Input to the Regional CONFINTEA VII Follow-up Conference: Perspectives from CSOs
Key Recommendations from ASPBAE CSO Preparatory Meeting and Spotlight Reports
23 May 2023

We, civil society ALE advocates and practitioners from 14 countries in South Asia, South East Asia, East Asia and Central Asia gathered in a virtual meeting on May 23 to build consensus on recommendations and action points that will be presented in the Virtual Regional CONFINTEA VII Follow-up Conference in Asia on May 30 organised by UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office in Bangkok.

We acknowledge the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) as a significant guide in realizing ALE as a fundamental human right and harnessing the transformative power of ALE for building a sustainable future.

We also laud the MFA's strong reference to the role of civil society organizations in ALE policy, implementation and monitoring, and its articulation of the importance of "multi-stakeholder platforms to support the governance of ALE with all relevant actors", including of civil society.

We reiterate that adult literacy remains an outstanding issue in the Asia Pacific region as it remains home to 46% of the world's youth and 61% of the world's adults who are denied their right to literacy. Governments should redouble efforts to promote adult literacy towards meeting the SDG 4.6 target. ALE policies and implementation must however rethink the notion of literacy. It must recognize the different literacies and knowledge systems, employ lifelong learning approaches, linking formal, non-formal and informal learning with skills and work, environmental and climate literacy, digital literacy, gender education and ALE for responsible citizenship, tolerance, peace, justice and human rights and social cohesion.

We, CSOs, are committed to work critically with governments and other stakeholders to achieve the ALE commitments as embodied in the MFA as well as in the SDG 4 and SDGs. We will also continue to advocate for ALE and non-formal systems with a high standing alongside the formal education system due to its power to create social transformation and empower adults, women, migrants, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, and communities at large. Aligned with the regional priorities set in 2021 and learning from our work in ALE practice and advocacy, especially in working with marginalised communities, we put forward the following recommendations:

National ALE Policy and Financing
- Governments must enact a comprehensive legislation and policy on ALE as a right within the lifelong learning framework with the participation of civil society and other ALE stakeholders. The national law should be followed with clear implementation rules and

guidelines, defining specific roles of the national and local governments and with categorical policy on annual budget allocation from the national/central government.

- Governments must address the massive financing gap for ALE by increasing and allocating public funding to the development, implementation, and monitoring of ALE policies, plans, and programmes that cater to the learning needs of all learners, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable groups.

- Governments should allocate at least 4-6 % of GDP and/or at least 15-20% of total public expenditure to education as already affimed both in the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the Marrakech Framework for Action on ALE. We also reiterate the CSO call even in CONFINTEA VI (Belem) for countries to allocate at least 6% of the national education budget to ALE with at least 3% dedicated to adult literacy in countries where high levels of illiteracy persist. Systems must be in place to ensure transparency and equity in allocation and spending, ensuring affirmative financing for ALE programs for marginalized sectors such as women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, refugees and learners in difficult circumstances.

- Governments should proactively work towards filling the funding gap to meet the SDG 4 adult literacy targets and to integrate skills training through the fulfilment of existing commitments related to official development assistance (ODA), including the commitments by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries.

- Governments and the international community should seriously commit to and undertake tax justice measures to generate the necessary resources for education and ALE, following the agreement made in the Education 2030 Framework for Action in 2015, which emphasised on 'widening the tax base (in particular, by ending harmful tax incentives), preventing tax evasion and increasing the share of the national budget allocated to education'.

- The CONFINTEA VII and MFA action plans should be integrated with the SDG4 implementation with special emphasis on targets 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7 and aligned with the national and local education sector plans. Further, the report by the International Commission on the Futures of Education, 'Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education,' should constitute the foundations for ALE programs framed in the country.

Equity and Inclusion
- Governments need to prioritize and target special population groups who are diverse, complex, marginalized, religious and ethnic minorities, youth and adults with special needs and adapt instructions as per their learning needs. Underserved and vulnerable population groups should always be prioritized in ALE provision by delivering inclusive ALE programmes in partnership with CSOs that are at the forefront of ALE provisioning in grassroots communities.

- Governments should invest in learning programs and facilities that are learner-centered and context-responsive, accommodating groups with special needs including people with disabilities and ethnic minorities, and attentive to those in emergencies, fragility and conflict-

affected situations. ALE offered in indigenous languages are critical for all learning and education and must be delivered with consideration to culturally responsive worldviews, models, paradigms and epistemologies." We strongly recommend that all information must be translated into the local languages, including sign language. Revitalization and language strategies must be part of ALE.

- Countries must invest in community learning centers. Learners, parents, family members, and communities must have access to community-based learning, gender-just skills education, family literacy programmes, reading centres, and other programmes that foster intergenerational learning and support the continuity of learning, especially on mental health, food and nutrition and community resilience efforts.

- Gender equality is one of the main goals of ALE. This requires not only enabling the balanced participation of man and women in ALE, the use of gender-sensitive didactics and feminist epistemology, but also ALE policies with the special focus on women (most importantly in literacy efforts) and addressing systemic issues of power relations and oppressive cultures for women in various curricula and educational settings.

- To motivate learners from marginalized sectors to participate in ALE programs, governments together with other stakeholders should build an ecosystem support, especially for marginalized women, that will support the learners' participation in holistic adult literacy and other ALE programs

ALE and Digital equity, literacy and citizenship
- Education systems should set into motion affirmative actions toward ensuring access to multilingual education and digital literacy for families, especially in remote rural areas and other marginalised communities.

- Develop programs on critical thinking, communication, empathy and social skills in navigating the online environment to counter false information and misinformation.

- Governments should set into motion policies and programs to develop relevant, effective strategies, policies and tools and promote open education resources that will address equity, inclusion, privacy and ethics in relation to the use of technology for learning as articulated in the MFA.

- Education systems should invest in the capacity building of teachers, educators, CLCs, CSOs and other ALE implementers who should be sensitized on the significance of integrating digital technology and work skills with adult literacy and enable them to acquire knowledge and skills to develop updated curricula, materials, and suitable learning strategies to reach out to the target population, especially the marginalize youth and women.

Quality ALE
- Education systems must recognize the urgency of addressing climate change and sustainability. According to UNESCO education, which includes ALE, "should equip youth, adults and older people and their communities with the understanding, skills and attitudes to comprehend

climate change and its causes, cope with the immediate impacts of the climate crisis and engage in shaping green, low emission and climate-resilient societies." Further, we believe that ALE should importantly work towards advancing social and ecological justice where those least responsible for causing the strains on the planet do not continue to disproportionately pay the price for them.

- The quality of ALE should be prioritized by creating equivalent or non-equivalent learning models and that teachers, teacher educators, field coordinators, managers/ supervisors focus on quality in trainings, pre-service, in-service and M&E initiatives.

- Capacity-building training programs should be implemented to ensure qualified and competent staff in non-formal education and community learning centers.

- Universities and teacher training institutions should offer new courses on lifelong learning and ALE that includes training programs on community education, mobile teaching and other competencies for ALE teachers/educators.

- Government and other ALE programs should address emerging threats to society, terrorism, violence, fanaticism, rising inequalities etc. through ALE and lay clear emphasize on global citizenship, climate change, basic health & hygiene, prepare individuals for future work, and create a culture of life-long learning.

- ALE curricula should be transformed to meet the learning needs of learners and equip them with the core competencies and capabilities they require not only to live healthy and fulfilling lives and success in the future of work but also to address the issues of a rapidly changing world. This will entail the mainstreaming of climate change education, global citizenship education, and gender equality education in transforming curricula with the aim of broadening education.

ALE Governance and Systems

- The COVID-19 and similar emergencies have resulted in the closure and interruption of many ALE programmes. Robust ALE systems and the financing to support these should be ensured so that ALE programs are resilient enough to withstand the impacts of emergencies and indeed contribute to emergency responses of target communities.

- Build mechanisms for high-level, inter-Ministerial coordination and interface to foster a holistic and systemic approach to ALE (covering formal, non-formal and informal systems) and promoting a lifelong learning culture. These mechanisms shall guide and oversee the provision of adult education, including matters related to finance, programs, teaching-learning facilities and teachers/educators professionalization. Such mechanisms should ensure consultation with and the meaningful participation of civil society, learners organisations, youth and other ALE stakeholders.

- A whole-of-government approach for ALE implementation is imperative. This requires strong coordination between the Ministry of Education and relevant agencies to ensure provision of

diverse programs relevant to the country but at the same time providing coherence of ALE programs among different government bodies.

- Education is decentralized in many countries in Asia Pacific, the role of local governments in the financing, development and provisioning of ALE programs should be harnessed. Local governments together with national government agencies have to be responsible for guaranteeing the right to ALE. At provincial and district levels, invest in and improve the management of vocational, continuing education centers and Community Learning Centers to make them accessible, sustainable and relevant to the needs of the learners.

- Expanded flexible learning pathways to "all sections of the population, including indigenous communities, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups", which reinforced attention to marginalized groups.

- Countries need to institute robust Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) systems that will recognize and accredit quality ALE programmes implemented by CSOs and NGOs working with youth and adults in marginalised communities. This will provide learners pathways towards further education and/or decent work. At the same time, RVA must be developed towards integrating traditional knowledge and intergenerational learning into TVET and community learning programs. In the Pacific, for example, women and artisans have much knowledge to offer such as in weaving, crafts making, canoe building, and construction of disaster-resilient houses.

Monitoring and accountability mechanisms of MFA

- Launch an information campaign about the state of ALE in the country and start a country and multi-stakeholder process of developing an Action Plan for ALE and the implementation of the MFA where clear country targets, financing and indicators for monitoring progress are defined. Ensure the participation of CSOs and other key stakeholders in defining priority areas and action plans.

- Build disaggregated data systems to inform ALE policy and programs. Further, governments need to strengthen data gathering and analysis around economic indicators and importantly social cohesion measures that can be used to influence adult education policy and funding debate. There should be equal weighting of social cohesion measures with those of economic drivers.

- Conduct nationwide and localized awareness raising and commitment setting on the MFA plan of action, including capacity building of local governments, CSOs and other stakeholders. To reach out and achieve wider support, the MFA and country action should be translated into the country's language.

- For the effective implementation of the commitments to MFA, create a mechanism for intersectoral interaction (state bodies, public and private education providers, CSOs, employers and donor organizations) for regular evaluation of the effectiveness of the Program,

identification of barriers, development of new innovative solutions and making the necessary changes to the Program and Action Plan. Related to this, produce periodic country reports on progress of MFA implementation with broad-based participation of civil society and other ALE stakeholders. These should inform the development of a more robust Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) that can effectively track global progress on the MFA and galvanize global support towards meeting the MFA commitments. Particular attention should be exerted on improving the mechanism for GRALE reporting by Member States, ensuring that the civil society will be provided opportunities to inform and feed into the process, including capturing civil society information and data based on their work on the ground for ALE.

- Launch country-level experts' consultations and broad-based dialogues especially involving ALE stakeholders, including learners, human rights and education rights specialists and advocates, to support the UNESCO-led efforts to strengthen the existing human rights framework on the right to ALE within a lifelong learning framework.

Promoting Good Practices from Countries within the Asia Pacific

There are many good practices in Asia Pacific that we can build that will support the realization of the MFA. We would like to call attention to the following:

In the Philippines, the Republic Act 11510 or Alternative Learning System Act (Inclusive, Equitable, Quality, Equivalent Pathway to Basic Education was enacted in 2021. The entire law is progressive but we would like to highlight three key features:
- Provides flexibility in the duration of learning programs, learning contents and delivery strategies and utilizes non-formal and informal education approaches.
- Establishment of at least one CLC in every municipality or city – priority should be given to areas where there is limited access to formal basic education or communities with high numbers of out-of-school children, youth and non-literate adults.
- ALS Teachers program – Creation of teaching positions and allocation of corresponding salary grades, professional development and training opportunities given to ALS/non-formal teachers; including support for transportation and teaching aids allowance.

Building inclusive youth education is a key priority of the MFA. To engage students and marginalized youth, we would like to recommend the youth-led action research or YAR strategy of ASPBAE that has been implemented since 2017 and through the years with 11 countries in Asia Pacific.

- The YAR mobilized and empower diverse youth groups to effectively communicate their right to quality and inclusive education. The YAR initiative was youth-led and has provided a space for members to increase their skill set within the area of research and design. It has also created opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills such as developing data collection methods and analyses leading to advocacy and community actions.
- ASPBAE's YAR work on the "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Marginalised Youth" was recognized during the Global Webinar conducted by Collective Service's Youth Engagement Subgroup (YES!). The organizations and networks leading and supporting this YES initiative include UNICEF, UNAIDS, UN WOMEN, UNFPA, the Youth Compact and the Collective Helpdesk.

- The YAR approach can be used for learning programs as well. This should align with ALE's participatory principles that involve learners in activities that are meaningful and relevant to their day-to-day lives. Co-construction processes and participatory research are particularly suitable to enabling ALE teachers, designers and participants to jointly assess the effects, strengths and areas of improvement of the programmes developed.

Finally, ALE and intergenerational learning have been proven pivotal in enabling people and communities to confront the current and future challenges not only in their respective countries but across countries. Problems such as climate change, migration and refugee crisis, conflict and disasters need international cooperation. We therefore, urge Member States to define a regional ALE agenda and clear cooperation plans that will provide learning and opportunities in conflict-affected countries, Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries. We reiterate the call for Affirmative actions and ODA/multilateral support for the Global Alliance for Literacy and E-9 initiatives as well as integrating funding for ALE in the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait.

To collectively monitor and work towards the achievement of the MFA, we recommend that the countries' progress in the MFA be included in the annual Asia Pacific Meeting of Education (APMED) meetings. MFA Regional monitoring mechanisms should also be instituted at the regional and sub-regional levels. CSO efforts to mainstream in the country Volunteer National Review (VNR) processes, ALE issues and concerns guided by the earlier Belem Framework for Action, have been seen as effective in drawing greater policy and public attention to ALE. This reinforces the understanding that efforts to integrate the MFA follow up within the SDG-SDG4 processes would prove beneficial for ALE. To this end, we will also sustain our active engagement in the global SDG4 High Level Steering Committee (HLSC) to advance the ALE agenda, particularly in pursuing the decision made by the HLSC in December 2022, which called on "Member States to pursue their commitments made in inter-governmental processes such as the Marrakesh Framework for Action on Adult Education…upholding their strategic importance in advancing the aspirations of the Transforming Education Summit (TES) to transform education at the country level."