

Learning Brief

GCE Youth Action Month 2022: Webinar Series

#ClaimingOurEducationAgenda #OurEducationOurFuture!

Youth and Student-Led Solutions in Education Advocacy



Abideen Olasupo, Global Action Week for Education, 2022

Background

On the 25th and 27th of October 2022, the GCE hosted its second annual Youth Action Month. The Youth Action Month is GCE's annual youth and student led flagship initiative which provides a platform for youth and students to lead policy and advocacy discussions, co-creating strategies and developing shared agendas for youth led education advocacy and activism within GCE. This year, GCE's Youth Action Month focused on Intersectionality as Praxis and how it affects education equality and inclusivity globally. Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, age and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination, marginalisation or disadvantage.

During the first part of the two-part series webinar, global youth and students' organisations convened to discuss particular issues that are key to the youth agenda and to formulate strategies and a way forward towards revolutionary action as a follow-up to the Transforming Education Summit Youth Declaration and in the lead-up to the GCE World Assembly in November 2022. This first part was dubbed "*Youth Pass the Mic on Intersectionality as Praxis*" under the theme, [#ClaimingOurEducationAgenda](#). The panel was made up of youth activists from different youth movements including, Cynthia Nyongesa-SD4 Youth Network, Majd Hithnawi-ACEA Youth Network, Mary Maker-Co-Founder of Elimisha Kakuma, Alexandra Seybal-Global Students' Forum, Irfaan Mangera-Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, Juliet Tsepang Khumalo-Vice President, All Africa Students Association, Samuel Gwenzi-Southern African Students Union (SASU), Jazmin Elena-MELAC Latin America and Caribbean Youth and Students Association and Priyanka Pal-ASPBAE Youth Coordinator.

The second part of the series was dubbed "***Strategic Planning: Towards GCE's World Assembly***". Lessons and experiences were drawn from African, Asian, Latin American and the Middle East. The panel for the second webinar included, Reem Hamdan- representative of the Youth Network of the Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA); Pierina Anton Lopez from Global Campaign for Education-USA and co-author of a report on Financing Education in Emergencies; Ireti Adesida - Director General for Rhealyz-Africa; Brittany Elyse-Assistant Director of Emergency Coordination Team UNICEF USA; Ellen Dixon-Steering Committee Member at the Global Student Forum and National Researcher and Academic Quality Advisor at the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations; Phumza Luthango - GCE Research and Advocacy Officer; Luis Eduardo Perez Murcia - GCE Research and Policy Advisor; Shamah Bulangis-young queer feminist from the Philippines and co-chair of Transform Education; Lutfiyya Dean-All Africa Students Association and Grant Kasowanjete-GCE Global Coordinator.

Situation analysis

Whilst intersectionality is topical and relevant to the current challenges faced by young people across the world, webinar panelists and participants lamented that:

- ✚ There is structural intersectionality and serious structural inequality which prevents young women and girls from accessing education. 9 million girls between the ages of about 6 and 11 will never go to school at all, compared to 6 million boys (UNESCO, 2022). Their disadvantage starts early in their lives: 23% of girls are out of primary school compared to 19% of boys (UNESCO, 2022). The exclusion rate for girls is 36% compared to 32% for boys (UNESCO, 2022). The world records 39 000 child marriages per day (UNESCO, 2022).
- ✚ In 2020, UNESCO estimated that 11 million girls were at risk of not going back to school after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✚ An estimated 35 million children around the world have been forcibly displaced. Nearly half of school-age refugee children are out of school (UNICEF, 2021).
- ✚ Gaps remain, particularly in the areas of education in emergencies. There is no commitment to ensure the continuity of education during conflict and take all measures to protect the educational facilities (schools) during wars in accordance with international humanitarian law, despite the fact that out-of-school children in conflict remain a huge issue.
- ✚ War, natural disasters and other crises have uprooted large numbers of children and families. In times of emergencies, children suffer first and foremost. When children are unable to access an education due to living in a humanitarian crisis, the consequences are catastrophic.
- ✚ There is a lack of investment in and commitment to gender transformative education to create a present and future that is feminist, equitable, and free from harmful gender stereotypes, comprehensive sexuality education and inclusivity.
- ✚ Most African governments devote less than 1% of their budgets to mental health services (World Economic Forum, 2021) and an estimated 100 million people in Africa suffer from clinical depression, including 66 million women (World Economic Forum, 2021).

"An ongoing, long-standing issue is that mental health — across health, social, education and other sectors — has been heavily underfunded. Countries spend on average only 2% of their health budgets on mental health [...] Capacity of staff needs to be built across health, social and educational sectors to address mental health, especially in low- and middle-income countries."

-2019 to 2023 Who Special Initiative for Mental Health.

YOUTH & STUDENTS

PASS THE MIC:

Intersectionality as Praxis

#ClaimingOurEducationAgenda

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EDUCATION
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ASPBAE
Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education

AOESEA
Arab League Campaign for Education to All
الحملة العربية للتعليم للجميع

GLOBAL
STUDENT
FORUM

AASU

Challenges highlighted

During the webinar panellists and participants cited the following challenges that mostly emanated from the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and displacement, climate emergencies and gender discriminatory

- ✓ Classification of education among the youth and students' fraternity comes from the commodification of education where access to education tends to favour those who afford it. The situation is worsened by gender inequalities, economic hardships in countries such as Zimbabwe, disability, race and the digital divide.
- ✓ It has been common knowledge to neglect students who are disabled in accessing education. Many youth and students with disabilities fail to access education as parents fail to have enough resources to cater for their needs.
- ✓ Indonesian youth and students from the fishing communities indicated their inability to attend schools which forces them to take up jobs at a young age to support their families.
- ✓ The Philippines reported that the loss of livelihoods and education during the pandemic also has a significant gendered dimension.
- ✓ Nepal recorded a growing number of cases of violence on young girls and early child marriage. The gendered violence including physical and mental abuse, rape, child marriage and sexual abuse on girls also reportedly increased.
- ✓ Speaking about youth and students' education, the aspiration for technology - based learning has come closer since the pandemic. However, in India, Shodinis (meaning female researcher) pointed out that girls did not have access to smartphones as the family gives first priority to the male student in the house. This increased the gender gap making young girls more vulnerable and unable to access education.
- ✓ Domestic responsibilities were significantly increased for young girls during the pandemic affecting their study time and access to remote learning opportunities, even when digital infrastructure is available.
- ✓ In terms of gendered dynamics in vocational training in countries such as Palestine, preference is given to male over female learners. To add insult to injury, there are sometimes 3000 applications yet only two people are recruited for an engineering job/training.
- ✓ In Bangladesh, India and Nepal, the closure of schools has made girl students more vulnerable to early child marriages.
- ✓ Due to economic and social challenges, millions of youth and students drop-out of colleges and universities per year.
- ✓ For refugees, it is difficult to get a shot at studying due to lack of funding, loans, and any form of financing unless organisations such as UNICEF and the UNDP intervene. The process of vetting and selection takes a while. Hence, it takes a long time for refugees to begin and complete their studies. Whilst, 96% of refugees get a shot at primary school, only 6% make it to high school and 1% make it to college.
- ✓ There are not nearly enough teachers in refugee camps. The student to teacher ratio is very high, each class having at least 120 pupils (6 to 10 students being girls) using the hot-seating method (a model in which one group attends class from morning until midday then the other begins at midday up to end of day).
- ✓ Climate change is a deadly factor and one that is linked to other struggles which does not affect everyone the same way. It is one of the biggest emergencies/crises of our generation and will hit young people the most. During conferences, politicians continue making pledges to mitigate climate change, but many of them remain unfulfilled.
- ✓ 6% of people who attend university take up 80% of leadership positions which points to the disparity and weaknesses in how people occupy decision-making roles and responsibility.
- ✓ Youth and student activists continue to be arrested and kidnapped for calling for climate justice.
- ✓ Poverty and food poverty are key barriers to education which need to be addressed.

- ✓ There is a severe lack of coordination and collaboration among the government, civil society and private sector on climate justice and other human rights issues.
- ✓ Growing organisations such as Rhealyz Africa encounter setbacks such as the dire need to

upgrade their media equipment, restrictions in some of the schools they work with, shortage of funding to push their media advocacy messages to have more reach and unstable internet connectivity for remote engagement.

Youth and Student-Led Actions: Best Practices

During the webinar, participants put forward the following lessons and best practices adopted to address barriers to their work as well as youth and student-led solutions and actions:

- Student-led actions have historically challenged the status quo as a result of radical ideas and political participation catalysing social change and calling out the root causes of climate change by building on the heritage among young people to promote human rights.
- Climate justice education can be a game changer. When education is made available to everyone, it will enable critical thinking, reflection, action and transformation in our societies. Education is a key ingredient to facilitate transition and dealing with the climate crisis.
- Former refugees, for example Mary Make, a former refugee at Kakuma Refugee Camp where she grew up, is working with Elimisha Kakuma to provide opportunities to further refugees' education and opportunities to leave the camp. She also provides them the opportunity to learn, as well as linking them with other opportunities beyond camps and aid so that they can secure funding for higher education.
- ASPBAE has been involved in conducting several regional events, facilitating regional training and giving mentoring support for national coalitions through intergenerational dialogues with members to strategize on the youth work.
- ASPBAE has been conducting regular capacity building training workshops and youth consultations were planned with the coalition to provide support and assistance for youth. Sign language and other regional language interpretations support were provided for the active participation of many marginalised youth.
- ASPBAE conducted research in nine countries and consolidated a youth-led action research report on the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised youth and students. The research findings and recommendations have been presented at major regional platforms and strategic partners such as UNICEF, UNESCO and APREMC.
- To address the effects of mental health on marginalised youth and students, ASPBAE worked with mental health professionals such as Mariwala Health Initiative and i-Call of the TATA Institute of Social Sciences who co-designed and co-facilitate the capacity-building training for youth and members. Learning materials, audio-visual notes, and other hand-holding support were made available to equip youth to implement the study effectively.
- In response to the silent yet deadly mental health pandemic, that is claiming the lives of many youth and students across the globe, the Canadian Federation of Students created the graduate student mental health toolkit and wellbeing survey that was extensively disseminated among student and youth movements, StudoMatrix developed a national program on stress management and the All-Africa Students' Union Partnered with Connected Minds and provided online mental health counsellors during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ASPBAE organised two sets of five days of training for 40 youth leaders who in turn mentored 90 community youth researchers and a total of forty hours of training and mentoring for youth catalysts. Sign language and other regional language interpretations support were provided for the active participation of many marginalised youth.
- Rhealyz Africa has empowered, through training and capacity building initiatives, over 570 disadvantaged women and trained over 1900 secondary school girls with 185 secondary school boys in the last four years. We've had between 67% to 79% feedback on all our various media including our weekly radio advocacy programs and presently focusing on ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV) with building a new set of male champions fighting for the rights of women/girls. This was achieved through speech competitions, mentorship circles and communication/media advocacy training for girls.
- In collaboration with UNICEF and ACEA, the Star Factory in Palestine has adopted an all women policy to recruit and develop their capacity to work at the factory so as to address the dominance of men in vocational training.
- GSF is developing a policy paper which will be released after consultations with other youth and student movements. The document will serve as a reference point for collective advocacy through advocacy and training by incorporating climate education in curricula co-created with youth and students, practising democratic decision making for climate solutions, climate finance including loss and damages and accountability.

Recommendations and way forward

To push for the implementation of particular issues that are key to the youth and student's agenda and formulate strategies and way forward towards revolutionary action as a follow-up, webinar participants and panellists made the following recommendations:

- Governments should provide digital infrastructure with good internet connectivity for free to the marginalised youth and students.
- Governments can also make sure that the public schools are updated with new technologies and with high-speed internet connectivity for all youth and students in surrounding communities and students to access and use for free. This can become a community-based education centre, especially for young women and girls to access the digital infrastructure and a space to conduct community centres for learning and a safe space for peer interaction.
- Governments must lead the effort to ensure that all stakeholders are given the support they need to properly perform their roles, especially for parents and teachers.
- Government should support youth and students by providing training to parents and caregivers, teachers, and other members of the community in acquiring technical skills on handling mental health issues.
- For young women and girls, governments should provide more technical skills-based training which will enable them to access job opportunities that pay well, making them financially independent. These may include better apprenticeships, vocational and technical training. Similar provisions can be made for young single mothers by providing regular subsidies and free healthcare facilities for themselves and for their child, in addition to skills-based training to access good quality job opportunities.
- Governments can use media platforms such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines to promote campaigns and advocate against Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), early child marriages and gender discrimination.
- Right policy measures must be put in place to ensure continued provision of quality healthcare for all, especially on mental health for young women and girls. This must include provisions to mitigate the growing anxiety among young women and girls and compensate them for the loss of social support/protection networks during emergencies and other crises.
- Special effort should be taken by the education department to create accessible and inclusive learning packages that can incorporate special needs for youth and students with sensory and other disabilities. Additional training should be organised at schools or at the community level to teach sign language to families having deaf youth and students.
- Solidarity and empathy with other youth and student movements must be encouraged so that when one organisation is under attack or a student (s) is arrested, the support and solidarity transcend national borders and is amplified at regional and international platforms.
- When it comes to practising decision-making for climate solutions and policy discussions, stakeholders must ensure representation of local groups and communities at local levels.
- Young people must be protected and positively engaged when they speak about climate justice and not be criminalised.
- There should be better financing for youth action against climate change and climate financing that recognises that those countries that have economically benefited from the climate crisis should now share the wealth with those most impacted and enable them to adapt to its effects.
- In terms of accountability, countries which pollute the most, must pay for climate action.
- In order to translate youth and students' solidarity into action into greater systemic change, young people need to be more practical and capitalise on online platforms to amplify their voices on climate justice. This needs to be completed by being strategic by including all other groups in youth and students' solidarity.
- Provision of adequate bilingual education resources for multilingual learners that prioritise instruction in students' first languages.
- Establish and develop laws, policies, funded programs, and curriculum for early childhood learners, regardless of their immigration status, gender, age, race, among others that aim at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

- Through the GCE, youth and student movements can support national coalitions in designing and implementing research agendas, advocacy and campaign initiatives on climate justice.
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- The GCE has established a well-grounded group that represents the geographical realities of its movement that focuses on gender contributing to collective thinking. Therefore, the GCE invites the youth and students to nominate a representative on their behalf to be part of the Gender Working Group that will be able to drive the GCE's activism work and establish country-level partnerships that work on gender in education.
- Further, the GCE calls on the youth and students to support it in defining the best approach to integrate GCE gender objectives within their regional networks and activities. The GCE's overall aim with gender work is inclusivity, awareness, and bringing our desired change in society where girls' and boys' education is protected from discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This space is a decision-making space that brings an opportunity to come up with political solutions on how we navigate protecting the most vulnerable people in our societies globally, where children can be learners.



Youth and students must be at the center of all decision-making, policy formulation and implementation processes.

Resources

You can access the 1st day event recording: [here](#).

You can access the 2nd day event recording: [here](#).

Presentations are available: [here](#).