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confintea VI

living and learning for a viable future:
the power of adult learning

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**African Statement on the Power of Youth and Adult Learning and
Education for Africa's Development**

1. We, the representatives from 46 African countries at this preparatory Africa regional conference for CONFINTEA VI, declare our commitment to make youth and adult learning and education a right and a reality for all our people. New challenges and demands are made on Africa to master new and old situations and we voice Africa's call to CONFINTEA VI: join and support us in this struggle for lifelong learning, sustainable development and a culture of peace. Such societal change evolves as a product of conscious citizenship and increased livelihood skills. Youth and adult learning and education are the vehicle of such change as they enable youth and adults to actively participate in this development process.
2. This preparation for CONFINTEA VI is taking place in a context marked by a range of new decisions by the African Union such as the Charter on the African Cultural Renaissance, the Second Decade for Education, the Youth Charter and the establishment of the African Academy of Languages, all of which advance youth and adult learning and education (ALE).

General context

3. The serious social and economic crisis we are currently experiencing has energised people whose voices have been silenced and ignored. African leaders are strongly denouncing the artificially-induced crises surrounding the depletion of natural resources and food shortages. Simultaneously, civil society around the world has voiced loud calls for the promotion of democracy, peace, social justice, security and respect of human rights. This denunciation by people from both the South and the North is unprecedented. The historic political change taking place in the most powerful country reveals to us that all social orders are susceptible to challenge and defeat. In spite of all the economic and social effort and progress made by several African countries, the international development indicators depict a bleak picture for Africa. Indeed, the continent is still experiencing extreme poverty, recurrent armed conflict, political instability, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and various forms of exclusion, violence and migration.

4. Africa is the second largest and one of the most diverse regions of the world. The potential of Africa resides in its human, cultural and linguistic as well as its ecological diversity and natural resources. But Africa faces a variety of serious challenges. Three-quarters of the world's poorest people live in sub-Saharan Africa, a situation created and exacerbated by the persisting denial and lack of capacities induced by unequal socio-political and economic systems. It is also a continent challenged by the rapid growth and urbanisation of its population and the need to meet the educational and then livelihood needs of young people. In this context, youth and ALE are the foundation for sustainable development. We are unanimous in our recognition that the development of African capabilities through education and the use of African languages are critical for the realisation of an integrated, peaceful, prosperous Africa. Youth and adult learning and education are an effective tool to develop Africa's people, impart appropriate skills (including vocational and technical skills), knowledge and attitudes among youth and adults in order to enable them to participate actively in the true integral development of their countries and the attainment of the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals.
5. We speak from an African perspective on youth and adult learning and education which is rooted in African philosophies and cultures and in the integration of modern knowledge and technologies. It provides a conceptual and practical framework for developing effective policies, practices, research, partnerships and networking to provide opportunities which benefit and empower both youth and adults. The focus of youth and ALE is on responding both to an individual's needs for learning as well as to the collective learning needs of people living in various communities.

Advances in Africa

Policies and programmes

6. Within the last decade, our countries, with some support from the international community and civil society organisations, have promoted several innovative policies and programmes which have had positive impact on youth and adult learning and education. For example, through the outsourcing/faire-faire strategy governments have developed partnerships with other stakeholders to mobilise funding and increase and improve provision for literacy and adult education. Provision has taken place, from mass literacy campaigns through to effective sector-wide approaches to learning across multiple levels.

Partnerships

7. Multi-stakeholder partnerships between governments, communities, civil society organisations and the private sector have enhanced provision of a wide range of programmes. These endeavours have been supported by technical and financial development agencies as well as international organisations.

Quality provision

8. Responding to the specific learning needs of youth and adult learners, innovative curricula have been devised on diverse topics. In literacy and other adult education programmes the issue of gender has to some extent been mainstreamed and this has had some impact on women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes. Programmes addressing HIV/AIDS have also been promoted and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) have also been integrated into literacy and basic education programme development and into many other development sectors such as health and nutrition, micro-credit, human rights and citizenship using a variety of participatory approaches and methods.
9. Addressing the necessity for more effective assessment, monitoring and evaluation in youth and ALE has led to innovations in the validation of prior learning and the recognition of

knowledge and skills obtained through non-formal education. Several African countries are developing national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). These recognise that it is necessary to establish systems for learning validation which are equivalent to the systems of formal education. This is regardless of where and when the learning occurs and ensures fair equivalence between formal and non-formal learning, enabling learners to access the “ladders” and “bridges” which promote educational opportunities, career paths and lifelong learning.

10. All these advances are localised. They must be up-scaled through effective policies and implementation (which includes implementation plans, funding, capacity-building, partnerships and networking, monitoring and evaluation) within and between African countries. In addition huge challenges remain.

Challenges

11. The challenges to youth and ALE have to be acknowledged and energetically overcome. Our expectations of CONFINTEA VI are that this important meeting will energise our collective mobilisation for the next ten years – in strategic thinking, planning and committing resources to confronting these challenges.

Concepts and data of youth and ALE

12. There is a narrow vision of youth and ALE, often limited to literacy. There is a failure to generate reliable, relevant data and statistics on all youth and ALE in its wide scope. This undermines the development of adequate policy, plans and programmes. A rapid pan-African clarification and standardisation of the terminology and concepts relating to youth and ALE is required to enable comparability of data and to help regional collaboration and the dissemination of information and research. Universities must be re-engaged and strengthened as vital research and practitioner development partners in youth and ALE.

Frameworks for policy, legislation, governance, funding

13. Very few countries have comprehensive policies, legislation and strategic plans related specifically to youth and ALE. The lack of these frameworks weakens the linkages between non-formal and formal education and multi-sectoral collaboration and inhibits the incorporation of African perspectives into youth and ALE.
14. Only a few countries have established effective multi-sectoral governance bodies of youth and ALE to ensure that the endemic marginalisation of youth and ALE is ended. There is a challenge to ensure that such bodies should focus on the whole range of lifelong learning, not just on literacy and basic education.
15. Where decentralisation of governance and/or provision takes place, the problem of inadequate resource allocation at all levels is felt.
16. Education (and particularly youth and ALE) is seldom viewed as an investment rather than simply as an expenditure. Funding of youth and ALE is seldom based on an adequate needs assessment, research data or adequate costing and budgeting. Existing benchmarks for the proportion of the national education budget dedicated to youth and ALE (as a whole or merely to literacy) are poorly understood and adhered to.

Language, literacy, learning, and literate environments and the media

17. In African countries, the role of mother tongues as effective means of communication, administration and learning is not well exploited and often neglected. Very few countries have promoted mother tongues through policy or by resourcing the supply of reading and writing material and other educational resources (including sign language and Braille) which are an essential factor in sustaining literacy, numeracy and a culture of lifelong learning. There is limited effort to use all the writing systems available to the communities. It is very difficult to promote a culture of reading and writing without literate environments.
18. An enabling post-basic literacy environment should be assisted by effective publishing and library policies, including the subsidisation of reading materials for new readers. The role of the general media is also not effectively used in support of youth and ALE.

The role of universities and research institutions in promoting youth and ALE

19. The role of African universities as both research and training institutions is not well recognised, even though it is essential for developing policy-makers, adult educators and facilitators, for researching youth and ALE and also for providing various forms of continuing education and non-formal education for adult learners. Some universities have not been flexible and responsive enough in their role in supporting youth and ALE. Funding institutional development and research at higher education level has been absent, inadequate or poorly sustained.

Personnel and their professional development

20. There is a crisis at the bottom of the field at the level of the literacy, non-formal and adult education facilitators and another (less obvious but of particular long-term importance) at the top, at higher education institutions which are meant to nurture new leaders, specialists and practitioners of adult education. Calls for the professionalisation of adult education practice have been inadequately dealt with. Many adult education practitioner qualifications and training programmes are not recognised and there is a need for better conditions of service, and for the strengthening of the tertiary institutions, both nationally and regionally, that educate and train practitioners, managers and policy developers in adult education.

The partnership between government and civil society

21. The important role of civil society formations (NGOs, CSOs, religious and other organisations) in youth and ALE is inadequately recognised and needs to be actively encouraged and supported. More accountable and transparent frameworks for collaboration have to be developed.

Implementation of programmes in various youth and ALE sectors

22. We acknowledge the need to thoroughly revamp systems, curricula, materials and personnel training and for the achievements of learners to be recognised in a way that effectively articulates with formal certification and continuing education and training.
23. There is a paucity of concrete strategies to improve participation and promote inclusion among diverse groups of youth and adult learners and to set realistic achievable targets, benchmarks and measurable indicators related to resources, enrolments, contact hours, assessment and certification.
24. The advantages of special programmes for out-of-school youth are not fully appreciated and exploited. Neither is the possibility of linking skills training and income generation with various forms of youth and ALE. There is a great lack of appropriate career guidance and counselling services; and life skills should form an integral part of youth and ALE so that learners can be better equipped to manage their lives in the many facets of work, living and learning.

Recommendations

25. Recognising that the fulfilment of the right to education for adults and youth is conditioned by frameworks of policies, legislation, funding and implementation which seek to address challenges facing countries in the region, we therefore recommend the following:

On CONFINTEA VI

26. The CONFINTEA VI conference should be action- and output-orientated. Participating governments should make a strong commitment to revitalise ALE and there should be an action agenda for effective and rapid international, regional and national follow-up. An advocacy group for youth and ALE composed of governments, bilateral and multilateral organisations and the private sector should be set up to mobilise funds for youth and ALE and take seriously the needs of Africa.

Policy and action plans

27. Every country should have a comprehensive national youth and adult learning and education policy and action plans (which also provide a comprehensive language policy and support for the creation of literate environments). This policy should be backed by legislation together with strengthened capacity to give effect to the policy. This policy should take into account strategies for poverty alleviation.

Funding

28. There should be renewed state sector, donor and private sector commitment to sustainable funding of youth and ALE and the current attempts to establish minimum funding benchmarks as a percentage of national education budgets should be intensified while strategies are developed for mobilising funds and for the accountable and transparent utilisation thereof.

Structures

29. There is a need to ensure that new structures, such as the growing establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks, ensure that youth and ALE needs are adequately served.

Inclusion

30. All African states should promote inclusion through youth and ALE programmes that take into consideration the specific needs of minorities, vulnerable and marginalised groups and groups with special needs.

Participation

31. Government, civil society and the private sector should jointly develop concrete strategies for the involvement of youth and adult learners directly in policy and programme formulation and implementation. This should include an effective communication and media strategy.

ICTs and media

32. Africa should capitalise on the digital dividend, on job training, skill upgrading, promoting open and distance learning, and the use of traditional media and the new ICTs. Governments should develop strategies and partnerships which enhance the use of ICTs and media to advance youth and ALE.

Professionalisation of youth and ALE personnel

33. The terms and conditions of service of youth and ALE practitioners and adult education personnel, particularly in literacy, adult basic and non-formal education, need to be urgently addressed. Professional qualifications for adult educators need comparable status to those of conventional educators and trainers. There should be increased training and research capacity-building through the creation and development of higher and other tertiary education institutes (including vocational and technical institutions), ALE research centres and departments for the development of educators and trainers.

Partnerships

34. Governments, communities, civil society organisations, the private sector and development partners should work together to develop and implement youth and ALE policies and programmes.

Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation

35. Governments should develop quality assessment, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms as well as ensure that research and data collection take place in order to formulate and regulate policies and programmes and to evaluate the impact of youth and ALE. They should also develop frameworks for learning validation which are equivalent to systems of formal education, regardless of where and when the learning occurred and ensuring fair equivalence between formal and non-formal learning.
36. Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation should be conducted at the sub-regional and regional level. A peer evaluation strategy that involves civil society should be developed. Regional information communication and management systems should be created to produce and disseminate results and best practice.
37. African states should establish a monitoring mechanism with clear benchmarks and indicators for implementing these recommendations. The results of such activities must be communicated and shared at the regional level.
38. The African region recommends that CONFINTEA VI mandates the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning or sets up a monitoring committee to monitor progress annually in youth and ALE performance according to set benchmarks defined during the conference.

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