

## Education coalitions reaffirm their commitment to education at regional consultation

Asia Pacific Regional Consultation for Education Advocates  
2-5 September 2018, Colombo, Sri Lanka



**ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, inaugurating the regional consultation with lighting of a lamp. The consultation was convened by ASPBAE in collaboration with the Coalition for Educational Development (CED) in Sri Lanka.**

The Asia Pacific Regional Consultation for Education Advocates gave ASPBAE's members an opportunity to engage in informative discussions on pertinent education issues, build their capacities, share their experiences, and highlight their advocacy efforts at the national level. ASPBAE members also benefited from the presence of regional and global partners, such as the Africa Network Campaign on Education For All (ANCEFA), Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE), Arab Campaign for Education (ACEA), International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), who shared their strategies and plans, providing relevant information to the coalitions to enhance their efforts in favour of right to education and lifelong learning.

The regional consultation, convened by ASPBAE in collaboration with the Coalition for Educational Development (CED) in Sri Lanka, aimed to offer an arena to strengthen capacities and share experiences on the work of Asia Pacific civil society advocates advancing the right to quality basic, youth, and adult education, especially within the spaces provided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG 4 (education goal in the SDGs) policy processes, with particular attention to:

- Strengthening the student and youth constituency within the movement, advancing the right to education and the SDG 4 agenda with a special focus on involving marginalised youth.
- Promoting marginalised women's education and empowerment agenda.
- Concretising SDG 4.7 in policy and programmes.
- Developing civil society organisation (CSO) analysis and positions to respond to emerging innovative financing instruments for education.
- Emergent issues and initiatives identified by the participants.



**The regional consultation was formally inaugurated by Sunil Hettiarachchi, Secretary, Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, who highlighted that education is necessary for harmonious human development.**

The Consultation also aimed to provide a platform for ASPBAE's members and partners to update on ASPBAE advocacy plans and strategies (2017-2020) and plan for coordinated action. More specifically-

- Review and affirm campaign plans for the 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) and its preparatory processes, including preparations for CSO Spotlight Reports and engagements around SDG Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).
- Sustain engagement with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), especially through CSO representation at the GPE Board to inform key GPE agenda and processes.

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**ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, addressing the regional consultation that brought together CSOs to work towards policy advocacy and the right to education in a more focused and concentrated manner.**

The four-day consultation was formally inaugurated by Sunil Hettiarachchi, Secretary, Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka. Shedding light on the local context, Mr. Hettiarachchi stated that despite several challenges the country faces, the literacy rate is at an impressive 92%. He reaffirmed the government's stance that education is a necessary tool for harmonious human development and schools play a crucial role in developing a knowledge-based society. The government is also focused on teachers' development.

Shantha Kulathunge, National Coordinator, CED Sri Lanka, offered inaugural remarks as well, representing the host organisation. At the

national level, CED has developed and submitted civil society proposals for educational reforms and policies taking its member organisations on board. It has been an active part of government consultations for the preparation of the SDG Volunteer National Review (VNR) and the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2018. Owing to the lack of space for CSOs, a separate group called the 'Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform' was formed to facilitate an inclusive transformation towards sustainable development where CED assisted in compiling the education sector analysis.

This regional consultation brought together CSOs to work towards policy advocacy and the right to education in a more focused and concentrated manner. Keeping in mind the global context, this consultation gave CSOs a platform to develop interventions for a new global agenda for education and to ensure that global commitments such as the SDGs are being translated on the ground at the country level.

ASPBAE, along with regional partners such as ANCEFA, CLADE, and ACEA, gave valuable insights on their preparation for the HLPF 2019 and how CSO participation can be enhanced in these formal spaces, giving them an opportunity to expand discussions with relevant policy makers and donors at the global level. ICAE introduced the Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (EASG), the NGO mechanism within the HLPF focused on education. ICAE shared the plans of the EASG for the High-level Political Forum 2019 and oriented the participants to the HLPF processes to inform their planning.



**Shantha Kulathunge, CED National Coordinator, highlighted the active role of CED in government consultations for the preparation of the SDG Volunteer National Review (VNR) and the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2018.**

The regional consultation in Colombo gave coalitions an opportunity to sustain engagement with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), especially through CSO representation on the GPE Board.

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**Eri Yamamoto, ASPBAE Executive Council member representing East Asia, at the consultation that aimed to offer an arena to strengthen capacities and share experiences on the work of Asia Pacific civil society advocates.**

Zehra Arshad, National Coordinator of the Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE), and Laura Giannecchini, Regional Coordinator at CLADE, serve as board members on GPE CSO 2 constituency, representing civil society. During this regional consultation, they highlighted the discussions and shared their reflections and analysis on the debates within the GPE Board, especially around the new Private Sector Strategy of GPE.

### Empowering marginalised women through education

Women and gender empowerment were at the centre of discussions as the outcomes of the ASPBAE Study on 'Policy and Financing Options for

Skills for Work of Marginalised Women' was discussed with country studies presented by Azad Foundation, India, and PEKKA (Women Headed Family Empowerment), Indonesia. Both research studies focused on poor and marginalised women.

Amrita Gupta, Director, Research, Advocacy and Communication from Azad Foundation, shared the India study findings. The study observed that while many policies exist to empower women, implementation faces a host of problems. Government skilling programmes have a gender-blind approach and are tilted in favour of men. Access to literacy skills are also affected by gender, caste, religion, and location, which adversely affects women. Azad Foundation argued that to be attentive to the needs of marginalised women, there should be flexibility in trainings to fit care work and family emergencies.

Nani Zulminarni, ASPBAE President and Director of PEKKA, discussed research findings from Indonesia. The study confirmed the poor participation of women in paid work. 84% males of working age are employed verses 51% of females. The study observed that the Indonesian government has indicated seriousness in poverty eradication and in expanding employment opportunities, especially for low-income groups.



**Solange Akpo of ANCEFA speaking at the consultation. ASPBAE, along with regional partners, gave valuable insights on their preparation for the HLFP 2019 and how CSO participation can be enhanced in these formal spaces.**

Similar to the findings of the India study, however, the Indonesia research observed that skilling programmes for women tend to overlook the constraints they face to access education and skill-building opportunities on account of their low status. The programmes tend to be short-term, one-off – without providing ongoing support for poor women.

PEKKA argues that women's economic empowerment requires a comprehensive approach where it would not be enough to just improve the business skills and economic conditions of women. It calls for

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**Amrita Gupta (Azad Foundation) sharing the India study findings of the ASPBAE study on 'Policy and Financing Options for Skills for Work of Marginalised Women'.**

that regional and sub-regional “thinking conclaves” will be organised around the findings of the study, bringing together practitioners, advocates, and academicians to validate and build on the findings of these studies. Capacity building efforts to support country-level advocacy will also be pursued.

efforts to also empower them socially to help them pursue loftier ambitions, and build their knowledge, critical awareness, and capabilities.

The consultation discussed promoting marginalised women’s empowerment with significant insights from the Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA) in collaboration with Hanoi Association for the Deaf, addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights being provided to deaf women.

ASPBAE’s Thea Soriano shared plans on ‘Advocating for Marginalised Women’s Education and Empowerment Agenda’. She announced

### Strengthening youth movements to advance the right to education

The regional meeting highlighted the experience around strengthening the student and youth constituency within the movement advancing the right to education. Examples from Bangladesh, Timor-Leste, and Nepal were brought to attention to showcase the exemplary efforts that are being made in organising and strengthening the voice of youth from marginalised communities in education and development policies and spaces.

Participants at the regional consultation deliberated on how to better engage youth and students to strengthen the education movement: The youth movement can be expanded by mobilising and engaging youth in policy discussions on education. They can be strengthened by being offered spaces to interact with each other openly and meaningfully. The youth must be provided opportunities and trainings to further enhance their skills. Providing education opportunities through formal and non-formal means is an important aspect which will allow the youth movements to grow exponentially.



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### Understanding the push for innovative financing in education

ASPBAE launched two publications during the consultation – ‘[Addressing Privatisation Using Human Rights Review Mechanisms](#)’, and ‘[The Privatisation Trap – A Policy Review of Education Privatisation in the Asia Pacific Region](#)’, analysing public-private partnerships in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Additionally, a primer on the current innovative financing instruments will be

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**ASPBAE's Thea Soriano shared plans on 'Advocating for Marginalised Women's Education and Empowerment Agenda' and mentioned that announced that regional and sub-regional "thinking conclaves" will be organised around the findings of the study.**

1 from the GPE Multiplier for every USD 3 raised in new external funds. In the Asia Pacific, this fund targets the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Impact bonds are also gaining greater currency, where delivery of social services is initially funded by investors and when impact is met through an evaluation, funding is provided through a government or donor agency (results-based financing). Education Cannot Wait is another initiative designed to help reposition education as a priority during emergencies which impacts lower and middle-income countries with humanitarian emergencies targets. Until March 2018, USD 82 million in 14 countries was disbursed. In the Asia Pacific region, the funds were disbursed to Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

David Archer, a member of the Board of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and Head of Participation and Public Services, ActionAid International, argued that there is a tendency to think more about international financing and innovative financing instruments at the expense of a focus on shoring up domestic financing. Domestic resource mobilisation is central as domestic resources support the lion share of education financing needs. David went on to highlight the 4-S framework to appraise domestic resource mobilisation: Share, Size, Sensitivity, and Scrutiny of national budgets. In Asian countries, the government share for education is significantly low and very few meet the benchmark 20% share of education in national spending. There is a massive opportunity to increase education financing by increasing this share.

Commenting on the innovative funding instruments, David shared the critique by GCE of the International Financing Facility for Education (IFFEd). Although premised on catalyzing more low-interest loans for education, it holds a clear danger of increasing the indebtedness of lower-middle

developed which will discuss the innovative financing mechanisms of low and lower-middle income governments.

A session in the consultation was devoted to gaining a better understanding of 'innovative financing'. The more prominent innovative financing mechanisms in education being actively pushed include the International Financing Facility for Education (IFFEd), aimed at generating new funding by combining guarantees and grants to create affordable loans to countries to finance education. The GPE multiplier fund is also a mechanism in innovative financing – the purpose of which is to catalyse more and better funds for education. Under this initiative, countries can access USD



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**ASPBAE's Helen Dabu (R) and Bashir Khaliqi from the Afghanistan education coalition (ANAFAE) sharing an energetic moment at the regional consultation.**

income countries, many of whom are already in high or moderate debt distress. Further, loan mechanisms do not provide predictable and sustainable financing sources that help governments make the long-term investments that are needed to improve education.

### Understanding and concretising SDG 4.7

SDG 4.7 states that by 2030, “ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” Participants agreed that SDG 4.7 was

very broad in its nature and not easy to comprehend or respond to. Due to this, governments have a low political will where they are likely to implement it in a narrow way. In his presentation, Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara, ASPBAE’s Immediate Past President, explained SDG 4.7 in an interactive and engaging way to help participants comprehend its complex nature.

Robbie stressed that many of the core elements of SDG 4.7, including human rights, gender equality, as well as health and well-being, are already embedded in national education policies. The target, therefore, is concerned not only with acquisition of subject knowledge, but also the development of social and emotional skills needed to apply this knowledge. In the discussion, it was highlighted that SDG 4.7 must be mainstreamed and operationalised from early childhood through higher education and in non-formal education for children, adolescents, youth, and adults. It also recognised the importance of partnership and multi-sectoral cooperation in achieving SDG 4.7. Essentially, governments are the ultimate duty-bearers with an obligation to ensure appropriate policies and adequate resources.



**Jose Roberto Guevara, ASPBAE's Immediate Past President, led a session on SDG 4.7 where he stressed that many of its core elements, including human rights, gender equality, and health and well-being, are already embedded in national education policies.**

Participants were briefed on the plans for the upcoming World Assembly of GCE which will give national civil society coalitions, regional networks, and international networks an opportunity to discuss key achievements and challenges of the campaign since 2015. The global forum will also serve as a platform to discuss emerging global issues, to agree and clarify collective positions, and set priorities and direction for the coming period of 2019-2022. The GCE World Assembly will host the first Youth Caucus event since the establishment of the GCE movement where young education activists from all

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over the world will discuss and debate on issues around the education sector. The participation process for the GCE World Assembly was highlighted for the benefit of the coalitions so advocacy agendas can be incorporated into the GCE plans.

The regional consultation ended on a high note with coalitions reaffirming their commitment to education, working on the ground, and engaging key stakeholders for effective change.



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