

## Bringing human rights and equity to the fore in education financing

Regional Consultation on Education Financing and Privatisation in the Asia Pacific

29-31 August 2016, Bangkok, Thailand



**The Regional Consultation aimed to update on the SDGs, contribute to the Human Rights Guiding Principles, and agree on national and regional action plans on education financing and privatisation.**

ASPBAE, in cooperation with the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR), the Open Society Foundations (OSF), and the Right to Education Project (RTE Project), organised a 'Regional Consultation on Education Privatisation in the Asia Pacific' in Bangkok. The consultation was organised in the context of the rising trend of privatisation and commercialisation of education in the region and globally, and in recognition of the recent resolutions and reviews of UN Human Rights bodies that call on Member States to "address any negative impacts of the commercialisation of education" and to put in place a regulatory framework to monitor private education providers.

The overall objectives of the consultation were –

1. Update on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly issues relevant to financing, equity, and partnership
2. Discuss, solicit feedback, and contribute to the development of Human Rights Guiding Principles on the Role of States and Non-State actors in the Provision of Education
3. Agree on next steps – national and regional action plans, strategies in pursuing the advocacy initiatives on education financing and privatisation issues in the context of the SDG/Education 2030 and existing international human rights law.

In his welcoming remarks, ASPBAE's Rene Raya highlighted several concerns related to the development goals, including the challenges of implementing the SDGs, critical gaps in financing, indicators that do not fully capture the essence of the development goals, and the rise of privatisation under the guise of partnerships, amongst others.

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, led a session dedicated to providing updates on the SDGs. David Atchoarena, Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO Paris; Anjela Taneja, Head of Policy, Global Campaign for Education (GCE); and Wardarina, Asia Pacific Regional CSOs Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) were the panellists for the session. In his presentation, David Atchoarena provided a review of the broad framework of the SDG goals. He stressed the importance of having a universal agenda, relevant for all countries, that is inclusive and focuses on quality and equity. He informed that, following the agreements in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, UNESCO has initiated the convening of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee as the global mechanism for coordination of the follow up work as defined in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, advancing the education-related goal and targets (SDG4) and other commitments to education within the overall SDG agenda. The Steering Committee provides overall guidance and monitors the processes that are in place at different levels, including the global level in this regard. Civil society is fully represented in the SDG 4-Education 2030 Steering Committee.



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**ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, led a session dedicated to providing updates on the SDGs.**

GCE's Anjela Taneja addressed the trends in financing of the SDGs and SDG 4. She highlighted the USD39 billion annual financing gap for providing quality education from the pre-primary to the upper secondary level if current levels of spending by governments are maintained. She stressed that governments were not doing enough in terms of investments for education and in strengthening the public education systems that could guarantee the right to education and meet the SDG 4 targets. Anjela stressed that current financing frameworks of the SDGs have ignored adult literacy and adult education and this trend should be reversed. She underscored that to meet the funding gap, new monies have been pledged for

education; that new pledges to education should not double-count commitments or dip into commitments already earlier made to education or humanitarian aid.

Wardarina, of APCREM, spoke about role of the private sector and concerns around public private partnerships. She identified three missing pillars of the SDGS - (1) Accountability – weak voluntary processes for national reviews (2) Financing – failure of governments to commit to addressing imbalances in global financial systems, and (3) No reforms of global financial systems. Wardarina highlighted the role of civil society organisations in pushing for accountability of multi-stakeholder partnerships. She urged that multi-stakeholder partnerships should - be aligned to national and local needs, recommit to putting people at the centre, recognise the notion of power based on mutual respect and solidarity, and ensure an accountability framework by having partnerships with clear criteria. Proposing the way forward, Wardarina stressed the need for national level monitoring and advocacy, and participation in future regional and international advocacy opportunities.



**UNESCO's David Atchoarena (L) provided a review of the broad framework of the SDG goals. GCE's Anjela Taneja (centre) addressed the trends in financing of the SDGs and SDG 4. Wardarina (R) of APCREM spoke about role of the private sector and concerns around public private partnerships.**



**The Consultation was an opportunity for participants to exchange information and experiences on the national rollout of the SDGs and its financing implications.**

Participants were then divided in to sub-regional groups where they exchanged information and experiences on the national rollout of the SDGs and its financing implications. They discussed issues such as the status of the SDG rollout and incorporation of these into education sector plans, SDG financing commitments and reflections in national budgets, initiatives to adopt the SDG indicators at the national level, engagement of coalitions or organisations in the SDG rollout and financing, and possible joint actions and initiatives that coalitions can take together.

Tanvir Muntasim, International Policy Manager, Education, ActionAid International, and ASPBAE's Rene Raya co-

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chaired a session on 'Framework Setting for an Equity Lens for Financing the SDGs'. This session involved a panel presentation where national education coalitions shared examples of State initiatives and civil society advocacy on financing for equity in education. The panellists were coalition representatives from the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Cambodia. Participants then formed groups to discuss examples of equitable resource mobilisation and budget provisions for hard-to-reach and marginalised groups in their countries and to propose principles or a framework for equity-based financing of education. Some of the main points of the group discussions were the need to have policies that support equity-based financing, the need for flexible provisions for education programming or infrastructure (e.g. residential schools in conflict areas), importance of equity-sensitive data, and the need for participatory and decentralised decision-making processes.



**Tanvir Muntasim of ActionAid provided an overview of global trends and challenges in education privatisation. He discussed the effect of the involvement of the private sector in education and the expectation that it would deliver people from the challenges of illiteracy.**



**Ram Gaire of NCE Nepal spoke on the further segregation of education and discrimination against girls as some of the ill effects of education privatisation in Nepal.**

commitment to basic rights but are so far, not backed by adequate financial allocations. He discussed the effect of the involvement of the private sector in education and the expectation that it would deliver people from the challenges of illiteracy. He also touched on the presence of international and philanthropic donors and highlighted some of the key emerging issues related to education - equity and coverage do not reach marginalised/disadvantaged groups, lack of evidence to support the idea of the advantages of private schools, proliferation of low cost and low quality private schools with non-qualified teachers, and lack of accountability.

Representatives of 3 national education coalitions - Ram Gaire (NCE Nepal), Addie Unsi (E-Net Philippines), and

The third day of the Workshop was dedicated to an expanded consultation with international NGOs, human rights organisations, experts, UN agencies, and Thai-based NGOs on a draft set of Guiding Principles on Private sector participation in education from a right to education perspective. Providing the context for the discussions on the draft Guidelines, the consultation began with a session on 'Global privatisation trends and country studies from the Asia-Pacific region', where Tanvir Muntasim provided an overview of global trends and challenges in education privatisation. He stated that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), while exhorting human rights, were defeated by modes of implementation and limited rights to only development goals, which led to skewed educational systems and more inequality. The SDGs saw an increased



**Addie Unsi, of E-Net Philippines stated that the alternative human rights report of the Philippines underscored that less than 1% of the Philippine education budget goes to marginalised groups. In contrast, subsidies to private schools have been increasing consistently.**

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**Nida Mushtaq of PCE Pakistan highlighted the questionable role of bilateral and multilateral donors in education, and absence of regulations for private schools.**

Nida Mushtaq (PCE Pakistan) – shared findings of ‘Parallel HR Reports Focusing on Education Privatisation’. Some issues that emerged were a decrease in government budgets for education, inefficiency in the implementation of policies, large number of dropouts and low completion rates among children, the questionable role of bilateral and multilateral donors in education, and absence of regulations for private schools.

The discussions on a civil society initiated proposal on Human Rights Guiding Principles on the Role of States and Non-State actors in the Provision of Education focused on an in depth introduction to the draft Guidelines and their premises, feedback from the participants to improve the draft document, and joint reflections mapping out the possible next steps towards the popularisation and finalisation of the Guidelines. Delphine Dorsi, Right to Education Project (RTE Project), Mireille de Koning, Open Society Foundations (OSF), and Sylvain Aubry, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR), led the discussions on the Guiding Principles. Participants were organised into smaller discussion groups to give their comments and feedback on the draft.

Delphine Dorsi gave participants a background of the RTE Project before introducing the development of RTE indicators (200 indicators). She highlighted the importance of RTE indicators to - measure the realisation of RTE, strengthen advocacy work, and allow for better accountability. Delphine then demonstrated how to access the indicators online. She detailed the next steps including improving the list of Indicators, supporting civil society organisations in monitoring the right to education, and using the indicators to monitor progress towards the SDGs.

In the concluding session of the consultation, ASPBAE’s Cecilia Soriano detailed out regional actions and next steps. She stressed the need to influence regional SDG/SDG 4 platforms and the need to also create regional CSO-led spaces to monitor the SDGs and SDG 4, as a means to powerfully influence and engage sub-regional and intergovernmental bodies. Drawing from the discussions and recommendation of the participants, she identified a four-point action plan for financing equity in SDG 4 – (1) research, case studies, monitoring (2) capacity development, including the development of a manual/tools on equitable financing for education (3) budget analysis, tracking, and (4) lobbying, policy engagement, and public advocacy. Some suggestions for joint action related to equity-based financing included joint research, developing a policy brief/statement on equity-based financing, and lobbying within the SDG and SDG 4 regional and sub-regional spaces (e.g. SAARC, ASEAN).



**Mireille de Koning (seen here), OSF, Delphine Dorsi, RTE Project, & Sylvain Aubry, GI-ESCR, led a discussion & feedback sessions on the Human Rights Guiding Principles on the Role of States and Non-State actors in the Provision of Education.**

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Participants of the consultation included ASPBAE member national education coalitions, international education networks, international NGOs and human rights organisations, and representatives from UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO Paris, UNICEF and other UN Agencies.

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