

UNESCO REGIONAL CONFERENCES IN SUPPORT OF GLOBAL LITERACY

May 2007

MAIN GOAL OF THE CONFERENCES AND THEIR FOLLOW-UP AT REGIONAL AND COUNTRY LEVEL

The ultimate aim of this undertaking is to assist countries to address their literacy challenges and to make a real and measurable impact on the life of their populations, which should contribute to sustainable human development and poverty reduction.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNESCO'S ACTION

The action of UNESCO is embedded in the Dakar Framework of Action for achieving Education for All and more in particular in the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) which was proclaimed by the General Assembly for the period 2003-2012 in response to the major challenge posed by illiteracy in today's world of emerging knowledge societies.

The vision for the UNLD situates Literacy for All at the heart of Education for All. Literacy, as the foundation of lifelong learning, is a fundamental human right. UNLD aims to address the basic learning and development needs of almost 800 million adults—two thirds of whom are women—who cannot read and write, as well as over 100 million school-age children who are not in school. The goal of UNLD is to mobilize the political will and action as well as the corresponding resources necessary to make literacy an international priority. Therefore literacy should be placed at the center of national education systems and development efforts.

UNLD addresses literacy within and outside schools and targets children, young people and adults. Its efforts will contribute to the Education for All (EFA) goals of increasing adult literacy rates by fifty percent; ensuring equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes and achieving gender equality in education by 2015. Its also aims at ensuring that a mastery level of learning is attained by all learners and their quality of life is improved. UNLD thus complements international poverty-reduction initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Moreover, as a global strategic framework for achieving the goals of the UNLD, UNESCO launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in 2005. LIFE is put into action in 35 countries that have a literacy rate of less than fifty percent or a population of more than 10 million people who cannot read. Eighty-five percent of the world's non-literate population resides in these countries.

LIFE will be implemented over ten years and guided by three core principles: country ownership and diversity, links with national policy, and progressive phasing.

LIFE aims at the empowerment of the individual and the community, with a special focus on women. This implies a bottom-up approach, based on the needs of the target group. Also, while literacy is the main thrust of LIFE, the link between literacy and development will be key to its success. Integrated approaches linking literacy with sustainable livelihoods, health, intergenerational learning, etc. will be developed. This is of particular importance if literacy programmes are to contribute to poverty reduction.

The 35 LIFE countries are: **Africa:** Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone
Arab States: Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan,

Asia and the Pacific: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Brazil, Haiti

BACKGROUND: THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL LITERACY

Mrs. Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States of America and Honorary Ambassador for the UNLD, hosted the first-ever White House Conference on Global Literacy in New York City on 18 September 2006.

The White House Conference on Global Literacy underscored the need for sustained global and country level leadership in promoting literacy.

Through panels and informal discussions, the Conference provided practical information about successful programmes that promote literacy as a catalyst to advance social and economic participation, human development, and poverty reduction. Themes covered were: Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning; Literacy for Health and Literacy for Economic Self-Sufficiency.

The White House Conference was the starting-point for a major campaign in support of literacy internationally.

UNESCO REGIONAL CONFERENCES

As a follow-up to the White-House Conference, UNESCO is organizing six regional conferences in the Arab Region, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the Caucasus, and Latin America and the Caribbean to address their specific literacy challenges, to be followed by concrete country support.

The UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy which are organized in the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) are part of a major drive to promote literacy at international and regional levels. These Conferences build upon and extend the work begun at the White House Conference on Global Literacy.

The Objectives of the Regional Conferences are to:

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

Contents

The same core themes will be taken up by all conferences, in order to ensure a coherent process. At the same time, themes may be added for each conference to address regional priorities and specific features.

The Conferences will consist of two main types of presentations followed by discussion:

1. Roundtable presentations and discussion on main challenges and achievements in the region, on the following themes:
 - Literacy Policies and Strategies, Costs and Financing
 - Programme Delivery
 - Benchmarking, Monitoring and Evaluation of Literacy
2. Presentation of effective practices in the region, on the following programme foci:
 - Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning
 - Literacy for Health
 - Literacy for Economic Self-Sufficiency
 - Literacy and ICTs

3. The Conference will look into how effective coalitions are built to promote and sustain literacy for all.
4. The Conferences will feature an exhibition and a fair of experiences and good practices under the title 'Creating literate environments'.

Countries to host the Regional Conferences

Africa: Mali

Arab States: Qatar

Asia:

- East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: China
- South, South-West and Central Asia: India

Europe: Azerbaijan

Latin America and the Caribbean: Costa Rica

Participants

First Ladies, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, ministers in charge of education and literacy, ministers of finance, UN-Agencies and other international organizations, civil society, universities and research institutes, programme managers and practitioners, multilateral and bilateral organizations and private foundation, donors, publishers, writers, and the media.

Size and Duration

150 – 250 people, 2 - 3 days

Timeframe:

2007 to 2008

Dates

12 -14 March 2007, Doha, Qatar, hosted by the Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned.

31 July – 1 August 2007: Beijing, China

10 – 12 September 2007: Bamako, Mali

29 – 30 November 2007: New Delhi, India

13 – 14 May 2008: San José, Costa Rica

September 2008: Baku, Azerbaijan

SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES

As a follow-up to each conference, it is expected that countries of the region will be provided with support for the development and implementation of context-specific and relevant literacy programmes, determined on the basis of countries' priority needs and based on lessons learned from effective practices around the world.

UNESCO's support to countries is oriented towards building national capacities at all levels to develop, implement and sustain effective practices. Moreover, UNESCO's strategy will be the adaptation and implementation of evidence-based effective practices, based on experience and needs on the ground, thus paving the way for replication and up-scaling. Studies will be undertaken not only to identify major gaps and priority needs, but also to show the way of how to best tackle the literacy situation and to improve the quality of life of the target beneficiaries. In order to ensure sustainability, efficient policies must be in place. UNESCO's action will comprise concrete operational support, with a view to achieving a measurable impact on the chosen target group, the results of which will inform policy. Moreover, assistance to policy formulation and implementation will be provided, and the creation of a literate environment will be promoted.

The above strategy aims at providing support to the countries in such a way that national capacities are built and the necessary conditions are created so that literacy interventions have a lasting impact, contribute to greater development goals and poverty reduction, and are sustainable.

Through UNESCO's longstanding experience in the area of literacy, we know that decisive factors for sustainable literacy, among others, are the need for paying special attention to the learning needs of women and girls; the quality and motivation of the facilitators; a solid partnership between all stakeholders involving the government, the private sector, and NGOs; ensuring the use of literacy through creating a literate environment; the enhancement of policy frameworks for literacy; and reinforcing integrated approaches such as linking literacy with sustainable livelihoods and life skills, thus improving the quality of life of learners and their communities and contributing to poverty reduction. These factors will be taken into consideration for the development of country programmes.

Thus, UNESCO's approach is to situate the provision of literacy within a wide developmental and cultural context. Literacy is understood as the foundation for lifelong learning and a tool for empowering individuals and their communities. Literacy is an indispensable means for personal self-fulfillment, effective social and economic participation and the exercise of freedom. Literacy is therefore essential to human development, poverty reduction and economic advancement.

Countries: Priority will be given to LIFE countries and countries with particular needs as determined by each region. It is proposed to support at least five countries per region, which can be expanded over time.

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