

The Role of Teacher Organisations in Asia Pacific in a Changing Economic and Educational Environment

EIAP's Capacity and Response

The current Global Economic Crisis has once again posed several challenges to the Trade Union movement in general and to the Teachers' Organizations in particular.

Amongst others, this crisis is also an indication of disharmony between principle of good governance in planning, implementation and evaluation of economic and social development policies in the nation and the role of Trade Union in the context of the process of change. It is always important to the members that the process of change focuses on economic growth with equitable distribution of income and wealth in society.

Teachers' organisations must therefore have a critical and in-depth knowledge of their national and international role in order to be effective. Teacher organisations are a critical and equal social partners in the process of economic and social development. The first question that the current crisis poses is the relevance of Teacher organisations in overcoming the crisis and the development of a strategy to participate in the tripartite process of the nation's economic and social development.

If there is a lack of understanding of the current predicament of the nation, the Teachers organisations will not be able assist nor strengthen themselves to play a meaningful role in the recovery programmes. A critical evaluation is therefore necessary for the real empowerment of unions to sustain their relevance as equal social partners in the tripartism for economic development and social justice for the workers.

The second question that we face is the capacity of teacher organisations to make meaningful contributions to the agenda of the recovery programmes and face ensuing challenges and emerging challenges of the future.

Teacher organisations must be credible suppliers of grassroots realities so that assumptions and distortions do not become basis for decision making. A social dialogue process is very important for teacher organisations to achieve the objectives.

Teacher organisations must be sensitive to the different layers of education system that is present in each country. It is therefore critical to distinguish between the government-run education services and the private sector education services in the country. It is obvious that the government-run services are important for the majority of the society especially the poorer section for the community.

Trade Unions must therefore examine the question of resource allocation in the context of recovery programmes to maintain the critical service of Education for All.

The above challenges among others call for new forms of capacity building within teacher organisations. They must move ahead into the realm of knowledge to understand the details and nuances of current economic crisis and proposed recovery programmes.

Towards this end, the EIAP Committee carried out a mail survey to find out the status, capacity and impact of EI programmes on EI's Regional affiliates in facing the new emerging challenges.

The objectives of the survey were:

- Ascertain current status of EIAP Affiliates
- Develop strategies to activate and strengthen EIAP Affiliates
- Plan and develop policies & programs to make recommendations to EI Board
- Propose strategies to address challenges during changes of policies
- Review the EI Constitution based on feedback (essentially focusing on dues structure)

The committee reviewed, analyzed and prioritized the following areas of concern for action:

- Education and Employment
- Human and Trade Union Rights
- Equality Issues
- Communication and Research
- Solidarity Programmes

Employment and Education

The replacement of regular teachers by recruitment of temporary teachers in many countries poses a serious problem to teacher organisations. Some of the categories of teachers being recruited are:-

- Para Teachers
- Daily-rated teachers
- Contract Teachers
- Ad-hoc Teachers
- Education Workers

These “teachers” are under qualified, under trained and enjoy no benefits or basic workers rights. If the current trend of recruitment of non-qualified personnel to be teachers continues they will, in due course completely replace regular qualified teachers. We may not achieve quality education for all if such stop gap and ill-thought measures are allowed to continue. This is continuing to be a major obstacle to the achievement of EFA goals and pose a problem serious enough to make the teacher organisations irrelevant. In many cases the Union constitutions and national laws do not allow the recruitment of these “teachers” as members as many of these personnel are not qualified and/or are hired on temporary or part-time basis on contracts.

As education budgets in most countries are reducing, there is insufficient resource allocation for efficient and effective functioning of schools. Other major areas of concerns are benefits, in service training and migration of teachers.

Equity Issues

Although progress has been made, there is still a lot to be done in resolving equity issues such as:-

- Maternity Protection
- Violence Against Women
- Pay Equity Issues
- Minority Issues
- Education of Girl Child

Human and Trade Union Rights

The variety of regimes in Asia Pacific do not allow any generalization for the entire region. In some countries, some of the labour laws do protect the workers rights as payment of wages, hours of work, rent days, maternity leave lay off and termination benefits. But these coexist with regulations

that are detrimental to workers and their rights to freedom of association. Within this Jekyll and Hyde scenario, there are curbs upon workers and trade unions and the violations assume various forms:-

- Restriction on collective bargaining
- Interference in union functioning and administration etc.
- Employers Anti Trade Union Tactic
- Preventing Strikes
- Discrimination
- Victimization on Equal opportunities
- Union busting activities
- Intimidation
- Restriction on organizing
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Communication and Research

The technology development in IT and multimedia has changed the way organizations communicate, operate and arm themselves with information. In this area, the private sector followed by government embraced the technology and benefit from it. Teacher organisations have generally not been able to keep pace and optimize the benefit from the technology. Nonetheless, affiliates felt that email and newsletters are effective tools of communication. EI Research and other documents should use these vehicles to disseminate information. Research has not been one of the priority areas in many teacher organisations, mainly because of lack of resources and expertise. They need to invest in research facilities training programmes and have an adequate IT and communication system.

Solidarity Programmes

Technical cooperation to teacher organisations in under developed and developing economies in the last 60 years demonstrates good intentions to strengthen and direct the labour movement both at the local level and worldwide towards common objectives in addressing labour's grievances. The resource for assistance has primarily come from generous contribution of organized labour in industrialized economies. This is irrefutable. Assistance for Organisational Development through training programmes, exchange of study visits etc has been and integral part of global and national union initiatives.

However, the present status of organized labour be it national, regional or global, as perceived from various growth indicators such as rate of unionization, successes in collective bargaining, representation and substantive influence in national/international labour policy formulation is rather marginal and in most cases measures to alter labour's persuasion and organized power has to be well thought through and developed.

The EIAP affiliates have bilateral and multilateral programmes mainly for organizational development and leadership training which covers about slightly more than one third of the EIAP affiliates. The EI affiliates in the region are appreciative of such programmes. However, some of these well intended assistance programmes have not attained the measure of success that was expected. Some organizations that have been the beneficiary of these assistance programmes for more than a decade have yet to achieve sustainability. Sadly, these unions will not be able to continue the programme on their own without assistance. There seems to be over dependency on external financial assistance. Some of the observations for not attaining the expected level of success are:-

- The programme in the beginning did not fit into the need and priorities of the recipient organization.
- Lack of continuity and follow up work
- Unions preference for bilateral programmes where EI role is to act more an advisory capacity.
- The change of leadership in organizations often changes their priorities, which at times has political motives
- Lack of resource allocation for follow up work and poor monitoring.
- Inaccurate evaluation reports.
- Non-compliance or non-enforcement of decisions taken
- Selection of participants who often do not meet criteria set for the programme..
- Officials of organizations who do not fully recognize and appreciate the values of the programme.

With reduced funding, the possibility for continued organizational development programme is indeed bleak.

Capacity Building

Teachers organizations in the region need to address the issue of capacity building. Capacity building is no more merely organizing leadership and administration of Teachers Organizations. Now it demands that you are able to move on with areas of technical deliberations for union sustainability. Teacher organizations need to review their roles, goals, leaderships, structure and inter-relationship with organizations before their very existence is threatened.

Course of Action/Strategy

We need to strengthen organizations through increased membership, improved governance structures and by being, independent, self reliant, focused and a knowledge and learning organization. These can be achieved by:-

- Action Research especially Union-led Action Research
 - Such research carried out by affiliates or their countries could be shared through the Regional Office so that all affiliates benefit from the good work done
- Sharing of Advocacy/Campaign/Lobbying materials as well as newsletters
 - Affiliates could regularly update the Regional Office on educational news of their own countries. Individual affiliates could also volunteer their expertise/resources to others in the region.
- Intra/Sub-Regional/Bilateral Collaboration
 - This is an area that has been overlooked. There is plenty of expertise and resources available within the region. There are very strong affiliates in the region who could lend support and capacity building assistance to other affiliates in the region. This assistance need not be financial in nature.
- Workshops (Sub-Regional)
 - Due to the great diversity of the Asia Pacific Region, it would more effective to organize sub-regional or even workshops for affiliates at similar levels of development as there would be greater commonality and relevance for the affiliates participating. **One main area EIAP workshops could focus on is “Union Education” – to highlight the roles and responsibilities of teacher unions**

To effectively engage governments, Teacher organisations need to be knowledgeable in the following areas:-

- National Policies
- Global Education (EFA) Issues
- Millennium Development Goals
- Human Trade Union Issues
- Privatization /GATS/WTO

To be a Strong Union it needs to:-

- Have membership Strength
- Recruit of beginning / young teachers
- Address needs of teachers
- Organize the unorganized
- Address needs of Para/Temporary teachers
- Provide membership services
- Increase organizational strength
- Promote Trade Union Rights
- Have good governance
- Regularly communicate with members
- Increase and collect dues

It is the hoped that affiliates who have much progress the areas listed above who come forward to assist others who need it.

EIAP's Response to the EI's Dues Structure

The Asia Pacific Region is the most populous region in the EI structure with 72 affiliates in 35 countries and a declared membership of 9,053,063. Almost 1/3 of EI membership is from this region but it does not reflect the strength of the region in terms of number of votes. The region has about 15% of votes with Europe and North America has about 69%. The voting strength is calculated on the dues paid and the region is unable to meet this requirement even in part by many organizations, thus allowing a concentration of votes on very few unions. This is in part due to poor salaries, recruitment of large numbers of temporary teachers who are denied the right of association, decreasing union membership and organizations inability to draw new members.

The EI's subscription system has a commendable equity value as it pertains **"to each according to its means"**. The practice enables the association of affiliates throughout the world, irrespective of the differences in internationally trade value of the money income of its affiliates' members to participate. This progressive practice is due to the good-will and honorable intentions of unions in advance economies to forge an effective labour movement at all levels.

The weighted system has led to an inverse proportion in leadership positions and power influences within the International institutional structure and as a consequence many of the unions and their representatives from emerging economies are left out of the pale of decision making processes in the organization. The prevailing system of votes and delegates should be reviewed and changes made to the existing structure in order to substantively engage affiliated union not with-standing their differential subscription rates in overall decision making both at the global level and especially at the regional level. The EIAP committee prepared a detailed paper on the dues structure for the World Congress in Berlin but was not discussed due to the withdrawal of the resolution on dues by the Board.

Institutional arrangements at the regional level could/should be adjusted to provide constitutional provision for the Regional Structure to have greater empowerment in leadership election, policy formulation and trade union operation. The Regional structure need to be more empowered to play a greater role in the development of the Region.

While discussions at both regional and executive board levels on dues structure must continue to ensure better representation of the membership, EIAP affiliates must also strive to be become more effective organizations that are relevant to their own constituents. In so doing, affiliates would be able to address concerns of falling membership as well as non-fee paying membership. There must be a synergistic effort through dialogue and capacity building at country, regional and international levels so that EI remains relevant to individual teacher organizations.

Recommendations

- **The EIAP must foster unity of all affiliates for strong commitment to trade unionism and profession.** They need to have a common stand on matters affecting teachers, children and education. They have to effectively put forward, represent regional views and pursue common goals and improve the status of teachers and education. They have to put in place a system to receive feedback and exchange views among the affiliates
- Carry out an in-depth impact study of all EI education programs/activities in collaboration with development cooperation partners once in four years.
- Capacity building programmes must be reviewed and redesigned to meet current needs.
- Understand, monitor and react to National Education programmes of governments including tracking education budget.
- Organizations should move away from the “**dependency Syndrome**” in terms of financial resources. A review of subscription rates is essential to meet the goals of the union and fulfill financial obligations to EI. Regional affiliates should strive to set up a Regional Development Fund.
- Encourage and strengthen inter-intra relationship among affiliates collaborate with NGO’s promoting education.
- Research being an integral/critical part of organizational development in meeting educational and professional challenges, teacher organisations and need to look at “Research” as a priority area in the context of Regional issues.
- With the feminisation of the teaching profession, special programmes and efforts to mainstream women in organization leadership need to be further intensified.
- Strengthen advocacy and mobilization activities to pressure governments from continuing to recruit under qualified and untrained teachers to fill vacancies and replace retiring teachers.
- Concrete, comprehensive and sustainable measures must be put in place to have a viable structure to stop the non-compliance and erosion of Trade Union Rights in the Region.

Conclusion

The objective of teacher organizations is to become a meaningful, independent and respected partner in the policy making process. A partner who is well able to influence policy decisions which take into consideration the needs of students, teachers, parents and society. A partner who will act as the pulse, voice and conscience of teachers, children and education.

The current challenge for Teacher Organizations is to sustain the relevance in the economic and social development of the Nation. It is important that equal social partner status of Trade Unions/ Teacher Organizations in tripartism in the nation is exercised to promote consultation and consensus in solutions or overcoming the problems related to all educational and professional issues.

Failure to plan and develop the teacher organizations' capacity to function effectively, promote workers rights, defend the rights of children and enhance the status of teachers and education, would make the teacher movement irrelevant,.

It is not merely the question of organizations survival but it is survival of the teaching profession accessibility to education, achievement of EFA, MDG goals and more importantly the well being of future generation.