

Youth speak out on leadership and meaningful participation in education policies and programmes

Youth Action-Led Research (YAR) Learning Exchange

21-22 October 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, welcoming participants of the YAR Learning Exchange in Bangkok.

Across the Asia Pacific region, young people continue to face unequal access to quality education, decent employment, and opportunities for meaningful participation and leadership in civic and political spaces. Despite these challenges, however, youth remain at the forefront of social change and transformative actions. And as a powerful force of change, youth should not be overlooked or excluded in conversations, but rather given a seat at any table where decisions affecting their rights and their lives are being made.

In parallel with its efforts to amplify the voices of the youth and strengthen the youth constituency in the Asia Pacific, ASPBAE initiated in 2017, a Youth-Led Action Research (YAR), an approach that builds the leadership capacities of marginalised youth and

brings to the fore their own narratives of education and empowerment. These are envisaged to continue to inform advocacy efforts and reinforce the practice of NGOs working with youth. Following a highly successful pilot of the YAR in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, ASPBAE expanded the YAR effort in 2019 to Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Nepal and Mongolia with the perspective of scaling up further in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in 2020.

To provide a platform for learning and exchange on the overall YAR experience to date, ASPBAE organised a YAR Learning Exchange that brought together 34 participants from the YAR participating countries.

The learning exchange aimed specifically to –

- Appreciate the outcomes and follow-through actions and plans of the YAR initiative in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines;
- Discuss preliminary findings and recommendations of the YAR from Nepal, Mongolia, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu;
- Share reflections of the young community researchers on the success and challenges in implementing YAR in their respective communities;
- Exchange ideas and lessons learnt on YAR as a process for engaging marginalised young people in education policy and programme development at the community, sub-national, and national levels.



The learning exchange was a platform for exchange on the YAR experience.

The YAR learning exchange set the scene for a spirited sharing of the YAR journey in three pilot countries, namely India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and in four expansion countries, Timor-Leste, Mongolia, Vanuatu, and Nepal. Participants highlighted YAR as a continuous process that equips youth with the knowledge, techniques, and tools to develop useful life skills and positive changes in mindsets.

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Participants presented significant personal or community change stories creatively using theatre or community media, which are the tools used in the Philippines and India to popularise findings of the YAR and to encourage young people to participate.

Participants also reflected on what the YAR initiative needs to do to ensure that youth are effectively involved in leading the learning and transformative process of action research. They shared the findings of the YAR in the four expansion countries and identified the issues that youth face, such as the increase in out-of-school youth in Timor-Leste, alarming rates of school drop-outs in Vanuatu, poor representation of

children in school decision-making processes in Mongolia, and the prevalence of early marriage and alcoholism in Nepal.

Youth cannot bring about transformative change without the support of their families and communities, as well as NGOs, educational institutions, and governments. Participants worked on drafting key recommendations, including defining the features of an ecosystem that can allow sustained participation of youth in advancing their education aspirations and in participation in decision-making processes that impact on their education access and over-all well-being. They pointed to the need for the provision of economic opportunities for families; inclusive spaces for the active involvement of youth in decision-making processes; increased access of marginalised youth to quality education and lifelong opportunities; youth-responsive programmes, policies, and budget allocations; close cooperation among influential actors; and peer support and learning, among many others.



Participants identified issues that youth face, such as the increase in out-of-school youth in Timor-Leste, high school drop-out rates in Vanuatu, poor representation of children in school decision-making processes in Mongolia, and the prevalence of early marriage and alcoholism in Nepal.

It is simply not enough to ensure that youth are educated and well-informed. The aim should also include empowering youth, especially marginalised youth such as underprivileged, girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, minorities, learners from rural and remote areas, and other disadvantaged groups, to effectively and meaningfully participate in national, regional, and global spaces. This will require scaling up the scope and reach of the engagement of young leaders whose voices are becoming increasingly indispensable in the efforts to build an inclusive, youth-responsive society. [END]