



# SUMMARY OUTCOMES

UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy

and

Qatar Foundation Innovations in Education Series

## **‘Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches’**

The first UNESCO Regional Conference in support of Global Literacy and the third Qatar Foundation Innovations in Education Symposium, entitled **‘Literacy Challenges in the Arab States Region: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches’**, was jointly organized by UNESCO and the Qatar Foundation on **12 – 14 March 2007 in Doha, Qatar**, and took place under the auspices of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned.

The Conference, whose opening ceremony was honoured with the presence of the Emir of the State of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, was attended by five First Ladies – four from the region and one from Azerbaijan – and by seventeen ministers and two permanent secretaries, as well as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, policy-makers, UN agencies, representatives from civil society, universities and research institutes, programme managers and practitioners, multilateral and bilateral organizations, private foundations, donors, publishers, writers, and the media.

Sincere thanks were extended to the Qatar Foundation for taking a leading role by hosting this conference and for its hospitality. The support for literacy from such a key ally was recognized as important for deepening partnerships of this kind.

This Conference is part of a series of regional conferences being organized by UNESCO in the framework of United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE).

The Conference noted that progress in literacy in the Arab States Region is being made:

- Countries in the region are making strong efforts and solid achievements in improving literacy;
- NGOs are making important and rich contributions to improving literacy and to developing new approaches;

- A range of innovative experiences, effective practices and research evidence provide a sound basis for future action;
- Cooperation and networks of partnerships, demonstrated through this conference, should be further expanded and strengthened;
- Most importantly, the presence of ministers of education from the region demonstrated their dedication to literacy. They will review their national policies and strategies according to the outcomes of the conference, integrate them into national plans and increase investment in literacy;
- Of special significance is the fact that the First Ladies attending the conference, from within as well as outside the region, are committed to mobilise support and to rally for the cause of literacy in their own countries and beyond.

These elements of progress give a solid platform for strengthening action on literacy in the region, in order to address the particular challenge of adult literacy – we must not forget that approximately 60 million adults in the Arab States Region still do not have the literacy skills they need.

Recognising the particular challenges of the Arab States Region, the following approaches received broad support during the Conference:

- The three-pronged approach proposed by the 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report will serve as the framework for action: ensuring access to quality primary education, scaling up effective programmes, and creating literate environments;
- A broader definition of literacy is essential, encompassing skills necessary for productive and active participation in society, beyond merely reading, writing and numeracy;
- Literacy should be promoted as a right for everyone, irrespective of age and gender;
- Special attention should be given to LIFE countries;
- Countries in conflict and post-conflict situations require special efforts and support from the region and by the international community;
- Literacy for women and girls needs particular emphasis, with specific programmes to address their needs;
- There are effective programmes in the region that must be further evaluated and taken to scale;
- Adult literacy is essential as part of wider development strategies and for achieving EFA and the Millennium Development Goals. This requires the collective responsibility of others ministries, such as social development, employment, health, agriculture, finance and economy;
- Partnership is essential in achieving adult literacy goals. Actors include government, civil society and the private sector. In the Arab States Region, the full engagement and recognition of NGOs will be crucial for promoting and delivering programmes;

- Good evidence supported by reliable and valid data is an essential basis for literacy policies and programmes. This implies a clear commitment to high-quality and sustained monitoring and evaluation, on the basis of recognised benchmarks;
- Investment in capacity development in all aspects of designing, delivering and managing adult literacy work is of prime importance in bridging the gap between policy and implementation;
- New and additional resources are necessary to implement adult literacy, from government budgets, regional and international donors, and private sector partners.

In support of these actions, the following specific measures were proposed during the course of the Conference:

- To call upon the Arab Summit, which will take place in Saudi Arabia in 2007, to put literacy high on its agenda and to support a regional programme for literacy;
- To propose the establishment of a regional fund to support effective programmes and new initiatives for literacy, both for governments and NGOs;
- To urge national governments of the region to undertake concrete follow-up to implement the recommendations of the conference;
- To ask UNESCO to set up a regional working group, bringing all actors together to support the follow-up of the conference.
- To call upon the international community to prioritize the protection of education in crisis and post-conflict situations in particular in Iraq. In this context, the UNESCO working group on crisis and post-conflict situations should focus particularly on designing modalities for the protection of teachers and students in Iraq.