

ORANGE

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2019 ASEF CAPACITY
BUILDING TRAINING



Designed by Manvir Dobb and Alvaro González

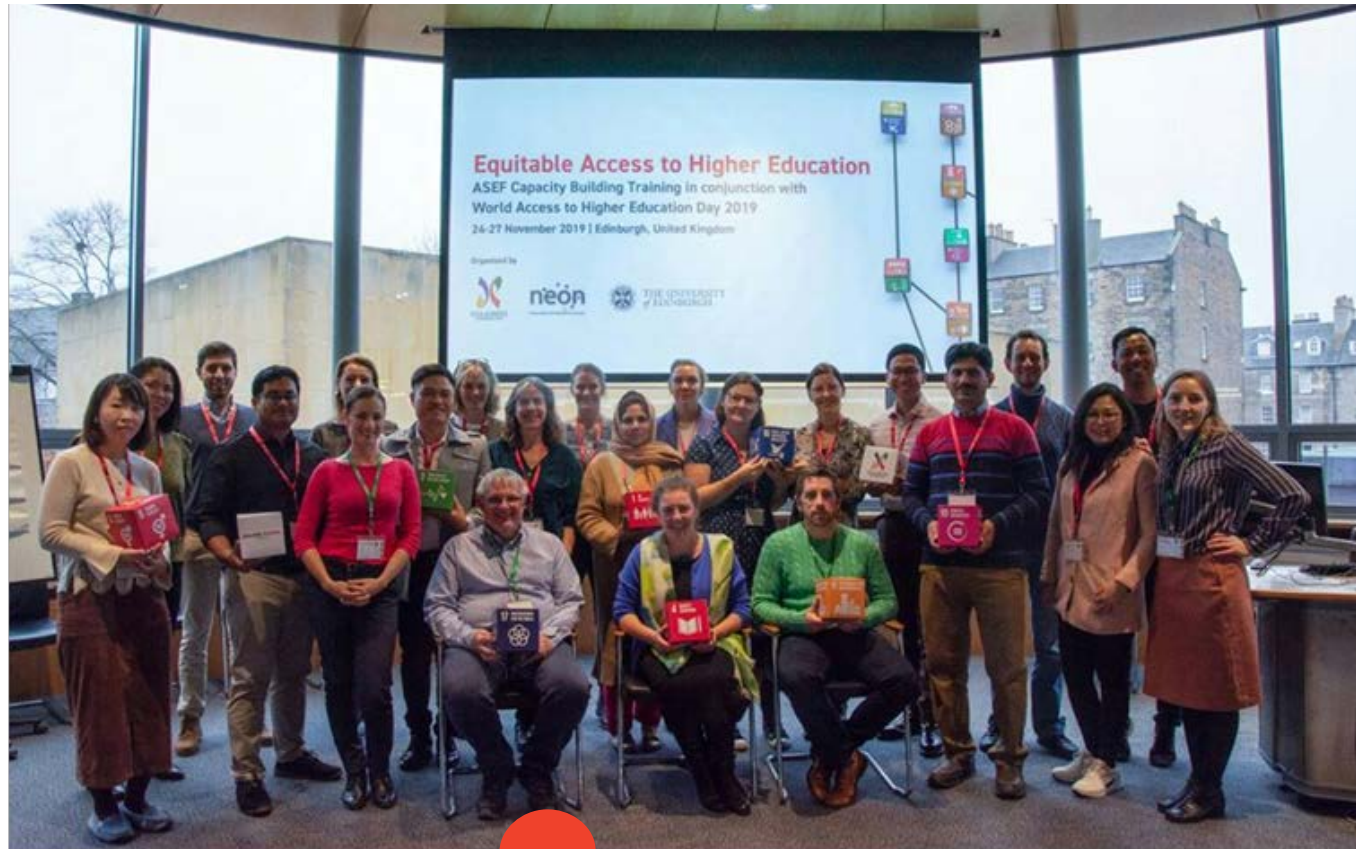


Photo by: Ms Ellen Blair

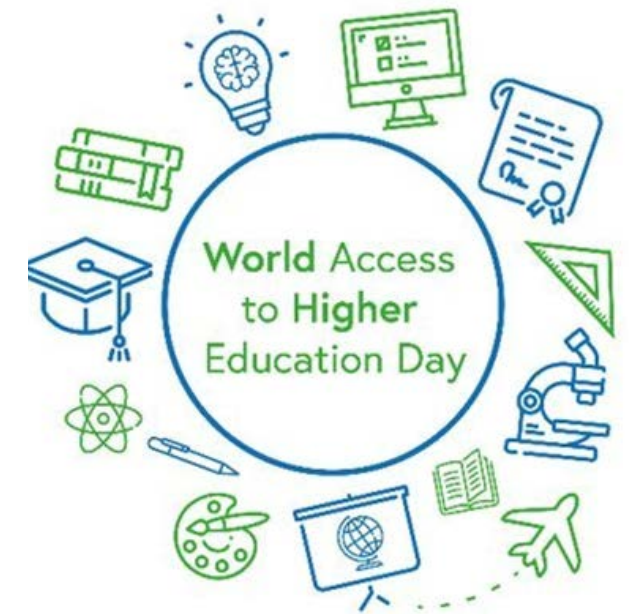
Dear Reader,

In over 90% of all countries, participation in higher education is unequal, with well-off families being strongly over-represented among university students. In addition to socio-economic statuses, inequality between sexes or discrimination against disabled people limits the access to higher education.

The second World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED) organized by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) took place on 26 November 2019 in Edinburgh, Scotland. WAHED is a platform to raise global awareness around inequalities in access and success in higher education and was hosted by the University of Edinburgh.

As a spin-off activity of the 7th Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7) the ASEF Capacity Building Training on Equitable Access to Higher Education was held from the 24 – 27 November 2019 alongside WAHED. The capacity building training for university managers on the matter of access and success in higher education aimed at increasing the participants' understanding of the evidence and theory where access, success and participation in higher education are concerned.

Orange Magazine followed the ASEFCapacity Building Training and talked to various participants about their experience in the field. This magazine aims to summarize important topics discussed and provide an overview of the overall output of the training.



**Learn more
in this edition
of Orange
Magazine!**

THE ASEF CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION



Photos by: Ms Ellen Blair and Ms Patricia Senge

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ASEF Capacity Building Training in conjunction with World Access to Higher Education Day: Highlights



Photo by: Ms Ellen Blair

From 23-27 November 2019, the Asia-Europe foundation (ASEF) hosted an insightful conference alongside the World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED) exploring the crucial topic of equitable access in higher education. The ARC spin-off was aptly hosted in Edinburgh, the capital of one of the few countries to offer free higher education to its residents. Participants included university leaders, researchers, policymakers and students from all over the globe, all of whom are working in the field of access, diversity and inclusion in higher education. Together, they debated and discussed the causes of and solutions to unequitable access to higher education. These discussions were not undertaken in vain. Attendees shared the intention of implementing such solutions in an action plan inspired by the conference. In this, the conference provided a platform to facilitate a real, tangible impact on this truly vital topic.

DAY 1

Day 1 identified the challenges of achieving equitable access and success in higher education, and how they can be adequately addressed. To begin, the stark reality of the global access picture was depicted through data. For example, inequality in access to higher education has been found in over 90% of countries. There was emphasis on the need for impact studies, i.e. what works and what does not work, in order to develop effective solutions. This goes in conjunction with the importance of strong databases. A group exercise followed in which participants identified whether their countries collect data on higher education participation based on social background. Along with the need for a strong database, virtues of alignment, political continuity and a supranational agenda were identified as important.

Questioning what role higher education plays in capacity building emphasises that it is not only about initial access to HE; it also concerns guiding and improving access for the most disadvantaged groups, ensuring the gap does not continue. For example, disadvantaged students may only consider an undergraduate degree and not a masters as the encouragement they receive may be limited. This is where another level of inequality reveals itself, as higher-income students have the capacity to continue their studies. Recognition of the different layers of inequality is essential to develop meaningful solutions.

DAY 2

It is true that we are witnessing large swathes of students not progressing into higher education globally and this conference endeavoured to find out why. Of course, the exact reason cannot be pinpointed. It is a multifaceted issue requiring multifaceted solutions. Not to mention the idiosyncrasies of each context. For this reason, day 2 sessions homed in on Europe and Asia independently.

Ms Nishat Riaz, Director of Education at the British Council, hosted a brilliant session on the Asian context, focussing particularly on Pakistan. To put the context in perspective, she outlined how 31.8 million children are out of school in South Asia and how there is a huge growing population.

To combat the persisting inequality in education, she suggested the starting point of establishing a university in every district. This reflects the key to facilitating equitable access which is having a safe environment to do so.

There are many barriers, for women and those with disabilities in particular. A thought-provoking exercise involved four volunteers standing at the front of the room and assuming the role of: a girl, a boy, a boy with disabilities and a girl with disabilities. In the context of Pakistan, they were asked to step forward if they believed their family would support them in going to school, going into higher education and going to work after higher education. The results were that all had remained put apart from the boy, who had received unwavering support, revealing his inherent privilege. This exercise effectively illustrated the material and cultural barriers that are prevalent in this context. As exemplified, attitude and behaviour change are integral, but this cannot be imposed – it has to come from within. In this sense, the required culture change can be mobilised through communities on a local level, in turn influencing change on the regional and global level.

The overall focus on capacity building throughout the training emphasises the role of higher education institutions in guiding students to achieve their goals, not only during, their studies but thereafter. Equality in education inevitably forms the basis of an equal society. Thus, envisioning an equitable future can be difficult, but immensely important. This conference provided a valuable space to reflect on the vision of a world where equal access to education is successfully prioritised and achieved. On the whole, it was a privilege to attend and a much-needed step towards a more equitable world.

Ms Daphne Furr

Discussing access to Higher Education in Pakistan

An interview with Ms Nishat Riaz



During the ASEF Capacity Building Training, Ms Nishat Riaz, the Director Education of the British Council Pakistan held a workshop on the role of gender and access to education in Asia. Ms Riaz has developed and supervised large scale programmes on health, gender, skills, culture and education. She is one of the founding members of Karakorum International University – the first university in mountain ranges in Karakorum and Himalayas in Pakistan. Also, Ms Riaz is the first female engineer from Gilgit Baltistan.

Q1: Ms Riaz, in your presentation you discussed equity in access and success in (higher) education in Pakistan and Asia. You especially addressed the role of gender. Could you briefly reflect on the current situation in Pakistan?

Ms Riaz:

While the rest of the developed world is getting old, this part of the globe is young. Pakistan is home to over 100 million young people. Pakistan's constitution assures every child of basic education, however, the number of out of school children remains high at around 24 million, out of which 55% are girls.

Access to higher education is merely around 10%. Female participation in higher education is better with around 47% of student population being girls. However, the ratio drops down drastically when it comes to jobs and employer market. Though the total enrollment in HEI's has increased from 0.276 million during 2001-02 to 1.298 million by 2014-15, but still Pakistan's GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) in higher education was just 10% during 2015-16. For instance, female's enrollment has increased from 36.8% to 47.2% by 2014, but the dream of gender equality in higher education is far away.

In Pakistan literacy rate is 24% as compared to 38% in India and 78% in Srilanka. Socio-cultural norms and religious interpretations are creating insecurity for the rights of women. The laws which exist are not implemented. These sociocultural norms prescribe a different roles and responsibilities for women. All these factors limit the women's access to education, health, decision-making and control over the resources.

Despite inherent challenges, Pakistan's HE sector has seen enormous growth over last two decades. The establishment of Higher education Commission (HEC) in 2002 was a significant step towards reviving the sector. Since its birth, HEC is not only helping improve the access but also the quality and relevance of higher education sector. HEC has been focusing on improving the access to women by establishing women only universities, by providing child care facilities to women employees and by introducing travel grants and scholarships for women faculty and students. However, the scale is huge and real ambitious and consistent efforts by the state and the private sector are required to bring about the impact that matters.

Q2: What sort of programmes is the British Council facilitating to address these issues?

Ms Riaz:

The British Council works in the fields of Education, Arts, Society. Under Education portfolio, the British Council works in School education, Higher Education and Skills from across the country. We connect the UK and Pakistani school sectors to enrich education, promote global citizenship and build international trust and understanding. We foster dialogue and international partnerships between higher education institutions and organisations and help students who want to study abroad.



Photo by: Ms Patricia Senge

We work in vocational education sector to make education and training systems better able to respond to labour market demands and learner needs. Our programmes around apprenticeship bring employers and young skilled people closer where there is a win for win for both.

Addressing the access issue, Take a child to School – our student enrolment programme has enrolled around 250,000 children to schools across Pakistan.

Each of our programme whether in schools or higher education or skills, focuses on fostering partnerships between educational institutes from Pakistan and the UK. The schools working under our connecting classroom programme have formed over 2000 partnerships with UK schools and from around the world. Similarly, over 156 partnerships exist between the Pakistani universities and that of the UK.

The British Council recently launched the Pak-UK Education Gateway, which is a joint programme with the HEC. Launched in 2018, it will allow the British Council to improve higher education links between Pakistan and the UK in specific areas like; innovative and collaborative research, higher education leadership, quality assurance and standard setting, distance learning, international mobility and transnational education.

Q3: What changes do you hope to see in the short- and long run regarding access to education?

Ms Riaz:

Access is critical for a country like Pakistan. Getting children into schools and universities and equipping them with skills is central to the progress and development of this part of the world. Schools are the feeding units for higher education, if Pakistan manages to provide equitable access to young people, they will find ways of contributing positively to the world. When I say access, I mean equitable access- for everyone- leaving no one behind- across the social fabric and across all backgrounds

Once the young people are in an education institution, providing them quality education and relevant skills is essential. This requires refreshing the curriculum, training teachers and developing an ecosystem of quality education which enables the learner to be able to cope with the challenges of future.

Governance and leadership of education sector is a big area which needs attention. Developing immediate, medium and long term strategies and ensuing capable management systems are delivering the vision. Consistency, persistence and ambitious leadership is needed to develop a robust and working model for this young nation.

Going further ahead, education system has to be responsive to the needs of immediate and long-term future. The disconnect between academia and industry/employers is an area that requires attention from different partners. At the moment, it's either reactive or non-responsive, this isn't the case of Pakistan only. The education sector in many countries is slower than other sectors. This has to change, the education systems should be agile, driving the change rather than being challenged by external factors.

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Q4: Who should and can initiate/commence these changes?

Ms Riaz:

Primarily, it is the state that is responsible to provide quality education. However, given the scale of challenge and amount of resources it might require, all key stakeholders have to play a role. The state can enable a suitable environment by supporting all partners and bringing them together. This means, the state should be able to provide a clear vision and a regulatory framework that enables all partners to contribute towards achieving equitable access to education. Bridging the gap between academia, industry, business and philanthropy is one of the ways to connect the missing links.

In a country with rising population and limited resources, the private sector, philanthropy and international organisations can play a major role. It's a task that has to be collective, converging all efforts and resources to enhance the impact.

Ms Patricia Senge

A lens into the key sessions

Defining access and success in higher education

Higher education is considered to be a universal prerequisite for success. However, this success cannot be guaranteed due to the hindrances faced in the initial stages of making higher education accessible to all. A discursive conversation is deemed imperative for discussing the lexicon surrounding access to information, and to facilitate this inclusive accessibility. The participants of the workshop split into groups of five for this exercise to ensure that all spectrums of equitable access to education were discussed. Socio-political history and a strong preoccupation with social class was established as being a predominant factor in access to higher education in the UK. The international collaboration of minds representing different parts of the world helped to broaden perspectives while discussing differences that spanned across the states. The lack of a standard definition regarding 'access to higher secondary education' reflects the lack of homogeneity across countries in the approaches taken towards accessibility. Questions surrounding what success in higher education meant were also perused, with participants pondering over the skills that university equipped individuals with, and their relevance in helping one adapt to a constantly evolving workforce. The inequality in education was discussed to the effect of both access and success, as children belonging to a household in the lower economic strata statistically do worse at every step of school due to the disparity of other resources utilized by other children. This ties in with Intersectional disadvantages discussed by other participants, who highlighted other key factors that often hinder accessibility, including, but not limited to gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, religion etc. In the UK, children of Romani descent are often the most disadvantaged when it comes to accessibility to education.

The participants agreed that this was in stark contrast to the Felicity Hoffman case, where applications were forged to include fake credentials for Hoffman's children who were already from privileged backgrounds, and thereby widening the gap in accessibility to higher education. A recent UK government move to reduce this divide is the Labor governments' proposition to abolish Private education. The discussion soon progressed to 'How much advantage is too much?'. A study showed that children whose parents read to them knew a substantial number of words more than those children who were not read to. The participants seemed divided on the question of where to draw this line of 'passing on privilege'. A few suggestions were provided. Participants stated that the help provided should be based on the children's need, and a thorough understanding of what is lacking in the holistic development of the children. The participants agreed with the idea that parents should not force their children into higher education without knowledge of the child's needs and weaknesses, and their compatibility within a certain degree programme. When asked how buying advantage can be mediated, participants suggested that government and other non-governmental organizations must help those that are underprivileged, so that they can add to the advantage that other children possess, like access to tuitions and extra-curricular activities etc.

The intrinsic need of parents to provide children with 'the best' university education was addressed, however no collaborative answer to what constitutes a 'best university' was found. Other suggestions included that when a state takes complete charge of the education system, there is no need for an added advantage, as the state would act as an impartial equalizer. There seemed to be a conundrum between a sense of entitlement versus a sense of working hard enough to rise above and create opportunities which were related to a sense of class, and privilege. The sustained knowledge of options being open, and aspirations being things you are aware of often comes from conversations sustained by the primary caregivers. Participants concurred that University needs to be opened up as an option, and not as the natural route. This is to ensure that it would be something that youngsters approach towards without there being an implied pressure on parents or primary caregivers to also be primary educators, as often times they may not be equipped to do the same.

Several unconscious ways of passing on advantages we discussed such as international trips that aim to introduce different cultures, and having access to books and different technological gadgets around the house. Different target groups were also discussed as being further disadvantaged, and this included students with disabilities, older and underprivileged students. Newer target groups were also discussed, these being students who are refugees, those who identify as being part of LGBTQIA, victims of sexual abuse, students who belong to military families, students who do not speak the national language and so on.

Overview of trends and developments in global practice:

This session was aimed at determining what must be done in order to reduce inequalities in higher education. International evidence showed that quasi-experimental design has yielded results that showed that this method was beneficial in bridging this gap. This method is used to feel the impact of public policy elements which was then used to develop academic and social capabilities that would help them to assimilate into higher education portals.

Two main conclusions were drawn:

- 1) In terms of outreach policies, these methods are effective with active counselling and if the application process were to be simplified
- 2) The methods are not effective when they are provided with a general overview of what they are to merely experience.

The experts handling the sessions spoke about the importance of need based grants, as they do not systematically increase enrollment rates, but only work when they provide enough money to cover unmet needs or include an early commitment during high school. They also stressed the importance of the engagement of NGO's and communities. Programs like ArbeiterKind were discussed and considered as model examples of community engagement with optimum levels of outreach activity being carried out to mentor students who are most in need of help.

Year-round programs are considered especially important, as during the academic year there would be a lot of tutoring for academics, as well as mentoring for other activities. These include cultural events that would take them to museums, cultural exhibitions, and longer summer school to increase the campus experience. These programs should also ensure that achievement in school is monitored, and insufficient progress means students would sometimes be dropped from the program. The specific purpose of such a program would be to prepare students to enter into higher education in a very pragmatic manner, with the students who run this program also receiving a small stipend in the form of scholarships. Experts agreed that this needed to be a sustained activity that engaged the students, and their families, as it is important to include parents in inculcating the mindset towards higher education. A disadvantage of such a program is the high resource intensity and the large amount of funding allocation necessary to ensure its holistic application.

Some colleges that are elevating efforts to increase accessibility to higher education include Berkeley University California, University of Cape Town, and the UniversdiadEafit. This depicts the homogeneity in the aspiration to increase accessibility to higher education across countries. They indulge in different activities, but work towards facilitating the same aim. There is an important understanding of the financial and cultural context in this scenario with the participants from different states having to elucidate on the financial and cultural differences that need to be accommodated and understood while having a conversation about increasing accessibility to higher education.

Ms Saira Banu

The debate on the centralisation of education in the Philippines



Photo by: Ms Ellen Blair

This article is inspired by an interview with Dr Edizon Fermin, the Vice President of Academic Affairs at the National Teacher's College in the Philippines, during the ASEF Capacity Building Training. When asked about what he thought the key issues were in terms of higher education in the Philippines, it was made apparent that the centralisation of education was the main focal point.

In the interview, Dr Fermin states:

"The Philippines is split into 17 administrative regions and while decentralisation allows for various regions to specialise and adapt to their unique position, it also means that many areas are less likely to respond to the established benchmark and standards. We need to find a balance between national priority goals and regional development goals."

Of course, the Philippines is not the only country that struggles with the issue of local autonomy; and while every country's situation is unique, by using the Philippines as a case study, looking into both its history and present situation, universal topics can be drawn upon and related to on an international scale.

The centralisation of education is founded in aiding to combat social division, which focuses broadly upon standardising public school standards in the aim that students are on equal footing regardless of economic background. However, upon further inspection, economic factors within nationwide education also bring into play the issue of there being a rural and cosmopolitan divide. In 2014, the National Achievement Test (NAT) and the National Career Assessment Examination (NCAE) revealed the disparity in the quality and effectiveness of education between urban and rural centres in the Philippines: primary school completion rates in large towns and cities, such as Metro Manila, were approximately 100 percent; whereas rural areas, such as Eastern Visayas and Mindanao, hold primary school completion rate up to 30 percent or even less.

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This is not to say that the Filipino government has not taken steps in order to tackle the role of centralisation in the ever-growing divide between urban and rural areas. In 1991, the Philippines passed the Education Commission Report (EDCOM), which brought about the Trifocalisation of Education. This was swiftly followed by the Phil Education Sector Study in 1998, which further enabled local governments to cater to local needs; measures, which due to the diverse culture and geography in the Philippines, are necessary.

Within this trifocalisation, local governments now play a role in the construction and maintenance of buildings at elementary and secondary schools, as well as the establishment and maintenance of specialised extension classes in subjects specific to local and regional priorities. Parallel to this, the national office formulates the basic education plan under which national education learning outcomes are monitored and assessed; while the regional office follows suit to the national office, but on a slightly more specific level through planning and managing effective and efficient use of personal, physical, and fiscal resources in the area.

Underpinning all these elements is the idea of shared governance which promotes the recognition that every unit in the education bureaucracy has a particular role, task, and responsibility inherent in the office, and for which it is principally responsible for outcomes.

While this principle is of noble reckoning, it has equally come under scrutiny for its vague definition upon which there is no form of differentiation for roles which may fit the criteria of more than one trifocal office.

Therefore, much in line with Dr Fermin's statement, it seems that while institutions have been established to tackle regional social division, the actualisation of such goals of decentralisation are met with fear of there being a lack of regulation on a nation-wide level for implementing the country's benchmark standards. Such confusion leads to the continuation of shortfalls in textbooks, teachers, teaching spaces, and the perpetration of the very problem which was intended to be fixed.

In terms of international support, in January 2009, the Department of Education signed a memorandum

of agreement with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to seal \$86 million assistance to Philippine education. However, the aforementioned NATAchievement Test suggests this also seems like an alternative to creating the same problem.

Unspecialised development models are part of the problem.

As Dr Fermin also asserts, "the ability to make decisions based on evidence is necessary." This has now come to mean a mutual meeting of minds between both Europe and Asia, for no solo nation can provide the solution to a global initiative. Globalisation no longer means the 'benefaction' of one country onto another, and the ASEF Capacity Building Training has proven just that.

"The workshops here have been routed on the concept of diversity, which has facilitated a variety of opinions. Finding the differences and common grounds between our countries' higher education institutions has allowed us all to mutually learn from each other."

The programme has involved working on case studies of higher education which are universally applicable; and through this, participants from both Asia and Europe have been able to reflect on their country's unique situation.

By looking at the development of education in the Philippines, it is hoped that the necessity for (and endurance of) initiatives like the ASEF Capacity Building Training, and its ability to bring about cross-national discussion in finding unique solutions to access to higher education globally, is justified.

Ms Manvir Dobb



Discussing gender and access across Afghanistan and Ireland

In discussion with Prof. Azizullah Amir and Ms Deirdre Creedon



Photo by: Ms Patricia Senge

During the ASEF capacity building training workshops, our young journalist Ms Dhruvi Chakravarthi had a chance to receive some key cross-comparative insights from Prof. Azizullah Amir, the Founder and President of the Moraa Educational Complex in Afghanistan and Ms Deirdre Creedon, the Access Officer of Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland.

Ms Chakravarthi:

Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview and I hope you have found the sessions to be insightful, so far. To start off, can you please highlight the areas in which you've worked with access through your respective careers and highlight how your backgrounds/environments have influenced the choices you have made?

Ms Creedon:

Well, when I started my career with CIT, I was brought under the European funded projects, we have new projects for women. And the project was around increasing the numbers of girls taking of STEM subjects in secondary school. I was previously talking about these gender roles or female role models and working at an institution level in terms of developing equality, quality policies. There were five higher education students in Ireland working on that at the time. We received European funding for that. So that was at the start of my career and I moved from that into another European fund project for longterm unemployed men. But interestingly, even though I suppose I started with access, more recently, this shoestring level of gender is getting more prominence again in relation to women being represented at management levels within the organization. Athena's One is an initiative where any institution that is getting research has to satisfy Athena One's requirement around gender equality, female representation. So because of that, as the funding for research is in jeopardy, if you don't reach the phase of the different awards, there is bronze, silver, gold by a certain period of time, your research funding will be taken off. So it's given a little bit of a stick for institutes. So because of that initiative, it has allowed my organization to bring that gender equality discussion back into the senior management levels. And also white and black discussion around equality and diversity and inclusion, not just gender, but it has allowed us a vehicle to look at it.

Prof. Azizullah:

Every country, every organization and every person has its own achievements and challenges. I think when we are talking about education and women, and trying to compare Ireland with Afghanistan, it is like comparing a building that is already constructed, painted with just a few renovations with a piece of land that's yet to be prepared to lay the foundations of the building. So it is very, very different on our side of the world with so many challenges. How does one envision a country that has had 14 years of war, active war, international war? Everyone ends up starting their lives from scratch. I started my life, my professional life from, from scratch, from zero outside, cause we could fall. I went to medical university and my biggest ambition and my desire and my father's desire and wish was that I become a professor and a teacher in a medical university. And when I took the exam was admitted as a professor in that university that day, I wanted to surprise my dad and came home to inform him that today your prayers came true and I am now a teacher in the university. And in front of our house, the kidnappers came and took me. I was kidnapped. So I was in so much shock and I couldn't share this with my dad. So my dear life starts since then. When I was newly graduated from university and I was just in the market to start my career and become a teacher and then start my other businesses. But I was held hostage by the kidnappers. I was kidnapped for four and half months. And that was the sweetest and the worst time of my life - I learned a lot, received a new outlook to the world. And then I escaped after four and a half months and I started my private businesses. I became the assistant professor in the medical university. I opened a private hospital from scratch. Remember, I didn't have money and had to take loans from other friends and colleagues and started a private hospital for the first time, one of the first private hospitals in Afghanistan. I remember, I lost my mom as a kid because of lack of female doctors.

There was a motivation in my heart that I should do something for women and women-run hospitals. So when I started the private hospital, I couldn't hire enough women to work in the hospital in different fields. That's when I realised that female doctors and female experts were lacking.

I started the educational center for women, an educational complex only for women and by women in the community, in a country that is highly looked down upon, where people do not send the women to the doctors, to be seen nor touched. So we need more female doctors. So I start this educational complex that is unique in its current and its concept in the world because we receive babies who are 20 days old and we make them doctors and teachers. So we guide them through all levels of education - nursery, primary school, secondary school, high school, Institute of health sciences, university, their hostels are all in the same compound led only by women and all followed.



Photo by: Ms Ellen Blair

Ms Chakravarthi:

That was very insightful, thank you. With regards to the sustainable development goals and indicators, what are your core targets and when do you kind of predict to achieve them within your own areas?

Ms Creedon:

Outside of gender, it's the sustainable development goal on leaving no one behind. That is the ambition that I was trying to straight forward. And that dictates a lot where we are headed towards. And I suppose any of the initiatives that we would work on within my institution, would have that overarching objective.

Prof. Azizullah:

For me, it would be the illiteracy and maternal mortality in Afghanistan. So, by creating experts in the provinces, in the rural areas. So now our first batch of doctors will graduate in three years and our midwives have already graduated, as the courses are shorter. So when these experts graduate and go to the field and work with the community and train other students and doctors, creating a pattern and multiplying the process. The ultimate goal is to educate the whole community, all families, all women. And then once women are educated, peace will come. One of the biggest challenges in our country is the lack of peace, constant state of fighting, the war, the horrific mentality to kill and destroy each other, to destroy our home country. This can only be prevented by educating the women, by HPE mothers, sisters, wives. They will create a domino effect by bringing change to the families, families bringing change in the community. The community will bring change to the nation and a feeling of patriotism will arise and people will help each other and really grow. So there's a long journey in bringing this big change. We believe in education, that is our slogan.



Photo by: Ms Ellen Blair

Ms Chakravarthi:

Is there anything you would take back from the capacity building training programmes to implement in your institutions in Ireland and Afghanistan?

Prof. Azizullah:

For me, any learning is associated with questions and very often, I attend programs like this. To ask more questions. One of the things that is the beauty of what we learn is the issue of diversity in conferences like this and learning from each other, listening to each other and understanding that the world is a big piece of work with thousands of variations and variables of thought. Here, we may have one thing, one type of challenge, one type of view. And there, another. The good thing is that we understand each other and we learn from each other, we respect each other and we understand that everyone has their own obligations. We do not create stereotypes and we do not judge each other without understanding the situations and challenges and achievements and problems. So I think it gives me more questions on how we can coordinate with the world and globalize education? How can we make the whole world a village and get closer to each other? And bring peace internationally, bring prosperity to all of humanity and all human beings working together without accusations.

Ms Dhruvi Chakravarthi

Summary of Final Presentations

Amongst the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, 'Quality Education' is a global goal that resonates to achieve equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all through an inclusive manner. This goal reaffirms that achieving inclusive and quality education is a keystone to sustainable development. As identified by the participants through their presentations at the end of the capacity building programme, diversity and cross-cultural exchange of perspectives is essential to effectively enable access to education in local circumstances. In his presentation, Dr Edizon Fermin of Philippines concluded how these types of events are necessary in improving higher education at a rapid and sustainable pace. He also highlighted the huge focus in Asian universities on the cultural nuances of engaging with education as well as the necessity to find a balance between prioritising national goals and regional development goals.

By reflecting on the wide-ranging and contrasting perspectives to the local issues of 'access' shared through the conference, participants expressed through their presentations how this has ignited a spirit of enhancing global networks to be able to implement these goals at a local level more efficiently. The training brought together 20 participants and 8 resource persons representing 21 ASEM countries and in the process, the problems and solutions expressed by the participants were un-identical but ignited a stream of thought. Looking through the global access picture, a concept introduced in the second day, participants included some of the challenges they are currently facing in their spheres. For example, India is currently in a youth bulge phase with over 600 million young people under the age of 25 which exceeds the entire population of the UK by nearly 10 times. The participants highlighted the difference in breadth and scale of the issue of access but the impending need to continue bringing a comparative approach to analyse where different countries fall on the scale to catering to access.

The participants collectively recognised how non-formal or informal education enables learners to accumulate qualifications through flexible participation. A recognised goal that many of the participants were keen to implement. Through their presentations, they also expressed the necessity to design responsive learning programmes to the demands of learning content and also offer open educational resources. These broad strategies were identified and participants shared their motivation to navigate through any structural barriers to implement this in their capacities. Highlighting this, Mr Anthony Gartner of Australia described how it is important to start at the grassroots to ensure smooth transitions through all levels of education so that people are encouraged by the larger system to pursue Higher Education from the very beginning. Ms Gemma Xarles-Jubany of Spain questioned how to increase accessibility within internationalisation of Higher Education and highlighted the necessity to rethink current education systems and access strategies with sustainability and tech in mind.

By measuring the impact of access policies and understanding the capacity for cross-regional cooperation, some of the participants, including Ms Diedre Creedon of Ireland expressed how it was an eye-opener to receive this cross-cultural narrative and be more mindful of it whilst implementing policies. She also identified how in order for societies to thrive, everyone should be able to showcase and hone their skills to contribute to a better and more sustainable world. Amongst other participants, she also highlighted the necessity of starting at the grassroots and creating an intergenerational dialogue with parents, teachers and friends.

Resonating with the ethos of the Asia-Europe Foundation of 'Diversity Creates', the concluding presentations left a mark of hope, determination and effective strategies in creating a more accessible world for generations to come.

Ms Dhruvi Chakravarthi



Photo by: Ms Ellen Blair

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