The Asia Pacific Regional Consultation of Education Advocates was hosted by ASPBAE in collaboration with the Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA) in Da Nang. The four-day consultation provided ASPBAE members and education coalitions an opportunity to engage in diverse and distinct conversations around education.

The Regional Consultation was attended by 18 national education coalitions and representatives from regional and global partner organisations, such as the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE), Arab Campaign for Education (ACEA), Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE). Representatives from CLADE, ActionAid International, and Oxfam Ibis also participated virtually, giving their inputs via Skype.

The plenary sessions and the consequent discussions were based on the following objectives:

- Sustain the space for learning and experience-sharing and strengthen capacities of Asia Pacific advocates to advance the right to quality basic, youth and adult education
- Provide a platform for ASPBAE, its members and partners within the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to update on advocacy plans and jointly strategise for coordinated action
- Discuss CSEF end-of-phase III reporting, stock-taking, and planning for the new funding mechanism, Advocacy and Social Accountability (ASA)

The event commenced after a brief introduction by Maria Khan, ASPBAE Secretary-General, who welcomed Tran Xuan Nhi, President of the Board of VAEFA. Mr. Nhi welcomed the participants to Da Nang and offered an overview of the education context in the country. He stated that the literacy rate of Vietnam is 97.4% and highlighted that accessibility of education is now on the rise as there are increased facilities in rural areas, satellite classes, schools in remote areas, and boarding schools that are available in areas with ethnic minorities. Mr. Nhi also addressed the challenges faced by VAEFA. These include the difficulty to ensure equity and inclusion for people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and migrants. School related gender-based violence still remains a crucial issue in many areas. Education also lacks attention and investment from the government.
Followed by Mr. Nhi’s introduction, Nguyen Kim Anh, National Coordinator of VAEFA, introduced the work of the coalition and highlighted its policy wins, maintaining that national, regional and global connections and cooperation are essential for policy advocacy. VAEFA’s continued advocacy with the government has led to several policy wins. The coalition advocated with the government on inclusive education, stating that people with autism should be entitled to the support scheme and benefits for people with disability. They also advocated for the addition of sign language in the Revised Education Law. As a result of this advocacy, the government recognised autism as a type of disability and included sign language and braille in Article 11 of the Revised Education Law.

Several thematic topics were discussed at the Regional Consultation, including responding to education challenges in emergencies, strengthening civil society analysis to respond to challenges in education financing, such as the private sector involvement in education. A session was dedicated for the CSO representatives in the Board of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to update the CSO2 constituency from the Asia Pacific on salient issues within GPE and consult on ongoing concerns. The consultation also featured a capacity building session on gender in and through education. ASPBAE representatives shared the success generated from participation in regional and global events such as the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2019 and discussed actions taken during the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM). Along with this, the efforts of the coalitions were also highlighted including, the civil society spotlight reports on SDG4 and the best practices of the coalitions. Discussions also revolved around planning for proposals for the new funding mechanism i.e. Education Out Loud.

Advancing the right to quality basic, youth and adult education within the spaces provided by the SDGs and SDG 4 policy processes

ASPBAE’s Thea Soriano highlighted the wins, challenges, and lessons in advocacy for SDG 4 at the HLPF 2019 - which is the main UN platform on sustainable development. The overall theme of HLPF was ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’. This was an important forum to attend in 2019 since SDG 4 - Quality Education was under review along with other SDGs including SDG 8 – decent work and inclusive economy, SDG 10 – reduced inequalities, SDG 13 – climate action, SDG 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG 17 – partnerships. One of the main issues that came forward during the HLPF was the disconnect
between global and regional architecture. It was increasingly recognised that regional agreements and discussions should be accorded more weight in the global processes and agreements. The outcomes from regional dialogues should be tackled in the global processes, and country Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) should be discussed at the regional level as well. It was noted that CSOs need to be a part of these processes as critical stakeholders in the achievement of the SDGs. Another aspect of the presentation highlighted the key messages on SDG4 in the Asia Pacific Forum of Sustainable Development (APFSD) which stated the need to accelerate efforts to remove systemic barriers, advocate for financing equity, increase investment in data, track inequalities in education and ensure stakeholder participation in all phases of SDG4 implementation.

ASPBAE’s Rene Raya highlighted the CSO Spotlight Reports which were launched at the HLPF 2019. These reports serve as standalone or alternatives to the official Government reports on SDG 4 or the Volunteer National Reviews (VNRs). In 2019, national education coalitions and ASPBAE members prepared sixteen country Spotlight reports and two regional reports - a synthesis of the individual country Spotlight Report findings and an Explainer on Policy and Financing Options for Skills for Work of Marginalised Women. By 2019, 34 countries from the Asia Pacific have submitted their VNRs, with the Philippines and Indonesia submitting them for the second time. The Spotlight Reports serve a great purpose as ASPBAE and the coalitions have used them in national and international advocacy engagements including in national forums and dialogues on VNRs and SDGs.

The 16 Spotlight Reports highlighted that the SDG 4 rollout processes in the Asia Pacific countries have been underway but in varying stages in different countries. All the countries have SDG committees but only five (5) out of the 16 reviewed are engaging the government bodies at the highest level. Most of the countries have an SDG Policy Framework and Implementation Plan in place and they are aligning the SDGs with the Education Sector Plans. 14 of the 16 countries have also developed indicator framework indicators and in
seven (7) countries, the Education Ministries are playing a larger role in the process with focal persons identified.

While addressing the shortcomings in the rollout process, it was identified that few countries have legislation in place and fewer are engaged with the parliamentary committees on SDG 4. In many instances, the critical indicators of the SDGs were not included in the discussions and CSOs noted that the governments are still working out the numerical targets. Raya emphasised on the fact that there is a need to institutionalize the coordination mechanisms between governments and CSOs as only five (5) countries have such mechanisms. The CSOs also identified financing as the most critical shortfall in the SDG rollout. It was noted that the current resources are not enough, there is no estimate of the financial requirements for SDG 4. It was also observed that there is no firm commitment from the government to increase budget for SDGs and no clear financing strategy as to how this will be achieved. The CSOs played a significant role in the rollout of the SDGs and engaged with the government but it was noted that the government consultations were not held on a regular basis and were merely held for validation of the government.

Giovanna Mode, Policy Analyst, CLADE, highlighted what the SDG advocates need to do in the future and identified some of the issues they should be attentive to. Focusing on the opportunities that the HLPF 2019 presented, Giovanna stressed that 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have captured the attention of member states, civil society, UN system and local governments. In this context, it is important to spread the message that without SDG 4 there is no 2030 Agenda. HLPF also provides an opportunity to connect local, national and global processes which can be strengthened by engaging other sectors, maintaining the connection between SDGs with human rights bodies. She stated that advocates can look at when their countries will be under review and consider being present in order to strategise advocacy actions around that forum. She concluded that even with limitations, SDGs and HLPF are crucial tools to advance not only SDG4, but human rights, democracy, and peace as well.

Responding to education challenges in emergencies and crisis

The regional consultation also featured a session on education challenges in emergencies and crisis. The shifting political situations and the rise of crisis in different countries have had an adverse impact on education in many of these cases, which were reflected by the members of the plenary session.
Elise Radisone of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) emphasised steps the organisation is taking to ensure the right to education in all contexts of emergencies and crises. INEE has 15,000 individual members and operates in 190 countries. Elise shared the context on education in emergencies stating that 61% of refugee children attend primary school compared to global average of 92%. At the secondary level, this figure drops to 23% compared to 84% globally and only 1% of refugees attend university compared 37% students globally. Despite this great discrepancy in numbers, there are a few promising steps that have been taken in the right direction. This includes the alignment of the education clusters strategies with the national education plans. 1.3 million children were reached through the Education Cannot Wait Fund (2016) and development-oriented donors have significantly increased their work in fragile and crisis-affected contexts. The EU has also committed to increase education funding up to 10% of their humanitarian budget while the 2018 G7 Charlevoix Declaration focused on closing the gender gap and humanitarian-development nexus.

To better concretise INEE work and advocacies are the country level, Elise also described the steps that INEE is taking in collaboration with the government in Myanmar to address the issue of Education in Emergencies (EiE).

INEE is also taking targeted actions which includes the motivating, supporting and paying teachers, improving gender equality, providing Psycho-Social Support (PSS) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and providing greater protection for education.

Under these targeted actions, INEE has made recommendations to crisis-affected and host governments to recruit qualified teachers with decent pay and reasonable working conditions, and to include refugee and displaced teachers in camps or host nation’s teacher workforce to motivate, support, and pay teachers. On improving gender equality, INEE proposed that government should adopt gender-responsive policies and programmes to address school-related Gender Based Violence, to promote multisectoral collaboration to improve access to and quality of education for girls. With reference to providing PSS and SEL, INEE recommended to the government to define education outcomes for children and youth and to incorporate PSS and SEL into teachers’ professional development programmes. Referring to providing greater protection for education, INEE recommended that governments need to sign and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and incorporate the guidelines for the protection of schools and universities from military
use into legislation and military doctrine. The government should also systematically investigate attacks on education and prosecute perpetrators and respond to attacks on education.

Recommendations were also made to the donors under these targeted actions to provide multi-year funding to establish guidelines for teachers’ recruitment management and professional development. For improving gender equality, they should take steps to strengthen collaboration to promote action that addresses gender equality in EiE. Knowledge management systems should also be developed to facilitate wider dissemination of proven interventions that address support gender responsive programming. With reference to PSS and SEL, donors need to fund and monitor programmes that define education outcomes and develop evidence-based programming to achieve these outcomes. Regarding protection of education, donors need to systematically underline the need to adhere to existing international laws that protect education and strengthen international norms and standards, especially in their recipient countries.

For each of these targeted actions, INEE has developed detailed resources with strategies. These resources assist in identifying the problems and proposed solutions which fall under these targeted actions.

Nani Zulminarni, President of ASPBAE and Director of PEKKA addressed the issue of gender-responsive education in contexts of emergencies and crisis. In her presentation, she stated that need based education should be introduced as women, girls, men and boys are different in many ways. There should be inclusive processes, equal opportunities and access to resources. Barriers and discrimination against particular gender in leadership roles should be dismantled.

The Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC) also discussed the establishment of the Education in Emergency Working Group (EiEWG) which is actively working towards improving education services in emergencies. The EiEWG conducts meetings that are chaired by the Ministry of Education (MoE), and co-chaired by UNICEF and Save the Children. The EiEWG has established community-based schools (CBSs) and temporary classrooms (TCs) with WASH facilities, provided learning kits for students, teaching kits for teachers and classroom kits. They focus on the concept of safe schools and provide temporary classrooms and rehabilitation of the damaged schools. In Afghanistan, the attacks on schools tripled between 2017 and 2018 and the
security situation left more than 1,000 schools closed by the end of 2018, denying half a million children their right to education.

Refat Sabbah, General Secretary of the Arab Coalition for Education for All (ACEA), stated that there are over 47 million people across the Arab region affected by conflict and crises according to UNESCO. This is not only an ongoing humanitarian crisis, it is a development one, affecting every part of society, especially the young generations. In order to address the challenges brought forth by conflict and to cater to education, ACEA builds the capacity of its members on SDG 4 and how they can utilise the available mechanisms to monitor the achievement. In addition, ACEA gives guidance as to how to participate in the implementation and follow up processes of SDG 4. In 2017, ACEA included an intensive capacity building program for member coalitions on topics relevant to SDG4 with more focus on financing education. They also succeeded to mobilise all community actors and promoted networking among civil society organisations, and sharing experiences at the local, regional and international levels.

Education financing

Education financing has been an important theme which has been discussed in detail in regional consultations for the last few years, as new insights on this technical matter keep emerging. This year, the aim was to strengthen CSO analysis and positions to respond to challenges in education financing especially on rising private sector involvement in education. Ashina Mtsumi, Policy and Legal Officer at GI-ESCR, gave an overview of the Abidjan Principles – a document which outlines the obligations of states to provide public education and to regulate private sector involvement in education. In her presentation, Ashina emphasised on the guiding principles of the Abidjan Principles and stated that they are necessary to move beyond rhetoric on the right to education. They are also necessary to respond to the ideology of criticism, to develop a robust narrative and build a common position on these principles. These principles reflect on implementing existing human rights law and giving a coherent understanding of principles in education necessary for just and dignified societies. Participants found it interesting that the Abidjan principles have been adopted by 55 experts so far, of which over 60% are from the Global South, and over 60% women. The Abidjan Principles are also open to endorsement and have been adopted and recognised by the UN Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

David Archer, Head of Participation and Public Services at ActionAid International, contributed to the discussion on education financing via Skype. While commenting on the trends in private sector involvement on education, he stated that when looking at financing, it is important to look at the bigger picture first and address the issue of chronic
underfunding of education. This continues to be a crucial problem which needs to be addressed as governments, especially in Asia, continue to fall short on their commitment to education.

Assessing the trends in private sector involvement, there are three crucial factors that need to be considered - the first being the domestic tax base. It has been observed that the domestic tax base in many low-income countries is skewed. Ideally, the tax to GDP ratio should be a minimum of 20% but many governments are falling short on this. To counter this, there is a need to work with activists in other sectors to explore the case of expanding the tax base of the country as tax needs to be collected in a progressive and gender responsive way. Another critical issue that David discussed was the rising debt crisis especially debt that is illegitimate or accrued in non-transparent ways. This is an issue that the governments are facing as they have to service foreign debt first before spending on public services. The debt crisis is rapidly getting worse which drastically affects the education services. The third critical issue mentioned was the “wage bill containment,” a policy that the International Monetary Fund is imposing on countries where governments cannot spend above a certain amount on services which primarily affects the education and health workers.

David also stated that a number of organisations are using education as a means of building profit by funding primarily for-profit organisations. The best measure that can be taken against this is to strengthen the public sector. Archer stated that the GPE is a very useful platform which can be utilised to generate policy discussions that are in favour of education as a public service. There has been a debate in the GPE board meetings on pushing back the private sector involvement in provision of services. With representatives of the governments and CSO representatives present in the GPE forums, there is a possibility of navigating policy spaces to ensure that education does not become a commodity that few can afford.

Consultation on the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

The Regional Consultation also hosted a session aimed at sustaining a strong engagement with GPE especially through CSO representation at the GPE Board and Committees. Tanvir Muntasim, Civil Society and Mutual Accountability Education Specialist at GPE, shared the GPE Secretariat updates including the GPE Strategic Planning process and the Effective Partnership Roll-out (EPR) programme. Tanvir stated that the EPR was a suite of recommendations and decisions which aimed to achieve significant improvements in the GPE country level model, including strengthened mutual accountability and government ownership, major rebalancing and strengthening of the partnership.

In his presentation, Tanvir discussed the key questions...
Participants discussed funding mechanisms of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and implications for coalitions.

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In another part of the presentation, the GPE Strategic Plan was highlighted responding to the question of how GPE can best leverage their model and resources to get every child in school and learning. The theory of change was discussed along with GPE strategy development process with its timelines.

A closed session with the CSO constituency was also held where the GPE CSO 2 Board Representatives, Camilla Croso (Coordinator-General, CLADE) and Maria Khan (ASPBAE Secretary-General) shared updates and reflections on key GPE agenda including decisions and discussions arising from the GPE Board Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden. The Board Representatives also shared the updates going into the GPE Board meeting in December 2019 to further sustain this engagement. The closed sessions featured a discussion among the CSO constituency to prepare inputs for the GPE strategic planning process.

**Capacity building training on gender in and through education**

Using the expertise of ASPBAE’s President, Nani Zulminarni, and ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South and Central Asia, Meenu Vadera, a capacity building session was conducted to orient the participants on ways of “engendering” their work. The session aimed to build on the existing understanding of organisations on issues such as gender and education, gender and youth, gender-response budgeting and gender-based strategic planning among other themes. This capacity building session also discussed the tools which can be used for socio-economic gender analysis, barriers that women and girls face in education and how organisations can assess if gender needs to be

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A session on gender in education, led by ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, and ASPBAE EC Member, Meenu Vadera, aimed to build on understanding of issues such as gender and education, gender and youth, and gender-responsive budgeting. The training also discussed the spotlight reports and proposals that the coalitions submitted from a gender perspective, analyzing the trends that were seen in both the documents. The training also included an element of developing a theory of change from the perspective of gender – an exercise which the coalitions benefitted from as they shared that they previously had limited knowledge of gender and will be incorporating these concepts in their future advocacy efforts.

Wrapping up CSEF and preparing for ‘Education out Loud’

The consultation also had an in-depth discussion on the end of Civil Society Education Fund reporting and stock-taking conducted by Edward Chikonyora, Grants and Finance Manager, GCE, and Wolfgang Leumer, CSEF Global Coordinator. The presentations focused on finance reporting and management, and plans related to the documentation of the CSEF experience including the end of project evaluation.

Muntasim Tanvir of GPE and Antonio Cabral from Oxfam Ibis led a discussion introducing the funding modalities of Operations Component 1 (OC1) of the new funding facility for civil society advocacy, Education Out Loud (EOL). They oriented the coalitions on the newly released guidelines for grant application under Education Out Loud, discussing the timelines, approval procedures and preparations that the coalitions will have to undertake in accessing the grant. Antonio also advised that the Oxfam Ibis Grant Agent office for the Asia Pacific will be located in Kathmandu, Nepal, and will be operational from September 2019.

Sharing advocacy plans for future action

Advocacy plans for the upcoming year were also discussed in depth by both the regional and global organisations. ASPBAE representatives shared that they will continue to pressure governments to fulfill the obligation to realise free quality public education for all and full agenda of SDG 4. ASPBAE will continue to lobby governments to deliver on the full SDG 4 agenda as they aim to participate in the 5th Asia Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 and ensure CSO participation in the VNR review process for HLPF 2020. The representative from CLADE shared their plans as they aim to have permanent dialogue with different regional stakeholders including CSOs, education ministries, parliamentarians, students, teachers, academics with a combination of national, regional and international as the starting point of all actions. ACEA stated that they aim to contribute to the UNESCO roadmap, framework of action, and the

Wolfgang Leumer, CSEF Global Coordinator on the end of Civil Society Education Fund finance reporting, management, and stock-taking.
revision of the implementation progress of SDG 4 at regional level by giving more consideration to the emergency context. They also aim to use the VNR and spotlight reports as essential tools to monitor education in each country. Besides this, they aim to build the forthcoming strategy on social accountability by focusing on key actors especially in the absence of government in many countries under emergency in order to influence educational policies in the respective areas.

Participants also took part in open space discussions around multiple topics identified by the participants on fake news, gender, sexuality, and the right to education, embedding SDG 4.7 framework in government policies to counter various forms of extremism and discrimination, mobilising domestic resources for education, and disability inclusion in education.