

# **UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy**

## **Addressing Literacy Challenges in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches**

**31 July - 1 August 2007, Beijing, China**

### **1. Background**

The UNESCO Regional Conference in Support of Global Literacy entitled “Addressing Literacy Challenges in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches” forms part of a series of six Regional Conferences supporting global literacy that are organized by UNESCO within the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE).

The conferences are contributing to a major drive to promote literacy at national, regional and international levels as one of the major Education for All goals and as a foundation of lifelong learning. The regional conferences will build upon and extend the work started at the White House Conference on Global Literacy held in New York in September 2006, hosted by Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States of America and Honorary Ambassador for the UNLD. The objective is to trigger sustained global and country-level leadership for the promotion of literacy by renewing support to and encouraging investment in literacy for all and by integrating literacy programmes into a sector-wide education strategy.

The initiative seeks to assist countries in addressing their literacy challenges and to make a real and measurable impact in the life of their populations, with the aim of contributing towards sustainable human development and poverty reduction.

The six regional conferences – covering the Arab States Region, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean - will address the literacy challenges specific to each region. They will serve to gain momentum for advocacy based on evidence in favour of renewing commitment and action in the field of literacy for out-of-school children, young people and adults. Each conference will result in concrete action points and country support.

In sum, the objectives of the regional conferences are:

- to advocate for literacy;
- to identify and discuss main challenges and achievements in literacy;
- to develop recommendations on how to move forward;
- to present and disseminate effective literacy practices;
- to build cooperation among stakeholders;
- to mobilize partners and resources for concrete interventions at the country level.

The first regional conference took place in Doha, Qatar, on 12–14 March 2007 under the auspices of Her Highness Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned.

## **2. Asian Sub-Regional Conference: Literacy Challenges in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches**

UNESCO is now organizing the second sub-regional conference in the series which focuses on East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. The Conference will take place on 31 July and 1 August 2007 in Beijing, hosted by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

As a key instrument for lifelong learning, indispensable for effective participation in social and economic life and essential for peace, literacy is a very important issue in the region. Although the total literacy rate in the sub-region is high (91.7%), a serious gender gap persists, with 70.4% of the illiterate population being women. In addition, there is a high disparity among countries in the sub-region. The literacy situation in many of the countries targeted by the conference remains critical. However, successful and sustainable local literacy policies and initiatives do exist and pave the way for replication in other places and contexts.

The conference is thus of utmost importance for UNESCO and its Member States and partners in their efforts to achieve the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals and to fulfil their commitments to EFA, the UNLD and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

The Conference will propose roundtable discussions on literacy challenges and achievements in areas such as literacy policies and strategies and programme delivery. Specific regional topics and challenges, such as Literacy in a Multilingual Context and Literacy and Rural Development, will also be examined. The conference also will look at innovative ways to improve literacy levels building on and deepening the following three thematic fields addressed in the first conference on Global Literacy: Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning; Literacy for Health; and Literacy for Economic Self-Sufficiency. In addition, Literacy and ICTs will be another theme on which effective practices will be presented.

Partnerships shall be fostered among key stakeholders: decision-makers, civil society organisations, community-based organisations, bilateral and multilateral organisations, and private providers in the field of literacy. The conference will ultimately lead to renewed commitment, with concrete proposals in support of activities at country level.

## **3. Objectives of the Sub-Regional Conference for East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific**

The objectives of the conference are:

1. to undertake strong advocacy for literacy in the sub-region as part of the global literacy drive, LIFE and UNLD within the overall framework of EFA;
2. to build renewed commitment towards literacy at the highest political level, including increased investment and resources;
3. to build a coalition of partners, involving governments, NGOs, private providers, development agencies, etc., in support of effective national literacy programmes and

policies in the framework of LIFE, UNLD and other global initiatives such as EFA, the MDGs and DESD

4. to facilitate exchange and sharing of successful experiences and effective practices in the area of literacy, and access to the stock of knowledge and know-how;
5. to contribute to the accelerated implementation of the LIFE programme in the sub-region;
6. to create a new momentum for UNLD in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific and contribute to the preparation of the UNLD review in 2008.

#### **4. Participants:**

The Conference will be attended by First Ladies; ministers in charge of education and literacy; international organisations; NGOs; universities and research institutes; private and public donors; and the media.

#### **5. Venue and Dates**

31 July and 1 August 2007, State Guest House, Beijing, China.