

ASPBAE secures SDG 4 policy wins at 6th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

27-29 March 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



The 6th APFSD, convened by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), is the regional preparatory event for the 2019 HLPF. ASPBAE participated in the event with several of its coalitions and members.

For the past three years, ASPBAE has been participating in the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and the civil society meeting that precedes the official forum. This year, at the 6th APFSD held in Bangkok, ASPBAE organised a larger delegation composed of representatives from national education coalitions, the youth constituency, and ASPBAE members, especially those from countries reporting on their respective Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) in the forthcoming High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2019.

The 6th APFSD, convened by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), is the regional preparatory event for the 2019 HLPF, which brought together more than 850 participants, including representatives of governments, intergovernmental organisations, United Nations bodies, international organisations, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders.

This year's HLPF theme of *'Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality'* provides a good opportunity for governments and stakeholders to conduct an in-depth review of the goals that are most critical to people's empowerment and development: SDG 4 (inclusive, equitable, and quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships).

This year marks a high point in ASPBAE's advocacy engagement on the SDGs, highlighted by the first ever review of SDG 4 during the 2019 HLPF. Moreover, from 24-25 September 2019, the second segment of the HLPF will be convened by the UN General Assembly to follow up and comprehensively review the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs. The event is the first UN summit on the SDGs since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015.

The ASPBAE delegation, led by ASPBAE EC member from the South Pacific and youth leader, Peter Clinton Isaac Foese, along with ASPBAE staff, Cecilia (Thea) Soriano, Rene Raya, and Anita Borkar, included representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Mongolia, Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand.



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ASPBAE participated in the roundtable session on SDG 4. ASPBAE's Cecilia Soriano (2nd from left) spoke in the panel, taking off from ASPBAE's key messages and building on the statement agreed upon during the People's Forum.

It was noted that among the SDGs, the push for SDG 4 is not strong, mainly due to the perception that SDG 4 is not threatened as a goal. The reality, however, is that SDG 4 is not on track globally and regionally. Moreover, inequity, discrimination, and segregation in education have actually worsened in most countries across the region. It is for these reasons that ASPBAE sees the urgency of giving prominence to SDG 4 as a foundational goal that impacts heavily on all other SDGs, and to push for critical reforms and increased financing to accelerate efforts to meet all targets. This was the mission that guided the ASPBAE delegation in its participation in the APFSD and the People's Forum (APFSD).

ASPBAE actively participated in the roundtable session on SDG 4 that was chaired by UNESCO and that saw the participation of member states, UN agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs), and other stakeholders. The roundtables were designed to jointly agree on the analysis regarding progress on meeting the given SDG and its targets and to jointly develop policy recommendations.

ASPBAE's Cecilia Soriano spoke in the panel, taking off from ASPBAE's key messages and building on the statement agreed upon during the People's Forum (read more about the People's Forum in the next article). She stressed the need to take decisive policy measures to overcome systemic barriers and accelerate efforts to get back on track.

A lively discussion followed with ASPBAE delegates offering critical inputs to the draft recommendations for adoption – which as envisaged to inform the official submission of the region to the 2019 HLPF. It was encouraging to note that most of the interventions from the ASPBAE delegation were taken on board and integrated in the final recommendations reported in the full plenary.

Some of the recommendations were – (1) Accelerate efforts to remove systemic and non-systemic barriers that hinder equity, inclusion and quality; (2) Concrete and effective policy interventions to remove any forms of barrier (direct and indirect) to education; (3) Increase and ensure the supply of motivated, qualified, adequately resourced, and empowered teachers supported by an enabling environment; (4) Reaffirm the global commitment to allocate at least 4-6% of the GDP and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to education, and ensure an efficient, transparent, and equitable resource allocation and accountability in expenditures.

On the third day of the forum, ASPBAE, UNESCO Bangkok, and the Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Education 2030 co-organised a side event on 'Multi-Stakeholder partnerships for SDG 4 and Launch of the GEMR 2019 Youth Report.' Fidelis Leite Magalhaes, Minister of Legislative and Parliamentarian Reform of Timor-Leste, who was earlier elected Chair of the APFSD, gave the keynote address, stressing the critical role of education in human development and in meeting all the SDGs. Ahmed



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ASPBAE's Rene Raya presented the highlights of the CSO country and regional spotlight reports.

Shamim Al Razi, Joint Secretary for Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education, Bangladesh, presented the progress and challenges in implementing SDG 4, citing the important role of civil society organisations (CSO) in SDG processes.

ASPBAE's Rene Raya presented the highlights of the CSO country and regional spotlight reports, discussing both the achievements made and challenges faced by governments in SDG 4 implementation, and the key recommendations to meet all targets on time. He noted that while most governments have rolled out the SDGs, including SDG 4, there is lack of clear financing commitments and weak engagement mechanisms for stakeholder participation in SDG processes, while critical gaps remain in data and monitoring, making it difficult to track particularly the excluded and those left behind.

The panel was followed by the launch of the GEMR 2019 Youth Report, with UNESCO presenting the outline and key messages, and two youth representatives from ASPBAE and ARROW sharing their reflections.

ASPBAE's youth representative, Peter Clinton Isaac Foause, emphatically pointed out that, *"not only should we be looking at the statistics, numerical codes and numbers, but also how they are connected to the stories and experiences of the young people, ensuring that these are connected to the stories of their land... and that the stories of people in other lands are learned and integrated in our educational systems."*

Overall, the ASPBAE delegation was satisfied with the outcome of the APFSD and the related events held prior to the forum, and noted that important breakthroughs were achieved which adequately prepares ASPBAE for its engagement in the forthcoming HLPF in July and the UN General Assembly in September 2019.



At the launch of the GEMR 2019 Youth Report, ASPBAE EC member, Peter Clinton Isaac Foause, emphasised that the realities of young people and their environment should be integrated in education systems.

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