

ASPBAE THIS MONTH

August 2020

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Reimagining the future for a fairer education and lifelong learning systems that are more resilient and sustainable

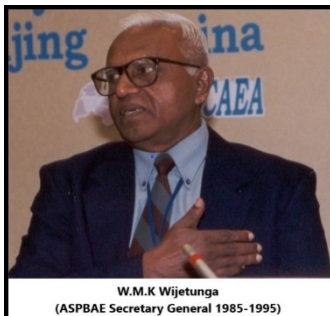
Australia National consultation for ASPBAE's 8th General Assembly

[Full article](#)



Afghanistan: Continuing literacy and non-formal education for youth and adults during the COVID-19 crisis

[Full article](#)



Farewell Wije, rest well

ASPBAE Secretary-General, 1985-1995

[Full article](#)

On International Youth Day, young people from the Asia Pacific shout out to "Count Us in"

The ASPBAE-organised webinar, '*Count us in: Community youth shoutout on education and life during the pandemic*', was organised with Youth Action Research (YAR) partners to launch the COVID-19 research findings and recommendations of the action research studies. - [Read more](#)

Securing Financing Education Equity for Stronger Public Education Systems - ASPBAE contributes to UNESCO Workshop on Education Costing and Financing

Key stakeholders gathered to enhance their knowledge on the use of education finance data for informed and evidence-based policy and decision making in this virtual Regional Workshop.

[Read more](#)

New CSO2 Representatives in the Board of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

The developing country civil society constituency (or CSO2) in the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) selected a new set of representatives to the GPE Board in its meeting on 24 August 2020. - [Read more](#)

Education News and Views

New UNESCO report on Artificial Intelligence and Gender Equality

[Read more](#)



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Member of the Month

Research Centre for Inclusion (RCI), Vietnam

The Research Centre for Inclusion (RCI) is an NGO in Vietnam that aims to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities (in particular children and persons affected by leprosy) through research and advocacy on disability, inclusive education, inclusive health, social inclusion, and community-based rehabilitation.

RCI gathers evidence for advocating stronger implementation of disability policies; improves access to quality inclusive education for children with disabilities; improves quality of health care and rehabilitation services; and enhances participation in community activities.

Click [here](#) to know more about RCI.

Photo of the Month



The theme of International Youth Day 2020, 'Youth Engagement for Global Action' highlighted how the engagement of young people at the local, national, and global levels is enriching national and multilateral institutions and processes.

ASPBAE Lens

ASPBAE would like to dedicate a space in the Bulletin to showcase photos its staff have taken, featuring their perception of life around them, the interesting things they see, inspiring moments they observe, and beautiful imagery they capture that reflect education and lifelong learning in different ways and forms. In this edition, we feature a photo taken Anita Borkar, Regional Coordinator of the Training for Transformation (TfT) programme.

Anita Borkar

TfT Regional Coordinator



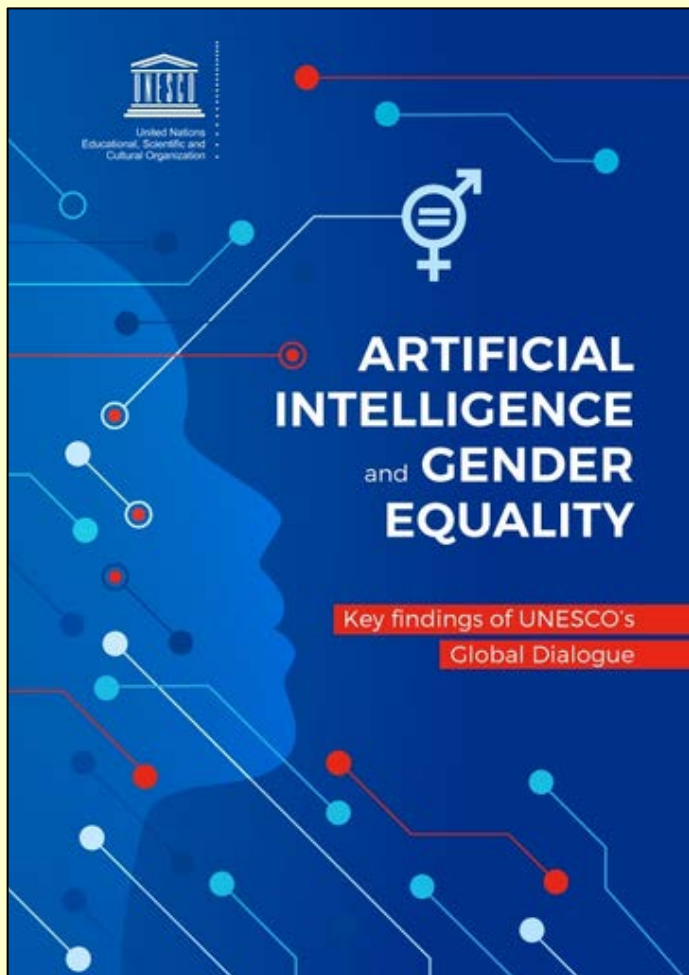
EDUCATION NEWS AND VIEWS

This section of the Bulletin is dedicated to highlighting news and events from the Asia Pacific and from around the world focusing on education and lifelong learning. For this edition, we highlight a UNESCO report on artificial intelligence and gender equality.

New UNESCO report on Artificial Intelligence and Gender Equality

31 August 2020

UNESCO released its new report on Artificial Intelligence and Gender Equality, which sets forth proposed elements of a Framework on Gender Equality and AI for further consideration, discussion and elaboration amongst various stakeholders.



Advancing gender equality through education, the sciences, culture, information and communication lies at the heart of UNESCO's mandate, with Gender Equality constituting one of the two Global Priorities of the Organization since 2008. UNESCO is therefore keen to adopt a gender equality lens in its ongoing work on artificial intelligence in all its programme areas.

Research, including UNESCO's 2019 report *'I'd Blush if I Could: closing gender divides in digital skills through education'*, unambiguously shows that the gender biases found in AI training data sets, algorithms, and devices have the potential of spreading and reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. These gender biases risk further stigmatizing and marginalizing women on a global scale. Considering the increasing ubiquity of AI in our societies, such biases put women at risk of being left behind in all realms of economic, political and social life. They may even offset some of the considerable progress that countries have made towards gender equality in the recent past.

AI risks having a negative impact on women's economic empowerment and labour market opportunities by leading to job automation. Recent research by the IMF and the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that women are at a significantly higher risk of displacement due to job automation than men are. Indeed, the majority of workers holding jobs that face a high-risk of automation, such as clerical, administrative, bookkeeping and cashier positions, are women. It is crucial that women are not left behind in retraining and reskilling strategies.

While AI poses significant threats to gender equality, it is important to recognize that AI also has the potential of making positive changes in our societies by challenging existing gender norms. For example, while an AI-powered recruitment software was found to discriminate against women, AI-powered gender-decoders help employers use gender-sensitive language to write job postings that are more inclusive in order to increase the diversity of their workforce. AI therefore has the potential of being part of the solution for advancing gender equality in our societies.

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During the time UNESCO is drafting its Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, it is important to reflect on how to best integrate gender equality considerations into such global normative frameworks. It is also crucial to examine closely how AI codes of ethics can and should be implemented in practical terms. In order to explore these questions,

UNESCO's Gender Equality Division initiated a Global Dialogue on Gender Equality and AI with leaders in AI, digital technology and gender equality from academia, civil society and the private sector.

This Report sets forth proposed elements of a Framework on Gender Equality and AI for further consideration, discussion and elaboration amongst various stakeholders. It shares the main findings from experts' contributions to UNESCO's Dialogue on Gender Equality and AI, as well as additional research and analysis. This is not a comprehensive exploration of the complexities of the AI ecosystem in all its manifestations and its intersections with gender equality. Rather, this is a starting point for conversation and action and has a particular focus on the private sector.

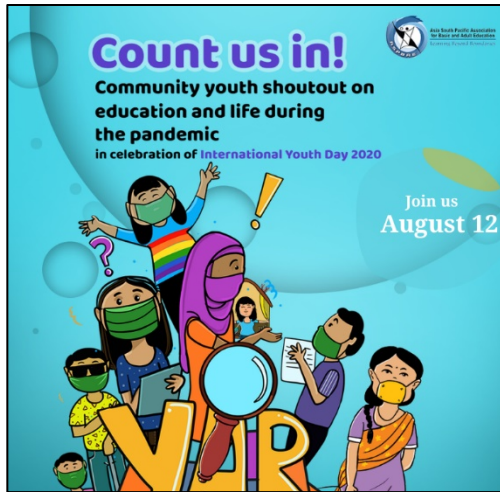
It argues for the need to - 1. Establish a whole society view and mapping of the broader goals we seek to achieve; 2. Generate an understanding of AI Ethics Principles and how to position gender equality within them; 3. Reflect on possible approaches for operationalizing AI and Gender Equality Principles; 4. Identify and develop a funded multi-stakeholder action plan and coalition as a critical next step.

Read the full report [here](#). [[BACK](#)]

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ASPBAE held a virtual launch of the Youth-Led Action Research (YAR) on COVID-19 on the occasion of International Youth Day on 12 August.



Participants discussed research findings and recommendations of the YAR studies along with charting out future action plans for translating research into actions.



ASPBAE Executive Council Member, Peter Clinton Isaac Foase emphasised that young people come with innovations, power, and creativity, and they need to be nurtured and encouraged.

On International Youth Day, young people from the Asia Pacific shout out to “Count Us in”

12 August 2020, Virtual

Enthusiasm, Articulation, and Passion! These three words best describe the youth who shared their insights, research findings, and recommendations at the virtual launch of the Youth-Led Action Research (YAR) on COVID-19 organised by ASPBAE on the occasion of International Youth Day.

The webinar, ‘Count us in: Community youth shoutout on education and life during the pandemic’, was organised with YAR partners to launch the COVID-19 research findings and recommendations of the action research studies. The 3-month project was carried out in nine countries to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the education, health, and overall well-being of youth living in marginalised communities. The meeting was joined by various community youth, youth organisations, YAR partners, representatives from UNICEF and UNESCO, and the government of Nepal. Participants discussed research findings and recommendations of the studies along with charting out future action plans for translating research into actions. Participants commemorated International Youth Day by celebrating the research work, passion, and talent of young researchers across Asia Pacific region.

Addressing participants of the webinar, ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, congratulated all the youth researchers for their work. She praised the youth who are fighting for equality and freedom across the globe and emphasized the capacity of the youth for bringing change. While mentioning ASPBAE’s youth work, Nani highlighted that ASPBAE has always believed in young people and in their inclusion in the development of communities around the world. ASPBAE also recognizes the challenges the youth are facing now, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic where spaces need to be created for young people to raise their voices and being a part of processes to overcome the impact of the pandemic. Thus, ASPBAE’s youth action research for understating the impact of COVID-19 on youth living in marginalized communities is one of the strategies to bring collective voices of young people to the mainstream. This project aims to gather pandemic experiences and recommendations of young people, in particular, and focuses on documenting education responses along with creating spaces for youth interactions and networking. ASPBAE also believes in the power of inter-generational dialogue. Each generation plays an important role and brings a unique perspective for making the world more inclusive and just for all. Nani thanked all ASPBAE’s strategic partners for supporting the process.

ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing the South Pacific, Peter Clinton Isaac Foase, shared ASPBAE’s YAR journey and emphasised that young people come with innovations, power, and creativity, and they need to be nurtured and encouraged. He emphasised that action research allows that to happen beautifully and that through it, young people not only participate in the research, but they lead it and take decisions and implement the entire research cycle. Peter reminded everyone that many of our challenges are invisible -

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ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, emphasized that the YAR project aims to gather pandemic experiences and recommendations of young people and focusses on documenting education responses, along with creating spaces for youth interactions and networking.

Findings from Mongolia, India, Sri Lanka pointed to the negative impact of social distancing and lockdowns on young people, issues related to food security for the poor, inaccessibility to on-line education and risks of increased numbers of school drop-outs, gender-based restrictions on the use of mobile phones, harmful impact on physical and mental health, loss of livelihoods, and early marriage.

racism, discrimination, inequalities - and that many more are big challenges need to be fought together.

ASPBAE's Sunil Gangavane shared a brief context of the YAR COVID-19 project and congratulated youth researchers for their dedication and hard work. Despite the lockdown, they engaged their peers in meaningful dialogue and managed to collect data while following safety norms. They creatively explored social media and other channels. In some places, despite the challenges in connectivity and lack of ICT tools, young people continued in conducting short surveys and interviews. The youth also initiated local actions during the lockdown and contributed towards community change.

A session on research findings and recommendations was moderated by Vichelle Yumuya (E-Net Philippines), Shardha Koirala (NCE Nepal), and Kajal Boraste (Abhivyakti Media for Development, India) - all youth representatives from YAR partner countries. The conversations were organized in three segments – (1) Understanding the context, marginalisation, and action-research process. Enamul Hoque (CAMPE, Bangladesh) and Dara Adriana (PEKKA, Indonesia) shared the context of the project, profile of the youth, challenges, and innovative ways of conducting the research. (2) Munkhchimeg Yadamsuren (All for Education, Mongolia), Kajal Boraste (Abhivyakti Media for Development, India), and Dinithi Alahapperuma (CED, Sri Lanka) shared their key research findings. (3) Jose Jesus (CSEP, Timor-Leste), Laxmi Nepali (NCE, Nepal), Mia and Yen (E-Net Philippines) presented the recommendations and local actions of young people.

Discussions on the research findings and recommendations revealed that the pandemic has impacted almost all spheres of life, with marginalised communities being affected the most. COVID-19 has exposed the precarious conditions of our systems. The digital divide has become starkly visible. These serious ramifications are long-term and will deeply affect the poor, children, women, and other vulnerable groups. Presenters shared deep concerns on how marginalised youth and their families continue to face multi-layered discrimination, resulting in exclusion and systematic oppression.

Findings from Mongolia, India, Sri Lanka pointed to the negative impact of social distancing and lockdowns on young people, issues related to food security for the poor, inaccessibility to on-line education and risks of increased numbers of school drop-outs, gender-based restrictions on the use of mobile phones, harmful impact on physical and mental health, loss of livelihoods, and early marriage.



Members, including CSEP Timor-Leste, shared experiences in advocacy and community initiatives.

Members also shared experiences in advocacy and community initiatives. For example, in Timor-Leste, CSEP, along with youth researchers in 12 municipalities, came together to establish a marginalised youth forum. Through this forum, the youth agenda will be strengthened and presented at national advocacy platforms. The group also presented research findings to the State Secretary for vocational training and employment for influencing state budget allocations for youth demands. In the Philippines, youth were actively involved in educational campaigns, relief work, and advocacy activities. One of the groups started the 'What, Who, and When' campaign in which they asked powerful

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The digital divide has become starkly visible. Presenters shared deep concerns on how marginalised youth and their families continue to face multi-layered discrimination, resulting in exclusion and systematic oppression.

questions to the government and demanded their rights to food, education, and the right to ask questions. The youth groups contacted NGOs and other groups to join their efforts and expanded their ground-level actions. Along with these actions, the group was very active on social media. They developed a series of videos, podcasts, and organised webinars and FB live sessions. This helped in gathering more people to participate in the cause and sustain the campaign. Similarly, in many other countries, youth played a significant role in relief work, distribution of rations, health care facilities, and in helping NGOs and local governments reach communities on time.

Bamsa Lal Tamang, Mayor of Indrawati Municipality in Nepal and General Secretary of Federation of Rural Municipality; Rika Yorozu, Programme specialist, Higher Education, UNESCO; and Chris Henderson, Regional Officer, UNICEF Regional Office South Asia (ROSA) all addressed the webinar. They acknowledged the challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on education and learning. They also stressed the importance of national-level youth mapping for youth empowerment, mentoring and capacity building, and participation in governance-related issues. Rika Yorozu specifically highlighted 3 key messages – (1) Free higher education for women - violence and abuse have increased against women and girls if they are not supported, their progress will be negatively affected; (2) Increased role of television in education; and (3) Strengthening of local education and training, especially at the village level.

UNESCO's Rika Yorozu highlighted 3 key messages – (1) Free higher education for women; (2) Increased role of television in education; and (3) Strengthening of local education and training, especially at the village level.

Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara, former ASPBAE President and current President of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), highlighted the importance of action research as a tool and an opportunity for youth engagement and dialogue, especially in this critical time where interaction and support are most needed. He added, *"On behalf of the ICAE, and the Global Campaign for Education, we hope we can share your inspirational stories, which we are sure will have positive outcomes. It may not come quickly, as everyone all over the world will continue to face serious challenges. However, what your work has shown today, that our ability to survive through this time comes from really continuing to support each other."*



Robbie Guevara, former ASPBAE President and current ICAE President, highlighted the importance of action research as a tool and opportunity for youth engagement and dialogue.

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, offered the synthesis of the event's discussions, focusing on the key messages arising from the rich exchange:

- Young people have many identities which define their varied learning contexts: young people from poorer communities are seldom full time students. They work, have family obligations, sometime as parents, oftentimes as bread-winners. Young women play additional household and family-based roles in caring for siblings, in domestic chores, in taking care of the health-related needs of family members as primary care-givers. Continuity education programmes of governments should account for these diverse realities and learning conditions of young people.
- The COVID-pandemic has brought to the fore the stark reality of inequality in access to education. Most young people from poor families have no access to the internet or devices to access online education and learning opportunities – the main mode for education delivery in the face

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In her synthesis, ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, highlighted key issues including the varied learning contexts of young people, inequalities in access to education, and the important role of youth and adult learning in government continuity education programmes.



ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, concluded by reiterating that it is crucial, as young people, to take hold of their own futures and chart their path, transcending the difficulties which have been imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

of school closures. Continuity education programmes of governments should account for this deep divide: free internet, expanded information and communication infrastructure to reach poorer communities, free access by poor youth to the gadgets that enable online learning will have to be set in place to meet equity goals in education.

- The learning needs of young people are diverse – life-wide and life-long. Continuity education programmes should therefore go beyond alternatives to schooling. It is the education for young people and adults that is saving lives during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Youth and adult learning and education should thus be an integral part of the continuity education programmes of government.
- Social safety nets are essential features of continuity education programmes. Cash stipends, food assistance, free health care are essential to enable young people to cope with the pandemic and participate in education and learning.
- Young people's engagement in community action are increasingly criminalised in many contexts: these should be exposed and challenged.
- Young people wish to participate in processes and decision-making arenas that affect and define their lives. Their engagements should be institutionalised.

Maria ended by expressing appreciation the youth researchers and their commitment to continue their research and advocacy work during the COVID-19 pandemic. She further highlighted the need for such spaces where youth from marginalised communities share their voices and perspectives. She reiterated that it is crucial, as young people, to take hold of their own futures and chart their path, transcending the difficulties which have been imposed by this pandemic. Maria added that the webinar and the coming together of marginalised youth in the region was a powerful way to celebrate International Youth Day and congratulated everyone who have made this event possible. [\[BACK\]](#)

Securing Financing Education Equity for Stronger Public Education Systems - ASPBAE contributes to UNESCO workshop on education costing and financing

26-28 August 2020, Virtual



The UNESCO regional workshop aimed to identify and understand the issues and challenges that Member States face in collecting and utilizing education finance data and how they are addressing these issues and challenges.

From government officials to experts across Asia and the Pacific, key stakeholders gathered to enhance their knowledge on the use of education finance data for informed and evidence-based policy and decision making in the virtual *Regional Workshop on Education Costing and Financing*. The event, organised by UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), and Korea Funds-in-Trust, is part of the series of technical workshops envisaged to strengthen national capacity on costing and financing of education in the region.

This regional workshop specifically aimed to identify and understand the issues and challenges that Member States are facing in collecting and utilizing education finance data and how they are addressing these issues and challenges. It also provided a platform for the exchange of ideas and good practices in gathering and utilizing this data that can be implemented for allocating resources more

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Presentations addressed issues such as improving the quality of education finance data and its effective utilization, collecting and compiling education expenditure data, and practices and mechanism in collecting, utilizing, and reporting country data on education finance from the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.



ASPBAE's Rene Raya spoke on strategies to secure financing education equity in building and recovering better. He presented a costing model using formula-based budgeting that takes into consideration disadvantaged and excluded learners, particularly from rural areas.



Country presenters from governments of Nepal, Japan, and Thailand shared innovative practices and ideas on what can be improved to ensure quality and effective utilization of education finance data.

effectively to ensure no one is left behind, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

The workshop was formally opened by Maki Hayashikawa, Chief Inclusive Quality Education Section, UNESCO Bangkok, where she pointed out the importance of data to achieve more equitable financing of education. The first day of the event saw presentations of Nyi Nyi Thaung, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Bangkok, on improving the quality of education finance data and its effective utilization, and Roshan Bajracharya, Senior Regional Advisor at UIS-AIMS Bangkok, on the collection and compilation of education expenditure data. Government officials from the ministries of education in the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines shared issues and challenges as well as practices and mechanisms in collecting, utilizing, and reporting country data on education finance.

ASPBAE's Rene Raya was one of a number of speakers during the second day. He spoke on strategies to secure financing education equity in building and recovering better. Also speaking was Roshan Bajracharya on education finance indicators, methodologies, and sources and Yi Yang-Ju, UNESCO Programme Specialist, on lessons from South Korea on strengthening education finance data. Country presenters from the governments of Nepal, Japan, and Thailand shared innovative practices and ideas on what can be improved to ensure the quality and effective utilization of education finance data.

In presenting on the topic *Securing Financing Education Equity for Stronger Public Education Systems*, Rene asserted that inequity in education remains a serious challenge, and has in fact widened even more given the COVID-19 global pandemic. He presented a costing model using formula-based budgeting that takes into consideration disadvantaged and excluded learners, including female learners, particularly from remote rural areas, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, Dalits, and learners from poor families, conflict zones and disaster-prone communities.

ASPBAE sources most of its data from official government and UN reports and statistics, but also conducts representative surveys where needed and generates data from case studies, key informant interviews, and focused group discussions for thematic studies. ASPBAE and its members also conduct budget tracking and expenditure analysis to support the advocacy for bigger, better and more transparent budget allocations for education. As takeaway, Mr. Raya asserted that investing in equity pays off, even as he stresses the importance of partnerships and a vibrant civil society to meet all SDG 4 targets.

During the final day, UNESCO Bangkok introduced the regional costing tool that it developed, in collaboration with UIS Regional Office in Bangkok, to support Member States to estimate the resources associated with attaining SDG4 targets specifically, Target 4.1 (Basic Education), 4.2 (1-year pre-primary education) and Target 4.5 (gender equality). It is hoped that the costing tool can help guide education ministries of Member States in developing gender- and equity-sensitive financing for education to ensure that no one is left behind in fulfilling the mandate of the Education 2030 Agenda. [\[BACK\]](#)

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New CSO2 Representatives in the Board of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

The developing country civil society constituency (or CSO2) in the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) selected a new set of representatives to the GPE Board in its meeting on 24 August 2020.

Laura Giannecchini replaces Camilla Crosso as the main representative. Both are from the Latin American Campaign on the Right to Education (CLADE).

Helen Dabu takes over from Maria Lourdes A. Khan as the alternate representative in the Board.

Members of the constituency were highly confident of the leadership and capacities of Laura and Helen. Laura served in an earlier term as CSO2 representative in the GPE Board and Helen has been active in the GPE engagement processes for many years. She has served as Technical Adviser to Maria and Camilla in their GPE Board roles and has therefore attended Board meetings in this capacity and has been actively engaged in the GPE strategic planning processes currently underway.

Laura and Helen will serve for the remaining period of the term of this current Board, whereupon fresh elections will be conducted within the CSO2 constituency for the representatives in the next Board term.

Camilla and Maria reaffirmed their commitment to support Laura and Helen in the coming months, albeit in new roles. They also underscored the need to put in place an ongoing process of capacity-building to regenerate CSO2 leaders from the different CSO2 regions, able to take on GPE Board and Committee roles

Members of the CSO2 constituency thanked Camilla and Maria for all their work and contributions towards ensuring the strong input, engagement and presence of the constituency in the GPE Board. [\[BACK\]](#)

Reimagining the future for a fairer education and lifelong learning systems that are more resilient and sustainable

Australia National consultation for ASPBAE's 8th General Assembly

7 August 2020, Virtual

Accredited ASPBAE members in Australia came together for a national consultation as part of ASPBAE's 8th General Assembly taking place this year. The organisations included Adult Learning Australia (ALA), National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC), the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University; and Women In Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE).

Members highlighted the urgent development issues and challenges facing Australia that education should address, including the impact of the ongoing COVID-19, which has exacerbated existing inequalities and has impacted the

Laura Giannecchini replaces Camilla Crosso as the main representative. Both are from the Latin American Campaign on the Right to Education (CLADE). Helen Dabu takes over from Maria Lourdes A. Khan as the alternate representative in the Board.

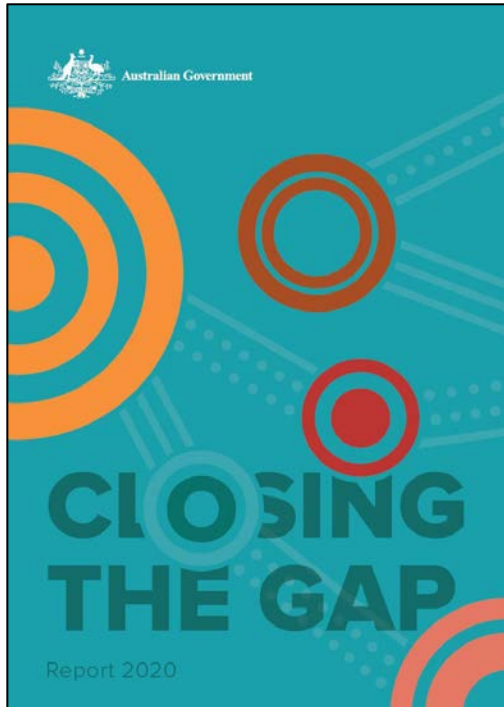


ASPBAE's members in Australia highlighted that lack of digital skills and a lack of affordable and secure infrastructure has hampered disadvantaged groups to access online resources.

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The release of the 'Closing the Gap Report 2020' highlighted existing inequities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



One of the recommendations offered to ASPBAE by its members in Australia included finding ways to counter fake news and misinformation which is a serious threat to education and impinges on all issues including climate change debates, denialism, and inaction.

most already disadvantaged groups. There have been some innovative models developed to help maintain contact with learners, particular where educators have developed and delivered workbooks, using text and telephone to make contact, WhatsApp, Zoom, and other formats. However, a lack of digital skills and a lack of affordable and secure infrastructure has hampered disadvantaged groups to access online resources. Many educators were ill prepared and lacked skills to move courses quickly online.

The release of the new [Closing the Gap Report 2020](#) highlighted existing inequities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For example, despite some improvements, in 2018 about one in four Indigenous students in Years 5, 7 and 9, and one in five in Year 3, remained below national minimum standards in reading. Between 17% to 19% of Indigenous students were below the national minimum standards in numeracy. There are concerns about retention of Indigenous students and a lack of access to the internet at home.

Under COVID, domestic violence incidents have recorded increases, mental health concerns are growing as are gambling online and drug use. COVID-19 has also exposed pre-existing inequalities in education such as the lack of preparation to learn online and the lack of capacity to learn from home. There are significant cuts to universities, and increased fees for Arts degrees which limits broader holistic learning and liberal thinking.

The current conservative Government continues to cut to the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) which has provided an excellent fact-based service, while at the same time providing subsidies to the biased Murdoch press which is growing in reach and impact. This has led to a decline in the flow of objective, fact-based information to the Australian population. It has also led to a lack of calling to account by the mass Media for policy positions and corruption of Australia's conservative political parties, while at the same time severely criticising progressive policies and politicians. Misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories that are spread via social media are also having an impact and need to be fought with facts, evidence, education for critical thinking, and better regulation.

Members offered a number of recommendations to ASPBAE for its future work and directions:

- ASPBAE has a key role in promoting a positive vision, reimagining the future for fairer education systems that are more resilient and sustainable. It can continue to expand its role in networking, connecting, and focusing on the things we can change - providing good news stories and case studies, so that we don't feel powerless.
- Continue offering webinars that share examples of work and engagement with communities; learning from others.
- Promote education about bias in mainstream media that supports authoritarian governments, corporations and fundamentalists. Find ways to counter fake news and misinformation which is tantamount to 'unlearning', and a serious threat to education and they impinge on all issues including climate change debates, denialism and inaction. This

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Members in Australia also recommended that ASPBAE have a stronger focus on SDG 4.7 and promote education that highlights links between the COVID pandemic and environmental destruction, and links between population growth and diminishing natural habitats.

- can include promoting education for critical thinking and real democracy, and advocacy skills to call mass media corporations to account.
- Have a stronger focus on SDG 4.7: as we face a climate emergency, education needs to respond more effectively in support of sustainability. ASPBAE can promote education that highlights the links between the COVID pandemic and environmental destruction, and also links between population growth and diminishing natural habitats which force animals to survive in smaller areas.
- Establish sub-communities within ASPBAE's membership that are thematically aligned.
- Investigate how to better diversify our membership and partnerships with other sectors such as the health sector.
- Promote and respect indigenous culture and practices.

Regarding proposed amendments to ASPBAE's Constitution, the members, while agreeing to support them in principle, suggested it include the phrase 'promote indigenous empowerment' and a broad expression regarding marginalised groups.

Jenny Macaffer from ALA and Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara from RMIT were selected Voting Representatives for the 8th General Assembly. [\[BACK\]](#)



Afghanistan is among the countries in South Asia with a significant number of illiterate youth and adults, estimated at over 12 million, 60% of them female.

Afghanistan: Continuing literacy and non-formal education for youth and adults during the COVID-19 crisis

By Rie Koarai, Japan NGO Network for Education, Mohammad Yasin Samim, Deputy Ministry of Education for Literacy, the Ministry of Education, Afghanistan, and Rafiullah Shahpoor, Deputy Ministry of Education for Literacy, the Ministry of Education, Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been suffering from protracted conflict for over 40 years, which has produced recurrent and sustained situations of internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees. The country has also been exposed to other repetitive emergencies such as droughts and floods.

As a result of these challenges, Afghanistan is among the few countries in South Asia with a significant number of illiterate youth and adults, estimated at over 12 million (60% of them female) (UNESCO, 2020). The overall literacy rate in the country stands at 43% (only 29.8% for women), while the literacy rate for youth (15-24) is 65%, which indicates a huge gap, both in terms of age groups and gender.

Despite improvements in education since 2002, the recent gains are at risk given the COVID-19 pandemic. The disease has been spreading fast throughout the country since March which forced the government to close all educational institutions on 14 March 2020, including public and private schools, community-based schools, and literacy courses for youth and adults.

Despite improvements in education since 2002, the recent gains are at risk given the COVID-19 pandemic. The disease has been spreading fast throughout the country since March which forced the government to close all educational institutions

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The government of Afghanistan has developed an education response plan which includes guidelines for youth and adult literacy during the COVID pandemic. The plan includes distance learning, small group learning, literacy at home, and capacity building of facilitators.

What are the government initiatives on youth and adult literacy?

The government of Afghanistan has developed a [comprehensive education response plan](#) to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the plan, the Deputy Ministry of Education for Literacy (DMoEL) developed detailed implementation guidelines for youth and adult literacy for use during the COVID pandemic, which outline: i) distance learning through TV and radio, ii) small group learning (5 students per shift in open space), iii) self and family literacy at home; iv) self-capacity building of literacy facilitators.

Although the coverage of TV literacy programmes expanded from only the capital Kabul and surrounding areas before the current crisis to nationwide in mid-April, access to TV remains limited, especially in rural areas, and poor households cannot afford to purchase TVs or cover electricity costs.

Small group learning in open spaces, which is flexible and requires no technology, started in early April and has been effective in bringing literacy closer to youth and adults. Another initiative is self/family learning, through which educated family members teach non-literates at home, with literacy textbooks and some guidance provided by the government.



The Deputy Ministry of Education for Literacy had been conducting self/family literacy for the past few years, and there is a standardized learning assessment system developed with the support of ASPBAE member, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Interestingly, the DMoEL had been conducting self/family literacy for the past few years, even before the current crisis, and there is already a standardized learning assessment system developed with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency ([JICA](#)). After passing the assessment, students receive a certificate equivalent to grade three of formal school.

These initiatives show not only how to respond to the crisis promptly with low-tech measures, but also that “preparedness” or what people already have is very important and can serve as an effective coping mechanism. As of May 21, more than 39,000 people were accessing alternative literacy programs in 27 out of the 34 provinces.



ASPBAE's member in Japan, Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), with the financial support of the Japan Platform, was able to re-start literacy and sewing courses for internally displaced and returnee women.

The case of a Japanese NGO in responding to learning needs of youth and adults

The DMoEL's COVID guidelines have also helped NGOs and other partners continue literacy and skills training for youth and adults. A Japanese NGO, [Shanti Volunteer Association \(SVA\)](#), with the financial support of the [Japan Platform](#), was able to re-start literacy and sewing courses for internally displaced and returnee women by April 1st after a temporary closure, with other preventive training of staff and students. It established small group learning in open spaces, keeping enough social distancing among students.

Women are not only beneficiaries of the project but are active change agents in the community. Women in sewing courses supported by SVA have produced protective masks to sell at a low price to villagers to prevent the spread of COVID-19, after learning good practices at the Community Learning Centres of DMoEL. Similarly, other students received sewing machines to produce masks, and literacy skills such as recording, counting and calculation were integrated as part

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Women learning literacy in a small group.
Photo Credit: SVA

of the activity. Health, sanitation and nutrition are also included into the literacy primer.

Towards the end of June, all 150 literacy registered students passed the required assessment to receive the government's certificates equivalent to grade three of formal school. The project activities on literacy and sewing have been handed over to the community to continue on their own. Some of the graduates are highly motivated to teach other non-literate women in the community. As for making and selling masks, there is a plan to utilize earned income, if any, for empowering women, including through education.

At the end of June, the government prohibited small group learning to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Collective advocacy could help promote flexible and effective learning with the necessary prevention measures as described above.

A way forward

The literacy and non-formal education activities for youth and adults described here complement the large number of activities implemented by the government, for example those financed through a GPE grant of US\$11 million.

Despite the efforts of the Ministry to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on learning for school children, it is likely that some students will drop-out because of this crisis, especially as the crisis continues. As the Ministry may look to address this new challenge, the demand of literacy and non-formal education for youth and adults will increase.



Skills training, especially for women, is needed to support households. This will lead not only to women being able to protect themselves, but also their children, families, and communities.

It is essential that youth and adults acquire [literacy as a "foundation skill"](#) along with training on health and sanitation, to recognize and apply appropriate knowledge and skills to cope with the massive crisis the world is facing. Skills training, especially for women, is needed to support households. This will lead not only to women being able to protect themselves, but also their children, families, and communities.

This article appeared on the [GPE website](#). [\[BACK\]](#)

Farewell Wije, rest well

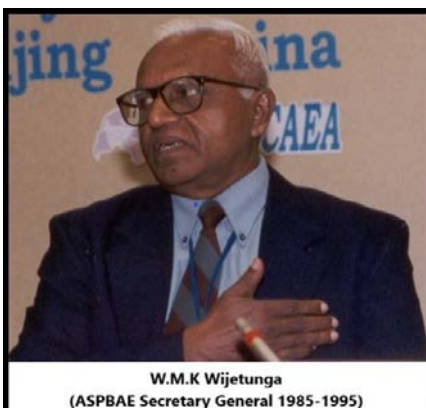
ASPBAE Secretary-General, 1985-1995

Condolence message of ASPBAE to the family of late W.M.K Wijetunga

It was with great sadness that we received the news about dear Wije's passing.

To lose a loved one is bad enough. To bid farewell against the backdrop of so much turmoil and uncertainty must have been even more trying. We hope you are coping best as you can and are keeping safe.

It has been some years since we had Wije formally join an ASPBAE event: the last may have been our 50th year anniversary celebrations in 2014. Then, as in many other past occasions, we revelled in his accounts of our history, peppered



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W.M.K. Wijetunga with current ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan. Maria took over from Wijetunga as Secretary-General.

- in his usual style - with amusing anecdotes and meeting or travel vignettes, so vivid we could almost feel the enthusiasm and dogged determination of those early ASPBAE pioneers. While these encounters over the last decade may have (regrettably) been few and far in between, Wije has - and always will be - part of the collective consciousness of ASPBAE.

When the news broke out about his passing, messages of sympathy and remembrance came immediately. Those who had met and worked with Wije spoke of his kindness and generosity, of old friendships across borders and continents forged by shared visions, of his tireless, able pursuit of a stronger ASPBAE and a resilient adult education movement.

Those who never met him – the generation of leadership 2 decades after he left as ASPBAE Secretary General – nevertheless KNEW of him. Some recalled his writings, remembered his place in the narrative of ASPBAE's life and all spoke in reverence of the contributions he made, the solid legacy he left behind.

ASPBAE has nurtured many very able leaders through the decades. But Wije was an outstanding one even in this pantheon. There are many milestones in ASPBAE's long history – moments that defined and redefined our work and life; moments that tested and fostered our resilience as an organisation that today counts 57 momentous years. The one milestone however that this generation of ASPBAE members consider with great awe and gratitude is that moment in the late 1980's- early 1990's when ASPBAE dared to change course: when it brought in into its constituency, the emerging NGO, civil society organisations in the Asia Pacific, and embraced the work around adult learning and education fostered in movements of change, resistance, democratisation and transformation. The ASPBAE we know today that advances adult education that is rights-based, gender-just, empowering, embedded in a lifelong learning framework and passionately assertive of the learning needs of marginalized groups and communities was built on this very foundation.

There are many who contributed to driving this shift and shaping its legacy but the one person who sparked the change was W.M.K Wijetunga.



Wijetunga with Rajesh Tandon of founder of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and former ASPBAE President.

As ASPBAE Secretary General (SG) in those defining years, he held a vision of an ASPBAE that was in step with the times. He worked hard to put in place an inclusive, broad-based process to craft this – deeply respectful of what had come before, but boldly asserting an aspiration for the future, even if it challenged ASPBAE convention. There was a place for grassroots organisations, of feminist movements, of popular educators, of academics, of NGO leaders and many more in the dialogue. And when the unities that defined the ASPBAE of today emerged, he threw his energies in nurturing the leadership that could see this transformation through.

When he bowed out after a decade of illustrious service as SG, Wije left behind an ASPBAE that had a formidable civil society network in the Asia Pacific; a robust accountability and governance structure that was geographically diverse, inter-generational and gender-balanced; that had grown into an articulate CSO

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voice for the global South; and a recognised international player, earning the coveted official relationship status with UNESCO and with the United Nations.

We are certain that the work that made all these possible came with a cost – not the least, in terms of time away from the family.

Thank you for sharing Wije with us. For one who has witnessed it up close, I know how generously you all supported not only Wije, but ASPBAE's life and causes.

Words will always be an inadequate salve to the deep pain of loss. We offer them in any case - in honour and remembrance of Wije - and in the hope that you may find some comfort in knowing your grief is shared by many who owe a huge debt of gratitude to that fine human being and staunch advocate of adult education that Wije was.

Our deepest condolences and respects. [[BACK](#)]



Wijetunga (2nd from right) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, at ASPBAE's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2014.

Publishing ASPBAE's write-ups: Please contact ASPBAE's Information and Communications Coordinator, Medha Soni, at medha.aspbae@gmail.com if you wish you re-produce any material published in this Bulletin.

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