should be improved to enhance effectiveness of programs and policies.

Conclusion

There remains an urgent need to realize the talents, aspirations and the productive potential of youth in order to leverage the demographic dividend that countries in South Asia hope to enjoy. Disenfranchised youth cannot deliver poverty reduction, development or sustainable economic growth. Young people that are ill-equipped to fend for themselves in a fast-changing economic environment will be left behind, exacerbating inequality that will reverberate for generations to come.

The transformative power of education is well acknowledged; it serves many personal, social, and economic ends.[47] One measure of a successful education is whether it enables an individual to eventually find good employment. The role that education plays in preparing young people for work is becoming more important as inequality and economic insecurity grow. Heightened economic insecurity has risen from decades of high growth rates that have not translated into better livelihoods in many South Asian countries.[48] Human development outcomes, especially the outcomes for the poorest quintile, have declined in the region.[49] The incidence of precarious work has gone up,[50] and data suggests that even those with higher degrees often remain unemployed.[51]

The role that education plays in preparing young people for work is becoming more important as inequality and economic insecurity grow.

Increasingly parents want to know that when they educate their child, their children will have a brighter future including better employment prospects. Individuals want to know that investing in an education will help them support themselves and their families. And governments want to know that their workforce is equipped to meet industry demand.

This report highlights the strides that several South Asian countries have made in improving enrolment rates. But the quality and relevance of education needs to be improved on an urgent basis. While this will take time, governments face the immediate pressure to leverage their demographic advantage before it expires.

Skills training is therefore emerging as a more immediate solution. But education and skills cannot be a substitute for one another. The two need to be on a continuum. The Sustainable Development Goals recognize the urgent need to bridge the worlds of education and employment to effectively harness the enormous potential of youth. There is clearly a need for skills development, but it cannot be a substitute for all that basic education provides.

Education provides foundational literacy and numeracy, as well as broader learning. UNESCO in its Education for All Global Monitoring Report notes that access to secondary school is the most

important indicator of progress in opportunities to acquire foundational skills."[52] But education is also essential for "psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner."[53] Education is much more than workforce development. But preparing young people for work is an important function that education must serve as well.

There is widespread recognition of the need to equip young people with the skills they need to cultivate livelihoods. The recognition that life skills and soft skills are an important part of the equation is permeating the development discourse. As a complement to secondary schooling, TVET is available in all countries in South Asia, but enrolment rates, quality and equity are dismally low. Much work remains, especially in bridging education and skills, rather than the two operating as silos.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings this report suggests the following:

1. Public and private financing

1a. The need for greater investment in primary and secondary education, and quality education reform, is greater than ever. Public sectors in the region must continue to make education a priority in addition to skills development and at the 4-6 percent of GDP recommended for education.[vii] Free and compulsory education from pre-primary through primary and secondary education should be a priority. Equally important, is more efficient and equity-based domestic financing which results in improved education and labor market outcomes.

[vii] *At the Seventh Meeting of the High-Level Group on Education for All (December 2007, Dakar), the Ministers of Education recommended that "National and local governments should mobilize sufficient domestic resources in accordance with indicative standards (~6% of GNI / 15-20% of government budget) in allocations to education, with a prioritization of basic education (>3% of GNI / 10% of government budget)." The Oslo Declaration "Acting Together", issued at the eighth meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA (December 2008), urgently calls on "national governments to allocate adequate domestic resources (4-6% of GNP/15-20% of public expenditure) to education. Ninth Meeting of the High-Level Group on Education for All 23-25 February 2010 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: "We call upon national governments to reinforce their determination to increase the current level of domestic spending to education to at least 6 per cent of GNP and/or 20 per cent of public expenditure, with greater focus on good policy, cost-effective use of resources, transparency, accountability and equitable allocations of resources according to need."*

1b. Domestic financing alone will be insufficient to build and strengthen systems which will equip young people with 21st century skills. This will require the active engagement with the private sector not only in terms of resource mobilization but also as a service provider with governments. New models of public and private partnerships can help finance investment for these education and skills interventions.

2. Policy and planning

2a. Drawing on the good experiences of learner-centered pedagogy, teacher education and community participation in education from primary into secondary schooling should be encouraged to further quality education. Education sector planning which promotes greater coordination of different ministries and development partners addressing education, skills development and livelihoods would ensure the convergence required to enhance the skills and employability of young people.

2b. High levels of migration into already saturated urban labor markets means that there are more young people in these areas with nothing to do. Education and skills training must cater to the specific needs and circumstances of urban youth.

2c. Since technical and vocational training tends to be dominated by disadvantaged youth, in the longer term, more diversified curriculum with technical, vocational and general education at upper secondary ensures equal opportunities and choices for all students. Diversifying curriculum in South Asian countries will need greater investment and public-private partnerships.

2d. There is need for building institutional capacity, especially with regards to linking education plans at sub-national level, with the appropriate budget allocations. This calls for budget mechanism reforms that encourage determining fund allocation and spending on education at the sub-national level, far beyond advocating for spending differently.

3. Improving the school-to-work transition

3a. Skills training – especially short three or six month modules – cannot compensate for years of poor quality education. Basic education is a foundation. Skills training can build on that foundation, but it cannot be a substitute for it. International evidence has demonstrated how significant foundational and transferable skills acquired from early childhood improve later work outcomes. Schools must cultivate social and life skills at lower levels, and transferable livelihoods training at higher levels of schooling. This should be followed by a transition into more in-depth skills training programs for specific employment skills.

3b. Improve the transition from primary to lower secondary schooling and tackle

the barriers that limit the access to lower secondary education, particularly for marginalized adolescents the majority of whom are adolescent girls. Secondary education is an important determinant of a young person's employment trajectory later in life. As such, improving the quality of secondary education across the region will ensure no youth is left behind. Career counselling, entrepreneurship education linked to financial literacy can help bolster future prospects. Formal apprenticeship or short-term internships can also help enhance the school-to-work linkages.

3c. Skills and job training must be connected to actual job opportunities, including preparing young people for an increasingly technological work-place.

3d. Technology is an important vehicle by which to bring teaching and learning interventions to scale, and is a complement to face-to-face interaction, as the role of the teacher is central to the student's overall experience. Schools can expose students to the rapidly changing world of technology and build their capacities to keep up.

4. Alternative learning pathways

Considering the large majority of those out-of-school are adolescents, alternative learning pathways should include a combination of foundational literacy/numeracy skills, life skills and soft skills tied to basic livelihoods training. These programs would benefit from strengthened quality monitoring and follow-up. The priority for these young people with little or no foundation skills is such ALPs or second chance education.

5. Expanding the evidence base on the nexus of education, skills and employability

5a. Literature and data on the school-to-work transition is very thin, especially for South Asia. What is even more deficient, is an understanding of how education systems must adapt to prepare youth for the world of work. What interventions are successful at what periods? How should funding for education be effectively utilized? Additional research should explore:

i. Techniques and policy drivers that will effectively realign groups such as informal sector workers and migrant workers into the academic vocational education mainstream, focusing on the challenge of discontinuity in education among these groups.

ii. Development of a comprehensive education and skill level system that links various levels of education and skill sets and provides youth opportunity for upward learning and growth.

iii. What role should the private sector play in the area of education and skill development? As an ultimate generator of demand for skilled workers, should the nature of private-sector contribution remain philanthropic, or are the models of 'private education

and training' sustainable and scalable? Detailed reviews existing surveys of employers in various countries, for example Labor Force Surveys, or NSS in India, are needed to get their opinions on whether their new young recruits, at various levels, do indeed have the relevant skills.

iv. What is the most effective way to spend funds allocated for education? How should governments allocate education budgets by cycle, and how can one make these budgets more gender responsive?

5b. 22.7 percent of the people with tertiary education in South Asia are unemployed. This number is even higher for individual countries, with Sri Lanka at the highest 40.8 percent.[54] This calls for a need to assess and evaluate the actual employment outcomes that the existing system of secondary and higher education and the various interventions in the sector have in the region, and to reassess and redevelop the approach towards workforce development.

5c. Conflict, political instability and natural disasters plague the region making it even harder for its sizeable youth population to obtain an education and skills and find jobs. Promoting safe schools and learning environments coupled with interventions to generate employment in these countries are essential to ensuring the well-being of their youth, but also for the long-term health and stability of the nation. There is a need to generate and disseminate good practices on how to provide education and learning in unstable environments and equally important is how to link them to earning potential and economic mobility.

South Asia's youthful population presents a tremendous opportunity for the region. The demographic dividend is a once-in-a-nation's- lifetime occasion that must not be squandered. Education and training systems should be reformed to meet the demands of a 21st century economy. Carefully crafting a lifelong learning continuum that develops the capacities of youth at different stages of their lives is essential to harnessing their potential as economic and civic agents, and to building more just and equitable societies.

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for every child

JustJobs Network is a private, nonpartisan organization finding evidence-based solutions to one of the most pressing challenges of our time: How to create more and better jobs worldwide. We produce empirical research on good job creation, focusing our work on the critical knowledge gaps in the global employment landscape.

JustJobs convenes a global network of diverse stakeholders—including policy shapers, academics, and grassroots leaders — to deepen the practical implications of our research endeavors and amplify their impact. Through the combination of cutting-edge research and global knowledge sharing, we aim to forge a fresh, dynamic channel for policy dialogue on employment at national, regional and international levels. Our team members are based in New Delhi and Washington, D.C.

www.justjobsnetwork.org

UNICEF is working across 190 countries and territories with governments and civil society to advance children's right to survive, thrive and fulfill their potential. Adolescent development and education have emerged as a priority for UNICEF's work in recent years. UNICEF South Asia strives to address the persisting challenges of out-of-school children and learning along with linked cross-cutting priorities of early childhood development and gender equality through primary and secondary education and alternative learning pathways.

Building on the achievements in universal primary education, UNICEF is increasingly working with partners on improving skills for learning, personal empowerment, active citizenship and employability which now features prominently in the organization's next Strategic Plan for 2018 -2021. This has resulted in global guidance on improving work outcomes among young people and the role of skills and this study aims to contextual the guidance for South Asia.

www.unicef.org

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