

## Advocating for Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Asia and the Pacific

4-6 September 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



**ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan (centre), and Thea Soriano (R) with Ichiro Miyazawa (L) of UNESCO Bangkok at the ALE workshop in Bangkok.**

*“Once you stop learning, you start dying”* – This quote by Albert Einstein lends well to the fact that Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is an integral part of the right to education and lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education that aim to ensure adults participate in society and to the world of work. ALE dates back to the ancient cultures of China and Rome. During the glorious time of adult education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several countries, including the Soviet Union, Turkey, Cuba, and China, amongst others, were able to eliminate illiteracy through campaigns and social movements and educate those oppressed to reflect on their situation and demand their rights.

However, ALE took a backseat in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) focussed mainly on primary education. ALE became a sub-sector of the education system with governments devoting less than 1% of their education budget to it. In 2015, with the adoption of the Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals, ALE emerged as an essential part of the lifelong learning framework, which is the guiding principle of the education agenda. Nevertheless, the financial and human resources for ALE are still scarce. Effective advocacy and lobbying are critical to ensuring a stronger voice for policy and programmes focussed on ALE.

With this background, ASPBAE, in collaboration with DVV International’s Regional Office in South East Asia, organised a capacity building workshop on ALE advocacy in Bangkok. The workshop aimed to strengthen knowledge and skills of civil society education coalitions and adult education providers to enable the scaling-up of ALE advocacy in their countries and other transnational policy spaces. It also focussed on providing a space for exchange, for building a shared understanding of ALE concepts and the critical regional and global policy debates around it. Regionally coordinated and country-specific action plans were developed to campaign for ALE policy development and financing as well as government collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs), especially those working with marginalised communities.

Highlighting the role of ALE in addressing inequality, Maria Khan, ASPBAE Secretary-General, and Johann Heilmann, Regional Director, DVV International, South East Asia, welcomed the participants while highlighting the challenges in calling attention to ALE in the regional and global education agenda.

Invited resource persons and the participants deliberated on the context of ALE globally and regionally and the global policy frameworks that inform ALE practice, notably the SDGs-SDG4, the Belem Framework for Action (BFA) and the UNESCO Recommendations on Adult



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programmes, bridging education/second chance learning programmes, training for work, and skills trainings for livelihood. There are also programmes for Digital Literacy and Language Literacy. In many countries, what often dominates are programmes on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

There are multiple actors and agencies involved in the provision of ALE. A main provider of ALE is the state, usually through the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other bodies such as the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT). Local government authorities are also ALE providers along with non-state actors, such as NGOs, community-based groups, and private for-profit providers including corporations.

Participants emphasised that adult learning and education benefits learners by imparting the necessary skills and knowledge for active citizenship by addressing specific learning needs, inspiring positive changes in attitudes and behaviours, fostering critical thinking and awareness for empowerment benefitting especially marginalised adults, and contributing to the improvement of overall quality of life. It is also critical for helping adult learners fight for and enjoy their rights. Various examples were offered by the participants on how adult education resulted in women's empowerment, efficiency in work, active citizenship and greater awareness and knowledge on environmental issues.

While ALE has a wide range of psychological, economic, social, cultural, and political benefits, these have been overlooked by policymakers, education development partners, and even civil society for far too long.

Various other challenges plague ALE in the region. There is a general lack of general understanding and awareness of ALE offering a major obstacle towards increased funding and priority for this sector

Learning and Education (RALE). Spaces for CSO engagement on ALE policies in UNESCO and other inter-governmental bodies were described.

Ichiro Miyazawa of UNESCO Bangkok spoke about the different perspectives connecting ALE with life and work.

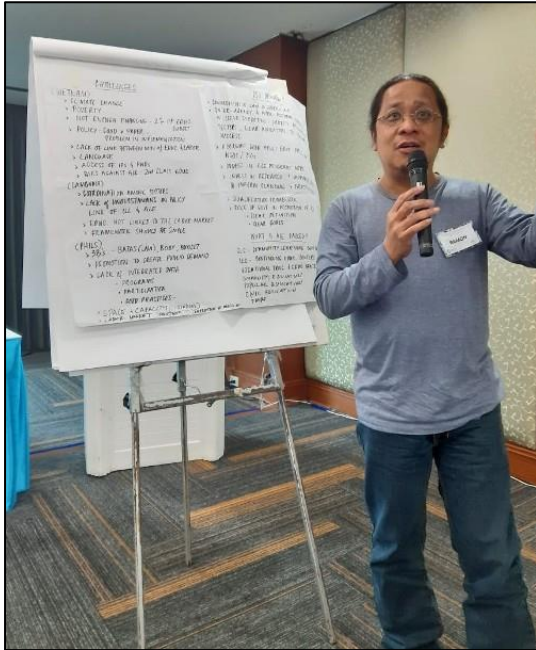
Participants described ALE programmes in the Asia Pacific region as being complex and diverse. It also goes by many names: continuing education, community education, non-formal education, to name some. In different countries in the region, ALE covers basic literacy programmes, accreditation and equivalency



**ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan (L), with Johann Heilmann, Regional Director, DVV International, South East Asia (centre), and Hitomi Rankine of UNESCAP.**

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**Ramon Mapa of E-Net Philippines elaborated on the policy frameworks, financing systems, programmes on ALE within government-led lifelong learning systems of their respective countries.**

in public provisioning. The insufficiency of integrated and reliable data prevents the shaping of more robust action, policies, and plans on ALE. Many countries do not have a defined legal framework for ALE. There are hardly any mechanisms for inter-agency coordination and whereas different stakeholders and ALE providers are involved, synergies are not being created. There are also issues of quality concerning different dimensions of ALE, in particular, the curriculum, teachers, and teaching materials, needs assessments, producing and monitoring results and evidence. Documenting good practices, tracking outcomes of participation, and finding other ways to generate evidence on the benefits of ALE can be useful to galvanise more political and citizen attention to ALE.

Hitomi Rankine of UNESCAP spoke about ALE in SDG/SDG 4 processes. She highlighted gender gaps and the exclusion of marginalised communities as some of the major challenges in the implementation of the SDGs. She also observed that although SDG 4 is seen to be one of the goals which is registering better results, there is uneven performance with respect to the

different targets on SDG4 and adult learning and education related targets lag behind.

Werner Mauch, of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), reminded that governments signed up to commitments to promoting ALE as outlined in the Belem Framework for Action and UNESCO's RALE along the areas of ALE Policy; Governance; Financing; Participation; and Inclusion, Equity, and Quality. He also elaborated on the linkages between these frameworks and the SDGs-SDG4. He pointed out that although there is no specific target on adult education, ALE is anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which explicitly identifies adults as learners and addresses ALE in specific targets, specifically targets 4.3, 4.4 on vocational skills, 4.6 on literacy and basic skills, and 4.7 on active and global citizenship skills. The 2030 Agenda also reflects the priorities identified in the UNESCO Recommendation on ALE, and recognises the formal, informal and non-formal forms of ALE. In principle, ALE is a full and recognised component of lifelong learning.

Werner also advised that the 4<sup>th</sup> Global Report on Lifelong Learning (GRALE) themed on Participation in ALE will be launched in November 2020. He also advised that the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA 7) will be convened by UNESCO in 2022.

Ethel Agnes Valenzuela of SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministries of Education Organization) elaborated on SEAMEOs strategic education agenda and ALE programme experiences.

Concrete experiences and good practice in ALE within the public education systems were shared. Parichart Yenjai of the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education, Thailand, and Ramon Mapa of E-Net Philippines elaborated on the policy frameworks, financing systems, programmes on ALE within government-led lifelong learning systems of their respective countries.

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ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano outlined the regional and global policy spaces to pursue ALE. A session was also organised to share plans on an ASPBAE initiative to review the SDG Volunteer National Reviews (VNRs) from the perspective of ALE in 10-14 countries. The review will seek to analyse how ALE is treated/attended to in the SDG country plans, programmes and M&E process to inform ASPBAE and its members' advocacy positions and strategies on ALE. Anita Dighe, and ASPBAE consultant commissioned to lead this process, was the key resource person in this session.



Participants included partners of the DVV International Regional Office and ASPBAE members from India, Nepal, Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Specific discussions were also pursued to strategise participation and define [key messages of civil society](#) for the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED 5) which will focus on SDG 4.6 on adult literacy and SDG 4.1 on primary and secondary education.

The workshop concluded with participants preparing country-specific plans of action for ALE advocacy including key messages, policy spaces, and opportunities.

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