

ASPBAE's collective advocacy for SDG4 and education in SDGs in UNESCAP virtual discussions

Virtual meeting on COVID-19 education response

30 March - 6 April, Virtual



The UNESCAP virtual discussions reviewed the progress of SDG implementation in the region with specific focus on the six entry points identified by the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) of 2019.

Working in silos will not deliver the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Working in solidarity with other civil society organizations (CSOs), movements, and sectors will broaden the advocacy on equitable, inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all (SDG4). This collaboration will also promote education as foundational to the realisation of the other SDGs.

Inspired by these lessons from its engagements across countries in the Asia Pacific and at the regional level, ASPBAE has been actively engaging in the regional SDG platforms. Since 2017, it has participated in the intergovernmental forum Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and importantly, in the CSO initiated forum Asia Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development (APPSD).

In 2020, the theme of the 7th APFSD is 'Accelerating action for and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific' which is in line with the theme of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). Every year, the APPFSD and APFSD are held in late March in Bangkok, Thailand. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the face-to-face conferences were cancelled and APFSD was conducted through virtual meetings.

In preparation for the APFSD, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) organised virtual discussions from 30 March – 6 April. The overall aim of the discussions was to inform the development of the regional input to the HLPF. They also reviewed the progress of SDG implementation in the region with specific focus on the six entry points identified by the Global Sustainable Development Report of 2019. There were seven virtual discussions that kicked-off on the overall theme followed by specific deliberations on the six entry points namely:

1. Human well-being and capabilities
2. Sustainable and just economies
3. Food systems and nutrition patterns
4. Enhancing power grid connectivity to achieve affordable & clean energy for all
5. Urban and peri-urban development
6. Global environment commons

Each meeting was attended by 200-230 participants coming from Member States, CSOs, UN system and international partners. Participation was by invitation. A total of 17 representatives from 13 ASPBAE members and 1 from the ASPBAE Secretariat had been invited. The organizations were: Afghanistan



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ASPBAE and its members from Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, Vanuatu, India, and PNG were invited to participate.

(NCE India); Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN); and ASPBAE.

National Education Coalition (ANEC); Alliance of CSOs in Tajikistan for Education (AOTE); Association for Education Development, Kyrgyzstan; Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka; Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands (COESI); Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP), Timor Leste; Civil Society Network for Education Reforms, Philippines (E-Net Philippines); Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh; Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Bangladesh; Global Action Nepal (GAN); Kolisen Blong Leftemap Education (KOBLE-Vanuatu); National Campaign for Education, Nepal (NCE Nepal); National Coalition for Education, India

SDG4 was discussed in the entry point “strengthening human well-being and capabilities.” Developing the capacities of people, working towards gender equality, and access to basic services for all, as well as ensuring transparent and accountable institutions, are at the heart of the transformative Agenda 2030. Under this entry point, SDG4 has been clustered with SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 2 – Zero Hunger, SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being, SDG 5 – Gender Equality, SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 15 – Life on Land and SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The virtual discussion on Entry Point 1 was held on 1 April 2020.

The Asia Pacific CSO Statement on entry point 1 was delivered by Sai Jyothir Mai Racherla of the Asia Pacific Resource and Research Center for Women (ARROW) on behalf of the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (APRCM). The statement included ASPBAE’s submission on education which stated that, *“While education is touted to make progress, gender disparities in education continue to persist within countries and across countries as well as by economic status, ethnicity, location, background or physical and mental abilities. Estimates point to at least 18.7 million children out of school in the region.”* The Statement made a strong recommendation calling for universal access to human wellbeing and capabilities through sound governance measures and multi stakeholder collaboration. Further it reiterated that the *“achievement of the SDGs is squarely dependent on addressing the structural and systemic barriers like patriarchy, caste system, communalism, institutionalised racism, class, that perpetuate inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression.”*



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In the same session, Enamul Hoque of CAMPE Bangladesh argued that education should be a priority strategy to develop the potential of people. Access to quality education and lifelong learning for all is

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young people in the SDGs. She cited that many young people have been neglected and their voices not been heard by governments.

Through written comments in the virtual discussion and other submissions, ASPBAE representative Cecilia (Thea) Soriano argued that much needs to be done to guarantee the wellbeing and strengthen the capacities of people in vulnerable and difficult circumstances. Inequity in education persists within and across countries that discriminates the most marginalised. The 'Leave no one behind' in education agenda is not progressing. Adult education promises a lot of potential in developing people's ability to act and transform their realities but is not given attention and support by many governments. Women remain neglected in literacy and skills development. Thea challenged the trend towards privatisation of education in Asia Pacific and the underinvestment of governments in strengthening the public education system. With the COVID-19 pandemic, she cited the imperative to ensure equitable access to online and distance learning as well as providing a role for Community Learning Centres as hubs for continuing learning and information dissemination on public health, community participation, human rights education and other community issues. ASPBAE, in its written submissions, reiterated that the current context reinforces the need for intergenerational learning through non-formal means of education where different members of families and communities can learn together on health and other issues affecting their lives. It emphasized the role of different sectors and the government in promoting such education and learning opportunities citing the "learning cities" as a framework that can be adopted.

ASPBAE members also attended the other virtual discussions such as on entry point 4 on Sustainable and Just Economies. According to the ASPBAE regional paper on women and skills, women dominate the informal economy where they comprise nearly half of the working population in agriculture in the Philippines, more than 70% in Indonesia, and 90% in India. However, the paper on entry point 4 made no reference to skills development for decent work of marginalized women. ASPBAE has called attention to this recommendation during the virtual discussion and in its submissions to APRCEM and UNESCAP.

only possible when governments mobilise the needed financing for education and ensure that there is equity in the use of education resources. He also shared that concerted efforts are needed to address the needs of those who are left behind, such as ensuring education and other social services for Rohingya refugees. He also raised the issue of education in the COVID-19 response.

Adivi Luitel of Global Action Nepal (GAN), as a youth representative, called attention to the need for governments to work with

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Adult education promises a lot of potential in developing people's ability to act and transform their realities but is not given attention and support by many governments. Women remain neglected in literacy and skills development.

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ASPBAE reiterated that the current context reinforces the need for intergenerational learning through non-formal means of education where different members of families and communities can learn together on health and other issues affecting their lives.

of action on biodiversity, ecosystems, disaster risk reduction and climate change.”

The virtual discussions enabled ASPBAE members to participate in the deliberations on the APFSD theme with less costs. However, the lack of opportunities to speak in the discussions limited their meaningful engagements. At the same time, the virtual meetings have no spaces for interactions and building rapport with Member States and other CSOs that normally happen during face-to-face conferences. How technology can facilitate these dialogues, especially in advocacy platforms, remains to be developed.

To access documents and CSO statements during the virtual discussions, please visit the [UNESCAP website](#).

With the closure of schools and because of the lockdown, there was a strong push for digital technology as the great equalizer for development. This was however challenged by many CSO representatives. They argued that there are huge digital divides, where mostly marginalised people have no access to and cannot afford digital technology.

It worth noting that in the entry point on Global environment commons, there was a recommendation on education in the UNESCAP paper where UNESCO contributed. The paper stated “*education systems and awareness campaigns should be strengthened to build public knowledge on the role of biodiversity and ecosystems for societies, and on the co-benefits*



With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to ensure equitable access to online and distance learning as well as providing a role for Community Learning Centres as hubs for continuing learning and information dissemination.

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