

## Building capacities to strengthen the advocacy on the right to education

Regional Consultation on the Right to Education and the Abidjan Principles

4-5 October 2019, Bangkok, Thailand

ASPBAE, in cooperation with the Privatisation in Education and Human Rights Consortium (PEHRC), organised a Regional Consultation on the Right to Education and the Abidjan Principles in Bangkok that brought together representatives of national education coalitions in the Asia Pacific, academia, human rights organisations, and international organisations.



**The regional consultation on the Right to Education and the Abidjan Principles aimed to debate contentious elements of the Principles that are to education, specifically on the right to public education, the regulation of private actors in education, and financing and PPPs in education.**

Building on earlier initiatives and outcomes that resulted from research, information campaigns, lobby with international human rights bodies, and engagement with national parliaments and education agencies, the consultation aimed to deepen understanding on the Abidjan Principles, its salient contents and contentious provisions, the references to international law and agreements, the adoption process, and recognition extended by institutions and human rights bodies; and plan broader discussion of the Abidjan Principles and its possible uses in the upcoming advocacies of ASPBAE and coalitions for stronger public education systems, for increased financing for education, and for stronger regulation of private sector involvement in education.

ASPBAE Executive Council member representing East Asia, Batjargal Batkhuyag, welcomed the participants to the regional consultation. International Coordinator of LDC Watch, Gauri Pradhan, gave an inspiring keynote address, stressing the importance of strengthening the right to quality public education. Masato Abe, Economic Affairs Officer at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), formally welcomed the participants to the two-day consultation.



**Noopur of NCE India addressing the regional consultation in Bangkok.**

A session on country and regional sharing created opportunities for cross-country learning and knowledge-sharing where participants from India, Nepal, the Philippines, and South Korea expounded on the substantive issues related to privatisation of education in their countries. Some of the challenges identified were the low public spending for education that is below the global benchmark, the increasing commercialisation of education in most countries across the region, and the widening inequity and segregation in education. Other issues, such as the highly competitive education in South Korea and the clear bias towards the unregulated commercialisation of education in India and the Philippines, were also discussed.

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**Shantha Kulathunge of CED Sri Lanka taking part in the regional consultation where discussions focused on the influence of private actors on governments, the “conflict of interest” in authority figures in education policy, being owners of private educational institutions themselves, and the use of public funds to finance and support private education.**

Recognising the aim of the consultation as a platform to gain a deeper understanding of the Abidjan Principles and to help strengthen the narrative for more robust public education systems as key to upholding the right to education, breakout sessions were organised for more intensive discussions. Resource persons were Ashina Mtsumi, Policy and Legal Officer of Global Initiative on ESCR (GI-ESCR), Delphine Dorsi, Executive Coordinator of the Right to Education Project (RTE Project), and Gauri Pradhan, who were also a part of the pool of experts in the Abidjan Adoption Conference in February 2019 and were representatives of the drafting committee.

The resource persons shared the history, rationale, and process of the drafting of the Abidjan Principles. The [Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education](#) were adopted by a pool of human rights and education experts in February 2019 in Côte d’Ivoire after a

three-year consultation and drafting process. The Principles attempt to serve as a useful reference that can guide the way national education coalitions hold States accountable for the provision of quality public education, and approach the largely unregulated proliferation of private educational institutions.

Participants identified key issues needing further clarification, and noted contentious provisions that needed further substantiation. Participants appreciated the discussions on the right to public education and the obligation of States to protect and fulfil the right to education by providing public education and putting regulatory frameworks to ensure its quality.

During the debates at the consultation, several recurring themes emerged such as the influence of private actors on governments, the inherent “conflict of interest” in politicians and authority figures in education policy and more broadly, being owners of large scale private educational institutions themselves. In these contexts, the use of public funds to finance and support private education becomes even more egregious.

The last session of the regional consultation put a spotlight on planning the next steps for 2020-2021. Different participants shared their plans to disseminate the Abidjan Principles to their coalition members and to schools, other civil society groups, academic organisations, and human



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rights institutions; engage with the Ministry of Education and the National Parliament; and use different forms of media to campaign for the right to education, and raise awareness on the Abidjan Principles. Others committed to using the Principles as a reference in their lobbying for increased public budgets for education, stricter enforcement of regulations of private educational institutions and the rising privatisation of education. Participants from Mongolia, South Korea, and Kyrgyzstan spoke about organising forums and meetings, and to use the Abidjan Principles in leveraging political parties in upcoming elections for a clear stand against commercialised education.

Several coalitions noted that their existing laws and Constitutions offer no room for the use of public funds to support private schools. In such instances, drawing attention to the Abidjan principles may not be so helpful in bolstering their case for strengthened public education systems to ensure the right to education of all.

ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano, along with other resource persons, identified and outlined key events and platforms to raise advocacy positions on the privatisation of education, the regulation of private actors' involvement in education, and the Abidjan Principles.

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