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CONSOLIDATED REPORT ON THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ADULT EDUCATION (Hamburg, 14-18 July 1997)

OUTLINE

Source: 28 C/Resolution 1.1 (para. 2) and 28 C/Resolution 1.4 (para. 3).

Background: In accordance with these resolutions, and upon the invitation of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, the fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) was held in Hamburg from 14 to 18 July 1997. It was organized by UNESCO in co-operation with a broad range of partners including United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, development co-operation institutions, universities, and other institutions active in the field of adult education. The UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg, played a leading role in the preparation and organization of the Conference.

Purpose: The present report summarizes the main discussions of the Conference which put a strong emphasis on gender justice, the inclusive approaches to learning involving and associating minorities and people with disabilities, the shared responsibilities of NGOs and representatives of civil society in this field. The Conference also stressed the importance of adult literacy as a tool for fostering ecologically sustainable development, as well as the critical place of partnership and networking in adult learning. A full report is under preparation and will be distributed to all Member States and partner organizations. The Declaration and the Agenda for the Future of Adult Learning adopted by the Conference are available upon request.

Decision required: The document requires no decision.

INTRODUCTION

1. The fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) was organized in pursuance of resolutions 1.1 and 1.4 adopted by the General Conference at its twenty-eighth session. At the invitation of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany it took place in the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg from 14 to 18 July 1997. The Conference, although organized by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg, mobilized the co-operation and support of a wide range of partners, including United Nations organizations and programmes, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector. In fact it is to be considered as a collective effort and each organization, institution, or person that participated in the Conference is to be warmly thanked for their very active contribution and support.

2. The Conference was attended by a total of 1,415 participants including 41 Ministers, 17 Vice- and Deputy Ministers; 711 representatives (from 130 Member States, two Associate Members, two Non-Member States, one representative of the Palestinian Authority); 14 representatives of organizations of the United Nations system, and 17 representatives of intergovernmental organizations, 438 representatives of NGOs and 215 representatives of foundations and civil society.

3. CONFINTEA V, which followed four previous Conferences (Elsinore, 1949; Montreal, 1960; Tokyo, 1972; Paris, 1985), was held on the eve of the new millennium. It was backed by a wide range of preparatory activities: five regional consultations (Barcelona, Cairo, Dakar, Jomtien and Brasilia), a comprehensive questionnaire sent to all Member States and 12 international NGOs, a series of preparatory meetings with different thematic focuses and a set of important documents including a Draft Declaration on Adult Learning and an Agenda for the Future of Adult Learning.

PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

4. The general objective of the Conference was to highlight the importance of adult learning, to forge a worldwide commitment to adult and continuing education in the perspective of lifelong learning for all, to make recommendations for future policy and priorities, and to promote international co-operation in the field of adult education.

THE WORK OF THE CONFERENCE

5. The Conference, opened by the Director-General of UNESCO, was addressed by eminent personalities including His Excellency Mr Roman Herzog, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Her Excellency Ms Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Mr Henning Voscherau, First Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg; it elected as its President Ms Rita Süßmuth, President of the German Parliament, and as its Rapporteur, Ms Esi Sutherland-Addy from Ghana.

6. Delegates welcomed the enlarged concept proposed by the Secretariat to open the floor to all participants, irrespective of their status, while reserving the right to vote only to representatives of Member States as per the rules and procedures of category II meetings.

7. Another working principle, agreed upon, was to give preference in the plenary sessions to regional and subregional presentations instead of individual country presentations. Besides government delegates, representatives of NGOs and partner agencies and institutions were also provided with the opportunity to present their views and perspectives in order to

contribute to the building of a constructive partnership, especially for the implementation of the Agenda for the Future. (The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the World Bank).

8. The main conference deliberations were centred around four major activities: (1) the plenary presentation, review and discussion of current policies, practices and related issues; (2) the adoption of the Hamburg Declaration and the Agenda; (3) the exchange of experiences on the present and future of adult learning in the world, presented in some 33 concurrent sessions held by various thematic working groups; and (4) a series of public media round tables and panels. These media and advocacy activities were designed to provide space for discussing critical issues such as gender equity, the learning cities, literacy for empowerment and sustainable development, and partnership and international co-operation. A special event was organized to pay tribute to two late eminent adult educators and world citizens who influenced deeply and transformed the concept and practice of literacy and adult education during the last several decades, namely Paolo Freire and Dame Nita Barrow.

RESULTS OF THE CONFERENCE

9. The Conference stressed the fact that the world was passing through a process of great and rapid transformation deepening the inequalities and widening the poverty gap amongst the global community, and that education and learning, of which adult learning is a vital component, can contribute to responding and shaping this transformation process for the good of the people. Many examples were provided of a variety of strategies adopted by learning groups to overcome the present obstacles, and to anticipate and chart a better future.

10. However, it was also observed that the sheer vastness of available information and skills, the blazing speed of change and immense opportunities offered by the millennium contrasted with the relentlessly growing number of people for whom basic literacy and numeracy remain a cruel illusion. Hence the warning that unless policy-makers, researchers and practitioners in the field of adult learning rally their forces persistently around the globe into the next century, the full effects of exclusion and marginalization will turn the promise of the coming century into a sour disappointment.

11. One outstanding feature of this Conference was the clear recognition of the central role that learning can play in sustainable development and its contribution in particular to poverty reduction and income generation, empowerment and consolidation of democracy, disease prevention and sustainable health, and to the protection and improvement of the environment.

12. Adult learning was found to be a vital catalyst and a facilitator in addressing the world's environmental problems, and the environment was projected as a key issue in adult education for the twenty-first century. Health education and health literacy appeared very strongly for the first time on the agenda of an international adult education conference. It was forcefully stressed that they should constitute an integral and significant part of adult education; the level of education is reflected in the health status, and adult education is a process of enabling people to increase control over their life condition and welfare. This is of special significance to women who can gain control over their reproductive health and capacities.

13. It was especially stressed that adult education for democracy, peace and human rights needed to be critical, creative and compassionate, to develop capacities to feel, to learn and to act locally, nationally and globally. A real challenge for adult educators in many countries was to learn how to move from the politics of resistance to the politics of participation; how to move, while carrying hopes and dreams in a slow and fragile process of democratization, towards strategies of more equitable economic development. The Conference emphasized the role of literacy and adult learning in promoting the concept of active and critical citizenship which comprises the ability to interpret experience, to make individual decisions and to participate in political processes, and in the fulfilment of individual dignity.

14. CONFINTEA V saw the emergence of a new vision of adult learning and called for a shift, a new role to face the political and economic changes taking place in the socially transformed world. The Conference was viewed and lived by many participants as a sounding board to construct a new shared vision looking at adult learning as an integral part of lifelong and lifewide learning processes, promoting family and community learning as well as dialogues between culture, respecting differences and diversities, and thus contributing to building a culture of peace.

15. This new, enlarged and integrated vision of adult education should call for the creation of *inclusive learning societies* building on all the potential and resources of all people and the environment. The major achievements of the Conference, which cut across all its deliberations and transpired in the work and outcomes of all the commissions and thematic groups, were encapsulated in *five aspects* largely recognized and enthusiastically backed by the participants. These are: the strong emphasis on *gender justice*, the *inclusive approaches* to learning involving and associating *minorities and people with disabilities* and building on their initiatives, projects and needs; the shared responsibilities of *NGOs* and various representatives of *civil society* in the formulation, provision, management and evaluation of adult education programmes; the *integration of literacy and adult education into development* activities and the critical place of *partnership and networking* in adult learning.

16. The Conference urged governments and participants to acknowledge the learners not as objects but as subjects of their learning projects and initiatives. In such a context, adult education should more specifically contribute to the struggle for social and economic development, justice, equality, respect for traditional cultures and recognition of every human being through individual empowerment and social transformation addressing human suffering in all contexts: oppression, poverty, child labour, genocide and denial of learning opportunities based on class, gender, race or ethnicity.

17. The importance of *gender equity* and its transversal and all-pervasive dimension were highlighted, and a firm commitment made by all actors and partners present to translate these in their programmes. In a plea for gender-sensitive lifelong learning, the need to recognize women's knowledge and potential was emphasized, particularly in an environment in which women's work tends to be devalued. Women and youth have been brought back to the centre of health and population issues from the human rights and development perspectives; this requires listening to their point of view and respecting them as active subjects, finding appropriate creative and imaginative methodologies to address their main preoccupations.

18. Although there are many excellent policy documents in place, implementation is lacking or lagging. While formal schooling in certain contexts has contributed to the emancipation of women, it is also true that it has resulted in the reproduction and reinforcement of gender inequalities and stereotype gender roles. Some non-formal and adult education programmes have successfully addressed the issue of women's empowerment by

building on their family and community experiences, but much remains to be done to implement programmes geared towards making both men and women gender-sensitive, thereby narrowing the existing social and economic gender gaps.

19. Similarly, thanks to their active involvement and creative contribution, *people with disabilities* were recognized as vital actors and fully fledged partners of adult learning and their specific learning needs put in the centre of priority concerns. A first step was done by the Conference organizers, who created optimal conditions for accessibility and participation in all deliberations for people with different disabilities. The use of sign language was appreciated and a recommendation was made to UNESCO to use sign language in all its meetings and to convene a first Conference on Lifelong Education for the Disabled in 1999.

20. Indigenous peoples and minority groups were also represented at the Conference. Their concerns, while similar in many respects, are also distinct. Indigenous peoples, holders of the world's traditional knowledge and history, have as such a unique role to play in contemporary society. Minorities claim a different vision of education expressed in language and culture. Like indigenous peoples, they are eager to participate in the spirit of 'learning to live together'. This spirit should also guide the education of millions of people affected by the increasing migrations. Adult learning in these contexts should be intercultural and respectful of the specific situations, needs and expectations.

21. The reality of the aging population was brought home to the Conference. More than 10 per cent of the world's population is over 60 years and this proportion will rise constantly while societies are still ill-prepared to face such historically new demographic conditions. It was evident to participants that adult education could make a difference by promoting a new vision of older adults as autonomous, responsible people and a productive force in society, giving them access to knowledge and new learning. A call was made to celebrate 1999, the International Year of Older People, and use it as a strong symbol of the changing world and demography.

22. In respect of all these groups with specific interests and needs, it is the majority, the dominant groups who have to unlearn discriminatory concepts; they must acquire knowledge and develop empathy and solidarity in order to respect the diversity and plurality of individuals, people and cultures. It is the obligation of education authorities to see that the teaching methods, learning approaches and curricula of adult and non-adult education reflect and enhance all these elements.

23. The fourth aspect of the Conference was constituted by the multi-varied participation of NGOs and their contribution to the deliberations and recommendations adopted. It is largely admitted that the engine of the new transformation recently observed on the adult education scene was to be found in the emergence of an active civil society through associations, NGOs and other socio-professional and cultural movements, and the dedication and know-how they brought into the field of adult education. The Conference made history by putting government delegations and NGOs together in negotiating and building a constructive framework for reflection and action, thus creating a powerful synergy moved by the engine of transformation thus constructed.

24. The Conference stressed the need to enhance, within a framework of partnership, international co-operation and solidarity; the key words underlined were partnership versus assistance, participation, mutual support and networking. International co-operation and solidarity should seek to promote and support human development programmes to enable adult learning throughout life, within and across sectors; to maximize opportunities for adult

learning by integrating its components into all development programmes and projects; and to increase the capacity of all the non-traditional actors to participate actively in adult learning opportunities.

DECLARATION AND AGENDA

25. At the close of its deliberations, the Conference adopted the *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning* and the *Agenda for the Future of Adult Learning*.

26. As the Hamburg Declaration points out, the informed and effective participation of men and women in every sphere of life is needed if humanity is to survive and to meet the challenges of the future. Adult education is more than a right, it is the key to the twenty-first century, it is a condition and a tool for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, gender justice and economic development.

27. The representatives of governments and non-governmental organizations and institutions participating in CONFINTEA V recognized the substantial transformation undergone by adult learning in terms of growth in scope and scale; nevertheless basic education and basic literacy remains a concern in several regions of the world. They underscored that learning throughout life implies the rethinking of content, and of the complementarity and continuity between various forms and modalities of learning.

28. The Hamburg Declaration stresses the point that in spite of the fact that new demands are made on society for learning and new affirmative actors are emerging and claiming responsibilities, the state remains the essential vehicle for ensuring the right to education and training for all, though its role is shifting within the new and expanding partnership between the public, private and community sectors.

29. In such a context, adult education was viewed not only as a right but also as a duty and a shared responsibility both to others and to society as a whole, and it is essential to create the conditions required to exercise this right.

30. The Agenda sets out in detail the new commitment to the development of adult learning as expressed in the Hamburg Declaration. It calls for concrete actions to be taken by governments, NGOs, UNESCO and its partners, the private sector and civil society.

31. Action-oriented recommendations were made on all issues discussed in the various instances of the Conference covering policy, practice, research, capacity-building and partnership and networking. In particular, the Agenda paid overt attention to the issues discussed below and called upon the governments, UNESCO, NGOs, the international community, and the private sector and social partners of adult education to give them priority and initiate corresponding actions to implement them.

POLICY AND ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

32. The following policy and action recommendations to UNESCO and its Member States and partners are submitted to the General Conference for its consideration.

33. The Conference succeeded to stimulate a process of redefining literacy and called upon all parties concerned to move away from the deficit and pathological approach to literacy, to view it in its plural contexts and to chart policies, and to redesign and implement programmes taking into account the fact that literacy acquisition is concerned with the making of and participation in literate culture and societies at individual, family, community, national and

regional levels. Apart from being considered a condition for economic development, literacy contributes greatly to the facilitation of the lifelong learning process of adults and children: at the same time, it can only be sustained if embedded in a literate culture. As a social practice, literacy has to build on the existing capital of local languages, cultures and knowledge.

34. The intricate relation between literacy and the mother tongue was greatly emphasized and governments, community organizations and adult education institutions were invited to depart from the fear and the misconception of multilingualism as a threat and obstacle, and rather to consider its potential by promoting bi-literacy and inclusive learning programmes, associating in particular minorities and local populations.

35. Adult learning must be seen as a productive investment. Investing in lifelong education should result in positive returns not only in economic growth but also improved quality of life and the overall sustainable development of society. Governments should guarantee a basic investment in adult education while developing a wide range of partnership with other actors in the field. It was observed that there are hidden social costs resulting from non-investment. All CONFINTEA partners were urged to support more research and contribute to capacity-building on cost-benefit relationships in order to guide and encourage a shift from supply-driven education to demand-driven systems of learning and the creation of open learning communities.

36. While universities should maintain their independence and retain their capacity to create and be innovative institutions of higher learning, they should respond to the needs of societies to rethink education in a world of global change, establish links between research, training and services to the community, and implement international research and co-operation in the field of adult learning.

37. The quality and transparency of data and information in literacy and adult education should be greatly improved. A better information base is the prerequisite for developing sustainable literacy and adult education policies, and may result in increased financing. Monitoring literacy and adult learning is of essential importance provided that this does not limit creativity and result in norms and standards that are not culturally sensitive and locally sustainable. Member States and other CONFINTEA partners were encouraged to undertake concerted initiatives in this direction, paying enough attention and providing resources for qualitative research.

38. Participants have been encouraged to invest in analysing the links of adult learning and the world of work. In this undertaking, the concept of work must be redefined, going beyond the idea of paid work and paying tribute to every area in which productive and reproductive responsibility are taken; this notably concerns women's activities. The new paradigm of work should inform adult and continuing education and inspire lifelong learning programmes at the workplace.

39. The potential of new information and communication technologies for adult education was mentioned by all and an appeal was made to further explore ways in which technology can be appropriately used for literacy and adult education. While it is true that technologies bear great potential for and can contribute to adult learning, given political will and support for the active appropriation of these tools, it is however important to remain critical about why, how and for whom the technologies are being used. In spite of the explosion of knowledge and new media, equitable access to information and knowledge on adult learning today remains a dream for many individuals and groups. As technology is foremost a tool,

there is an urgent need to invest more time and money to train people and build capacity and to launch a large exploratory study on the use of technology in literacy and adult education.

40. The Conference called for a radical change of attitude on the part of educational institutions and organizations, including the formal school system, universities, enterprises and all social partners. An extended form of dialogue between institutions is therefore necessary to allow for mobility between different learning environments and to promote new kinds of learning for the acquisition of new knowledge. A dynamic lifelong learning environment cannot be directed from top down, but presupposes a high degree of participation from adult citizens.

41. Cultural agencies and their resources such as libraries, museums, theatres, ecological parks and traditional community organizations are of utmost importance. The Conference recommended developing such agencies, promoting the democratization of their access, strengthening co-operation in their networking and creating in particular a network of networks of documentation and information services.

42. A consensus has emerged in respect to some key issues addressed by the Commissions and the Conference as a whole, and special recommendations were made to UNESCO and its partners for specific concerted actions which have to be followed up during the forthcoming biennium. This concerns the need for concerted activities, particularly in the following areas:

43. The strong call for renewed government commitment and shared responsibilities with civil society and the private sector in investing in adult learning.

44. The need to mobilize additional resources for least developed countries (LDCs), through debt swap, transfer of resources from arms purchase and other modalities.

45. The critical place to be taken up by civil society and national governments in the monitoring and follow-up of the implementation processes, and the creation of an *International Literacy and Adult Education Watch*. In this respect, UNESCO will mobilize its Regional Offices, Headquarters and field offices, especially the *UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), Hamburg*, which will be strengthened as an international reference centre, to undertake in co-operation with the CONFINTEA partners the necessary back-up requested.

46. The launching of a *United Nations Week for Adult Learners*, in conjunction with International Literacy Day to encourage and motivate adult learners, to mobilize the communities and to create an inclusive learning culture. UNESCO will steer the consultative process leading to the worldwide acceptance and celebration of this week.

47. The Conference also requested UNESCO and its partners to support the *One-Hour-A-Day for Learning Movement* aimed at promoting and fostering a culture of learning.

48. Finally, UNESCO and the international community were invited to launch, starting as early as 1998, a *Paolo Freire Decade on Literacy For All* in the perspective of learning throughout life together with the *African Decade for Education for All*.