



DARING TO GROW

ASPBAE was born in the late sixties out of the enthusiasm of committed individual adult educators, notably New Zealander Arnold Hely supported by Australian Dulcie Stretton, working with S C (Siva) Dutta, whose base was the Indian Adult Education Association in New Delhi. ASPBAE began optimistically but quickly fell on hard times with the death of Hely, who had provided the main secretarial support. Unfortunately his death occurred before ASPBAE had been able to find members and become known other than among a small founding group of individuals in their home organisations.

By 1977 ASPBAE had created an identity sufficiently firm to make it a plausible partner for DVV...Within the region the primary task was simply to find who and where the adult educators wereand to begin to create a sense of common membership with a regional AE purpose using ASPBAE. This meant looking to government departments sometimes in repressive regimes as well as to teachers and scholars in Asian and Pacific universities, and to opposition NGOs in trying to foster a dialogue across these different sectors.

ASPBAE was still in a rudimentary state of development in 1977, despite having enthusiastic members in a number of countries passionate about educating adults, developing communities, and supporting balanced human development which combined economic and social purposes with an emphasis on 'the poorest of the poor'.....

.....What was needed was more opportunity to meet and in other ways exchange information, experience and ideas about what mattered, what worked, and why, on a basis of what came to be called South-South learning and reciprocity rather than having everything flow through and be legitimised by New York and Paris, London or Washington. This was the need and the challenge which DVV took up.

.....The partnership identified several needs and possible modes of regional development. The first principle was that needs and programmes must be identified and fashioned from the region and membership, even though 'membership' was diverse, thin and sometimes nebulous.....The founding (Chiangmai) workshop under the auspices of the dynamic host Thai Department of NFE, the leading governmental AE body in the region, was therefore a participatory planning event.....

....Out of the Chiangmai seminar a number of programme strands emerged. These included country workshops and training programmes, travelling fellowships, support for annual executive meetings linked to annual regional conferences or other key events, and the means for Asian-Pacific personnel to contribute to wider international exchanges, both South-South and through ICAE.

As well as direct exchanges and events, DVV funds supported a programme of publications, including an enlarged ASPBAE Courier.....DVV also supported a substantial amount of translation of materials into country languages, reflecting a concern that too



much that was being learned would otherwise be 'trapped' in a small English-speaking and internationally oriented elite....

As the programme expanded, another cohering purpose, sometimes explicit but always there at least in the background, was to build the national and regional networks so that cooperation and mutual learning would become easier. It involved supporting where possible the creation and strengthening of national professional, non-governmental adult education associations which included government participation but were not wholly owned by governments. This naturally proved easier in some countries and traditions than others....

Excerpts from 'DVV and ASPBAE, the Early Years' by Prof. Chris Duke, ASPBAE Secretary General, 1974-1985, Adult Education and Development Issue Number 60, 2003

DARING TO CHANGE COURSE

When in 1985, with great trepidation, I agreed to take over from Chris, Mr. Lim Hoy Pick, Chairman of ASPBAE at the time said "Wije you said yes and I shall stand by you". And true to what he promised, Lim stood by me, like a rock, both in diversity and in good times..... I was fortunate that I could spend my apprenticeship in the post of SG under Lim. One of the most defining moments of my association with Lim was when I urged ASPBAE to undertake a far-reaching reflection on its functioning, with my written submission, "ASPBAE – retrospect and prospect" to the ASPBAE Executive Meeting in Macau in 1990. Having seen my draft on the plane from Singapore to Hongkong he said without any hesitation, "Wije you go ahead and present it. I am with you".

The overall reflection about future directions of ASPBAE was undertaken in its Executives Council meeting held in Macau in the first week of September 1990. Various aspects of ASPBAE like structure, programmes, perceptions, images, capacities and constraints were looked at. Issues regarding the "focus of the programmes" whether to have definite programme area/ priorities came up.....

Members saw a danger in ASPBAE being perceived as merely a "funding agency" which channelised funds primarily from DVV.

A strong need to play "advocacy role" was also raised....

Issues regarding whether or not to have a full time Secretariat, funding sources was discussed.

In 1990 Lim finished his term as Chairman, and made way for Dr. Rajesh Tandon to steer the ship of ASPBAE into hitherto uncharted waters, and as I said at the inauguration of



the General Assembly, to take us to places which we had not visited earlier in the true spirit of an inspired leader.

The first General Assembly of ASPBAE took place from December 9 to 16, 1991 where 212 delegates from 33 nations got together to the theme of 'Adult Education in the 90s: UNITY IN DIVERSITY'. It provided a forum for the concerned practitioners and researchers to establish adult education as the key to sustainable development of the third world.

The vision of ASPBAE as reiterated in the Assembly becomes amply clear in the speech delivered by the President, Dr. Tandon.

"As adult educators, we believe in the capacities of people. We believe in their capacity to dream to create, to learn, to change. And it is that belief which is under scrutiny at this moment because if we remain true to our belief as adult educators, we will have to work towards strengthening the contributions of people in their own development. We have to work towards strengthening the people-centred, people-based, people-controlled development efforts..."

Adult education stands for a purpose, a vision. Issues that concern people need to become issues for adult educators... As adult educators we can contribute towards the process of women's empowerment by bringing the educational process at the centre of these efforts. We need to insert ourselves in understanding the aspirations, the struggles and the initiatives of the women throughout this region... also their profound role in strengthening the process of building peace in our communities..."

Following the restructuring of ASPBAE in 1992, there has been an increase in more proactive programmes, some of which would even be of a more activist nature. More needs-based activities have been encouraged and pursued.

Rajesh's chairmanship has enabled ASPBAE to draw not only on his vast experience, but also on the resources of PRIA, of which he is the Executive Director. Rajesh has also opened windows for ASPBAE to interact with his wide network of international non-government organizations, adding value to the work of ASPBAE and thereby taking ASPBAE to the very epicentre of momentous events world-wide.

Excerpts from:

Asian and South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, 1964-1997, a glimpse in its past, present and the future, by Dr. W.M.K Wijetunga, ASPBAE Secretary General, 1985-1995

ASPBAE-DVV Cooperation, by Dr. W.M.K Wijetunga, ASPBAE Secretary General, 1985-1995, Adult Education and Development Issue Number 60, 2003

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DARING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE – 2000 - 2013

The years following the Tagaytay Assembly were devoted to building and strengthening the network capable of carrying out its mission.....During its 3rd General Assembly in 2000 in Chiangmai, the members analysed the findings from a broad-based review of its work and current context summarized in a document, 'Learning to Make a difference'. It observed that:

"As a network and a movement for a transformative and empowering Adult Education, ASPBAE has done well.

- *ASPBAE has built its network. It is a network of significant depth and reach*
.....
- *It is the only regional organisation at the moment attending to issues of Adult Education."*

The review observed, however, that the strength of the network has so far not been successfully harnessed to influence education policy reforms or to challenge dominant paradigms of education and learning where needed.

In defining therefore how ASPBAE can better "make a difference", the general Assembly of 2000 mandated a much stronger emphasis on ASPBAE's policy advocacy role.

*By far the most effective and useful space for policy engagement on education for that period was the **Education for All (EFA) follow-up processes**. The EFA commitments were reference points for donors and governments (although watered down somehow by the UN MDGs). Internationally, spaces were expanding for CSO participation in EFA processes – even from the South. EFA therefore provided the main platform for policy engagement and advocacy of ASPBAE.*

ASPBAE subsequently aligned itself strongly with the main EFA CSO formations globally: the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the UNESCO NGO Collective Consultation on EFA.

ASPBAE increasingly realized that to secure gains for adult education within the current policy context, it has been necessary to underscore within a rights perspective, the indivisibility of the 'education for all' agenda: that universal quality primary and secondary education cannot be achieved in the continued absence of safe, enabling learning environments for girls and boys in their homes and communities that literate, critically-aware parents can provide. Conversely, the potential for meaningful 'learning throughout life' for all citizens rests on a strong basic education foundation.

ASPBAE recognized that it needed to make an explicit commitment to advance the right to basic education alongside its mission to promote the right to learn throughout life.

*In 2008, ASPBAE's 5th General Assembly mandated an important change in its Constitution: It agreed a name change to '**Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education**' whilst retaining the acronym 'ASPBAE'. 'Bureau' was replaced by 'Association' in ASPBAE's*



name – underlining the changed structure and constituency of the organization since 1991; and 'Basic education' was introduced, reflecting the organisation's support for the broad EFA agenda while retaining a clear focus and priority to advancing adult education and learning.

To date, ASPBAE has 179 member organizations and around a hundred individual members in 33 countries all over the Asia Pacific.

ASPBAE has contributed well in enhancing the practice of transformative adult education in the Asia Pacific. It has offered arenas for trainer-facilitators in adult education to scale up their competencies, building an expanded pool of trainers able and willing to operate not only nationally, but at regional and cross-country teaching-learning arenas.

ASPBAE has enabled greater visibility of the highly creative and dynamic work of NGOs and community-based groups through ASPBAE documentation, research, publications and information and communications work – offering opportunities for the experience and frameworks of grassroots practitioners to inform adult education scholarship and policy work.

ASPBAE has helped strengthen the CSO infrastructure nationally to advance the right to education and learning through effective policy advocacy, employing a wide range of capacity support: trainings, policy research, the development of toolkits, institutional development support and mentoring in organising and running policy advocacy campaigns and actions.

ASPBAE remains a well-recognised CSO voice in regional and global education policy arenas – informing the debates with the perspectives and concerns of Asia Pacific CSOs, drawn from the wealth of insight and practice of ASPBAE's wide network.

It has been said that the resilience of ASPBAE - its persistence through 43 years - is evidence of its strong ability to reinvent itself and thereby ensure its continued relevance. It is envisaged that the ASPBAE leadership and membership will ensure that this tradition is honoured, and ASPBAE will continue to grow and mature.

Excerpts from:

- 'DARING TO PERSIST: ASPBAE @50', by Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, ASPBAE Secretary General 1995 to date, Adult Education and Development Issue Number ____, 2012*
- Summary of Discussions ASPBAE Executive Council Strategic Review and Planning 2006-2007*

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