



## confintea VI

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

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## From Literacy to Lifelong Learning: Towards the Challenges of the 21st Century A Statement from Latin America and the Caribbean

### General Considerations

***“From literacy to lifelong learning”*** is the great challenge which this Regional Conference poses for us.

In other words, the challenge is to advance from initial literacy – *which is the way in which literacy for young people and adults continues to be understood in many countries of the region* – to a vision and a broader educational provision which includes teaching but also recognizes and validates learning acquired, not only as adults, but also throughout our life: in the family, in the community, at work, through the media, through social participation and by the very exercise of citizenship.

Education is a fundamental right, a key which gives access to other basic human rights such as health, housing, work and participation, among others, while also making it possible to accomplish global, regional and local agendas<sup>1</sup> for development.

This implies recognizing that we face a paradigm which conceives the human being as the subject of education, as someone who possesses singular and fundamental knowledge, who is a creator of culture, a protagonist of history, capable of producing the urgent changes necessary for building a more just society.

This conception not only encompasses formal education but also incorporates and revalues non-formal and popular education, and surpasses the individualistic vision of learning when it proposes the social construction of knowledge in learning communities which promote inter-cultural, inter-generational and inter-sectoral relationships and the protection of the environment.

<sup>1</sup> The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA), the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC), the Iberoamerican Plan for Literacy and Basic Education of Youth and Adults (PIA), among others.

From this perspective, literacy is the necessary but not sufficient point of departure which allows each and every person, in the twenty first century, to continue and supplement their learning throughout life and thus exercise their rights as citizens.

### **The Specificity and Heterogeneity of this Region**

Latin America and the Caribbean is a profoundly heterogeneous region with great specificities, made up of 41 countries and territories, in which some 600 languages are spoken. It is formed by very different realities, including those of education and more specifically of adult and youth education. This diversity between and within countries requires caution when generalizations are made and demands huge efforts in the diversification, elaboration and improvement of policies and programmes for very different contexts and specific groups, taking into consideration differences of age, gender, race, territory, language, culture and special learning needs.

It is also the most unequal region in the world, with 71 million persons living in extreme poverty and a further 200 million in poverty. Educational, political, economic and social exclusion are all faces of the same coin. While education – and within that, adult and youth education – is a fundamental tool for combating poverty and social exclusion, we also recognize that, without undertaking structural changes and without the convergence of other policies, it is impossible for education alone to offer solutions for these same questions.

The diverse socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural contexts of the region pose a broad set of obstacles to literacy and other forms of learning for young people and adults. Among such factors we include unemployment, social exclusion, migration, violence, the disparities between men and women, all of which are broadly linked to structural poverty. This situation has been aggravated recently by the food and energy crises and by climatic changes.

### **Advances**

After a period of stagnation on the part of Governments and international organizations during the 1990s, adult and youth education has, in recent years, achieved renewed momentum in the region. Significant advances have been made at the legislative and policy level in the majority of countries, with regard to the recognition of the right to education and to linguistic and cultural diversity. Literacy plans, programmes and campaigns have been reactivated in the national and international agendas. At the same time, provision for completing and certifying primary and secondary education for young people and adults has been institutionalized, which in some cases has been linked with vocational training programmes.

The provision of non-formal education has grown considerably, covering a diversity of topics linked to rights, citizenship, health, intra-family violence, HIV and AIDS, protection of the environment, local development, social economy and solidarity. Advances in gender parity have been achieved in some countries. There has also been a growth in the attention given to special groups such as migrants and prison inmates. The use of ICT and audiovisual tools has been introduced in the field of adult and youth education, in some cases with investments and interventions by governments and by means of international co-operation.

In a few countries, adult and youth education has achieved important advances in terms of the construction of systems of information, documentation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. We also note a growth in research both at national and regional level in recent years. South-South co-operation has been developed in many of these fields with diverse forms of regional and sub-regional initiatives.

## **Challenges**

In spite of all this, each one of these advances presents, at the same time, new and old challenges. The distance between legislation and policies and what has actually been achieved continues to be great. This implies the need for more participative ways of constructing policies and for greater monitoring by civil society in general and on behalf of the beneficiaries of adult and youth education in particular.

The coverage of these programmes, including those provided by governments, continues to be very limited when faced with the existing demand, and continues also to marginalize rural and indigenous populations, afro-descendants<sup>2</sup>, migrants, people with special learning needs and prison inmates, maintaining or even deepening the gaps rather than reducing them.

The strategy to integrate young people and adults under the same category must not lead us to lose sight of the specificities and challenges of each age group, considering that young people constitute a majority in the region. At the same time, the priority given to educational provision for certain age groups, in general up to 35 or 40 years of age, excludes older segments of the population and thus denies them their right to education and runs contrary to the principles of lifelong learning.

The diversification and decentralization of educational provision requires co-ordination and articulation among diverse actors – national and local governments, civil society, trade unions, churches, private enterprises and international organizations among others.

Gender parity, in various countries, has been established as a necessity, which affects particularly young women from indigenous populations and boys and young men from the English-speaking Caribbean States, from initial education through to university, and also in the field of adult and youth education, requiring the implementation of affirmative action policies and strategies.

There is a need to make better and more sensitive use of the new technologies for educational purposes and to learn practical lessons from the experience of countries which have developed pioneering work in this field. There is also a need to advance further in monitoring and evaluation, particularly the evaluation of learning outcomes, and to disseminate and benefit more from the results of existing research, both to strengthen policies and to improve practice.

It is possible to identify several unresolved issues, among which we include: chronic under-funding for adult and youth education; its great vulnerability in terms of lack of participation, institutionalization and continuity of policies and programmes.

In addition, there is a need to pay special attention to the training of adult and youth facilitators and educators, and to research in this field on pedagogical-didactic frameworks that respond to the diverse contexts and specificities of the field, with support from universities.

From the point of view of its coherence with equity, it is also necessary to reverse present tendencies, by emphasizing the need for quality and relevance while giving priority to local regions, sectors and more disadvantaged groups such as rural, indigenous populations and afro-descendants, migrants, people with special learning needs and prison inmates.

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<sup>2</sup> Specially in Latin America.

## **Strategies and Recommendations**

Recognizing that the fulfillment of the human right to adult and youth education is conditioned by the implementation of policies which seek to overcome the profound economic and social inequities of the countries in the region, it is imperative:

### **Policies**

1. To recognize Adult and Youth Education (AYE) as a human and citizen right, which implies more commitment and political will from national and local governments for the creation and reinforcement of quality learning provision throughout life, guaranteeing that AYE policies take account of cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic and gender diversities and include programmes which are linked to training for decent work, active citizenship and peace, in order to strengthen and promote community empowerment.
2. To promote policies and legislation which integrate AYE into public education systems and guarantee its application while encouraging changes to make the systems more flexible and to adjust standards to goals and challenges. This should be supported by the creation of public watchdogs to monitor policies and the use of resources.
3. To construct coordination mechanisms at national level which help to establish an integrated policy to promote inter-sectoral and inter-institutional efforts which articulate the actions of the state with those of civil society (organized social movements, churches, trade unions, employers amongst others) and make possible a holistic approach in addition to follow-up and social control.
4. To continue seeking approaches which strengthen and guarantee lifelong learning which include literacy and basic education; the promotion of reading and a written culture as the basis for the creation of literate environments, with different tools for overcoming inequality and poverty in the region and for constructing alternative forms of development. In this sense, the valuing of popular and non-formal education is fundamental.
5. To elaborate policies for the initial and continuing training of teachers of young people and adults with the participation of universities, systems of education and social movements, in order to raise the quality of educational processes and to guarantee an improvement in the working and professional conditions of educators and school staff.

### **Funding**

6. To recommend more significant proportions of the national budget for education – at least 6% of the GNP – and guarantee within this budget specific resources for AYE – at least 3% of the educational budget – which allows them to be executed with transparency, efficacy and efficiency.
7. To guarantee inter-sectoral resources – national and international, from public and private funds – for plans, programmes and projects of AYE which include a gender perspective and recognition of diversity, which make possible the development of affirmative action policies and the funding of studies which demonstrate the social and economic cost of the low levels of education among large sections of the population.

### **Tools**

8. To develop policies which support research and the systematization of educational experiences and promote the dissemination of knowledge, documentation and the circulation of relevant practices of AYE. Reinforce Latin American and Caribbean research networks in AYE.

9. To develop a system of evaluation, reporting, registering and monitoring with international parameters to enable the formulation of policies based on the evaluation of processes, systems and methods which guarantee certification, accreditation and recognition of knowledge and skills.
10. To initiate the inter-sectoral and inter-institutional design and development of written materials in mother tongues which reflect the cultural diversity of peoples.

### **Inclusion**

11. To design policies which favour an inclusive education with equity of gender and quality which encompass the specificities of diverse groups, particularly indigenous people, people of afro-descendants, migrants, rural populations, prison inmates and people with special learning needs.

### **Participation**

12. To promote greater participation, in particular of youth and adult learners, and cooperation between civil society, the private sector and different state organs, through the promotion and strengthening of the concept of horizontal cooperation between countries as well as strengthening international cooperation in favour of AYE.
13. To propose that UNESCO takes a central and relevant role in guaranteeing the right to education and, in particular, coordinates the goals established in international conferences and monitors the achievements.