



How civil society engaged in a regional mechanism: the Asia Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED V)

For the last 5 years since the international community agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, UNESCO’s Asia Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and UNICEF’s Regional Offices for East Asia and the Pacific, and for South Asia, have collaborated to organise an annual meeting of stakeholders, called the Asia Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED), to facilitate progress towards achieving SDG 4 on education by the countries in the region.

For each of these years, ASPBAE, member national education coalitions and organisations, and other CSOs have participated in APMED to ensure civil society is visible, and its perspectives are heard and included in the discussions and in the final APMED statements and recommendations.

This issue of *Ed-lines* reflects on the latest such meeting, APMED V, which was held from 1-3 October 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the theme, ‘*Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in the Era of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development*’. The event focused on two SDG 4 targets: SDG 4.1 (primary and secondary education) and SDG 4.6 (youth and adult literacy and numeracy).



ASPBAE, including member national education coalitions and organisations and other civil society organisations, has participated in APMED over the years to ensure civil society is visible and its perspectives are heard.

What is the regional contribution of APMED 5 and its role as a mechanism for bringing about education reforms in countries in the Asia Pacific? And what is the value and impact of civil society participation and advocacy at this meeting? This edition of *Ed-lines* briefly reflects on these, and provides a range of civil society perspectives related to SDG 4.1 (primary and secondary education) and SDG 4.6 (youth and adult literacy and numeracy) that were promoted in APMED V.

APMED plays a significant role

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important education updates, regional data summaries and comparisons, support and motivation to progress on implementation, as well as a sharing of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives from many country government officials and other stakeholders.

While it is always difficult to attribute impact, there is little doubt that APMED acts as a valuable enabler of country-level action for SDG 4. The recommendations, that are crafted by the Meeting Drafting Committee and endorsed during the APMED plenary, represent a significant consensus to drive and inspire country-level actions, and also to contribute to broader international mechanisms, analyses, accountability, and further advocacy. One challenge that APMED faced was that some countries chose not to send a delegation and that there was variability regarding the level of official representation. Some delegations consisted of senior officials, while other governments sent lower level officials.

Strong civil society participation had an impact at APMED V

APMED is also important as a model for including civil society as a credible, informed, and respected stakeholder, to the extent of having a built-in mechanism that ensures strong civil society participation. APMED V was a good example of this. It enabled the active participation of 18 national education coalitions and another 3 adult education organisations, all members of ASPBAE, along with including representation from the youth and persons with disabilities.

As is its usual practice, ASPBAE organised a pre-APMED meeting of civil society organisations (CSOs) to ensure there was a strong CSO consensus on the issues and recommendations to take to the APMED V meeting itself, and to strategise on maximising civil society influence. In the weeks and months prior to APMED V, ASPBAE negotiated and proposed experienced relevant civil society

speakers and moderators at the plenary, parallel, and sub-regional sessions. This bore fruit as there were 4 civil society presenters in plenary sessions and 8 presenters or moderators in the parallel sessions. The visibility, quality of inputs, and positive feedback enhanced the credibility of civil society as an important stakeholder.

Based on the key points of the CSO pre-meeting, ASPBAE developed an issues and recommendations paper that was distributed to country delegations and was drawn upon by CSO delegates when making interventions in various sessions. Numerous officials commented on the usefulness of the CSO paper for their own considerations. It was also drawn on during the meetings of the Drafting Committee, which included a civil society representative. To assist in coordination, the CSO contingent met at the end of each day to reflect on the day's efforts, issues arising, and to strategise about contributing to the next day's sessions.

Outcomes, gains and challenges

In assessing the outcomes and gains of civil society participation and advocacy in APMED V, apart from the positive feedback from other stakeholders about the quality of inputs, and the high visibility of civil society, it is instructive to note that a significant amount of the language and some of the recommendations listed in the CSO issues and recommendations paper were included in the APMED V Regional Recommendations document. For example, it was pleasing to note that a rights-based approach was recognised as needed, that governments are the main duty bearers and their obligation cannot be replaced by anyone else.

It was also agreed that governments need to allocate sufficient resources to enable the progressive realisation of the right to 12 years of free and 9 years of compulsory primary and secondary education by 2023. Participating governments and other stakeholders agreed to support continued professional development of teachers as a critical means to ensure education quality. Further, there was a



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recognition of the need to see literacy as part of a learning continuum, rather than a dichotomy of being ‘literate’ or ‘illiterate’. Holistic, lifelong learning, and pathways to learning were recognised.

However, some challenges remain, for example understanding what roles there should be for the private sector in public-private partnerships. There are differing views on the attention to and nature of learning assessments, although CSOs were pleased that the consensus veered away from a narrow view on ‘measurable learning outcomes’ as the hallmark of education quality. The Recommendations document instead referred to the need to “*promote better use of formative and summative assessments to improve the holistic development and learning outcomes of children*”. There is still much vagueness about the meaning of the word ‘innovative’, and nervousness to urge an increase in national education budgets, with more general language regarding ‘sufficient’ or ‘sustainable’ domestic

resources used in the Recommendations document instead. CSOs would also have preferred more additional specific language committing to measures that allow greater access to education of learners with disabilities given the focus on ‘inclusion’ as the theme of APMED V. For all these gains and challenges, APMED V provided a valuable regional arena for important policy debate.

In this issue of *Ed-lines*, we feature contributions from CSO participants at the event, which will provide much of the richness and texture of the issues that were discussed. The contributors drew from their own country and sub-regional experiences, which include: the multidimensional demands for diversity of learning by youth and adults (Bangladesh); promoting literacy and lifelong learning (Kyrgyzstan/Central Asia); financial commitments to ensure the right to education (Nepal); young people’s participation in education processes as key to ensuring quality education (Philippines); and inclusive education and a gendered ‘holistic’ perspective (Mongolia and India).

Adult learning and education – A shared responsibility!

By **Ehsanur Rahman, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South and Central Asia**

Adults around the world are now global citizens. As citizens living in a global village, they contribute to development socially, economically, and politically, besides their roles to conserve the environment. The contributions vary in degrees, depending on how they are prepared to be an active member of the global society. SDG 4 on education, specifically through Target 4.6 on adult literacy and learning, is a tool where all governments have committed to adhering to and preparing citizens with literacy and learning proficiencies by 2030.

The progress on Target 4.6 (youth and adult literacy and numeracy) is expected to be measured by

proficiencies in functional literacy and numeracy, and participation rates of those enrolled in literacy programmes – not just by recording changes in literacy rates, as done presently in most states.

Regarding proficiency levels, it is best to term them as ‘literacies’, rather than ‘literacy’. To be an active citizen, people now want to go much beyond functional literacy levels, which are mere foundational skills to equip one to learn further. The required proficiency of youth and adults thus entails technological literacy, financial literacy, social literacy, health literacy, emotional literacy, environmental literacy, etc. All these together prepare a person to play pro-active roles in a social, economic, and political world. For sustainability of these roles, ecological dimensions become cross-cutting across all proficiencies because, while we have borrowed the natural environment from the next generation, we are obliged to conserve it to return it to them keeping it unaffected, if not improved.

Having these multidimensional



Ehsanur Rahman

demands for learning by youth and adults, the learning process needs to be diverse, bringing it outside ‘formal’ structured formats of education. Given the practical engagements of youth and adults in various social and economic spheres of life and to prepare them to cope with changing technological and social conditions, there is a need for diversity in the methods of learning so that they can learn at their own pace.

The duty bearers around citizens, from both public and private sectors, are quite diverse and shoulder the responsibility of preparing youth and adults to be active contributors in relevant disciplines. There are dedicated government ministries and

departments of education – social, economic, and environmental affairs, for example – as well as the private sector that are doing business in these fields. There are also NGOs, professional associations, media groups, and foundations dedicated to providing services at the community level or extending technical support at the macro level.

We now look forward to a shared responsibility for adult learning and education by all sectors. This is an urgent agenda in preparing people for the next decade and the targeted 2030 timeline. The international community,



To prepare youth and adults to cope with changing technological and social conditions, there is a need for diversity in the methods of learning so that they can learn at their own pace.



The duty bearers around citizens, from both public and private sectors, are diverse and should the responsibility of preparing youth and adults to be active contributors in relevant disciplines.

along with governments, have already committed to sharing the responsibility so that ‘no one is left behind’.

Here is an illustration of how the role-sharing mechanisms should look like –

Public sector roles: Policy support, regulatory framework development, financing, compliance assurance, targeted educational services.

Non-government sector (including private sector) roles: Technical services in policy and strategy development, ‘education watch’

services, research and innovation, targeted educational services.

International development partners’ roles: Resource support, technical support for systems upgrading, global knowledge management.

Let education become a shared responsibility to empower adult and youth learners assume active roles to face and resolve global, national, and local challenges, and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure world.

NCE Nepal calls for strong financial commitments to ensure the right to education

By Ram Gaire, National Coalition for Education (NCE), Nepal

Education is a basic human right, and it is the state’s responsibility to provide education to all on a fair and equal basis, especially for marginalised women, adult learners, youth, and children. There are different international human rights instruments that conform to education with human rights-based standards, not only in the formal education system, but also beyond the classroom.

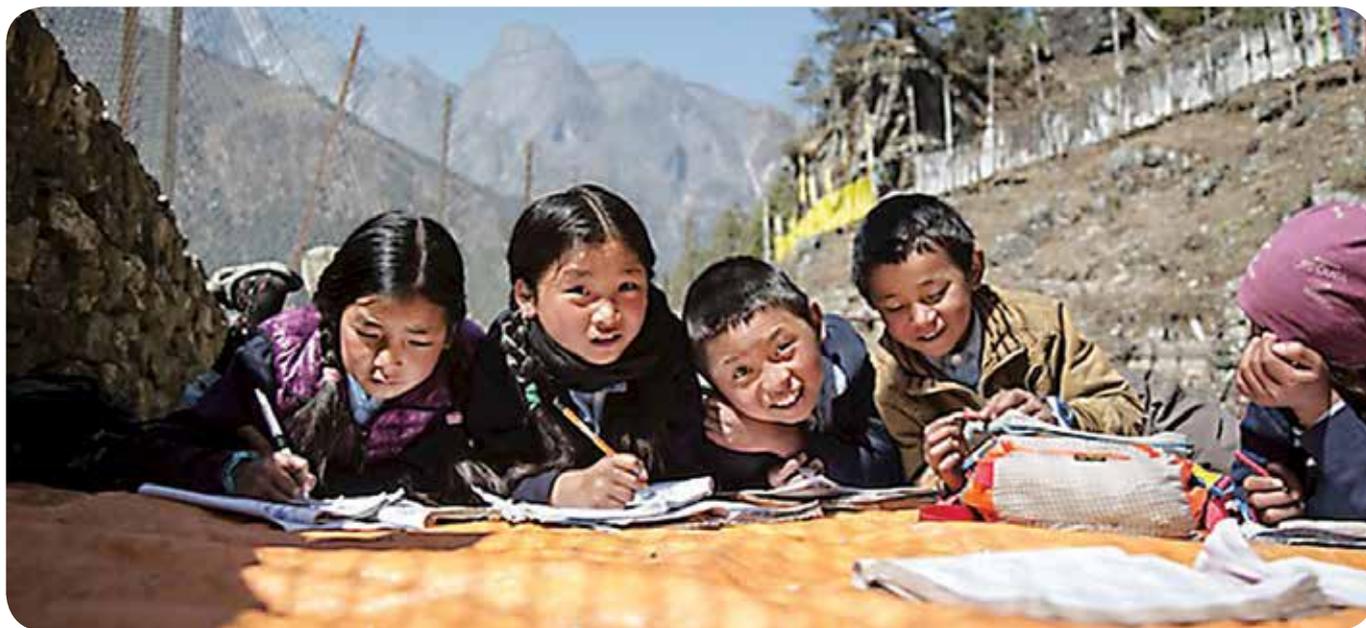
After 4 years of implementation of the SDGs, more than 200 million children are out of the school system. Those who are in the school system have not been able to benefit

from proper learning proficiencies. The majority of out-of-school children and youth are from marginalised and deprived communities. Hence, extra interventions are needed by the government and other stakeholders for marginalised communities to benefit from the system. A human rights perspective is necessary to ensure that equal rights of those communities to education are protected, respected, and fulfilled.

There is an urgent need of additional funding mechanisms.



Ram Gaire



There needs to be extra effort from governments, UN agencies, and bi-lateral and multilateral agencies to address the huge financing gap in current budgetary allocations to education.

In this context, a human rights-based approach to education financing should be applied where funds are allocated without discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, geography etc. Also, human rights-based financing enables states to follow national and international legal policies, laws, priorities, and commitments that are aligned to SDG 4. In the same way, human rights-based financing focuses budget transparency where information and data are easily available and accessible

For human rights-based financing, the four S's are tools to hold states accountable to their commitments towards education financing. The four S's are – Size of the budget is the % of the national economy (GNP/GDP). The share of the budget is % of the national budget. Sensitivity is to ensure equity in budget allocations. This is especially important for the Asia Pacific as it is a region which needs to pay special attention to issues related to women and girls (especially from poor households), children, youth, adult learners, adult illiterates, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas, indigenous people and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, undocumented migrants and refugees, out of school children and youth, and those affected by conflicts and disasters, especially in fragile states/areas. A budget that is sensitive would be well equipped to address the concerns of such communities and groups. Scrutiny is important for civil society organisations (CSOs) to ensure that the budget is participatory and transparent and to advocate for legal frameworks and mechanisms for CSO participation and for monitoring mechanisms.

In short, the right to education is an uncompromisable

agenda. There needs to be extra effort from governments, UN agencies, and bi-lateral and multilateral agencies to address the huge financing gap in current budgetary allocations.

Governments should consider the following to ensure that the right to education is respected, fulfilled, and protected –

- A strong public education system to realise the rights to education.
- Political will to address inequity in education and for good governance
- Funding priority for women and the furthest behind (children with disabilities, marginalised youth)
- Scale-up, sustain, and improve programmes that effectively address equity.
- No further delay in budgetary allocations and ensure accountability and transparency in financial management.
- Clear, strong financing commitment and strategy such as a progressive increase in public investment for education.
- Increase domestic revenues through key tax reforms; end tax exemption; address tax evasion and avoidance
- No commercialisation of education and enforce regulation of the private sector in education to ensure equity, non-discrimination, and the right to education.
- A vibrant civil society on SDG 4 for maintaining equity, social justice. and peace.

Educate, Empower, and Engage young people to participate in education processes

By *Vichelle Yumuya, Education Network (E-Net) Philippines*

It is important for young people, especially women, to be able to finish primary and secondary education because it helps them to maximize their full potential and have access to opportunities. Free education should be ensured to eliminate



Vichelle Yumuya

hidden costs in schools such as payment of projects, papers, exams, and other learning materials. Equitable education is important because learners are diverse and each of them has different needs. In promoting quality education, students should have adequate, gender-sensitive, and culture-sensitive instructional materials. Relevant and effective learning outcome means that education should not be market-oriented, but it is a platform for students to develop life skills, values, principles and civic engagement.

Having literacy and numeracy skills is the basic foundation of learning. SDG 4 redefined the meaning of literacy and numeracy beyond the ability to read and write a simple statement and having basic arithmetic skills. Having these skills should also mean that they are able to comprehend, distinguished facts from fictions,

and develop critical thinking. Literacy and numeracy should focus on proficiency. Having this ability creates a big impact in the youth and adult learners, especially women, because they are able to understand information, have access to jobs, and exercise their rights.

EDUCATE – Young people should know their rights; they should have free access to information and they should be aware of different social issues happening around the world.

EMPOWER – Young people should have capacity building to enhance their skills in leadership and communication.

ENGAGE – Young people should be able to engage in government and CSOs planning and policy making, as well as being involve in the implementation processes.



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Adult education must be officially recognised to promote literacy and lifelong learning

By *Anastasiya Dmitrienko, AED Kyrgyzstan*

Today, in addition to the standard understanding of literacy as the ability to read,

write and count, it is necessary to develop “functional literacy” among young people and adults – that is, ability to improve professional qualifications and employment; media literacy; critical thinking skills, knowledge of laws and rights. It is important to remember that education doesn’t end outside the school or higher education institution, any person has the right to education from the moment of birth and throughout life. And one of important components of development of lifelong learning (LLL) is adult education

Speaking about the experience of



Anastasiya Dmitrienko

Central Asia, we can say that the state provides advanced training and retraining services. The need for additional adult education is covered by various NGOs. So, for example,



A major achievement of civil society organisations in Kyrgyzstan was the development of the Adult Education Concept that recognises that adult education requires official recognition to enable the implementation of a lifelong learning framework.

in the early 2000s in Kyrgyzstan an informal association of adult education providers began to form. Later, in 2006, with the support of

DVV International, the Kyrgyz Adult Education Association (KAEA) was created and officially registered. To date, about 21 thousand people have

already been trained by members of KAEA. Talking about the result of the work of all existing training centres, the number of trained adults will be many times greater.

A major achievement of civil society organisations in Kyrgyzstan was the initiation of the development of the Adult Education Concept and with the recognition that adult education needs official recognition to promote and implement a lifelong learning philosophy. The development of the concept and its subsequent promotion for adoption by the Government is the first confident step towards recognition of adult learning. We believe this is the beginning of new beginnings in the promotion of lifelong learning in Central Asia.

ALL means ALL

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

The need for action to improve access to education of children with disabilities was articulated in the 2005 education sector review, and in the Master Plan (2006-2015) of Mongolia. In 2019, nearly 70% of school-aged children with disabilities are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, according to data provided by the Association of Parents with Differently-Abled Children (a member of AFE Mongolia).

Children with disabilities tend to start school later than the official school entry age and they are likely to drop out, especially from Grade 1. The majority of children with disabilities who did not enrol in schools and dropped were children who have multiple disabilities, children with mobility impairment, and children with mental disabilities (JICA, 2017).



Tungalag Dondogdulam

The idea of inclusion has been promoted by international organisations and local NGOs since 2003, and led to a 2016 amendment of the Mongolian Education Law after adoption of the ‘Law on the Rights of People with Disabilities’. The Ministry of Education has taken several steps towards inclusive education, especially ground-breaking regulation on inclusive education of children with disabilities in regular schools, and instruction on providing support for children with disabilities.



Mongolia introduced ground-breaking regulation on inclusive education of children with disabilities in regular schools, and instruction on providing support for children with disabilities.

Nirantar (India) calls for focus on marginalised women and girls for holistic, inclusive education

By Archana Dwivedi, Nirantar, India

One of the unique features of the SDGs is that they are all interconnected and one can see the resonance of one SDG in many other relevant goals within it. However, when we talk of strategies and action points to achieve those goals, we are talking in silos.

We are here in APMED 5 discussing the SG 4.1 and 4.6 – to achieve inclusive and quality education for all and literacy for youth and adults. We know that unless we are addressing the issues of diversity, gender, disability, marginalisation, poverty, identity, and representation, education cannot claim to be inclusive. While all of these categories can be mutually exclusive, we must also be able to see them as intersecting and multiplying with each other to understand them in totality and reality. For example, gender is one axis of power that marginalizes women and girls, and

ability is another axis of power that marginalizes disabled people. But women and girls who are disabled are more marginalised within the disabled community, which is further aggravated by poverty and their rural/urban location. Thus, marginalisation is experienced in a layered manner where disadvantages multiply.

If education programmes or interventions for disabled people do not address gender concerns, they may leave out the more marginalised women and girls within the disabled community. Our strategies and action plans need to adopt intersectional approaches that allow us to see the layered as well as crosscutting nature of these marginalisations. For example, if we have to work with ethnic minorities to ensure them access to quality education, we have to think of specific strategies to



Archana Dwivedi

address gender-based concerns, in addition to the issues of language, disability, and their representation in the curriculum. But unfortunately, our programmes are still working on individual issues without looking at other intersecting aspects that are part of people's lived realities. I would have really appreciated if APMED 5 could become that space where we could bring these intersectionalities to the fore and talk about them holistically.

Platforms like APMED can play an important and decisive role in providing focused attention to each goal while constantly working towards making inter-linkages among them and pushing for intersectional, intersectoral approach-based solutions.



Unless we are addressing the issues of diversity, gender, disability, marginalisation, poverty, identity, and representation, education cannot claim to be inclusive. We must see them as intersecting and multiplying with each other.



Strategies and action plans need to adopt intersectional approaches that allow us to see the layered as well as crosscutting nature of gender marginalisations.

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