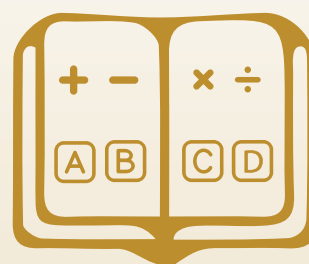


Situation Analysis of SDG 4 with a Gender Lens

Target 4.6



By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

Literacy is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and together with numeracy, is considered a necessary prerequisite for achieving all other development goals. Acquiring functional literacy and numeracy skills is essential for learning, decent work and participation in society.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) reported in 2017 that global literacy rates have been increasing for both males and females in all age groups (UIS, 2017). The data reveal remarkable progress compared to earlier generations. However, many countries missed the Education for All (EFA) goal of reducing adult illiteracy by 50% (ibid), and women still make up two-thirds of the global illiterate population. As a result, they are denied opportunities to participate in society fully or find decent employment, partly due to their inability to read, write and calculate.

Target 4.6 renews the global commitment to universal literacy for youth and adults, and stresses the importance of achieving proficiency; the demonstrated ability to use literacy and numeracy skills in daily life. To reach the target, and ensure gender parity for men and women, countries will need to integrate gender mainstreaming strategies and programmes in national policies and Education Sector plans (ESP).

1 Analysis and Overview

East Asia and the Pacific made good progress in improving literacy between 2001 and 2016 (**Figure 1**). Today, literacy rates among youth (aged 15-24) are close to gender parity. Adults (aged 25-64) reached gender parity in literacy (0.98) in 2016. The elderly (aged 65+) made the most significant progress. The gender parity index for the elderly

rose to 0.85 from 0.7 between 2001 and 2016. Nevertheless, elderly women are still the most likely cohort to be illiterate.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the gender parity index for literacy in selected countries by age cohort. According to the data, there has been a steady improvement over time. With every generation, parity improves. In Timor-Leste (2010) and Myanmar (2016), youth have achieved gender parity in literacy. In Lao PDR (2011), female youth remained at a disadvantage with a gender parity index of 0.88. In Mongolia (2010), all age cohorts are at parity.

There are, however, areas of persistent gender disparity. Adult women, aged 40 to 44 in Timor-Leste and Lao PDR, are 0.7 index points below men. As much as literacy rates have increased among youth, the gender gap remains wide among older generations because the elderly are unlikely to learn to read. As a result, elderly females are more than twice as likely to have no or low literacy skills compare to elderly men.

Participation in literacy and non-formal education programmes

Many countries try to improve literacy rates among youth and adult populations by offering programmes designed to teach functional literacy. Such programmes generally include reading, writing

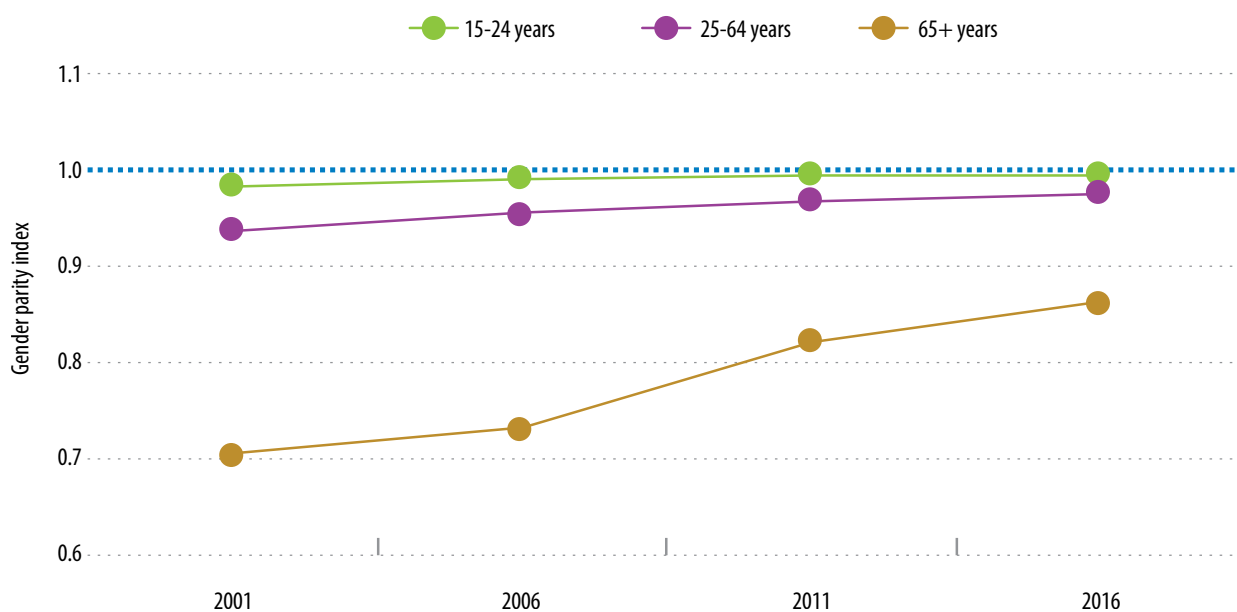
and arithmetic, along with other life skills.

Between 2014 and 2016, Cambodia offered 4,617 functional literacy programmes benefiting 97,551 learners, of which more than 70% were female (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). Between 1991 and 2015, Lao PDR provided literacy skills training to almost 94,201 youth and adults, of which 56% were female (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015).

Literacy skills for persons with disabilities

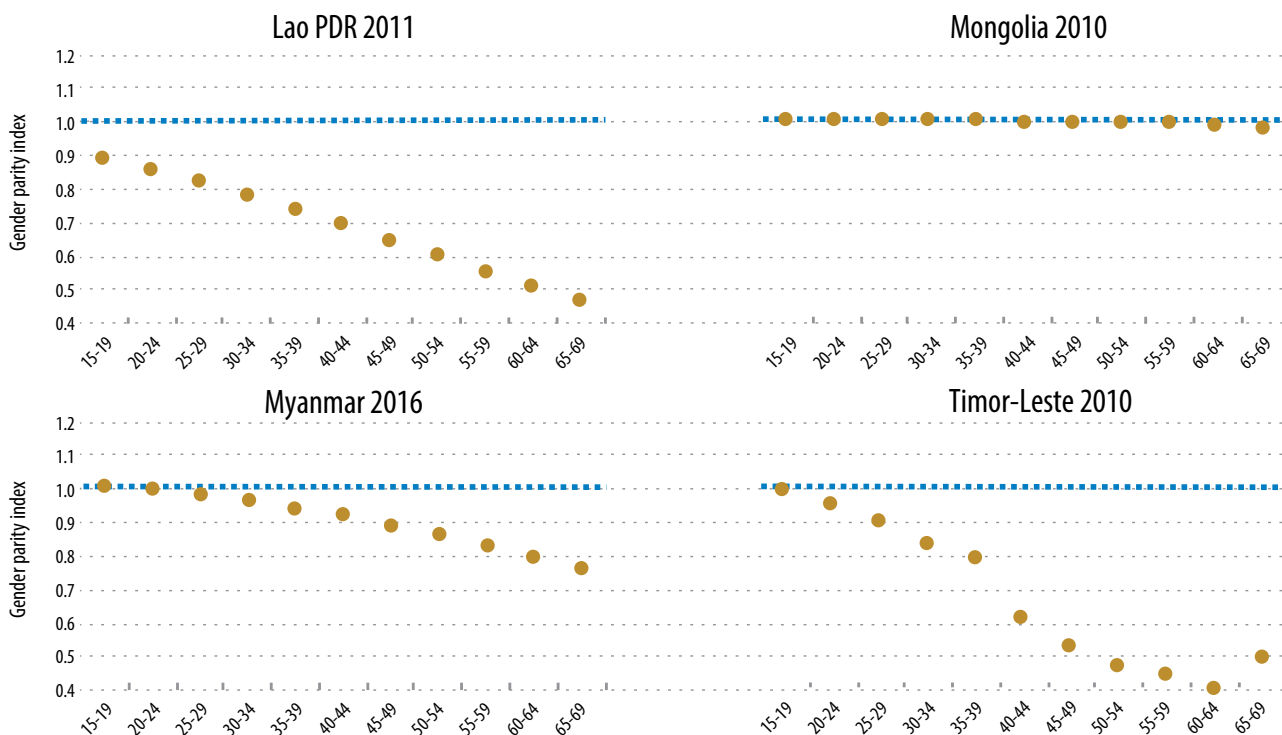
While literacy rates among youth and adults in Asia-Pacific have improved over the past decades, persons with disabilities, have yet to catch up. In Viet Nam in 2009, 94% of adults (15+) without a disability were considered literate (**Figure 3**), although women lagged behind men by 4 percentage points. In contrast, the literacy rate for persons with disabilities was a mere 59%. Adult men with a disability had a literacy rate of 72%, while only 48% of adult women with a disability were literate. In other words, one in four men and every second woman with a disability are likely to be illiterate. Bridging the literacy gap among disabled youth and adults will require governments to do more to address the intersection of literacy, disability and gender.

Figure 1: Gender parity index for literacy among youth (15-24), adults (25-64) and the elderly (65+) in East Asia and the Pacific, 2001 to 2016



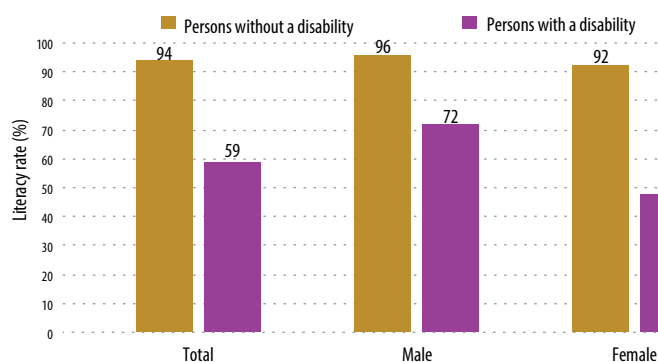
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, [March 2018].

Figure 2: Gender parity indices for literacy, selected countries



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, [March 2018].

Figure 3: Adult (aged 15+) literacy rate in Viet Nam, by sex and disability, 2009



Notes: The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) censuses did not use the Washington Group set of questions to identify persons with disabilities. Averages are unweighted and were calculated from the most recent data. Caution is advised as the data may not present a complete picture.

Source: UIS, 2018 from IPUMS-International, 2005-2011.

2 Issues and Challenges

Literacy skills for adults

Adult education tends to receive less attention in education sector planning in Asia-Pacific compared to formal education. In many countries, adult literacy learning initiatives lack adequate funding (ASPBAE, 2012). Moreover, a range of factors, such as gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs, exacerbated by location, poverty or ethnicity, can influence whether a man or woman has access to literacy programmes. Consequently, such programmes are a critical part of efforts to bridge the literacy and numeracy skills gap

because adults no longer have access to the regular cycle of basic education.

Self-reported vs. assessed skills

Even though literacy rates are improving, census and household data mostly overstate the actual proficiency levels of populations. Often, youth and adults who self-report as being literate or numerate actually possess a very low proficiency level (UNESCO, forthcoming) and may only be able to process single words or single digit mathematic calculations. Data collected from households where the female members are not allowed to participate in a survey are the most unreliable. Typically, the

male head of the household will report on behalf of female residents. Under these circumstances, literacy assessments of any population, male or female, are of limited use. Categorizing populations as literate or illiterate, based on self-reporting, does not capture the full spectrum of literacy and numeracy skills, especially for women.

3 Recommendations

Identify literacy by group and level

Quantitative and qualitative data should be used to provide a more holistic understanding of the literacy needs of men and women in a community, to better inform policy and programme planning, and to lead the allocation of funding. This strategy will require governments to invest in the collection of disaggregated data by location, sex, health, wealth, age, ethnicity, language, etc.

Tie literacy programmes to daily life

Literacy programmes for adults are most effective when they are locally relevant, learner-centred, use appropriate learning materials, and are directly linked to activities that take place in the learners' daily lives (UNESCO, 2012). This fact is particularly

important for women who typically have fewer opportunities to access adult learning. Programmes that make an effort to inform the community of the benefits of literacy and numeracy skills for improving health or income can boost participation. Programmes that offer mother-tongue based education are considered a more effective bridge for learning, especially among women who may have limited exposure to the languages used beyond their community.

Develop competency assessments

Literacy rates based on data collected from self-reported assessments are now considered less relevant for policymaking. A well-organized literacy assessment test, such as the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) or the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey can help countries measure more precisely the literacy skill levels among their populations. In addition, regional and national literacy assessment frameworks will provide a clearer picture the actual literacy status of populations, and enable governments to tailor programmes that are gender-responsive and aligned to the needs of specific groups, even if resources are limited.

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These data sheets are a first step in strengthening the gender lens in analyses of data. More disaggregated and nested analyses can result in more specific and nuanced recommendations.

