

Equity and inclusion, quality teaching and learning, and education financing emerge big issues at regional education meeting

5th Asia Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED 5)
1-3 October 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



The 5th Asia Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED) saw the strong and very vocal participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Asia Pacific, many of them ASPBAE members. Amidst a group of over 250 participants including government representatives, UN officials, NGOs, and academics, CSOs called for strong financial commitments to ensure universal access to 12 years of free, publicly-funded quality primary and secondary education. They called for governments to end years of neglect of adult literacy and accelerate efforts to set in place legislative frameworks and policies ensuring publicly-funded youth and adult literacy programmes to be run in collaboration with other stakeholders and local communities, ensuring quality provisioning and leaving no one behind. There was also a call for holistic and inclusive education and stronger measures to end all forms of discrimination, including those based on gender.

Amongst ASPBAE's membership, there was active participation of 18 national education coalitions and another 3 adult education organisations, with representation from the youth and persons with disabilities.

APMED 5, with the theme – *Delivering Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in the Era of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development* – focused on SDG 4.1 (primary and secondary education) and SDG 4.6 (youth and adult literacy and numeracy) and included several plenary and parallel sessions.

In his opening address, Shigeru Aoyagi, Director, UNESCO Bangkok, highlighted the challenges related to access to education of children, youth and adults, “*Many children in lower secondary education are*

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Shigeru Aoyagi, Director, UNESCO Bangkok

not proficient in reading and in mathematics. In the Asia Pacific, there are 258 million out-of-school children at primary and lower secondary levels and 20 million out-of-school children at the primary level. Of the 773 million youth and adults world-wide who cannot read and write, 446 million are in the Asia Pacific.” He warned that, “We are not on track. If we continue, we will never see results. We have to come up with concrete recommendations on how we can address the issue of out-of-school children, youth, and adults, especially those from marginalised communities”. The UNESCO-Bangkok Director concluded his address by stressing that

the education sector has been slow in catching up with global trends. He encouraged APMED 5 participants to look at ways which lend to accelerated efforts to remove values that hinder equity, inclusion, and equality in education. He called for recommendations that lead to diversifying learning outcomes in formal and non-formal education systems to eradicate illiteracy, tailored to learning needs and linked to skills development for decent work.

Regional Director, UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF EAPRO), Karen Hulshof, offered three strategies to tackle the learning crisis – (1) Strengthen and invest more in education systems; government budgets need to prioritise education by committing at least 4-5% of the GDP or 15-20% of national expenditure to education; (2) Ensure availability of reliable data and evidence as they are at the heart of efforts to tackle inequalities and develop relevant policies for those not in school or those not learning. Data is needed to determine who is being left behind, where, and why; (3) Promote news way to accelerate learning. Education should be adapted and flexible and embrace innovative ideas for multiple learning pathways.



Karen Hulshof UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF EAPRO).

Duriya Amatavivat, Deputy Permanent Secretary General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO, Ministry of Education (Thailand), spoke about the major components of education in the Thai context - raising the awareness of young people of SDG 4 and the global goals; government and CSOs

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working together towards ensuring quality education; and forging strong partnerships for SDG 4.1 and 4.6 in line with the 20-year national strategy of Thailand.

Also in the opening plenary, ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano presented the civil society Spotlight Reports on SDG 4 where she elaborated on the ways CSO participated in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes, the collaboration between ASPBAE and national civil society education coalitions in preparing Spotlight Reports on SDG 4, the main features of the reports and the SDG/SDG 4 roll-out process in the Asia Pacific, including the role of CSOs.



ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano

Regarding the status of SDG 4 in the region, Thea stressed that while many governments integrated SDG 4 in the education sector plans, there was a lack of financing framework and strategies to achieve the SDG 4 targets. Instead of increasing the funds for education, she cited the regional summary report on the decreased spending of education in 15 countries in Asia Pacific based on the UIS data from 2016-2018. At the same time, out of the 16 countries, only 7 have institutionalised SDG 4 mechanisms for CSO participation. Some of the issues she highlighted were low education financing and the growing trend of education privatisation; widening disparities, discrimination, and segregation; poor learning environments, facilities, and infrastructure; shortage of teachers, poor training, and low salaries; low priority for non-formal education, adult education, and literacy; lack of disaggregated data; and inadequate TVET/skills training for decent work, including for youth employment.



Shantha Kulathunge of CED Sri Lanka

In offering a way forward, Thea emphasised that Asia Pacific CSOs call for – (1) A clear financing commitment and strategy; (2) A strong public education system within a lifelong framework; (3) Priority to women and the furthest behind for equity; (4) Teacher capacity, participation, and wellbeing; (5) Political will for good governance in education at national and sub-national levels; (6) Institutionalised civil society participation representing diverse voices.

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ASPBAE members and civil society organisations played an active role in several of the parallel sessions and sub-regional discussions during the event.

Ehsanur Rahman, of the Dhaka Ahsania Mission and ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South and Central Asia, spoke in a plenary discussion on the global and regional overview on SDG 4.6 on youth and adult literacy and numeracy. He addressed NGO contributions to SDG 4.6 and links to other SDGs. He highlighted the advantages that CSOs benefit from such as the ability to reach the unreached, innovative and flexible programming, experiential expertise, cost effective outreach, and community involvement in interventions. He also

identified the role of regional and global organisations such as ASPBAE and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) in advocacy and capacity building for adult learning and education and emphasised the combined role of governments, CSOs, and development partners in realising SDG 4 and its targets. He linked the importance of SDG 4.6 with other goals such as Equal rights to economic resources (SDG 1.4), Resilient agricultural practices (SDG 2.4), Access to health care services (SDG 3.7), and Women's participation and leadership (SDG 5.5), amongst others. In conclusion, Ehsan called for shared responsibility of all actors towards Education for Sustainable Development (GCE) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) for cultural and environmental integrity and an inclusive and secure world.



Ehsanur Rahman, of the Dhaka Ahsania Mission and ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South and Central Asia



Kilala Devette-Chee, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing the South Pacific.

representing the South Pacific, highlighted that the Pacific has the highest youth illiteracy rates in the world. She spoke emphatically about the lack of basic reading and literacy skills in schools and lack of

Ehsan also addressed a parallel session on measuring the functional literacy skills of youth and adults in Bangladesh. He presented the adult literacy context in the country including literacy analysis, measurement, methodologies, and assessments, as well as mapping of non-formal education (vocational education) and linkages with literacy, skills, and lifelong learning.

Responding to some of the challenges related to literacy in the South Pacific, Kilala Devette-Chee, ASPBAE Executive Council Member

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Vichelle Yumuya (R), of SPEAK, E-Net Philippines, and a youth representative at APMED 5

data. “The youth are not literate despite going to school. There is no data collection to identify youth, including those with disabilities. We do not know how many of them are literate, and how many are women and girls. There is no funding from governments towards the youth. Governments need to allocate much more funding towards these issues.”

In another parallel session, Ram Gaire of NCE Nepal (an ASPBAE member) presented a civil society perspective on the right to education. In the session, which highlighted the

importance of sufficient investment to fulfil the fundamental human right of the “Right to Education”, Ram emphasised a rights-based approach to education financing, including encompassing an approach that is non-discriminatory, accountable, transparent, and participatory. He elaborated on the 4 S’s in appraising education financing, namely – Size (amount relative to the size of the economy; % to GNP or GDP); Share (% share of the total budget); Sensitivity (is the allocation equitable, inclusive, and gender-just?); and Scrutiny (is it transparent and participatory?).

Ram presented recommendations which included a clear, strong financing commitment and strategy (progressive increase in public investment for education, increased domestic revenues; progressive tax reforms - ending tax exemptions, addressing tax evasion and avoidance); no commercialisation of education; regulation of the private sector in education; and a vibrant civil society on SDG 4.

CSOs actively participated in several other sessions at APMED 5. Vichelle Yumuya, of SPEAK, E-Net Philippines, and a youth representative, along with Nguyen Tuan Linh of the Vietnam Association for the Deaf, took part in a panel discussion on ‘Ensuring the learning continuum as a right - linking SDG 4 Targets 4.1 and 4.6’ where they explored the linkages between SDG 4.1 and 4.6 in terms of how they contribute to lifelong learning for all and the realisation of a learning continuum at the country level. Shaheen Attiq-ur-Rahman of Bunyad



Shaheen Attiq-ur-Rahman of Bunyad Foundation, Pakistan

Foundation (an ASPBAE member in Pakistan) addressed a session on ‘Effective Promotion of Literacy through ICT and Creation of a Literate Environment for All’ where she provided a country perspective of literacy and elaborated on the creation of a digital hub, or E-learning, for rural communities to share information, spread awareness, and bring communities closer together through communication and

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technologies. She specifically explained the use of mobile rickshaws, mobile phones, and computers to tackle illiteracy, especially amongst marginalised women and girls.



Archana Dwivedi, Nirantar, India

A session on ‘Preventing and reducing marginalisation through youth and adult literacy programmes’, moderated by ASPBAE’s Cecilia (Thea) Soriano, saw valuable inputs and presentations by ASPBAE’s members in India and Afghanistan. Archana Dwivedi of Nirantar (India) gave a gendered perspective of youth and adult literacy programmes, focussing on the role of and outreach to women, and Jan Mohammad Ahmadian of the Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC) spoke about youth and adults affected by conflict and the

impact on literacy and learning. Both Archana and Jan spoke in the context of generating policy and programme recommendations that will be useful for the implementation of SDG 4.6, providing evidences and key messages that will push governments and international partners to invest in youth and adult literacy, and promoting education reforms that ensure the implementation of literacy programmes within a lifelong learning system. Their inputs also focused on preventing and reducing marginalisation through youth and adult literacy, and effective financing policies and strategies for literacy, including data collection, implementation, and monitoring of SDG 4.6.

DVV International’s Johann Heilmann moderated a session on ‘Innovative Pedagogies for Disadvantaged Youth and Adults’, a session that focussed on strategies to meet the education needs of ethnic minorities, factory workers, and migrants in the contexts of Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand.

ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing Southeast Asia, Nguyen Thi Kim Anh, represented civil society at the closing ceremony of APMED 5 where she called for the need to have indicators to address marginalisation. She stressed that international partners need to allocate funds for the education of marginalised groups, such as for girls and women’s literacy and education, for inclusive education, and social protection for marginalised learners. Click [here](#) to watch her closing remarks.



Nguyen Thi Kim Anh, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing Southeast Asia

APMED 5 concluded with the presentation of a set of draft recommendations (currently being finalised) to remind all stakeholders of the

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urgency in addressing the remaining gaps and issues, and accelerating national efforts in achieving SDG 4- Education 2030 in the region. The draft recommendations can be summarised into 3 categories – Equity and Inclusion; Quality of Teaching and Learning; and Financing.

Equity and Inclusion - Remove barriers for inclusion at all levels. Countries need to enact/enforce policies that address inclusion and equity, in all of its diverse aspects that allow and promote opportunities for all learners, from children to adults.

Quality of teaching and learning - improve classroom-learning strategies, achieve learning outcomes beyond simple, narrow competencies of literacy and numeracy, and embrace the multi-dimensional and holistic aspects of learning and literacy outcomes for lifelong learning.

Financing - Establish sustainable and innovative financing mechanisms to address the significant funding gaps in education expenditure, to progressively realise universal free 12 years of education and youth and adult literacy.

The draft recommendations ended by stressing that ultimately, governments, as the main duty bearers to uphold the right to education, must lead the efforts to improve the quality of education and ensure we progress towards SDG 4. Efforts need to be rooted with a rights-based approach in order to leave no one behind.

Finally, in the SDG 4 National Coordinators' Meeting, which followed the SDG 4 technical and capacity building meeting, ASPBAE presented the follow-up efforts of its members post APMED 4. They presented the efforts of the national education coalitions in engaging governments in the implementation of the Regional Recommendations for Action for SDG 4 Targets 4.3 and 4.4 which were agreed upon in APMED 4.

ASPBAE undertook active social media work throughout APMED 5. We thank all those who contributed to our communications work at the event. You can click on the following links for the various blogs and videos –

[Promoting adult learning and education within a lifelong learning framework at APMED 5](#)

[Civil society makes key policy recommendations on SDG 4.1 and SDG 4.6 in lead-up to Asia Pacific education meeting](#)

WATCH: ASPBAE and DVV International talk about progress in SDG 4 and what changes they expect to happen



ASPBAE's Bernie Lovegrove participating in APMED 5



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[Afghanistan coalition \(ANEC\) calls for increased financial resources to education and a standardised non-formal education curriculum to tackle illiteracy](#)

[Adult education must be officially recognised to promote literacy and lifelong learning – AED Kyrgyzstan](#)

[NCE Nepal calls for strong financial commitments to ensure the right to education](#)

[Educate, Empower, and Engage young people to participate in education processes](#)

[Adult learning and education – A shared responsibility!](#) (*Ehsanur Rahman, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South and Central Asia*)

[ALL means ALL – AFE Mongolia](#)

[Nirantar \(India\) calls for focus on marginalised women and girls for holistic, inclusive education](#)

[Vietnam Association for the Deaf calls for increased access to education tailored for people with disabilities](#)

WATCH: ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing Southeast Asia, Member Nguyen Thi Kim Anh, speaks at APMED 5 closing ceremony.

END