

Global meeting on education privatisation highlights threats to the right to education

7-10 September 2017, Kathmandu, Nepal

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At the global meeting in Kathmandu, civil society came together to coordinate actions to counter the education privatisation drive and offer concrete alternatives consistent with human rights law and the new education agenda.

NCE Nepal and ASPBAE co-hosted the Global Meeting of the Privatisation in Education and Human Rights Consortium (PEHRC) in Kathmandu. The Consortium is a global network of civil society organisations (CSOs) working together on issues around privatisation and the right to education. The Kathmandu meeting was the fourth in a series of global events organised by the Consortium. The previous meetings were held in September 2016 in Nairobi, October 2015 in London, and June 2014 in Geneva.

The meeting in Kathmandu culminated in a visit to communities to reflect on how privatisation impacts on the education of poor children and youth. Following the global meeting, ASPBAE organised a regional consultation of education coalitions in the Asia Pacific region held from

11-13 September 2017 (see article on regional consultation).

The events in Kathmandu took place amidst the rising privatisation and commercialisation of education around the world which prompted civil society groups to come together and coordinate actions to counter the privatisation drive and offer concrete alternatives consistent with human rights law and the new education agenda. The global meeting convened diverse stakeholders from 21 countries in Asia, Africa, the Arab Region, Latin America, Europe, and North America, including representatives of national education coalitions, international development NGOs, human rights organisations, academic institutions, youth groups, and other education advocates.

Policy makers, parliamentarians, senior educationists, former Ministers, human rights activists, representatives of the Human Rights Commission, and journalists participated in the inaugural session of the global meeting. Chief Guest for the occasion, Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister of Nepal, Honorable Gopal Man Shrestha, spoke of the need to strengthen public education, as envisioned by the constitution of Nepal, to ensure that the educational rights for all are upheld. Other speakers stressed that though free and compulsory education is a constitutional right in Nepal, privatisation in education has led to segregation in society, leading to questions regarding quality and access of public education in the country.



The meeting aimed to review progress of the various initiatives and the collective work undertaken, determine key strategies for joint action, and agree on mechanisms for effective coordination.

David Archer of ActionAid, speaking on behalf of the Consortium, reiterated the concerns of CSOs on the increasing privatisation of education, and shared the overall objective of the meeting. The meeting aimed to review progress of the various initiatives and the collective work undertaken by the Consortium members, determine the key strategies for joint action, and agree on mechanisms for effective coordination.

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The global meeting recognised breakthroughs achieved in exposing the negative impact of privatisation on education access and quality, and in obtaining favourable resolutions from human rights bodies, governments, and international forums.

The participants discussed a range of issues and key global developments related to privatisation of education. They noted with particular concern the global growth of commercial school chains, such as Bridge International Academies, the expansion of public private partnerships (PPPs) in many countries with inadequate regulation, the outsourcing of the public education system in Liberia, and the continuing support provided by financial institutions and development agencies to private actors in education. At the same time, the meeting also recognised the breakthroughs achieved in exposing the negative impact of privatisation on access and quality, and in obtaining favourable resolutions from Human Rights bodies, governments, and international forums.

The meeting also served as a learning event with resource persons and experts sharing the outcome of their studies on privatisation trends globally and in specific countries. Participants from the different global regions, likewise, shared the challenges and impact of privatisation in their respective areas.

As mentioned, the global meeting included field visits to public schools, trust schools, and low-fee private schools to witness first-hand the impact of privatisation on the public education system in Nepal. The field visit provided a platform for participants to identify the challenges related to low government spending on education, the poor quality of public education, and the closure of public schools giving way for private actors to come in. They also were able to observe, through their interactions with students, teachers, and school management committees, how private schools are able to charge high fees which include admission fees, laboratory fees, monthly dues, and other fees which poor families can hardly afford.

In its concluding sessions, the participants defined strategies and roles, and agreed on common positions on the key issues identified. The global meeting adopted a two-year strategy to guide its research agenda and priority actions for 2018 and 2019. For Nepali organisations and participants, the global meeting created a momentum for a stronger anti-education privatisation movement in the country, highlighting issues of segregation, discrimination, and disparity in society, and the threat to right to education.



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