

# ASPBAE Ed-lines

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL



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## ASPBAE's 8th General Assembly successfully held amidst challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic

Over the last two decades, ASPBAE's regional strategic planning workshops related to its General Assembly (GA) have been conducted in face-to-face meetings of members. In 2020, given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and varying levels of mobility and travel restrictions, the Regional Strategic Planning Workshop related to the 8th General Assembly was organised virtually.

The GA brought together accredited and individual members, as well as strategic partners, in several processes organised during the year. This includes: members' consultations; Executive Council (EC) elections, and voting for the proposed ASPBAE Constitutional Amendments. The Regional Strategic Planning workshop was the culminating event of the 8th GA organised at the end of 2020, where ASPBAE's new logo was also launched. Communiqués on the various aspects and processes of the 8th GA were sent to all the members throughout the year.

The 8th GA processes included consultations with members which were further divided in two phases consisting of

sub-regional cluster meetings and national consultations. In June 2020, three sub-regional cluster meetings were organised in: (1) South Asia, East Asia and South East Asia; (2) South Pacific, and; (3) Central Asia, where member organisations from 26 countries participated. The main agenda of the cluster meetings was to offer an in-depth briefing to the accredited members on the areas for discussion during country consultations. Milestones of ASPBAE's work in the period 2017-2020 were presented



*The 8th ASPBAE General Assembly culminated in a regional strategic planning workshop held virtually due to the pandemic.*

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*National consultations were held in 25 countries for members to share their perspectives on ASPBAE's current work and strategic directions for the next four years.*

and relevant feedback was solicited. The process for voting on the proposed Constitutional Amendments and the governance processes of the 8th GA were also presented in the cluster meetings.



*The theme of ASPBAE's Regional Strategic Planning Workshop organised virtually was 'Re-IMAGINE, re-THINK, re-CREATE: Adapting to change, preserving the gains, ensuring empowering education and lifelong learning for ALL'.*

The national consultations of ASPBAE members were organised following the cluster meetings. These consultation meetings, in 25 countries, were organised for members to share their perspectives on ASPBAE's current work and strategic directions in the next four years, sensitised to the diverse national contexts in the region. Members also discussed the proposed amendments to ASPBAE's Constitution and facilitated the process of selection of Country Voting Representatives (1 male and 1 female) from respective countries.

ASPBAE Executive Council (EC) elections for the term 2021-2024 and voting for the proposed amendments to ASPBAE's Constitution were conducted electronically during the 15-day voting period in October 2020. An election was held for the only contested post for this term – the EC representative for South Asia (female). All the other posts, including the post for ASPBAE President, were uncontested.

Dorothy Lucardie, a former ASPBAE EC member, was appointed as the 8th GA's Returning and Election Officer. As Returning and Election Officer, she oversaw the efficient, fair, and transparent

conduct of the ASPBAE Executive Council Elections (for the EC term 2021-2024), and the voting on proposed Constitutional amendments. Taking advantage of the enhanced capacity of ASPBAE and its members to meet online in 2020, she presided over an interactive forum presenting the two candidates contesting for the post of EC representative for South Asia (female) to the 52 Country Voting Representatives of the 8th GA. Following the online voting process, Meenu Vadera was elected EC female representative for South Asia. In addition, all the 19 proposed amendments to the ASPBAE Constitution were passed.

The Regional Strategic Planning Workshop, organised virtually from 15-17 December 2020, took on the theme - "Re-IMAGINE, re-THINK, re-CREATE: Adapting to change, preserving the gains, ensuring empowering education and lifelong learning for ALL". The regional workshop brought together over a hundred ASPBAE members and strategic partners to discuss and deliberate on ASPBAE's work and to inform its strategic plan for 2021-2024.

Designed as an interactive space, the regional workshop included conversations with inter-generational leaders from the education movement to collectively analyse current and emerging contexts that impact on education and development and draw important recommendations that can feed into ASPBAE's strategic plan and expand its thematic areas of work. A session was also included to strategically draw from the voices of the youth and provide a space for them to inform the ASPBAE's work in the next four years. Further, discussions were also held to generate recommendations from members on how ASPBAE can further harness its institutional strengths to facilitate more member-member collaborations and experience-sharing to optimise the rich body of work and depth of experience in education practice and advocacy among ASPBAE's members and partners.



*ASPBAE's Executive Council for the term 2021-2024 and its new Secretary-General, Maria Helen Dabu, were formally introduced to the membership.*

ASPBAE's Executive Council for the term 2021-2024 and its new Secretary-General, Maria Helen Dabu, were formally introduced to the membership during this Regional Strategic Planning workshop. It was concluded with a ceremony to honour Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, who decided to step down as Secretary-General after 25 years of dedicated and unparalleled service to ASPBAE.



EDITORIAL

## Ensuring the right to education for all as integral to human rights-based recovery and rebuilding

*By Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, ASPBAE Consulting Director for Policy and Strategic Directions; former ASPBAE Secretary-General*



*NGO workers, including education rights activists and ASPBAE members, were some of the first responders to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

ASPBAE convened its 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2020 against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic which, along with climate change and conflict, has created “the greatest humanitarian challenge since the Second World War”, according to UN Secretary-General, Antonio Gutierrez.

It was arguably not the most favourable of periods to organise a broad-based, intensive, and organisation-wide governance and leadership transition process. But years of building a durable organisation had prepared ASPBAE for the challenge.

ASPBAE’s tenacity to carry on in the midst of a context much altered by the pandemic was only in keeping with how civil society in the Asia Pacific responded to the crisis. NGO workers – including education rights activists and ASPBAE members – were some of the first responders to the COVID-19 pandemic. They organised the

relief effort for those who had lost jobs, livelihoods, and access to food and shelter following the massive lockdowns to contain the pandemic. They helped volunteer health assistance responses



*In various national, regional, and global policy spaces shaping and tracking the SDGs and SDG4 roll-out, ASPBAE offered a credible, resonant voice of civil society.*



***ASPBAE's capacity support for education advocacy helped sustain 19 national education campaign coalitions to achieve policy reforms that protected and defended education rights.***

as the persistently underfunded public health systems teetered to near collapse in the face of huge numbers needing medical support. They launched education campaigns to battle fake news and to link especially vulnerable communities to critical information on COVID, social protection responses, and other measures to safeguard their lives and well-being. And when policy platforms and spaces re-opened under the “new normal” of operating and relating, education rights activists were present and were poised to be meaningfully and pro-actively engaged at local, national, regional, and global terrains of policy and decision-making to ensure education rights were advanced.

The collective review by ASPBAE's membership and leadership, of the period 2017-2020 during the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, sketched a portrait of organisational robustness and resilience. ASPBAE has maintained and grown a formidable network across the Asia Pacific region of highly credible, effective, and committed education activists and their organisations, seeking to secure quality, transformative education and lifelong learning for all children, youth, and adults.

In various national, regional, and global policy spaces shaping and tracking the SDGs and SDG 4 roll-out, ASPBAE offered a credible, resonant voice of civil society, grounded in grassroots realities, and championing the aspirations of vulnerable and erstwhile excluded groups. It offered creative spaces for youth leadership and intergenerational solidarity that strengthened the collective voice and agency of young women and men from marginalised communities to assert

their education rights and participate in policymaking. Forging cross-country dialogue between practitioners and advocates of adult learning and education (ALE) built greater conceptual clarity on what transformative education entails, enhancing the already strong CSO ALE practice and informing policy.

ASPBAE's demand-driven, context-based, ‘real world’ capacity support for education advocacy helped sustain 19 broad-based national education campaign coalitions to achieve policy reforms that protected and defended education rights. ASPBAE nurtured its membership base and deepened its geographic spread, creating a new Central Asia sub-region in its governance structure.

Clearly, there is a strong foundation of work that ASPBAE stands on as it defines its future course. But ASPBAE and its members are all too aware that they face bigger challenges in the period ahead with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic layered on and exacerbating long-standing and unresolved structural problems the world has been facing.

The scale of poverty, hunger, and joblessness multiplied in the



***UNESCO estimates that as many as 24 million children and youth are estimated to be at risk of being pushed out of education systems.***

wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as lockdowns and restrictions on mobility spawned a global recession unparalleled since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The UN's Financing for Sustainable Report 2021 estimated that 114 million jobs have been lost, and about 120 million people have been





*Education rights advocates should continue to demand the safeguarding of all human rights within education as well as enhancing human rights through education.*

plunged back into extreme poverty. Women have been unduly affected: more women have lost work compared to men, being disproportionately represented in sectors with the least secure jobs, and lower social protection coverage. Worryingly, while around 9% of the world's population experienced severe deprivation of basic needs (by World Bank estimates), the world's ten richest men saw their combined wealth increase by half a trillion dollars since the pandemic began —more than enough to pay for a COVID-19 vaccine for everyone and to ensure no one is pushed into poverty by the pandemic, according to Oxfam International.

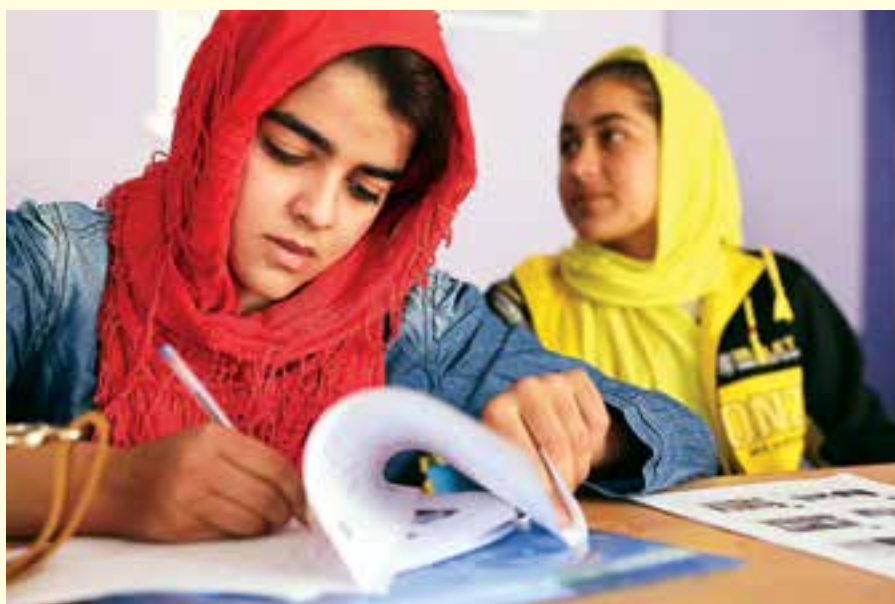
In 2020, the impacts of the climate crisis brought more hardship to the Asia Pacific, a region already reeling under COVID-19 difficulties. Violent political conflicts persisted in the period despite the call for a ceasefire by the UN Secretary-General in the face of the COVID crisis. Rising nationalism and the infusion of religion in politics undermined secularism and pluralism, increasing societal polarisation and contributed to the heightened conflict. Social media platforms have also become engines for the dissemination of hate speech towards minority groups and deliberate disinformation. The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic saw governments seize the opportunity of the crisis to silence critical voices and censor reports of state abuses in relation to handling the pandemic. Democratic spaces have been shrinking pre-COVID and they continued to contract.

Education can offer a powerful means to fight poverty, inequality, exclusion, and hatred. It can offer the tools for greater opportunity, to enable women and men, the young and the old, to have an equal voice and power to participate substantively

in decision-making processes determining their lives. But education too was one of the sectors very badly hit by the pandemic. UNESCO estimates that as many as 24 million children and youth are estimated to be at risk of being pushed out.

A human rights-based recovery from the pandemic should recognise that education is a right and a key strategy to equip people to best respond to and rebuild from the crisis. ASPBAE should push governments and the international community to honour the commitments to education as enshrined in the global SDG 4 agenda – not a narrower, short-sighted version of it currently being promoted.

ASPBAE and its members should sustain efforts to push governments to bridge the wide digital divides in online learning predicated on income, gender, location, ethnicity and race, religion, and other structural disparities and where people with disabilities are considerably left out. Measures to end structural discrimination in education should be embedded, likewise, in the plans for the safe re-opening of schools, learning centres, and other educational institutions, whilst guaranteeing the overall well-being of teachers, trainers, learners, and all education personnel. Ending systemic discrimination of girls and women, in particular, is essential to the right to education



*Ending systemic discrimination of girls and women is essential to the right to education for all.*

for all.

Education rights advocates should continue to demand the safeguarding of all human rights *within* education as well as enhancing human rights *through* education. They should challenge narrow, instrumentalist conceptions of 'quality'



*A more resilient, inclusive, gender-just education system truly for all cannot and should not ignore adult learning and education (ALE). ASPBAE needs to lend its powerful voice towards this end.*

education peddled with renewed zeal and genuinely ensure that even online and distance education should be directed at “the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, as defined by human rights convention. Democratic rights of speech, assembly, and organising should be defended in education systems, increasingly under attack from rising authoritarianism under the cloak of emergency response.

Education rights activists should persist in demanding *free* quality education, cautioning against the corporate capture of digital learning that could further education commercialisation and privatisation, undermining the right to education. They should sustain campaigning to protect education budgets, resist harmful fiscal austerity measures that would cut funding to education, health, and social protection programmes, and lay claim to education’s rightful place in stimulus plans of governments. They should push for stronger progressive fiscal policies and tax reforms that would stem illegal capital flight and generate the resources to sustain strong public education systems that deliver equitable, gender-transformative, and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Adult learning and education (ALE) helped save lives during the pandemic. Health education democratised the much-needed information on COVID and how communities can best care for themselves. Skills training and digital literacy helped

people recover income and livelihood opportunities lost. Inter-generational learning sustained continuing education as parents, grandparents, and elder siblings took on the roles of teaching in the advent of school closures. Where the rich tradition in ALE of participatory, context-based teaching and learning approaches have been tapped, it well served more effective delivery of community-based education – most suitable for poorer, marginalised communities with no access to technology-based learning.

Yet, youth and adult learning and education have remained at the fringe of policy discourses and education recovery plans of governments and donors. Education is certainly essential to prepare for the future, but it equally needs to equip the decision-makers of *today*. The reversals needed to address the climate crisis, future pandemics, repression, intolerance, war, and conflict, cannot wait. ALE offers the means to equip today’s citizens and communities to cope with these challenges and to urgently transform the conditions needed to set the world towards a more sustainable, equitable, peaceful, and just future. A human rights-based recovery and rebuilding agenda needs to advance the education rights of all. And a more resilient, inclusive, gender-just education system, truly for *all*, cannot and should not ignore adult learning and education (ALE). ASPBAE needs to lend its powerful voice towards this end.



# Fostering **CHANGE FOR TRANSFORMATION** through empowering learning opportunities and inter-generational partnerships in the Asia Pacific

By Nani Zulminarni, ASPBAE President

*The continuing power of patriarchy, religious fundamentalism of race, caste and gender, violence against women, and discrimination based on sexual identities has hindered progress in the Asia Pacific.*

To facilitate the process of re-thinking, re-creating, and re-imagining ASPBAE and its contribution to the right to the education movement, it is important to reflect on the regional education and development trends and contexts that have a far-reaching impact on our fight for the right to transformative education.



*There are challenges linked to the narrowing down of the SDG 4 promise, privatisation of education that pushes countries towards greater debt, and gaps in the financing of public education.*

Our worlds and ways of working have changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has reserved its most vicious and devastating blows to those who are vulnerable and marginalised. The crisis has added an estimated 71 million people to the already staggering figure of 700 million who remained below the poverty line, even in pre-COVID times.

In the Asia Pacific, and indeed in many countries in the world, there have been threats to democracy, an increase in fascism, trampling of human rights, silencing of opposing points of view to prevailing political discourses, weakening of institutions, muzzling of the media, and the systematic demolition of

existing structures. The continuing power of patriarchy, religious fundamentalism of race, caste and gender, violence against women, and discrimination based on sexual identities, has hindered progress in the region. We are also observing overarching and triumphant militarism which has increasingly permeated economic, political, and cultural spheres like never before. The impacts of climate change, and the glaring and growing polarisation between extreme concentrations of wealth and dehumanized living poses, threats to any hope of equity, justice, and, above all, peace.

This pandemic has left its most devastating impact on education systems. Lockdowns and school closures have left out many from formal learning opportunities. Public opinion and policymakers have opened up in their consciousness to the wider frontiers of education and learning beyond schools due to the crisis. The crisis has also put a spotlight on huge disparities and gaps that societies have lived with, and how



*The education movement must push for transformative education and lifelong learning systems that are impactful, accessible, of good quality, adequately-funded, and inter-generationally relevant.*



*The education movement in the region needs to redefine and reconstruct new leadership for the future ensuring the collective and inclusive rather than the structural and dominating.*

that has expressed itself in education systems. We have seen a massive digital divide, determining how one child's future is secured with access to gadgets and internet, versus the lost aspirations of another child without it. In the midst of all this, there are challenges linked to the narrowing down of the SDG 4 promise, privatisation of education that pushes countries towards greater debt, and gaps in the financing of public education.

This is an opportune moment for civil societies to engage with communities and families as foundations of individual learning beyond formal schooling processes. For indigenous communities, there is another dimension of indigenous knowledge systems and wisdom embedded in families, which should be taken into account. It is especially in these challenging circumstances that the education movement must push for transformative education and lifelong learning systems that are impactful, accessible, of good quality, adequately-funded, and inter-generationally relevant. This transformative education must challenge mindsets that are exclusionary and unjust and enable people of all ages to be change-makers.

This is the time to enable young people in the Asia Pacific to take the lead in bringing about change while learning from the contribution, experiences, and achievements of the past. The education movement in the region needs to redefine and reconstruct new leadership for the future, ensuring the collective and inclusive rather than the structural and dominating.

In conclusion, there is much promise due to the strong education movement we have built in the Asia Pacific through ASPBAE, one that can interlink and thrive from local, regional, and global networks and experiences. Our movement is poised to foster an inter-generational partnership of working, cooperating, and collaborating to bring about truly inclusive and empowering change for transformation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ASPBAE'S SUB-REGIONS

*The following sub-regional inputs were based on the plenary session of ASPBAE's Regional Strategic Planning Workshop, held from 15-17 December 2020, where ASPBAE Executive Council (EC) members offered their brief sub-regional lens and perspectives on key areas based on the various thematic sessions discussed in the planning workshop. This session was meant to convey the character and peculiarities of the sub-region they represent; and to convey to ASPBAE members the considerations ASPBAE needs to be cognisant of when planning work around given thematic issues or concerns so they account for sub-regional peculiarities.*

### South Asia: Inter-country collaboration key to sustainable change

**By Ehsanur Rahman, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing South Asia**

South Asia is comprised of seven adjoining countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka - geographically knit together by sociocultural, political, historical, economic, and educational factors.

Inequality and poverty remain a cross-cutting thematic issue across the sub-region. Gender disparities remain amongst the worst across the globe, where skills for marginalised women are often stereotyped. However, with the larger portion of the young population, the sub-region can benefit from the demographic dividend by investing in human resource development, contributing to economic growth and equity.



*Universal primary and secondary education in South Asia are the first steps towards equipping young learners with the requisite skills and competencies needed in the changing labour market.*





*In South Asia, continuous effort on strengthening education and skills-building must be prioritised towards resilience-building.*

Recognising the sub-region's peculiarities and unique challenges, it is important that the strategies and recommendations to ASPBAE's strategic work be built on and leveraged on these to contribute to its success. It is important to consider that strategies that worked well in other sub-regions may not work well in South Asia.

Universal primary and secondary education are the first steps towards equipping young learners with the requisite skills and competencies needed in the changing labour market. Given the sub-region's challenges in terms of school transitions, enrolment rate, and employability, partly be due to challenges related to accessing the right skills for dynamic markets, UNICEF, in a publication on Improving Education Quality in South Asia (2018), posited that upgrading the quality of teaching, learning, and further initiatives for upskilling and re-skilling can reduce dropout rates and ensure better transitions from early childhood learning into primary and secondary education, further ensuring a better transition from school to the professional world.

As the aggravating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to disrupt the education of learners across the region, continuous efforts on strengthening education and skills-building must be prioritised towards resilience-building.

ASPBAE can upscale showcasing its achievements at national, regional, and international levels. Collaborating with other countries in the region can strengthen the capacities around market-responsive skills, which includes Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), that can transform education equity, quality, and efficiency.

Work needs to be expanded beyond countries for sustainable changes at sub-regional levels. Networking and forging new partnerships with neighbouring Southeast Asian countries and other developed countries in East Asia can also be tapped to add value for sub-regional growth and regional advocacy.

## East Asia: Protecting education budgets and addressing private sector capture of education

*By Batjargal Bathuyag, ASPBAE  
Executive Council Member representing  
East Asia*

Countries in East Asia differ in many aspects. Although it remains an evident strength that enrolment rates at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels are significantly high throughout the sub-region, in Mongolia, the tertiary enrolment rate and employment opportunities for females remain inadequate.

In addressing the diverse educational needs of young people and adults, countries in the sub-region rely mainly on formal education, solely because non-formal education is still not adequately developed. This approach, however, is considered problematic, as a one-size-fits-all approach does not address diverse and progressive learning needs. It is, therefore, imperative to diversify the sub-region's education system.

East Asia has the largest aging population, hence, putting a spotlight on the importance of addressing inter-generational issues is paramount in the sub-region. The large urban-rural divide in countries like China and Mongolia, in terms of infrastructure and online facilities, also needs to be taken into account as the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted rural populations, forcing the region, and the rest of the world, to shift to online modalities of learning.

In terms of education financing, the sub-region is relatively doing better - some East Asian countries have even provided aid to other countries. However, with the pressing health situation and the focus that needs to be enforced for pandemic



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*Continuous effort must be exerted in advocacy around protecting education budgets and engaging countries like Japan, China, and South Korea which are capable of extending more help in supporting education through their development aid.*

response, significant funds were diverted from education to other sectors. With this, a continuous effort must be exerted in advocacy around protecting education budgets and engaging countries like Japan, China, and South Korea, which are capable of extending more help in supporting education through their development aid. This should be on top of their existing overall Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Lastly, with the region being home to some of the world's best education systems, there is also a need to be mindful and vigilant of the private players promoting privatisation of education and the corporate capture of digital learning.

## Southeast Asia: Calling for more advocacy engagement for people with disabilities

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

Southeast Asia has an impressive diversity of culture, history, and politics. Over the years, the sub-region has witnessed a growing economic interdependence among its countries, while, at the same time, territorial disputes of neighbouring countries have been noted. Other contextual issues include the loss of biodiversity, worsening pollution, environmental disasters, and the rise of authoritarian regimes in a number of countries in the sub-region.

Those belonging to the vulnerable and marginalised population, including migrants, women, and people with disabilities, are often left out from the formal education systems. Stigma and discrimination against people with disability, lack of understanding of the issues, and lack of political will, which leads to insufficient funding in addressing the learning needs of people with disabilities, is just one example of persistent education challenges in the sub-region.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization

(SEAMEO) has identified seven priority agendas for education, which include:

- Achieving universal Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
- Addressing barriers to inclusion
- Resiliency in the face of emergencies
- Promoting Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
- Revitalising teacher education
- Harmonising higher education and research
- Adopting a 21st century curriculum



*Those belonging to the vulnerable and marginalised population, including migrants, women, and people with disabilities, are often left out from formal education systems.*

There is a need to interlink ASPBAE's themes with these seven priority areas for education and also maximise opportunities in engaging with this platform.

More analytical tools should be developed to help look into emerging issues and come up with appropriate recommendations. ASPBAE's support for the participation of local CSOs in national, regional, and global advocacy events can also be expanded to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in relevant platforms so that their reality can be shared and their voices can be heard by policy makers.



*ASPBAE's support for the participation of CSOs in advocacy events can also be expanded to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in relevant platforms.*



Clarification of concepts such as inclusive education and special education, is also needed to ensure quality of monitoring and advocacy work. In some instances, lack of funding for special education is due to inappropriate understanding and misinterpretation of the concepts. ASPBAE could also ramp up capacity building work, which serves as one of its strengths, to enable persons with disabilities to more effectively engage in advocacy work.

## The South Pacific: Indigenous education an integral part of lifelong learning

**By Peter-Clinton Isaac Foaese, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing the South Pacific**

South Pacific is a large sub-region constituted by various islands and diverse cultures. The sub-region relies heavily on the abundance of the Pacific Ocean, which, they in turn have taken care of for over a thousand of years.

This is a sub-region most vulnerable to environmental challenges and the impacts of climate change. People continuously suffer at the expense of those from developed countries, particularly when biological waste and pollution caused by the practices and industries of these countries reach the Pacific Ocean.

Although people from the sub-region see themselves holistically from physical, social, cultural, and familial perspectives, colonisation had greatly impacted their self-identity. For too long, colonisation and individualistic education have restricted people's mechanism for self-determination. This has undermined indigenous knowledge systems and disrupted the strong connections and bonds of the people with its ocean, lands, and ancestors. People's struggle for self-determination and indigenous identity consequently impacted the sub-region's development in education.



*There should be revitalised support in protecting indigenous culture and languages of the South Pacific, recognising that traditional learning spaces are just as important as formal learning spaces.*

Collectively, adult education improves the well-being of people and the environment. However, there is still a wide gap in the area of sustainable development from the perspective of indigenous communities. ASPBAE can scale up its support to the South Pacific by offering larger spaces in global advocacy platforms so that people's voices from the sub-region are heard on issues such as adult education and climate change.

The youth population in the sub-region surpasses that of the older adult population, and as the sub-region continues to face identity-related challenges, there is a need to ensure that the youth population builds life skills anchored on the local language and culture. There should be revitalised support to protect indigenous culture and languages, recognising that



*ASPBAE could expand its work in helping address the destructive impacts of climate change. There should be a continuous effort to raise the people's voices when it comes to holding major environmental polluters to account.*

traditional learning spaces are just as important as formal learning spaces. ASPBAE should continue to promote the application of traditional knowledge systems alongside mainstream knowledge systems to find solutions to urgent problems.

It is further recommended that ASPBAE expand its work in helping address the destructive impacts of climate change. There should be a continuous effort to raise people's voices when it comes to holding major environmental polluters to account.

Since there is a high migration rate from the South Pacific, attention and support must be given to labour migrants to ensure that they are informed of and can protect their rights.

ASPBAE's strategies in the coming years must strongly account for the South Pacific context, and support must be given to coalitions and other members to optimise their full potential in advancing education and lifelong learning, deeply rooted in their indigenous knowledge and identities in the sub-region.

## Central Asia: Prioritising quality education and building capacities for education advocacy

**By Nasiba Mirpochoeva, ASPBAE Executive Council Member representing Central Asia**



*It is important to learn from success stories, lived realities, and best practices that can be adapted to the Central Asia context.*

ASPBAE has memberships in three countries in Central Asia - Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. It is important to note that these countries are former Soviet Union countries, and are thus, facing cross-cutting thematic issues in the areas of education, unemployment, and demographic growth.

The process of building partnerships with civil society organisations in these countries started with meetings and information exchanges that served as platforms for learning. It was vital to understand the relevant platforms and tools that can address common challenges faced in these three countries to establish connections and enable trust-building amongst each other. It is important to learn from success stories, lived realities, and best practices that can be adapted to the Central Asia context.

While the pandemic situation in the sub-region is relatively manageable, it was not fully spared from its broader impact. In Tajikistan, for example, a lot of restrictions have been imposed, especially on labour migrants hoping to enter other countries,

particularly in Russia, for employment. Tajikistan relies heavily on the remittances of its migrant workers and a significant percentage of its population works outside the country to support their families. Their lives and livelihood continue to be threatened by the restrictive travel bans on account of the pandemic.

At the same time, civil society organisations in Tajikistan are keen on promoting disability rights and inclusive education. Although the convention on this matter has already been signed, its ratification was put on hold because priority was given to the more pressing need for pandemic response, impacting the work of these civil society groups working on equity issues. Other development partners working on community-based learning also suffered the same fate.

Achieving quality education remains a significant challenge, further exacerbated by the shift to online modalities of education, the costly internet connection and poor coverage, especially in remote and rural areas in Central Asia. On top of these, equipping educators with the proper skills for new technologies and ICT is going to be a persistent challenge.



*There is a need to create platforms to highlight and prioritise issues impacting the Central Asia sub-region and to build capacities for effective education advocacy.*

With these contextual considerations, it is recommended that ASPBAE consider the following in its work in the sub-region:

- There is a need to create platforms to highlight and prioritise issues impacting the Central Asia sub-region and to build capacities for effective education advocacy.
- It is critical to work collaboratively with members to address pressing issues that threaten the education agenda and to identify good practices that can fill the gaps in education.



# ASPBAE'S STRATEGIES

## *Ensuring a relevant ASPBAE Strategic Plan responsive to the impacts of COVID-19 and the challenges to education and lifelong learning*

ASPBAE's Regional Strategic Planning Workshop in December 2020, the culminating event for its 8th General Assembly, took on the theme "Re-imagine, Re-think, Re-create: Adapting to change, preserve our gains and ensure empowering education and lifelong learning for all". It reflected ASPBAE's fidelity to and staying strong on asserting education and lifelong learning as a fundamental human right. It affirmed that pursuing education and lifelong learning as a human right will help address entrenched, systemic, and intergenerational inequalities, exclusion, and discrimination. It also called upon its membership to see how ASPBAE can continue to be responsive to the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the various developmental challenges at the national, regional, and global levels.

There is no doubt that the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education and education financing in the Asia Pacific region and the world has been sweeping, deep, and ultimately long-lasting. This will be part of a broader context piece ASPBAE needs to navigate, alongside other development issues.

Apart from responding to current and emerging contextual issues, ASPBAE's strategic plan for 2021-2024 also draws on the main messages and recommendations of its members during its 8th GA-related consultations with its members that will define its work in the next four years. Building on these national consultations, sub-regional cluster meetings, thematic working group discussions, and youth consultations, the following are the highlights of how these will be reflected in ASPBAE's strategic directions.



*ASPBAE's Regional Strategic Planning Workshop in December 2020 called upon the membership to see how it can continue to be responsive to the impacts of COVID-19 and developmental challenges.*

## Policy Advocacy

The challenges to meeting the SDG 4 promise have multiplied in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the UN underscored, "the pandemic has created the most severe disruption in the world's education systems in history and is threatening a loss of learning that may stretch beyond one generation of students." Undoubtedly, the financing needs for recovery strategies in education will be huge, and this will include costs for remedial classes to address learning gaps, especially for poorer students; re-enrolment strategies for marginalised students; second-chance education solutions for adults; and refurbished infrastructure and protection measures for teachers, trainers, and education personnel for the safe reopening of schools and other educational institutions. All these additional pandemic-related



*ASPBAE will continue to push for the civil society policy agenda on education equity, inclusion, Adult Learning and Education (ALE), and financing of the full SDG4 in decision-making processes.*



*ASPBAE has sustained its work on education financing with better and stronger evidence, enhanced capacities for engagements, broader public support for its key positions, and more favourable responses from target agencies, institutions, and international platforms.*

recovery strategies come on top of existing education expenditures and have vast cost implications.

There is much from ASPBAE's tradition to draw on to meet these contextual challenges in the coming four years. For one, the integral link of ASPBAE's regional and global advocacy to the pieces of evidence and realities in countries will continue to inform the Asia Pacific agenda and recommendations for education. The collaborative and coordinated responses of ASPBAE members will enable exchanges and advocacy that demonstrate education policy reforms that can be adopted across countries.

ASPBAE will continue to push for the civil society organisation (CSO) policy agenda on education equity, inclusion, Adult Learning and Education (ALE), and financing of the full SDG 4 in the discussions of governments in regional and global decision-making processes. Contingent to ensuring CSO voices is safeguarding the spaces for CSOs in the regional and global SDG 4 architecture. This institutionalisation of CSO participation in the SDG 4 architecture signals to countries the indispensable role of CSOs in education governance as embedded in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. Therefore, ASPBAE helps develop capacities of its members to effectively engage at country, regional, and global levels.

Education financing has been one of ASPBAE's core advocacies since the

Education for All (EFA) campaign period and into the SDGs. ASPBAE's continuing review of the education situation, and its annual planning process, confirm the importance and urgency of addressing education financing as a critical issue to guarantee the right to education and build strong public education systems.

ASPBAE has sustained its work on education financing with better and stronger evidence, enhanced capacities for engagements, broader public support for its key positions, and more favourable responses from target agencies, institutions, and international platforms. Further, ASPBAE's advocacy to governments to deliver on the full SDG 4 agenda necessitates working with members on SDG 4 targets that are often overlooked by governments. This includes cross-country evidence-based advocacy on SDG 4.4 (gender-just skills education),

SDG 4.6 (including digital literacy), and SDG 4.7 (e.g. peace education). The next four years will be critical in sustaining and upscaling these initiatives, capitalising on the gains and breakthroughs achieved and the breadth of targets reached.

## Leadership and Capacity Building

The leadership and capacity building strategy of ASPBAE has grown over the years. It has been oriented to strengthening youth and adult education practice to enhance the competencies of adult education practitioners among its member organisations



*Leadership and capacity building for policy advocacy of national education campaign coalitions has been a key component of ASPBAE's capacity support for its members.*





The most significant contextual change in NECs' work has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has required NECs to adjust their advocacy priorities and has limited their capacity to mobilise and engage their governments, requiring them to creatively adapt to online participation and advocacy. This, in turn, has required ASPBAE to reflect on its current approaches and pursue adaptive and context-responsive capacity support to national education coalitions.

Drawing on key emerging contextual concerns, as expressed in ASPBAE's 8th General Assembly discussions, there is a need for capacity support to NECs to promote youth engagement within

*There is a need to provide support for more concerted analysis of national education systems.*

who run education programmes benefitting marginalised and vulnerable groups and communities in the region. It has also been oriented to strengthening capacities of civil society organisations in education advocacy, advancing the right to education and lifelong learning of children, youth, and adults in the Asia Pacific region.

And within its previous strategic plan, it has significantly expanded support for youth-led action research (YAR) and youth constituency building efforts, engaging and enabling marginalised youth in the region to inform ASPBAE's education advocacy agenda at all levels.

During ASPBAE's 8th General Assembly, with existing inequalities expected to deepen on account of the pandemic, ASPBAE members recommended that an expansion of work in the leadership and capacity building strategy be made in relation to building capacities and supporting a critical mass to help address issues of race, disability, and gender in education.

## Capacity Building for Policy Advocacy of National Coalitions

Leadership and capacity building for policy advocacy of national education campaign coalitions (NECs) has been a key component of ASPBAE's capacity support for its members. This effort aims to strengthen advocacy on the right to education and lifelong learning by holding governments and other decision-makers to account, through the active and sustained engagements in policy and public advocacy of broad-based NECs in the Asia Pacific region.

coalitions and create spaces for their voices, strengthen girls and women's empowerment, leadership, pursue gender-transformative and mainstreaming efforts, advance disability-inclusive education, and challenge racism and identity-based discrimination through the NECs' work.

ASPBAE will continue to provide context-based, demand-driven, and customised capacity support to national education coalitions, attuned to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, there is a need to provide support for more concerted analysis of national education systems, including processes linked to education sector planning and monitoring, and key engagement mechanisms, such as Local Education Groups (LEGs), with in-country advocacy geared to support the marginalised, including those missing out on digital learning opportunities. Capacity support is also required to



*ASPBAE will continue to provide support for coalitions advocating to challenge the trend in education privatisation and work towards strengthening public education systems.*

strategise for increased influence in online government policy forums, strengthen coalition sustainability and second-line leadership, promote and package coalition achievements and good practices, build critical analytical skills, understand and counter fake news and misinformation, reflect on the use of artificial intelligence, and promote democracy and civil society spaces. There is also a strong desire to strengthen exchanges and mutual learning on adult learning and education between national coalitions and other ASPBAE members.

ASPBAE will continue to provide capacity building support for advocacy on increased education financing focused on domestic financing for equity, urging governments to finance education opportunities for the most marginalised who have been most affected by the pandemic, including those missing out on online educational opportunities. ASPBAE will continue to provide support for coalitions advocating to challenge the trend in education privatisation and work towards strengthening public education systems. Opportunities will be provided for cross-regional learning in relation to education financing and engagements with Global Partnership for Education (GPE) processes and mechanisms at national and global levels.

Online and blended modalities will be featured strongly in ASPBAE's capacity support provisioning to national education coalitions through the period of 2021-2024.

## Capacity Building for Adult Learning and Education (ALE) Practice and Advocacy

The Training for Transformation (TfT) Program of ASPBAE has been the core programmatic expression of this strategy, advancing innovative, pro-poor, rights-based adult education through the targeted activities.



*ASPBAE will seek to sustain its ongoing work that brings together ALE practitioners and advocates in programme initiatives related to capacity building.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world significantly, and also brought on unprecedented changes in the education sector. What it has not significantly highlighted is the inadequate government attention to ALE – even in the face of so much evidence that ALE saved lives in the pandemic, and continues to do so.

With the traditionally low priority accorded by governments to adult learning and education (ALE), it has largely fallen on NGOs to offer much-needed adult education provisioning, especially for marginalised youth and adults in the Asia Pacific region. Support to enhance ALE practice, therefore, remains an essential part of ASPBAE's work. ASPBAE, however, believes that the scaling up needed to meet the extensive learning needs of youth and adults in a highly dynamic context, rife with much challenge as well as opportunities, requires the public sector to step up and meet its obligations as the duty-bearer for education. Policy advocacy on ALE is, therefore, imperative in ASPBAE's work to advance the right to education. NGO experiences in running transformative ALE initiatives that attend to the learning needs of the marginalised, offer powerful lessons and insights that can not only further replicate good practice, but also help shape better ALE policies.

To support the expanded ALE advocacy efforts of ASPBAE in the coming period, ASPBAE's capacity building efforts will need to likewise be expanded, aligned to emerging needs, and delivered in context-responsive modalities. It will also dovetail the capacity requirements for ALE advocacy in the policy spaces for the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA VII) in 2021-2022, an ALE-focused policy process steered by UNESCO which is convened once every 12 years, and in SDG-SDG4 related processes.

It will sustain its annual Regional ALE Advocacy Training, which started in 2019, and will be oriented to help ASPBAE members and partners coordinate their ALE advocacy efforts and sharpen their policy recommendations on ALE. This will be further complemented by customised mentoring support to ASPBAE members and partners undertaking ALE advocacy efforts at the country level.

ASPBAE's Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC) was one of its major arenas for capacity building directed at ALE practitioners in dialogue with ALE advocates. New priority thematic areas will be provided attention in the BLDC curriculum, for example, on issues of inclusion, such as race and other identity-based discrimination; and on disabilities; or on the implications of fake news.





*ASPBAE's Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC) was one of its major arenas for capacity building directed at ALE practitioners in dialogue with ALE advocates.*

ASPBAE will seek to sustain its ongoing work that brings together ALE practitioners and advocates in programme initiatives related to capacity building, such as the work on SDG 4.7, and on skills education for decent work of marginalised women. It will continue to be poised to respond to on-demand training/capacity-building invitations from members and partners, mobilising the deep bench of expertise within the network on ALE practice and ALE.

## Youth Constituency Building

For the past 8 years, ASPBAE has been committed to supporting and fostering the potential of young people across the Asia-Pacific region. Through its youth work, ASPBAE has identified and has been engaged with diverse issues being faced by young people in their country. With the evolving

needs of the youth, capacity building remains at the core of ASPBAE's youth work.

Through ASPBAE's Youth-led Action Research (YAR), which it has conducted with its members over the years, it has built the capacities of marginalised youth to lead and conduct research in their communities, devise a youth agenda, and define the education that they want. It also aims to inform advocacy efforts, lessons, and good practices on how to meaningfully involve youth and sensitise education programmes to the learning needs of marginalised youth.

Further, ASPBAE's initiatives with and for the youth are aimed at strengthening the participation of diverse youth, especially marginalised youth, and ensure their voices in education advocacy spaces as well as in leadership and governance structures of ASPBAE's members. Through its various activities in recent years, ASPBAE has been able to create an environment for nurturing the potential of the youth, enabling youth leaders to have a voice and agency within member organisations and in decision-making processes.

For 2021-2024, ASPBAE's youth engagement strategy will focus on enabling a critical mass of young people, within the youth constituencies of members, to demand their right to education and pursue the SDG 4 agenda in education policy spaces and other decision-making bodies in local, national, regional, and international platforms.



*ASPBAE has been able to create an environment for nurturing the potential of the youth, enabling youth leaders to have a voice and agency within member organisations and in decision-making processes.*

ASPBAE will continue to create opportunities for young people to be change makers, fostering a safe and secured space to cultivate learning and exchanges.

Priority areas will include equity in education; linkages of youth issues to development; capacity development of its members in mobilising diverse young people and youth groups, especially those from marginalised communities; ensuring youth participation and leadership in SDGs-SDG4 and other decision-making processes related to education at the local, national, regional, and global levels; building solidarity amongst youth-led and

youth-focused organisations working on education through student movements; fostering cross-country exchanges; and amplifying youth voices to inform education policy and programmes within the framework of ‘leaving no one behind’.

## Building Strategic Partnerships

Over the years ASPBAE has built strong strategic partnerships with other civil society organisations, intergovernmental organisations and institutes, recognising that the achievement of its goals and strategic objectives is best served by strongly working in tandem and in partnership and solidarity with other similarly-motivated groups.



*ASPBAE continues to play leadership roles in global civil society networks advancing the right to education and lifelong learning.*

ASPBAE’s core strategic partnership is with its members located in 33 countries of the Asia South Pacific region. ASPBAE’s members operate at different levels – several at the grassroots, many at national and sub-national levels and increasingly, cross-country. ASPBAE has partnerships with national education campaign coalitions and education advocacy networks in 22 countries in the Asia Pacific.

ASPBAE continues to play leadership roles in global civil society networks advancing the right to education and lifelong



*ASPBAE’s core strategic partnership is with its members located in 33 countries in the Asia South Pacific.*

learning; the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) which it co-founded, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (CCNGO Ed2030).

ASPBAE has also sustained its strong presence in the inter-governmental and multilateral mechanisms following up the SDG4 commitments, notably the Education 2030 High Level Steering Committee (HLSC) and the Technical Consultative Group on the SDG4 Indicators at the global level and the Learning and Education 2030+ Networking Group (LE2030+) at the regional level.

In its 8th General Assembly, ASPBAE members recommended the following which it will pursue in 2021-2024:

- Sustain its strong cooperation and solidarity with its current strategic partners nationally, regionally and globally;
- Align with other social movements to promote and protect the education agenda. This involves exploring opportunities to expand alliances with those that can help further ASPBAE’s education agenda, especially within the new themes/areas that emerged during the 8th GA national consultations and regional strategic planning. This can include building alliances with tax justice movement, sectoral movements (indigenous/ethnic groups, people with disabilities, etc.), and those working from the academia;
- Expand its thematic, sectoral and sub-regional approach in strategic partnership.

## Institutional Strengthening

### Membership

As a regional, membership-based organisation, ASPBAE derives its strength and identity from its diverse and dynamic membership. The members, thus, play an intrinsic and vital role in shaping ASPBAE’s work and future directions. ASPBAE’s membership is comprised of community-based organisations, NGOs, women’s organisations, popular education groups, educational institutions, national education campaign coalitions, national adult education networks, and individuals.





*One of the aims of ASPBAE's Information and Communications programme in the next four years will be to ensure a robust, relevant, and impactful communications programme able to support ASPBAE's strategies.*

In the 8th GA, the members offered the following recommendations to be pursued under ASPBAE's membership strategy in the next four years:

- Expanded and more diverse membership, particularly those working with or representing marginalised groups within ASPBAE's expanded work in gender, race, and disability; and those from academia.
- Contextualised and customised ASPBAE engagement with members in Central Asia and the South Pacific.
- Improved membership coordination support, including facilitating member-member collaboration.
- Continue to offer a space for members in ASPBAE's communication and digital platforms to foster solidarity and learning exchanges among its diverse membership.

## Information and Communications

Communication has always been central to the way ASPBAE positioned itself internally and to the outside world. It relied on strategic communications as a key strategy for internal membership consolidation, for building bridges of learning and solidarity amongst its diverse member organisations and partners, and as a tool for policy engagement, advocacy and campaigns, and capacity building.

Moreover, rapid changes in technology offered newer and more effective ways to communicate with more people. ASPBAE's communication strategy cuts across various thematic issues and member organisations to meeting the goals of raising awareness, lobbying, information sharing, networking, capacity building, and sustaining ASPBAE's institutional profile.

One of the aims of ASPBAE's Information and Communications programme in the next four years will be to ensure a robust, relevant, and impactful information and communications programme able to support ASPBAE's strategies. This will be done by implementing an Information and Communications programme that is able to effectively and strategically serve its audience within the diverse representation of groups and communities in ASPBAE's membership; offering capacity building on information and communications; and ensuring consistency with organisational framing and analysis.

In the new strategic plan, ASPBAE's Information and Communications initiatives will also prioritise increased messaging and visibility of its programmes with more robust social media engagements, showcasing innovation and best practices, increased campaigning for advocacy, and utilising more innovative and engaging communication tools. It will also work towards developing a long-term strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion in its communication efforts.

## Resource Mobilisation

ASPBAE will be attentive to the potential wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic into its institutional support and its ability to generate new resources in the long-term.

Globally, governments are facing a reduction in domestic revenues, with lower GDP in 2020 due to lower economic activity brought about by lockdowns, where businesses have closed and unemployment has risen sharply. For donor



*ASPBAE will be attentive to the potential wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic into its institutional support and its ability to generate new resources in the long term.*



*ASPBAE aims to enhance the capacities of ASPBAE's members and national coalitions on gender equality in education.*

countries, this has meant prioritising additional resources to service their domestic economies.

While ASPBAE remains in reasonable shape financially in the short to medium term, it will optimise this strong position to continue finding opportunities to diversify its resource base to support the expanded thematic work recommended by its members.

Sustaining ASPBAE's current partnerships is a core element in its resource mobilisation strategy for the coming period – and key to this is ASPBAE maintaining its quality work and meaningful collaboration.

## Gender Mainstreaming

ASPBAE aims to contribute towards a gender-sensitive ecosystem where experiences, opportunities, and knowledge are shared equally among all genders in accordance with their skills, needs, and aspirations.

ASPBAE's work will continue to be informed by principles of gender justice and facilitated by its gender mainstreaming processes. ASPBAE will expand efforts to support its

membership in its gender mainstreaming initiatives through trainings and through further development and dissemination of ASPBAE's gender mainstreaming tools, in addition to sustaining internal policies on gender-balanced participation in ASPBAE's programmes and activities.

Specifically, ASPBAE will aim to enhance the capacities of ASPBAE's members and national coalitions on gender equality in education. It will work on knowledge management of gender equality programmes with ASPBAE members and national coalitions. It will also develop Gender-Just Skills Education (GJSE) as a holistic framework for skills education for decent work of marginalised women, and strengthen the institutional framework of ASPBAE through the integration of gender equality principles in its policies, programmes, and processes.

Lastly, ASPBAE will continue to provide capacity building support to national education coalitions and adult education practitioners who are involved in advancing gender equality in education.



# Expanded Thematic Canvas

## Education Financing: Expanding efforts to protect education budgets

From the prolonged school closures and widening digital divide, to the corporate capture of learning platforms and de-prioritisation of education budgets, the COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in new realities that could undermine the right to education. And in light of its unprecedented impacts, there is a pressing need to strengthen public education systems and to build more resilient education institutions that can weather future crises and ensure learning continuity for all. Critical to achieving these is increased and sustained financing for education.



*Education financing has long been a core advocacy of ASPBAE and has become an increasingly important area of work against the backdrop of the pandemic and beyond.*

As the pandemic magnifies the urgency of addressing the widening inequities and the financing gaps in education, increased education budgets in the coming years will be contingent on a strong commitment and robust actions towards prioritising education that is equitable, inclusive, and gender-responsive through deliberate policy and financing choices that ensure accessible and quality education for all children, youth, and adults.

Education financing has long been a core advocacy of ASPBAE and has become an increasingly important area of work against the backdrop of the pandemic, and beyond. In the last four years, ASPBAE and its members, including national coalitions, have pursued campaigns and engagements for higher and better education budgets linked to the concerns on equity and inclusion, and as a critical requirement to meeting all SDG 4 targets.

ASPBAE initiated a research effort to better understand COVID-19's impacts on education financing. The outcomes of this research are envisaged to inform and strengthen ASPBAE's and coalition partners' advocacy campaigns to protect and increase education budgets, and ensure learning continuity and equity as well as the safety of learners and teachers.

Related to education financing issues is the rising trend in privatisation and commercialisation of education across the region. ASPBAE and its members will pursue the work in challenging this and campaign against the corporate capture of online and distance learning platforms, which exacerbate inequalities in education access.



*ASPBAE and its members will pursue its campaign against the corporate capture of online and distance learning platforms.*

Recognising that much of the resources for public education will have to come from adequate domestic sources, ASPBAE undertook research focused on domestic resource mobilisation, intended to explore reforms towards a more progressive taxation system, as well as revenue-generating schemes that can be replicated in other countries in the region.

Trends and the financing implications of the pandemic on Official Development Assistance (ODA) for education and external debt, including debt swaps and debt servicing, will also necessitate attention. ASPBAE started to look into the so-called innovative financing schemes proposed by some donors and financial institutions, noting that some of them are debt-generating and facilitate further privatisation of education.

While there are many challenges ahead, ASPBAE and its members, including national education coalitions, will continue to expand efforts to protect education budgets and advocate for enhanced equity, inclusion, and gender

sensitivity in education access and quality, and increased financing to ensure that learning continues, especially for the most marginalised.

## Misinformation: A threat to SDG 4 and democratisation

While communication technologies enabled instantaneous information dissemination to a wider audience, it has also enabled the enormous spread of disinformation. While ‘misinformation’ is known as the spreading of false information, regardless of intent to mislead, ‘disinformation’, on the other hand, is the conscious dissemination of misinformation. This includes deliberately misleading or biased information



*It has become an important task for all who aspire for a healthy democratic governance and peaceful and equitable societies to rapidly identify and counter disinformation.*

intended to manipulate narratives or facts. Additional examples are propaganda, fake news, conspiracy theories, editing of images, and ‘deepfakes’ which use artificial intelligence on visual and audio content.

Global media corporations, such as Facebook and Google, wield enormous power over the dissemination of disinformation. Not only have they struggled to develop policies to limit the disinformation, they are also capable of incentivising (and even promoting) a wide range of disinformation and targeted advertising for revenue generation. Google and Facebook use algorithms that are fed to users based on their individual prior use. These algorithms expose people to stories that conform to their existing views and can consolidate the creation of worldviews such as QAnon.

Governments, which are no strangers to disinformation and some of them may even use their media platforms for their political agenda, are struggling to put disinformation limits on these global media corporations. Populist authoritarian leaders and regimes use disinformation through both social and traditional media to attack institutions that attempt to promote transparency and call leaders and governments to account.

Fundamentalist organisations take advantage of these platforms to promote their ‘version’ of reality which deviates

from facts, research, and science. Powerful corporations separately and collectively use mainstream and social media for propaganda purposes, often criticising facts, science, and reputable research, resorting to misleading data and assertions.

The problem with disinformation is serious and has worsened over time. It has become an important task for all who aspire for a healthy democratic governance and peaceful and equitable societies to rapidly identify and counter disinformation.

## Impact on SDG 4

Without further democratisation, the promotion of broad critical thinking skills, and digital literacy, SDG 4.7 will not be achieved. Democracy and strong democratic institutions are crucial to achieving SDG 4.7 because, when allowed to function effectively, this enables the protection and promotion of human rights, respect for all people on the planet, peace and non-violence, gender equality, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the discussion of ideas and policies. Transparency and accountability are also basic components of SDG 4.7. There are powerful vested interests opposed to SDG 4.7 and democratisation primarily because achieving these would diminish their wealth and power.

Unless these vested interests are challenged, they will continue to pose a significant threat to education and learning, and can undo much strides in education through deliberate programmes of ‘unlearning’ and indoctrination.



*As part of its work in advocating for SDG 4.7, ASPBAE will seek to support education and advocacy for critical thinking skills and digital literacy.*

Critical thinking and digital literacy skills need to be promoted, such as the ability to reason, analyse, and distinguish facts from disinformation in light of new technologies, including whether an opinion or document is evidence-based or not.

As part of its work in advocating for SDG 4.7, ASPBAE will seek to support education and advocacy for critical thinking skills and digital literacy. Through a wide range of forums and workshops through the period 2021-2024, ASPBAE will aim to raise awareness of its members, undertake literature reviews and research to understand the extent and quality of critical thinking skills and digital literacy in curricula in



countries in the Asia Pacific region, and promote effective teaching practices that support critical thinking, and through its training for transformation programme, seek to train more participants to be change-makers advocating to counter disinformation.

## **Self-determination and indigenous education: Supporting a broad education alliance of ASPBAE members to define an agenda grounded in the realities of the Pacific**

For people located in the South Pacific, the expanse of the Pacific Ocean carries histories, narratives, and relationships which evoke a complex set of political and personal connections that run deep. The ocean becomes that steadfast constant which forms the basis of identity, reclaiming the past, continually reshaping the present while simultaneously envisioning the future. For those that draw on the spiritual life force and energy of the ocean, its waters and fonua (land) are equally part of you as you are of them. The Fonua, the Langi (skies), and the Moana (seas) are reference points in genealogies, knowledge, language, and spirituality and are therefore an integral part of self and contextual education. Colonisation, capitalist education, and foreign approaches applied insensitively often give rise to new types of leadership that break down traditional structures. Because of the failure of education in the Pacific, indigenous people have been seeking more control over their education to reinstate their own culture and their dignity.

The South Pacific is a diverse sub-region. Unlike Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Australia, the rest of the nations are largely developing, some isolated, small, if not tiny nations in size, hence, in economy and political leverage. Their location and smallness in landmass makes some of them absolutely vulnerable



*Because of the challenges of education in the Pacific, indigenous people have been seeking more control over their own education to reinstate their culture and their dignity.*



*Civil society has called for an alliance of ASPBAE members in the Pacific to define an agenda grounded in the realities of the sub-region, including upholding the importance of indigenous knowledge.*

to environmental challenges and the impacts of climate change. Under resource constraints, many of their people live beyond their home nation, and many others form the temporary labour pool for Aotearoa and Australia through government run programmes. In parts of the Pacific, governance, corruption, questionable investment/exploitation by foreign entities, and lack of appropriate education exacerbate economic and social issues, particularly poverty, social cohesion, and opportunities for young people.

Challenges in the education system in the sub-region are enormous. These include the use of languages and curricula that continue to ignore the history and culture of indigenous people, and chronic under-funding of education sectors. The rural-urban divide continues to widen, with resources largely consumed in urban areas, where people also have access to digital resources.

Over the years, through the support of the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF, now known as Education Out Loud Fund), ASPBAE has been actively engaging with and providing capacity support to national education coalitions in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Samoa to support education advocacy work in these countries and in the sub-region.

A number of representatives from across the sub-region gathered on 10 November 2020 via Zoom to discuss “Self-determination and indigenous education: perspectives from the Pacific” with the aim of developing a context-based approach in the South Pacific, taking into account geography, culture, and history. Hence, they called on ASPBAE to support local Pacific CSOs in articulating indigenous knowledge, culture, and environment within a Pacific perspective.

Going forward, they have called on ASPBAE to support a broad education alliance of ASPBAE members in the sub-region to define an agenda grounded in the realities of the Pacific. This includes upholding the importance of indigenous knowledge throughout ASPBAE’s work and elevate the place of indigenous educators and indigenous education in its strategies. To further articulate these recommendations, strategic discussions with ASPBAE members from the sub-region will be held to deepen these intentions and define action points for ASPBAE to take forward.

## Advancing disability inclusive education and lifelong learning in the Asia Pacific

ASPBAE's work in recognising education as a basic human right applies to every individual, regardless of one's range of abilities or disabilities. Disability-inclusive education and lifelong learning play a vital role in harnessing one's full potential, which in turn contribute to poverty eradication, attainment of social justice, and sustainable development.

In preparation for ASPBAE's strategic planning for 2021-2024, issue experts and education advocates convened through a working group consultation meeting organised in October 2020, with the aim of developing a thematic paper to advance disability-inclusive education and lifelong learning in Asia Pacific.



***Disability inclusive education is vital to achieving quality education for all, and just and more inclusive societies, an important component of ASPBAE's vision and mission.***

This initiative is a follow-through of the national consultations held in July 2020 where members echoed that advancing disability-inclusive education must be an integral part of ASPBAE's next strategic plan.

Although varying levels of progress have been noted globally and in the Asia Pacific in advancing disability-inclusive education and lifelong learning, persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers.

The main barriers to the education and lifelong learning of persons with disabilities include discrimination and stigma, lack of accessibility to physical and virtual learning environments, lack of access to assistive technology, essential services, rehabilitation, and support for independent living - all critical not only for their education and learning but also for their full and equal participation as agents of change and development. The barriers remain due to policy and budget gaps, cultural bias, and other reasons or factors that often reflect lacking or wavering political will of governments to carry out their obligations.



***Efforts in acknowledging, identifying, and removing long-standing barriers excluding learners from exercising their right to quality education must continuously be integrated in ASPBAE's core strategies for the next four years.***

Disability-inclusive education is vital to achieving quality education for all, and just and more inclusive societies, an important component of ASPBAE's vision and mission. Inclusive education helps create societies based on tolerance, inclusion, and social justice. It prevents people with disabilities from being isolated and excluded from society. Instead, it enables them to participate in community life alongside everyone else. Through learning together, students and learners with and without disabilities, and their teachers and parents, can more easily understand and accept each other. Importantly, inclusive education helps people with disabilities take their place as equal members of society. It is a vital step towards greater independence, improved social skills, and opportunities to take part in the economy and society as a whole.

Efforts in acknowledging, identifying, and removing long-standing barriers excluding learners from exercising their right to quality education and augmenting support systems that will facilitate full and effective inclusion, participation, and empowerment of persons with disabilities in societal activities and development must continuously be integrated in ASPBAE's core strategies for the next four years.

***Key approaches to be pursued by ASPBAE under this thematic area will include the following:***

- Leadership and capacity building for people with disabilities and their organisations that are members of national education coalitions in the Asia Pacific region to strengthen their advocacy and representation skills in education and development policy platforms.
- Advocacy engagements for disability-inclusive education and lifelong learning policy and financing at national, regional, and global levels.
- Facilitating exchange of information, learning, and experiences, including supporting initiatives at the local level that promote disability-inclusive education.

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