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SUMMARY OUTCOMES

UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy

“Literacy Challenges in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches”

Beijing, China, 31 July – 1 August 2007

Literacy today

Today literacy is on the move, and literacy needs are changing. Globalization makes new demands and changes the meaning and uses of literacy - mobility and rapid communication require new competencies in literacy. Strong government policies are required to respond to these demands and to recognise the multiple dimensions of literacy that people need, in different contexts and for different purposes.

The conference therefore recommends that:

- Policy-makers at local and national levels recognise and promote the importance of literacy competence at all levels of education, as the key tool for lifelong learning and as an instrument for poverty eradication;
- Governments adopt policies informed by an assessment of the current literacy situation and evidence of the changing demands for literacy;
- Governments, UNESCO and regional bodies must work together to improve the collection and accuracy of literacy data, using international quality standards to ensure scientifically valid and technically reliable data;
- Governments strengthen policies for the promotion of literacy, for both children and adults, and increase budget allocations to literacy;
- Champions and other leaders be mobilised to raise the public profile of and investment in literacy.

Learning literacy in context

Multiple and diverse groups without literacy are differentiated by language and culture, as well as by learning needs. Patterns of livelihood and social interaction mean that learning takes place in different ways. Building on learners' knowledge and cultural background, literacy must serve relevant and useful learning purposes, integrated with the acquisition of relevant skills for work and life.

The conference therefore recommends that:

- The mother tongue or first language of the learner be used for initial literacy and as a basis for learning national and international languages as part of a multilingual approach;
- Literacy provision should not be seen as a stand-alone programme, but rather be embedded in programmes designed to offer other skills and knowledge in relevant domains – strengthening health, economic activity, family life, or citizenship;
- Literacy efforts maximise learning opportunities through mutual support among family, community, school and other local institutions;
- Literacy programmes are designed according to the circumstances, languages, cultures, gender and socio-economic status of the learners;
- Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector make innovative and appropriate use of new technologies in literacy programmes, particularly to reach groups with special needs and in less accessible areas.

Reaching those without literacy

Literacy rates are rising, and the East Asian, South-East Asian and Pacific regions have made remarkable progress in the last two decades. China alone has cut illiteracy by 94 million in that period. Yet we face a tough challenge: the remaining groups without literacy are harder to reach and will need particular efforts. In this sub-region, 70% of those without literacy are women. Furthermore, literacy for indigenous peoples and minorities, for the disabled, and for other marginalized social groups will, in many contexts, require diverse approaches. Increasing migration means that illiteracy is on the move, bringing new challenges of literacy provision.

The conference therefore recommends that:

- Governments identify and map disadvantaged areas and groups in order to better design literacy programmes for those still without literacy;
- Local stakeholders give input into the planning and implementation of literacy programmes, building on relevant learning needs and community-based structures;
- Regional collaboration be strengthened to understand and address the implications for literacy provision of urban/rural and cross-border migration and in small island states;
- Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector draw on innovative practices and experiences in literacy provision to inform policy;
- Partners in literacy make innovative and appropriate use of new technologies in all kinds of literacy programmes in order to reach groups with special needs

and in less accessible areas.

Sustaining literacy

Too often, minimal levels of literacy are not sustained and so people lose the capacity they once learned. The sustainable use of literacy depends on high-quality learning, on a rich literate environment, on assessment against clear benchmarks, and on productive partnerships among government, civil society and other stakeholders.

The conference therefore recommends that:

- Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector give particular attention to the quality of literacy learning, with high-quality materials and, in particular, developing the professional capacity of facilitators;
- Governments will endeavour to ensure that literacy facilitators receive appropriate compensation comparable to teachers in the formal system;
- The lessons of effective literacy programmes are learned and used to scale up efforts for other groups, taking full account of variation in context;
- Clear baselines and benchmarks are used in the design, implementation and evaluation of literacy programmes, providing a basis for effectiveness and improvement;
- Developing rich literate environments that include local writing and publication activities, local libraries, and a policy framework that facilitates access to affordable learning and reading materials;
- Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector develop patterns of partnership appropriate to the context and based on comparative advantage;
- Articulations between formal, non-formal and informal modes of learning are forged so that learners may easily access lifelong learning opportunities, gain equivalency and validate their knowledge.

The Conference agreed that further dialogue and cooperation on literacy needs and challenges should be actively pursued in the sub-region, making full use of existing regional mechanisms.