



## confintea VI

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

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**CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference in Asia and the Pacific**  
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## **Asian Statement on Building Equitable and Sustainable Societies in Asia and the Pacific**

### **Contexts and challenging issues**

#### **The resurgence of adult learning and education**

1. The new millennium has brought about a renewed appreciation of adult learning and education (ALE) as central in addressing the critical development challenges in Asia and the Pacific. The rapid pace of change, and the rise of knowledge economies and learning societies in a globalised world, highlight the importance of ensuring that all adults have access to high-quality learning and education opportunities.
2. At the same time, unresolved socio-economic problems, in particular extreme poverty, unemployment and exclusion, and the challenges created by internal and cross-border migration, as well as massive environmental degradation, are best addressed with a holistic education framework based on a human-rights approach which promotes social transformation and peace.
3. ALE is a core element of lifelong learning, and contributes enormously to the generation of creativity, innovation and new ideas necessary for building equitable and sustainable societies. ALE is central to advancing individual and community well-being, social justice and gender equality and to propelling productivity and economic growth.
4. ALE has indeed assumed a new urgency in Asia and the Pacific, flourishing with a multiplicity of learning pathways. We hereby reaffirm the critical role of adult learning and education in expanding human capabilities, freedom and choice.

### **Development challenges in the region**

5. Countries in Asia and the Pacific are rich in cultural and linguistic heritage. The region is home to four billion people or 60 per cent of the world's population, living in only 29 per cent of the land area. Differences and disparities are more prominent features than the common geographical space that the countries share. There are, for example, over 3,500 languages spoken in the region, a fact which illustrates the scale of the practical issues involved in emphasising education in mother tongues.
6. Asia incorporates five of the E-9 (high population) developing countries of the world – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. They account for half of the world's population and three quarters of the world's illiterate adults. Ten countries in East Asia and the Pacific and four in South Asia have Least Developed Country status, with high levels of poverty and dependence on external assistance. The region also has the largest concentration in the world of people in extreme poverty, and the majority of the world's two billion people who live on US\$2 or less daily.
7. Access to high-quality literacy and adult learning – especially for women – is a major challenge in the region, attesting to the lack of integrated policies, innovative strategies and adequate financial allocations. In some countries, less than one per cent of the education budget is allocated to adult learning and education, including literacy programmes.
8. Migration and the displacement of populations, language diversity and structural shifts in the economy from farming to industry and services, as well as rapidly-changing labour markets, add to urgent social and individual needs for learning and upgrading occupational skills. Globalisation and the knowledge economy are exerting great pressures to adapt to new workplace environments, and there is a premium on continual upgrading of knowledge and skills. However, despite these pressures, and although there has been an increase in the commercialisation of adult and non-formal education, affordable opportunities for enhancing skills are limited and insufficient efforts are being made to promote adult learning and education in the sub-region.
9. These challenges are aggravated by high population growth, large numbers of non-enrolled children and early primary school-leavers. People living in urban areas have greater access to formal schooling, higher-quality education and non-formal education programmes, although the exception to this is urban slums where the poor are concentrated.
10. While the region is home to newly-emerging democracies, many countries are affected by political instability, conflict and violence.
11. Environmental degradation, whether in the form of rising sea levels or climatic change, has the potential to have a serious effect on the lives and livelihoods of vast numbers of people across Asia and the Pacific.
12. Consequently, the major development challenges in the region are to reduce poverty, to strengthen inclusive and participatory democratic processes based on peace, justice and human rights, and to promote equitable and sustainable development.

### **Advances and constraints in adult learning and education**

13. While progress in adult literacy has been the fastest in Asia and the Pacific among all regions of the world (*Global Monitoring Report, 2008*), overall progress in adult learning and education has been constrained by the lack of specific policies and strategic implementation plans. Quality in adult learning and education is hampered by the weakness of organisational structures, by low levels of professionalisation and by insufficient involvement of higher education institutions.
14. At the same time, several countries in the region are beginning to develop systematic approaches to adult learning and education, guided by a policy framework. Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea have achieved close to universal primary and secondary education and beyond. They now prioritise post-secondary vocational and technical upgrading of the workforce. They need to consolidate and deepen the gains they have made and place adult learning and non-formal education firmly within a progressively comprehensive framework of lifelong learning.
15. There is an increasing proportion of older, retired or semi-retired people, in particular in Central and East Asia and in developed countries in the region. Lifelong learning for the older age-group is assuming new significance, as it prepares them for new types of work and social and community services and leisurely pursuits.
16. A special concern in meeting lifelong learning aspirations in the region is to recognise and take into account the diversity of cultures, languages and economic development and the geographical dispersal of island states. It is important to ensure culture-specific responses, drawing on traditional or indigenous knowledge and values and upholding cultural identities within the global economy. Against this background, adult learning and education, including literacy and learning in mother-tongues, deserve much greater priority in Asia and the Pacific.

### **Recommendations, strategies and benchmarks**

#### **Policy**

17. We acknowledge that adult learning and education can provide people with the necessary abilities, skills, awareness and creative competencies to exercise and advance their rights, to end poverty, to contribute to equity and inclusion, and to build equitable and sustainable societies. We believe that it is urgent for governments to:
  - reaffirm and create full conditions for the exercise of the right to learning and education for all and by all.
  - recommit to a vision of adult learning and education within a perspective of lifelong learning and to confirm the primary responsibility of governments to enact and strengthen appropriate legislative frameworks.
  - ensure that adult learning and education policies are designed with sector-wide approaches and lifelong learning frameworks and integrated with EFA, MDGs, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and national development plans.
  - ensure that adult learning and education policies are implemented through adequately financed programmes which are reviewed and evaluated against pre-determined benchmarks.
  - provide high-quality learning opportunities for all throughout life, to build learning communities and societies.
  - enhance the capacity of relevant ministries to implement policies and to monitor progress at regular intervals.
  - promote international cooperation and policy dialogue.

## **Financing**

18. Adult learning is an investment, and not merely an item of expenditure from the national budget. Significant financial investment is needed to meet the diverse and complex challenges of adult literacy, adult education and lifelong learning for all the citizens of Asia and the Pacific. Therefore:

- governments should recommit themselves to the CONFINTEA V agreement to allocate 6 per cent of GNP to education. Allocations to adult learning and education/lifelong learning, at least 6 per cent of the education budget, should be increased through advocacy to national finance and planning ministries.
- adult education activities which are outside the budgets of education ministries should be recognised, acknowledged and tapped into, and their funding allocations should be increased.
- governments should seek to liberate new resources for literacy and adult education by improving management and accountability, including decentralisation to local community levels for decision-making in resource allocation and spending.
- development partners should, without condition, increase and prioritise aid (including debt swap or debt cancellation) to adult literacy and life skills for youth and adults in ways which are responsive, transparent and participatory.
- development partners should fulfil their commitment to filling the financing gaps in EFA by contributing at least US \$2.5 billion to ensure the achievement of the EFA goal of improving adult literacy levels by 50 per cent by 2015.
- the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) should include adult education, non-formal and literacy component, and ensure efficient and prompt delivery of financing support.

## **Quality**

19. Recognising that individuals and communities must be empowered to face developmental challenges in this diverse and rapidly changing region, and in order to build equitable and sustainable societies, it is imperative to assure the quality of adult learning and education. We therefore recommend:

- the development and improvement of curriculum, materials and pedagogy, in order to ensure the relevance of ALE content in all domains to meet social and individual needs, taking into account different contexts
- building the knowledge base on adult learning and education through systematic interdisciplinary research for innovation, replication and mainstreaming
- that governments assess and develop human resource capacity for professionals in ALE in partnership with research and higher education institutions
- that governments establish and strengthen equivalency frameworks through national quality accreditation and quality standard-setting
- that Governments establish networks and partnerships among ALE providers and supporting organisations at national and local level, to enhance institutional capacities and strengthen professional development
- that UNESCO facilitates international networks for collaboration and sharing good practice among Member States.

## **Participation and inclusion**

20. To build equitable and sustainable societies in Asia and the Pacific requires the participation of as many actors as possible, whether governmental or non-governmental, public or private, individual or collective. To combat marginalisation, poverty and unemployment, the need to expand adults' access to literacy and learning has become ever greater and demands urgent action. Every participating nation is encouraged to develop and implement their own action plan to ensure multi-stakeholder partnerships at national and local levels to secure recognition, commitment and active

involvement of different government agencies/departments, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, local communities, formal/higher education institutions and the private sector in planning, financing and monitoring ALE. We recommend that:

- Member States should establish multi-pronged affirmative action strategies to address inequality issues such as gender, poverty, age, disability, ethnicity, displacement through conflict and migration. There should be a systematic focus on women and disadvantaged groups in all educational policies and approaches.
- Member States establish a national high-level oversight body in the form of an Adult and Lifelong Learning Council or Commission to mobilise and coordinate the efforts of all ALE stakeholders.
- accessible ALE programmes should be created that are free or subsidised by government, with incentives for learning, including paid study leave for ALE.
- strong partnerships should be built between government and NGOs, CSOs, as well as ALE providers with community-based organisations and strengthen the capacity of communities for involvement in planning and implementation of ALE programmes.
- networks of multi-purpose community-based learning centres should be established to form a base for offering ALE.
- ALE should be integrated with income generation programmes and innovative community development projects.
- free assessment services should be provided and labour market information disseminated to motivate potential learners.
- local wisdom, knowledge, methodologies as well as mother-tongues should be valued and applied in ALE programmes.

### **Monitoring**

21. The lack of reliable data and evidence makes it difficult for governments, their partners and other stakeholders to track progress in policy implementation. Adult education is not exceptional in this regard. Regular collection of information, at both national and international levels, will help governments and stakeholders to follow the progress of policy and financing in ALE and lifelong learning. We recommend that:

- Member States should be encouraged to establish and strengthen data collection and information management systems at local and national levels. Such systems should have the collaboration of academia, government and NGOs be developed with a common framework that allows comparisons at regional and global levels.
- governments, working with key stakeholders, should coordinate the mapping of adult learning and education, to generate disaggregated information on the learning needs and appropriate approaches to reach the neediest and most disadvantaged groups.
- a regional and/or global monitoring and quality assurance mechanism, including both quantitative and qualitative ALE indicators, should be developed by UNESCO/UII and implemented to check progress in meeting CONFINTEA VI targets.
- an Asia-Pacific Commission, comprising key stakeholders and experts, should be formed to monitor progress in adult learning and education initiatives in the region.
- a *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* should be produced more frequently, and should include regular national reporting and assessment on ALE.
- a substantial Mid-Term Review should be conducted in 2015 (coinciding with the EFA and MDG timelines) to report on national implementations of CONFINTEA VI initiatives.