EDUCATION SECTOR DIRECTIONAL GUIDE SUMMARY
Learning for All

Explaining Asian Development Bank (ADB) strategies, the Education Sector Directional Guide—Learning for All (EdSDG) details the bank’s agenda in supporting developing member countries (DMCs) with financing, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance to improve the efficiency of ADB’s investments in education.

Informing ADB staff as well as stakeholders comprising DMC officials, multilateral development banks, and UN agencies, the EdSDG is also aimed at readers in academia, the private sector, and civil society organizations.

The EdSDG aligns with ADB’s Strategy 2030 and its seven operational priorities. The directional guide is divided into three main sections: Where We Are, Where We Want to Be, and What We Will Do.

Where We Are

During the last 50 years, DMCs have made notable progress in education. In the 1970s, two-thirds of the world’s out-of-school children were in Asia and the Pacific; but by 2018, the region’s primary school enrollment rate had reached 90%—and now, most DMCs promote universal secondary education.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain over the scale, quality, and cost of the region’s education. About 16 million children remain out of primary school and 34 million out of secondary school. Most adults in the world with low reading proficiency live in Asia and the Pacific, and most with less than a primary education live in South Asia. Despite higher educational attainment, many graduates cannot find jobs, while employers cannot fill vacancies—reflecting a mismatch in skills (although wages and working conditions are also factors). Moreover, poor learning outcomes and inequities in education have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

The future of education is profoundly affected by the following six megatrends:

(i) climate change
(ii) biodiversity loss
(iii) digital transformation
(iv) demographic change
(v) labor mobility, and
(vi) urbanization.
In addition, emerging trends within education itself need to be understood to improve teaching and learning:

(i) foundational learning redefined for the 21st century skills framework;
(ii) convergence across different disciplines—psychology, neuroscience, technology, and pedagogy;
(iii) integrating health, hygiene, nutrition, water supply, and sanitation;
(iv) digital learning;
(v) integrating start-up incubation with technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education in partnership with the private sector;
(vi) integrating climate change concepts and practices in curricula and facilities at all levels of education; and
(vii) lifelong learning (LLL).

Where We Want to Be

ADB optimizes its support for DMCs’ sustainable development priorities through finance, knowledge, and partnerships. The bank’s education portfolio is evolving to meet current and future transformative needs, ensuring that everyone gets foundational skills—so no one is left behind.

Lessons

The EdSDG identifies lessons learned from reviews, operations, and research.

Review of ADB’s education sector operations plans. Following a review of the bank’s plans for education, it was recommended that there should be

(i) a two-pronged strategy to improve access to education and its quality—to enhance competitiveness and workforce innovations, and transform DMCs’ education systems;
(ii) more diverse partnerships to fertilize knowledge solutions;
(iii) greater use of information and communication technology, public–private partnerships, and integrated regional cooperation; and
(iv) strategic staff deployment to address quality, scale, and the rising expectations of lower middle-income countries.¹

ADB operations. The bank’s support for education should focus on

(i) sector needs, substantiated by continuing policy dialogue;
(ii) improving access, especially for girls and the marginalized;
(iii) integrating interdisciplinary science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education; (iv) teacher professional development (TPD) to improve pedagogical skills and subject knowledge; (v) utilizing on-the-job learning for TVET and higher education, in partnership with the private sector; and (vi) strengthening ADB databases and institutional memory.

Global research. Key considerations include

(i) early intervention to support those falling behind in at least two subjects;
(ii) adult education for LLL;
(iii) decentralization—which must consider technical and political factors—to improve education outcomes; and
(iv) effective use of funds.

The EdSDG notes that demand has rapidly increased for people with digital skills in computational thinking, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication. Economies now require innovation in education, to foster talent and agility in using technological advances for economic development. The sudden shift to online learning during the COVID-19 crisis has amplified inequity, through lack of internet access and insufficient devices.

In addition, meaningful youth engagement involves young people participating throughout programs and in youth–adult partnerships that contribute to positive, sustainable outcomes. ADB’s Education Sector Group will work closely with the bank’s NGO and Civil Society Center, to integrate activities that economically empower younger people.

What We Will Do

The EdSDG identifies ADB’s vision for the education sector, and details the bank’s approach, implementation, and focus areas.

The Vision

Through funding over $16 billion in education loans and grants for more than 50 years, ADB has substantial experience in helping DMCs reach the goal of quality education for all.² ADB’s vision for education is “to achieve a quality-assured, inclusive education system that ensures learning for all.” This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, ensuring inclusive and high-quality education for all and promoting LLL. The vision emphasizes the growing importance of LLL to integrate formal, nonformal, and informal learning in a robust education system. It aligns with major international commitments to leave no one behind and to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

² Ibid.
ADB proposes a two-pronged approach to expanding its operations in education. Going back to basics will ensure foundational literacy and numeracy for all, providing a platform for transformative ecosystem approaches that enable leapfrog development. Foundational and transformative approaches can be pursued concurrently in DMCs where less advanced regions need stronger foundations, and more advanced regions are ready for transformation.

ADB’s support is proposed in three clusters. The first cluster is foundational learning, which includes early childhood education and improved school facilities for health, hygiene, water and sanitation, nutrition, and digital learning to ensure equity and a safe, learner-friendly environment, informed by lessons from the pandemic and other disasters. The second cluster is workforce development, which needs to consider formal, nonformal, and informal reskilling and upskilling as working lives lengthen and occupations and skills in demand rapidly shift. The third cluster adopts interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches to support sustainable development with justice, as education is its biggest enabler.

ADB will operationalize the two-pronged approach in four complementary areas. These will leverage ADB’s strengths and comparative advantages as a regional development bank. First, in line with its Strategy 2030, ADB will follow an ecosystem agenda that applies systematic thinking and foresight to education development, combining life cycle and whole-of-government approaches. Second, as a major development partner of DMCs, ADB will augment loans to the education sector, increasing to 6%–10% of its annual lending portfolio by 2024. Leveraging more cofinancing partnerships, ADB will sharpen its focus on supporting global priorities such as foundational and digital learning, green abilities, Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) skills, and gender equity. Third, ADB will balance country-specific projects unique to each DMC and more generic projects that support common emerging priorities such as digital, green, and IR4.0 skills. Fourth, ADB will pursue common frameworks, standards, and strategies to respond to emerging challenges with speed and agility.

Focus of ADB Support

Education technology—an ecosystem approach. While ADB funds infrastructure such as devices, connections, and learning management systems, it also needs to package education technology interventions in ways that improve government capacity, school administration, TPD, and curriculum reform by using localized, quality digital...
content. Facilitating school-to-work transitions, new digital job-matching and youth-counseling services can also guide career choices, prepare school finishers at all levels for the workplace, and design age-appropriate reskilling and upskilling programs. The new world of work in IR4.0 requires more personalized guidance for students in their choice of courses and future career paths. ADB’s support can be through projects that provide funding and technical assistance for digital job- and career-matching services made available from college until employment.

**Teacher professional development.** In digital learning, teachers become coaches and facilitators, rather than lecturers feeding information to students in the classroom. This marks a major change in the mindset of 21st century teaching and learning, with the student at the center as the primary agency of learning. TPD programs, particularly for new science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) domains, require approaches that promote engaged learning and creative thinking skills. Equipping teachers for this new approach is essential to the transformation.

Inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary approaches to education. Approaches combining psychology, neuroscience, and pedagogy are crucial to transform teaching and learning, starting with young learners. This will require support from all stakeholders. To serve the needs of future economies and societies, it will be necessary to focus on education and training for green and climate-resilient occupations, sustainable infrastructure, high-tech agriculture, rapid rail transit, and urban development including smart cities. ADB’s Strategy 2030 also supports intersectoral collaboration and partnerships.

Quality of learning, learning management, and assessment systems. In rapidly changing economies and societies, education systems need to put in place agile and responsive learning programs across all levels that can serve learners of various ages and life long learning. These call for innovative learning assessment systems and quality assurance mechanisms to meet future job market demands. Adaptive and personalized solutions—which also focus on quality learning for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities—will be crucial for inclusive development.

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Read the Education Sector Directional Guide in full here:

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On the cover: Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project; Mongolia. Higher Education Reform Project; Solomon Islands. Students are studying in a computer lab at the University of South Pacific Solomon Islands Campus.

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