Civil society networks – adapting to change

Networks have been an outstanding feature of the body of work of civil society. Networks, operating at various levels – national, regional, global - have effectively facilitated arenas for joint learning and exchange, thus contributing much to the enhancement of civil society competencies and impact. Networks have also played powerful roles in shaping policy – forging consensus, fostering the complementation of otherwise disparate efforts, and offering a strong, collective voice to influence policy change and reforms. As policies have been increasingly shaped and influenced by global and regional discourses and imperatives, networks operating nationally, regionally, and globally have become critical arenas for negotiation, strategising, and coordinated action to intervene powerfully in the complex, diverse levels of engagement where policy decisions are taken and formed.

The close to 50-year history of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) offers an important narrative of how civil society networks endeavour to sustain themselves, remain relevant, and thrive. On 21 November 2013 in Hong Kong, ASPBAE and its strongest partner, dev international, jointly organised a Reflection Seminar on ASPBAE’s 50 years of work to offer a space to recollect and learn from the rich experience of this long standing Asia South Pacific civil society network. ASPBAE President, Jose Roberto Guevara, in summarising the shared reflections from across the different eras of ASPBAE’s life, asserted that the main factor behind ASPBAE’s tenacity was its ability to recreate its identity and mission in response to a rapidly and profoundly changing context and environment, while holding steadfast to its core commitment to advance the right of all to learn throughout life.

Borne of the enthusiasm of a group of committed adult educators in 1964, ASPBAE eked out an existence largely by optimising the opportunities presented by a far better-resourced UNESCO of the 60’s and 70’s. With the appointment in 1974 of Chris Duke as Secretary-General and the setting up of a core Secretariat, the base was set from which ASPBAE pursued a greater aspiration for growth. But it was its partnership with dev international (1977) that offered ASPBAE opportunities for expansion in the depth and reach of its programmes. dev international fostered a partnership with ASPBAE based on mutual learning and cooperation, allowing ASPBAE greater autonomy for its work. This approach offered ASPBAE the wherewithal and confidence to boldly recreate itself at different points of its existence.

The ambition in the late 70s to

continued on next page …
broaden ASPBAE’s constituency was set in a period where conflict was rife, totalitarian regimes were ascendant in the region, and the Asia Pacific was a wide stage from which the Cold War played. National adult education associations, predominantly lodged in universities and government departments, became the main organisational expression of the ASPBAE network for most of the decade of the 80s. The work, in the main, involved training programmes, traveling fellowships, the release of a journal on adult education called ‘ASPBAE Courier’, translation and dissemination of relevant material in local languages, and international exchanges both ‘South-South’ and through the International Council for Adult Education of which ASPBAE was a founding member (1973).

A deeper analysis of the changing terrain of adult education work in the Asia Pacific region prompted a fundamental rethinking within ASPBAE about its direction and purpose in the late 80’s. ASPBAE began to realise that the dynamic practice of adult education in the Asia Pacific region had grown and flourished within the popular movements for change and resistance that sprung in the region. It thus reorganised itself to embrace a brand of adult education which was more directly attentive to transforming the lives of people and communities, NGOs and community-based education organisations became the core membership of ASPBAE following a restructuring process, mandated by its First General Assembly in 1991.

Assessing its work close to a decade following its restructuring process, the Third General Assembly of ASPBAE in 2000 recognised that transformative, empowering adult education can best thrive under a more hospitable policy environment; and to better facilitate the achievement of the right to learn for all, good adult education practice needs to be scaled up and mainstreamed. It thus mandated a stronger emphasis on ASPBAE’s policy advocacy role and its deep engagement in the Education for All (EFA) follow up processes.

Engagement in this space necessitated forging partnerships with other civil society organisations and networks advancing universal, free, public primary education of good quality, notably child rights groups, teachers unions, and other NGO and campaign formations. Its leadership and capacity-building work expanded towards advancing policy advocacy around the full EFA agenda. ASPBAE took a leading and proactive role in strengthening national education campaign coalitions championing the full EFA agenda in poorer countries and in building alliances with national education coalitions in richer countries in the region to make the case for reforms in Official Development Assistance (ODA) favouring basic education.

The significant shifts in ASPBAE’s structure and functioning, notwithstanding the gains arising from these however, came with no small costs to the organisation. The shift to a stronger emphasis in advocacy continues to challenge the organisation where a majority of its members prioritise work on adult education provisioning rather than education advocacy. The stronger emphasis on issues of marginalised communities in the region and the expansion of the organisation to a largely NGO and activist constituency, left little room for involvement in ASPBAE work of those in its erstwhile membership who preferred to ‘work within the system’ of universities and government agencies. Many of these were located in the richer, more industrialised countries of East Asia, where there existed solid state commitment to public education of good quality at foundational levels. The education gaps and challenges they were addressing were therefore of a different order from those ASPBAE was responding to. Current developments in the region and globally offer a renewed chance for broader engagement with these players and a re-think once again of how ASPBAE should configure its work in the next phase of its life - ‘beyond 50’.

The changing configurations of the current world order challenge the notions of the earlier so-called ‘North’ and ‘South’. Majority of the poorest are no longer in the least developed countries of the world, rather in middle income countries. Exponential economic growth has privileged some and left majority behind. Equity and inequality therefore need to be at the center stage of the political agenda for development and education – an agenda that is imperative for both the richer and poorer countries of the region. Issues of sustainability require a truly global response to development and the climate crisis.

ASPBAE needs to carefully appraise these developments and define the new partnerships, alignments it will forge, the structures it will need to reshape, and the ways of working it will need to refine as it charts its future path. It is envisaged that the ASPBAE leadership and membership will honour its time-held tradition and successfully reinvent and recreate itself to continue to grow, mature, and dare to persist.

To read the full article written by ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, log on to ASPBAE’s website at www.aspbae.org.

Participants of a Reflection Seminar, bringing together stalwarts in ASPBAE’s 50-year history, recognised ASPBAE’s ability to reinvent itself to adapt to changing environments while committing to achieve lifelong learning for all.
Civil society networks, like ASPBAE and its members, have been actively engaged in what has been called the post-2015 development agenda process. Officially linked to the end of the commitment period to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the process is meant to review and propose a new set of development goals linked to a global series of thematic consultations, a report by the eminent UN High-Level Panel (HLP) appointed by the UN Secretary-General and the recommendations by an Open Working Group (OWG) building on the outcomes of the Rio+20 process.

For us in ASPBAE, the more relevant global process and deadline that is happening alongside the post-2015 process is the end of the second commitment period of the Education for All (EFA) goals that began in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and was renewed in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. During this same period, ASPBAE is also engaged with the preparations for the end of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) in 2014 (and not to forget the end of the UN Literacy Decade in 2012.)

All these key UN periods, events, and processes have been open to the participation of civil society organisations, consistent with the commitment of the UN to engage a wide range of actors, aside from governments, like academia, philanthropic organisations, and private corporations, in what they have called “conversations” rather than consultations. Whenever we have been invited and funded to attend these official processes, we made the most of the opportunity to advocate for our core commitment to an education goal that acknowledges the right to quality education within a lifelong learning framework, not just children but for youth and adults.

Two key outcomes of these post-2015 processes have been the report of the HLP that was released in May 2013 and the report of the UN Secretary General entitled “A life of dignity for all” in July 2013. The latter report identifies a proposed set of goals, with one explicit education goal, which is to “Provide quality education and lifelong learning. Young people should be able to receive high-quality education and learning, from early childhood development to post-primary schooling, including not only formal schooling but also life skills and vocational education and training.”

While we acknowledge the inclusion of elements of our key advocacies around quality education and lifelong learning, we continue to argue that the scope of education in the current formulation of the education goal continues to be very narrow, focusing only early childhood education up to post-primary schooling, and on the education of the youth in VET and life skills.

As we approach the end of the commitment periods for both EFA and MDGs, we support and will continue to contribute to accelerating efforts to achieve, if not get as close to, the original education goals. However, we are also realistic in what can be achieved given the limited time and the significant lack of resources.

Global goals and targets provide us a framework to engage with all stakeholders involved in achieving our commitments, but the real change happens much more on the ground. As civil society organisations, we need to be able to create our own platforms, where we are able to invite and engage our own governments in genuine policy dialogues, armed with evidence-based research and real world stories from the people and communities we work with.

While we will continue to contribute as best as we can through participation in the official post-2015 processes, I urge our members to be vigilant in ensuring that we are not trapped into a false sense that we can achieve our core advocacies through participation in these official platforms alone.
Partners in adult education and learning have manifold opportunities to engage in networking with an increasing variety of organisations, platforms, and coalitions. They are available at global, regional, and national levels, and sometimes it is hard to determine where the benefits for such cooperation lie. We have to be selective and evaluate after some time what works and what does not.

International development cooperation started in the 1960s with the advent of development aid, following liberation wars or in parallel to still existing colonial-ruled countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It was governments that started to create ministries or agencies that got involved in development projects. It didn’t take long for multilateral organisations to become central in the process, some focused towards development, others more on health, education, work, agriculture, habitat, or family planning.

Charity-oriented foundations and a wide diversity of non-governmental organisations also got involved in international development cooperation. Some of them started as early as the 1960s and others followed in the coming decades. Some collected money after disasters and implemented projects for reconstruction; others were more professionally oriented towards development involving civil society.

**ASPBAE-dvv international cooperation**

ASPBAE and DVV have a long history – DVV was founded 1953, ASPBAE in 1964. Both are based on memberships of other organisations. DVV works through community learning centers which are found in all villages and cities in Germany, serving 10 million youth and adults every year. In 1969, DVV started a Department for International Cooperation, today called *dvv international*. ASPBAE’s work is through approximately 200 members from countries in the Asia Pacific region.

ASPBAE and *dvv international* started cooperation in 1977, and ever since it has been a quite convincing learning experience for both. They have been successful in implementing a variety of programmes towards policy advocacy and capacity building. Both are members and supporters of a number of coalitions, platforms, and campaigns oriented towards the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals.

**Europe and Asia – a network of key players**

Increased globalisation does not mean that the cooperation between regions is getting less significant. One of the very important processes where this can been seen clearly and strongly is between Europe and Asia, or more specifically between Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the European Union (EU), on the level of governments, parliaments, and the people. The process is called ASEM, the Asia Europe Meeting. The participation is no longer confined to ASEAN and EU alone, but important players such as China, Japan, Korea, Australia, and Russia have joined.

In 2012, the ASEM process held its Head of States Summit in Lao PDR. ASPBAE, the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), and *dvv international* invited members from their networks to join the 9th Asia Europe People’s Forum where civil society organisations from both continents shared information and experiences from their work. They agreed to run three workshops on skills development, climate change, and lifelong learning.

There was consensus that joint cooperation between Asia and Europe is important and should continue. It creates an additional advocacy arena in these regions and is also a facilitator for more and better development cooperation. Partners are already preparing for the next Asia Europe Meeting and Asia Europe People’s Forum which will be in 2014.

*dvv international* is the Institute of International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association. It has been a long-standing supporter and partner of ASPBAE over 25 years in adult education and learning.
Civil society networks and lifelong learning

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

I
n 1919, at the end of the First World War, the British Ministry of Reconstruction commissioned a report on adult education which argued, with great force, that voluntary organisations (civil society) had an essential role to play in the organisation of learning opportunities for adults, however brilliant the provision made by the State:

In a modern community voluntary organisation must always occupy a prominent place. The free association of individuals is a normal process in civilised society, and one which arises from the inevitable inadequacy of State and municipal organisation. It is not primarily a result of defective organisation; it grows out of the existence of needs which the State and municipality cannot satisfy. Voluntary organisations; whatever their purpose, are fundamentally similar in their nature, in that they unite for a defined end people with a common interest.

I have never read a better argument for the purpose of independently-organised learning networks, and the last phrase ‘unite for a defined end people with a common interest’ is, surely, a description of what ASPBAE has done with great flair and success for 50 years. Of course, ASPBAE is itself made up of many more local and national networks, each dedicated to securing education as a human right – and just as local groups combine in networks for solidarity, to share good practice, and to be more effective advocates, regional and global networks perform those functions in regional and global settings.

They ensure that the voices of learners are heard by those making decisions affecting them. They monitor how far governments follow through on the commitments they make. They organise capacity building workshops so that emerging leaders can share in the tasks of representing civil society. They undertake research and organise lobbying. But lifelong learning is not just a matter of structured programmes. It involves cultural action too, with banners, manifestations on the streets, singing, and dancing. At our best, as at the World Social Forum, we combine serious analysis with fun, earnest meetings with street theatre, in the belief that ‘another world is possible’, and to work out how to make it happen.

Currently, ASPBAE and ICAE more widely are working together with the Global Campaign for Education and Education International to make sure that a holistic education goal is a centrepiece of the new global targets to be adopted post-2015. From Dakar to New York, we have argued that this should be based on a call for ‘quality education and lifelong learning for all’. We seem to be winning the argument about the headline – but we need to make sure adult literacy and learning for adults are included in the detail. Then we are arguing for a successor programme to Education for All to be managed by UNESCO. Winning that argument will depend on working together – locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

But we must also stop long enough to celebrate birthdays, and say best wishes to ASPBAE for the next 50 years.

ASPBAE is a founding member of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), a global network of regional and national associations promoting the right of all to learn throughout life.

---

Civil society networks and the climate crisis

By Nafisa Joseph, Executive Director, Laya

C
ivil society networks at the global level, especially Climate Action Network (CAN) and its regional counterparts, have been active since the very inception of global negotiations on climate change. More recently, the Global Call for Climate Action (GCCA) has been playing a significant role. Their focus by and large has been on urging governments to act in a way that takes the world down the path of legally binding commitments on carbon emission reductions for a safe planet, especially for future generations.

However, engagement in the climate crisis for civil society networks in the global South has been an uphill task. There are networks such as the Third World Network (TWN) and Climate Justice Now (CJN) that are engaged in influencing climate change negotiations from a southern perspective. There are other North-South networks such as Act Alliance and faith-based networks which are promoted by northern partners but focus on social justice concerns and have been creating opportunities for southern participation. But mostly, the southern voice particularly linked to sustainable development issues remains elusive. The influence of civil society on government stances in favour of marginalised communities in most developing nations of the world is hardly visible.

No doubt there is indeed a dearth of organisations in the global South who are prioritising climate change as a sustainable development issue and less so on education for sustainable development in a climate changing world.

This is the most appropriate time for civil society organisations in the...
The kind of civil society organisations needed in the post-2015 scenario are those that are able to translate grassroots experience into policy concerns.

The kind of civil society organisations needed in the post-2015 scenario to push the sustainable development agenda forward are those that not only have grassroots experience, but especially those that are able to translate their grassroots experience into policy concerns. We will need networks and organisations that are able to envision the global South not only in the achievement of its human development indicators, but also in opting for a low carbon pathway that does not transgress ecological limits.

This will have huge implications for education for sustainable development which must challenge the current economic growth-oriented model of development to post a far more radical framework, where the interconnectedness between the human fraternity within a climate changing world must form the core of our education processes. This is where networks like the CLIMATE-Asia Pacific, (a network - formed by CEC-Philippines, ASPBAE, and dev international - of climate change and environmental educators and advocates from NGOs, people’s organisations, and the academe based in the region) have a big task at hand to undertake in focusing on education for sustainable development.

This is the moment we need to seize in investing in value-based education, even rethinking education itself, such that the integrity of mother earth is sustained in a climate changing world.

Laya is an India-based NGO that serves as a resource centre for indigenous communities. It works with them to assert their rights and to promote sustainable alternatives at the grassroots level.

ACE Aotearoa and the ASPBAE connection

By Analiese Robertson, Professional Development and Networks Manager, ACE Aotearoa

ACE Aotearoa actively promotes and supports the diversity of lifelong learning in Aotearoa/New Zealand and fosters collaboration and cooperation to the advantage of adult learners, educators, and providers.

Being a member of ASPBAE has brought us many advantages. It not only gives us a voice in an international forum, but it also builds our capability and strengthens our links with a global network.

What we have gained is an understanding of adult and community education within a global context. What we have learned is that for ASPBAE, education about human rights underpins everything. In our country too this type of education is vitally important. For the last two years, ACE Aotearoa has partnered with the Electoral Commission and is now providing civic education workshops. Unless our disadvantaged groups vote in our local and general elections, we cannot have a voice in contributing to a fair and just society.

Forging close ties with METI

By Walter Vermeulen, Executive Director, METI

METI is a Samoan Charitable Trust which was established in 2000. Although broadly an environmental organisation, METI promotes a holistic approach to environmental management and runs integrated projects in health, education, agriculture and sustainable development.

Upon its incorporation, METI joined ASPBAE as a participating organisation. The Executive Director of METI and some of the Trustees forged ties with ASPBAE in 1998.

In 2001, ASPBAE assisted METI by sending Sandy Morrison and Timote Vaioleti to conduct a training workshop that helped to establish METI’s capability to work in a participatory mode with grassroots communities and allowed its staff to become familiar with adult education techniques. The experience gained from this workshop would have long-lasting effects and facilitated METI’s later community projects and its involvement with Non-Formal Learning (NFL), Second Chance Education (SCE), and the creation of farmer cooperative societies.

METI is proud to be a participating organisation of ASPBAE and will continue this close bond to further the lofty principles on which ASPBAE’s work is based.
NCE-Nepal’s journey with ASPBAE

By B.K. Shrestha, President, NCE-Nepal

The journey of NCE-Nepal with ASPBAE has been a stepping stone to paving the way for attaining the right to quality education for all. As a civil society organisation, NCE-Nepal has been a front-line education coalition in the country made up of 52 member organisations including NGOs, international NGOs, teachers unions, and the media.

In the course of its journey with ASPBAE, NCE-Nepal has strengthened its capabilities by connecting people worldwide and participating in workshops, conferences, and trainings. It has lent its voice in policy arenas contributing to significant achievements in access and gender disparity in education, an increased education budget, and reaffirmed commitments to the right to education.

Learning and advancing together with AFE Mongolia and ASPBAE

By Dondogdulam Tungalag, Coordinator, “All for Education” (AFE Mongolia)

In 2010, AFE Mongolia (“All for Education”, Mongolia) started its journey as a national coalition working towards transforming the lives of children, youth, and adults. ASPBAE’s knowledge and experience over 50 years has guided us through this journey. Since then, thanks to ASPBAE’s capacity building efforts, coalition members have been able to lay a strong foundation for collective national action based on clearly articulated and strongly shared goals, values, and principles in line with the universal principles of human rights, gender equality, democracy, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, participation, and Education for All.

ASPBAE is a recognised voice in policy discussions at regional and global levels and is uniquely positioned to contribute with well-researched policy positions. AFE Mongolia has been enriched with its collaboration with ASPBAE; it would like to offer blessings on the occasion on ASPBAE’s 50th anniversary.

ASPBAE and Dhaka Ahsania Mission - working together for Education for All

By Ehsanur Rahman, Executive Director, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Bangladesh

The ties between the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and ASPBAE are a unique example of a collaborative movement in achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals. The Dhaka Ahsania Mission is poised to substantially contribute to ASPBAE’s efforts to strengthen capacities of civil society organisations, coalitions, and institutions in the Asia Pacific. DAM’s membership in ASPBAE has created scope for collective advocacy in advancing the interests of the most marginalised groups.

The cooperation between both organisations is also characterised by ASPBAE’s continuous support to DAM in various ways. Examples include publishing monographs under the UNESCO-ASPBAE Beyond Literacy series, recommending DAM for international awards, inviting participants from DAM to participate in ASPBAE’s Basic Leadership courses, and jointly organising regional training courses in Bangladesh. The Dhaka Ahsania mission values ASPBAE’s support and looks forward to continuous collaborations together.
The 1996 Darwin Declaration

Carving the path ahead

The Darwin Declaration, adopted in 1996 at ASPBAE’s 2nd General Assembly in Darwin, Australia, laid the foundation for ASPBAE’s work in the years to come. The Darwin Declaration is a milestone in ASPBAE’s history as it unambiguously states ASPBAE’s deep commitment to equity and to advancing the learning interests specifically of vulnerable groups. Here are some excerpts from the Declaration:

We, the participants to the Second General Assembly of the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE), have come together to reflect critically on adult education in the region, and to plan for the future.

ASPBAE VISION

ASPBAE seeks to build a global order which empowers people, promotes sustainable development and peace, and is committed to the transformative function of adult education, especially to promote the learning and interests of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

ASPBAE strives to build partnerships with all those movements that share similar values and objectives.

...We will use the tool of adult education to challenge the domination of global corporations, and the political and economic elite whose policies and practices threaten to consume our lives and lead to more exclusion, oppression, social disintegration and environmental degradation...

...We urge UNESCO to adopt the text of the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. By doing so, it will strengthen international standards for the protection and promotion of the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples...

...ASPBAE reaffirms its commitment to an empowering and transformative education for women in keeping with the resolutions and Declarations of the Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing World Conferences...

...We further call upon UN Bodies, Multi and bi-lateral agencies and Donors to provide adequate resources and other mechanisms necessary to meet the objectives of building a world where equity and justice are guaranteed to women and the girl child...

...ASPBAE asserts that environmental education is a life-long learning process, recognising that ecological problems should be seen and addressed within a socio-economic and cultural context...

...ASPBAE reaffirms its belief that Literacy is a Human Right...

...We therefore resolve that: we will pursue the goals established in 1990 by the World Conference on Education for All, to meet the basic learning needs of all our people, especially those of women and girls who suffer most from lack of access to education, and achieve a fully literate society...

...ASPBAE will promote education for migrant workers and immigrants, and advocate with governments to ensure the protection of their rights and the promotion of their well-being.

...Similarly, ASPBAE realises the adult education needs of people living in planned societies which are moving towards a market economy, and will seek to enhance their capacities to deal with the transition....

...ASPBAE reaffirms its commitment to the promotion of adult learning for all, including education for those with disabilities, elderly, HIV/AIDS education and others.

Adult education has the potential for being a powerful tool in the empowerment of peoples and the transformation of societies. It is our task and challenge to wield this tool effectively and responsibly.

Read and approved by the Second General Assembly of the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE), December 7, 1996, Darwin, Australia.

For further information, please contact:
Medha Soni, ASPBAE Information and Communications Coordinator
Ph: +91 (0) 9811699292 (New Delhi, India)

Email: medha.aspbae@gmail.com • Website: www.aspbae.org

This issue of Ed-lines draws from ASPBAE policy and research material and acknowledges contributions from the ASPBAE policy team.

Flashback: With ASPBAE’s 50th anniversary in 2014, Ed-lines looks back at these 50 years and features articles commemorating important moments in ASPBAE’s life and history in each Ed-lines issue in 2013-2014.