



UNESCO organises CONFINTEA VII sub-regional consultation in Central Asia

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From research to action, youth at the forefront!

Documenting actions and recommendations of youth amidst challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

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High in aspirations, low in funds - An analysis of India's National Education Policy (NEP)

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Education News & Views

Right to read: Joint efforts to provide books to minority-language learners

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ASPBAE's Central Asia members call for access to ICT, re-skilling opportunities, and increased budgets for adult learning and education

ASPBAE Central Asia members' preparatory meeting for CONFINTEA VII

ASPBAE members from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan participated in a meeting designed to orient members on the Central Asia CONFINTEA VII sub-regional consultation and to provide a platform to discuss key issues and recommend strategies to improve Adult Learning and Education (ALE).

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ASPBAE joins Asia Civil Society Partnership on Sustainable Development (APSD)

As part of its intersectoral collaboration to advocate for the Sustainable Development Goal 4 agenda within the SDGs, ASPBAE joined as a member the Asia Civil Society Partnership on Sustainable Development (APSD), which is a regional network and platform of civil society organisations in Asia engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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ASPBAE supports the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) in preparation for the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

In preparation for the APFSD, the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) works closely with its Regional Coordinating Council and an Advocacy Team. ASPBAE is part of the Advocacy Team representing the Education Group in APRCM. - [Read more](#)

Member of the Month

Watch on Basic Rights Afghanistan Organization (WBRAO)

Watch on Basic Rights Afghanistan Organisation (WBRAO) has been active in organising awareness raising and advocacy programmes on education, literacy, justice, peace, prevention of child abuse and increasing access of women to their rights.

WBRO conducts capacity building programmes, national campaigns, advocacy on the right for quality education, especially for girls, and on the rights of victims of violence, especially women and girls.

Photo of the Month



21 February – Theme: *Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society* - because when 40% of the world's inhabitants do not have access to education in the language they speak or understand best, it hinders their learning.

ASPBAE Lens

ASPBAE dedicates this space in the Bulletin to showcase photos its staff have taken to feature their perception of life around them and the interesting and inspiring moments they observe. In this edition of the Bulletin, we feature a photo taken by Cecilia (Thea Soriano), ASPBAE Programmes and Operations Coordinator.

Thea Soriano

ASPBAE Programmes & Operations 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 global event held to commemorate the International Day of Education 2021.

Right to read: Joint efforts to provide books to minority-language learners



By Nyi Nyi Thaung, UNESCO Bangkok Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, and Kristen Gracie, UNESCO Bangkok Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

During this world-upending pandemic, ethnolinguistic minority learners are falling further through the cracks. Even if they have access to the technology necessary for distance learning, they will likely not receive content in their language. Here is what organizations like UNESCO are doing to make sure minority learners don't fall further behind.

A bedtime story or sharing your favourite book with a friend in class are treasured childhood experiences. Children from minority-language communities can miss these life-shaping moments, simply because there are no books available in their language. Without these books, it is difficult to learn to read and to learn in school at all. In the classroom, the impacts of this language barrier can be profound. These students are more likely to drop out of school and often struggle with the consequences of low literacy and poor educational attainment for the rest of their lives.

The pandemic is making learning harder for minority children

During the world-upending crisis of the pandemic, ethnolinguistic minority learners are falling further through the cracks.



Even if these students have access to the technology necessary for distance learning, they will likely not receive content in their language. This widens the digital divide for already marginalized groups.

Regardless of the pandemic, however, the solution remains the same and begins with using a language the child already knows. Many studies show that mother tongue-based education is crucial to ethnolinguistic minority students succeeding in school. Successful mother-tongue-based education relies on children having access to books in their languages first. These learning materials are fundamental to early education experiences that support them for life.

The simple idea of creating books in minority languages has provided a common goal for countless individuals and organizations to rally around. [The Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group \(MLE WG\)](#) is one of them and is currently leading a series of webinars to support the teaching and learning of ethnolinguistic minority learners. The most recent [webinar](#) focused on efforts to reach these learners with digital educational materials. This effort is driven by a strong, interconnected system of actors working together to make sure every child has access to reading materials in a language they understand. In the COVID-19 crisis, this work is all the more urgent in the absence of distance learning materials in minority languages.

Collaboration and partnerships are key

These partnerships have worked effectively through the pandemic because of years of building trust and collaboration. For example, [Bloom](#), a platform for creating, translating, and sharing books, jointly decided with Pratham Books and The Asia Foundation to use creative commons licenses so books in each of their libraries could be accessed by all learners. The use of the creative commons license illustrates the collaborative nature of this effort, extending beyond large global foundations and thriving on the contribution of minority language communities. Sharing materials under a creative commons license matters because speakers from these language communities are actively involved in creating and distributing content.

This initiative can be seen in the [Afghan Children Read](#) project, in which participants from the Ministry of Education insisted on creating their own books to reflect their own values and culture. While translating existing books is quicker than creating original materials, culturally tailored materials are uniquely able to reflect the world that children know. These learning materials will help improve literacy learning outcomes for Grades 1 to 3 students in Dari and Pashto. By using recognizable settings and content, these books support children's learning and affirm their ways of life.

The project has already printed and distributed 595,000 early grade reading teaching and learning materials that do just this. The leadership of translators, teachers, and organizers from minority language communities makes it possible for children in these communities to experience the joy of reading. Across the global movement, partnerships bind together the people and groups working from the local level in early childhood care centres and schools to the global level in governments and international organizations. The response to the pandemic has proven the strength of these relationships and networks, and these are just a few examples of providing acutely needed learning materials in all languages. Beyond the pandemic, these strong partnerships will be necessary to ensure education for all and meet the needs of the estimated 2.3 billion people who lack access to education in a language they speak.

[Learn more about the MLE WG](#) and sign up for the newsletter to receive information about the next webinar in the series on education for ethnolinguistic minority learners.

This article was originally published by GPE (Global Partnership for Education). [\[BACK\]](#)



CONFINTEA will be hosted by Morocco in 2022 and will examine the Adult Learning and Education (ALE) policies within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

During CONFINTEA VII, Member States will be encouraged to put in place policies, incentives, regulatory frameworks, and institutional structures and mechanisms to contribute to a culture of human rights, social justice, shared values, and sustainability. In the age of artificial intelligence, special attention will be paid to using information and communication technologies to promote access to Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and inclusion.



Prior to the UNESCO Central Asia sub-regional consultation, ASPBAE organised a virtual civil society preparatory meeting to discuss CSO contributions in implementing ALE in the sub-region and build consensus on recommendations for the future of ALE in Central Asia.

ASPBAE's Central Asia members call for access to ICT, re-skilling opportunities, and increased budgets for adult learning and education

ASPBAE Central Asia members' preparatory meeting for CONFINTEA VII

22 February 2021, Virtual

The [International Conference on Adult Education \(CONFINTEA\)](#) has been taking place every 12 years since 1940. [CONFINTEA VII](#) will be hosted by Morocco in 2022 and will examine the Adult Learning and Education (ALE) policies within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is expected that a new framework for action on ALE, intended to replace the [Belem Framework of Action](#) which was adopted in CONFINTEA VI in Brazil, will be developed.

Member States will be encouraged to put in place the policies, incentives, regulatory frameworks, and institutional structures and mechanisms to contribute to a culture of human rights, social justice, shared values, and sustainability. In the age of artificial intelligence, special attention will be given to information and communication technologies for the promotion of access and inclusion to ALE. The 5th edition of UNESCO's [Global Report on Adult Learning and Education \(GRALE 5\)](#) will also be launched at CONFINTEA VII which will provide an overview of the present state and developments from an international perspective. As a global monitoring tool, GRALE 5 will review the implementation of the commitments of the Belem Framework of Action and UNESCO's 2015 recommendations on ALE.

CONFINTEA VII will involve a preparatory phase through sub-regional and regional consultations which lay the cornerstone of the global conference. The sub-regional and regional consultations are planned in 2021 which will help participants identify the current issues on ALE in each region and suggest recommendations for CONFINTEA VII.

The virtual Central Asia sub-regional consultation was organised by UNESCO Almaty where five Member States presented their progress on ALE, followed by civil society perspectives on its implementation.

Prior to the sub-regional consultation, ASPBAE organised a virtual civil society preparatory meeting to:

- Examine the context of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in the Central Asia sub-region against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Discuss civil society organisation (CSO) contributions in implementing ALE in the region
- Build consensus on the recommendations for the future of ALE in Central Asia

Sixteen ASPBAE members from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan participated in the meeting that was designed to orient members on the forthcoming Central Asia sub-regional consultation and to provide a platform to discuss key issues and recommend strategies and activities for improving ALE based on their country contexts.



Civil society recommendations emerging from the meeting focused on participation, equity and inclusion, quality, policies and legislation, and financing and governance.



CSO recommendations called for access to ICT for all, including the elderly population; improving the quality of online Adult Learning and Education (ALE); and establishing partnerships with CSOs and local governments to expand ALE.

In the preparatory meeting, ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano presented a background of CONFINTEA VII describing the preliminary phases, importance of GRALE inputs, and timelines. This was followed by two group discussions moderated by ASPBAE's Anita Borkar and Subrat Nayak where participants exchanged views on the issues and challenges on ALE implementation in their countries and proposed key recommendations.

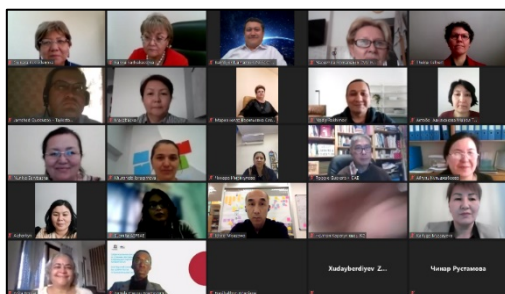
Consolidating the context and challenges of the Central Asia sub-region on ALE implementation, ASPBAE's Susmita Choudhury facilitated a session to build consensus on CSO recommendations. Linking the challenges emerging in the group discussions, Thea categorised the recommendations into the 5 areas of the Belem Framework of Action – Participation; Equity and Inclusion; Quality; Policies and Legislation; and Financing and Governance. Some highlights of the recommendations called for the following -

- Ensure access to ICT for all, including the elderly population
- Provision of self-employment skills training and re-skilling opportunities
- Improvement of internet infrastructure and access in remote areas
- Improvement of the quality of online ALE, including development of online ALE manuals and adapting off-line training programmes
- Promotion of best practices in ALE
- Establishment of an advisory group on ALE comprising of representatives from CSOs, community, and public organisations
- Member State's commitment to ALE by increasing allocation of budgets, and policy and programme development
- Development of structured state programme to enhance ALE
- Establishment of a partnership mechanism with CSOs and local governments to expand ALE

These recommendations, including good practices and perspectives from CSOs, were presented by Nasiba Mirpochoeva, ASPBAE Executive Council member representing Central Asia, in the CONFINTEA VII Central Asia sub-regional consultation organised by UNESCO Almaty. [\[BACK\]](#)

UNESCO organises CONFINTEA VII sub-regional consultation in Central Asia

25 February 2021, Virtual

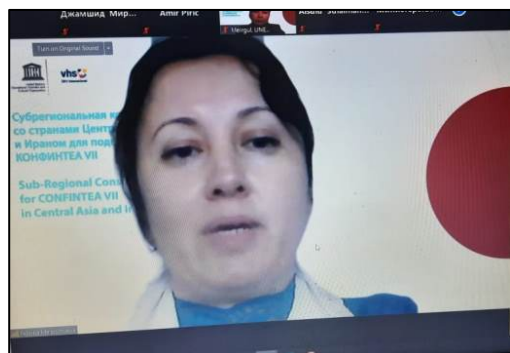


UNESCO's Central Asia sub-regional consultation for CONFINTEA VII saw participation from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

UNESCO's Central Asia sub-regional consultation for CONFINTEA VII was organised by UNESCO Almaty. The objective of the meeting was to assess specific issues and challenges related to adult learning and education (ALE) that the sub-region is currently facing; document promising innovations, including at the policy level; analyse the impact of COVID-19 on ALE participation, provision, and policies; outline prospects of ALE; identify contributions of ALE to the achievement of SDG4 and other SDGs; identify key priorities in Central Asia and suggest areas and mechanisms for sub-regional cooperation.

Participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan presented the progress on ALE in their respective countries. Civil society views were presented by DVV Central Asia and ASPBAE. DVV shared

Country presentations highlighted accomplishments related to policies, COVID-19 impacts on ALE, and steps taken to address these challenges.



ASPBAE Executive Council member representing Central Asia, Nasiba Mirpochoeva, presented civil society perspectives on the ALE challenges in the region and shared key recommendations from the ASPBAE-organised civil society preparatory meeting.

findings from its macro-level study on ALE, while ASPBAE presented civil society perspectives on the challenges, learnings, and recommendations on ALE.

The country presentations highlighted accomplishments related to policies, COVID-19 impacts on ALE, and steps taken to address these challenges. This was followed by Q&A sessions where participants spoke about, amongst other things, linking ALE with National Strategy plans, incorporating ALE in the concept of inclusive education, and mechanisms to improve ALE implementation.

DVV Regional Director for Central Asia, Thekla Kelbert, synthesised the comparative analysis of Central Asia policies on ALE. While stating the key challenges, including the impacts of COVID-19 on ALE, Thekla highlighted ALE's response to the crisis through the use of digital tools and continued capacity-building through online platforms. Recommendations were also presented which include strategies to strengthen ALE in acts, laws, regulations, and budgets; recognition, accreditation and validation of prior learning; digitalisation; and structural support to embed ALE as a sub-sector in the education system.

Nasiba Mirpochoeva, ASPBAE's Executive Council member representing Central Asia, presented the civil society perspectives on ALE challenges in the region. She also shared the key recommendations from the civil society preparatory meeting organised by ASPBAE which stressed civil society participation and collaboration, access to ALE for all, and the need to increase financing allocations on ALE. [\[BACK\]](#)

ASPBAE joins Asia Civil Society Partnership on Sustainable Development (APSD)



As part of its intersectoral collaboration to advocate for the Sustainable Development Goal 4 agenda within the SDGs, ASPBAE joined as a member the [Asia Civil Society Partnership on Sustainable Development](#) (APSD), which is a regional network and platform of civil society organisations in Asia engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. APSD's goal is to *'facilitate and strengthen regional collaboration and solidarity for synergy among international CSOs in Asia.'*

APSD is a regional partner of the Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD), the global CSO umbrella network engaged in advocacy and campaign on the SDGs and other relevant issues. APSD has a particularly strong agenda on SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. ASPBAE's work, specifically on SDG 4.7 on sustainable development and global citizenship education, is closely related to SDG 16 and located on education towards promoting peace, diversity, and democracy.

APSD facilitates, supports, and participates in monitoring and advocacy activities, such as the People's Scorecard on SDGs by the A4SD, CSO monitoring report on the implementation of the SDGs, and Voluntary National Reviews. It is also connected with international networks, such as A4SD, Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM), Civicus, Forus, Civil 20 (C20), and international forums such as the Tokyo Democracy Forum.

APSD has a strong agenda on SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. ASPBAE's work, specifically on SDG 4.7 on sustainable development and global citizenship education, is closely related to SDG 16 and located on education towards promoting peace, diversity, and democracy.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



Civil society advocates and practitioners engaged in monitoring SDGs, particularly SDG 16+, gathered to discuss the regional overview, present national civil society monitoring reports on SDG 16, and develop a Scorecard to provide an opportunity for CSOs to review and assess the delivery of the 2030 Agenda in their own country.

ASPBAE participated in the 2021 Tokyo Democracy Forum that focused on SDG 16+ and human rights, democracy, and CSO response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to democracy



ASPBAE is part of the Advocacy Team representing the Education Group in the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM).

ASPBAE participated in the meetings on the Civil Society National Monitoring of SDG 16+ and People's Scorecard (PSC) in Asia co-organised by the APSD and Asia Development Alliance (ADA) from 10-17 February 2021. Civil society advocates and practitioners engaged in monitoring SDGs, particularly SDG 16+, gathered to discuss the regional overview, present national civil society monitoring reports on SDG 16, and develop a Scorecard to provide an opportunity for civil society organisations (CSOs) to review and assess the delivery of the 2030 Agenda in their own country. Several recurring themes emerged from the presentations which include the lack of progress on SDG 16, shrinking of civic spaces, curtailment of freedom of expression, and poor governance and lack of government transparency.

ASPBAE also participated in the 2021 Tokyo Democracy Forum hosted by the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) on 15-16 February 2021. Focusing on each target within Sustainable Development Goal 16+ on peace, justice, and strong institutions, presentations looked at progress and challenges around themes such as on migrant workers, media freedom, and democratic election. It also focused on human rights, democracy, as well as civil society responses to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to democracy. The first day featured a country session with presentations from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; comments from experts in Cambodia, Singapore, Kazakhstan, and Japan; and, an open forum to cap the session. The second day featured a thematic session with presentations and an open forum on democratic election, inequality, media freedom, and migration in the context of Asia.

Being a member of APSD provides ASPBAE opportunities for understanding in-depth the linkages of SDG 4 and SDG 16 and opens up wider venues for intersectoral partnerships for its SDG 4.7 work. [\[BACK\]](#)

ASPBAE supports the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) in preparation for the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for more than a year now, the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) managed to adapt and go forward. The 8th APFSD with the theme: '*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic in Asia Pacific*' will be held mainly virtually from 23-25 March with a few sessions in the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) in Bangkok.

In preparation for the APFSD, the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) worked closely with its Regional Coordinating Council and an Advocacy Team. The latter is composed of representatives from different APRCEM members who supported the Secretariat in preparing for CSOs' meaningful interventions in APFSD. ASPBAE is part of the Advocacy Team representing the Education Group in APRCEM.



APRCM prepared Fact Sheets that analysed the progress of the SDGs. ASPBAE contributed a Fact Sheet on COVID-19 Recovery Funds which provided inputs for SDG 17 on partnerships and financing and overall efforts towards sustained recovery and resilience.



ASPBAE research in the Fact Sheet shows that COVID-19 recovery funds are mostly loans, not grants. UNESCO states that a majority of the financial support comes from loans amounting to \$36.7 billion, or 96.31% of the support.

With the theme and focused SDGs to be reviewed in the APFSD and further in the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), APRCEM prepared Fact Sheets that analysed the progress of the SDGs, especially in light of the pandemic, as well as provided key recommendations for the APRCEM Statement and interventions of APRCEM members during APFSD.

ASPBAE prepared the Fact Sheet on COVID-19 Recovery Funds. While there is no specific roundtable discussion that will tackle the theme in the APFSD, the Paper provides important inputs for SDG 17 on partnerships and financing and overall efforts towards sustained recovery and resilience. The Fact Sheet offered important analysis points based on a review of literature on COVID-19 recovery efforts. Some main points from the Fact Sheet were -

Poverty and gender inequality increased

- During the pandemic, some of the most marginalised groups are the women and youth. Based on the ILO's Asia Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2020, during the pandemic, there is a larger decline in working hours and employment for women than men. Young people have also been especially affected by working-hour and job losses.
- According to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, the COVID-19 pandemic is pushing an additional 71 to 100 million people into extreme poverty. The ILO estimated that the total number of working poor, those living on less than \$1.90 per day, in the Asia Pacific could reach between 94 to 98 million in 2020. With the second wave of the pandemic across the Asia Pacific in 2021, this situation could worsen.

Composition of fiscal policy varies across countries

- The capacities to respond to COVID-19 are unequal and exacerbates inequalities according to the ILO Report 2020.
- The ILO Report further stated that because advanced economies can dedicate substantially more funding to their COVID-19 policy responses than lower-income economies, inequalities between countries in Asia Pacific are exacerbated.

Given the realities illustrated by the points above, international financing support will be most needed. However, ASPBAE's research showed that –

COVID-19 recovery funds are mostly loans, and not grants, as further described below:

- A UNESCAP Report revealed that seven multilateral banks (MDBs) and international financial institutions (IFIs) are providing financing totalling to \$40 billion worth of financing for Asia Pacific countries between March and September 2020. However, this support for health systems, and later for economic recovery, remains insufficient.
- UNESCAP stated that a majority of the financial support comes from loans amounting to \$36.7 billion, or 96.31% of the support. Only \$1.4 billion or 3.64% are grants, while debt relief is only \$0.018 billion or 0.05%.

ASPBAE also shared recommendations for the SDG 8 Fact Sheet, linking SDG 4, in particular gender-just skills education for decent work, most especially for marginalised women. ASPBAE provided updated information to its members and encouraged them to register in the virtual intergovernmental meeting, APFSD, as well as in the People's Forum. [\[BACK\]](#)



Young people continue to face significant disruptions and changes due to COVID-19 on multiple fronts - at home, in their schools, communities, and workplaces where their present and future seem to be under threat.

From research to action, youth at the forefront!

Documenting actions and recommendations of youth amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world. Millions of people have lost their lives, a million others became unemployed, migrants returned to their villages, students were pushed out of education, and many young girls were forced into early marriages. The pandemic and the lockdown of economies affected marginalised communities the most.

Young people also became vulnerable. They continue to face significant disruptions and changes on multiple fronts - at home, in schools, communities, and workplaces. While they unpack the meaning of a 'new normal' for them, their present and future seem to be under threat.

Yet the youth have also been at the forefront of local-level actions. They have been active in relief work, awareness campaigns, mobilising communities to shape creative forms of resistance, and solidarity.

ASPBAE and its members from nine countries of the Asia Pacific, including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu undertook a participatory action research to listen to and document youth voices and narratives. The study primarily focused on understanding the impact of the pandemic on education, livelihood, health and well-being, as well as documenting key recommendations from the youth to governments and education stakeholders which called for improvement of infrastructure, access, and services.

Youth groups, working closely with their allied organisations, continued to provide community support and worked on the recommendations that emerged from the study supported by ASPBAE. As documented in this study, from the onset of the pandemic, and much before lockdowns were announced, youth from various member groups jumped into action. Connecting with different stakeholders, they managed to gather the support of people and stocked up on essential goods. They were at the forefront in distributing relief supplies, helping their neighbours and community members provide timely assistance.

For example, youth groups in the Philippines acted promptly, connecting with allied organisations and institutions for support such as food relief, medical supplies, and other essential goods. Youth groups coordinated with various organisations for community cleaning and disinfection efforts. Although government departments started food distributions, it was slow and limited. Therefore, the youth initiated a donation drive. They managed to distribute food packs to many poor families until the food relief assistance from the government was regularised. They also mobilised other youth volunteers to help in their awareness-raising campaigns. With the help of creative posters, they shared accurate information about the COVID-19 virus and ways to prevent it. This helped many families address their anxieties and practice proper health protocols. The youth teams also organised many virtual exchanges and webinars to advance these conversations.



Youth groups in the Philippines connected with allied organisations and institutions for support such as food relief, medical supplies, and other essential goods.



Considering the significant increase in domestic violence during the lockdown, youth groups in India created posters containing helpline numbers and other resources, encouraging people to be aware and take action in such situations.

In Timor-Leste, young people met with officials from the Ministry of Education to present their research recommendations. In Mongolia, young people submitted recommendations to the National Human Rights Commission, which found the study useful with regard to LGBTQI groups in the context of the pandemic.



In consultations in Bangladesh, stakeholders agreed and emphasised the role of youth organisations, educational institutions, government, and NGOs in supporting youth development.

Furthermore, to ensure that their research findings also served as a means to give back to vulnerable communities, the youth started devising various next steps. In Nepal and India, for instance, the youth teams undertook awareness initiatives on the prevention of COVID-19 and explored ways to provide psycho-social support to communities in need.

The sharing of information through social media helped to promote a positive behaviour and way of learning and engagement during emergencies. For this, messages and information were shared through infographics, videos, podcasts in regional languages, and local channels.

These awareness-raising initiatives helped reduce mental stress and psychological fears among young people during the pandemic and encouraged them to engage in creative activities and learning.

Considering the significant increase in domestic violence during the lockdown, youth groups in India created posters containing helpline numbers and other resources, encouraging people to be aware and take action in such situations. The team tackled the issue of early marriages by creating an animation video that was circulated on social media. They also presented the research recommendations to local councils, demanding attention to the situation of girls in the country.

In Sri Lanka, along with community awareness, the group decided to share their research findings and recommendations in national newspapers. They connected with journalists and published their articles in five national [newspapers](#).

Consultations with multiple stakeholders were organised in Bangladesh to share key recommendations and organise support for the youth. In the consultations, all the stakeholders agreed and emphasised the role of youth organisations, educational institutions, government, and NGOs in supporting youth development.

In Timor-Leste, young people met with officials from the Ministry of Education and Technical and Voluntary Education and Training institutions to present their research recommendations.

A similar meeting was also organised in Mongolia with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Department of Family, Child, and Youth Development. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare noted the comments made during the discussion and expressed their willingness to work with youth NGOs. The group also submitted their research findings and recommendations to the National Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Forum of NGOs found the research study very useful for understanding the situation of LGBTQI groups in the context of the pandemic.

This study, which was designed amidst this challenging and difficult time by these courageous youth groups, is a testament to the transformative power of the youth, their voices, and their stories. ASPBAE members and their associated youth groups are determined to continue these follow-up local actions and inform their policy advocacy work. [\[BACK\]](#)



India's National Education Policy is immensely significant as it comes after a gap of nearly 30 years and will be a key document providing direction to the education sector in the coming years, catering to almost 50% of India's population.

New proposals in the policy include universalisation of school education, doubling of Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education to 50% by 2035, bringing approximately 32 million out-of-school children in mainstream education, expansion of coverage of mid-day meals, recruitment of teachers, and improvement in digital infrastructure that has been realised in the wake of COVID-19.



While the NEP aspired to achieve 6% of GDP allocation to education, the current public spending is far below this target.

High in aspirations, low in funds - An analysis of India's National Education Policy (NEP)

By Protiva Kundu, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) of India was approved by the Union Cabinet on 29 July 2020. The policy is immensely significant as it comes after a gap of nearly 30 years (the last national education policy was in 1986, modified in 1992) and will be a key document providing direction to the education sector in the coming years, catering to almost 50% of India's population.

The policy is presented as a single organic continuum from pre-school to higher education. NEP proposes *"the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems"*.

There are several new proposals in the policy, including universalisation of school education, doubling of Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education to 50% by 2035, bringing approximately 32 million out-of-school children in mainstream education, expansion of coverage of mid-day meals, recruitment of teachers, and improvement in digital infrastructure that has been realised in the wake of COVID.

The execution of these proposals requires substantial government expenditure on education in a phased manner. The NEP has acknowledged the need for higher investment in education and envisioned that to reap maximum benefits from this investment, financing should be largely from public sources. It has also rightly identified that under-allocation of resources is leading to under-utilisation. Therefore, with a need for higher public investment, the policy recommended increasing the overall public expenditure on education to 6% of the GDP, a norm accepted for the national outlay on education by all previous national education policies.

The Union Budget 2021-22 was the first budget after the rollout of the NEP 2020. Hence, the expectation was that the budget will have some NEP implementation plans. Unfortunately, the budget failed to offer any financial roadmap for NEP implementation. The Ministry of Finance has allocated a budget of over Rs. 93.2 million (USD 12.4 million) for the education sector, of which Rs. 54 million (USD 7.2 million) is allocated for Dept. of School Education and Literacy and Rs. 38.3 million (USD 5.1 million) for Dept. of Higher Education. The budget has not only been decreased by 6.13% from 2020-21 (Budget Estimates-BE), but its share in the total Union Budget has fallen from 3.3% to 2.7%.

While the NEP aspired to achieve 6% of GDP allocation to education, the current public spending is far below the target. The decline in allocation towards the sector from 0.44% in 2020-21 to 0.42% of GDP in this budget indicates that the Union Government is shifting the responsibility of education financing more towards State governments.



Most of the interventions laid out in the National Education Policy either do not have any budgetary implications or are not reflected in the budget in any form.

The NEP recommended for the creation of a gender-inclusive fund. However, there is a decline in allocations for the National Scheme for Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education from Rs. 1.2 billion (USD 15.9 million) to Rs. 10 million (USD 133,000).

The budget speech by India's Finance Minister listed a set of initiatives taken as part of the NEP that includes National Professional Standards for Teachers, indigenous toy-based learning – pedagogy, National Digital Educational Architecture (NDEAR), standardisation of Indian sign language and reforms in 10th and 12th grade exams. However, most of these interventions laid out either do not have any budgetary implications or are not reflected in the budget in any form. Similarly, the proposition of strengthening 15,000 schools as 'exemplar schools' in regions towards achieving the goals of the NEP does not have an action plan, undermining the implementation of the proposed initiative.

With the overall fund brought down, the fund allocation for *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*, the key flagship scheme responsible for education from pre-primary to higher secondary level of education, has witnessed a budget cut of around 20% from the previous year.

Highlighting the sorry plight of girls' education, the NEP recommended for the creation of a gender-inclusive fund. However, there is a decline in allocations for the National Scheme for Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education from Rs. 1.2 billion (USD 15.9 million) to Rs. 10 million (USD 133,000).

The NEP talks about the goals of affordable and quality education for all, but the Union Budget fails to address the measures proposed in the NEP or even indicate its steps to work towards achieving the aspirations set in this important policy document. High in aspirations but low in funds, the NEP appears to be a distant dream. [\[BACK\]](#)

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