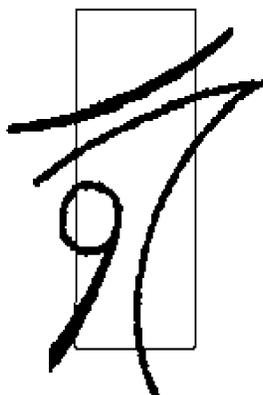




Assessing achievements in adult education and learning: The CONFINTEA V Midterm Review Conference

A key to sustainable development in the 21st century and a means for bringing about justice, peace and solidarity around the globe is adult education and learning. In order to assess what has been achieved towards accomplishing these goals worldwide in the past six years, more than 300 participants from over 90 countries took part in the CONFINTEA V Midterm Review Conference held in Bangkok, Thailand, 6 -11 September 2003. The conference was organized by the UNESCO Institute for Education in collaboration with the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and with support from the Department of Non-formal Education of the Ministry of Education of Thailand. It brought together members of governments with representatives of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities and research institutions. They met to follow up on the implementation of commitments and recommendations made at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in July 1997 in Hamburg, and to prepare the ground for CONFINTEA VI, which will take place in 2009.



A series of thematic workshops addressed the basic contexts of adult education and learning. These included: democracy; poverty; literacy; work; gender; health and the environment; higher education institutions; documentation and information networking; teacher training and the quality of adult-learning programs; monitoring and evaluation; museums, libraries and cultural heritage; information and communication technologies; the needs of special groups: persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants, and prisoners; finally, international co-operation and solidarity.

Five sessions were held on regional reviews of Africa, the Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean. They were supplemented by fifty country reviews presented along with the findings of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). In a concluding round-table discussion, representatives of the United Nations Fund for Population Activity, the European Union, the German Ministry of Education and Research, the World Bank and a former Latin American Minister of Education spoke to the foremost challenges facing adult education and learning in today's rapidly changing world.

A major outcome of the meeting lies in its “Call for Action and Accountability”. Participants in the review came to the conclusion that despite the promises made in 1997, adult education and learning has not yet received the attention which it warrants in recent national educational reforms and international drives to eliminate poverty and illiteracy and provide education for all. Their assessment highlighted numerous policy and legislative innovations, an increased tide of participation in adult education and learning, and significant advances in the empowerment of women. Nonetheless, they found that the ability of adult education and learning to contribute to establishing a world of democracy and peace and its potential to support struggles against poverty and violence, HIV/AIDS, and environmental destruction, among other problems, are not being adequately realized. In warning that declines in public funding for adult education threaten to erode what gains have been made, participants were unanimous in calling for renewed commitment to these goals and better accountability for their attainment, greater sharing of national and international resources and more creative partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector.

The Conference Report can be obtained from UIE (c.sebastiani@unesco.org). It is available in English, French and Spanish.

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