



# Maputo Strategic Platform: The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment in Africa

LIFE 2006-2015



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Institute  
for Lifelong Learning



## What is LIFE – the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment?

LIFE is a new collaborative framework, aimed at coordinating policies, action, resources and ideas and speeding up the acquisition of literacy and basic education in all the countries most in need. It is both a strategy and an operating mechanism for the attainment of the objectives of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), Education for All (EFA) and the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and the successful achievement of national education plans. Within this context, all countries meeting LIFE criteria (adult literacy rate less than 50% and/or over 10 million people without basic literacy skills) must immediately set to work in order to extend, accelerate and improve their literacy strategies. In this respect, LIFE in itself is neither a programme nor a project, much less a fund. On the other hand, it does offer an effective operating framework for a massive intervention and for mobilizing resources on a large scale on the basis of a new kind of partnership.

### Implementing LIFE: a must for Africa

One of the priority aims stated in the African Union (AU) Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa from 2006 to 2015 is to enhance literacy competencies and develop cultural industries for the economic empowerment of women and men.

The first gathering of African LIFE countries on the implementation of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) took place in



Maputo from 29 to 31 January 2008 and was strengthened by the participation of Brazil and Haiti, the only LIFE countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The meeting highlighted the potentially enormous impact that this initiative could have on the achievement of the objectives set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Education for All (EFA), the

United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), as well as by the AU Second Decade of Education for Africa and other regional initiatives. It also drew attention to the risks and serious consequences that would arise in the event of failure to implement LIFE.

LIFE countries are indeed the most disadvantaged ones in Africa, and we have an obligation to act in solidarity with them for social justice and gender equality, an obligation that is embodied in this initiative, which is seen as the cornerstone of EFA and a foundation for lifelong learning.

## What needs to be done and by whom?

LIFE focuses on the following strategic areas:

- Advocacy and communication to make literacy a priority on the agenda of different stakeholders and create a momentum for pooling resources and jointly accelerating literacy efforts;
- Capacity-building for the development of policies for sustainable and empowering literacy;
- Capacity-building for the delivery of empowering literacy programmes of good quality;
- Sharing of knowledge and inspiring innovations to continuously improve literacy policies and practices.

The implementation of this initiative in Africa requires and demands that the following measures be taken immediately:

### By LIFE country governments:

It is unacceptable that in many cases more than half the population of the countries concerned should be excluded from the development and decision-making process. The marginalization of such a proportion of the population constitutes a flagrant violation of their rights. Their lack of opportunity amounts to an enormous waste and acts as a brake on their countries' development.

LIFE is not only a concrete expression of the right to education, which falls within the remit and duties of governments, but it also and above all contributes to the empowerment and autonomy of ordinary citizens while enhancing their capacity to acquire the skills they need to manage their own affairs, improve the quality of their lives and participate in public life.

There is therefore an urgent need to:

- include literacy and non-formal education among the priorities of sectoral education and poverty reduction strategies, which must be duly reflected in an approved national policy document;
- adopt LIFE as a common framework of intervention for all literacy and non-formal education activities, projects and programmes;
- allocate adequate and tangible funding from national education budgets (at least 3%);
- adopt and implement an African Literacy and Language Charter.

Furthermore, LIFE requires that governments enter into a broad coalition with communities, national and local partners in different development sectors, civil society organizations, communities, parliamentarians and the private sector, as well as bilateral and international partners.

### **By civil society and the private sector:**

LIFE needs the support and participation of all sectors and stakeholders, and these partnerships are crucial for defining policies, mobilizing funds, undertaking large-scale interventions and sharing knowledge. The LIFE implementation strategy is a shared responsibility requiring the commitment of NGOs and CSOs to support and complement government efforts while placing a special emphasis on advocacy, mobilization, communication and innovation to meet the expectations of the most marginalized populations.

The ability of NGOs and CSOs to reach out to the most excluded populations and harness their knowledge, experience and commitment must be used to extend the scope of LIFE to maximize government and partners' investment. It is recommended that partner NGOs and CSOs:

- intensify their advocacy with technical and financial partners and governments in order to obtain increased funding;
- participate in capacity-building, the gathering of good practices and the processing and dissemination of information and data;
- monitor the quality of programmes;
- constantly hold all partners and stakeholders to account.

### **By education development partners:**

Although LIFE is an initiative launched by UNESCO, it does not constitute a new and distinct activity, competing with or additional to the existing priority literacy programmes established by countries and their technical and financial partners. It is not a stand-alone initiative distinct from national priorities and plans. It is rather intended as a framework for responding to new requirements and to the urgency and magnitude of the literacy challenge raised by LIFE. There is therefore an urgent need to:

- undertake to review the priorities that have been established according to the strategic areas proposed by LIFE;
- review financing mechanisms and criteria in the light of LIFE requirements;
- consequently review budget allocations in order to place more emphasis on literacy programmes;
- suggest ways of speeding up the implementation of this initiative.

### By the United Nations, in particular UNESCO:

As mentioned earlier, LIFE will contribute to the implementation of UNLD and the MDGs and will effectively help achieve the objectives of other United Nations initiatives, in fulfilling the mission and mandate of the UN System.

This UNESCO initiative is fully in line with the “UN Delivering as One” strategy. There is therefore a need to:

- make LIFE part of the joint programming strategy;
- provide technical support and financial resources for its implementation;
- suggest ways of improving its application.

The relevance of LIFE is recognized and very widely shared. This is the most important and most visible initiative as far as the implementation of UNLD is concerned, in addition to making a valuable contribution to EFA, MDG, DESD and the plan of action of the AU Second Decade of Education for Africa.

LIFE has further enhanced UNESCO’s comparative advantage and its immeasurable role in the creation of literate societies. LIFE offers hope, real commitment and a new vision. There is therefore an urgent need to:

- **support LIFE countries with:**
  - the preparation of framework documents (policy papers, strategic guidelines, situation analyses, country files, LIFE action plans);
  - the process of validation of policy documents concerning literacy and NFE;
  - mainstreaming LIFE into all national and international programmes, initiatives and frameworks such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA), the UNESCO Global Initiative on Education and HIV and AIDS (EDUCAIDS), Sector-Wide Approaches in Education (SWAPs), the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI), the UN Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI), the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF);
  - the preparation of quality inputs/determinants (curricula, learning materials, training, assessment, statistics, monitoring and evaluation, etc.);
  - the development of an integrated monitoring and evaluation system based on both qualitative and quantitative data and information;

- the production and dissemination of communication and advocacy tools;
- **act as catalyst for mutual learning and the exchange of experiences among and beyond the LIFE countries to:**
  - produce conceptual documents, case studies and reports on the impact of literacy actions on global objectives and/or challenges (EFA, MDG, DESD);
  - identify, document and enhance good practices, and promote their application on a large scale;
- **develop strategic communication and advocacy mechanisms which:**
  - ensure that literacy is included on all international and regional policy agendas and addressed at meetings of the AU Heads of State, the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF) and the Regional Economic Communities (REC);
  - conduct strong, international advocacy campaigns and encourage cooperations that place a greater emphasis on literacy;
- **develop a resource mobilization strategy to:**
  - remind technical and financial partners, governments and the international community of the need to abide by their commitments and set a good example to others;
  - mobilize more financial resources for the initiative (at least one million US dollars per country in the first year and 400,000 US dollars per country in subsequent years).

This Strategic Platform was discussed and adopted at the African Regional LIFE Meeting (Maputo, Mozambique, 29-31 January 2008). This meeting was co-organized by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA) and UNESCO Maputo in collaboration with the UNESCO offices in Africa.

For information on LIFE, please contact your nearest UNESCO office, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education (BREDA), or the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

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