
A TECHNICAL BRIEF

TRANSFORMING TEACHERS *and TEACHING for* **ADOLESCENT HEALTH, WELL-BEING *and* GENDER EQUALITY**

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TRANSFORMING TEACHERS AND TEACHING FOR ADOLESCENT HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND GENDER EQUALITY: A TECHNICAL BRIEF

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RESOURCES

1. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2024 Regional Snapshot: Asia and the Pacific, available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/fgm-regional-snapshots/2024-asia-and-pacific>.
2. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying (Paris: UNESCO, 2019), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>.
3. The WHO states that, "Interprofessional education occurs when two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes. See: <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/d743ea4e-8c14-493c-b3a5-1a0022e6ce54/content>

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INTRODUCTION

The Asia-Pacific region, home to 50% of the world's adolescents and youth, faces an urgent and interconnected crisis in adolescent health, well-being, and gender equality. Stark statistics from the region underscore this urgency. For instance, adolescent girls in South Asia are three times less likely to be enrolled in school compared to their male peers, they are exponentially more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) and spend many more hours on household and care-taking duties. Similarly, at least 80 million girls and women in Asia have undergone female genital mutilation procedures.¹ Schools, which should be safe havens, are settings for much of the violence experienced by children. One in three students in Asia has been bullied by their peers at school at least once in the last month.² Boys disproportionately experience physical bullying and corporal punishment, while girls are more subject to psychological bullying and appearance-based harassment. These challenges are compounded by pervasive, harmful gender norms that are the root cause of poor adolescent outcomes, contributing to high rates of school exclusion, child marriage, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and poor SRH and mental health.

In this context, teachers are positioned as critical, life-changing agents for delivering transformative change. The strategic priority must shift from if we should teach sensitive content to how we can empower and professionalise educators to do so effectively. In response, the **Transforming Teachers and Teaching for Adolescent Health, Well-Being and Gender Equality** regional forum was convened in Bangkok from September 23-25, 2005. The forum brought together 160 key stakeholders, including 29 government representatives; 98 youth, civil society and UN agency representatives, and 33 academia and education experts from over 20 countries. The forum's opening session noted teachers as 'reliable sources of accurate scientific information' who are vital in mentoring students to develop life skills and make informed, healthy decisions.

This high-level multi-stakeholder forum was co-convened by the Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), UNESCO (Regional Office in Bangkok and Regional Office for South Asia, UNICEF (East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Regional Office for South Asia), UNFPA Asia

Pacific Regional Office, and Education International Asia-Pacific, in collaboration with the SDG 4 Youth and Student Network and YPEER Asia-Pacific Center. The forum reaffirmed a clear and unified consensus: educational systems can empower, protect, and professionalise educators to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality in the classroom. The forum's dialogue demonstrated that effective approaches and solutions already exist. Scaling these efforts, however, requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder effort to address the systemic barriers and professional deficits that currently inhibit the delivery of high-quality Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Gender-Transformative Education (GTE).

This technical brief summarises the forum's key findings and actionable recommendations to move educators and deliver large-scale, skill-based health and well-being education. It builds on the collective evidence and practitioner experience of 160 stakeholders from countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The high-level, multi-stakeholder forum focused on three thematic pillars:

1. Curriculum;
2. Pedagogy; and
3. Monitoring, Measuring, and Learning.

The discussions represent the collective synthesis of implementation evidence, research, and practitioner experience of participants from across the region. Some of the key discussions included:

- **Teacher Well-being is a Precondition for Student Well-being.** The most significant barriers to implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Gender-Transformative Education (GTE) are not technical, but systemic and internal. Teachers report a profound 'confidence deficit', stemming from personal discomfort with sensitive topics (like sexual orientation and GBV), and a fear of social and professional backlash. This is compounded by severe workload barriers, as non-teaching administrative duties consume time needed for student emotional support. The forum concluded that systemic protection for teachers, requiring government 'Commitment and Cash', is an ethical and practical prerequisite for success.
- **Pedagogy must Shift from 'What' to 'How'.** The forum strongly critiqued traditional, top-down 'information cascade' training models as ineffective. Transformative

education requires a pedagogical shift to active, skills-based practice. Participants discussed key frameworks, which included:

- > Sustainability requires institutionalisation and co-creation. Programmes must be embedded within national systems. This requires youth-led co-creation, blending youth-friendly methodologies into official government training of trainers (ToT) to ensure relevance and buy-in. Furthermore, it demands new metrics for teacher appraisal that formally recognise and reward ‘community engagement and public service’ as a core contribution to nation-building, not just academic publications.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ACROSS THE THREE THEMATIC PILLARS OF THE FORUM

Pillar 1 : Curriculum

Pillar 2 : Pedagogy

Pillar 3 : Monitoring, Measuring, and Learning

PILLAR 1: CURRICULUM

The structure and content of the curriculum significantly influence the ability of teachers to deliver impactful education. Traditional approaches often silo CSE as standalone subjects, limiting their perceived importance and reducing opportunities for meaningful engagement. Additional insights to strengthen curricula include:

- Integration across subjects is essential in addition to mandatory inclusion of CSE in the curricula
 - > A ‘fully loaded curriculum’ is a major barrier to implementation. To address this, CSE and GTE competencies must be integrated across all subjects (e.g., gender equity in science, diverse families in social studies) rather than being siloed as an extra, low-priority subject. When it is a standalone subject in certain countries, CSE should be given priority as any other mainstream subject. Countries can aim toward large-scale models for integration, mandating gender and development (GAD) principles across the curriculum, research, and community outreach with teacher education institutions.

- Addressing curriculum gaps remains a critical priority and need.
 - > Evidence shows critical content is missing or disappears at crucial ages. In some countries, adolescent reproductive health (ARH) content is absent in junior high schools, a period when puberty and sexual health education are most relevant. Ensuring robust coverage on an age-appropriate basis throughout the adolescent years is vital for effective health outcomes.
- Youth led co-creation is needed more than ever to ensure CSE curriculum is comprehensive and relevant.
 - > Transformation hinges on positioning young people as active ‘collaborators and co-creators’ in curriculum design and policy. Blending youth-led, activity-based methodologies into official government Training of Trainers (ToT) is highly effective. This approach builds teacher confidence and ensures that content is ‘more sustainable, more interactive,’ and relevant.

PILLAR 2: PEDAGOGY

Traditional, top-down ‘information cascade’ training models are often ineffective for transformative education. Evidence shows these models are prone to ‘information dilution’ and fail to build the practical skills and confidence educators need. Effective teacher development must pivot from focusing on what to teach (content) to how to teach it (pedagogy), providing practical tools and immersive, skills-based experiences.

- The S.A.F.E. Mandate for Social Emotional Learning (SEL): Evidence shows that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes have lasting positive effects on student well-being and academic attainment. However, this effectiveness is guaranteed only when SEL adheres to the S.A.F.E. principles: Sequenced (connected activities), Active (collaborative learning), Focused (targeting specific skills), and Explicit (clear learning goals).
- Mandatory Values Clarification (VCAT): A teacher’s personal values, derived from culture and upbringing, frequently clash with the evidence-based, rights-based values necessary for effective CSE delivery. Value Clarification and Attitudes Training (VCAT) is essential to help teachers manage this internal conflict. Tools that support self-reflection help educators analyse their biases and uphold their professional, rights-based obligations.

- **Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA) as an Ethical Standard:** Given that many students have experienced trauma, and that CSE/GTE content can be sensitive, the Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA), defined by the principles of safety, connection, and calm, is a non-negotiable ethical standard. Practical classroom strategies that “do no harm” are mandatory, including the use of content warnings before sensitive topics, providing opt-out options for students, and guiding teachers to use hypothetical scenarios rather than encouraging personal disclosures.

PILLAR 3: MONITORING, MEASURING, AND LEARNING (MEL)

To secure sustained political and financial commitment, programmes must produce credible evidence of value of CSE programmes. Robust MEL systems are therefore crucial for institutionalising transformative education.

- **Robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** To secure sustained political and financial commitment, programmes must produce credible evidence of their value. The SERAT (Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool) framework was presented as an evidence-based methodology for measuring nuanced CSE outcomes, moving beyond simple knowledge recall to assess shifts in learner attitudes, relationship health, and help-seeking behaviour.

Evidence indicates significant positive outcomes, yet adoption of MEL frameworks by ministries remains limited. Strengthening MEL ensures that policymakers and funders have credible data linking CSE/GTE to measurable outcomes, fostering political and financial support for scale up.

MEL should also include formative classroom assessment, tracking teacher performance and integrating student feedback to inform continuous improvement. By doing so, it validates both pedagogical approaches and systemic investments in teachers' development.

The forum underscored the importance of integrating MEL frameworks at national levels, providing governments with credible, actionable evidence of the impact of teacher-led transformative education, thereby securing political and financial support.

TEACHER WELL-BEING AS A PRECONDITION FOR SUCCESS

While curriculum, pedagogy and MEL are the pillars of transformative education, the forum underscored that teacher well-being is the foundation. Teachers face multiple challenges, including low salaries, high workloads, social backlash and lack of professional support, among others. Evidence revealed that even when training is available, confidence deficits in handling sensitive topics often stem from fear of professional or community repercussions, limiting effective delivery of CSE and GTE.

Programmes such as online mental health support for teachers and Nepal's youth led co-creation initiatives illustrate that supporting teachers' emotional and professional need is essential. Protecting teachers from non-teaching administrative duties, providing wellness programmes, and offering access to counselling are critical measures for ensuring educators can focus on interactive pedagogy and student well-being.

DISCUSSIONS, WORLD CAFE AND SKILL-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

The forum's discussion, World Cafe sessions and Skill-Building Workshops collectively reinforced the thematic pillars while providing practical, field tested solutions. World cafe sessions created participatory spaces for peer learning and exchange, highlighting innovations in pre-service and in-service teacher training, whole school approaches, digital education, research informed pedagogy and MEL. They demonstrated that scaling transformative education requires both systemic reform and practical, context specific strategies.

Skill building workshops provided hands-on tools for value clarification, disability inclusion, SEL, trauma-informed teaching, safe classroom design and formative assessment. The sessions bridged policy with practice, enabling teachers to apply new pedagogical methods, measure learning outcomes and foster inclusive and empowering learning environments.

Overall, these interactive sessions ensured that the forum's objectives were translated into actionable models that can be scaled across the Asia Pacific region.

ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION AND POLICYMAKERS:

- a. **Legislate** clear policies and allocate dedicated funding to ensure critical protection and support for teachers delivering sensitive curricula, including mandatory teacher wellness programmes and access to GBV counselling.
- b. **Revise** national teacher mandates to formally remove all non-teaching and administrative work to protect teachers' professional time for relational pedagogy and student well-being support.
- c. **Address** the 'curriculum variability' issue by ensuring that SRHR and sexuality content is robustly present during junior high school (the onset of puberty) and integrated across all subjects.
- d. **Ensure** comprehensive content in line with evidence-based guidelines are included in other grades.
- e. **Adopt** and adapt robust monitoring tools (e.g., the SERAT framework) to generate evidence that links CSE delivery to measurable outcomes in relationships and help-seeking.

FOR TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (TEIS):

- a. **Revise** pre-service and in-service curricula to include mandatory, sustained training in VCAT and self-reflective practice on one's own values to address teacher biases and discomfort with sensitive topics.
- b. **Shift away** from short, one-off training to long-term continuous professional development models that are collaborative, sustained, and practice-oriented.
- c. **Embed** interprofessional³ education with health experts and youth advocates.
- d. **Develop and implement** training on classroom assessment tools (e.g., peer assessment, observation of co-operation) that verify skills acquisition and attitudinal shifts related to GTE and SEL, moving beyond rote testing.
- e. **Collaborate** with governments to embed new metrics, such as 'community engagement and public service,' into teacher appraisal and career progression frameworks.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS:

- a. **Sustain solidarity** and convening through multi-stakeholder partnerships and establish regular platforms to maintain technical exchange and solidarity.
- b. **Research and advocacy** focused on cross-cutting issues of inclusion, diversity, and equity for marginalised groups, specifically young people with disabilities and gender-diverse people.
- c. **Leverage digital equity** and ensure that digital delivery models prioritise offline accessibility and low-bandwidth solutions to reach learners in geographically isolated areas.
- d. **Advocate** for the expansion of CSE coverage beyond adolescents to include adult and elderly people, addressing the taboos and specific health issues faced by older populations.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO COLLABORATIVE ACTION

The forum demonstrated that transformative education solutions exist and are being implemented. Scaling these efforts require coordinated investments in teachers, systemic curriculum integration, innovative pedagogy and robust MEL. The solutions through the education system to adolescent health and gender equality challenges are underway in countries across South and Southeast Asia. The work ahead requires unwavering solidarity and a renewed commitment to investment, particularly in the face of a challenging anti-rights climate.

The core message is clear: the future of transformative education depends on recognising the indispensable value of the CSE teacher. The principle that 'teacher well-being is student well-being' must be a cornerstone of future policy.

All stakeholders must embrace these findings and commit to a coordinated, multi-stakeholder effort, combining political will, robust financing, and skills-based pedagogical reform to empower our educators and cultivate generations of informed, empathetic, and empowered adolescents and youth.



Stark statistics from the Asia-Pacific region, home to **50%** of the world's youth, underscore an **urgent and interconnected crisis in adolescent health, well-being, and gender equality.** Schools, which should be safe havens, are settings for much of the **violence experienced by children.** In this context, teachers are positioned as critical, life-changing **agents for delivering transformative change.**

ARROW is a regional non-profit women's NGO based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Since it was established in 1993, it has been working to advance women's health, affirmative sexuality and rights, and to empower women through information and knowledge, engagement, advocacy, and mobilisation. ARROW envisions an equal, just and equitable world, where every woman enjoys her full sexual and reproductive rights. ARROW promotes and defends women's rights and needs, particularly in the areas of health and sexuality, and to reaffirm their agency to claim these rights.

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