

National coalitions and ASPBAE staff meet on-line to update on the impact of government responses to the coronavirus pandemic on education

6 April 2020, Virtual



The aim of ASPBAE's first Zoom online meeting of education coalitions was to gain a sense of how respective government measures regarding the coronavirus are impacting on education, how coalitions have been able to respond, and the key education issues that are being raised in each country.

As the impact of the coronavirus pandemic was taking hold, flights ceased, and national borders were closed, ASPBAE convened the first all-in Zoom online meeting of the national education coalitions in the Asia Pacific region. Thirty-one participants from 18 coalitions joined: Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa, along with ASPBAE coalition capacity support staff.

The purpose of the meeting was to gain a sense of how respective government measures regarding the coronavirus are impacting on education, how coalitions have been able to respond, and the key education issues that are being raised in each country ([ASPBAE Statement on COVID-19](#)). The meeting was also an opportunity for ASPBAE to update the coalitions on initiatives by global education organisations such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and UNESCO, and on SDG processes in relation to COVID-19 especially.

The Zoom meeting was important in light of the unprecedented global pandemic which prevented the possibility of face-to-face meetings. It helped build the sense of community and solidarity between coalitions and with ASPBAE staff as we deal with a common global threat, albeit in very different contexts. The meeting began with brief presentations from the coordinators of each of NCE Nepal, E-Net Philippines, and AFE Mongolia.

Nepal

The Coordinator of NCE Nepal, Ram Gaire, summarized how Nepal's lockdown began on 24 March, and schools were closed. Online education started, and the Federal Government realized the need to invest further in the online education. NCE-Nepal has been working with its members via email and phones on monitoring education accountability during the emergency to ensure that education is still prioritised and that resources are used appropriately and preventing corruption. The coalition conducted a mapping of organisations that are undertaking activities at the district level to ascertain what support is needed.



NCE Nepal has prioritised the issue of education access for marginalized sectors affected by the pandemic, including girls, people with disabilities and children from poor families.

At the national level, NCE has been participating in the education cluster led by Ministry of Education (MOE), producing self-learning materials. The coalition is helping prepare these with guidelines on how parents can support children's home learning. NCE has also provided messaging and awareness raising including engaging health experts, using social media and YouTube.

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In order to engage local governments during the lockdown, NCE interacted online. NCE has seen the importance of linking education to health and sanitation. Some members in rural areas have been engaged in the campaign to sensitize the people on social distancing, washing hands, and maintaining health. NCE has also discussed how to support teachers, students and parents.



In the Philippines, teacher organisations have indicated that some teachers use mobile phones to access the DepEd Commons, but they have limited mobile data. There is the challenge of how teachers will gauge what the students are learning.

Philippines

E-Net Philippines Coordinator, May Cinco, summarised how the Philippines has been in lockdown (enhanced community quarantine) since 16 March and this was likely to be extended through April and beyond. It is estimated that 27.2 million students from both public and private schools are affected. The Department of Education (Dep Ed) has an online platform (DepEd Commons) where grade level students and teachers can access their lessons.



People with disabilities will be most affected. Prior to the pandemic, E-Net had been able to advocate in the national budget for the passage for a funding allocation for learning materials for people with disabilities.

There are many problems including that not all students and teachers have a laptop and internet connection, and the speed of connectivity is poor for many. While the DepED claims it has reached 2 million students through the DepEd Commons, there is no data on who has accessed what. Students and teachers are not used to online learning and are having difficulty with connecting. Teacher organisations have indicated that some teachers use mobile phones to access the DepEd Commons but they have limited mobile data. And while there is a module by subject and by grade level, there is the challenge of how teachers will gauge what the students are learning. Teachers are worried that students might be doing online gaming instead of online learning. There is also the concern about addressing the situation of teachers exposed to the

virus. Further, part-time and contractual teachers face no work no pay in this situation of extended lockdowns. How do we ensure and engage governments in the provision of pay to these types of teachers?

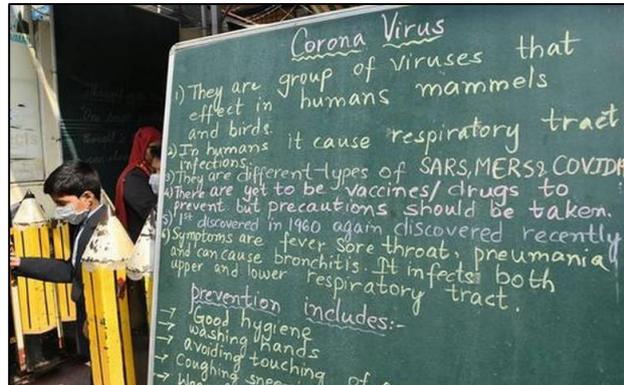
People with disabilities will be most affected. Prior to the pandemic, E-Net had been able to advocate in the national budget for the passage for a funding allocation for learning materials for people with disabilities, however, now they do not know the implications of the pandemic on this budget, and await

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feedback from DepEd. E-Net is also involved in the monitoring so-called 'Last Mile' schools in remote areas. These schools are the most vulnerable.

Due to the quarantine, E-Net's advocacy has been undertaken by phone calls and emails, where it connects directly with the DepEd Under Secretary and Parliamentarians. E-Net's secretariat staff work from home and share useful materials with members online. Staff have also conducted an online survey with the members on the challenges they face.



The Department of Education in the Philippines is focussing on campaigns and information dissemination in preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

Most of the leaders are saying that now is the time and opportunity to rethink the education and health system, with a call for a holistic approach. The DepEd is part of the inter-agency task force in charge of the actions for the coronavirus pandemic. Most activities of DepEd focus on campaigns and information dissemination in preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

E-Net is continuing its desk research and producing a video with the University of the Philippines College of Education with children's vocabulary on the pandemic. This will be shared online.



In Mongolia, school lessons on every subject are delivered on television and the internet and parents need to supervise the lessons. However, nomadic people, children from poor families and other homes have no access to television, satellite and internet.

for months, while only small government funds are being given to children and families. Meetings with the schools are closed, children are sitting at home and not allowed to play in the public spaces.

Mongolia

The Coordinator of the coalition All for Education (AFE) Mongolia, Dondogdulam Tungalag, summarised how Mongolia had been in a state of emergency for three months. Given its close proximity to China where the coronavirus began, Mongolia responded much earlier than most other countries, closing its borders from 27 January 2020 and began closing down schools and were to remain closed at least till end April.

People are not allowed to go out, so those people selling on the streets have lost income

The Government has taken strict steps to contain the virus and these have been successful, with very few infections. Government official work is carried out online. The work of the LEG is via emails and online meetings. AFE Board meetings are carried out online while can staff go to the office, but wear masks.

Since January, school lessons on every subject are delivered on television and the internet and parents need to supervise the lessons. However, nomadic people, children from poor families and other homes

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have no access to television, satellite and internet. For those who do have access, a welcome inclusive measure is that television lessons include sign language interpretation.

Some of the concerns include that there is no mechanism to monitor students, to ascertain which are really watching the television lessons. There are no clear guidelines on how to monitor television lessons or homework, and there is no support to teachers. Teachers unions reported increased stress among teachers due to long hours of exposure to chat groups, mobiles and laptops, to monitor the students.



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Universities conduct online lessons and have their own learning platforms. There has been some support for non-formal education, and the government has provided lessons in 2 mother tongue languages.

Three further briefer contributions were made by coordinators from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Timor-Leste.



While private schools have provided online classes in Afghanistan, there is a need to support public education to continue the lessons needed and to invest in emergency programmes in education.

Afghanistan

Coordinator of the Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC), Jan Mohammad Ahmadian, summarised that all schools were closed and the lockdown would continue well into May. At the time of the call there was no online learning but there were plans for this to begin.

ANEC is engaged in awareness raising on how to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. While private schools have provided online classes, there is a need to support public education to continue the lessons needed. There was no plan in the remote areas where there is limited technology and people lack

access to education. There is a need to invest in emergency programmes in education.

On 4 April, the GPE Secretariat advised of an allocation of US\$15 million from GPE to Afghanistan to support the education sector response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. ANEC advocates with the LEG in-country group which will engage CSOs in the COVID-19 response plan. Further, the Education in Emergency Working Group (EiEWG) will be responsible for a call for proposal and funds will be partially allocated to CSOs.

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Bangladesh

Enamul Hoque, Deputy Director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), updated that the Government of Bangladesh closed all educational institutions from 16 March. The government has announced stimulus packages including support for the garment sector and informal sector. The garment sector is one of the largest and workers are suffering due to lost wages.



There are concerns about an increase in out-of-school youth after COVID-19 in Bangladesh, with absenteeism, increased child labour, safety of girls on the way school, and further early marriage and pregnancy exacerbated by the pandemic.

There is much to be done with awareness-raising and information dissemination. One challenge is to deal with fake information. CAMPE is monitoring and engaged in the process.

The Local Education Group (LEG) is working every week and CAMPE attends government meetings. Despite the many challenges, the pandemic has increased the opportunity for using information and communications technology in the mainstream schools. While private schools have opened online schooling, there are equity concerns for government school children who don't have online access. The government-initiated television schooling, and while lessons are shorter, they are appreciated.

There are concerns about an increase in out-of-school youth after COVID 19, with absenteeism, increased child labor, concerns about the safety of girls on the way school, and further early marriage and pregnancy exacerbated by COVID 19. CAMPE has initiated a survey of its members to develop key issues to take to Government

Timor-Leste



Timor-Leste has only a emergency budget till 2020. The new budget will be announced in 2021. This has affected education operations and the lack of budget support for schools and food have posed significant challenges.

The Coordinator of coalition, Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP), Jose de Jesus, updated that Timor-Leste announced a state of emergency on 22 March where all schools and offices were closed and people were not allowed to go out. NGOs are working from home.

Timor-Leste is facing an additional critical situation since the President did not approve the state budget for 2020. There is only an emergency budget until end of 2020 and new budget will be announced in 2021. This has affected education operations and the lack of budget support for schools and food is stressful, especially in rural areas.

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ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, and alternate member of the GPE Board representing the Southern CSO constituency, provided an update on responses from GPE and UNESCO to the coronavirus pandemic and impact on education.

UNESCO-Bangkok and UNESCAP amidst the coronavirus pandemic (*a separate items on these appears in this bulletin*).

At the time of the meeting, online education was available for primary but not the secondary schools. However, many students have returned home to their villages, and will miss out due to no online access.

Global updates on education and regional advocacy on SDG4

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, and alternate member of the GPE Board representing the Southern CSO constituency (known as the CSO2 constituency in the GPE Board), provided an update on responses from GPE and UNESCO to the coronavirus pandemic and impact on education. ASPBAE's Thea Soriano provided an update on the SDG4 and SDG processes under

Key education issues raised across many countries

After the presentations, time was given for coalition representatives to further discuss the key issues. Those that were commonly experienced across many countries included the following:

- Greater attention needs to be given to education access for marginalized sectors affected by the pandemic, including girls, people with disabilities and children from poor families and remote areas who all will be affected by the lack of internet access, and the economic crisis they face during and after the pandemic.
- While learning online and by television have been valuable and important mediums through the lockdowns, there are many shortcomings with online learning strategies, including that not all students and teachers have a laptop and internet connection, and the speed of connectivity is often poor. Many poor families don't have televisions, so their children can't access televised lessons.
- There is a great need for training for teachers and non-teaching personnel regarding appropriate ICT in different contexts, and for ensuring teachers get paid during the lockdown
- Schools must be connected to the internet free of charge; communities and even households need to be given access to online learning.
- It is important to ensure there are programs to capacitate parents in the event home schooling distance learning online learning would be practice widely in the event of disasters and pandemic.



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- For those who have access, there is no mechanism and guidelines to monitor online or television lessons or homework.
- It would be valuable to have research and to document actual experiences to know if online lessons during emergencies is conducive to learning, and the importance of online interactions and guidance from teachers.
- There is concern that as governments fail to provide quality education in challenging remote areas of the country, the private sector enters to fill the gap on providing services. Governments need to consider the current and longer-term impact of private sector provision of education and the extent to which it undermines government funded public education.
- Schools are also spaces for school feeding for the most marginalized, it is also a refuge for students who are in living with abusive families, these are all lost due to the closure of schools. How do we raise these issues to local governments and school principals? How do we secure the safety of students?



There is a great need for training for teachers and non-teaching personnel regarding appropriate ICT in different contexts.



It is important for civil society to monitor government education budget spending, since many governments are looking to shift funds from various sectors to deal with the health and economic dimensions of the crisis.

- We can document previous and current experiences on violence in the community during lockdowns and loss of jobs, and the issue of food for children is addressed. There are experiences to draw on from education in emergencies in Afghanistan, in Bangladesh in dealing with Rohingya refugees.
- It is important for civil society to monitor government education budget spending, since many governments are looking to shift funds from various sectors to deal with the health and economic dimensions of the crisis. We need to continue advocating for financing of education and to protect education budgets especially for education of vulnerable learners such as out of school youth and people with disabilities.
- Regarding the impact of the coronavirus on the GPE Education Out Loud (EOL) funded programmes, a clear message from the Grant Agent, Oxfam Ibis, was that there was definitely latitude to adjust projects, both in terms the focus of activities and the timing of events through 2020 and 2021.

The meeting closed with a strong sense of commitment and collective solidarity to continue to advance education in light of the pandemic, and to have further meetings such as this one to update each other. As an additional way of ensuring a regular flow of information and updates between coalitions and from and with ASPBAE, a 'Sharing and Exchange' folder was set up by ASPBAE on Google Drive, and already many coalitions and ASPBAE staff have contributing news, key documents and analyses on the impact of COVID-19.