

Policy on Adult Learning in Uzbekistan

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Uzbekistan is a multi-ethnic society: more than 100 ethnic groups live on its territory. The native inhabitants are Uzbeks, which consist of about 80% population. The official language is Uzbek, although the Russian, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Tajik, Kyrgyz and Turkmen languages are used as teaching language in secondary schools of Uzbekistan. Within formal education system government provides textbooks in above mentioned seven languages. In order to create optimal conditions for integration in the international community, since 1996 the long-term transfer programme from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet has been under way. Due to the intensive demographic growth rate, children, adolescents and young adults up to the age of 25 years comprise 60% of the total population. More than half of the population of Uzbekistan is rural and is engaged in agriculture. The right for access to education is stipulated in Chapter 41 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan, which states: "Each and every citizen has a right to education. The government guarantees equal and equitable access for free education".

The process of strengthening the links between the economic system and education system is the main feature of the latest developments in society. When Uzbekistan became a sovereign state in September 1991, and started the gradual transition to a market economy, these changes required an adequate system of education and training. Such a system was designed to reflect the rapidly changing labor market conditions and to encourage indigenous improvements in the structure of the education cycle, as well as pedagogical contents. The transition to a market economy caused a strong demand for new curricula, new teaching methods and new interpretations of literacy, competence, practical knowledge, professional qualifications and employable skills.

The Government of Uzbekistan declared education as priority sphere for social and economic development, democratization, humanization of all fields of public life. Adoption of new Education Law and National Programme on Personnel Training in 1997 have given a new impetus to the development of education system and emergence new types of educational institutions. The essence and distinguished peculiarity of the new education model however is the integrated system approach in corporation with such basic components like: personality, state and community, continuous education, science and production. The key element of new legal framework is the creation of a knowledge society by introduction lifelong learning programs. Reforms are not only related with modification of continuous education structure and development of learning standards, but as well with introduction of new learning approach, such as multilingual and multicultural education. New education structure, which could be considered as system of skill improvement, provides 12 years of compulsory secondary and vocational education. Democratization and decentralization of learning process leads to the emergence of various forms of non-formal education. Formal education system covering continuous learning process from pre-school to university level. Non-formal education provides additional learning opportunity for adults. Since the literacy rate in Uzbekistan is about 100%, adult learning programs mostly oriented for personal development and empowerment. These programs are stimulating establishment of professional associations and development of civil society, promoting the concept and practice of human development. In term of social implications and transformation of mentality, there are, at least, two important outcomes of the adult education in Uzbekistan:

- the replacement of public ownership by private ownership;
- switch from centralized to largely decentralized making decision process.

The principal goal of government's policy on adult education as well as on whole lifelong learning process is to promote learning culture within society. Learning culture will have to lead to a changing canon of education. New canon of education should create conditions for new society, that can move and nurture plural citizenships, citizenships that are aware of diversity and can welcome diversity, that can live together in a multicultural global village, will celebrate diversity and learning environments.

In order to anticipate the impact of globalization adult learning programs designed in a way to provide flexible and lifelong opportunities enabling learners to adapt to demands for new knowledge and skills.

New educational standards were adopted by the Government of Uzbekistan in 2001. On the basis of the new standards respective educational institutes had elaborated their own curriculum and introduced new training facilities.

New educational standards are focusing on:

- expanding the labour market in the service sector, which is still small, to offset redundancies in manufacturing and farming;
- developing small-scale enterprises, which will provide most of the jobs in the economy;
- encouraging the emergence of a new productive class, which will strengthen the social pluralism that is the essence of democracies;
- restoring the values of merit, risk-taking, innovation and hard work which are then driving forces of a market economy.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, in the meantime, governmental and non-governmental structures are dealing with the activity of adult education. In accordance with Education Law, both Ministry of Public Education and Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of Uzbekistan considers systematically such questions, regulates development of network jointly with local executive authorities, strengthens technical equipment base, creates and recommends curriculums, programmes, textbooks, carries out the preparation of teachers. These programs give learning opportunity for adults to get recognized educational qualifications and enhance their empowerment in society.

Citizens of the country, independently on their age, have all necessary conditions to be trained at the different kind of educational establishments such as: vocational, secondary special and higher schools, Universities, advanced training courses, cultural houses, studios and community learning centers. Adult education, particularly in the transitional period plays important social role and provides possibilities to improve the potential of manpower. For example, taking into the account the on-going long-term programme of transition from Cyrillic to Latin script, the short-term training courses on functional literacy of adults has been organized within various educational institutes.

During the next decade the getting both secondary and vocational education will become more significant trends. The main concern is getting the job by youth after completing vocational education. Transition to the new economic relations in country leading to the changes of requirements of the labor market. According to the changing in the economic structure the needs in the education is changing as well. People have to be retrained. In this connection another concern related with content and quality of textbooks. The textbooks are composed separately for adult education in order to meet new requirements.

New policy is promoting democratization of educational management by means of broadening autonomy of educational institutions, attracting private sector, NGO's and local community to the construction of learning society.

All these efforts are creating positive attitudes of youth towards lifelong education and professional career. Youth is in an unfavorable position to compete with working adults for long-existing jobs, but have more chances of getting new jobs created in private and informal sectors. As unusual phenomena, compared to some other countries experience, is that in the period of profound social transformation in Uzbekistan, the young generation is increasingly pragmatic and active in the informal sector and self-employment. In accordance with sociological survey majority of youth try to improve their qualifications and find a job corresponding to their education.

These trends stimulated the creation of alternative non-governmental educational centers, which providing short-term training courses for upgrading professional qualifications of adults. In this regard, the example of support of UNESCO in creation of Community Learning Centers in Uzbekistan accelerated the process of introducing new modes for adult and lifelong education, particularly in rural and remote areas.

As consequences, there is great demand in country for qualified educators in such educational centers. The Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education are developed a concept of skills upgrading and structure for the period till 2005. The existing system of skills upgrading have two Academies, 22 institutes (retraining scientific-pedagogical institutions), 21 faculties at the various Universities, 4 nation-wide centers, 14 specialized courses and "ISTEDOD" National Foundation. These educational institutions serve 8 following areas of knowledge: education; humanitarian sciences and arts; social and economic sciences, business and law; natural sciences; engineering and building construction; agriculture and farming; health care and social welfare; public services.

In order to support lifelong learning system another innovative mode has been introduced as well – Information Centers within public educational institutes. The tasks of the Information Centers are following:

- rendering telecommunication services (distance education);
- duplicating, circulation of scientific literature and teaching aids and information;
- information marketing;
- wide utilization of small-scale publishing facilities for provision of learning materials;
- introduction of virtual library system;
- elaboration of teaching materials on the basis of ICT (multimedia CD-ROMs).

The Information Centers are an integral part of educational institutions, which provides lifelong learning programs, contributing to the elaboration of mechanism for establishing of "knowledge society". The monitoring and evaluation of activities of such Information Centers are carried out by respective academic council of educational institution.

The trends towards more and better human resources development in Uzbekistan, including lifelong and adult education, is inevitable. The challenge is to facilitate the process in appropriate forms according to the demands of democratic societies and labour markets, and youth aspirations.

The central and local education institutions in Uzbekistan are facing a need to collaborate with foreign lifelong education institutions, as well as industry and commerce in dealing with such issues as:

1. development of a curriculums and training materials for the different levels and types of adult education, with more emphasis on practicalities and externalities of the initial period of economic activities, including informal sector and self-employment operations;
2. designing in-science teacher training and retraining schemes to improve the competence of trainers and the quality of education together with qualitative market-oriented changes in the teacher training institutions;
3. creation of the professional networks (professional associations) for lifelong and adult education for coordination of activities and better dissemination of "good practices".

Undoubtedly, many of the goals set by Uzbekistan depend on the acquisition and application of additional resources. It is abundantly clear that at least in the early years of the next decade, not all of these can be provided by the government and so other sources will have to found. This will require new kinds of partnerships to be forged between government and local community. It will also require greater coordination between government and international bilateral and other agencies so that projects can be designed and implemented that fit into larger programmes which in turn are elements of national strategy.

This may not be an easy task as education system managers in Uzbekistan have little experience of working with local communities in a truly collaborative manner. Of course, it is true that local communities have little experience of working with senior education planners and project managers from central government. Moreover, it must be said that international and bilateral agencies often have their own priorities and these may not be consonant with those of other agencies or be consistent with the strategies of national education planners.

Compared with areas of primary, basic and secondary education, the areas of adult and lifelong education in Uzbekistan has also substantive organizational and institutional response to the tremendous social demand for new knowledge and skills, corresponding to the challenges of emerging market economy and democracy.

The existed in the Soviet past qualitative mismatch between adult and lifelong education, from one side, and then labour market offsets, from other side, the impressive quantitative figures of graduates and diploma specialists who where the first victims of unemployment due to the structural adjustment policies in the public sector. Enormous public resources were spent to teach overspecialized disciplines, but the students and graduates were defenseless in a market economy. Even higher education diploma was no longer a guarantee of employment or adequate remuneration.

Transition to a new system of education has been started in 1998 and will be completed during forthcoming decade. The development and rational placement of new educational institutions within the system of secondary specialized and vocational training taking into account geographical and demographic conditions of the locations and local needs in specialists of the necessary profile. In order to support this transformation process, UNESCO have started in 1998 the project Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Uzbekistan. The objective of the project is to support "Education for All" strategy and promote lifelong education system with particularly focus on non-formal education programmes. Non-formal education programs covering early childhood, adult education and etc. on the level and with support of local community, representatives of civil society. In the meantime there are ten functioning CLC in Uzbekistan. Adults participate in various activities of the CLC's. This is another dimension to the new kinds of partnerships that need to be built between government and communities is related to identification of the learning needs of individuals and communities, and in the collaborative design of modalities and mechanisms for service delivery.

Despite to the fact that the Republic of Uzbekistan has a huge potential of the educators in secondary and higher educational establishments, most of them, being good specialists in taught subject, often use old educational methodology and technology of the previous generations, that does not allow effective involvement of the students into the learning process.

The "ISTEDOD" National Foundation (which was created on the basis of unification of "USTOZ" and "UMID" National Foundations) carries out systematic retraining and improvement of professional skill of adults (students, educators, etc.) in the areas of their specialization according to 28 priorities identified. Implementing educational programs, "ISTEDOD" Foundation has faced a problem of poor technological equipment in regional high schools, colleges, lyceums, and universities. In many higher educational establishments there are single computers not linked into local network and without access to Internet. The absence of the modern technical equipment and access to worldwide informational webs does not allow the teacher to reach a level of colleagues from developed foreign countries.

In this regard the idea of the organization of Mobile Technical Center was suggested as one of the option for solving some of the outlined above problems. Center, located in Community Learning Center, could be equipped by portable computers linked in a network with access to Internet can be placed on microbus and assembled in any place within 1- 2 hours. Based on such mobile center it is possible to effectively conduct seminars and training courses. It has been proposed to create several mobile teams of trainers (within existing CLC's of Uzbekistan), those who obtained abroad experience in various areas of study. These teams during year will conduct training seminars, replacing one another, in all regions of the country. Seminars will cover all 28 specialization identified as priority.

The short-term objectives of the Mobile Training Center are to improve of professional skills of population (for example, agricultural extension programme), to provide updated retraining facilities for educators, to establish close collaboration networks with potential partners (educational, scientific and cultural institutions) from abroad.

The long-term objectives of the Mobile Training Center are promotion community empowerment, establishment of, so called, "Smart Corridor" between rural and urban areas of country and construction of infrastructure for distance education.

The tasks of the Mobile Training Center are following:

- in-country and abroad training of mobile teams of educators and specialists from local institutions;

- organization of training seminars on new educational technologies and methodologies;
- organization of retraining courses on the priority specialties;
- organization of virtual libraries on various subjects of education;
- monitoring, evaluation and feedback of training activities.

With the purpose of a realization of gradual and continuous education within the framework of implementation of the National Programme on Personnel Training it is planned once a two years to technically upgrade the computer equipment and constantly improve professional skill of experts of the mobile teams.

The strategy on establishment of “Smart Corridor” will be based on joint collaboration governmental and non-governmental organizations of Uzbekistan with foreign partners in order to promote creation of open democratic society oriented on market economy. The strategy of joint operations seems to be the most effective mechanism for promotion of lifelong learning in country.

In-country training courses of the Mobile Training Team will cover issues on:

- study of new teaching methods, standards of various foreign educational systems, educational curriculums and programs;
- qualification and recognition of diplomas, equivalency mechanism between formal and non-formal education;
- introduction of scientific achievements into the educational process;
- basic skills on utilization of modern informational technology in daily life;
- elaboration of multimedia, video or radio educational programs;
- improving the knowledge of foreign languages.

The “Smart Corridor” will connect all Community Learning Centers among themselves and with well-known scientific, educational and cultural institutions in country and abroad. At the first stage, because there are 14 administrative regions in Uzbekistan, the Mobile Training Teams of the Community Learning Centers will serve to several regions. On the basis of collected information, the Mobile Training team will create virtual library, which will contain textbooks, methodological handbooks, science education, etc. Providing adults with an opportunity of familiarization with new textbooks, educational and scientific journals are one of the major element in creation of a favorable environment for construction of a learning society.