



2nd REGENERATE Leadership & Learning Institute: WHERE VOICES TAKE FLIGHT

37 advocates. 9 countries. 1 Institute sending ripples across Asia-Pacific.

Organized by APCASO under the Regional Gender Justice and Sexual Rights Initiative (REGENERATE), the 2nd Leadership & Learning Institute, held from June 21 to 26, 2026 in Hanoi, Viet Nam, brought together 37 civil society and community advocates from across the Asia-Pacific region, all working at the intersection of HIV, TB, malaria, gender justice, and sexual rights, for learning, honest conversation, and movement building.

A Room Full of Possibilities

The Institute opened on the evening of June 21 with APCASO's Executive Director, Ms. R.D. Marte, setting the stakes early. She reminded participants that in a world where civic space for women, girls, and people of diverse sexual orientation,

gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) is shrinking, the space REGENERATE creates is both a privilege and a responsibility. Ms. Khuat Thi Hai Oanh, Executive Director of SCDI, took participants back to

where REGENERATE began: years of proposals that went nowhere, rejections that kept coming, and a small group's stubborn belief that this initiative was worth fighting for.

The evening continued with Ms. Mangala Namasivayam, APCASO Programme Manager, walking participants through the three pillars REGENERATE is built upon: capacity building, movement building, and advocacy. Together, they are reshaping how gender justice and sexual rights are understood in health

programming and policy, particularly in HIV, TB, and malaria.

The evening closed with the show and tell activity, and it was here that the room truly opened up. Each participant had brought one object that holds a piece of who they are. What followed was an hour of stories that were personal, surprising, funny, and at times deeply moving. People from nine countries, carrying vastly different experiences of the world, kept finding themselves in one another's stories.



The Work Begins

The first full day of the Institute opened with Ms. Mara Quesada, REGENERATE Platform Steering Committee co-chair and lead facilitator, setting the stage. Together, participants established the shared expectations that would shape the week ahead, creating a space where difficult conversations could unfold with openness, respect, and trust.

Then came the PowerWalk. Facilitated by Ms. R.D. Marte and Ms. Manisha Dhakal, REGENERATE Platform Steering Committee member, the exercise did something that a slide deck cannot: it places participants in the shoes of people whose experiences are shaped by different SOGIESC and intersecting identities. Looking around the room, participants could see how age, class, disability, migration status, and SOGIESC intersect to shape vastly different experiences of opportunity, safety, and belonging.

The session on Sex and SOGIESC followed, anchored by the gender matrix exercise. Even within this room, it quickly became clear that the binary categories in the matrix were not representative of everyone present, as Ms. Quesada invited participants to reconsider the categories and assumptions through which they understood identity.



Ms. Ngorn Seavmey, a graduate of the 1st REGENERATE Institute, led the session on power and patriarchy. She guided participants through a process of asking “but why” again and again, peeling back the layers of an issue until its root cause was exposed. And then, just as importantly, asking “so what,” sitting with the real human cost of those root causes and who bears them.

Ms. Namasivayam closed the day with a session on the fundamentals of human rights, leaving participants with one idea that would anchor everything that followed: knowing our rights is the first step to defending them, for ourselves, for one another, and for the communities we serve.

The Conversation Deepens

Day 2 opened where Day 1 left off, with Ms. Namasivayam leading sessions on human rights instruments and sexual rights, giving participants the legal and normative foundations to understand not just what rights exist on paper, but how they are upheld, violated, and contested in the countries where they work.

Then, within the sexual rights session, a single slide on comprehensive sexuality education stopped the room. Story after story emerged from



participants across different countries, organizations, backgrounds, and SOGIESC, about what it means to grow up without language for who you are. About the self-stigma that fills that silence. About the physical, mental, and sexual violence that finds the people no one taught anyone else to see or respect. And about the margins within the margins: identities so far outside what society accepts that, even within communities that know exclusion, they can still be invisible. The message that kept resurfacing was clear: comprehensive sexuality education is not only for students. Families, organizations, and communities need it too.

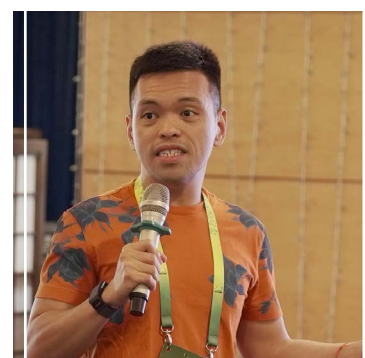
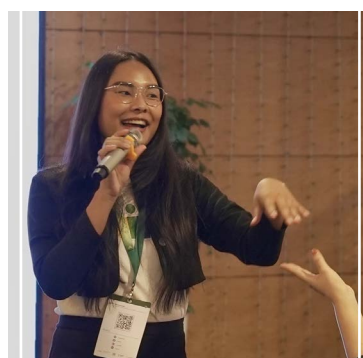
The afternoon session, facilitated by Mr. Jeff Acaba, focused on gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI), the gender equality continuum, and intersectionality. Participants explored how programmes can move along the gender equality continuum, from reinforcing unequal power relations to actively transforming them, while unpacking the difference between equality, equity, and justice. Together, these perspectives offered new ways

of examining who is being left behind in HIV, TB, and malaria programmes and policies, and why.

The Path to Change

On Day 3, the conversations shifted from understanding systems to changing them. Ms. Dhakal grounded the shift in lived experience, sharing the instrumental role of her organisation, Blue Diamond Society, in Nepal's journey towards the legal recognition of transgender people. She reflected on milestones along the way, including the appointment of the country's first transgender Member of Parliament, illustrating how sustained advocacy can reshape both law and society.

Facilitated by Ms. Quesada, the rest of the day focused on strategic advocacy planning. Participants from Cambodia, Thailand, and Viet Nam worked through the advocacy priorities of their national REGENERATE Platforms, identifying clear objectives, stakeholders, opportunities, and pathways for change.



Meanwhile, participants from across the wider Asia-Pacific region came together to identify common priorities and develop a shared regional advocacy agenda that could strengthen collective action beyond national borders.

As the day drew to a close, participants heard from Ms. Adirek Rueanpin, who shared the ongoing work of SWING in advocating for the legalisation of sex work in Thailand. Her reflections were a reminder that advocacy rarely follows a straight line. Progress demands persistence, coalition-building, and the willingness to continue pushing for change even when success is not immediate.

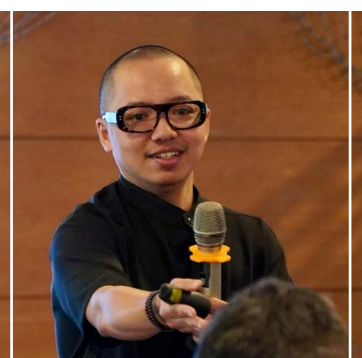
The Leader Within

Day 4 turned the focus inward. Facilitated by Ms. Thanh Ha Chu, a graduate of the 1st REGENERATE Leadership & Learning Institute, the session on gender-transformative leadership invited participants to

consider not only the kind of leaders they are today, but the kind of leaders they hope to become. Through creative exercises, including imagining a Museum of Gender-Transformative Leadership, participants explored leadership as something shaped by purpose, values, and practice rather than position or authority.

The reflection became deeply personal when participants wrote letters to their future selves, sealing them to be opened six months after the Institute. The letters captured the commitments each participant was making to themselves and offered a future moment to pause, look back, and reflect on how far they had come.

Ms. Quesada brought the session to a close with a synthesis of the week's learning through the metaphor of a growing garden. Participants then folded origami butterflies and added them to the growing garden Mara had created during her synthesis. Soon, those butterflies would leave Hanoi with them, a quiet reminder that the work of the Institute would continue in the communities they returned to.



Beyond the Institute

Before the graduation ceremony began, Ms. Marte introduced the regional REGENERATE Platform as a space for collaboration and collective advocacy beyond the Institute, while Ms. Richa Maheshwari introduced the values that guide it. For many participants, it offered them a first glimpse of how the relationships and conversation built over the past few days could continue long after they returned home.

The ceremony itself reflected the diversity that had filled the training room throughout the week. Participants, in their vibrant traditional attire, brought the colours and cultures of nine countries into the celebration. One by one, graduates received their certificates and pink and green stoles, to roaring applause and joyous laughter, pausing for photographs that captured the community they had built together.

Into the Field

The final day took participants into the field, where the ideas explored throughout the week could be seen in action through SCDI's work. Ms. Oanh welcomed participants to



the organisation and shared SCDI's journey and the principles that underpin its work.

Participants then divided into smaller groups based on their interests, joining sessions on LGBT+, Community Systems Building, or Harm Reduction and Mental Health. The visit offered an opportunity to see many of the ideas explored throughout the week reflected in real programmes, real partnerships, and the everyday work of creating more inclusive health systems — a fitting final chapter for a week that had never stopped asking what change looks like in practice.

The Road Ahead

The REGENERATE Leadership & Learning Institute is a pivotal step in our journey towards building a sustainable regional movement for advancing gender just and sexual rights affirmative health policies. Participants from both the 1st and 2nd Institute will be invited to join the REGENERATE Platform, strengthening advocacy across the Asia-Pacific region. What began as a room full of possibilities is becoming a growing community of advocates, carrying forward the conversations and commitment forged during the Institute into the work that lies ahead.

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

