

a European Youth Press magazine

ORANGE



4thASEF SUSTAINABLE YOUNG LEADERS DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT POST-COVID-19

A multi-part youth programme in 2021 | Virtual, Cambodia & Across ASEM Countries
Official youth event in support of the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13)

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Dear Reader,

How can YOUTh shape Sustainable Development in a post-Covid-19 world?

To discuss this question over 200 participants from 51 Asian and European countries met online for a 10-month youth leadership programme organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). The 4th ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS4) particularly focused on three spheres of youth leadership (self-leadership, team leadership and societal leadership) and four thematic areas (SDG3: Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG4: Quality Education, SDG8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG13: Climate Action).

The leadership programme was divided into three phases. It started off with an intensive knowledge building phase in form of webinars, intercultural online collaborations across continents and several virtual youth dialogues with Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) partners, leaders and experts. Building on the knowledge acquired, participants jointly developed activities—the Leadership in Action activities—to contribute towards the achievement of the SDGs, particularly focusing on local communities across ASEM and the virtual space.

The programme ended with the ASEFYLS4 Summit Week during which the ASEM Youth Report was launched, and the youth declaration presented during the opening ceremony of the ASEM13 summit.

The articles in this magazine follow the conference and specifically address various of the thematic areas discussed during ASEFYLS4, analyzing challenges and discussing youth leadership in Sustainable Development. They are written by six young journalists from Asian and European countries, who participated in the youth leadership programme and share their insights. With this in mind, it should be noted that the views represented in this magazine are those of the authors, rather than of ASEF, ASEM or the European Youth Press.

Overall, this magazine, published by the European Youth Press as an independent organization, provides an overview of the 10-month journey, reflecting on participants' impressions and lessons learned, presenting some of the output of the training and summarizing some of the discussions. Enjoy!

MS PATRICIA SENGE
Editor in Chief

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The Beginning of the 10-month-long Learning Journey

by Mr Alvin Adityo

Tuesday, February 23, 2021 marked the beginning of another chapter of the 4th Asia–Europe Foundation’s Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS4). Unlike the previous ASEFYLS editions during which participants from around the world gathered in the host country, where the ASEM Summit was hosted, the 4th edition took place online, due to the global pandemic. Nevertheless, it did not decrease the value of the programme. On the contrary, adapting to the circumstances, ASEF created a compact programme, with equally intense and inclusive learning opportunities. For ten months, over 200 participants and facilitators from 51 countries discussed issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the post-COVID-19 era.

Ms Leonie Nagarajan, Director of Education Department at ASEF, greeted the participants with a warm welcome and introduced the panelists of the opening session afterwards. The first panelist to be introduced was Ambassador Toru Morikawa, Executive Director of ASEF. In his welcoming speech, HE Morikawa mentioned that he hopes ASEF will contribute to knowledge, capacity, col-

laborations and long-lasting networks, in this globalized, but also increasingly fragmented & fragile world. He also encouraged the participants to build-up resilience and the foundation for self-leadership, team leadership and societal leadership among young people.

In his closing statement, HE Morikawa stressed that he is expecting several outcomes of the journey. First, he hoped that youth would grow through peer-to-peer training, learning and co-operation and engage in Intergenerational Leadership Dialogues to debate solutions and visions for “Sustainable Development in a post-COVID-19 World” in the context of social and political realities. Second, he asked the youth to walk the talk (execute the ideas of the discussions to action) and demonstrate their commitment to “Sustainable Development in a post-COVID-19 World” through concrete “Leadership in Action” activities in local communities across ASEM and the virtual space. Lastly, he reminded the participants that their thoughts and perspectives on “Sustainable Development in a post-COVID-19 World” will be captured in the ASEFYLS4 Youth Declaration



«The 4th ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS4) is an invitation to youth to build-up resilience and the foundation for self-leadership, team leadership and societal leadership.

It is our hope that we contribute to knowlege, capacity, collaborations and long-lasting networks,an important task in this globalised, but also increasingly fragmented and fragile world.»

AMBASSADOR MORIKAWA TORU
Executive Director, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)



HE SOK SOKEN
Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation, Cambodia



MS LEONIE NAGARAJAN
Director, ASEF Education Department

handed over by four youth representatives to the ASEM Leaders during the 13th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM13) Summit Opening Ceremony.

Following, HE Soken Sok, Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC) of Cambodia, was introduced. As a representative from Cambodia, the host country of the ASEM13 and ASEFYLS4, HE Sok stressed that he is honoured to welcome young, talented people from around the world to this 10-month long programme. In his welcome remarks, HE Sok highlighted the importance of collective and coordinated transformation at all levels of society to achieve the 17 SDGs. He explained that the programme would facilitate participants' involvement not only in peer-to-peer learning about the issue that piqued their interest, but also to take part in making a real impact through one of the 15 Leadership in Action projects, which were part of ASEFYLS4 to seek improvements in the areas of Health & Wellbeing, Quality Education, Decent Work & Economic Growth, and Climate Action. With the rise of populism across the world, youth is vulnerable

to political polarisation and radical indoctrination, without actually being given the chance to be involved in institutional mechanisms that help solve problems on the ground. This leadership programme would provide a unique opportunity to demonstrate the participants' knowledge, problem-solving skills, and a chance to kick-start their leadership campaign. He went on stressing that he would hope that participants could contribute more to policy making and implementation at both the global and local levels in the future.

To end his remarks, HE Sok brought forward an interesting aspect on the importance of intergenerational collaboration between present policy makers and young change-makers at both the national and the international level to ensure sustained progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

The event continued with Ms Nagarajan showing the participants a picture of a compass and asking them what was wrong with it. Participants quickly noticed that there was no needle, which forms part of a fully functioning compass.

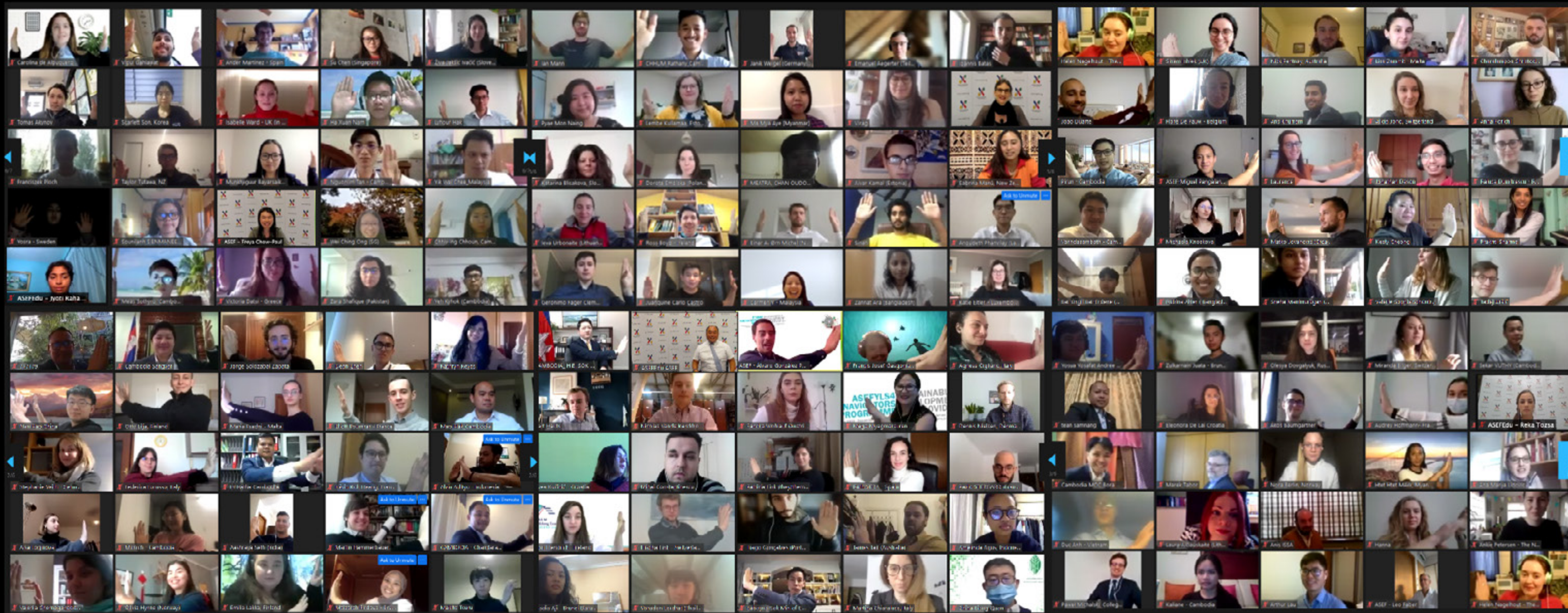
Ms Nagarajan stressed her hope that the ASEFYLS4 programme will provide a sense of direction to the participants, not only towards the SDGs, but also towards leadership more generally. To realize the idea of giving young people a sense of direction, the learning programme is divided into three phases, namely the knowledge building, youth summit, and leadership in action phase.

In the Knowledge Building Phase (February – May 2021), participants enhanced their knowledge on the four main SDGs, namely Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Climate Action. During this phase, ASEF collaborated with the College of Europe in Natolin (CoEN) in developing thematic courses on the four development goals. Additional individual and group assignments were distributed amongst the participants, allowing the participants to interact, collaborate, and share their ideas on SDGs and connecting issues. Apart from thematic courses, ASEF also facilitated a leadership training in collaboration with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) for the participants. Likewise, CCL assigned individual

and group projects and led reflection sessions on how to become an effective leader in society and working groups.

After the Knowledge Building Phase participants were divided into 15 groups, working on different local community and/or virtual activities, the so-called Leadership in Action projects, related to the SDGs. Each group had a Navigator, who acted as a project leader of the group and had received training during the ASEFYLS4 Navigator Training prior to the programme. This phase intended to provide the young change makers the opportunity to showcase their leadership and knowledge on development-related project implementation in real societies.

The 10-month long learning programme concluded with a virtual ASEFYLS4 Youth Summit week alongside the 13th ASEM Summit, virtually hosted by the Government of Cambodia.



lithuania bangladesh china luxembourg latvia ireland myanmar
thailand finland romania estonia india czech republic germany
norway brunei darussalam hungary slovakia singapore sweden australia
croatia malta france new zeland south korea poland kazakhstan greece
bulgaria japan netherlands australia united kingdom philippines denmark
indonesia russia spain mongolia laos malaysia vietnam
cambodia

Get to Know the ASEFYLS4 Participants

by Ms Dorota Smólska

In its third month already (time really does fly), the 4th edition of ASEF Young Leaders Summit is in full bloom. What better moment to get to know the participants than now, with the Knowledge Building Phase approaching its end? Today we are shining a spotlight on our peers from Asia and Europe, their unique background and experiences, Leadership in Action projects, thoughts on leadership and more. We will come back to the featured participants after the ASEM Summit to ask them if their views changed — so stay tuned!



MR JUANQUINE CARLO R. CASTRO

Philippines

Currently studying at the University of Philippines, majoring in Communications and Multimedia Art. He is serving as President and founder of Youth Service Philippines, an NGO dealing with environment, health and sports. Juanquine has also supervised and spearheaded 20 projects and counting for the youth. He was awarded various leadership, journalism, research, and Model United Nations awards. His interests involve the environment, sports, education, and health.



You decided to join Project 13: Podcast on Climate Action. What led you to choose this project out of all the projects available?

I chose it simply because I am a broadcaster myself, here in the Philippines. With this in mind, I plan to apply my broadcasting knowledge to this podcast. Aside from this, I take matters seriously when it comes to the environment itself and climate change has affected different countries to various degrees. It has an effect on the Arctic region, for me it is a very interesting topic since the water levels tend to rise in various countries, which will lead to flooding in the next following years. That's why I chose to focus on this.

What is your role in the project?

Initially, we were given a set of tasks and I came up with the idea of streaming the podcast on YouTube. People would likely see more with regards to the expression of the speakers and different individuals that we will invite to the podcast. I am geared towards speaking and editing. Recently we were able to meet with the team: some of them are professionals in their field and two of us are still in university. We used Mural as a support for our discussion and we talked about the leadership roles that everyone has done in the past, and I think that it is

an essential stage, as it informs us about the capacity of the said individual. I'm positive we will be able to create a great podcast in the long run.

What, in your opinion, makes a good leader? What qualities are needed?

To be a good leader, you should be compassionate. You should understand your members well enough to know how they are doing, especially in this time of the pandemic, where most of us are confined in their homes, unable to share their emotions or what they're currently going through, which affects their mental health. To be a leader in this time of the pandemic, compassion is number one. Honesty should be one of the things considered; your members should be able to tell you if they can do a certain task or not, to prevent any delay. These things make a good leader.

MR TIAGO GONÇALVES

Portugal

Received his MSc in Bioengineering (Biomedical Engineering) from Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto (FEUP) in 2019. Currently, he is a PhD Candidate in Electrical and Computer Engineering at FEUP and a research assistant at the Centre for Telecommunications and Multimedia of INESC TEC with the Visual Computing & Machine Intelligence (VCMII) Research Group. His research interests include machine learning, explainable artificial intelligence (in-model approaches), computer vision, medical decision support systems, and machine learning deployment.



Why did you decide to join Project 15: Atlas-Akhyana, what is your motivation behind it?

Although it is not my specialization, I really like to do things out of my area. When I was a student, I was the Manager of the Energy Network in ShARE-UP, a student organization doing consultancy projects that aim to create social impact. Therefore, I believe this project is an interesting way to revisit some of the topics, which are not connected to my daily work. By doing that, I can learn new things and contribute to something bigger than myself. We are assessing the situation regarding sustainability in specific regions, focusing on the impact of climate change. It will be interesting for me to get to know different stories and extract information that could lead us in doing something better.

What are your expectations, do you think that everything will go smoothly, or do you see any obstacles or risks in the implementation of your project?

The first thing that could be considered an obstacle is that everyone is in a different time zone, so it's difficult to get a common time to meet. Most of the people don't really have a technical background and we have to learn everything from scratch, especially cartography. We have Francis helping us in interpreting maps and how to deal with technological systems in cartography. We have to learn it in a

very short time. It will also be hard to balance it with our personal lives. These should be the main difficulties, but I see them more as 'special challenges' and 'once in a lifetime opportunities': to be involved in the exchange of ideas and experiences.

What, in your opinion, makes a good leader? What qualities are needed?

I usually say that a leader should also know how to be a follower. I believe that a good leader knows how to put himself or herself in a place of the rest of the team. A good leader knows how to delegate tasks. Each member of the team has specific skills which are valuable, and this person should know how to divide them to leverage each skill. It's also important that the leader is somehow flexible enough to communicate and push team members by putting them in different context, out of their comfort zones. Besides being a boss, the role of a leader is to act as a facilitator and to help members to grow and make the project grow as well. A leader is a person that connects the dots between team members and can gather the team as a whole.

MS SINEM ISHLEK
United Kingdom

Currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Development Studies from SOAS, University of London. Prior to University, she was an active member of her school's Amnesty International Society as well as Debating Society. At University, Ms Sinem is serving as the president of SOAS Turkish Society for the 2020/21 academic year, where she has led many inter-collegiate collaborations aiming to bridge cultures and build a community of diaspora. Additionally, Sinem recently held the role of Content Contributor for "thinkHER ambition" — a social enterprise aiming to upskill young women aged between 14–19.



You are assigned to Project 4: The BEEP Media Campaign. This project is focused on SDG 4: Quality Education. Why did you decide to join this particular project?

SDG 4 of Quality Education really resonates with me. I've always been driven by my strong belief that every child regardless of race, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status should have access to high-quality education. This really stems from the fact that my own grandparents were either entirely illiterate, or had to drop out of school, because they had to work. I have a very vivid memory of when I was really young, and my grandma was at our house. I was proudly reading through my teacher's feedback when my grandma, out of nowhere, stroked the page I was reading from, leaving me a bit confused. She seemed mesmerized by my handwriting, inspecting every single sentence. And then she said: "I really wish I could write like this too". When she said that, I felt helpless and frustrated because no child should be denied the transformative power of quality education. I'm very happy to be working on this project.

What obstacles do you see in the implementation and what are your expectations? Do you think everything will go smoothly or are there any risks?

Covid-19 and everything held online is in a way an obstacle for us. I know there's been a global tran-

sition towards digitalization, but we need to concentrate on what these out-of-school youth need and what their requirements are. We need to ensure that their voices are heard and that we are doing this project for them—more than a project for us and for ASEF—because the target audience here are the children and for me that is the most important thing: to make sure they receive this alternative education pathway.

Is there something about your country that you would like to change in terms of the education system?

Covid-19 very obviously resulted in there being many obstacles to education, and although the UK most of the time is seen as a very wealthy nation, I think the digital divide in this country is still very prevalent. There are some students who are of a less fortunate background and may not be able to access education effectively, because they don't have the means to buy the digital devices. I think that is an area that must be tackled, particularly in the short-term, because we don't know how long Covid is going to last. The restrictions are slowly getting eased, but I think the consequences of Covid will last for a while. One main thing that I would have liked to see the UK government prioritize, is ensuring that digital inequality is eradicated.

MS LAMIA MOHSIN
Bangladesh

Graduate from the Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, is currently working as a Junior Consultant at the Resilience and Inclusive Growth Cluster, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangladesh. She is the co-founder of "Standing up for the Underprivileged", a youth-driven, voluntary organization working on areas such as social inclusion, reduced inequalities and access to education. She has won a number of research grants, including the Young Researcher grant awarded by UNDP's Effective and Accountable Local Government (EALG) project.



Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Currently, I am working as a co-founder of a youth initiative called "Standing up for the Underprivileged". We work with 100 children and women. Our main areas include inclusive education and women empowerment. Due to the second wave of Covid, a lot of people are unable to find work and feed their families, so we are trying to provide customized food packages. We recently concluded a project which focused on providing access to education for underprivileged children in remote areas of Bangladesh. We try to focus on ethnic minorities, because of the language barrier and engage them in mainstream education. I'm currently trying to develop a project where I can increase advocacy related to climate change by developing a curriculum. I'd like to reach these children using online modules where they can learn about climate change and disaster in an engaging way.

Is there something about your country that you would like to change in terms of SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing?

There is a lot to think about and change. State healthcare lacks investment, funding and has a poor quality of service delivery. People in our country cannot afford private healthcare, so they opt for state sponsorship. The quality itself is not up to the mark and at the end of the day, people suffer. One

of the main issues that I think about is the state of rural healthcare in our country. We have 60–70% of the rural population, however rural healthcare cannot offer the level and quality available in the cities. Whenever a person in a village becomes sick, they are immediately transferred to the city, which makes them dependent on healthcare in the cities and facilities overcrowd. That is one area that I feel needs a lot of improvement.

What, in your opinion, makes a good leader? What qualities are needed?

Personally, I feel that I'm not a born leader. I think I'm the kind of person who has always shied away from taking any kind of leadership responsibility. That has changed gradually over time, because sometimes there is a situation where you cannot find anybody else to lead, so you must be the one who takes on the role of a leader and I think I did pretty well. I believe those experiences helped me learn and improved my communication skills. To be a good leader, you have to be able to communicate well with your team members. There are certain instances where you just have to take up the role of a leader and those experiences help you learn a lot about human interactions, communication and emotions.

Building Youth Spaces for Sustainable Development

by Ms Nur Syahirah Khanum

Recently, I have been observing the increasing youth engagement efforts in civic and political spaces. It is either through formal institutional mechanisms or youth creating their own spaces to champion the causes they believe in and affecting change. While youths worldwide continue to take and claim their spaces in the public sphere, there are institutions providing various platforms and programmes to further develop youth leadership. Two common arguments within youth spaces exist. The first suggests that these institutional opportunities serve as mere tokenistic media exercises and lip service. The second argues that mechanisms established by institutions are effective in including youths in decision-making processes and providing resources for youths. Recognising these two common arguments, in this article I illustrate that for meaningful youth participation, youth spaces must be accessible, inclusive and serving as a space to build connections.

The United Nations launched the Youth2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy in 2018 at a High-Level Meeting in New York. This strategy does not negate the various youth engagement mechanisms that were established before the launch. Nonetheless, it sends a strong signal that youths are important stakeholders for increased impact especially in the “engagement and participation in the implementation, review, and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” including other relevant global agendas.

Furthermore, Youth2030 aims to build the agency of young people and advance their rights through global, regional, and country-level actions. This is particularly momentous as there are opportunities for youth engagement while we are going through COVID-19 waves of recovery and spikes of cases with newer strains. For more than a year now since its first recorded case, COVID-19 has highlighted key areas deeply affecting youths. Some of these areas are education, employment, and governance that highlight intergenerational inequity, lack of accountability, and injustice.

In many parts of the world, including ASEM countries, there are increasing movements and protests mobilised and led by youths. This is due to the issues with governance and the lack of initiated intentional engagements. For example, youths are protesting against the authoritative government i.e. the monarchy. Elsewhere, young people — as young as 15 years old — are at the frontline protesting against the military junta’s coup. In Indonesia youths are mobilised to protest the Omnibus Law as neither the President nor the People’s Representative Council “consult or compromise with the people and continued to push the ratification of the bill”. More recently, Malaysian youths are protesting against the delay in implementing voters’ registration for 18-year-olds in the country, and the suspension of Parliamentary sittings due to COVID-19. The Election Committees are delaying the implementation of the 2019 “Undi18 Bill” affect 1.2 million youths

YOUTH HAS VOICES



The Star/Asia News Network (Straits Times): Protestors holding the banner which reads “Where’s our votes?” in front of the Parliament building, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



we all want the same: to leave a better legacy for the next generations



between the age of 19 to 20 in Malaysia. These occurrences suggest that the government are disregarding youth's and the opposition's voices by preventing access from the established platforms. Thus, youths are protesting as a way to engage with their government.

While there are rising youth-led movements and protests, there are multilateral platforms available for youth to partake in various initiatives and contribute towards causes passionately. As we are gathered here in the 4th ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS4), I had the pleasure to discuss the factors and challenges of meaningful youth participation in the context of Asia and Europe with two participants. They are Mr Tiago Gonçalves from Portugal, and Mr Visal Chourn from Cambodia.

Both Mr Gonçalves and Mr Chourn agree that honesty and trust are important to a mutually beneficial relationship. It will also foster a relationship that is based on respect, love, and dignity. This will produce a transparent process that helps in working together for the implementa-

tion of respective projects. They further explain that both honesty and trust require commitment from group members. Mr Gonçalves suggests that commitment would allow for one to know one's own limitations and strength, and further expresses, "we should know how to ask for help and we should be available to provide help to the ones who need it". Mr Chourn explains that trust among members is built through time and commitment "to be able to open up about certain vulnerabilities that are deeply in their hearts". The structure of the ASEFYLS4 where it is set for 10 months with three phases definitively establishes the space for the opportunity to foster honesty and trust among members, facilitators, and organisers.

Besides honesty and trust, Mr Gonçalves points to the importance of cultural knowledge and intercultural intelligence for meaningful engagement. The current rate of transboundary cooperation and collaboration presents several challenges as there are different cultures, life experiences, and biases. This is particularly prevalent in the context of Asia and Europe, but the difference in cultures

should not be the reason for people to work in isolation. To Mr Gonçalves, people need to learn from each other through conversations and "see how can we adapt our behaviour in a way that we can be sure we are respecting each other". Cultural awareness assures Mr Gonçalves to interact with others where it is an opportunity to exchange cultural knowledge and gain friendships.

Mr Chourn expressed that one of the biggest challenges of COVID-19 is the adaptation of the program to online platforms. This adaptation of an immersive program presents a barrier to engagement where the up close and personal approaches are lacking. In this case, "participants bear the responsibility to be present, showing up to discussions and be interactive, whereas the organisers must ensure that the spaces provided are accessible", asserts Mr Chourn. He further adds that youths must be guided by mentors. As he reflects on his 'Leadership in Action' project: Food Forest, Mr Chourn believes that this is a vital aspect for successful learning where there are mentors who are willing to listen, understand, and encourage their mentees.

Both Mr Chourn and Mr Gonçalves shares their sentiment on the importance of empathy. Chourn affirms that youth must be able to relate their emotions with the current trends so that they can relate their feelings and thinking. According to him, this is a way to develop empathy so that each party can play their respective roles. Mr Gonçalves sees the importance to put himself in others' positions or contexts, which helps him to understand their motivations or struggles. The understanding of each other's motivations contexts and problems are key for solidarity, he feels. In the case of ASEFYLS, he assumes that "we all want the same: to leave a better legacy for the next generations".

Listening to Mr Chourn and Mr Gonçalves, I choose to remain hopeful. At this point, we are at a pivotal crossroads for meaningful change. I believe that we, the youth, are readily dedicated to making the necessary changes for sustainable development beyond Agenda 2030.

How Covid-19 has Widened the Gap in Education

by Mr Nick Pentney

In February and March 2020, the world was left upheaved and shaken to an extent not seen for a generation as the Covid-19 virus forced the world into lockdown. Governments put out mandatory orders for their citizens to remain indoors and to socially distance from each other. School students and teachers all over the world were told it was no longer safe to participate in classroom learning and schools were left to ponder how they would continue providing an education to their students. from their homes.

The news coverage covering the Covid-19 pandemic has mainly focused on health concerns like case numbers and deaths resulting from the virus. Economic hardships and adjustments to house bound lifestyles have also made news coverage but what has gone largely unreported has been the long-term impacts on child education all over the world due to school closures.

A widening of the gap between the quality of education received by the world's poorest and richest students has been one of the consequences of the pandemic. This is due to many schools relying on online education to proceed with their education programs, something that not all schools around the world are able to afford. For example, the OECD forecasted that in Spain 68% of students in advantaged schools were in possession of sufficiently powerful digital devices

compared to only 10% in disadvantaged schools. In Japan 30% of households with annual incomes under 4 million Yen (USD \$37,000) said they had no access to computers and tablet devices.

Economics Lecturer of North Western University in the United States Dr Matthias Doepke reported in The Economist magazine that the world's youngest schoolchildren would be hurt most by school closures, saying that "kids can't easily make up for lost time". As further evidence of this, the UNICEF estimates that 463 million children had no chance of remote learning via radio, television or online content. Statistics from the World Bank in December 2020 indicate that 72 million children could be pushed into learning poverty by the Covid-19 pandemic, defined by the world bank as being unable to read simple texts by age 10. The consequences of this are devastating on the global economy with 10 trillion dollars in future lifetime earnings risked being lost, the equivalent of 10% of global GDP.

So what have states done to address these inequalities?

Many schools around the world have sought to move education online and distribute smart tablets and computers to students so they can learn from the safety of their homes.

Before Covid-19 the Refugee, Migrant Children Centre (RMCC) in Melbourne, Australia was an organisation that would organise in person after-school programs for refugee and migrant kids to learn, complete homework and participate in fun activities with mentors and fellow students. Upon mass business and school closures in Australia in March 2020 due to Covid-19, the after-school programs were moved online thanks to the distribution of older generation iPads from retail stores to RMCC who distributed them to each of the student participants. This meant students were able to participate in the programs at any time and were not further disadvantaged from school closures.

The Ministry of Education and Professional Training of Spain created a website that translates to "resources for online learning". This website al-

lowed teachers, families, and students to access online learning material from home. In addition, public television channel RTVE in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Professional Training created an Educlan (an educational tool for students and families) that has allowed audio and visual content for children aged 3 to 10.

Japan has had better luck during Covid-19 assisting developing nations such as Cambodia launch their own online resources. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has worked with the Japan International Cooperation Agency to create an educational program called "Think Think", a program that provides free online lessons to students and is then broadcasted via the television channel Satellite Decho TV for those who don't have internet access.

463 million children had no chance of remote learning via radio, television or online content





help them remain focused on the

Cambodian teachers took advantage of the country's high mobile phone usage (129 mobile phones per every 100 people) to send out homework and feedback via SMS texts. The Ministry of Education has sought to take advantage of the country's wide ownership of mobile phones by delivering a Youtube channel, Facebook page and eLearning Centres that students from home can access and download material from.

In neighbouring Malaysia, public broadcaster Radio Televisyen Malaysia launched a channel called TV Okey that was designed to deliver educational television programs to all students. Not all households in Malaysia have access to internet, computer and tablet equipment that other students in other countries are using to watch videos and complete online work sheets and projects. These programs in Malaysia were broadcast for 2 hours a day on television and on the website of the Ministry of Education so that those who have access to a television will be able to have 2 hours of learning a day.

While these efforts are making smaller differences towards improving student access to education, there are still significant gaps in the access to education between poorer and richer households. Teachers who are unable to use or distribute online technology means that students and their parents also struggle to obtain or use the systems through lack of guidance. Peterson (2018) argues that efforts should come from school principals to support teachers in their usage of online teaching resources so the teachers can act as mentors to guide students and "help them remain focused on the learning elements of the tasks".



Examples of this can be found in Western Australia, where the local state government sought to train teachers on how to best utilise the platforms and technologies. In schools that had the funding to provide their students with the technology to work from home, the result was higher productivity.

The common trend in these solutions are households and schools who have the resources and wealth to access online education programs will reap more rewards of government programs than those who can't afford to have a computer or tablet. Students without internet access in Malaysia will have to rely on 2 hours of television learning, students in Japan are without textbooks, computers or even a quiet study space and students in Australia whose schools cannot afford to distribute computers will either be given significant amounts of paper handouts or rely on the generosity of charities to engage in online learning.

Governments around the world have implemented programs that have proven online education can be implemented from the safety of students' homes. Where the challenges lie is making sure that students regardless of their socio-economic background have access to the very same resources. Making these resources available via television and internet is a step in the right direction. The next step will be providing training to teachers to be able to effectively teach their students using online or alternative technology and the expansion internet connections for those in rural areas who struggle to escape the cycle of poverty if they can no longer participate in school lessons. As outlined by the World Bank, all economies around the world will suffer if education standards continue to slide and those who cannot afford an online education will remain in a cycle of poverty.

learning elements of the tasks



The Privilege of Access and Facilities for Students:

What can we do to help?

by Mr Alvin Adityo

$$\frac{\partial u}{\partial t} + u \frac{\partial u}{\partial x} = -\frac{1}{\rho} \frac{\partial p}{\partial x}$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x} \left(\frac{p}{\rho} \right) + u \frac{\partial}{\partial x}$$

“Is it a generational problem, did children start to feel less motivated and more scared to dream?”

Coming from an upper-middle class family, I always had the privilege to attend the best schools and university in my country with the best teachers and learning modules. Long story short, in 2019, I graduated from one of the best universities in the country with honour. With my background as a French studies student, I decided to kick start my career as a volunteer where I taught basic French to children from rural areas.

One time during a French basic communication class for children aged 10-14, the learning topic discussed future jobs and dreams, so I asked the children “What is your dream job?”, and the class suddenly went silent while I was listing every familiar profession for children. As I did not receive any answer from the students, I decided to speak in my native language and asked them the same question. One student who was slightly older than the others started to speak and said “My only dream is to graduate from high-school and start looking for a job right after”. I was confused hearing his answer and after the class, I kept wondering to myself, “Is it a generational problem, did children start to feel less motivated and more scared to dream?”

I kept that question in mind until I landed a job as a researcher in a think-tank organisation, where I focused on researching social welfare and education issues in Indonesia. To understand the context of the education system better, I did a lot of desk research and expert interviews. At the same time, these experiences helped me answer the question I had.

Unsurprisingly, the socio-economic situation plays a great factor for children to continue their studies. In Indonesia, there are around 78.14 million people working in the informal sectors. Out of 78.14 million people, approximately 29.5 million people have been surveyed based on their monthly earnings. Interestingly, the majority of the people already earns more than Rp 2 million per month – more than US \$145 – which means, if one person from this group does not have any family member to take care of, they would only spend around Rp 1.2 million per month – equivalent to US \$85 – for basic needs like food, the rent for a small studio for one person, electricity, and water. Yet, they could still save the unspent money for emergency funds.

It becomes apparent that the story would be different for someone who already has a family and children to take care of. With the same amount of monthly earnings, lower-income households need to spend more on education fees, learning facilities, and indirect cost to education (child's transport and pocket money). According to a survey, the average total household expenditure for a high school level education for one person is Rp 552.312 – equivalent to US \$40 – per month. This often has to be multiplied by 2 until 4, because it is quite common in Indonesia to have family members consisting of more than two children, regardless of the financial status and background of the family.



258 MILLION STUDENTS STAYING OUT OF SCHOOL

For that reason, it is understandable for children coming from poor backgrounds to drop out from school, simply because their family could not pay for their education. Sometimes to keep themselves in school, children need to work after school to help their parents financially and to fund their education. With this in mind, it started to make more sense why the children I taught French some years ago said their only goal in life is to finish high school and look for a job with that degree. Because for them, it is already a privilege to attend education until high school.

What is happening in my country Indonesia is just a small fragment of reality. Around the world, there are 258 million students staying out of school. While there are various reasons as to why these children are dropping out of school, for example, gender discrimination and access to schooling, the real cause of this problem is related to poverty and other economic factors, resulting in high school-age youth choosing employment over the continuation of their education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic schools have been closed for 168 million children, following the social restriction imposed by governments around the world. Another by-product of this pandemic is massive furlough and workers laid-off, and by that, many informal workers are suffering financially, unable to fund their daily basics

and family, especially for their children's education. These events can later widen the gap in education, create learning poverty for children and decrease their chance to get job opportunities in the future. Amidst all the uncertainties in this era, it is difficult for the children to think about their future, especially when they are coming from poor backgrounds. Then, what we can do to keep these children away from the damaging impact of poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic, and to keep them in school?

As a saying once said, "It takes a village to raise a child". Collaboratively taking actions and engaging various sectors including governments, academic institutions, the private sector (businesses), media, and young people (public) is the most effective way to recover from the situation. Without this collaborative partnership between cross-sectors and each of them staying in their own silo doing 'Business as Usual (BAU)', we might be seeing an even greater gap in education and increased learning poverty for students, even after recovering from the pandemic. Then, what can these sectors do? And what roles could they play in such partnership?

GOVERNMENT

Governments certainly have a vital role in this matter. They can play various roles, starting from setting the policies and targets, organising indicators and budget, until monitoring and evaluating policies and projects. Nevertheless, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world only have one main agenda which resonates with the high-level global leaders meeting, namely how to recover from the pandemic. For now, the question of what can governments do simultaneously to reducing the impact of COVID-19 and the economic gap for children remains.

First, governments need to make sure that they are protecting the education budget of their countries. In the pre-pandemic era, the spending on global education grew steadily, with low- and middle-income countries recording the fastest growth, (Figure 1). And on average, governments around the world become the greatest funder in the education sector, making all countries' education development highly dependent on the government's allocated fund for education (Figure 2).

With that said, reallocating or cutting the education budget for COVID-19 mitigation would cause severe losses to the development of education. As the development in the education system is already too dependent on the public sector's funding. Even when combining all budgets in the education sector during the pre-pandemic era, still many children remain left out of schools.

Then the next question is what should the education budget be spent on during this pandemic? The answer should be **providing facilities (smartphones, mobile data, and access to online learning platforms) for children and teachers.** With schools being closed following the social restriction imposed by governments, providing relatively cheap to free online learning services and facilities to accommodate teaching and learning processes would certainly help minimize the current disruption in education. At the same time, providing learning facilities to those most in need could be seen as a very good foundation for the government. Particularly, if in the post-pandemic era they decide to emphasize the hybridity of education methods, including online learning.

Yet, I do realise that not all countries have the capacity to provide free facilities to students and teachers, which allows the shift of the learning processes to online methods. Since governments are already struggling with the COVID-19 situation, reprogramming the budget on health sectors. Thus, this is the moment for other collaborating partners to jump in and help the government.

Figure 1. Growth in real education spending, by income level

2009 = 100



Figure 2. Government, household and official development assistance spending on education

constant 2018. US dollars (trillions)

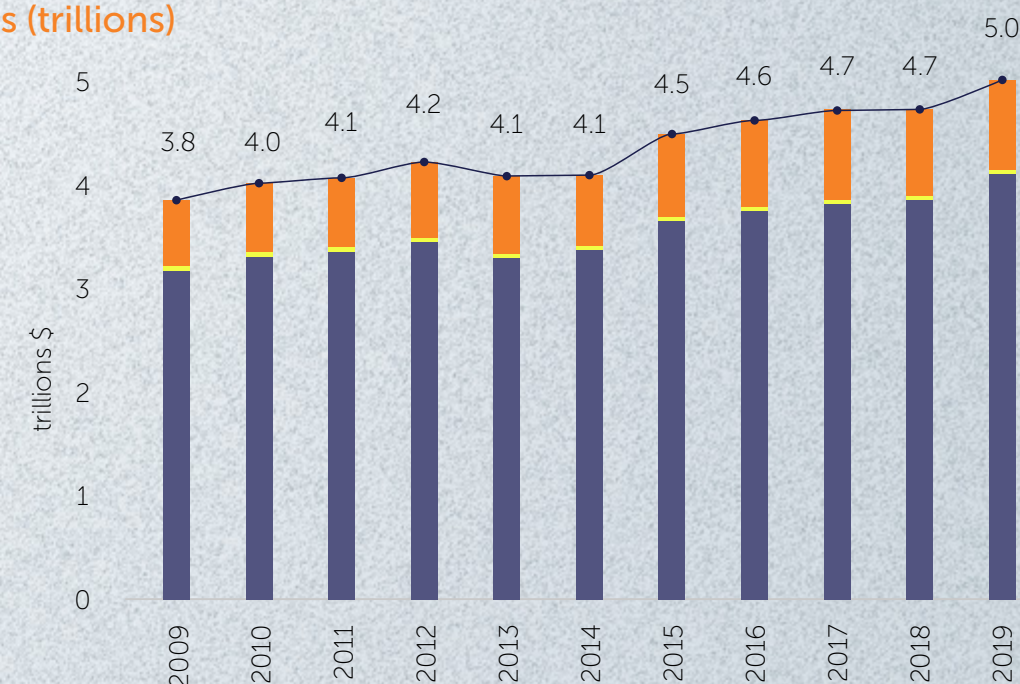


Figure 1 and 2 depict education spending in the past decades from various sectors. On average, governments around the world have spent significantly on education, compared to development assistance and household (EFW, 2020)

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND THINK-TANK ORGANISATIONS

With the government having their hands tied handling the virus at the moment, these stakeholders could definitely ease the burden of the government by advocating for policy recommendations and assessing whether a policy is going as intended.

Academic institutions and Think-Tank Organisation regularly publish evidence-based reports for policy reference without which government institutions and the private sector would go blind in their decision-making process, perhaps speculating and doing numerous trials and errors on policy implementation and product innovation which could have been avoided. Furthermore, the data provided by these research and academic institutions could be useful for the private sector to innovate their businesses. Thanks to this data and the acceleration of digital transformation, there are many start-ups growing in developed and developing countries which can provide services based on the community's needs. Especially in education sectors, many edtech companies now can give access to learning materials which are accessible to many students regardless of where they are living and background.

PRIVATE SECTORS (BUSINESSES), MEDIA, AND YOUNG PEOPLE (PUBLIC)

In the midst of the pandemic, most countries across Asian and European regions have collaborated with prominent edtech and telecommunication companies of the country, to provide relatively cheap to free online learning access during the pandemic. In my opinion this is a step forward in education, despite obvious setbacks during the pandemic. Hopefully this initiative does not only occur momentarily during the pandemic, but will continuously develop to reach more students who live in rural areas and do not have the funds to participate in online learning.

Yet, despite digital transformation happening almost everywhere in the world, we also need to consider the issue of digital divide. Using mainstream media like television, radio, text messages and newspapers would still be effective in disseminating the learning materials given the context of the pandemic situation. Broadcasting lessons via national television and radio would still be effective to reach students who are not connected to the internet.

With all partnership stakeholders having played their roles to make sure that the education sector is not lagging due to the pandemic, the last question is: What is our role, as young people, in this partnership? and what can we do?

The answer is: Educate ourselves to know the context of the pandemic and its impact on education better. The pandemic gives us a silver-lining that allows us to access more opportunities, without which we would never have the chance to participate. It is time for us to involve in volunteer activities, social media campaigns, participate in webinars, seminars, and trainings conducted by the government, NGOs, or even youth organisations within our community. From this point, we would know the real time problem in the community and start to understand how to help people.

THESE ACTIONS HELP THE COMMUNITY TO MOVE FORWARD DURING THE HARD TIME

What we have done during ASEFYLS4 with the 15 Leadership in Action projects implemented by participants provides an example and demonstrates the importance of our role in helping the community to recover from the pandemic. Even though our projects may focus on different aspects and are not limited to education, but also breaking the stigma, mental and wellbeing, campaign on climate action etc, these actions help the community to move forward during the hard time. Also, it can be a platform for people whose voice has not been heard before.

A LIGHT IN THE END OF THE TUNNEL: THERE IS STILL HOPE FOR ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION FOR ALL

While the pandemic creates disturbance in all sectors, the tragedy in some ways opened our eyes to the gap of economic, opportunities, and accessibilities in our community. Hopefully, the collaboration between stakeholders and our effort to minimise the impact of the pandemic, especially in the education sector, setting the foundation to create a more inclusive and accessible education for all, and help the children continue their studies. After all, there would still be an opportunity for children to dream about their future.

Post Covid-19 Recovery: Youth Perspectives

by Ms Sun Setthikun

The global pandemic Covid-19 demonstrates a degradation of the global efforts in international development. Furthermore, it discloses threats with regards to various development issues, ranging from well-being to educational inclusiveness, equality among gender, economics, and climate change. To get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in ASEM countries, we interviewed three participants from ASEFYL4 to discuss their views on how areas of international development have been impacted by Covid-19 as well as the role of youth involvement in helping to reshape and participate in better recovery after the global pandemic.



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Ms Setthikun: How do you perceive the impacts and disruption caused by the global pandemic on international development?

Ms Seak Por: We all are aware of and witness the impacts and disruption caused by the current COVID-19 pandemic on the way to live, the way we work, the way we learn, and more. From my perspective, the biggest impact of the global pandemic on international development has been, firstly, the transferring of most of the attention and resources away from other issues toward resolving the current pandemic, and secondly, the disruption it creates toward the implementation of any development initiatives.

On the one hand, the pandemic is currently the top priority for all countries as well as international organizations. It is important to stop the spread as soon as possible and get the situation under control. Yet, we also have to admit that other development issues are getting less attention due to this. I believe agenda setting matters very much when there are so many issues out there to address.

Moreover, the global pandemic is creating a “new normal” that is prohibiting relevant development initiatives from proceeding. For instance, close contact with beneficiaries such as people with disabilities is largely constrained due to restrictive measures; traveling is nearly impossible in many areas of the world, and vulnerable people are also facing new additional challenges due to the current situation that requires further attention. Moreover, it is also reversing previously made achievements such as lifting people out of poverty and the decline of extreme poverty due to even harder financial hardship during this time. The World Bank has estimated that 88 to 115 people are falling back into extreme poverty due to this. Given all these negative impacts, I want to add that, on the flip side, maybe, the current pandemic is uncovering many vulnerability sectors of the society that have been neglected. Hopefully, they will receive attention in a post-recovery plan.

Mr Hao Nan: Speaking from my personal experiences by just zooming into East and Southeast Asia, we notice the widening gap among countries within the region concerning economic statuses. This issue can be reflected through the disparity of digital infrastructure in the region. The global pandemic generated socio-economic regression, which posed constraint and pressure on governments’ investment budget—especially in developing states—to further invest in digital infrastructure. Contrarily, in developed countries, the pandemic is perceived to be an opportunity to push forward their digital agenda. For example, in the case of East Asia, China came up with its 14th-five-year-plan, and a campaign to lay out new infrastructures, including the 5G infrastructure and Artificial Intelligence. Moreover, South Korea is closing a Green Economy Deal and Digital Deal to modernize its economy and to be greener and more digitalized. Another issue is related to youth mental health. In various countries with a younger population, such as many of the ASEAN countries, youth is exposed to unemployment or under-employment, triggering a sense of disappointment and depression. In South Korea and Japan, we witness an increase in the suicide rate during the peak time of the pandemic. A lot of young people suddenly become unemployed, and recently graduated students have a harder time to secure a job when entering the job market. I can personally relate to this, as someone who has graduated last year and started looking for work. Lastly, I would like to mention the issues of global solidarity – at the political level between states, and also at the individual level between people. Everyone is at a pointing-finger-at-one-another stage and has yet to work together to solve it. For instance, in Asia, we are working to promote collective responsibility, whereas in Europe, people are still prioritizing their individual rights. Ultimately, the pandemic has impacted the international sentiments, mutual understanding, and international exchanges between young people.

Mr Maxim Vandekerckhove: From my perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened existing challenges in society and made them more visible. The first disruption is the lack of access to educational opportunities or exchanges. For instance, the Erasmus+ is still quite limited – you are either an outstanding student or coming from a family with a good background to use the opportunity to its full potential. The program [mentioned] is officially open and available for everyone, but in reality, that is not necessarily the case. The miscommunication, lack of awareness of youth, lack of sharing of information has been an obstacle to the access of the opportunity. With Corona, the knowledge about these opportunities is short, and the youth's willingness is also diminishing. As I saw, people easily forget about how good the opportunities were before.

Secondly, another disruption concerns the skills that people have now as compared to the skills that the job market needs. The job market is evolving in ways which requires the youth to have broad skills, that is, become generalists – knowing about different topics. Nevertheless, the job market still wants people with specific skills, combining broad knowledge with a more specified background. Yet, the overpopulation makes it increasingly hard for young people to gain enough experience to overrule those with many years of experience. Due to the Coronavirus, even people with ten years of work experience have lost their jobs, which means they will now be entering the same job markets as young graduates. Therefore, young people like us with only two to three years of work experience will not be able to compete with them, this is incredibly sad. So, the states will need to consider how to provide sufficient income to all these people.

Although it will take away the incentives and merits for people to be successful, this can also be good for society: when providing basic income to younger people, one can also oblige them to a certain amount of work, including e.g. helping the society in the care sector. In return, we can have a better outcome for our society as we have people with higher education and with great soft skills employed in various sectors.

Ms Setthikun: What should be priorities and focus areas of governments and the international community to restore the progress on international development? How can youth contribute to the recovery?

Ms Seak Por: From my perspective, I think that the health care system and education sectors should be prioritized. Firstly, the current pandemic is highlighting many vulnerabilities of the health care system, especially in developing countries. Few experts have expected this pandemic or expected it to last for this long. Just like in the saying “No one is safe until everyone is safe”; the international community should come together and help developing countries in establishing resilient health systems for all citizens.

When health and well-being is disrupted, it influences all activities. Fortunately, it is now great to see the global effort in distributing the vaccine. Furthermore, education should certainly be one of the priorities, given its cross-sectional nature. The education sector has been significantly disrupted and is particularly important because it fosters experts, human resources and knowledge – valuable contributions to society at any time. The education sector can also go beyond teaching technical skills to develop soft skills that allow people to be more adaptive, flexible, and resilient to any other future obstacles. Also, the issue of understanding collective responsibility versus individual rights in times of emergency is important, as it is a determining factor in the decision-making process of restrictive measures. To contribute to the post-recovery, youth can voice their concerns to let the government as well as the international community know what needs to be addressed, utilizing social media and other tools to build the future we want. Youths can also be the authors and initiators of many creative ideas and solutions to societal problems – exchanging ideas and cooperation among youth from different backgrounds also makes the solutions even more effective with more resources mobilized. Lastly, we play a role in assisting the implementation of government measures and policies as an effective grassroots network.

Mr Hao Nan: As for me, I would answer it from two levels – domestic and international level. At the domestic level, the pandemic has disproportionate impacts on different groups of people from different economic statuses. The people at the bottom of the society might be impacted the most since they do not have a social safety guarantee, or security scheme, and a high income to begin with. With the socio-economic recession, they might have lost their jobs, might have been unable to pay their bills or their rent, which may lead to homelessness. This may certainly have a negative psychological impact on people. Therefore, the government needs to come up with plans, invest more, and provide opportunities to improve social safety nets which take care of the marginalized, and vulnerable people in society. This includes women, especially elderly women, single mothers, orphans, and disabled people. At the international level, there are too many quarrels between governments. Now it is time to restore multilateral cooperation. The first priority is to guarantee the delivery of vaccines, especially to developing countries which do not have the capacity to manufacture them themselves creating a great demand. That would lead us to respect international laws and institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF as well as regional organizations like ASEAN, and ASEAN+3. In such cases, youth can bridge mutual understanding between countries to resolve the misunderstanding. It is not just about communicating in a common language with other young people, but also diving into the culture, civilization, history, and context to make sense of the contemporary dynamics of certain countries. I wish to see youth pitch more ideas, and turn them into projects and reality – to make our world better.

Mr Maxim Vandekerckhove: The international community and the government need to get their priorities straight. Corona presents an opportunity to rethink our approach to long-term changes. At the international level, sustainable development goals are good ideas, but they are broad. What is essential is that there is a necessity to develop local plans of action in different countries, without criticizing other countries. In the EU,

there is a need to create a new contract between the government and the citizens in the society – like the Conference on the Future of Europe. Europe needs to have technological independence from other continents and big companies. It is also related to education and they need to think about providing incentives to develop open-source software, which is available to everyone. Local primary schools in Europe have a very low budget; they cannot spend thousands of Euros every year for a new version of Microsoft Office or zoom, so we need the government to invest in open-sources. This will improve e.g. higher education and exchanges of payment. Another aspect related to the development of the green sector are taxes on robots, just as the tax on labor – similar to how governments tax people who work – since products in Europe are produced by robots and people only contributing through their intellectual work. It would incentivize firms to hire more people, including small and medium enterprises, since the tax on labor is cheaper. Lastly, there is a need to have common and affordable transportation that can help us to move from place to place for employment and other purposes. Based on personal experience, I had to travel various places to attend international conferences where I met interesting people for my future to access to all these good opportunities. Therefore, government needs to learn from this and present a strong support plan for businesses, NGOs and schools that pushes for further European integration, and internationalization. In the post pandemic recovery, I hope international youth create institutional bodies that are dedicated to the youth specifically, and be a pressing group addressing issues. Our tasks should now involve being the link between the international and the local community – communicating the efforts by the international community to make changes and contribute to the development. We need to defend these efforts to protect international cooperation. We also need to make sure and keep on pushing for politicians and diplomats to report on their activities more and to be more accountable.

Homefree — the Future of Days at the Office

by Ms Sun Setthikun

As the COVID-19 pandemic has dragged on for longer and many of us have, to some degree, at least, gotten used to the idea of working from home, people and businesses alike are asking themselves how the nature of work will change in the future.

At first glance, it would appear that big business has certainly taken a liking to the idea of people working from home for a few days of the working week.

The e-commerce giant Amazon, for example, has decreed that employees in its corporate and technology divisions can work from home two days a week. Apple has recently instituted a similar policy, although it has not been altogether without controversy as the Delta variant continues to spread.

The virtues of working remotely are often seen as something of a no-brainer: no commuting and an increase in productivity are things few would not get behind, especially if all that can be achieved by staying at home, sipping on a cup of our favorite coffee as we plough through the tasks of the day, getting food delivered from our favorite restaurants on time for our lunch breaks.

As many of us will no doubt have experienced for ourselves, there is more than this to working from home. According to a study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, workers found that issues such as the lack of communication with colleagues and physical exercise, as well as distractions at work, contributed negatively to their experience of working from home, as can well be expected.

The ideal of working from home does indeed seem to be built around a home environment with very few distractions, where we are able to isolate ourselves from our other obligations and concentrate on work. Such conditions do not come cheap, as one might expect.

Apart from the issue of space, there is also the matter of workplace safety. In an office environment, one's employer is responsible for keeping employees up to speed with safety procedures and ensuring that workers can carry out their duties with as little risk to themselves as possible. When it comes to working from home, however, the situation is far more ambiguous: if an employee slips and falls at home during working hours, who is ultimately responsible? Can employers reasonably be expected to check every home for potential hazards? More broadly, if people always take work home with them, how do they switch off at the end of the working day?

Another factor in helping offices stay afloat, perhaps rather predictably, is money: as The Economist points out, developers and investors are scrambling to get their buildings up to scratch in anticipation of the new demands imposed upon them by people returning to the office in greater numbers. Sought-after amenities include outdoor spaces and better ventilation.

That does not mean, however, that those numbers will be as great as before: as companies reconsider their need for office space, with employees having become accustomed to working from home, there is plenty of vacant office space to go around. So far, 18% more office floor space has been lost around the world than during the 2007–2009 financial crisis.



All this means that those with a horse in the race of office real estate will no doubt bend over backwards to make returning to the office an attractive proposition for as many companies as possible. What may well change, however, is that both companies and office landlords will have to think of the office experience in terms of added value. Since working is no longer confined to any given physical space, workers may well feel that going to the office should be worth it, instead of something to be tolerated as part of the daily grind.

With all these questions in mind, and with working from home having some significant, proven drawbacks, it is far too soon to declare an end to the era of the office. One could even go as far as to say that working in an office is an easy solution to many of the problems workers face when choosing to work from home.

As is often the case, it is likely that the truth lies somewhere between the extremes. Those who can work from home will – no doubt – enjoy an increase in freedom and flexibility, but are unlikely to want to miss out completely on workplace camaraderie and the chance for a change of scenery now and again, not to mention the freedom to play slightly different roles at work and at home, with the lines between them defined clearly enough so as not to cause conflict.

If the pandemic has taught us anything about how we work, it is probably that some things are best kept outside the workplace, as evidenced by everything from Members of Parliament urinating during work calls to toilets heard flushing during sessions of the US Supreme Court.

Some boundaries are in place for a reason and for all the possibilities of working from home, we are unlikely to want to give up on them anytime soon.

Achieving Inclusion in ASEFYLS4 Through a Transformative Process:

a Conversation with Ms Leonie Nagarajan

by Mr Alvin Adityo



MS LEONIE NAGARAJAN Director Education Department of ASEF

Mr Alvin:

Ms Leonie, during the opening session, you mentioned that the previous three ASEFYLS were different compared to this 4th edition. Could you please explain briefly why and how ASEFYLS is different this year?

Ms Leonie:

Due to the pandemic the 4th edition of ASEFYLS is taking place online and is therefore completely different from the previous three editions. The first ASEFYLS was a face-to-face meeting, which we organised next to the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Luxembourg in 2015. The youth conference itself was for three to four days and included many debates and discussions. By the end of the summit we held a Call for Action.

The second ASEFYLS was held in South Korea on the side of the Economic Ministers' Meeting in September 2017. For the third edition in Brussels in October 2018, we engaged young people not only theoretically but also in practice. In my opinion, being a leader is not only about sharing your vision. You also need to lead, guide and demonstrate that you are actively pursuing your idea. Hence, we designed the ASEFYLS4 as a 10-month long leadership journey. The programme included a number of journey phases, included a Knowledge Building Phase, a Leadership in Action Phase and a virtual ASEFYLS4 Summit Conference.

Leadership is supposed to be a transformative process, and transformation only takes place when you get inspired. Then you are able to test, implement, and grow throughout the process.

Mr Alvin:

Do you think that the pandemic became a challenge for ASEF in organising this project? Or on the contrary, is it an opportunity for ASEF to innovate?

Ms Leonie:

The original project plan was very different. Initially, we wanted to focus on leadership and technology as a follow-up from the ASEFYLS4

in Brussels, which addressed the topic of ethical leadership, with leadership and technology as a sub-theme.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to adjust and make changes to our original plans. We wanted to create a programme where we tackle issues pertinent to the pandemic, but also a programme that looks beyond the pandemic itself. That is why we focus on sustainable development. We collaborated with College of Europe in Natolin (CoEN), who has played an essential part of the organisation since the 3rd ASEF Young Leaders Summit. We also partnered with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) to work on an ASEM Youth report and youth opportunities in Asia and Europe. CCL's philosophy of what leadership means is very similar to ours – it is a process and social interaction rather than a title or fact.

The pandemic gave us the opportunity to completely transform the project. Certainly, we considered the opportunities and risks of this programme, engaging over 200 young people over a period of 10 months. If the project were to take place in a face-to-face format, we would not be able to involve as many participants for financial reasons. However, due to the new format we were faced with other challenges, such as digital inequality and other accessibility issues, and the need of frequently checking-in with participants to ensure their continued commitment and involvement in the project. Engagement levels and dynamics in a virtual world follow different rules and principles. Many of our participants have other personal and professional commitments outside of the programme. If you sign up for an event that is 3-4 days long, you can manage your time easily. If you wish to be part of a 10-month long learning journey, that is a different scenario. Screens unfortunately are not very helpful for conveying inter-cultural messages and a feeling of community.

In short, the whole project methodology changed, however COVID-19 was in a way an opportunity for us, as we developed a project in a new format.

Mr Alvin:

The programme has attracted 202 participants from 51 countries. Even more interesting is the ratio of participants, which is quite balanced with around 55% female and 45% male participants, coming from diverse backgrounds. What role does inclusion play?

Ms Leonie:

For optics on paper, it is always nice to list statistics and to say that you have 55% female and 45% male participants coming from 51 countries, representing the whole ASEM community. But what is actually behind that number? Diversity on paper does not mean that everybody has the possibility to speak up and has space to get engaged. During this ASEFYLS edition we invited the alumni who are DEI experts and identify themselves as Persons with Disability to collaborate with us and give us advice on enhancing the accessibility and inclusion elements of the project.

When you talk about inclusion there are certain areas that immediately come to mind, for instance gender equity and inclusion of people with disabilities. But we also need to think about the inclusion of participants with different socioeconomic backgrounds, different levels of education, and based in different locations. Since some participants come from rural areas with difficulties to access the internet, we have to ask ourselves, how do we engage these participants? In the upcoming months we would like to conduct a survey and find out the participants' accessibility and what we need to improve over the next month to ensure that everybody has the same opportunity.

Mr Alvin:

I would like to take this opportunity to share my perspective on connectivity since you just touched on the issue. I have also witnessed that some participants have connectivity issues, which may decrease their motivation to partici-

pate in the online meetings. However, as you said, it is essential to ask these participants how one can assist them to follow the discussions. I have met with some participants with special needs that require assistance so that they can follow the remaining programme. How does ASEF try to facilitate participants with special needs?

Ms Leonie:

We need to realise that there is no one size fits all approach. Everybody has their different needs, competencies, skills, and backgrounds, which we have to acknowledge and understand. There are also different forms of and ways to assist participants. For example, if you have somebody who has a more introverted personality and who needs more encouragement to speak up, this encouragement can come from the moderators/facilitators, the organisers, but also the peers, who play a key role in supporting each other. Finding out how peers in the group are supporting each other is part of the journey as well.

We need to create an atmosphere where participants feel comfortable to speak and ask for support. As organisers we need to create an environment where participants can develop and show empathy towards others to understand and to step in and help.

Mr Alvin:

Right after the summit we will have what ASEF calls the Leadership in Action project. During this phase, participants which have been divided into 15 groups would showcase their leadership skills and SDG project implementation in the society. What do you expect from the participants during this phase?

Ms Leonie:

We have 15 different Leadership in Action activities ranging from fully virtual activities to onsite activities that take place in local communities.

For instance, we have some participants produce podcasts while others tackle female health hygiene and sexual education.

Each Leadership in Action activity is led by a team leader, the so-called Navigator, who sets the overall course. Participants are the crew to contribute to a successful journey. Each of them has different tasks. There might be people who have strong communication skills or have expertise in content building. Others may help setting the path for the 'ship'.

Each of the participants has to demonstrate his/her respective competencies and skills in the particular Leadership in Action activity. Then, it is a matter of time commitment and enthusiasm of the team to make the project happen. Over six months participants will be working with people outside their own country who they have never met in person. We hope that on one stage of the journey they can move from team members to friends.

Mr Alvin:

As you have stated earlier, the online meetings allow ASEF to invite more participants to the project. Could you see this project format repeating itself in the future?

Ms Leonie:

Hybrid projects are an interesting option for the future and offer many opportunities. However, we definitely want to go back to physical and face-to-face meetings, where we can interact and feel the excitement and intercultural dynamics of young people across the ASEM region. The online format opened our eyes that we can reach more people, and in the future, we need to try to find opportunities to make our projects more accessible, even though we know that we cannot gather the same number of participants as today for on-site meetings. I think our future

task will be to incorporate measures to enhance accessibility, rather than only going back to face-to-face meetings.

Mr Alvin:

Do you have a last message that you would like to share to the ASEFYLS4 participants?

Ms Leonie:

Firstly, I would like to thank the participants, because this project is obviously only possible when you have people who give you their trust and believe in the project. Secondly, while ASEFEdu facilitates the ASEFYLS, the project becomes alive with the participants, because this project is empty without their implementation.. We are providing the materials for building "the house" and we give it a foundation and structure, but the participants need to design, decorate and furnish the "house". They basically make it cozy. There is the saying 'you can bring the horse to the water but you cannot convince the horse to drink'. In the end, indeed, we are engaging over 200 participants and offer opportunities, but whether or not the participants use these opportunities is up to them. Likewise, each participant will use this opportunity differently. We want everybody to participate in every session and do their activities and tasks, but there are reasons why people are less or more committed. This is a journey, and in a journey there are moments where you are running faster and slower depending on your energy. So, our message to the participants is: The ASEFYLS4 is a worthwhile journey with different learning opportunities and all of you will learn in very different ways. Focus on your personal learning journey and your own lessons learned. We are here, giving you the raw materials. You are the one who ought to shape it.

Breaking Taboo on Mental Health

by Ms Sun Setthikun

A couple of years ago, I first realized that I encountered mental health issues. I was under a lot of pressure as a senior student who had a lot on her plate from studying to doing internship, running projects, working on her thesis, and trying to look for jobs after graduating. I would be lying if I were to say that I was not overwhelmed by the pressure of trying to be perfect, to land a good job and to not let down my family's expectations of me. At one point, I started to question why health insurance would only cover physical health and not mental health even though it is common among the global population. This is a small piece of evidence that illustrates how the topic of mental health remains a taboo in society - beyond a priority, or a topic of public discussion despite global efforts to raise awareness on it.

Mental Health is defined as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". In this sense, mental health is intertwined with people and community welfare, considering that it impacts individual activities, freedom and livelihood. Mental Health problems may range from anger to anxiety and panic attacks, bipolar disorder, depression, eating disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder also known as OCD, panic attacks, paranoia, personality disorders, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-esteem, self-harm, stress and more depending on the level of its seriousness. The causes of mental health illness may result from an individual's coping mechanism - their emotional and physical response to events and people around them together with the influence from external factors such as social and cultural norms, economic conditions, and politics.

Looking at the bigger picture of mental health, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 20% of global children and adolescents, and 15% of the elders at the age of 60 and more have been diagnosed with mental health disorder and illnesses. According to the World Health Organization report, one of the most common mental health problems is depression in which individuals may experience emotional up-down, or a state of emotionlessness responsive to life events. More than 264 million of global population have suffered from this issue, causing them to become less productive in works, study, and in a severe condition it contributed to suicide. Annually, an approximate amount of 800,000 people committed suicide, which estimated to take life at a rate of every 40 second. The major age group that has been the victim of this mental problem and committed suicide is identified to be at the range of 15 to 29 years old. Other mental problems such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and dementia severely consumed the wellbeing of 45 million people, 20 million people, and 50 million people around the world. Treatments for mental illness exist. However, more than 70% of the low-income and middle-income states (in EU, it is 50% of the patients) cannot afford to have it treated due to the social stigma against mental health illness, the limited resources, and available experts in those countries. If there were to be attention spared to help these group of people fighting their mental health problem, we might have saved lives of those 800,000 people who committed suicide every year (if not all of them, at least a huge number of the victim).

Amidst the global pandemic, mental health became one of the urgent yet underemphasized issues the society. In the normal phenomenon, mental health arises from various determinants including childhood, trauma, social isolation, discrimination, poverty, severe stress, and unemployment. However, due to the impacts of disruption in supply-chain, international trade and demands, global economies contracted resulting in job losses, poverty, and inequalities within society, and between states. Since fear, anxiety, and stress are generally the consequences of human response to uncertainty or threat, it inferred that the global pandemic which lasts for around more than a year by now inevitability generates overwhelming stress. This can ignite mental health illness with people having limited social contact due to lockdown, travel restrictions, protection measures that force the global population to stick to work from home, unemployment, online learning, and meetings. While government spending has dominated in healthcare sectors to treat infected COVID-19 cases, it did not cover the mental health treatment costs.

The stigma against mental health is buried within the social context whether it is in Europe and Asia, the problems are just as serious as one another which can be translated into economic loss if not properly handled. Based on data from Swiss Re Group, in major case-studies of Southeast Asia, statistics of mental health were marked at an unexpectedly high rate. Approximately 14% of the population of Singapore and Malaysia were reported to have suffered from mental health illness. In Europe, on the other hand, the number was estimated to be more than 84 million people with an annual rate of 10 million people increase. WHO in the EU reported the number of victims of depression, or anxiety at the rate of 25% of the population, often becoming a permanent disability. The economic impact of depression and anxiety alone, the damage accounted for \$1 trillion globally every year while the figure in Europe amounted to €170 billion every year.

Therefore, to put an end to mental health stigma, a global pandemic shall denote the need to heavily invest not just on physical healthcare infrastructure, but also mental health facilities, experts, and care services. Discussion on mental health shall be encouraged and facilitated in public policy debates, and normalization of discussion of mental health among youth and adults must be encouraged in order to break the taboo, and misconception of mental health. Lessons on mental health should be included in educational curriculum to raise awareness, and provide possible elementary coping mechanisms before they wish to seek professionals. Imagine if people are able to tell that they are depressed, or somehow they undergo through a phase of mental health; if they can turn to anyone around us without hearing them responding 'you know it is all in your head. You just overthink. You are such an attention-seeker'; if they can go and receive treatment openly and timely, would they opt to commit suicide? Wouldn't the world become a brighter and better place for everyone? It is at least better to a certain extent in which people would not lose their family members due to mental health, and they would not have to grieve and resent themselves for not paying attention to their family members. They as well would not fall into the mental health loops just like their loved one.

What has COVID-19 Meant for Global Refugee Policies and the Displaced People that Remain in Refugee Camps?

by Mr Nick Pentney

For 2020 and 2021, much of the world was restricted to a small space, with strict rules on people's movements and facing uncertainty about their future incomes and livelihoods. For migrants and refugees spread out around the world in UN funded refugee camps and temporary accommodations, this is something that they've experienced for years and for some, even decades.

COVID-19 has brought on new issues and challenges for the international community and for asylum seekers and refugees in 2020–2021, this is no different. They've had to overcome obstacles such as hunger, loss of income and security and increased border restrictions in their efforts to achieve resettlement. The recent mass evacuations from citizens in Afghanistan was a reminder that humanitarian crises continue in the background of the COVID-19 dominated news cycle. For this article I will seek to address how COVID-19 has influenced refugee and asylum seeker policies in Asia and Europe since the beginning of 2020, the challenges faced by refugees, asylum seekers and displaced peoples in refugee camps during the pandemic and what can be done to address them.



At the end of 2020 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) calculated that 82.4 million people around the world were forcibly displaced. This figure has doubled since 2010 and is the highest figure ever recorded, with massive humanitarian crises in Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar making up 68% of all displaced peoples. The COVID-19 crisis according to the UNHCR did reduce the anticipated number of displaced people by 1.5 million by the end of 2020 and a 33% fall in the number of asylum applications. The latter figure was largely influenced by many of the world's leading economies who make up the majority of refugee resettlements, closing their migration offices in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic to allocate resources to support their health systems and reduce their intake of migrants and refugees. This decision was in line with their objectives of decreasing the likelihood of introducing or increasing the presence of COVID-19 in their countries. Italy had a 38.3% decline of its refugee intake from March–May 2020 as a result of closing its migration office in March 2020 while Ireland, Cyprus, Poland and Portugal are some of the many other nations across Europe that closed migration offices temporarily during 2020 to direct resources towards containing the virus among their populations. Australia meanwhile decided to cut their refugee intake, reducing the number of resettlements from 13,750 to 5,000 people, a decision the Refugee Council of Australia called "shattering".

Some nations across Europe found ways to continue to support asylum seekers residing in their borders with Belgium, Cyprus and Spain extending rights to allow asylum seekers already in the country to work in industries with labour shortages such as agriculture and forestry sectors. Finland, Germany and Portugal took steps to create safe housing options that served to both decongest existing migration centres and to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading into the community.

Those in 2020/21 who were already displaced would come to experience further hardships brought on by the pandemic. Conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and Afghanistan continue to inflict violence upon civilians, leaving people with no choice but to seek refuge or asylum in other countries despite the health pandemic raging on around the world.

In Bangladesh more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees reside after fleeing from Myanmar due to what the UN describes as genocidal violence against the Muslim minority ethnic group. According to Oxfam International, when COVID-19 broke out into the global community, Bangladesh refugee camps struggled to get access to food. Extensive checks on food before entering the camps meant it often was rotten or inedible upon being provided to refugees. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) estimated in August 2021 that more than 75% of displaced and conflict affected people have lost income since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and 86% of the world's refugees were hosted in low-middle income countries with "significant financial challenges and fragile health systems". This means that those without incomes continue to face famine related challenges with many children impacted as they make up over 40% of displaced people's despite making up only 30% of the world's global population. Furthermore, the World Bank estimates that the number of people pushed into extreme poverty by the end of 2021 due to COVID-19 will be 143–163 million people. In Afghanistan and Iraq, 81% and 66% of displaced people surveyed reported having their meals cut since the beginning of the pandemic while in West Africa, UNICEF reported that acute malnutrition experienced by displaced people will rise by 1.5 million from 2019 levels.

Women also suffered significantly due to cuts in supplies, resources and workers from sponsoring organisations. Many women in the camps were responsible for keeping their families' areas clean and the pandemic meant their workload had to double. Their hardships were increased further when several organisations halted or decreased their contributions to UN refugee camps and those who ran the camps decreased the amount of security to reduce the risk of workers being infected with COVID-19. The consequence of this



the number of people pushed into extreme poverty by the end of 2021 due to COVID-19 will be 143–163 million

was an increase in domestic violence and sexual assault against women who now are increasingly concerned for their safety and the safety of their families residing in the camps.

At the end of 2020, COVID-19 had been reported to have been surprisingly absent from those residing in refugee camps. This could be attributed to many of these camps being in remote locations with the director of Human Rights Watch Bill Frelick claiming "No one casually goes in and out". It could also be attributed to strict national lockdowns such as Jordan's closure of airports and borders in early March protecting its 747,000 mostly Syrian refugee population. However, with many states gradually reopening their borders and easing restrictions, COVID-19 is becoming increasingly present in refugee camps with many camps in Jordan reporting their first cases in September 2020. With 40,000 per square km in the Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh and 21,550 per sq km in Tierkidi camp Ethiopia, people in these camps are particularly vulnerable to the Delta

COVID-19 strain without the necessary protective and medical equipment.

So, what can the global community do to ensure refugees aren't forgotten and left to despair during the COVID-19 crisis? The first is to answer the UN's call for funding to ensure refugee camps are equipped with necessary food, ventilators, protective equipment and security to ensure those in the camps have necessary protection against COVID-19, have an income and have security against potential sexual assault and violence.

UNICEF's Middle East and North Africa division only received 40% of essential funding in 2020 and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) faces budget cuts and has been required to reduce its food rations to refugees in Eastern Africa by 30%. The likes of Portugal, Italy, South Korea and the UK reduced their foreign aid budgets during 2020 with the UK reducing their budget by \$US3.7 billion, further complicating efforts by the UN to raise essential funds. The UN in 2021 has called for \$US35 billion in 2021 funding and while nations around the world have suffered significant blows to their economies to keep people employed and health systems afloat during the pandemic to the tune of \$US10 trillion collectively, asylum seekers as has been earlier outlined, can play a role in filling essential roles in national economies. Furthermore, the recent crisis in Afghanistan where many states volunteered planes and visas to rescue desperate civilians threatened by the Taliban showed global collaboration was possible, the world needs to come together to fix the shortfall in funding and resources experienced in global refugee camps that threaten to become overcrowded wastelands if wealthy nations continue to reduce their refugee intake and funding that supports displaced people overseas. The Global Humanitarian Overview outlined that 160 million people in 56 countries could be helped if the \$US35 billion was obtained in 2021. Much of that funding according to UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock would go towards helping the tens of thousands of flood victims in Bangladesh in addition to tackling violence against girls and vaccinating millions of refugees, which would go a long way to helping resettle them in nations that are fast approaching 90% national vaccination rates.



Another proposal is gradually increasing national refugee intakes to pre COVID-19 levels among developed nations. The UNHCR calculates that in 2019 64,000 asylum seekers started new lives abroad in host countries while only 22,800 did in 2020. More than 550,000 people according to UNHCR have fled their homes in Afghanistan this year while 3.5 million people are displaced within the country. Pakistan, Iran and Germany have taken in significant amounts of Afghan refugees with Germany processing 181,100 people and Chancellor Angela Merkel claiming another 40,000 still in the country may have a right to be evacuated to Germany if they are endangered by the Taliban. Whereas countries such as the UK, Australia

and Belgium have taken in a collective 33,900 people in the last 12 months. Both Pakistan and Iran have told the international community that they have reached max capacity and those who seek asylum in those countries will have to stay in camps near the border until they can return to Afghanistan. Many European governments are fearing a political backlash similar to those experienced in 2015 when many Syrian refugees were resettled. Austria, Poland and Switzerland have outlined they will not accept any new Afghan refugees and are upping border regulations to guard against illegal arrivals. However international law prohibits countries from denying entry to asylum seekers during a global health pandemic

and this law could be challenged in international courts over the coming months. While the crisis in Afghanistan is just the latest humanitarian crisis to cry out for significant refugee resettlement, many countries are simply looking to escape by taking a minimal number of refugees during their recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

It will require a combination of significant monetary contributions to the UN and an increase in refugee intake to ensure refugee camps around the world don't become wastelands to poverty, sickness and despair. Meeting the \$US36 billion annual goal will mean millions of displaced people sitting in overcrowded UN refugee camps

around the world have access to essential supplies and protection from violence and COVID-19 while they wait to be processed and resettled. As violence and unrest ravages on in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Venezuela during the COVID-19 pandemic, countries must not forget their obligations to international law and helping those in desperate need during the pandemic. While lockdowns are difficult to endure, enduring them in overcrowded refugee camps without access to protective COVID-19 equipment and access to food will mean the world will emerge from the COVID-19 crisis with another one on its hands.

Ambassador Johannes Matyassy Speaks with Asian and European Youths

by Ms Nur Syahirah Khanum and Mr Alvin Adityo

The ASEF Youth Dialogue Series with ASEM Leaders is part of the ASEFYLS programme where selected delegates moderate the session and present pertinent questions to the ASEM Leaders.

Thursday, 6 May 2021, ASEF officially launched the first ASEF Youth Dialogue Series with ASEM Leaders. On this occasion, Ambassador Johannes Matyassy, Deputy State Secretary and Director of the Consular Directorate, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) was invited to share his thoughts and experiences on COVID-19, multilateralism, the role of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and shared his advice to young leaders pursuing the international political arena.

The session was moderated by four delegates from the 4th edition of ASEFYLS. They were Ms Setthikun Sun, Cambodia, Ms Martina Chiara-luce, Italy, Mr Elischa Link, Switzerland, and Mr Emanuel Aegerter, Switzerland. The moderators addressed several questions to Ambassador

Matyassy which were gathered from the other 4th ASEFYLS delegates prior to the session. The questions are:

1. Based on your perspective, how do you think that the COVID-19 pandemic will impact relations among nations?
2. Collaboration between Asia and Europe will be essential in creating a global sustainable, just, equitable economy. What role do you see for ASEM, especially in a post-pandemic world? Do you see a special added value for small countries in this platform?
3. Students and young leaders often feel disconnected from processes of multilateralism, intergovernmental bodies, and international collaboration. These things seem so big, so far away and so exclusive. Why do you think that multilateralism should be appealing to young people, and how can they engage in it?



AMBASSADOR
JOHANNES MATYASSY

Deputy State Secretary
and Director of the Consular
Directorate, Swiss Federal
Department of Foreign Affairs
(FDFA)

Youth Up!



The session opened with encouraging words from Ambassador Toru Morikawa. He enthusiastically expressed "Youth Up!", and explained that young people need to be a part of the political decision-making process to make better policies. It was a meaningful opportunity for young leaders to listen to experienced political leaders in the spirit of curiosity and learning. Ambassador Matyassy proceeded with the dialogue by candidly sharing his experiences when he was starting as a political leader. He also shared his realistically hopeful views about multilateralism as we proceed with our lives during COVID-19.



His Excellency Johannes Matyassy during the dialogue with young people across the ASEM regions, moderated by ASEFYLS4 participant representatives (Left to right: Ms Martina Chiaraluze, Ms Setthikun Sun, Mr Elischa Link)

Ambassador Matyassy assured us with the words, “what concerns all of us, can only be solved by all of us”. It is a realistically hopeful reminder that as long as we are collectively caring, we can solve any challenge despite arising difficulties — this includes climate change. Climate change affects everyone, leading to the need to involve all to mitigate and adapt to it. He further expressed that it requires a global commitment and caring collective action. This has become evident as countries come together to address COVID-19.

Ambassador Matyassy also highlighted the importance of defending and advancing multilateralism despite its imperfections. He further explained that in pursuing multilateralism, it is vital to “build inclusive, innovative, and forward-looking partnerships”. Reflecting on the COVID-19 impacts, the pandemic has shown us the different ways to do things. His Excellency expressed that the pandemic has shifted the balance in the

way we do things. To find the new balance, society is rethinking ways of living and working which will change the behaviour of society. This shifts the relations between nations, balancing internal policies and solidarity. In this case, despite the differences and various reactions from the pandemic, solidarity between nations is the key aspect for us to overcome the pandemic.

His Excellency commended ASEM as both an informal and formal platform that brings together various nations and promotes mutual understanding. The informal character of the platform encourages “out-of-the-box thinking” during discussions. It is valuable for finding solutions. Not only that, Ambassador Matyassy shared that as a non-European Union member, it allows Switzerland to communicate and reach consensus with the Union, while building connections with the Asia region. This platform is beneficial as it brings various interests together and fosters consensus

building with the European and Asian nations, while producing concrete results through various collaborative projects. Ambassador Matyassy reminded us that mutual exchange and understanding is the foundation for finding the solutions for tomorrow.

When the topic of discussion later touched on young people’s engagement and influence in in-

specific area. The Ambassador explains that even though international relations studies give us exposure and a special flair on international topics, any other studies and specializations including health, law, geography, or economics would give us certain expertise. This would help us to have a position in a multilateral group where we could provide expertise and practice solidarity through our knowledge. Ambassador Matyassy further

“always remember to be the person that people listen to”

ternational political agendas, His Excellency reminded us that we are already in the process of engagement. Through the ASEFYLS platform, we are exchanging and developing ideas with other participants from the conference. Additionally, His Excellency encouraged us to raise our voices and our opinions whenever it is possible, because what we are doing now is influencing the future of the world and ourselves

Ambassador Matyassy further advised us suggesting that we should get an education, develop a focus area, and experience studying abroad. Education gives us the advantage to have a sense of understanding of how the world functions. His Excellency provided an example from Switzerland where political education is offered in schools, providing the younger generation with knowledge about the political and democratic systems and how they work in the country. Secondly, it is to be focused to develop expertise in a

asserted, “always remember to be the person that people listen to”.

As a closing remark, Ambassador Matyassy once again reminded us to stay focused on what we are doing right now. Meeting and working collaboratively with people from other countries and exchanging ideas to approach certain issues are necessary for the future of our world. His Excellency affirmed us with three significant aspects for multilateralism to flourish in a post-COVID-19 world and the role we can play - we must value cooperation and collaboration and be responsible to decide our future.

Covid-19 and Oceans

by Ms Sun Setthikun

The 8th of June marked Global Oceans' Day which was firstly adopted by the United Nations back in 2008, celebrated with the mindset of raising awareness on the importance of the oceans. Oceans cover 70% of the earth — supporting lives (human and living organs) by providing sources of food, homes to biodiversity, producing more than half of global oxygen, and creating jobs for millions of workers in the oceans-based industries in which the number is predicted to grow to 40 millions by 2030. However, throughout the years, the UN reported that around 90% of the large fishes devoured; additionally the ecosystem of coral reefs, which accounts for half a billion dollars for its net value, and is considered to be the home and foods of fishes and sea organism population, and the guard for global coastline from storm damage, is now 50% deteriorated. Therefore, to once again commemorate how important the oceans are for the lives of our people on earth, and how the livelihoods have impacted our oceans, this year's theme was determined to be "The Oceans: Life and Livelihood".

Amidst the pandemic, we witness an increase of plastic pollution in oceans contributed by the single use masks, and other personal protection equipment that were introduced as protection measures. It has been reported that in 2020, plastic pollution was estimated to comprise 1.56 billion face masks that constituted around 4,680 to 6,240 metric tonnes of the former status quo. What made it a concerning phenomenon is the fact that such huge plastic pollution proportions might take at minimum 450 years to dissolve, which consequently will deteriorate ecosystems,

sea lives, and in a long run hinder the global economy, ocean-based industries, fisheries, and lives that depend on oceans.

Nonetheless, there are also some lights in the darkness brought by the pandemic. Although Covid-19 has yielded regression and adverse impacts on global economics, international relations, trade, developments, and other aspects, the pandemic opens a new gate to ocean preservation. Thanks to the global economic slowdown brought by disruption of supply-chain, contraction of international demands in the market, it has been reported by the United Nations Development Program that the level of sea and water pollution, overfishing, and marine ecosystem deterioration has noticeably decreased last year during the initial outbreak. This resulted from the slumps down in international fisheries, international shipping, coastal tourism, coastal development, and natural resources extraction — oil and gas.

A study done by Shehhi and Samad found that within just two months of pandemic and lockdown, the emission of carbon dioxide was found to have fallen by 7%. This general improvisation was contributed by the plummet in observed emission in North Europe, South China, and Southeast USA. In China alone, the emissions plunged by 123 tonnes which was equivalent to five percent, resulting in a drop of sea surface temperature by 0.5°C whereas in the North Indian Ocean the average cooling of sea surface temperature was at 5% of its normal temperature. Since the ocean represents a shield to climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide emission,

the figure presents good news to ocean preservations. This is based on the understanding that in exchange for being a buffer to global warming by taking in carbon dioxide emission, the ocean will have to take in the heat which will lead to the rise in sea level, generating ocean acidification, which destroys lives below the water and its ecosystem.

Looking into the figure of each sector that contributes to the progress is the international shipping and ports management. It was mentioned that although ports are not closed amidst the pandemic, but the pandemic disfigures international shipping drastically, which infers that to a certain extent emissions were reduced. Ports around the world did not go through any closure, but their activities were reduced due to the slump in global consumption which caused international shipping demand to drop. In March 2020, during the initial phase of the pandemic declaration, we witnessed a decline of five percent and ten percent for cargo container trade. The number was noted by UNDP as the largest record for international trade. By the middle of 2020, it dropped further 8% based on the comparison between the 2019 and 2020 quarter database before recovering slowly in August. It is important to stress that the shrinkage of traffic signifies the drop of gas emission in which at a normal circumstance it represented 2.5% of global emissions that generated into the problem of ocean acidification, contributed to global warming, deoxygenation, and more.

Other aspects are global tourism and natural resource exploration and extraction, which was

highly constrained by lockdown, travel restrictions, and shrinking global demands. The UNDP report mentioned that with the pandemic, marine ecosystems remain clean, peaceful and quiet with minimal boating and diving activities together with less water pollution from nearby accommodations, resorts, and restaurants' improper disposable wastes. A slowdown in coastal construction and other development may have near term benefits of reducing stress on coastal ecosystems but these are unlikely to be sustained once such development returns. For the oil and gas industries, activities also died down as the oil price dropped as well as the reduction of international shipping caused a cut down of oil and gas demand.

To conclude, we can see that despite the fact that global pandemics yield abundant negative effects on sectors around the world, there is certainly a positive impact that they have generated for the oceans. This resulted from the halts of major international economic activities including international trade and shipping, tourism, and natural resources extraction, which are all the main sources of ocean pollutants. Despite that, attention shall be given to drafting measures to curb the plastic pollution created by the single use of PPE amidst the pandemic. Oceans play vital roles in human lives as it provides oxygen to living organisms on earth; create jobs for people; absorbs carbon dioxide; facilitate trade and more; therefore, it should be within human conscience and responsibilities to recognize their importance and raise awareness to protect oceans from deterioration.

Has Covid-19 Increased or Decreased the World's Reliance on Fossil Fuels in the Face of a Looming Climate Disaster?

by Mr Nick Pentney

In April 2020 the online world was stunned as they looked upon photos of a pollution free New Delhi and the Himalayas with New Delhi's India Gate war memorial and the snowy peaks of the Himalayas clearly visible in photos for the first time in decades.

As much of the world was confined to their homes in state-imposed lockdowns, the mass reduction of energy usage by the international community saw areas of the world that were previously choked with pollution, become clearly visible. The world in 2020 experienced its biggest annual drop in CO2 emissions ever recorded with China recording a 25% reduction in its annual emissions by June 2020 due to factories closing to prevent the spreading of the COVID-19 virus. In Delhi India the air quality index (AQI) levels fell from an average of 200 and a peak of 900 to a ranking of below 20. The World Health Organisation considers any AQI above 25 to be unsafe. These pictures gave hope to people around the world of how nature can recover if given a chance with greater pollution reductions.

This poses the question, has the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated, halted or de-accelerated the momentum towards more ambitious national climate policies?

One of the biggest shifts in global climate policy has come from the United States. The election of Joe Biden in the 2020 United States Presidential election meant that the world had an economic global power that was going to push for more global cooperation on climate change action as compared to an openly climate change sceptic Mr Donald Trump.

In April 2021 President Biden hosted a virtual climate summit on Earth Day requesting that states improve their previous Paris Agreement commitments. Some states responded positively to the US's encouragement with the EU increasing their greenhouse pollution reduction target from 40% to 55% cut of 1990 pollution levels by 2030 and Japan almost doubling their greenhouse pollution reduction target from a 26% to 46% reduction of pollution from 2013 levels. Furthermore, a meeting with G7 leaders in mid-June 2021 resulted in all G7 members agreeing to phase out government support for new coal power plants by the end of 2021.

However, while these are much needed positive steps in the right direction to combating climate change, many have argued the commitments made by the G7 and the international community are underwhelming. Climate Action Network

Director Catherine Pettengell stated at the conclusion of the G7 conference that the G7 had "failed to rise to the challenge" of agreeing on substantial climate commitments, especially as the participating G7 countries contribute a quarter of the world's global emissions. This is backed up by statistics collected by The Guardian that outline the countries attending the G7 summit including India, Australia, South Korea and South Africa committed \$US189 billion to support oil, gas and coal between January 2020 and March 2021 compared to \$US147 billion on clean energy sources.

This points to a common trend that many countries have shifted back towards fossil fuel reliance rather than taking steps to improve their green infrastructure. While the world now has the world's biggest economy looking to become a more active global player in reducing global carbon emissions, most countries have chosen to increase their reliance on fossil fuels during

the pandemic. A UN analysis of the \$US368 billion combined global government rescue funding during the COVID-19 pandemic found only 18% can be considered green.

Canada, China, France, India and Russia are just some of the many countries that increased their support for fossil fuel industries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia is another state that has chosen to follow the route of a fossil fuel led recovery. The Australian government, following a 6-month investigation by a panel created by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, has pledged the equivalent of \$US454 million to fund gas drilling expansions for exportation to trading partners in Southeast Asia. Australia resisted calls from trading partners and local activists to increase their carbon emissions target from 28% on 2005 levels by 2030 and will not commit to a net zero emissions target by 2050, a target a majority of top 20 global economies



In Delhi, India the air quality index (AQI) levels fell from an average of 200 and a peak of 900 to a ranking of below 20

have committed to. Indonesia is another country to firm its commitment to fossil fuels, currently accounting for 75% of all planned coal power plant construction in Southeast Asia according to the Global Energy Monitor and is planning to increase overall local coal consumption to make up 30-40% of all SouthEast Asia energy production. They also resisted the chance to reduce coal plant production despite Vietnam, India and the Philippines all cancelling a number of planned Southeast Asian coal plant productions.

When it comes to two of the world's largest carbon polluters, China and India have had mixed results when meeting or increasing their climate targets. China, while pledging to peak emissions

early, has been allowed a more modest pollution reduction target. This is to have 40% of its energy sector by 2030 be sourced from non-fossil fuel energy sources, which is According to Climate Tracker is being met, however greater pollution reductions by both countries will be needed for the world to prevent global temperature increases to below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

So, what can countries do to ensure effective climate policies are implemented? There are multiple outlets of which states can engage in to become a more active global player to reduce the most severe impacts of climate change and assist developing nations reduce their reliance on fossil fuels.

Orsted and Vestas. Furthermore, Denmark has increased its pollution reduction target to 70% by 2030, 15% higher than the EU's goal.

Another potential method of showing leadership on climate change is to increase funding for the global Green Climate Fund. The Green Climate Fund was established at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference for developing nations to source funds to build up their renewable energy capabilities and to build and support agriculture and infrastructure that could withstand future climate impacts on their countries. The agreed upon \$US100 billion contributions per annum target for developed nations to collectively invest into this fund by 2020 was the minimum

climate change action beyond their own borders to contribute further to assist developing nations reduce their environmental footprint.

Lastly, a final initiative is signing up to the High Ambition Coalition. The Republic of the Marshall Islands, a nation whose very existence is challenged by the rising sea levels posed by climate change, has formed the High Ambition Coalition. This Coalition seeks a more ambitious commitment from its members to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a net zero global emissions pathway and a 5-year cycle to update commitments. This Coalition has created a pledge for states to commit to at least 60% stimulus spending during the COVID-19 pandemic to go towards green industries. Currently only 9 countries are signatories to this pledge with the biggest economic signatory being the Netherlands. Signing this pledge will mean states such as the UK and the US who are announcing large nation emissions reductions packages will be bound to follow through with investing in green industries and will be answerable to the very countries whose lands are most at risk of being uninhabitable within decades.

As global leaders still collaborate on how best to handle the COVID-19 pandemic and distribute vaccines around the world, the issues posed by climate change remain, slowly creeping up on a global community largely distracted. With the UN intergovernmental panel on Climate Change conservatively giving the planet 10 years to prevent irreversible destruction to the planet, global leaders are missing the opportunity to implement green transitions as part of their COVID-19 responses that have the potential to respond to both threats to humanity. It can be done; just as urgent health measures and economic packages were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep people safe and economically secure. The same resolve will need to be taken to prevent the climate crisis from becoming uncontrollable and bringing untold destruction on the global ecosystem and the world's most vulnerable communities.

10 years to prevent irreversible destruction to the planet

by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2060, has continued to fund and build new coal plants in the country. The 25% emissions reduction by June 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the country has since been wiped out and returned to pre covid levels. Their Paris Agreement commitments have meant they are free to continue building new coal plants for the next 10 years. In contrast, India is currently on track to meet its Paris Agreement commitments made in 2015. The state is one of the world's biggest polluters but as also having extreme levels of pov-

The first is taking action at a national level. Denmark is one nation who is leading the way at reducing their emissions and increasing their investments into renewable energy sources. Conditions of the EU's post pandemic recovery fund dictated that at least 37% of funding obtained by members must be spent on green initiatives. Denmark has gone above this and spent 60% of its allocated \$US1.9 billion on green initiatives including green scientific research and transition of agriculture and tax reform that will promote greater investment from Danish wind power companies

amount needed for this fund to have a significant impact. As of 2018 the fund had only received \$US78 billion, a failure Climate Action executive director Tasneem Essop labelled after the June 2021 G7 conference as a missed opportunity and also called the G7 conference outcomes as "short sighted and unforgivable". For developing nations in the aftermath of COVID-19 to have a chance of rebuilding their economies with green initiatives and infrastructure, substantial contributions to this fund need to be made urgently. It is a method for states who wish to expand their

Ethical Leadership is the Bedrock of Sustainable Development

by Ms Nur Syahirah Khanum



The current forms of leadership compromise the path to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius. According to Alok Sharma, the president of Conference of Parties (COP) 26, the window to achieve the target is closing and leaders are needed to come forward. While hoping is crucial, taking ambitious actions are imperative to limit global warming as extreme weather events will be increasingly frequent and intense in the upcoming decades (Thiery et al, 2021). This presents a huge disadvantage to young people and the practices of sustainable development. In this article, I discuss the centrality of intergenerational equity in shaping ethical leadership in navigating the relationships between the present power structures and the interests of and for the future.

Intergenerational equity is one of the four principles of sustainability. The discourse is built on the ideas surrounding ethics of conservation that combine the "anthropocentrism of the utilitarian and the biocentrism of the preservationist" (Adnan, 2016). Adnan (2016) further expanded that the notion of sustainability considered ecological disturbance, governance, and managerial strategies, and social-ecological justice where the last centres on distribution of wealth between both intra- and intergenerational, and the North and South.

Over numerous discussions and mega-conferences on development and environment, the concept of sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). The Brundtland Report emphasised the needs, and limitations of technology and social organisation, or rather relationships between humans on the environment to meet present on future needs. Considering its moral and ethical foundation, sustainable development requires ethical leadership in all settings that deliberately reconsiders the relationship between power and interests.

Ethical leadership differs based on various contexts. Yet, it is universal in which it pertains to the interactions, relationships, behaviour patterns, and cultural norms. These elements are crucial to social change that happens over time. As we pursue the United Nations 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we are starting to observe in practical material terms the needs and limits of sustainable development. It is being scrutinised through the incremental implementations across various levels of governance. This process is a golden time to birth ethical leaders. They are those who create alternatives that

redistribute and realign the power and interests of decision-makers, policymakers, and the marginalised communities.

The UN 2030 Agenda has laid out universal values enabling the SDGs to be truly transformative. According to the UN Sustainable Development Group (2021), inherent dignity must become a fundamental aspect of development efforts and includes all people to actively participate in achieving sustainable development for SDGs to be truly transformative. One of the values is "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) that embodies:

the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2021)

Mahadi (2021, pg. 2) further points out that LNOB commits to "reaching out to all people in need and deprivation, wherever they are, in a manner which targets their specific challenges and vulnerabilities." These two perspectives suggest that the crucial objective of sustainability is the sanctity of life and the continuity of livelihood. Often, this is a shared responsibility between the government and communities. Therefore, the implementation of the SDGs must be of the interest of the people at the grassroots levels, not merely the federal, state, or regional level of governance.

The ethical codes or policy is not merely a document fulfilling institutional requirements. They are the basis of actions to centre those who are being left behind by modern development efforts. In practicing the shared responsibility, ethics that centers on human rights, dignity, safety, and well-being must be emphasised in decision-making. Leaders who undermine the intersectional application of such universal values or cherry-pick the beneficiary of their ethical leadership have no place in the making of a sustainable world.

Additionally, stakeholder engagement consultation has been vital in decision-making processes. However, it obviates building autonomy and agency of people to making informed choices without an ethical dimension. Furthermore, such engagement sessions only gather those with power to influence a particular decision and those with access to the corridors of power. Choong (2019) attributes this characteristic as policy-sation of social change that "confines social change to narrow policy interests." It is harmful as it further excludes stakeholders. Stakeholders mapping conducted by organisations remains futile when it does not identify those who are excluded and marginalised. This consciousness of ethics is crucial for development efforts to leave no one behind.

To date, we have not yet fully grasp what a sustainable world is. After all, as the future is unknown, we will never know the interest of the future generation. Some also argue that there is only an abstract form of reciprocity or the idea of doing things beyond oneself for a sense of continuity (Taylor, 2013). Regardless, it is significant to recognise that the implication of increasing levels of CO2 emissions is putting lives at stake.

Decision-makers and people must reimagine social norms that support environmentally beneficial actions by reconstructing and reorganising our needs. All ethical actions taken right now have various implications as they either maintain the status quo or shaping a sustainable world. Over time, I hope that ethical leadership ultimately creates the social change that centres on equity when defining the needs of people where the need for overconsumption is negated.

The Grand Finale – the ASEFYLS4 Summit Week

by Ms Patricia Senge

In late November 2021, the 10-month journey ended with the ASEFYLS4 Summit Week. The youth summit took place in conjunction with the 13th ASEM summit (ASEM13), which was hosted virtually by the Government of Cambodia. Over 5 days about 200 young participants from 51 Asian and European countries engaged in various online meetings with ASEM leaders, presented their outcomes of the 6-months Leadership in Action community projects to members of the ASEM diplomats corps, partner organizations and other participants and alumni. In addition, the ASEM Youth Declaration was presented by three ASEFYLS4 participants during the Opening Ceremony of the ASEM13 and the ASEM Youth Report on Leadership was launched.

The Summit Week started off with an official opening ceremony in which Ms Leonie Nagarajan, Director of the Education Department of ASEF, and Ambassador Morikawa Toru, Executive Director of ASEF welcomed all participants, congratulating them on their endurance and resilience during the 10-month journey. HE Hun Many, President of the Asian Youth Council and

President of the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia, was invited as a keynote speaker and particularly highlighted the importance of multilateralism to achieve the SDGs in a post-Covid world. The remaining four days of the Summit Week were structured thematically, with daily sessions on SDG3 Good Health and Well-Being, SDG4 Quality Education, SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG13 Climate Action taking place successively throughout the week.

While the majority of the ASEFYLS4 took place virtually, participants turned theory into action and jointly worked on 15 impactful community projects addressing the SDGs across ASEM countries over the summer prior to the Summit Week. These projects, presented during the Summit Week, promoted hands-on collaborations between participants, and followed the goal of creating sustainable impact on a local community level. Throughout the Summit Week, and particularly during the project presentations, it became visible that the topic of ASEFYLS4 “Sustainable development in a post Covid-19 world” is indeed linked to a great variety of sectors, in-



cluding, amongst other, geopolitics, economic growth, and social and cultural affairs. To this end, the Leadership in Action projects particularly highlighted the multifacetedness and interconnectedness of the SDGs.

The Summit Week ended with the launch of the ASEM Youth Report and the delivery of a youth intervention during the ASEM13 opening ceremony by three ASEFYLS4 participants to ASEM leaders of 51 countries from Asia and Europe, the EU, and ASEAN Secretariat.

The youth report is the first publication on youth leadership in ASEM and a collaboration between ASEF and the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). It focuses on how young people can take part in leadership across ASEM countries and how to further incentivize their participation. In addition, the report provides recommendations for the design of meaningful leadership experiences. It is based on an ASEM-wide online survey with a total of 13,676 respondents, representing the voices of ASEM youth. Additional focus group discussions and interviews added to the analysis.

The report also provides the unique opportunity to those in power to hear from young people about their own leadership experiences, aspirations and wishes for a post-Covid world. “We know that the young adults possess the global mindset, which is needed to spur and bring forward global change. Despite this great potential, young people remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making conversations,” says Ms Leonie Nagarajan. The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

The youth declaration focused on sustainable development in a post-Covid-19 world. It was delivered by 3 representatives of ASEFYLS4 and called for intergenerational unity, inclusive leadership, and meaningful involvement of youth in the design of policies. The full declaration can be downloaded [here](#). “We hope that what has been conveyed in the declaration will be put at the center of the ASEM policy deliberations and will go beyond the message but really lead into actions” concludes Ms Nagarajan.

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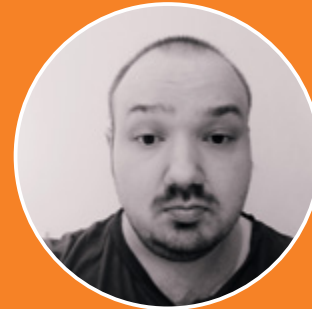
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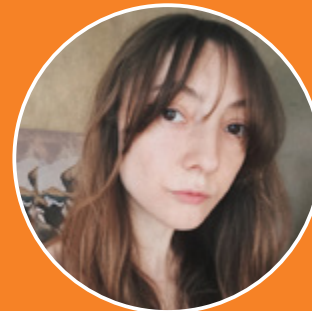
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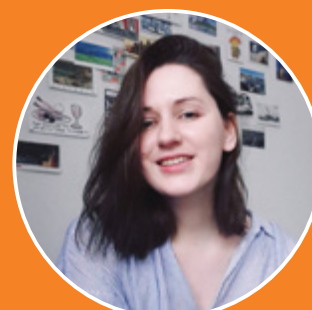
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