

The First REGENERATE Leadership & Learning Institute Concludes on a High Note



Organized by **APCASO** under the **Regional Gender Justice and Sexual Rights Initiative (REGENERATE)**, the Institute brought together 35 civil society and community leaders from eight countries, all working at the convergence of HIV, TB, malaria, gender, and human rights. During the course of this immersive training, participants deepened their understanding of gender justice and sexual rights (GJSR) while equipping themselves with practical policy advocacy tools to integrate GJSR approaches into health systems in their respective countries.



Setting the Stage



The Institute kicked off on June 15 with a warm welcome from Ms. RD Marte, Executive Director of APCASO, who shared that the REGENERATE Institute marked the realization of a long-held dream for APCASO. She expressed her excitement at seeing that dream come to life in the form of the diverse and committed group of participants gathered in the room, each bringing powerful experiences from the frontlines of health and rights work in the region.

Ms. Mangala Namasivayam, APCASO Programme Manager, provided an overview of the REGENERATE Initiative and why it is necessary to ensure gender- and SOGIESC inclusive health systems.

The day ended with a show-and-tell icebreaker, facilitated by Ms. Aom Maleehom, APCASO Programme Officer, where participants introduced themselves by sharing treasured objects and the personal stories behind them. The activity helped the participants to get to know each other, sparked curiosity and early connections.

Building Foundations on Power and Identity

The first day of training began with Ms. Mara Quesada, REGENERATE Platform Steering Committee Co-Chair, presenting an overview of the training and its goal of equipping participants with the skills, perspectives, and tools to become gender-transformative leaders.

The Power Walk exercise — facilitated by Ms. Hua Boonyapisomparn and Ms. Manisha Dhakal, REGENERATE Platform Steering Committee Co-Chair and Steering Committee Member respectively — prompted deep reflections on how privilege and discrimination operate within and across communities. The day continued with sessions unpacking sex, SOGIESC concepts, patriarchy, power, and global human rights frameworks.



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It was my first time hearing about the Yogyakarta Principles. I found them valuable because they clearly outline human rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity. |
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Participants appreciated Ms. Dhakal's first-hand experience of advocating for and achieving legal recognition of transgender people in Nepal. They also had the opportunity to apply their learnings to examine how inclusive their national HIV, TB, and malaria policies, laws, and programs truly are.

From Concepts to Policy Making: GEDSI and Advocacy

On June 17, Mr. Jeffry Acaba, APCASO Programme Manager, started the day with an introduction of key concepts of Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI). Ms. Namasivayam followed with a session on the policy development process, highlighting types of policies and the various steps leading to policy development. Participants had the opportunity to break out into groups to discuss the policies their organizations have helped develop and explore ways in which their organization can elevate its participation in the policy development process using the GEDSI lens.

In their reflections for the day, a participant shared “GEDSI is an appropriate approach that helps me identify vulnerable and excluded populations. It will help me scrutinize each step of the legislation process more carefully and ask: Is it inclusive? Are there any groups missing? What are the ways in which they can participate (in the process)?”

Crafting Advocacy Strategies

The third day focused on practical advocacy tools. Participants, divided into country groups, were introduced to the SMART Chart, a step-by-step guide for developing strategic policy advocacy plans. They applied each step to their chosen policy, which was refined with inputs from the facilitators and fellow participants, conducting stakeholder analysis, framing issues, refining messages, and mapping tactics. The day closed with a Brown Bag session featuring the film *A Nice Indian Boy*. The participants took in the story of a queer couple navigating love and family acceptance, which spurred rich discussions on visibility and acceptance.



Leading with Purpose

On June 19, the country groups presented their policy advocacy plans to the group, demonstrating how the theory and tools learnt from previous days can be transformed into action. Their passion for creating and in advancing inclusive policies was evident in their eagerness to implement their plans upon returning to their countries. The policy advocacy plans developed by Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam groups will be further reviewed, developed, and acted upon by the REGENERATE Platforms within these countries.

In the afternoon, Ms. Marte led a session on Gender Transformative Leadership. The session was a powerful reflection on how our understanding of leadership shifts when viewed through the lens of justice, equity, and lived experiences. This session flowed seamlessly into participants writing a letter to their future selves, to be opened in six months, acknowledging their leadership skills and the growth they aspire to moving forward.

Celebration and Commitment

Prior to the graduation ceremony, participants were introduced to the REGENERATE Platform and its values, before a joyful graduation ceremony. Ms. Marte, Ms. Boonyapisomparn, and Ms. Dhakal presented certificates and pink-and-green stoles, the colors of REGENERATE, to each graduate. Jean-Luc, Project Manager at L'Initiative, joined virtually to share words of encouragement and hopes for the future of GJSR in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Institute concluded with an immersive field visit to Pattaya on June 20, which included a visit to The Sanctuary of Truth, a session on sex workers' rights facilitated by SWING, and a vibrant Pride celebration—a fitting reflection of the Institute's core values of visibility, resistance, and solidarity.



What Comes Next

The energy of the training is already creating ripple effects.

I've already met with my organization's management to share key takeaways, and they're excited to integrate GJSR principles into our programs. I'm proud to be part of this journey.

-Yom Meu,
Malaria Consortium, Cambodia



The REGENERATE Leadership & Learning Institute is more than a training; it's a commitment to lead and build inclusive spaces for women and girls, and people of diverse sexuality in health, particularly HIV, TB and malaria. The movement is growing, and we're just getting started!



The REGENERATE Initiative is implemented regionally by APCASO, and nationally by our partners KHANA (Cambodia), SWING (Thailand), and SCDI (Viet Nam). It is supported by L'Initiative and Expertise France.

