



A series of 29 booklets
documenting workshops
held at the Fifth
International Conference
on Adult Education

CONFINTEA
HAMBURG
1997

10 a International cooperation

Enhancing international cooperation and solidarity



This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

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Theme 10: Enhancing international cooperation and solidarity

Booklet under this theme:

10a Enhancing international cooperation and solidarity

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Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference **The Hamburg Declaration** and **The Agenda for the Future**, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Enhancing international cooperation and solidarity

Introduction

What should be the purpose of international cooperation in the field of adult learning? What should be its meaning in today's global context? What are the mechanisms which make international cooperation effective in accomplishing its objectives? These and many related issues were discussed at the workshop "Enhancing International Cooperation and Solidarity" held at the 1997 Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), in Hamburg. The workshop was chaired by Kasama Varavarn, Ministry of Education, Thailand. The panel of speakers featured Paul Fordham, University of Warwick, International Centre for Education in Development; John Oxenham, Economic Development Institute, World Bank; Rajesh Tandon (ASPBAE); Clinton Robinson, Collective Consultation of NGOs for Literacy and Education for All; Peter Inkei, Ministry of Culture and Education, Hungary; Joe Samuel, Lecturer, Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University of Western Cape, South Africa; Barry Wilson; and Ingemar Gustavson, Department of Democracy and Social Development, SIDA, Stockholm.

A major thrust of the conference was to shift the emphasis in international cooperation from assistance to one of partnership, participation, networking, and mutuality. The participants in the workshop stressed that these concepts, which are central to adult learning, need to be taken all the more seriously at a time of increasing economic globalisation and accelerating development in the field of information and communications.

Like many other conferences, CONFINTEA V proposed the strengthening of international cooperation in adult learning. However, unlike previous conferences, it ensured that international cooperation did not mean simply cooperation between governments, nor the dominance of the North over the South. Care was taken to include NGOs in the process and to maintain a balance of regional interests through a series of preliminary regional meetings.

International cooperation in the past

In its earlier phase, international cooperation essentially took the form of a one-way assistance from the richer North to the poorer South. This assistance also tended to be linked to unilateral conditionalities. Preconditions still imposed by some donors inhibit openness in awarding contracts and make it difficult to involve NGO's participation in the implementation of programmes.

Most governments in industrialised countries have created a ministry or agency for international cooperation. At times these bodies are forced to adapt to criteria set by ministries of economy and finance. Under such circumstances adult education and community participation do not always receive the attention they deserve in development programmes.

The issues

In the field of international cooperation there are now many changes taking place. First, globalisation is creating the perception that major problems in the world today are shared by everyone on the planet. Secondly, after the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Eastern Block, the old geo-political divisions have lost their meaning. Increasingly there is a realisation that human societies rest on shared fundamental values and that it is in their interest to cooperate. This also applies to the area of development. Sustainability demands that the objectives, values and goals of development of the programmes be shared by both partners and donor agencies and defined in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

The new paradigm of international cooperation in adult education

International cooperation should not mean merely the transfer of resources and technical know-how but rather mutual learning and sharing of experiences. It should also involve institutional and organisational development, reciprocal communication and all parties learning from the process of international cooperation.

International cooperation needs to be viewed as a mutually beneficial exercise between partners, for the purpose of enhancing their capacities

to pursue their educational goals. It should be a mutually empowering experience and include a wide variety of actors from the grassroots to the national and international level. Only this plurality of activities and plurality of partners can give the right kind of thrust and momentum that is necessary for accomplishing the goals of international cooperation in adult education.

New vision in adult learning

Adult learning is based on cooperation. National as well as international cooperation should follow the principles of adult learning, i.e. mutuality, participation and partnership. Mutual learning is one of the approaches characteristic of this vision. Other essential features of the new approach to adult learning are :

- 1 It is increasingly world-wide, corresponding to common concerns that connect people across the world.
- 2 Much of it takes place outside the fold of formal education, in informal settings.
- 3 Adult learners are treated as autonomous and responsible beings and not as passive consumers.
- 4 Adult learning is no longer confined to the traditional education sector but encompasses virtually all areas of life from health and population to multiculturalism and the economy.
- 5 The focus is on local groups wanting to learn as well as on a holistic education where job-related adult education and capacity building in civil society are brought together. It seeks to create active and inclusive citizenship by encouraging individuals to learn to transform themselves from within. Creativity, imagination and promotion of an active citizenship are seen as important parts of learning to change.
- 6 Learners are encouraged to be active participants in all programmes from the planning stage onwards.

Only by viewing learning as capacity building of the whole civil society is there hope that disparities between people will diminish and an inclusive, more democratic society be created.

International cooperation also needs to take into account some of the risks that go with these new developments in adult education, for example:

- Many social movements and networks are finding wider economic and political events beyond their control.
- There are risks in moving away from the old discourse of education to the new one of “learning”. It is easier for public figures to make pronouncements about the right to learn, but fail to act when it comes to provision. Furthermore, the notion of adult “learning” could be used as an excuse for leaving adults to struggle on their own.
- High participation figures do not necessarily mean democratic involvement, greater accessibility for the ‘have-nots’ or genuine social mobilisation.
- Although the new extended vision of adult education cuts across all sectors, many educators of adults, such as health workers, do not see themselves as part of the adult learning enterprise.

Mechanisms for effective international cooperation

Participation is the key word in international cooperation. New partnerships are being created. Government agencies, a multiplicity of development NGOs, women's organisations, trade unions, business corporations, human rights and environmental groups – all of these are now becoming engaged in the work of international advocacy for adult learning. All these partners should agree on joint objectives of programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. They need to see themselves as actors in adult education in a holistic sense, where learning includes all aspects of life and all sectors of development.

The role of NGOs in adult education must be sufficiently appreciated. In the context of international cooperation, NGOs are becoming increasingly involved in adult learning programmes. A collective consultation mechanism has been specially negotiated by UNESCO in order

to ensure a strong representation of NGOs in the adult learning sector. NGOs should be adequately acknowledged in government policies, and their diversity and autonomy sufficiently recognised. It is necessary to use their potential to the fullest, enhancing cooperation between government and NGOs as well as among NGOs themselves and other players in development. There is a need for NGOs to be present in international forums to receive information which they can then disseminate to other organisations in the field.

Creating an environment conducive to international cooperation also entails providing greater opportunities for grassroots workers and learners to meet and interact with one another on both a South-South and a North-South basis.

Job-related training and education for active citizenship are complementary and should not be treated as separate entities. Training networks across regions should serve as mechanisms for upgrading adult education and making it more holistic.

A critical task at the macro level is to avoid negative impacts of structural adjustment programmes and other policies (fiscal, trade, work, health, industry) affecting the allocation of resources to the education sector.

Public policy frameworks need urgent review in many countries. The extended networks in the field of adult learning can become active only if there is a suitable public policy environment. There should be greater commitment by both member states and donor agencies to adult education as an integral part of learning throughout life.

To make adult education an integral part of development projects depends to a great extent on the policies of the partner countries and on breaking down the division of planning projects according to sectors. To make projects sustainable certain standards for adult education should be established, such as respect for human rights, protection of the environment, empowerment of women and participation of learners in planning and evaluation to secure ownership.

Sensitive monitoring and evaluation of adult learning programmes and projects should be done in cooperation with all actors involved, and built on regular dialogue and discussions, so that they can become a continuous and common learning process. Monitoring is also important in order to take steps to avoid the negative impacts of structural adjustment programmes and other policies on the allocation of resources to the education sector, with special reference to adult education.

Different actors and social partners should be given the mandate to carry out evaluation and monitoring.

Multilateral financial institutions should be:

- involved in the debate on adult learning in relation to the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes on education;
- encouraged to contribute financially to networks for local, regional and global cooperation between adult educators;
- involved in a transfer of resources where all partners play an active role;
- encouraged to respect the visions of their partners;
- encouraged to influence the policies of member states in favour of adult learning, rather than simply acquiesce in policies and projects promoted by borrowing members. In this regard, however, multilateral financial institutions need to be provided with the information with which they can advocate policies and projects, for example data on the state of adult learning, the theories of effective adult learning, the social and individual costs and benefits of adult learning programmes, the conditions for successful implementation of programmes and the effects of literacy and adult learning on abilities to absorb, organise and transmit information.

In a period of rapid change it is necessary to have regular exchange of experience and expertise between sectors and between regions and countries facing similar problems. An important way of disseminating information is by preparing national and regional reports and disseminating them among public and private agencies, trade unions and social partners involved in adult learning.

Mutual learning requires networking at all levels because the actors involved in adult learning are increasing and because new bridges are being built between formal and non-formal education. Mutual learning is the test whether partnership as a principle of cooperation and solidarity has been put in practice.

Conclusion

Following CONFINTEA V, UNESCO will be playing a leading role in international cooperation in the field of adult learning and in mobilising support of all partners, not only within the United Nations and multi-lateral systems, but also among non-governmental and other organisations in civil society.

For reasons of economy and efficiency, international cooperation will be based on existing institutions, structures and networks. The aim is to make the existing machinery for action, coordination and monitoring more effective, rather than duplicating it.

The challenge of a global economy must be met through global cooperation by:

- promoting lifelong learning, taking into account advantages in terms of flexibility, diversity and availability at different times and in different places;
- enhancing the new vision of adult learning which is both holistic, embracing all aspects of life, and cross-sectoral, including all sectors of cultural, social and economic activity;
- expanding the capacities of governments, NGOs and the private sector to develop alliances to promote “learning societies”;
- promoting an understanding of international human rights as the framework for the global society;
- governments acting on the consensus developed among multilateral organisations that each industrialised country should devote 0.7 per cent of gross national product to international cooperation and that each development project should include an adult learning component.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 10

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