



Cape Town, South Africa
6th-11th September 2004



**International Adult Learners Week 2004:
Adult Learning and Literacy for Democracy and Citizenship
Lessons Learnt and Recommendations**

I. Context

Learning festivals both express and stimulate the joy of learning and the pleasure of participation. In September 2000, UNESCO launched *International Adult Learners' Week* as a transnational advocacy framework to promote literacy and lifelong learning for all, following a recommendation emanating from the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in 1997. Linking thirty-five learning festivals worldwide, the *International Adult Learners' Week* movement has recently taken on renewed importance in mobilizing for the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and the Education for All (EFA) agendas, as it helps to nurture cultures of lifelong learning and to reinforce capacity-building and increased participation of citizens as well as more cooperation between all stakeholders in education.

South Africa, which is celebrating *Ten Years of Freedom and Democracy* in 2004, and the UNESCO Institute for Education co-hosted the *2004 International Adult Learners Week*, thus providing a forum for policy dialogue among educators, practitioners from civil society and policy makers on the importance of adult learning, literacy and lifelong learning with regard to building diverse, inclusive and democratic societies. Approximately 200 national participants from South Africa and fifty international experts and coordinators of learning festivals shared and analyzed conceptual implications as well as concrete work experiences and best practice around learning for citizenship, inclusion, equality and participation.

As the policy dialogue underlined, democracy entails accountability and the input and contributions of people themselves. However, while the importance of an active, inclusive and participatory civil society has been internationally acknowledged, most societies, despite their rhetoric and constitutional rights, are not functioning democratically. Human rights are still violated, and large segments of societies continue to be marginalized and disenfranchised. Democracy is also challenged by the shift of responsibilities from the public to the private sector, and growing political and religious fundamentalisms. Finally poverty and the denial of equal access to resources – one among them being education - need to be solved if genuine democracy is to be achieved.

Against this background, the policy dialogue aimed at strengthening the global movement of learning festivals as effective advocacy instruments for learning, participation and partnerships. In order to help advance the UNLD, EFA and CONFINTEA agendas, the policy dialogue reiterated the lessons learnt and proposed the following policy and programme recommendations.

II. Lessons Learnt

→ *With a view to civil society and citizenship:*

- There is not yet enough participation of civil society, including representatives from the grassroots level, in international and UN meetings and events. Innovative processes still need to be developed in order to make their participation meaningful and empowering.
- Racism, sexism, gender injustice, class distinctions, colonial practices, homophobia, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination curtail the effective practice of citizenship.
- Citizenship requires taking personal responsibility as well as holding the state accountable.
- While the responsibility of nation states is not to be negated, globalization and global politics necessitate the development of a “global citizenship”.
- At the same time, the loss of indigenous peoples’ culture, history, languages and identity has also impacted negatively on the history, culture and heritage of all humanity.

→ *With a view to the role of education:*

- Despite the depth and the breadth of efforts over the years and the recognition of its critical role for development and participatory societies, the whole field of adult education remains under-resourced.
- Adult education on its own cannot make a difference to alleviate poverty, but can make a crucial contribution to democracy if certain considerations are taken into account:
- Literacy and literacy classes are only conducive to empowerment and democracy if they are based on a critical analysis of values, socio-economic conditions and politics with an emphasis on local realities.
- Adult education in general is not sufficiently tied to community struggles.
- While recognizing the competencies of the local people, it is critical that their capacities are strengthened and new capacities built.
- Rural communities are a vital location for learning, but they are usually neglected and sometimes provided with learning programmes that serve more the interests of the providers than the needs of the local people.
- Too often, adult learning experiences are not documented and shared with the local and global adult learning community.
- If seen in isolation from questions of maintenance and infrastructure, the costs of high-tech ICTs (Computers and Internet) tend to be under-estimated and their accessibility overrated.
- “Older” ICTs, in particular radio, but also TV where available, remain the most accessible, cost-effective and appropriate technology (particularly in rural areas). In addition, radio can be most useful in transforming education (role of teachers, learner-centeredness).
- The positive impact of study circles on developing social skills and building critical citizenship, which has been widely recognized, is not yet sufficiently exploited.

III. Policy and Programme Recommendations

→ To Networks:

- Ensure a more inclusive representation (both geographically as well as with a view to different stakeholders) in networks at all levels.

→ To NGOs/Civil Society:

- Continue to lobby at national, regional and local level vis-à-vis policy planners, funders, academics and other stakeholders on behalf of your interests.
- Identify barriers to cooperation and engage in dialogue to ensure a shared vision to reach the excluded.

→ To Programme Designers:

- Make citizenship and democracy central to the design of adult education programmes.
- Use the concept of (the multiple aspects of) diversity as the organizing principle of education programmes, sensitization campaigns and teacher training, with respect for all as a core component.
- While recognizing that unity is not uniformity, direct learning programme towards unity in diversity.
- Employ a pluri-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-nation and gender-sensitive approach in every programme and campaign geared towards learning.
- Design programmes that empower learners, make learning fun, and are based on respect and spirituality, imagination and creativity.
- Include advocacy and negotiation skills in capacity-building programmes for learners and communities.
- Ensure that a needs assessment/analysis, which involves the local population/community, precedes the design and implementation of literacy and learning programmes.
- When doing the needs analysis, value what is already in the community and build on what they have.
- Ensure that people and communities are participants in, and not just recipients of planning processes.

→ To Governments:

- Engage/Involve NGOs, learners' associations and other partners from civil society at national, regional and local level in policy planning and the design of literacy and adult learning programmes.
- Ensure that people and communities at the grassroots level are participants in, and not just objects, of international meetings as well as the preparation of these events.
- Integrate respective budget lines and allocate resources to ensure an in-depth preparation of programmes.
- Create and accelerate accreditation possibilities for non-formal learning.
- Consider and exploit radio in designing distance literacy and learning programmes, particularly in rural areas.
- Ensure a policy (with clear and measurable targets/fixed quotas) on indigenous publications, learners' publications and publications in mother tongues and local languages, and allocate appropriate resources.
- Give official status to indigenous languages.
- Recognize the mobilization value of learning festivals and support them (financially and logistically) so that they become sustainable.

- Integrate learning festivals into official calendars.

→ *To Specific Institutions:*

- ADEA: Include, aside from teachers' and parents' associations, learners' associations in your policy dialogue and meetings.
- UIE and other funders: Continue to support the Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network (ALADIN), especially in building capacities for information management in the South.
- UIE: Organize an international learners' forum next year (in conjunction with the next International ALW), preceded by regional forums, and support the creation of an international learners' association.
