

Strengthening ASPBAE's youth constituency in the Asia Pacific

Asia Pacific regional meeting on youth constituency building

23-24 October 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



The Asia Pacific regional meeting was designed to facilitate cross-country exchange and learning, enabling the youth to define their priority issues for advocacy on education within the SDG 4 targets.

ASPBAE has long recognised the role of youth as a powerful force of change that, when provided with spaces and opportunities for meaningful participation and leadership, can drive and influence transformative actions in society. In its efforts to ensure that youth are engaged in dialogue and the interests of marginalised youth are placed at the centre of the agenda, ASPBAE intends to work closely with its youth organisation members and its members cooperating with youth- and student-led organisations. This includes working with national education coalitions in at least eight countries in the Asia Pacific to support the expansion of youth

participation and youth engagement in education policy, notably related to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and in ASPBAE's advocacy and capacity building work.

It is in this context that ASPBAE organised the Asia Pacific regional meeting on youth constituency building, *'Harnessing youth leadership in education in Asia Pacific'*, in Bangkok as the second part of the four-day regional youth consultation. The event brought together approximately 40 youth participants from the Asia Pacific to jointly analyse the context of youth in the region, and their education concerns and aspirations – drawing from the analysis and outcomes of the youth consultations around the Spotlight Reports and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2019 processes. The Asia Pacific regional meeting was designed to facilitate cross-country exchange and learning, enabling the youth delegates to define their priority issues for advocacy on education within the SDG 4 targets.

Over the course of two days, youth leaders from marginalised communities and the youth and student movement within ASPBAE developed a shared analysis of the structural barriers to quality education and learning access of young people and identified other education and development issues faced by youth in the Asia Pacific. They also reflected on the nature and diversity of youth in the region and ways to harness their potential for leadership in education. The meeting offered a platform for rich exchange among youth participants who drafted country plans of action to spur youth-led advocacy in education and SDG 4.



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The first day of the meeting focused on a discussion of emerging issues that impact youth development, participation, and education. Ichiro Miyazawa, UNESCO Bangkok, spoke on the negative impact on youth of the highly competitive education system, the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset, as well as the rise of new technologies and its implications on the future of work. ASPBAE's Medha Soni expounded on the issue of the spread of fake news, saying that its systematic

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use and spread can be traced to the, “*unique marriage between social media algorithms, advertising systems, people prepared to make stuff up to earn some easy cash, and a US election that gripped the nation and much of the world.*” She described the different types of fake news and offered ways to spot fake news.

Dilli Ram Subedi, President of the National Campaign for Education (NCE) Nepal, discussed the rising migration levels of Nepali youth in search of better education and economic opportunities, while Matcha Phorn-in of Sangsan Anakot Yaowachon (Thailand), highlighted issues related to youth, gender and Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) within education institutions in Thailand. She emphasised that achieving SDG 4 without addressing gender inequality, SOGIESC-based violence, human rights violation, and discrimination against youth is impossible. Jan Mohammad Ahmadian of the Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC) spoke about how fundamentalism in education contributed to the ongoing war and conflict in Afghanistan. Ryan Chua of Pusat KOMAS (Malaysia), shared the dangers of shrinking and expanding democratic spaces in Malaysia, which helped propagate racial and religious sentiments.

Participants raised strong concerns on how marginalised and vulnerable youth continue to face multiple inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination because of their age, sexual orientation, and gender identity, race, caste, ethnicity, religion, colour, disability, geographic location, socioeconomic status, migrant status, and other factors. Young women and girls, children and youth with disabilities, LGBTQI+ youth, indigenous people, poor and rural youth, migrants, refugees, nomads, stateless people, and internally displaced persons, youth living in disaster-risk and conflict-affected areas, youth exposed to drugs, and youth in orphanages were identified as the most marginalised groups who are disproportionately affected by persisting challenges in education and development. In the sphere of education, the challenges identified include the poor quality of education, outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, rampant corruption in the education sector, and brutal competition in schools.

Participants came up with slogans on harnessing the power of youth in advancing the right to education. The resulting messages, such as “*Our purpose in the world is not to get lost in the dark but be the light for others*”, “*Education is empowerment*,” and “*We are the right people to decide for our rights*” point to youth as change makers who can promote an inclusive and just society when they stand together.



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education. Nazik Mamasadykova of the Institute for Youth Development (IYD), Kyrgyzstan, spoke on the organisation's work with young people and in advocating with government to develop a youth policy. IYD developed a Youth Well-Being and Development Index at the national level which characterizes the realities of young people and offers a basis for IYD to craft recommendations to ministries and agencies on youth well-being, participation and development. Melissa Lama of Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa noted with concern the prevalence of racism and the unequal power dynamics that affects the participation of children and youth in schools. ACE Aotearoa helps young people become leaders and educators of youth in the community.

Yang Jiayang of PEER China talked about the organisation's efforts to provide an open and enabling environment that promotes youth empowerment. Pooja Pandey of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India, described PRIA's efforts in engaging adolescent girls and boys in marginalised and rural communities in dialogues that interrelate education with gender. She underscored the importance of reaching not only marginalised groups but also urban, middle-class populations. Discussions also pointed to the need for peer mentoring and using human rights instruments to hold governments accountable to meet their human rights obligations and commitments.

ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano identified key events and platforms where the voices of youth can be amplified in SDG and SDG 4 advocacy. ASPBAE strengthens its youth constituency through its members that are conducting Youth-led Action Research (YAR), which mobilises youth in marginalised communities to analyse issues in the education sector, develop a youth education and development agenda that they can pursue collectively especially in their communities and in partnership with other networks operating at other levels (district, municipal, state, national etc.). Thea mentioned ASPBAE's

Susan Vize, Regional Adviser for Social and Human Sciences at UNESCO-Bangkok shared UNESCO's strategies for engaging young people. She mentioned that they maintain a database of 1,500 organisations in 38 countries which allows youth organisations to connect with each other and showcase their work with the UN., She called on the youth participants to assist UNESCO's outreach to other youth, observing that youth are much more effective at reaching other youth.

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Lourdes Almazan-Khan, facilitated a panel discussion featuring youth participants from China, New Zealand, Kyrgyzstan, and India who each shared their experiences on engaging the youth, strengthening their capacities, and amplifying their voices in



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engagement at regional and global levels, specifically during the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) where SDG 4 was reviewed for the first time, and the efforts of ASPBAE to mobilise young people in these processes. ASPBAE will continue engaging the youth in youth-led advocacy on education through consultations on SDG 4 especially at the country level.

Several presentations also revealed various opportunities for youth engagement. Yerin Kang of the Civil Alliance for Social Transformation through Education (CIATE) Korea, presented CIATE's advocacy on SDG 4.7 on Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship. Jose de Jesus, of the Civil Society

Education Partnership (CSEP), Timor-Leste, discussed how their youth-led action research in the country has received support from government as the initiative has been recognised as an effective way to help generate credible data from the grassroots that can inform government policy.

Astrid Schmidt, Youth Engagement Officer at the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), shared that GCE is in the process of developing a youth engagement strategy that sufficiently represents youth. Aside from strengthening its youth constituency, GCE also plans to take part in global youth-led initiatives and link its aspirations with the national and regional efforts of youth for youth. GCE welcomes the active engagement of regional and international youth-led organisations as it aims to establish strong connections with the global youth to ensure a diverse and representative voice in the Board, and turn the dream of a global youth movement into reality.

Participants proposed actions to strengthen the youth constituency in their respective organisations. Some of the strategies and activities included engaging youth in ASPBAE regional consultation meetings on SDG 4, strengthening the youth constituency and building capacities through regional and international meetings and youth forums, engaging youth in coalition and CSO campaigns and programmes, introducing a human rights perspective to advance the right of young people, using a feminist lens to conduct research, developing a youth educator's programme and organising a trilateral meeting with youth, government, and NGOs/CSOs, and amplifying



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youth voices from the national to the global level through youth direct participation in global spaces for policy, network and capacity-building..

ASPBAE will continue to expand its work in strengthening its youth constituency in the region, setting in place opportunities that enable a stronger voice and agency of young people and youth-led organisations in ASPBAE's work and advocacies as a key stakeholder in education and lifelong learning.

In closing, ASPBAE Executive Member representing the South Pacific, Peter Clinton, encouraged participants to seek partnerships and set common goals that can be achieved together as a community and a family.

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