

ASPBAE

Ed-lines

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL



Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries

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Learning and the Good Society: Shaping the post 2015 Education Agenda

By Alan Tuckett, President, International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)

We are, confronted by multiple crises – arising from fiscal restructuring, climate change, accelerating inequality, food, energy and water shortages. Meanwhile, large parts of the globe are subject to continuing insecurity and conflict. At the same time, the balance of power and influence has shifted in many places away from nation-states to transnational corporations. Taken together, as Gita Sen argued to the World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education, the current context represents a fierce new world order, in which hard won gains are at risk, particularly in the economic South, and where the negative impact of these crises affect women disproportionately.

Yet we also live in a world of rising life expectancy, where many enjoy standards of living unimaginable to their parents and grandparents. Lifelong learning policies and practice are inevitably involved in responses to all of these issues, for as UNESCO's Fifth International Conference on

Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in Hamburg in 1997 made clear, while adult learning is a good in itself, it is a fundamental pre-requisite for the achievement of a range of social policy goals, especially on poverty eradication. For instance, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a policy commitment that addresses issues on poverty and social inequality cannot be fully achieved without investing in adult learning. Yet, the invisibility of an explicit focus on this catalytic function of adult learning has been a major weakness in securing its most effective contribution to development in industrialised and developing countries alike.

The scale of the fiscal crisis affecting many countries of the industrial North, coupled with the spread of neo-liberal economic and political ideas, has led both to a reduction and narrowing of focus in funding for development. In education, this has led funders to shift decisively away from programmes designed to secure long-term cultural change towards initiatives where outcomes can be easily measured.



Inclusive education programmes of good quality will respond to the learning needs of marginalized women and children

Tight resources lead policy makers to concentrate on core departmental missions – leading to less co-operation across policy areas, just at a time when more holistic approaches are needed. In a world where, it seems, only auditors work across the silos of governments' activities, there is a consequential focus on programme

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outcomes to enable the preparation of the cost-benefit analysis needed to make ‘rational investment decisions’ on the allocation of scarce resources. Those things that have a short term economic impact are then preferred to programmes seeking to engage marginalised groups to exercise their rights. Formal education is more easily measured than non-formal – so there is a decline in investment in outreach and engagement, and an upturn in support for qualifications-based study. There is also a consequential shift in the balance between learner-centred activity, and time spent reporting on progress, to meet the demands of funders for effectiveness and efficiency to be demonstrated. Of course, as Albert Einstein famously commented, ‘Not everything worth counting can be counted, and not everything you can count is worth counting.’

Another feature of the current crises is an increase in the volume of work government sub-contracts to private sector providers, but also to civil society organisations for programme delivery. This presents opportunities, risks and new burdens on civil society agencies. On the one hand, civil society organisations are, in the main, more effective at engaging systematically under-represented groups, so this trend can mean better targeting of existing programmes. On the other, the increased bureaucratic pressures – where accountability to the funder can take precedence over accountability to the communities served by CSOs – and reliance on continued funding can blunt the effectiveness of CSO advocacy activity.

In the light of all these forces, it is more important than ever to be clear about the kind of education we want to create together a world worth living in, and to make sure that we make the case for adult learners, and for the kind of learning needed, as effectively and imaginatively as we can. ICAE’s approach to these

questions is straightforward. We believe education is a universal right, and that our advocacy work needs to be grounded in a rights based approach with a commitment to equity – to ask always ‘who isn’t there and what can be done about it?’; and to work with and through the voices of learners. We believe, too, that policy and practice must be tested against their sustainability. That is why our current work focuses on five key themes:

- education for sustainability in a climate changing world;
- work to monitor progress and foster achievement of the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, and of the inter-governmental commitments made at CONFINTEA VI (the UNESCO international conference on adult education) in Belem;
- decent learning for decent work inside and outside the waged labour market – (critical at a time when so many young people are excluded from employment, and when women’s labour is systematically under-valued);
- work to promote education for

gender equality, and to overcome discrimination and exclusion affecting other marginalised groups, and those experiencing multiple disadvantage; and,

- best practice in popular education and ‘folkbildning’ – engaging learners as co-creators of education.

We do this work with and through our regional members and partners – like ASPBAE. We played an active role in the Rio Plus 20 process – but recognise the scale of the continuing challenge to secure wider recognition of the role of lifelong learning in fostering sustainable ways of living that engage the hearts and minds of people affected by change. And currently we are all working to identify what kind of global targets should be adopted following 2015, to follow the MDGs and EFA – and to highlight how best adult learning can help. It is vital work, of course, and we can only hope to have an impact if we work together effectively and efficiently (to use the language of the funders) but also with imagination, and in mutual celebration of our diversity, our difference and our common humanity. ■



The road to lifelong learning: Engaging learners as co-creators of education



EDITORIAL

Transforming Our Future: Opportunities and Challenges for Civil Society

By Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, ASPBAE Secretary General

Over the past several months, the international community had certainly woken up to the need to advance an international development agenda beyond 2015 – and the debates, assertions, arguments have grown manifold and flown fast and furious over the last year. The education sector – although slower in its efforts – had also began its deliberations.

The debates on the emerging agendas so far, indicate many opportunities as well as worries for advocates of the right to education and learning – and offer important input to the 6th General Assembly of ASPBAE in 2012 as ASPBAE charts its future course:

QUALITY: Current discussions on a post 2015 agenda place ‘quality’ high on the list of education priorities. While there is clear unity on the need to improve ‘quality’, rights advocates should however be wary of a framework that promotes a trade-off between ‘outcomes’ and ‘inputs’, resisting claims that high quality learning outcomes can be achieved with poor quality inputs. There is also considerable concern that ‘quality’ and ‘learning’ are defined too narrowly, for instance, with much impetus growing around early grade reading as a primary education learning goal – to the neglect of others. Equally, disturbing is the continued myth that schools alone are the key to quality learning – with persistent disregard for measures that can secure a supportive and enabling learning environment in homes and communities, needed to guarantee and sustain learning, such as adult literacy, non-formal, education programmes and vibrant community learning centres.

EQUITY: Evidence has revealed that deep inequalities in education seriously undermine progress towards the achievement of EFA. Even when disparities in access are bridged, economic, socio-cultural, geographic, gender-based deprivations cause wide disparities in education and learning performance. The concern for inequality is prominent in the current discourse, making it favourable to argue a stronger case for governments to put equity high in the political agenda of education in a new post 2015 consensus. It has been proposed that governments move away from targeting based on national averages, and move to defining equity goals instead. Setting equity goals and targets will come to naught unless backed by wider policy and financing commitments. Particular attention would thus have to be paid towards building reliable statistical systems to track the marginalised and towards estimating the cost of reaching disadvantaged groups and areas, and the measures to eliminate disparities. These should be accounted for in the new financing targets for education budgets and education aid.

YOUTH AND SKILLS: The youth bulge in several countries coupled with jobless growth and rising unemployment drives much attention to the situation and concerns of young people. Within the education policy debates, this has been reflected in a growing consideration to ‘life skills’ and TVET (technical and vocational education and training). The enhanced attention to EFA Goal 3 is welcome but many challenges persist in translating this interest to robust policy and priority. There is none, if limited consensus, on what ‘life skills’ mean and what ‘life skills’ should be prioritised. In the current climate of severe unemployment, there is an understandable emphasis aligning life skills with work. Education advocates should however argue for education for work initiatives to be pursued within the right to decent work framework – prioritising as well, skills that empower workers to assert their rights and entitlements. TVET and life skills programmes should be set within an equity lens – oriented to meet the needs of marginalised



Young people in the Philippines join a national rally calling for quality education for all by 2015

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Resourcing the Education We Want

*By Takafumi Miyake, Director of Afghanistan Office and
Advisor to Shikka Asia Foundation, Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA),
ASPBAE Executive Council Member*

The estimated USD 20 billion that Wall Street bankers collected in bonuses in 2009 was more than the world's 46 poorest countries spent on basic education. While the financial crisis was caused by the banking systems and regulatory failures of rich countries, millions of the world's poorest people are struggling to cope with the after-effects. Slower economic growth, intersecting with higher food prices, left an additional 64 million people in extreme poverty and 41 million more people malnourished in 2009, compared with pre-crisis numbers. Prospects for education will inevitably suffer. Additional pressure on household budgets will lead to children being withdrawn from school, and increased child malnutrition will affect school attendance and learning outcomes. The 2011 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) argues that seven countries, including Vietnam, among 18 surveyed countries made cuts in education spending in 2009. These countries had 3.7 million children out of school.

With the financial crisis having damaged economic growth prospects and put government budgets under pressure, international aid is more important than ever, yet donors are not delivering on their pledge to ensure that no country seriously committed to EFA will fail due to lack of resources. Disbursements of aid to basic education stopped increasing at USD 4.7 billion in 2008 despite the USD 16 billion annual financial gap for EFA.

Figure shows that while some donor-countries including the Netherlands, the UK, and the US invest on basic education, some big donors like Japan, Germany and France put premium on higher education. Only six among the largest donors EU, IDA, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and the US contributed 62 per cent of basic education aid. However, imputed students costs which support

students from poor countries to study in rich countries should not be counted as education aid because of two reasons. First, this money is also spent in donor countries and does not reach developing countries. Second, this money does not contribute to reducing financial gap for EFA. If all donors spent at least half of their aid on education at the basic level (the current average is 41 per cent) they could mobilise an additional USD 1.7 billion annually.

Looking beyond aid quantity, there are continuing concerns about aid quality. The EFA GMR 2011 shows that in 2007, less than half of overall aid was channeled through national public financial management systems; just one in five donor missions was coordinated; and only 46 per cent of the development assistance scheduled for delivery in a given year was actually disbursed during that year. These outcomes fall far short of the target levels adopted by donors in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005. Because of these, the education sector will suffer more and will find it difficult to deflect the direct implications of the financial shortfall. For example, gaps between aid commitments and disbursements hamper effective planning in areas whereby classroom construction and teacher recruitment are targeted (EFA GMR, 2011).

Decreased public financing on education has led to private financing in the name of public private partnerships (PPP), a type of governance reform which, according to critics, will only weaken governments' control over a public service. Evidence in Chile and the US shows that school choice and competition provided questionable impacts on learning achievement of students and, in fact, created disparities. Choice and competition is not a panacea for state failure, rather, it further increases the gap in access to quality education between the rich

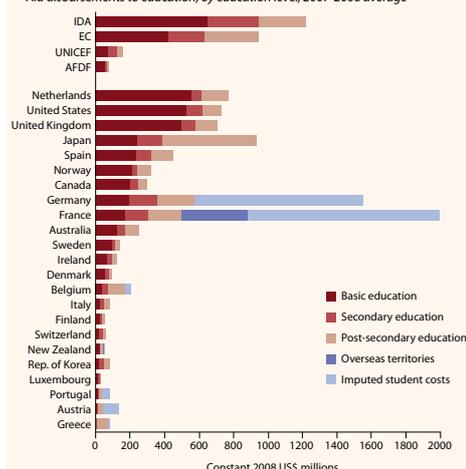
and the poor. Current governance reforms pay insufficient attention to equity, often with adverse outcomes in practice.

New and innovative financing mechanisms are proposed for development aid. The most promising one is financial transaction tax (FTT). The role of the financial sector in the economic crisis has prompted several governments to call for FTT. Debt crisis in Europe has strengthened the realisation of FTT. A levy set at 0.005 per cent could mobilise around USD 34 billion a year. Others argue for a comprehensive financial transaction tax that could mobilise as much as USD 400 billion a year.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) can be a mutual accountability mechanism between governments and donors to mobilise resources to achieve universal primary education (UPE). At the GPE pledge conference held in November 2011 in Copenhagen, national governments committed to increase domestic spending on basic education by more than USD 2 billion, while donors pledged to raise USD 1.5 billion for the GPE Fund between 2011 and 2014. In addition, the European Commission, France, Germany and the United Kingdom pledged to increase their bilateral aid to basic education between 2011 and 2014. Despite the good intentions, GPE's main focus on



Aid disbursements to education, by education level, 2007-2008 average



Source: OECD/DAC 2010

UPE only sidelines adult literacy and education as a crucial dimension in achieving EFA.

To sharpen our policy calls, here are the civil society advocacy points to secure that donors invest in ensuring the right to quality education for all:

- National governments should integrate education, particularly adult literacy into broader poverty reduction agenda. They should allocate at least six per cent of their GNP to education, of which six per cent of the national education budget should be spent on youth and adult education. Half of this should be spent on literacy in countries with significant literacy challenges. Governments should also pay sufficient attention to equity and act to reduce disparities through effective policy reforms.
- Donors should allocate at least 15 per cent of the Official Development

Assistance to education; with at least 60 per cent of this allocated to basic education, including adult literacy and life skills programs for adults and the youth. Donors should also improve quality of aid to basic education by supporting country-led education sector plans by making a shift from donor-driven project support to program and sector support, allowing schools and literacy programs to pay teachers' salaries as well.

- Global Partnership for Education needs to be radically transformed into a global initiative on EFA, which explicitly requires sector plans to include credible action on, and investment in youth and adult literacy, especially women's literacy. ■

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groups and communities. It is feared that the emphasis so far on life skills training in the formal system (the school system and TVET) will miss out on reaching the most marginalised youth and adults, including the 127 million young people without literacy skills who remain out of the system. Finally, it has to be recognised that there are broader life skills than those oriented to work and livelihoods that young people and adults require to respond to the world's current challenges: skills to broaden awareness and democratise information for responsible citizenship, in the tools for improved health, sustainable livelihoods, in the responses to disasters and the impact of climate change, and in the measures promoting tolerance and peace. These are so far neglected and ignored in the debates.

FINANCING: With the sustained financial crisis in Europe and the US affecting economic growth worldwide, many governments in poorer countries have resorted to cuts or zero growth budgets in education. Official development assistance is now on the decline. Closing the USD 16 billion EFA financing gap

has become more elusive. Changed aid practices also signal an increased focus on 'results' and 'outcomes' among major donors. Judicious and effective use of resources is of course highly desirable but this drive for 'results' tends to ignore the factors that hinder effective development cooperation such as unpredictable aid and aid conditionalities; and may push recipient countries towards prioritising short term, easily measurable targets at the expense of attending to core needs of education systems, or lead to bypassing underperformers who are usually those most in need (GMR, 2011 and Melamed, 2012). Asia perceived as an area of economic growth and home to emergent 'non-traditional donors' (India and China) is diminishing as a priority recipient for aid. An aggressive thrust by donors, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and governments for public private partnerships (PPP) in education have dominated the post-2015 thinking. For certain, the jury is still out on the promise that PPPs can deliver on meeting the EFA goals and targets. Many in civil society are yet to build consensus on the attitude to PPP in education realising it is a complex

issue and needs careful review and understanding from a social justice and rights-based perspective.

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING: Education, perceived as a 'better performer' in the MDG circles is losing its space in the emerging priorities of the ongoing post-2015 discourse. Human development – where education sits comfortably – is losing traction with the emphasis now on jobs, growth, sustainability/'green economies' and conflict/terrorism. It has been proposed that underlining education's essential role and contribution in addressing the issues that dominate will push education up in consideration. This presents an opening for advancing a lifelong-learning frame in the current discourse. Inarguably, quality formal schooling offers the essential foundational competencies that citizens need and should acquire by right. But formal schooling alone cannot offer the education response that citizens and societies require to prevail over humanity's current and growing challenges. It is opportune to advance priority for wider quality education responses to realise "A Future We Want" for a "World We Want". ■

Youth Bulge: from Disadvantage to Dividend

At current trends, India is poised to be the world's most populous country in 2025, overtaking even China. In a country of 1.2 billion people, where the fertility rate at 2.5 children per woman is still well above the replacement level of 2.1, there are more than 600 million people who are 24 years old or younger. Is this good or bad? The answer is quite tricky.

Some government planners say this is positive, as it then becomes a 'demographic dividend', in World Bank parlance. If the increase in the number of working age individuals can be fully employed in productive activities, other things being equal, the level of average income per capita should increase as a result. The premise is that, in a country with a youth bulge, as the young adults enter the working age, the country's dependency ratio – that is, the ratio of the non-working age population to the working age population—will decline.

Others, however, believe that in the real world, the more negative consequence of the youth bulge may be afoot. For if a large cohort of young people's needs for quality basic and higher education and skills training, political participation, reproductive health, and decent work and livelihoods are not met, the demographic dividend turns into a demographic bomb as increasingly large numbers of frustrated and alienated youth become a potential source of social and political instability.



What could build a bright future for these students in Nepal? Get youth education and lifelong learning right!

The world has reached a staggering population of seven billion people in 2011, with nearly two billion adolescents and youth among them. The numbers of children and young people in the less developed regions are at an all time high (1.6 billion children and 1.0 billion young people), posing major challenges for their countries. The population of the 48 least developed countries is still the fastest growing in the world, at 2.5 per cent per year, nine of the countries are in Asia and five in the Pacific.

Although its rate of increase is expected to moderate significantly over the next decades, the population of the least developed countries is projected to double from 0.85 billion in 2011 to 1.7 billion in 2050. In between these years, eight countries—India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Philippines, in order of population increment—are expected to account for half of the projected population increase at the world level. That's three in Asia.

But the strange counter-intuitive prediction is that by 2050, 100 countries are expected to have a median age above 40 years, 56 of which are located in the developing world. That is, population ageing, which is already pervasive in developed countries will happen more rapidly in developing countries than it did in their developed counterparts, according to the Economic and Social Affairs of the UN. The implication of this is that there is only a certain window of time with which to harness the dynamic potential of the youth's human capital and propensity for new ideas and innovation in these countries.

How then can the current youth bulge be handled, in countries where it exists?

“Providing education, employment and empowerment for young people are key factors in achieving global



Young Muslim women learn welding skills to qualify for jobs abroad

progress,” according to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 2 April 2012 at a meeting with educators and students in New York. The Global Colloquium of University Presidents at Columbia University is entitled ‘From Youth Explosion to Global Transformation: Unleashing the Power of Young People.’ Mr. Ban also stressed the need to provide employment opportunities to the 74 million young people who are unemployed worldwide, and warned that a lack of jobs can lead to social unrest, as shown by the civil uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in recent years. Of those 74 million unemployed young people, 45 per cent may be found in Asia-Pacific, with more young women among their ranks (except in East Asia). The female youth labour force participation rate in South Asia, for example, is a mere 27.3 per cent compared to the male youth participation at 64.3 per cent.

In discussions among ASPBAE colleagues and partners, the challenge of addressing the quality education and relevant skills needed by the youth encompassed not only ‘the what’ (content and competencies), but also what capacities are needed to be able to use and apply their learnings in real life. The process of learning itself and its empowering and transformative dimensions were of equal importance – just as ‘the how’ of the teaching/learning and how it is organised and governed. This involves:

Aligning Mismatches:

1. Skills mismatches - between the requirements of the available jobs and the skills possessed of those seeking employment. For example, skills mismatches contribute to the situation where 6 out of 10 young workers in Indonesia are trapped

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Asia-Pacific People Still Wanting New Politics and Governance

By Jerald Joseph, Executive Director, Dignity International
ASPBAE Executive Council Member, 2001-2008



People rally for free and fair elections in Malaysia

The last two years witnessed a vastly changing world. The ground under our feet has been moving, not only because of the tectonic murmurs that explode physically into natural disasters all over, but also because the political landscape in the region of Asia has been reshaped and rewritten. Not by great names and great heroes but by the simple men and women on the street. The Arab Spring or what I call the basic needs revolution was propelled by desperation of millions suffering the impact of vast deterioration of social and economic conditions.

Mohamed Bouaziz, 26, a street vendor selling fruits and vegetables in the rural town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia whose desperation for survival was put to the ultimate test, when police demanded him to hand over his wooden cart but he refused and a policewoman allegedly slapped him. He didn't possess a permit to sell his products. Bouaziz's only recourse was to set himself on fire in front of the government building. Within hours, his act of defiance and protest spread through social media and the start of the revolution began. This created a domino effect of people reclaiming their political space and right to their nations.

Many nations were then simultaneously subjected to an examination of their governance and democratic rule by their citizens. It didn't take long for the

long years of oppression to be exposed and the rising tide of change to grow. Elections took a new meaning. There were demands for proper elections, or in some instance, a demand for elections. This is a genuine call for political reform in many countries including Asia. The Philippines saw a new young president coming in as a beacon of hope. Malaysia saw 300,000 people take to the street demanding for free and fair elections. Singapore saw a significant voting pattern change that brought more from the opposition bloc as Members of Parliament (MPs). The greatest shock waves were from Myanmar (Burma), where political space expanded a little with the release of Aung Sang Suu Kyi from decades of detention, allowing her re-entry into active electoral politics. Pakistan also witnessed the removal of a sitting Prime Minister by the Supreme Court due to serious allegations of corruption.

These are but a few of the examples that mirror the dire need and rays of hope for a new kind of politics. People want a cleaner government than what they had for so many years. Is democracy functioning? Is democracy truly alive and meaningful? Is citizen's participation a hallmark of democracy in the country? Governments are on the defensive trying to explain their worth to their citizens. This is in itself the reawakening of democracy. For many countries, for the

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in low-skill, low-productivity occupations in the informal economy;

2. Timing mismatches - Not having the right quality and right quantity of labour force at the right time; as well as lack of capacity to adapt skills to the needs of the future rapidly changing, globalised and climate-changed world; and,
3. In-country Geographic mismatches - between locations of job opening and job seekers.

Closing the Gaps:

1. Barriers to Student/Learner cross-country mobility – ensuring that qualification and certification frameworks do not add another layer of disadvantage, rather considers non-formal and informal sectors, and enhances regional cooperation;
2. Seeking fair inter-country agreements on labour mobility and enacting model migration policies with youth and gender lens; and,

Labour migration governance and policies remain without a strong 'youth lens'. There are instances where labour sourcing countries have resorted to on-the-job training and apprenticeship programmes for the youth, disguised as cheap labour, and engaging young apprentices under substandard working and training conditions.

3. Ensuring youth participation in education governance, policy development and political processes.

Enlarging the vision:

1. Coming up with or updating national youth development strategies and bringing about policy coherence with education, training and lifelong learning policies and programmes;
2. Promoting inclusive, decent work-rich, sustainable development; and,
3. Getting youth education and lifelong learning right. ■

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first time, governments feel the power of the people as the “true bosses” of the land - to listen to and be accountable to.

The lack of real participatory democracy has been a worrying phenomenon in Asia for the longest time. With the exception of a few countries, many governments have been using their centralised power (through symbolic notions of democratic systems), their laws, policies and the police and military to check in dissent and suppress genuine calls for freedom and human rights. The proliferation of repressive laws that impede freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, the lack of an independent judiciary and centralised power in the government and police, are still prevalent in many South East Asian countries, denying citizens their fundamental rights.

Development and Democracy

In South Asia, the vibrancy of democracy is embodied in the energy of the hundreds of millions out on the streets demanding change or ensuring change of governments. This is expected in this region that still boasts of the largest democracies in the world like India followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The exercise of civil and political rights as seen in functioning democratic systems are by themselves however, insufficient to ensure the full realisation of the basic dignity of a human person. In many countries in the so called democracies of Asia, millions still suffer the frontal assault of poverty and desperately clamor for a life of dignity.

The deprivation of basic rights to these peoples has caused severe poverty, malnutrition, a stunted growth in the nation, huge illiteracy, displacement of people from their homes and lands, all of which are amply documented by numerous of research institutes, the UN and NGOs. While all governments are racing towards achieving some of the MDG targets, poverty keeps growing in some places and in other, taking on new forms. Governments must live up to their responsibility of ensuring that all human rights are enjoyed by all citizens.

Good governance must ensure that no people are left out of the wave of development and technology that seems readily available but inaccessible to all. This is the irony of a world where you

see one of the highest twin towers in the world in Malaysia alongside indigenous communities still living in poverty; the top computer technology and brains in India while millions languish in slums; and ultra modern cities sprout in China while illiteracy and poverty persist.

Democracy at the behest of Corruption

For the longest time, many nations in Asia and the Pacific have been at the mercy of wanton corruption that has sucked away money meant for development. This is a violation of human rights and must be stopped. There are enough scandals being revealed almost daily from the likes of the submarine purchase scandal in Malaysia involving a former Defense Minister, to the cricket professional league manipulation in India, to the wife of former prime minister in Thailand involved in a questionable land purchase, to the corruption scandals involving former presidents in Philippines and high placed officials in China which are now slowly coming into light. This must be fought with fervor if the region is to get to pole position in terms of development and human rights.

Cultural Practice Slowing Down Change

The Asia and the Pacific region is home to nations that have very deep and long histories of traditional cultural practices that are still linked to how politics and economics are shaped and practiced. One of the reasons the pace of political change has slowed down is the persistence of the feudal politics of patronage that enables the oppressive practices of the rich and the powerful to continue.

The more insidious forms of cultural feudalism can be seen till today in the serious caste discrimination on dalits that still affects about 250 million people in the South Asia region.

Women’s call for dignity especially in the domains of decent work has yet to be realised as most of the countries in Asia show that women’s position in the society are still far from the standards that UN CEDAW had set to have been achieved in the last 25 years.

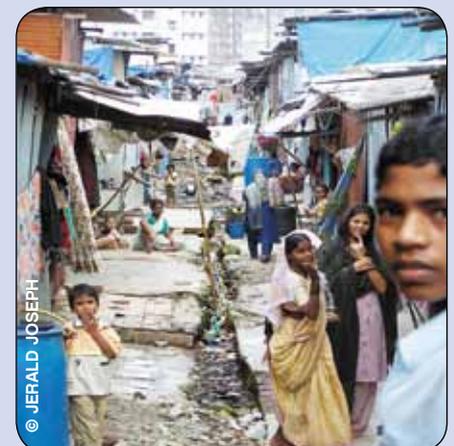
Militarisation and fundamentalism have also thrived in this environment where societies have been allowed and coerced to think that the feudal masters

(in the name of military, autocratic governments, landlords, religious leaders, etc.) are essential elements for the society to survive. We continue to suffer the impact of the growth of these fundamentalist tendencies.

Implication for Educators

The very fact that we have allowed these political, military, economic and religious tyrants to continue or allowed ourselves to be coerced into submission, points to the need for a strengthened role of lifelong learning at all levels. The demand for political and human rights education is crucial if we are to mobilise a continent and a world to transform politics and governance to become truly people-centric. The unpacking of culture is crucial if we are to change mindsets and attitudes of oppressive systems that have enslaved peoples for centuries.

We also need to analyse the failure and slow pace of our work that has enabled the unjust systems to persist. The time is now. The advent of new and cheap technology that pushed the social media reach to billions of people around the world in seconds has come to our advantage. We need to get all on board quick with a tap of a keypad; enable those who cannot afford it! The right to education and the eradication of illiteracy should be accelerated. No excuses by any governments or international bodies (including non-state actors) should be tolerated. We still believe that ‘another world is possible’ where dignity becomes central and the respect for human rights becomes the framework for society. Only then with people from the Asia-Pacific get the new politics and the new governance they rightfully deserve. ■



‘Another world is possible’ for the poor and the marginalised!

Education Underpinning Our Future Environment

Education has the power to influence the future of the world's environment. Through growing global consciousness, children and adults alike are increasingly more aware of their actions on a climate changing world. Conversely, environmental issues impact on education with effects of environmental change impacting on access to education services and indigenous knowledge systems.

As the global community approaches the end of the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), it is timely to reflect on the extent that education is working to ensure a sustainable future for all people. At its core, ESD focuses on harmony between economic, social and environmental values underpinned by culture. Sadly, the curriculum in many education systems places little emphasis on developing the skills and knowledge required to enable harmony between these values. Further some educators and advocates suggest that the increasing threat of climate change only highlights the failure of education systems to educate citizens that can live sustainability.

Over the last decade, climate change has undoubtedly been one of the most high profile environmental issues



The aftermath of the recent tsunami that hit the Samoan Islands. The government has been called upon to scale up its disaster risk reduction and management plans to mitigate the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

in both developed and developing countries. However, despite widespread scientific evidence much time in international forums has been dedicated to persuading 'climate sceptics' that climate change is real; even in the best case scenario the impact of climate change will have a devastating effect on the world's ecosystems and consequently to all people, especially the world's poorest. Sadly, although many countries have committed to reducing carbon dioxide emissions, a united global response to the problem seems likely, for the time being, to remain a distant dream.

Education about climate science has been central to the growing global climate consciousness. In many countries climate change has been integrated into mainstream science curriculum, with many children now understanding the causes and impacts of a climate changing world, and hence becoming advocates for action. Many climate vulnerable communities in developing countries have received training supported by development partners, CSOs and government on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Despite this growing consciousness, many economists, corporations and politicians continue to aggressively resist changing current practices that are the cause of climate change. Hence, it is critical that ongoing and future climate change education efforts find traction with those in the global community who continue to ignore the urgent need for action.

A climate changing world is already having an impact on traditional knowledge systems. In many small island states, there is a concern that climate change will result in indigenous land being inhabitable and that communities will be forced to migrate. With many people's



Indigenous women in Mindanao participate in a workshop on education and environment organised by E-Net Philippines (E-Net Philippines)

identity and culture being linked to their indigenous land, there is serious concern that indigenous knowledge and skills will quickly be lost due to climate forced migration. Further, subsistence farmers across the globe are struggling to adapt their long held indigenous knowledge systems to explain rapidly occurring climate induced changes to local ecosystems and weather patterns. The impact of climate change has already commenced on existing knowledge systems and will continue to impact on the maintenance of traditional cultures through education.

Climate change will also most likely threaten both formal and non-formal education through increased frequency of natural disasters and global food insecurity. Natural disasters already impact on people's access to education services and ongoing learning opportunities due to range of reasons including destruction of education infrastructure and trauma. An increased frequency of natural disasters has the potential to reduce access to education services, especially with limited funds to ensure recovery. The impact of climate change is already being experienced by many farmers and is predicted to dramatically reduce global food production. This has the potential to affect education through increased stunting and malnutrition, which directly impacts on children's cognitive development and learning through-out life. In response to these challenges, educators are increasingly striving to ensure education issues are

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REFLECTIONS: On the occasion of ASPBAE's 6th General Assembly

'Transforming Our Future: Living and Learning Together'

ASPBAE: The Early Days And The Next Fifty Years

*Where are we today,
and where did we come from?*

*By Prof. Chris Duke, ASPBAE Secretary General,
1974-1985; School of Global, Urban and Social
Studies, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia*



Chris Duke (right) with R. Tandon

This is called the Asian century. Globally, neo-liberalism is alive and well. There is hot debate about post and neo-colonialism or imperialism. The global scene is turbulent and uncertain. ASPBAE inhabits an unpredictable world where it is hard to predict five years ahead and short-termism is a curse for elected democracies.

ASPBAE spans half the world. The Bureau – the 'B' initially stood for Bureau – was born in the late colonial and decolonising era. Faith in 'development through modernisation' was normal. This was contested by some nationalists and by those sensitive to the diverse histories, cultures and strengths of the world's different communities. ASPBAE owed much to the liberal, humane, rather apolitical hopes and vision of post World War II adult educators in or educated in the North.

Lacking resources, structure or contacts in most countries, at a time before electronic communications arrived, ASPBAE was almost stillborn. Phone calls were difficult and costly. Starting with a simple hard copy mailed newsletter, it got its first wind in the 2nd decade, following the 3rd International Conference on Adult Education convened by UNESCO which was held in Asia, specifically in Tokyo, in 1972.

The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) was formed out of that Tokyo meeting. It was led from Toronto in the North with strong direction also from the South. With

ICAE's first big meeting in 1976, ASPBAE and its sister African and Latin American regional bodies became central pillars of ICAE. From the late seventies, ASPBAE won a regular funding stream from DVV, and its work widened. It grew in ambition, energy, identity and stature – an increasingly inclusive network in an increasingly connected-up world.

My direct knowledge of and part in ASPBAE dated from 1974 to 1985. Little survives from the time before that, when not much could be done. During the late seventies, the network extended to more countries, with activities in the Pacific and more in mainland Asia. The Bureau sub-divided into four sub-regions – South Asia, South East and East Asia and the Pacific. By 1985, ASPBAE was ripe for a 'great leap forward'. 'Bureau' became 'Basic'. New constitutional arrangements and practices were developed. The network organisation grew into the large, complex yet smoothly operating system that we have today.

Key attributes and defining actions of the foundation years:

- Forceful passionate visionaries and adult education (AE) leaders in the region, some maverick, some radical and risk-taking
- Finding and connecting up adult educators in different places in different countries, both governmental, some of an autocratic kind, and increasingly civil society-NGO as time passed
- Developing a common language

and purpose across diverse groups and cultures unfamiliar with one another

- Recognition and partnership with the influential UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok
- Forging a sustained non-paternalistic partnership of mutual respect and learning with DVV-IIZ Germany, a new model for South-North relations
- Gaining identity and voice in the world adult education setting to become a strong adult education and development policy influence beyond Asia
- Mobilising ASPBAE's own grassroots energies are keen to take an active part, leading to a wider programme and participatory constitutional changes in following years.

The gruelling but rich history of ASPBAE shall be shared, not only as an important element in the conversations around the 50th anniversary, but also to reflect and situate ASPBAE's work, policy directions and aspirations in a fast changing world, taking into account challenges brought about by the intensifying socio-economic and ecological crises.

Using the immediate past and present, the Assembly can examine our role in the dramatically changed context of the early 21st century. How well do ASPBAE's energies and dynamics respond and pro-act to changes in the region? How do efforts connect to immediate and pressing problems of communities in the region today? How well do they help to shape longer term directions?

On the basis of analysis such as this, the General Assembly can brainstorm priorities and processes, seeking a relevant and useful future across a huge and diverse region. ■

Keeping the ASPBAE fire burning

By Sandra Lee 'Sandy' Morrison, ASPBAE President 2004-2008; Associate Dean at the School of Maori and Pacific Development, University of Waikato, New Zealand.



A healthy and sustainable future is dependent on a number of factors including a sound grounding in education. In changing and sometimes turbulent times when education systems face pressures of reduced resourcing and providing outputs that are more economically focussed, the role of lifelong learning organisations such as ASPBAE become increasingly important.

ASPBAE's longevity is a tribute to its members and to ASPBAE itself. Its resilience as an organisation is a reflection of the commitment of all its membership to its ability to be inclusive and engaging. Its critical edge in understanding the tensions of the regional and global context without losing sight of experiences grounded in the realities of

communities. Even more simply, ASPBAE is an organisation that values its people, its members, and the relationships it fosters. Therein lies its strength. When one values people, one values and trusts in the human potential to transform the conditions and the context of communities through learning. ASPBAE with its small, yet efficient and effective infrastructure continues to reshape itself cognisant of the complexities of governance but keeping people and their lives as the central motivating factor of and for their work.

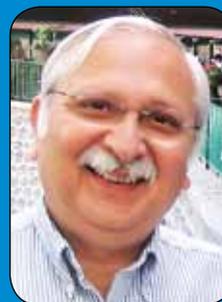
In the region of Asia South Pacific, poverty and illiteracy continue to exclude access to education. Geographic remoteness, environmental disasters, political

volatility are additional barriers. Building solidarity amidst such diverse populations is challenging, yet the strategic aims of ASPBAE in paying attention to policy advocacy, capacity building, strategic alliances continues to be relevant in the new millennium as it was in the last.

Over the years, ASPBAE has continued to underpin its work with stories sourced in the experiences of its constituents often putting a human face and a compassionate narrative to the liturgy of statistics that can be difficult to fathom. In moving towards defining the post 2015 agenda for education and lifelong learning, it is important to remember that we as members of ASPBAE are ultimately working with communities to build new narratives and as was once shared with me by Madame Shaheen Attiqur Rahman -- 'to burn the small candle that can lighten even the darkest room'. May these small candles continue to burn through the dedication and work of the ASPBAE family. ■

ASPBAE: Revisiting the past for the future

By Rajesh Tandon, President of ASPBAE 1991-2000; Vice-President of ICAE 1986-1994; UNESCO Co-Chair on Community-based Research and Social Responsibility of Higher Education; President, PRIA



At the turn of 1990s, history was being made in the world; Berlin wall had been pulled down; democracy had returned to Chile; Mandela was freed from prison; economic liberalisation was being 'unleashed' in India. In that context, the deliberations on 'International Literacy Year' and the call for 'Education for All' seemed to be important but not forward-looking enough. Global institutional structures -- in Ministries of education, in UNESCO, in international donor agencies, and even in NGOs (like

ICAE & ASPBAE) remained stagnant, despite such major global changes taking place.

When I became the President of ASPBAE in early 1990s, it became clear to me that we needed to redefine the vision of adult education in the changing context first; and, we decided to speak with the practitioners on the ground to understand, expand and articulate their visions for adult education. Simultaneously, the structure of governance and functioning of ASPBAE needed to be reformed as well. The ASPBAE

we all know today has its foundations laid in 1991-1992 through such a process.

What does that history teach us about seeking relevance? What can we learn from the period of 1990-2000 in the history of

ASPBAE about the ways in which to identify the most important trends of tomorrow, in our region, and around the world? What can that process of reforming ASPBAE tell us about ways in which further restructuring of ASPBAE should be carried forward? What were the risks in changing then? What are the risks in not changing now?

These and many other issues I hope to be able to deliberate upon with all ASPBAE colleagues in Cambodia in September this year. ■

Celebrating the Harvest of Meaningful Work

By Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo, Deputy Director, UNESCO
Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL),
Hamburg, Germany



Twenty-one years ago, I was asked to coordinate the organisation of ASPBAE's First General Assembly in Tagaytay in the Philippines. As the Executive Director of the Center for Women's Resources (CWR), I was more associated with the Women's Program of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and was wary of the then male-dominated ASPBAE. Nonetheless, with the collective efforts of Philippine NGOs, we successfully organised a serious but festive General Assembly. I vividly remember the singing and the dancing but more important were the discussions on direction setting and participatory mechanisms, and how these would eventually transform ASPBAE.

On the eve of ASPBAE's Sixth General Assembly, I cannot therefore but feel proud of where ASPBAE is. Whether at the regional or the global level, it is recognised as one of the most effective regional organisations. What lessons can one draw from ASPBAE's story of the last 20 years? There are many but let me focus on three related features: 1) its relevance to its constituency; 2) its agility; and, 3) its leadership.

It is not so easy to be relevant to the membership of such a heterogeneous region. The geographically linked Asia-Pacific is actually a tapestry of cultures, with numerous religions, colorful histories and myriad languages which result in the differentiated contexts ASPBAE needs to be relevant to. The ongoing process of mapping these fast changing contexts, listening to the pulse of its members and then, crafting programs seems to be an art that ASPBAE has learned. It has engaged in the critical issues of the region (i.e. literacy, work, women's equality, HIV prevention, sustainable development, indigenous development and migration) and at the same time, it has produced a

wide range of tools that support the members in their work.

Having more than 200 members in 30 countries in Asia-Pacific and responding to their multifaceted needs is not an easy job. Yet, ASPBAE has managed to be a flexible and agile organisation. The structure in place facilitates discussions and decision-making. The member organisations are motivated to participate in the different activities. The networking is supported by a team of competent activists. Partner organisations show their appreciation by continuous financial and technical support. All these elements produce a healthy organisation that is constantly renewing itself.

Finally, the critical role of the leadership cannot be underestimated. In the case of ASPBAE, a visionary leadership that is grounded on the belief that education is a right and therefore should be enjoyed by everyone is vital. The strategic skills have been honed by the ASPBAE leadership so that it is able to mobilise its constituency, multiply its supporters and broaden its partnerships. From a purely male leadership 21 years ago, it has now in place, a roster of leaders more representative of its constituency. Moreover, it has put in place a Leadership Program that will ensure the continuous nourishment of visionary and committed groundbreakers.

Transforming individuals, communities, societies, the WORLD is a serious endeavor. Yet, ASPBAE has shown that work is also fun, especially if it is driven by a passion to serve. For this and all the above, we have to celebrate the ASPBAE of today and what it could still become.

Let me end by greeting ASPBAE – MABUHAY! - a Filipino greeting for long life. ■

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part of multi-sectoral government planning, such as disaster risk reduction and management planning.

The growing global population will also likely further challenge global food security. The rapid population growth combined with increasing demand as countries develop, has the potential to cause food shortages. As noted previously, this will likely directly impact on early childhood care and development. Another challenge due to population growth will be access to water; provision of safe water and sanitation facilities in schools is central to ensure school participation, especially for girls.

The environmental issues discussed above are a serious threat to the right to education and lifelong learning. As noted previously, the increased frequency of natural disasters will impact on education service provision and ultimately participation in school. The quality of education is also at risk, with traditional knowledge systems being potentially sidelined by rapidly changing context for learning. Global food security issues will also impact on early cognitive development. In this context, already neglected areas like adult education will most likely be further marginalised.

The future of the world's environment depends greatly on the power of education to develop citizens that value harmony between economic, social and environment values. Education efforts need to focus on all people if a sustainable future is to be achieved. In reality, education underpins all efforts to develop and ensure sustainable future. ■

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