



UNESCO

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China

UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global
Literacy

**Addressing Literacy Challenges in East Asia, Southeast
Asia, and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and
Promoting Innovative Approaches**

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Report of the Conference

Key Partners

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China; Chinese National Commission for UNESCO; UNESCO Headquarters, UNLD Coordination Unit; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL); UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok; UNESCO Beijing Office; UNESCO Apia Office; UNESCO Hanoi Office; UNESCO Jakarta Office; UNESCO Phnom Penh Office.

This report was prepared by Ms Cynthia Bautista, main rapporteur of the Conference.

Contact address:

UNESCO Headquarters
United Nations Literacy Decade Coordination Unit
Tel.: +33 1 45 68 17 95
Fax: +33 1 45 26 56 26
Email: litconference@unesco.org

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BACKGROUND

Addressing Literacy Challenges in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches was the second of a series of UNESCO Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy organized within the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE). The Regional Conference organized in Beijing was a landmark meeting of policy makers and representatives of civil society groups, private providers, universities and research institutes, donors, and practitioners from East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific region.

The conferences are contributing to a major drive to promote literacy at national, regional and international levels as one of the major Education for All goals and as a foundation of lifelong learning. They build upon and extend the work started at the White House Conference on Global Literacy held in New York in September 2006, hosted by Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States of America and Honorary Ambassador for the UNLD.

Within the strategic frameworks of UNLD and LIFE, the Regional Conferences are intended to meet the following objectives:

- advocate for literacy;
- present effective and research-based programs;
- share and disseminate best practices;
- build cooperation among stakeholders; and
- mobilize partners and resources for concrete interventions at the country level

This Conference Report provides a synthesis of the points and key issues raised in the Conference papers, plenary and panel presentations, and roundtable discussions. It is organized into two parts that can each be treated as stand-alone reports. They are as follows:

Part I provides an overview of the region, its literacy challenges and the issues identified in various sessions of the Conference.

Part II presents the highlights of the Conference following the chronology of roundtable and panel presentations in Appendix A.

PART I

CONFERENCE SYNTHESIS

LITERACY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN EAST ASIA/SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

INTRODUCTION

East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific is a sub-region of many contradictions. It is home to the Asian economic tigers (e.g. Republic of Korea, Singapore and Hongkong/Taiwan in China) and to possibly the only economy growing at throttle speed at this time (i.e. China) yet more than a third of the population of countries in the sub-region (e.g. Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Mongolia, including China) are poor¹. East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific is also home to highly urbanized societies (e.g. Singapore, Republic of Korea, Australia) but in terms of magnitude, it has the highest rural population² even when compared to South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa which have higher proportions of people living in rural areas.

In terms of education and literacy, East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific is a study in contrast, with countries clustering around both high and low literacy levels. In the Pacific Islands alone, Tonga and Samoa register a high 98% literacy rate while Papua New Guinea has a literacy rate of only 60%. Within countries, deep gender and ethnic inequalities in literacy persist, with women and minority groups falling behind. Ironically, the sub-region that produced two of humanity's most remarkable proponents of literacy and lifelong learning, way before these concepts figured in international discourses—Korea's King Sejong (1397-1450) and China's Confucius (551-479 BC). A sub-region that achieved the most marked increase in literacy rate compared to the other regions of the world over the last decades³, continues to be home to a sizable 125 million adults who still lack basic learning tools to make informed decisions. Their numbers may be much higher when the inflationary effect of self-declaration in current literacy surveys is corrected and when distinctions are made between basic and functional literacy on the one hand, and between a traditional notion of functional literacy and a broadly defined concept that encompasses other skills needed in a rapidly changing environment (e.g., mathematical/ICT skills, entrepreneurial skills, and critical thinking skills), on the other.

LITERACY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

This section of the Report is a synthesis of the discussions in the roundtables, panel presentations and plenary discussions during the Beijing Conference. The more general

¹ Based on the revised international indicator of poverty of less than \$2 per person per day

² These observations are based on the 2007 World Bank Development Indicators.

³ See Figure 1 in Part II of this Report.

challenges and issues are summarized below. More specific issues are presented in Part II of the Report.

- the continuing hold of a traditional notion of literacy in the region and the need to broaden it in the context of the complexities brought about by globalization, urbanization, and international migration, among other processes;
- the conceptual equation of education with formal schooling or the prevalence of a mindset that marginalizes non-formal and informal education and the need for synergy and articulation of formal and non-formal education at the national level through a system of accreditation and equivalency programmes;
- the relatively low, and even declining state investment in adult literacy vis-à-vis competing education-related concerns e.g. world class research, higher education and the urgency of putting literacy up front in the policy agenda of governments in the region;
- the poor projection or low profile of governments in literacy advocacy and the need for top level leadership in mobilizations for literacy;
- lack of networks/linkages between government on the one hand, and private sector or civil society groups (including religious groups whose numbers are significant in the region), on the other hand, and the need for stronger partnerships, with governments taking the lead responsibility;
- as a consequence of lack of networks/linkages or strong policy advocacy for literacy, a wide range of effective pilot projects that remain small and the need for context-sensitive replication of these initiatives to scale up and institutionalize the programmes;
- weaknesses of existing literacy programmes and the need for more effective programme delivery;
- the absence of literate environments to sustain literacy gains and the need to develop and enrich such environments
- issues of measurement; lack of reliable and valid data and the need for information management and a system of assessment, benchmarking, monitoring and evaluation

ON THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF LITERACY

Conference participants called for a broader concept and expanded notion of literacy that would include other competencies such as communications and human relations, capacities in problem solving, creativity, ICT literacy, and entrepreneurship such as the one in the following table drawn from previous conferences:

Ideal Typical Depiction of Restricted and Expanded Concept of Literacy

Initial Parameters for Comparison	Limited Concept (this concept has evolved through time)	Holistic Concept
CONCEPT	Capacity to read, write and apply simple mathematics to everyday life	Capacity to access, integrate, manage and evaluate knowledge
GOAL	To acquire basic skills that will open windows for achieving one's goals and participating productively in society	To understand and reflect critically on life circumstances, exploring new possibilities and participating meaningfully in society as citizens of nations, the Arab region and the world
COMPETENCIES: Cognitive Dimension	Reading and writing (might include basic math and language)	Reading and writing skills, math and language, technological or ICT literacy, cultural literacy, media literacy
OTHER COMPETENCIES		Non-cognitive dimensions related to core competencies; critical thinking, capacities to act autonomously and understand the contradictions of society (conscientization), use tools and interact with others (e.g. empathy, confidence-building, networking skills)
APPROACH	Technical (focus on dichotomies/levels) independent of contexts e.g. literate/non-literates, functional levels of literacy 1-5	Holistic, integrated, active and embedded in context

The Conference focused on functional literacy, broadly and holistically conceived to incorporate other cognitive and non-cognitive competencies required to develop active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods, and gender equality, within a framework of lifelong learning for which literacy (basic and functional) is the foundation.

It is important to note that the notion of functionality in relation to daily life underlies a holistic view of literacy. By way of a synthesis of the assumptions underlying the presentations, it is important to make explicit the implications of a functionality-based concept of literacy. Such a concept entails

- focusing on the interaction of the individual and the environment in which he or she functions. Such a focus nuances the conceptual divide between illiteracy and literacy. With few exceptions, even illiterate individuals function within their specific environments although their potentials for coping with the demands of its rapid change may be limited. As noted by the panel discussions where the issue of migration and cross-border literacy was raised, functionally literate persons like the Conference participants may be illiterate in a city such as Beijing, where they are unable to communicate in the language of the dominant group;

- If functionality in daily life is key and literacy is not a once-and-for all event, then indicators of literacy have to be reviewed and refined. The need for more qualitative assessments, and for context-specific ways of measuring literacy, for instance, was raised in the meeting. Interestingly, efforts have been expended in this area.
- If functionality or literacy acquisition and use are a process and not a once-and-for-all event, then people can lose their skills through non-use, a phenomenon participants referred to as a relapse to illiteracy. This makes the development of literate environments necessary to reinforce basic literacy skills;
- Focusing on the functionality of individuals in their societies suggests the possibility, if not the desirability of tailoring programmes to learners who fall, accordingly, on the demand side of the equation. A learning-centred/learner- and process-oriented education, a desiderata expressed in most of the panels, implies, among others,
 - context specificity;
 - sensitivity to the culture and the language of the learner, a desired feature elaborated on under programme delivery below, was raised consistently throughout the Conference;
 - decentralized delivery or autonomy; programme responsiveness, diversity, and flexibility;

ON THE CONCEPTUAL EQUATION OF EDUCATION WITH FORMAL SCHOOLING

In several Conference sessions, participants expressed concern over the equation of education with formal schooling. The prevalence of a mindset that marginalizes non-formal and informal education accounts for the public's low valuation of literacy programmes which are associated with the non-formal stream of education delivery. .

The centrality of education in helping turn the state of underdevelopment around, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, bridging rural and urban divides, laying the foundation for a culture of peace in a diverse multi-ethnic, multicultural society; and enhancing identity and cultural rootedness, may be gleaned from various presentations.

Despite the value of education as extolled by powerful individuals in government and non-government sectors, education in the mind of government planners and the public as a whole is associated with school-based learning. Thus, the development of literacy outside schools through both non-formal and informal modes of learning, are relegated to the margins.

If functional literacy and basic education are linked, then it makes sense for the community of literacy workers to worry not only about out-of-school youth and adults

but of issues of access and quality in basic education. A comprehensive literacy approach would therefore include raising the quality of primary schooling as well as programmes for youth and adults. Illiteracy in schools, which accounts for the extremely low competencies of pupils who drop out in the region, is, therefore, necessary to eradicate.

Basic education for all is about achieving a common set of competencies that everyone acquires regardless of the channels or sources a person uses to acquire such education. Underlying EFA and the lifelong learning (LLL) discourse that developed in its wake, is the idea that learning is a continuous process of forming whole human beings—“*their knowledge and attitudes, critical faculty, ability to act. The process should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role and work in the community*” (Faure Report). Lifelong learning encompasses learning at all ages and subsumes informal and formal early childhood learning, school-based learning, adult non-formal education, the interface of adult formal and non-formal education and the informal education that goes on until death. The implications of such a principle are profound and the perception that school-based education is superior to alternative learning streams and modes of delivery no longer viable.

Organizationally, such an approach would need to translate into the integration of formal, non-formal and informal education. Integration, in turn, would entail the provision of mechanisms for individuals to move in and out of different learning streams and, if course, appropriate investment at all levels of this integrated education system, especially in non-formal education and literacy.

Integration of the different streams of education delivery is easier said than done. But the Conference presentations suggest that there are innovative ways of doing this. China, for instance, combines general education and literacy; centralized education and individual learning, modern ICT and traditional methods, literacy education and entertainment; and literacy education in the Chinese language and in minority languages. Interestingly, Yunnan has experimented an effective way of ensuring that non-formal modes of learning are implemented: The head of the formal schools also heads non-formal education in the province.

The integration of alternative learning systems into the education stream would require systems of equivalencies and accreditation (e.g. the Philippines’ and Indonesia’s equivalency system) that are regularly reviewed. The account of an increasing number of out-of-school youth re-entering and succeeding in the formal school system in the Philippines suggests pockets of success that ought to be more widespread when appropriate systems and procedures are institutionalized.

ON WEAKNESSES OF EXISTING LITERACY PROGRAMMES AND EXAMPLES OF MORE EFFECTIVE PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Abstracting from the presentations, among the observed weaknesses of literacy programmes in the sub-region are the following:

- The inability to reach and sustain the interest of the marginalized (migrants, disadvantaged women, urban/rural poor, ethnic minority groups);
- Top-down, centralized budgets and decision-making, and inflexible programmes that discourage innovations on the ground;
- Teacher-centred learning approaches;
- A ‘theoretical’/academic approach to learning with very little practical applications;
- Lack of intercultural and multilingual approaches to literacy, taking into account the cultural and linguistic background of the learners and their specific needs;
- Literacy interventions that are not integrated into the economic, social, and community life of participants and therefore, do not help them acquire and sustain learning and earning skills;
- Lack of support for more focused and evidence-based targeting of disadvantaged groups. Specifically, not all countries are doing disparity analysis and determining the real literacy needs of various disadvantaged groups;

Much of the discussion in the Beijing Conference evolved around effective programmes reflecting good practices that ought to be disseminated. The following is a sampling of such effective practices:

- Targeted and monitored interventions - in this regard, China’s focus on people in rural areas; China, Vietnam, and Thailand’s focus on indigenous peoples and minority groups; the Philippines’ on particular marginalized groups, e.g. out-of-school youth, people residing in remote communities are cases in point;
- Participatory approaches that are embedded in the issues communities face in everyday life - e.g. Action Aid Vietnam’s effective literacy and community development programme among ethnic communities based on Reflect;
- Appropriate language policies, especially in multilingual contexts. Research and the presented effective programmes provide evidence for the observation that learning to read and write in a language one understands and has command of, usually the mother tongue, facilitates the learning process. Mother tongue literacy can furthermore be a transition to learning other languages and literacy acquisition in these languages.

- Flexible, context-based learner-oriented approaches. Examples include the use of learner-generated materials; use of ICTs literacy, especially to reach populations in rural areas; Community Learning Centers, etc.;
- Community-based, holistic and participatory literacy interventions, that start from where the learners are, allow the acquisition of skills central to their lives, facilitate learning by doing; sustain literacy gains through the application of skills to everyday life.
- Decentralized budgets and decision-making or the granting of autonomy to formal and non-formal education institutions to stimulate creativity and innovations.

ON DEVELOPING LITERATE ENVIRONMENTS

How newly acquired literacy skills are used and enhanced by rich literate environments was touched upon in this Conference as well. The Mongolian family-based literacy programme, for instance, points to the importance of families as potential “literate environments”. The provision of learning materials throughout the country by “smart cars” and “mobile teachers” in Indonesia and the Philippines are also cases in point.

ON MEASUREMENT ISSUES AND BENCHMARKING

- The Conference raised a methodological issue regarding current estimates of literacy, which may be inflated because the numbers many countries submit to international statistical bodies are based on self-declaration.
- Agreements on the choice and operationalization of quantitative and qualitative indicators of functional literacy have yet to be made. UNESCO’s efforts in this direction were recognized in the Beijing Conference as good starting points for possible review by researchers in meetings of regional bodies such as SEAMEO.
- Action Aid’s empirically-derived benchmarks based on consultations with key informants from Ministries of Education, a survey of adult literacy programmes, processing and analysis by widely recognized international experts, verification in 47 countries, and distribution to 100 countries were presented and discussed.

ON LITERACY AS GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY, GOVERNMENT-CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS, POLITICAL WILL AND SCALING UP OF EFFECTIVE PILOT PROJECTS

Governments must take the lead responsibility, providing leadership and resources, working in close collaboration with civil society groups.

The visible leadership of governments in mobilizing resources for literacy and education is a significant explanation for the remarkable strides in literacy promotion in countries in the region such as China, Singapore, and the Republic of Korea.

The example of Singapore into an economically developed country shows the importance of literacy and education as foundations for this country's economic take off. In the last 40 years, Singapore had aspired for global literacy, strengthened basic education, and moved on to achieve excellence in various fields of higher education, all the while putting its money where its human resource development aspirations were. This experience is similar to that of the Republic of Korea which has gone beyond literacy programmes to establish lifelong learning opportunities while resolutely raising the standards of its basic and higher education systems to ensure its economic competitiveness.

In various countries of the region, the efforts of First Ladies have contributed significantly to the vigour of national literacy efforts. Encouraging examples from Indonesia and Mongolia were presented during the Conference.

The low priority for education and literacy in the agenda of many governments in the sub-region partly accounts for weak networks/linkages between government on the one hand, and private sector or civil society organizations, on the other. As a consequence, a wide range of effective pilot projects remain confined to small geographic areas. They have not been scaled up, and, therefore, have not made much dent on the literacy situation in the countries where they operate. In this regard, both the links between project implementers and government, and the political will to scale up effective programmes at the national level are imperative.

Cross-border literacy issues emanating from the globalization of labour markets were mentioned as another area of government responsibility which remains a major challenge for the sub-region. Further thought on this issue and the possible need for collaboration among the affected countries [both receiving and host countries] is crucial.

IN CONCLUSION, the Conference raised macro-and micro level literacy challenges and issues in East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It brought together various experiences in effective literacy interventions. Literacy interventions will however be judged by their effects on people who participate in them, whether they have empowered learners, who now have the confidence and the skills to actively participate in the increasingly complex world. The challenge is how to achieve global literacy and ensure that men and women are able to move on, learn throughout their lives, work productively and meaningfully and earn to meet their needs.

The challenge falls squarely on the shoulders of governments in the sub-region first and foremost, and on civil society groups, the private sector and other stakeholders in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

PART II

SYNTHESIS OF CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

OPENING CEREMONY

Master of Ceremony

H.E. Mr Zhou Ji
Minister of Education, China

Opening Address

Madam Chen Zhili
State Leader of the Central Government of China

Addresses

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura
Director General, UNESCO

Mrs Ani Bambang Yudhoyono
First Lady of Indonesia

Mrs Onon Enkbayar Tsolmon
First Lady of Mongolia

Mrs Laura Bush (video address)
First Lady, United States of America, and Honorary Ambassador for the
United Nations Literacy Decade

H. E. Mr Zhang Xinsheng
Vice-Minister of Education, People's Republic of China,
Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO, Chairman of the Chinese
National Commission for UNESCO and President of the China
Scholarship Council

ROUNDTABLE I:

LITERACY POLICIES AND STRATEGIES, COST AND FINANCE, BENCHMARKING, MONITORING, EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Moderator

H.E. Mr Zhou Ji
Minister of Education, China

Presentation of the Main Challenges and Achievements in the Region

Mr Ko-Chih Tung
Regional Advisor for the Asia Pacific Office, UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Mr Kai-ming Cheng
Professor of Education and Senior Advisor to the Vice Chancellor, University of Hongkong

Ms Victorine Kemenou Djitrinou
Education, Advocacy and Campaign Coordinator, Action Aid International

Roundtable Discussants

H. E. Mr Kol Pheng
Minister of Education, Cambodia

H. E. Mr Varakorn Samakoses
Deputy Minister of Education, Thailand

H. E. Mr Gan Kim Yong
Minister of State for Education, Singapore

Literacy Trends: Issues of Definition and Measurement

The Roundtable began with a presentation of the literacy trends in East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Statistics on world literacy reveal that much has been accomplished in this sub-region. Figures show high levels of youth literacy compared to other regions (except Latin America) and a more marked increase in adult literacy rates than in other regions. Nevertheless, much has yet to be done given the magnitude of the problem and the problem with the numbers themselves.

Accordingly, the figures for literacy are highly inflated. In the first place, the numbers provided by many countries to international statistical bodies are often only based on self-declaration. The introduction by UIS of three response alternatives (illiterate/ semi-literate/ literate) to the household literacy question improved the categorization.

Figures might be much lower if further distinctions are made between basic and functional literacy and between a traditional notion of functional literacy and a broadly defined concept that encompasses other skills needed in a rapidly changing environment, e.g. mathematical/ICT skills, entrepreneurial skills, and critical thinking skills.

Framing Literacy Policies and Strategies

Apart from raising issues of measurement and definition, the panel articulated assumptions about literacy that ought to constitute the overall framework for policies and strategies:

- Literacy is not a luxury. In the global era, it is essential to individual survival as a citizen of a community, nation, and the world. Literacy being a fundamental requisite for survival in the 21st century, the persistence of illiteracy should be understood as costly for the future.
- Literacy is not a side dish in a menu where formal education is the main dish. Adult literacy, in particular, is integral to basic education and must be treated as such. This premise would redound to a question of overall resource strategy.
- The goal posts for literacy are changing. Today and in the future, they would increasingly include new skills such as those listed above. Unfortunately, many literacy programs are still focused on learning basic reading and writing.
- Literacy is about knowledge and its application. It is the link between skills and the use of those skills. In other words, the learning process it entails requires applying knowledge and acquiring more of it in the process of application. Without such application and the continuing acquisition of skills central to their lives, a relapse into illiteracy would be an expected outcome. Building and enriching literate environments is thus imperative to help sustaining literacy skills.

The importance of literacy implied in the assumptions above is not matched by government investments in adult literacy. Investments in adult literacy, in fact, have declined. Moreover, with the expansion of formal basic education, enthusiasm for literacy campaigns has waned compared to the more vigorous state efforts in the 1970s and earlier decades. The yet unreached adults who remain illiterate are increasingly found among minority groups living in remote areas.

The overall decline in government support for adult literacy has, accordingly, impelled non-government organizations to fill the gap. The prevalence of low literacy rates among marginal groups, on the other hand, has spurred discussions and debates about how to develop effective policies, strategies and partnerships to reach them.

In 2004/2005, Global Campaign for Education conducted the largest ever survey of adult literacy programmes in order to develop a credible set of benchmarks on adult literacy for international use. The process involved many countries in the sub-region (China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and Japan). The 12 benchmarks have been distributed in over 100 countries and translated into different languages. They have helped galvanise dialogue on adult literacy, moving the UNLD forward.

The roundtable presentations concluded with the following questions to the discussants:

- What does literacy mean in your country?
- Is literacy a high priority in your country? If yes, to what extent can the 12 benchmarks be adopted to your system?
- Do you think the literacy programmes in your country do respond to the changing societal needs?

- Are literacy programmes in your country systematically and regularly assessed so as to measure the impact on specific target groups?

Achievements, Challenges, Solutions: Highlights of the Discussion

The discussants cited the literacy gains their respective countries have achieved. Singapore’s Minister of State for Education, Gan Kim Yong, for instance, spoke of the marked change in the education landscape of Singapore in the last 40 years. This, he said, was spurred by the primordial value accorded to literacy, education and human resource development in the country’s overall bid for modernity and global competitiveness. The single-minded pursuit by the Singaporean government of excellence and high intellectual standards for the city state included enhancing its competitiveness in math and science; improving teacher quality by educating educators and trainers; adopting flexible and differentiated approaches for different students to maximize their potential; and encouraging lifelong learning. The Minister furthermore insisted on the need to decentralize literacy programmes or to give autonomy and flexibility to schools and other venues of non-formal education; the need to develop flexible literacy programmes for groups with special needs,

The gains in Cambodia may not be as dramatic but considering its history, the increased enrolment in functional literacy programmes, the expansion of literacy programmes to the unreached rural poor, and its perceived relevance to the needs of the country as reported by the Cambodian Minister of Education, Kol Pheng, are also notable. Main challenges highlighted for literacy in Cambodia were the need to develop specific programmes for women and the lack of infrastructure for literacy classes; lack of training and delayed payment of literacy teachers that reinforce irregular student attendance of literacy classes.

Thailand’s Deputy Minister of Education, Varakorn Samakoses, addressed the problem of inadequate funding for literacy and proposed the institution of a fiscal measure, much like an earmark tax, that would be dedicated to literacy concerns. He further proposed to award civic prizes for literacy and the promotion of competition among local governments and provinces to address the demand side of literacy (e.g. learners and their motivations), which usually draws considerably less attention than its supply side.

ROUNDTABLE II:

PROGRAMME DELIVERY (EQUIVALENCY PROGRAMMES, CLCs, TEACHING LEARNING METHODS)

Moderator:

H.E. Mr To’omata AP To’omata
Minister of Education, Sports, and Culture, Samoa

Presentation of the Main Challenges and Achievements in the Sub-Region:

Mr Cliff Meyers
Regional Advisor for Education, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office

Mrs Carolina Guerrero
Director, Bureau for Alternative Learning Systems, Philippine Department of Education,
Philippines and Commissioner, UNESCO National Commission (Committee on
Education)

Mr Kiichi Oyasu
Programme Specialist in Literacy, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok

Ms Ella Yulaelawati
Director of Equivalency Education, Directorate for Non-formal and Informal Education,
Indonesian Ministry of National Education

Roundtable Discussants

H.E. Mr Victor Soares
Vice-Minister of Education, Timor Leste

H.E. Mr Dang Huynh Mai
Vice-Minister of Education, Vietnam

H.E. Mr Chan Nyein
Minister of Education, Myanmar

H.E. Mr Dato' Si Hishammuddin Hussein
Minister of Education, Malaysia

The aim of roundtable II was to examine ways to achieve sustainable literacy skills by focusing on four questions:

- Curriculum and material development: How to best adapt them to the diverse needs of the learners?
- Teaching processes: What approach should be used for children and adults? How should pedagogical approaches deal with the diverse needs of learners?
- Community Learning Centers (CLC): How do CLCs best meet the needs of the communities?
- Equivalency programme: How should delivery mechanisms and the monitoring and evaluation of learners be organized for different age-groups?

Curriculum and Materials for Diverse Learners: Shifting Discourse

Drawing from the work of Brian Street (1999 and 2000), UNICEF'S regional advisor for education, Cliff Meyers, noted a general shift in the understanding of literacy from an 'autonomous' to a more 'ideological' model. Accordingly, the autonomous model, which is associated with the traditional view, sees literacy as a discrete set of hierarchical skills and competencies that is the same for all literates.

In contrast, the ideological model views literacy as shaped by personal and social contexts and purposes. Literacy acquisition is based on the practical skills and knowledge needed by the learners. It ought to teach learners how to use literacy skills for keeping their financial records, and writing letters, etc. The ideological model is oriented towards the learner. Moreover, it assumes that learners could develop multiple literacies embedded in the various demands of everyday life.

Meyers further noted that the ideological model underpins participatory approaches to literacy. He cited three examples of innovative approaches to literacy material development: one adopted in Papua New Guinea which takes into account the multilingual context of the country; another in Thailand that utilized learner-generated materials; and one in China, using IT and enabling learners to develop their own web pages for community-based projects and to report and share their work with other schools in the Internet.

Culturally-sensitive and Participatory Approach to Curriculum/Materials Development and Teaching: the Case of Indigenous Peoples

Focusing on literacy among indigenous communities, the Philippines' Alternative Learning System Director Carolina Guerrero stressed the need to go beyond indigenizing existing mainstream curricula by simply using names of indigenous peoples in existing literacy materials. Culturally-sensitive curriculum development entails recognition of the worldviews and knowledge of indigenous peoples - in short, a holistic understanding and taking into account of the living conditions of indigenous peoples.

Guerrero reiterated the literacy goal of producing functionally literate individuals who are able to communicate effectively, solve problems creatively, and critically, use resources productively and sustainably, develop a sense of self and community, and expand worldviews.

Achieving these goals, according to Guerrero, is difficult and quite tedious. For one, it demands a series of consultations with and active engagement of the indigenous communities and other stakeholders in curriculum development. Even as the consultations are proceeding, literacy workers are expected to identify the core areas (i.e., family life, health, sanitation and nutrition; civic consciousness; economics and income; and the environment) and core messages, to match these with desired learning outcomes, to conduct national fora with greater participation of indigenous peoples, and to validate the new curriculum with other stakeholders.

Guerrero further explained that an equally challenging consultation process was needed in the development of prototype teaching-learning materials. Moreover, Guerrero advocated the use of the mother tongue as basis of instruction and lifeskills- and rights-based approaches.

On Community Learning Centers (CLC)

UNESCO Programme specialist Kiichi Oyasu began his discussion of CLCs by reiterating the premise that literacy acquisition is inseparable from its context as illustrated below. He proceeded to describe the CLC as a structured but flexible delivery mechanism for non-formal education outside the confines of formal schools. Located in both villages and urban areas, CLCs are usually set up and managed by local people “for local people”. Developed with the full involvement and ownership of the community, CLCs offer learning opportunities that help people improve their quality of life and promote community development through literacy, continuing education and skills development. CLCs do not require new infrastructure since they could very well operate from existing schools or other suitable venues such as temples and mosques.

CLCs are an appropriate venue for community empowerment and lifelong learning. They integrate community development activities; education and training courses; community library and information services; as well as coordination and networking activities. Interestingly, the functions of CLCs have expanded to include life skills, equivalency programs, mother tongue literacy, and ICT for community empowerment. As to lifelong learning, CLCs expand the time for learning and incorporate issues such as human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development.

Successful CLCs according to Oyasu share the following features: 1) context based programmes, 2) strong community participation, 3) effective resource mobilization, 4) capacity development of personnel and social networks, and 5) the availability of external support for the community.

Instituting a System of Equivalency

From her experience with equivalency programmes that provide multiple entries for Indonesian learners and promote corresponding pedagogical approaches and curriculum development, Indonesian Director for Equivalency Education, Ella Yulaelawati expressed the conviction that an equivalency program (EP) is crucial for achieving Education for All (EFA) and lifelong learning. Taking into account prior knowledge and skills of learners, EPs offer wide flexibility for assessing the learners’ appropriate competency levels depending on their credentials, achievements and experiences. Drawing from the Indonesian experience and that of countries like India and Thailand from which Indonesia drew pointers for designing its EPs, Yulaelawati summarized the characteristics and advantages of equivalency programs as follows:

Table 1. Characteristics and Advantages of Equivalency Programs (EPs)

Characteristics	Advantages
<p><i>Open Education</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumes an open education system, i.e. transfer program with multiple entry points; operating on a system of “open” admission in terms of age, geographic origin and educational background of the learner; and with a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases the probability of meeting the goals of <i>Education for All</i> through greater access to education by disadvantaged groups, traders, migrant workers, potential talents of athletes, artists, etc

learner-focused pacing	
<p>Context-sensitive Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entails life skills-based competency standards and localized curricula while maintaining standards for academic subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The curriculum increases relevancy, is integrated into the community with a sharing of resources and responsibilities; and is cost effective (e.g. no school uniforms etc.)
<p>Delivery System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courses that may be different but legally equivalent to formal education; Pedagogies that combine face-to-face interaction and distance learning using updated materials that tap into technological developments; A modular approach that enhances self-study; and the incorporation of work experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helps the learner find appropriate instructional path/independent learning places high emphasis on communication skills Encourages further study and incorporation of the world of work
<p>Assessment/ Certification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development of a national examination by a State body and systems of joint certification by Agency/State and credit transfer through prior learning assessment and recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> helps learners evaluate their own progress reduces repetition Enhances self confidence and the learners' social status Increases efficiency

Summary of Issues Raised by the Panel:

The following were among the issues raised by the presenters:

- ***On the development of relevant and culturally-sensitive curriculum***

- the need for teachers to be aware of multiple literacies and for greater creativity and innovativeness in developing and implementing curricula;
- the need for enabling legislation to facilitate the development of special curricula for indigenous peoples;
- the need for the adaptation of learning materials and their translation into the mother tongue of indigenous peoples.

- ***On constraints to the effective implementation of programmes***

- inadequate training of literacy teachers due to limited training time. Intensive training is usually packed within two weeks, making it close to impossible to impart the philosophy and necessary skills. Moreover, there is hardly any time for experiential learning by the teachers;

- the need to develop good linkages (e.g. with higher education institutions that could provide training) as well as stakeholder ownership of the programme;
- lack of synergy between formal and non-formal education (i.e. as exemplified in traditional schools indifference to accommodating equivalency programmes), as well as lack of coordination with other sectors, i.e. health and agriculture;
- the less than optimal quality of the non-formal education system;
- the need to develop innovative systems and literate environments for the general public as well as for special publics, e.g. migrant populations;
- the importance of empowering the community to deliver literacy programmes door-to-door in order to reach the unreached and to ensure the quality of the programmes for the unreached.

Contributions by the discussants

Education Vice-Minister Victor Soares shared the *Yo si Puedo* programme of Timor-Leste. Based on the Cuban model, the programme was designed to curb the high illiteracy rates in the country - 46% of the population 15 years and above was illiterate, illiteracy levels being highest among women (54% as opposed to 44% for men) and among those 40 years old and above. The programme is transmitted by television with experienced Brazilian and Cuban teachers as facilitators. Learning materials that are meant to promote group work and a sense of solidarity in the community are made available to the learners.

Soares informed the participants that currently, there are a total of 442 classes opened in each village. Each class is made up of two groups with 12 students each for a total of 10608 students in each phase (3 months). In 2007, Timor-Leste launched the longer *Steps Ahead*, a 6-month programme involving 4 modules. Soares announced that by 2008, Timor-Leste would have a 6-month, 14-module programme that would be linked to a system of equivalency.

Vietnam's Education Vice-Minister Dang Hyun Mai affirmed the premises of CLC and the importance of equivalency programmes. His presentation focused on the education and literacy challenges facing a country committed to basic education and the eradication of illiteracy. Despite Vietnam's successful integration of CLCs into the education law passed in 2005, there are still major challenges according to Mai. In the sphere of formal education, about 100,000 classrooms are still temporary and substandard; not all of the ethnic minority groups living in remote areas are reached by schools and only 70% of the targeted population nationwide has achieved primary education.

As to non-formal education, Vietnam is currently implementing culturally appropriate learning programmes in about 6000 CLCs, a rapid development considering its launching only recently. Mai stressed, however, that more work on the establishment of CLCs and on curriculum and material development is required to achieve universal literacy and basic education.

Myanmar's Education Minister Chan Nyein shared his country's commitment to quality basic education, early childhood education, literacy and the establishment of an evaluation and monitoring information system. He reported a 15% increase in attendance in schools, especially in remote areas, but was concerned about the fact that the attendance rate is still very low in these areas. The national schools enrolment promotion programme that urged all children at the village level to be enrolled in their communities increased the number of children in school. However, up to 15% of them drop out by Grade 1. Moreover, the lack of secondary schools within the reach of children from remote areas has also prevented primary school pupils from moving on to secondary schools.

Several measures, Nyein asserted, have been instituted to fill in the many gaps. For instance, Myanmar created mobile schools. Unfortunately, this initiative is hampered by the limited number of teachers willing to move with the school. E-learning centres were also set up in remote areas but they have been extremely difficult to sustain. There are also attempts to integrate disabled children into regular schools, if not special schools, but in a country where keeping school aged children in school is a major challenge, special education would be expected lag even farther behind.

Interestingly, the non-formal educators in Myanmar have launched a nationwide literacy campaign that is supplemented by student volunteers teaching literacy skills. As in the other countries in the region, such skills are linked to training for income generation and improvements in the quality of life (e.g. health and sanitation training). CLCs have also been established throughout the country in line with the national literacy movement. Unfortunately, it has not been easy to convince villagers to actively participate in the CLCs. A post-literacy programme is now in place to sustain literacy skills but it is far from being fully subscribed to.

Malaysian Education Minister Dato' Sri Hishamuddin Hussein situated Malaysia's literacy programmes in the context of its 2020 Vision: a leading Asian nation in quality human resources by 2010 and among the best in the world by 2020. To actualize this vision, the government resolved to first concentrate on basic education, to reach the unreachable, and raise the achievement of schools to a higher level. Challenging the one-size-fits-all template, the Malaysian government experiments on various approaches to physical infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum and learning materials development.

Although Malaysia has remarkable achievements in the areas of education and literacy, Hussein enumerated issues that still need to be addressed especially among the country's indigenous peoples and rural population in remote areas. They include the unwillingness of teachers to work in these places and the reluctance of parents to allow their small children to stay in boarding schools; the digital divide and difficult access to the Internet in various regions; and the lack of education programmes for populations with special needs like disabled people.

With respect to CLCs and equivalency programmes, Hussein emphasized Malaysia's goal of training learners who are not only imbued with a high sense of morality but are also marketable and employable. Whatever stream the country's children may follow, be it vocational or academic, they should see themselves as marketable. Achieving this goal would require a review of the curriculum and learning assessment tools and the provision of teacher training and physical infrastructure. In five years, Hussein hopes that the gap will be closed; that the playing field for Malaysia's citizens regardless of geographic origins, ethnicity, and class would have been levelled off and that new concepts and perspectives on literacy based on the Malaysian experience would have been incorporated into the global discourse.

Issues raised in the open debate

- Migration was mentioned as an important issue to be dealt with in the literacy debate in the region. The case of migrant workers who may be literate in their own country but illiterate in the host countries where they work is currently being dealt with by the Ministries of Labour or immigration authorities rather than the Ministries of Education. There are, however, existing bilateral agreements, e.g. between the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to educate migrant children in Malaysia along the Indonesian curriculum so as to enable them to reintegrate school in their own country when their parents' labour contracts in Malaysia have expired.

The issue of migration and literacy has also been raised by ASEAN in connection with migration and human security. In Thailand, migrants are seen as having the right to literacy, and therefore, to investments from the Thai government. Singapore has likewise supported literacy training for foreign workers, urging employers in the country to help their migrant workers function in Singaporean society.

Literacy is also an issue for internal migration, namely from rural to urban areas. Cities should take responsibility for the literacy acquisition and education of migrant workers and their children.

- It was also proposed that SEAMEO convene the Ministers of Education in Southeast Asia to discuss possible assistance to migrant workers as well as the feasibility of agreeing on benchmarks for effective programme delivery such as equal salaries for literacy teachers and primary school teachers; a minimum cost of trainees per head; and a share of government budgets of up to 3%.

ROUNDTABLE III:

LITERACY IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT

Moderator

Mr Sheldon Shaeffer
Director, UNESCO Bangkok

Presentation of the Main Challenges and Achievements in the Sub-Region

Mr Kenneth Sumbuk
Pro Vice Chancellor, Linguist and Academic, University of Papua New Guinea

Ms Kay Rader Ringenberg
Literacy Specialist and Multilingual Education Consultant, Summer Institute of Linguistics

Mr Tim Sangvat
Director, Mondulkiri Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Education, Cambodia

Roundtable Discussants

H.E. Mr Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun
Vice-Minister of Education, Lao PDR

H.E. Mr Midion Neth
Deputy Minister of Education, Federated States of Micronesia

H.E. Mr Tevita Palefau
Minister of Education, Tonga

Language and literacy acquisition and the development of literate societies are closely related. In multilingual settings, the choice of the languages of instruction in literacy programmes and in schools has a significant impact on access to literacy and its level of acquisition and use. Learning to read and write in a language one understands and has sufficient command of, usually one's mother tongue, facilitates the learning process and access to literacy in other languages, both national and international.

Language diversity does not impede literacy acquisition, especially if language and literacy policies are appropriate. In other words, linguistic diversity should not be seen as a problem, but as a key factor in designing interventions in literacy and other areas of development. Multilingual education is strongly linked to promoting cultural identities and preserving cultural diversities.

Language Challenges in the Sub-Region

Elaborating on these premises, the roundtable discussions began with an examination of the linguistic situation prevailing in the sub-region. Indeed, East/Southeast Asia and the Pacific is region with high linguistic diversity.

Papua New Guinea tops the list with more than 820 languages for a population of only six million people, followed by Indonesia with about 742 languages spoken in the archipelago's 17,000 islands. In Papua New Guinea, it is notable that 282 of the more than 820 languages have fewer than 500 speakers and 417 languages have fewer than 1000 speakers. High linguistic diversity in countries make literacy acquisition more challenging.

Lessons from the country cases

The following observations and lessons are drawn from the country cases presented in the roundtable:

- The importance of a clear and concrete political commitment through legislations and policies that would ensure and promote the provision of education in the mother tongue/local language of the learners. These are exemplified in:
 - The recognition of the diversity of languages and the adoption of about 400 local languages as medium of instruction in Papua New Guinea;
 - The mention of heritage languages in the Indonesian Constitution, the country's fundamental legal framework and the First lady's efforts to promote local languages towards achieving *Education for All*; and
 - The Cambodian government's policy to uphold the right of every person belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities to use their own language as articulated in the draft 2007 Education law.
- The need for localized literacy efforts amidst the indifference, if not lack of government, community or general public awareness of the importance of multilingual approaches in literacy and education;
- The need for thorough assessment of a specific linguistic situation, i.e. knowing which languages are used in which circumstances by the community, assessing the proficiency of the people in the various national and heritage languages, etc.;
- The need for preliminary language materials;
- The need for different programme models for different multilingual situations. In the case of Indonesia, for instance, at least four possibilities can be distinguished: a 'monolingual' model; a 'majority monolingual' model; a 'semi-bilingual model' and a 'mostly literate' model. Monolingual groups who are totally illiterate in a particular language ought to be treated differently. A programme in Indonesia exists where communities are taught to become literate in three languages (i.e. in Sunda, their mother tongue, in Bahasa Indonesia, and in English). In areas where the majority is monolingual but some members of the population are multilingual, the latter group can be systematically tapped to as resource persons for the others. Semi-bilingual groups, on the other hand, who possess television sets or radios and understand some of the other languages, but are not fluent and cannot fully read and write in that language, constitutes the third group.
- Assessment of the linguistic situation in the community is important to decide on the appropriate model to use. A crucial factor for success of any multilingual education programmes is furthermore the strong support and ownership by the community.
- The need for advocacy and involvement at all levels - community, district, provincial, and national - with 1) technical support from government, international organizations and non-government organizations in linguistic analysis and orthography development and preparation of teaching material, 2)

- training for monitoring and evaluation; and 3) documentation and exchange of lessons learned.
- Developing alphabets for the local/indigenous languages where they do not exist. An illustrative example is the research-based 3-week training programme in Papua New Guinea that was developed to produce a trial alphabet. For this training, people wrote stories in their own languages and a linguist helped design the alphabet. Within a year to 18 months of discussion, tests, and revision, a relatively standardized alphabet developed. Interestingly, this process was also adopted in Indonesia.

Recommendations from the panel presenters

- Ensure greater national and regional support to multilingual education including recognition of the status and work of the National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat; the establishment of and support for a Literacy Task Force (already in progress in Papua New Guinea); immediate review of the National Literacy Policy; the establishment of a linguistic institute; the conduct of regional consultative meetings to share views and support literacy work in the region; and the creation of a regional literacy desk to coordinate efforts within the region;
- Enrich the environment for multilingual education through more reading rooms, multi-media, and local reading materials;
- Provide diverse types of materials (e.g. alphabet posters, original personal stories) and develop flexible pedagogical approaches/methodologies. An example of a methodology for bilingual development in Cambodia is the transition from mother tongue literacy in the first year; to mother tongue fluency and oral Khmer in the next six months; to a transitional period where Khmer rules are explained in the mother tongue for another six months to Khmer and post literacy activities and materials including materials on many topics in the two languages. A dictionary in 3 languages – including English, was also developed for those who would like to expand their linguistic capacities to include English;
- Carefully assess and plan flexible programs that would fit a specific context;
- Provide adequate human and financial resources for literacy and especially for bilingual programmes;
- Enhance synergy and mutual reinforcement among the languages of focus;
- Committed and courageous advocacy for literacy and ownership at all levels of initiatives and programmes to help the citizens of the sub-region eradicate illiteracy; and
- Commit to strong advocacy for promoting linguistic diversity and for ownership of culturally-sensitive literacy programmes at all levels.

Country-specific recommendations from the Ministers invited as discussants:

For Laos

- Conduct more studies alongside curricular reform in both formal and non-formal education to assess the gaps between rural and urban learners;

- Develop more appropriate teaching methods;
- Recruit teachers from ethnic/minority communities to teach in their own villages since they understand the local language.
- Provide a higher budget for non-formal education than the current budget even if it already registers a 3% increase from the previous year;
- Request the assistance of international groups and partners in assessing the literacy situation in Laos and especially in enhancing the government's capacity to serve the literacy and language needs of ethnic groups; and
- conduct study tours/exchange visits and share experiences among countries in the sub-region;

For Micronesia

- Adopt a perspective where multilingualism is desirable in the multilingual contexts of the Pacific, recognizing as well the increasing popularity of French, English, Chinese, and Japanese as international languages in the context of globalization;
- Guard against marginalizing any indigenous language;
- Evaluate the situation of multilingualism and determine whether the country has an appropriate environment to promote it;
- Recommend that countries support each other in the promotion of multilingualism with appropriate transitions from one language to another, especially in light of the transnational movements taking place so intensively.

For Tonga

The small country of Tonga (population=100,000) differs from the other multilingual countries in that almost everyone is proficient in the three official languages of the country. These languages are the identity and values of the Tonga nation. To preserve the Tongan language, the country undertook a UNESCO-supported project to develop a monolingual dictionary.

Since Tonga has achieved a high literacy rate of 98% its literacy challenges seem closer to those of Northern countries. Tonga, for instance, is particularly concerned with IT literacy and how IT interacts with the national Tongan language.

Other issues raised in the open debate

- While policies promoting multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in education may be in place in many countries in East/Southeast Asia and the Pacific, there is a dearth of reading materials in the local languages.
- Highly valued books and reading materials ought to be printed in different languages;
- However, producing such books and reading materials is usually low in the priority list of some countries for which books are considered a luxury, and like other commodities, are taxed. In this regard, there is a need to work with governments to refrain from taxing educational books as long as the publishers are not producing them for commercial purposes;

- The cost of book production is used as a reason for not printing books in general and books in different languages in particular. This cost ought to be assessed, however, against the cost of not producing them to the education of citizens and to the preservation of languages;
- How to promote the minority language when the dominant language is the language of work and media is an issue. To those who argue against the promotion of a minority language, Conference participants would pose the counter argument that there is an even greater need for the mother tongue when learning the majority language is of utmost importance: the former is the language for learning the latter. Moreover, empowerment does not occur in only one language but in several languages, and the mother tongue or first language of the people play a crucial role.

ROUNDTABLE IV:

LITERACY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Moderator

H.E. Mr Bambang Soedibyo,
Minister of National Education, Indonesia

Presentation of the Main Challenges and Achievements in the Sub-Region

Mr Nanzhou Zhao
Director, International Research and Training Center for Rural Development (INRULED),
China

Mr Yoshimory Suzuki
Director, Programme Department of the Asia-Pacific Cultural Center for UNESCO

Roundtable Discussants

H.E. Mr Ulziisaikhan Enkhuvshin
Minister of Education, Mongolia

H.E. Mr Netani Sukanaialu
Minister of Education, Fiji

H.E. Mr Kuk Man Jon
Vice-Minister of Education
Democratic People's Republic of Korea

H.E. Mr Chen Xiaoya
Vice-Minister of Education, China

Urbanization is fast changing the face of East/Southeast Asia and the Pacific. However, the rural population continues to dominate in China, the Pacific Islands, and much of Southeast Asia. It is distributed in rural areas where poverty levels are high compared to urban areas.

In general, opportunities for quality learning and literacy acquisition are often less available in rural environments than in towns and cities. This is unfortunate in light of the high illiterate adult population in such environments and the increasing need for literacy as a tool for rural development. Lack of literacy opportunities often combines with other factors of marginalisation, such as gender, remoteness, and differences of language and culture, and renders rural development a more challenging pursuit. For these and other reasons, the literacy needs of rural people need special attention, with full recognition of the diversity of rural environments and the complexities of development in these contexts.

The Director of the International Research Training Centre for Rural Development (INRULED), Mr Nanzhou Zhao, highlighted the importance of literacy as a powerful tool in empowering rural people for participatory rural development. He began his presentation by raising the need to view literacy as multidimensional and to define it more broadly beyond the acquisition of reading and writing skills. The goal, according to him, is not only to acquire literacy skills but to build literate families in rural areas where

illiteracy rates remain high. Building literate families, in turn, entails a special focus on rural women, of whom the majority is illiterate.

Literacy is a pre-requisite to the transformation of rural contexts. As such, it is deemed not only as valuable in and of itself but as a means to attain collective goals such as poverty reduction, agricultural sustainability, rural development, and, in the case of the rural population migrating elsewhere, enhancing the capacity of migrant workers to function in their host communities.

To link literacy efforts to rural transformation, Zhao called for new projects and practical approaches to the effective implementation of programmes geared towards *Education for All* and the Millenium Development Goals. As mentioned in other roundtables, the desiderata for flexible rural-based literacy projects include 1) appropriateness to the context; 2) involved communities; 3) literacy and post-literacy activities that integrate life skills; and 4) the use of ICT and multimedia in literacy promotion.

In addition to the need for new projects, a major challenge is advocacy for literacy, especially for convincing people to join literacy courses. To meet this challenge, *Mina Smiles* was developed. It is a short animated cartoon film produced by the Asia-Pacific Cultural Center (ACCU) for literacy promotion. The story is about Mina, a 27 year old country woman with a husband and five children who lives in an imaginary rural village in Southeast Asia. Mina and her husband Jai never learned to read and write. The cartoon story depicts not only the day-to-day problems an illiterate rural person faces but his/her psychology as well. The story ends on the happy note that the knowledge Mina gains through a literacy class contributes to the happiness of the whole family.

The original English version of *Mina Smiles* was produced in 1993 by ACCU in close cooperation with UNESCO and literacy experts, grounded in the experience of rural illiterates of the Asia-Pacific sub-region. Translated into 39 languages in more than 30 countries worldwide, *Mina Smiles* has been effective in literacy promotion. It has raised awareness at the level of communities, policy makers, donors, and the general public.

What lessons have been learned in the course of implementing literacy programmes in rural areas? Based on the experiences of INRULED, Zhao reiterated the following lessons, some of which resonate with the insights Suzuki shared in his presentation:

- Linking literacy to the specific development needs of rural people. Literacy ought to be integrated into rural development plans. In fact, UNESCO should consider literacy for rural development as a main line of action;
- Promoting participation and ownership of local communities;
- Developing synergy between non-formal and formal education;
- Combining literacy/basic education, vocational/technical skill development and adult education;
- Integrating education with agriculture and applied sciences and technologies;

- Making appropriate and effective use of both traditional indigenous knowledge and modern information communication technologies;
- Promoting multilingual and multicultural approaches for literacy programmes for social cohesion and community harmony; and
- Sharing experiences and fostering international collaboration.

Country-specific comments from the discussants:

- They resonated with the view of literacy as a broad concept that includes developing critical thinking among learners and the acquisition of skills needed to function in a complex and fast changing world. All agree that literacy is a powerful tool for poverty alleviation and human development.
- The countries represented by the Ministers have integrated literacy into their respective development plans and have launched vigorous literacy campaigns.
- As a consequence, they have made notable strides in the fight to eradicate illiteracy - e.g. in Mongolia, a decline in school drop out rates, the 2003 transition to 12 years of basic education, the establishment of child friendly schools with dormitories, and the use of ICT and distance education. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the universal attendance in middle school by 1972 and in secondary schools by the end of the 1980s, the establishment of distance or correspondence courses throughout the country, the provision of basic education to farmers that combine literacy with training in new farming technology; and the institution of an agricultural centre that provides farmer training. In China, gains in the achievement of compulsory secondary education, the improvement in the quality of teachers, and vocational training geared either for agricultural technology use or for non-agricultural employment in rural areas.

Other issues raised in the open debate

- The need for certification of learners; it is recommended that a certificate be issued at the end of the 6th grade; It is further proposed that the certificate be made attractive to adult learners and a system of equivalency be instituted in all countries in East/Southeast Asia and the Pacific;
- The need to develop literacy assessment tests for farmers;
- The importance of comprehensive programmes and a vigorous government literacy campaign (involving other sectors) at the national and local government levels to ensure literacy acquisition in rural areas; and
- The need to focus particularly on rural women

PANEL 1

LITERACY FOR ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Moderator

Mr Edilberto de Jesus
Secretariat Director, SEAMEO

Presentation of Effective Practices

Mr Ramon Mapa
Founder, People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD)

Ms Hun Phanna
Program Director and Network Coordinator, Cambodian Women's Development Agency

Ms Quiyen Wei
Vice County Mayor, Longsheng County, Guangxi Province, China

Ms Jifeng Pan
Head Mistress, Huanglo Community Normal School, Guangxi Province, China

Literacy is not the only condition for productive work and becoming economically self-sufficient but it is a tool in many kinds of work and frequently a path to better work or formal employment. Since literacy is a key to further learning, any job training or vocational programme will require levels of literacy. However, literacy is an essential tool not only for formal jobs but also for cooperative schemes among farmers, fishermen, small traders, or women. The Panel discussion focused on practices embedded in communities rather than in the formal sector.

Details of the effective programmes presented

- *Community-based Adult Learning and Development Programme
PILCD – People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development
Philippines
Presenter: Mr Ramon Mapa*

PILCD founder Ramon Mapa began the session by sharing the practices of his organization's Community-based Adult Learning and Development Program. This programme aims to address the functional literacy needs of adults in rural and marginalized areas where alternative learning opportunities are lacking. Currently, the programme is implemented in three municipalities in Benguet Province, a major source of vegetables for the country's capital region populated by indigenous peoples. Being poor, people in these areas are primarily concerned with meeting daily subsistence. Thus, they are generally indifferent to training and literacy programmes. In this context, the challenge faced by PILCD from the outset was how to integrate initiatives aimed at developing functional literacy with the livelihood activities in the area.

In response to the challenge, PILCD developed a curricular framework anchored on five key learning areas: (1) Literacy and numeracy - basic and functional; (2) Life skills – interpersonal and intrapersonal including communication skills; (3) Livelihood and productivity; (4) Critical thinking; and (5) Development perspectives - local and global. These key learning areas are integrated into three programme clusters to cater for the different interests of the learners: (1) capacity development of grassroots organizations, including provision of livelihood and income generating skills training; (2) sustainable agriculture; and (3) basic education and literacy. Community-based organizations and/or neighbourhood associations including women’s groups are more inclined to get involved in the first theme; individual and organized farmer groups are more involved in the second theme; and out of school youths and adults who wish to get back to education are involved in the third theme. The programmes are linked to the country’s system of equivalency.

PILCD utilizes a learning methodology based on popular and participatory approaches - the ADIDS model (Activity-Discussion-Deepening-Synthesis). Although learning activities range from the traditional lecture discussion to group-based activities, games, and creative arts depending on the participants learning styles and contexts, “learning by doing” (or the action learning model) dominates the over-all learning process.

To date, the programme has attained some of its goals. The continuing training programme on sustainable agriculture that was initiated in 2003, for instance, has resulted in farmer participants adopting sustainable farming practices such as composting and integrated pest management and, to lesser extent, the judicious use of chemical inputs. The basic education and literacy programme, on the other hand, has produced learners who have passed the Department of Education-administered accreditation and equivalency test for secondary schools.

- *Community Self-prevention against Trafficking of Women and Children
Cambodian Women’s Development Agency (CWDA)
Cambodia
Presenter: Ms Hun Phanna*

Ms Hun Phanna shared her experience with the Community Self-prevention against Trafficking of Women and Children, a programme aimed at preventing the trafficking of women and children through literacy programmes, education, income generation projects, research, and information sharing. Information sharing is done through materials such as narrative story books, learning materials for villagers, legal information, and newspapers in Community Information Centers (CICs). The trained women leaders organise home visits in order to disseminate information on the tricks of traffickers, HIV/AIDS prevention, health, and laws on domestic violence. Focuses on enhancing the knowledge and skills of women, the programme helps improving the family economy and living standards.

Literacy acquisition in the course of the programme has enabled women to access information regarding trafficking. Phanna further informed that its participants have found productive work that minimize their vulnerability to exploitation - 20% in the garment factories; 20% in small enterprises; and 40% in the public school system. The relative success of the programme is partly attributed to the remarkable cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders including public authorities (Department of Education, Youth, and Sports), the Phnom Penh Municipality and the Department of Non-formal Education; community units like the CLC committees, village chiefs, and families.

- *Literacy for Ethnic Women in Rural Areas and Post-campaign Education in the Longsheng County*
Community Education Administration Center, Longsheng Ethnic Minority Autonomous County
China
Presenter: Ms Quiyen Wei

Ms Quiyen Wei, Vice-Mayor of the Longsheng Ethnic Minority Autonomous County, relayed success stories resulting from a vigorous literacy campaign in 119 villages and 10 townships where 76% of the population belonged to ethnic minorities. Geographically isolated and situated in a mountainous area, the illiteracy rates were very high at about 78%. As expected, the poverty situation was staggering. Intervention in these areas took the form of the 1992 UNESCO programme for literacy for women and the 1998 poverty eradication programme through education.

In the beginning, Quiyen Wei narrated, it was difficult to motivate learners. They then felt they had to do a lot of homework. Scattered in different areas, the government found it hard to carry out centralized literacy classes. Subsequently, a more suitable comprehensive system for rural literacy education, including rural community adult schools, was designed. Starting from village-based learning centres, the literacy programmes integrated local singing, DVDs, and other entertaining activities. They also provided for bilingual instruction in Mandarin and the ethnic community's language. Furthermore, illiterate villagers were motivated by the integration of literacy activities into the learning of practical income-generation skills. In fact, the programme offered a wide range of livelihood skills training like vegetable farming and new planting techniques that helped these villagers earn extra income.

The results are noteworthy. Illiterates did not only become literate, they were also encouraged to develop and sustain their newly obtained skills. Literacy rates increased to a phenomenal 97.1% (95% for women) as the neo-literates participated actively in helping achieve universal literacy in their county. Some of the minority women developed tremendous capabilities that included putting up a homestead company or an agricultural base catering to a tourist market.

The case of the Huanglo community was presented as an example. Most of the residents who had been illiterate became literate and most of them have also mastered science and technology skills. Some women are even able to speak simple English. The village itself developed ways to raise earnings with palpable effects on the economic conditions of individual families. In addition, the living standards and level of hygiene in the village improved. It is not surprising, therefore, that the poor population declined by 54000 from 1996 to 2006. The county also received state awards in environmental protection, ethnic women development, and cultural development.

The panel presentation concluded with a reiteration of the importance of embedding literacy programmes in their respective contexts. A context-specific orientation would be sensitive both to the supply- and demand side of literacy interventions. It would be particularly sensitive to the demand-side, which is usually ignored. After all, people need to be convinced that their learning efforts will pay off and provide benefits that would propel neo-literates to aspire for higher levels of literacy. .

Accordingly, teaching people to read, write and comprehend cannot be limited to the confines of papers, modules and books. The situational reality of the learners' immediate community and the larger national and local community is a vast source of learning contents and resources. From this perspective, efforts ought to be made towards developing processes that could facilitate the learners' deeper analysis of their situation and decision to act in their own terms taking into account their potentials and limitations as well as those of the literacy workers.

Other issues raised in the open debate

- Resource mobilization remains an important issue. The cases presented were partially supported by donor institutions with counterpart resources in the form of local government funds or resources in kind, e.g. labour of community members in building CLCs. In some instances, funds are not available for income-generating activities but the neo-literates are taught to write feasibility proposals that eventually attract funding;
- How to assess the literacy levels of individuals and communities is among the issues raised. In the programme in the Philippines, a profile of learners is prepared and a test for functional literacy administered. In China, illiteracy is determined at first blush by the capacity of members of ethnic communities to speak the national language Mandarin;
- The size of the beneficiary group and the need to scale up good practices are related issues raised in the open debate. In the Philippine case, the beneficiaries were confined to about four villages with 3000 to 5000 people; in Cambodia, the programme had reached 3000 children. Of the three cases, the Chinese programme had the largest reach. How to move from pilot projects to scaled-up interventions that would make a dent on illiteracy is a major challenge identified by the panel.
- Responsibility for rural migrants in urban areas or those occupying cross-cultural border communities such as Cambodians moving to Thailand is another key challenge raised.

PANEL 2

LITERACY FOR HEALTH

Moderator

Ms Raquel Castillo
ASPBAE and Asia Advocacy and Campaigns Coordinator, Global Campaign for Education

Presentations of effective practices

Ms Yanti Muchtar
Founder and Director, *Lingkaran Pendidikan Alternative Perempuan* (The Circle of Women's Alternative Education)
Indonesia

Ms Cecilia Serrano
National Coordinator of the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-net Philippines)
Philippines

Ms Gaoping Yu
Vice Director of the Education Bureau, Luodian County, Guizhou Province
China

Literacy is an integral part of working for better health. Whether it is filling in or reading health records, understanding prescriptions and names of drugs, following instructions on medicine bottles or writing a note for an employer, literacy is a pre-requisite not only for users of health services but for health workers as well.

Many effective literacy programmes combine the teaching of literacy skills with instruction in health matters. Such combination enhances the relevance of literacy acquisition and motivates learners to plod on. As the other roundtables and panels, panel 2 underscored again the importance of the local context. The choice of language/s for literacy is deemed particularly important because learners need to acquire literacy skills in their own language before learning the language used in the instructions on medicine packages. Apart from context, gender differences are also considered critical to the development of appropriate literacy interventions.

Details of the effective programmes presented

- *Alternative Community Education with T'boli Women and Community in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato*
PEPE: Popular Education for People's Empowerment
Philippines
Presenter: Ms Cecilia Serrano

The panel opened with Cecilia Serrano's account of community education in Mindanao. Serrano described the difficult living conditions of indigenous T'boli women, having to marry early and beget children right away in compliance with cultural norms.

The T'boli's cultural traditions, however, are not as hard and fast. Accordingly, they have partly given way to mainstream practices in the face of massive immigration of non-T'boli settlers in the region where the T'boli's live. This is particularly apparent in the areas of health and nutrition.

With the influx of migrants, illnesses like pneumonia, dengue, lung infections, and measles became quite prevalent. Exposed to new ideas on health from these migrants, the T'boli women are said to now be caught between the use of traditional health care and modern medicine. In the area of nutrition, they are now straddling between non-traditional cooking techniques like the use of flavour enhancers such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) and the use of traditional spices. Increasingly, Serrano noted the tendency of T'boli women to indiscriminately adopt modern health and nutrition practices. Their lack of access to full basic education services due to early marriage has exacerbated the situation. .

To help the T'boli women critically deal with health issues, e-Philippines pursued a community education programme that integrates literacy and post-literacy activities. This programme aims to do the following:

- Continuously develop the capacities of local educators to conceptualize, implement and manage their own community education programs on health and other issues;
- Implement appropriate learning programs that address the functional literacy needs of girls and women who were not able to finish basic education, providing information and skills on health and nutrition that are linked to family relations and culture;
- Work in partnership with local government units to access resources for community education;
- Develop education programmes (with appropriate curriculum and lesson plans) which support indigenous knowledge systems and beliefs amid T'boli's appropriation of modern lifeways; and
- Contribute to the advocacy for recognition of indigenous knowledge systems towards government's affirmative actions for indigenous education all over the Philippines.

The methodologies used in the community education programme emphasize experiential learning, self-reflections and learning from each other. Among the innovative approaches to literacy and health are 1) the *learning garden*, that will readily make available nutritious vegetables and traditional medicines. The plants (e.g. onions, oregano, etc) in the learning garden maintained by local educators and learners have labels to facilitate reading and writing skills; and 2) the *demonstration-actual practice approach* where the T'boli learn about measurements and mixing through demonstrations and actual cooking sessions. Indigenous food, nutritious ways of cooking, including proper breastfeeding are some of the topics demonstrated under Health and Nutrition.

- *Gender Justice Education for Marginalized Poor Women
The Circle of Women's Alternative Education (Lingkaran Pendidikan Alternative Perempuan-KAPAL Perempuan)
Indonesia
Presenter: Ms Yanti Muchtar*

This programme integrates literacy and life skills into the provision of alternative education. It also aims at enhancing the leadership and income generating capabilities of marginalized women. An important component of the programme is the learner's acquisition of knowledge and skills on reproductive health, child care, psychological (mental health) support and other care services.

Lingkaran Pendidikan Alternative Perempuan-KAPAL Perempuan privileges a participatory approach to alternative education. The Programme facilitators are made to live for six months in a community and gain the trust of its members. Together with the community, they subsequently refine five learning modules—1) social preparation, 2) gender, 3) sexuality and women's reproductive health 4) developing organization (forming grassroots women's groups), 5) women's economic development - that were previously prepared with other beneficiary communities. The facilitator and community members then develop materials for the modules. A workshop is held thereafter to obtain feedback on both the modules and the materials. After integrating the feedback, a workshop involving experts, government representatives, and NGOs is held to ensure the effective implementation of the modules over a period of 1.5 years.

What is notable about the Gender Justice Education for Marginalized Women Programme is its leadership education component. Selected women workshop participants are trained to take over alternative education activities by creating women's groups that serve as health care centres, community centres, and sources of alternative financial resources. Proof of the effectiveness of these groups is the initiation, management, and leadership of two women's schools that became part of the emergency relief activities in the communities during the flood disaster in Indonesia. The Government recognized the programme's effectiveness by allocating a budget for it and by encouraging its replication in North Celebes and Aceh.

- *Literacy for Health Improvement and Poverty Eradication Programme
Education Bureau of the Luodian County, Guizhou Province
China
Presenter: Ms Gaoping Yu*

In China, the Literacy for Health Improvement and Poverty Eradication Programme was developed to improve the living conditions of a large number of illiterate and poor people in the county of Loudian, Guizhou province, in Western China. The area, according to the county's Vice director for Education, Ms. Gaoping Yu, suffers from

desertification and water shortage. The region is also poor. Given the context, the programme is integral to the government's poverty alleviation efforts.

Before 2000, the illiterate population in the Luodian County was a high 33,000, with a majority of women and elderly people. In response to this situation, the Luodian County local government pursued a literacy plan that targeted the promotion of sanitation and health as well as income generation and the acquisition of skills by migrant workers. How to motivate learners was a major challenge. In this regard, the teachers and facilitators walked extra miles to visit families and learn about their difficulties. Some teachers even helped with housework.

Ms Yu concluded that the programme succeeded in raising local awareness of public health, i.e. maternal and children's health and common diseases. Health status in the county improved as clean water and toilets became accessible to each family. The income generation component of the programme, on the other hand, provided cows and other animals in the yard.

Issues and concerns raised in the open debate

The following are among the issues and concerns raised in the general discussion:

- the need to link programmes to government and stakeholders: The Indonesian programme involved academics, and other sectors from the onset, i.e. in the design and evaluation of modules as well as throughout their implementation. However, local government support in the form of revolving funds for the integrated literacy and health programme still leaves much to be desired. The e-Net programme in the Philippines engaged local volunteers in curricular development and the facilitation of workshops. Local elders also served as a major resource. Like the Indonesian case, local government support is still wanting. Support from national agencies like the Department of Health and national efforts associated with the *Education for All* campaign at the local level have also been inadequate.
- the need, in turn, for governments, to link up with and learn from NGOs to make government programmes more relevant, i.e. attuned to the expressed needs of the beneficiaries programme partners on the ground;
- the need to scale up effective programmes and ensure that innovative practices of NGOs are incorporated into policy;
- the importance of using the local languages in literacy campaigns and materials;
- the need to develop literacy programmes, activities (e.g. group discussion on the human body and health issues), and innovative materials (e.g. visuals) that focus on tabooed issues in most parts of the East/Southeast Asia and Pacific sub-region such as sexuality and women's health, e.g. body processes, contraceptive use, sexual relations between husbands and wives; the importance of focusing not only on women but involving their husbands as well was also raised;

- the usefulness of stories in imparting and retaining health-related knowledge and skills;

PANEL 3

FAMILY LITERACY AND INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

Moderator

Mr Grover Russ Whitehurst

Director, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education

Presentations of effective practices

Ms Anjana Mangalangi

Chief, Education and Child Development Programme in China, UNICEF

Ms Sereima Lumelume

Fellow, Institute of Education, University of South Pacific, Suva
Fiji

Ms Batchuluun Yembuu

Director, National Centre for Non-formal and Distance Education, Culture and
Science
Mongolia

Existing research has shown that literate parents influence the literacy outcomes of their children. In particular, empirical data reveals that literate mothers are more likely to send their children to school and support their learning progress. Moreover, such mothers are also likely to encourage children to be independent readers by the act of reading to them. Data further suggest that children of parents with higher educational attainment have tended to have a wider vocabulary and higher aspirations.

The moderator opened the panel discussion by asserting the need for a “three-legged stool” approach to ensure literacy and education for all - an adult education leg, a formal schooling for children leg; and a parent/child interaction leg that facilitates family education. In situations where parents have not had the opportunity to acquire literacy skills, the third leg, an intergenerational approach involving parents and their children, is expected to bear much fruit. An experiment involving the use of tape recorders to record interactions in the homes of 50 families, whose parents had different levels of educational attainment and belonged to different socio-economic groups, reveals that children from homes with educated parents had a wider vocabulary. Interestingly, a similar outcome was also associated with greater family interactions.

Sometimes known as family literacy, an intergenerational approach takes into account different learning styles and needs of adult and child learners. At the same time, activities designed for parents and children together stimulate and motivate learning, with the child obtaining the necessary support of his or her parents. Since parents engage

much more in their children's schooling experience, family literacy also strengthens the links between school and community.

Designing intergenerational literacy programmes entails not only an understanding of the context and sensitivity to language and culture but also materials suitable for children and their parents, separately and together.

Details of the effective programmes presented

- *Literacy on Rights: An Intergenerational Partnership*
UNICEF
China
Presenter: Ms Anjana Mangalagiri

In 2004, school quality was a major issue in China. By then, government had already expressed its vision of schools as venues for "essential quality oriented education". Capitalizing on the government's political statements/pronouncements, UNICEF advocated the adoption of the framework of the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) as a strategy for assuring school quality.

A series of participatory training on what children's rights mean for children as human beings was organized for the local community, government and organizations. The basic understanding is that awareness of children's rights begins in the family. With awareness raised, children are made to observe their own rights by keeping a diary of these rights, what is complying with and not complying with them (e.g. corporal punishment, unsafe school environment, parents' not paying attention to their children, parents discriminating among daughters and sons, etc.). The programme entails the development of a joint plan formulated by children and their parents. Children are then expected to present the plan and monitor their parents' fulfilment of their obligations. The plan describes the rights and duties of the children as well. Targeting 9-11 year olds children (grades 3-6) in 3 western provinces of China - Guangxi, Guizhou and Gansu - the programme hopes to reach 1000 schools and 350,000 children by 2010.

The idea behind the child-rights based child friendly school is the creation of a learning environment that is supportive of inter-generational learning and the improvement of the relationship between children and their teachers and parents. The programme led to parent and teacher interaction, which is not a normal practice in China. The resistance of teachers and parents who are not used to being questioned has slowly weakened.

- *The Book Flood Project*
Vanuatu Literacy Education Project (VANLEP)
Vanuatu
Presenter: Ms Sereima Lumelume

The Book Flood Project was established to address the low literacy rate in Vanuatu, one of the developing islands of the South Pacific. A survey conducted in 2003 by the government revealed very low literacy levels in Vanuatu's rural schools, reflecting inadequacies in teaching and learning and low levels of education of parents.

VANLEP aims at turning the literacy situation in Vanuatu's rural and isolated communities around. Targeting 8 to 10 year old children, it is a book-based, multi-pronged approach to literacy and language teaching and leaning. Through the *Book Flood Project* classrooms were flooded with quality children's books and managed with parental participation. On the assumption that parents are their children's first teachers and the time spent with them is precious, parents were made aware, through meetings and a specific publication of 1) the need to spend time with their children at home and in livelihood activities (e.g. carving) that would forge close family bonds; 2) the parents' role in transferring knowledge and life skills to their children; and 3) the value of reading to their kids and monitoring their progress in school. Since not all parents were literate, their own acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills were built into the intergenerational learning activities.

Lumelume claims that it has not been easy for parents to spend time with and read to their children because of their work. However, the project involved teachers, the closest to the people in the community, in transmitting the key message to parents "*do it today or it would be too late tomorrow*". The project also tapped into a wider network of extended families even as it trained and retrained teachers, increased the reading materials in classrooms, designed classroom spaces better to make them more attractive, and utilized interactive teaching methods. The overall result, according to Lumelume, is a noticeable change in parental attitude as well as a measurable increase in literacy rates.

- *Family-based Learning through Distance Education*
National Center for Non-Formal and Distance Education
Mongolia
Presenter: Ms Batchuluun Yembuu

Most of the illiterate Mongolian adults and school drop outs are found in rural areas. Many of them belong to nomadic families who live in scattered settlements across rural lands. As explained by Ms Batchuluun Yembuu, the National Centre for Non-formal and Distance Education's literacy programme was designed with this specific context in mind.

On the premise that families have at least one literate member, usually among the well-educated population 35 years old and above, the Mongolian government created a *Holt Ger* or family tent with 6 to 7 members. In the summer, literacy classes are held in two places: the community centres where families get together and the home of the head herdsman, which usually has a television and CD player. Literacy facilitators visit the families for face-to-face teaching. They leave homework that is expected to be submitted

upon their next visit. The families then come together (in the spirit of intergenerational learning), with learners learning from the more literate family members and teaching one another. The same intergenerational learning is expected to occur in the winter except for the less frequent visits of facilitators. There is a lot more home work during the winter season.

Beyond the acquisition of basic literacy skills, the programme promotes post-literacy activities. Yembuu asserts that modules and adult literacy textbooks which integrate reading and writing skills into life skills are provided for the neo-literates. Since most rural people in Mongolia have radios and television, the post-literacy modules build on the available ICTs and are accompanied by audio-visual materials (videos, tapes, CD-Roms, radio broadcasts)

As to the impact of the Programme, its noticeable effects include the reduction of illiteracy, the promotion of literacy use as well as the increase in the motivation of parents to keep their children in school. Although more vigorous efforts are needed to reach populations living 50 to 150 kilometres away from the centres, the programme has increased capacity for both distance learning and the production and deployment of various learning methods and tools.

PANEL 4

FROM LITERACY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

Moderator

Mr Abdul Hakeem
APPEAL Coordinator, UNESCO Bangkok

Presentations of effective practices

Ms Myrna Lim
Executive Director, Notre Dame Foundation for Charitable Activities-Women in
Enterprise Development
Philippines

Mr Sutchin Petsarugsa
Instructor, Northern Region Non-formal Education Centre (NRFEC), Lampang Province,
Thailand

Mr Truong Quoc Can
Coordinator of the Education and Reflect Programme, ActionAid
Vietnam

Mr Tianchun He
Secretary, CPC Committee of Higher Education, Yunnan Province and Party Secretary
and Director, Yunnan Provincial Education Department
China

Rapid social, political, economic and technological changes have made it imperative for people to learn how to function in a fast changing society. In this context, literacy conceived in a comprehensive way as the capacity to assess, integrate, manage and evaluate knowledge, is necessary to survive and achieve quality of life. In our fast changing world, it is essential for people to acquire the attitude and ability to learn continuously. Thus, the need to move from concerns with literacy to lifelong learning.

Concretely, this shift would mean using methods and approaches which are well adapted both to the circumstances of the learners and to the new opportunities that are available. Using learning methods that are appropriate to youth and adults, choosing the most appropriate languages for initial and ongoing learning, and building on the experiences of the learner are all ways in which literacy become accessible and relevant. It is also important to link literacy learning with the generic and technical/professional skills which enable learners to find their place in the economic and cultural life of the community and the wider society.

The discussion in panel 4 evolved around four programmes that foster lifelong learning. Each programme was discussed along three areas: the context and targeted programme partners; the vision, strategies, and overall nature of the programme; and its impact and challenges.

- *Alternative Learning Systems: Empowering Out-of-School Children and Youth through Literacy and Education Programme*
The Notre Dame Foundation for Charitable Activities, Inc. Women Enterprise Development (NDFCAI-ED)
Philippines
Presenter: Ms Myrna Lim

One of the major problems confronting the Philippine education system is the large number of out-of-school children as well as youth who leave school or drop out from formal schooling. Every year, an average of 2.5 million children and youth leave school due to poverty. The situation is particularly acute in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. About 200,000 school children and youth drop out of school because of poverty and the violent conflicts in the region. The out-of-school children and youth become very vulnerable to being recruited by rebel forces.

In answer to this situation, the NDFCAI-WED's Literacy and Education Programme provides children and young people aged 10 to 24 from conflict areas access to non-formal education within an alternative learning system, an alternative or parallel path to formal schooling that is not inferior to it.

The programme uses a learner-centred approach; flexible in time and place; and is based on adult learning principles. The acquisition of literacy skills alongside the learning of practical skills is an important underlying principle. The instructional managers, for instance, make sure that practical life skills are integrated into lessons in science and

math. Trained to simplify their lessons, they transmit reading, writing, and numeracy skills even as learners learn how to read electric meters, official receipts, labels, and compute the cost of building materials.

Rooted in the communities where the projects are implemented, the programme works closely with both the national as well as local government offices. A key feature of the programme is the mix of skills and topics tailored to boost the motivation and self-confidence of learners, who generally hail from poor and disadvantaged families. Modules thus include life skills lessons that enhance the employability of learners, develop appreciation of the value of a safe and healthy lifestyle, and promote good citizenship and appreciation of peace in the communities. Coping with emotions, communication skills, problem solving, and decision-making skills are also given emphasis to enhance the capability of the learners to learn and the motivation and confidence to go on learning. Peace education is mainstreamed into all the learning modules. Lim asserts that her NGO is keen on providing neo-literates with opportunities to continue learning in the course of doing. For instance, it provides modules that integrate livelihood and enterprise development.

How effective is the NDFCAI-WED's literacy and education programme? Within 8 months, a 3% decline in drop-out rates was registered. The programme increased the knowledge of those it covered and developed their life and leadership skills, enhanced their self-confidence and goal orientation, helped them develop practical skills for income generating projects, and successfully encouraged some of them to re-enter the formal school system or obtain certificates of equivalence.

A qualitative impact study based on intensive focused group discussions involving learners as well as parents and the community further disclosed appreciation of literacy skills or the new knowledge gained through the programme, access to free education, livelihood assistance, and contribution to peace building and solidarity. They are one in demanding replication of the project to serve more out-of-school children and youth. The scaling up of the Programme to each 100000 learners in the next five years, in collaboration with NGO networks in the region is the challenge facing NDFCAI-WED.

- *Northern Pwo Karen Bilingual Education Project at Omkoi District
Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission, Ministry of Education
Thailand
Presenter: Mr Sutchin Petcharugsa*

According to Mr Sutchin Petcharugsa, the project was conceptualized for 4 to 12 year old children belonging to ethnic minorities who lack behind in educational attainment in an education system only using the Thai language as a medium of instruction.

The project is working particularly with the Pwo Karen, an ethnic minority group of agriculturalists who have little opportunity to interact with the outside world. The

learners from this community have low performance and high drop-out rates when joining Thai-based schools..

In this context, the project aims to develop curriculum and learning materials in the Pwo Karen language as incentive for parents to send their children to school. A more important motivation for the use of the local language as medium for acquiring literacy skills is based on solid research into how children learn. Young children learn best in their mother tongue using materials based on their social and cultural environment. In later stages, the local language can be used to facilitate the learning of a second language, in this case Thai or even a third (English). Learning Thai is imperative for Pwo Karen children to enable their integration into Thai schools later on.

The project did not stop at developing materials in the local language. It helped develop a writing system for Pwo Karen since the community did not have a written culture. Furthermore, it facilitated the Pwo Karen learners' transition to the use of the Thai language through a bilingual curriculum and the building of a bilingual environment in the community centre.

In two villages of Chiangmai, for instance, Petcharugsa relayed that the project began with linguists from the Summer Institute of Linguistics doing phonemic analysis, proceeding on to developing alphabet charts, booklets and spelling guides together with Pwo Karen community leaders and villagers. A writer's workshop was subsequently organized and then brought to the village. The learner-generated materials produced in close collaboration with the Pwo Karen people are then used in the community learning centre.

There is, according to Petcharugsa, much appreciation among the programme beneficiaries of the literacy and life skills gained through the programme. They claim to have grown in confidence because they became literate in their own language and in Thai learned other subjects in the next stages, like all other Thais, in the national language. The project accordingly helped the children follow classes and gain access to new and further learning opportunities.

The success of the project is due to 1) the close collaboration between the project staff, linguistic experts, and the Pwo Karen teachers, leaders and ordinary villagers; 2) government support for the project; and 3) the Pwo Karen people's sense of ownership of the project and its outcomes.

- *Literacy and Community Development*
ActionAid Viet Nam
Viet Nam
Presenter: Mr Truong Quoc Can

Vietnam has achieved significant improvement in the area of education in the last decades. However, the improvement is not equally distributed. About 35% of illiterate

adults belong to ethnic minorities. Of this group, the number of illiterate women is twice the number of illiterate men. Conventional literacy programmes fail to address the specific needs of ethnic minorities and lack relevance of the curriculum and teaching methodology.

Against this backdrop, Action Aid Vietnam developed a Literacy and Community Development programme for poor and marginalized peoples in remote areas, 18 years old and above, of whom women constitute 79%. The programme uses the Reflect method developed by ActionAid and based on Paulo Freire's principles and participatory rural appraisal tools. For instance, it explicitly highlights 1) the need to replace the concept of facilitators with teachers; learners with participants; classes with reflection circles committed to a democratic, participatory, and symmetric relationship between learners and teachers; 2) the ownership of the programme by the participants who, because they are participants have a say in decisions e.g., time of the meeting; and 3) learning is embedded in the learner's active participation in community issues such as healthcare, in problem/issues identification, problem analysis, the search for solutions, action, reflection and adjustment. Connected to this is the role of self-developed materials for reflection

At the core of the programme is the constitution of Reflect Circles by the learners, which meet regularly to discuss the problems they face in their daily life. The discussion focuses on the causes and consequences of the problems, as well as the possible solutions and actions needed. In the meantime, the literacy context (key words, sentences, numbers) closely linked to the discussion is introduced together with technologies and skills proven to be useful to solving different problems. The literacy content emerges from community issues and is consistent with community development activities. This makes the contents relevant, improves the participants' literacy level, provides them with relevant information, techniques and life skills, and improves their confidence, self-organizing ability, and their participation in community and social work.

The Programme has resulted in higher literacy competencies among the more than 12000 participants since 2000. They have had an 80-90% retention rate. Ninety seven participants initiated post-literacy activities. Participants in Reflect Circles were also more likely to move out of poverty than non-attendees. Thanks to their new skills, many participants are said to have become either active members or leaders of local organizations such as women or youth unions. The programme is currently being expanded to 11 districts around the country and its positive impact led to the adoption of its participatory methodology by nine donor agencies and NGOs.

- *Literacy in a multilingual environment*
Yunnan Province Literacy Coordination Council
China
Presenter: Mr Tianchun He

Yunnan is a mountainous province in Southwest China populated by 26 different ethnic minorities. In 1990, one out of four people in Yunnan was illiterate; 66.5% of them

were women. The Yunnan government, through its Literacy Coordinating Council, took on the responsibility of eradicating illiteracy. Mobilizing various fund sources and utilising the resources of primary and middle schools for non-formal adult education, the Council created CLCs to facilitate bilingual teaching; developed literacy facilitators on a progressive basis each year; used multiple approaches to conduct numeracy programmes (e.g. encouraging family members to teach each other); and developed about 100 types of interesting and practical textbooks suited for the day to day needs of a wide variety of learners.

The Programme focuses on illiterate adolescents and rural illiterate women older than 15 years but younger than 50. Since its commencement in 1980, the programme has operated in 129 counties (cities and districts) in Yunnan Province. According to Party Secretary and Yunnan Provincial Education Department Director, Tianchun He, the Programme uses a teaching methodology that integrates practical application into learning. The teaching methodology spans a wide range of techniques (e.g. literacy playing cards) and modes of delivery (distance education as more and more households gained access to radios and televisions).

A combination of Chinese and minority languages is used in instruction and a unified provincial literacy textbook, as well as local textbooks are used. All teachers have at least the Grade A teaching certificate for primary or secondary education, and the student-teacher ratio is 1:10-20. Interestingly, the pool of teachers is supplemented by a system of volunteer teachers for literacy classes. The thematic areas addressed by the programme are the following: mother-child literacy and intergenerational learning; literacy for health; literacy for economic self-sufficiency; literacy and ICTs; literacy in a multilingual context; and from literacy to lifelong learning.

In the past decade, 4.63 million young and middle-aged illiterates have been made literate of which 3.2 million are women. The improvement in the lives of learners, especially women learners, has been documented. After receiving lessons about vegetation, horticulture and animal husbandry under the Rural Practical Skills Programme, for instance, their productivity had increased. Ethnic villagers also said to have acquired knowledge for producing hybrid wheat and other advanced farm products.

The programme's innovative features are: focus of government attention to all levels; wide participation of all social groups; diverse literacy approaches adapted to the context; and bilingual teaching and literacy. The government at all levels now allocates special funds for literacy in a sustainable way. In the next five years, the goal is to help the remaining 500,000 illiterates in Yunnan to become literate.

Issues raised in the open debate:

- For the selection of target disadvantaged groups, not all countries are doing disparity analysis. There is not enough support to identify different poverty levels and groups and the real literacy needs of these groups;

- Many of the pilot projects have not been scaled up. China offers a good example of strong government support for scaling up programmes. The remaining battle in many countries in the sub-region is how to convince policy makers to scale up and institutionalize;
- Many of the good literacy practices that are linked to lifelong learning goals are effective because they are attuned to the ground and are flexible. Both characteristics require decentralized structures, hence the need to highlight decentralization;
- The comments of UNESCO UIL Director Adama Ouane and APPEAL (UNESCO Bangkok) Coordinator and Panel moderator Abdul Hakeem synthesized the conceptual and substantive ideas raised in the panel discussion. Ouane highlighted the centrality of learning as the focus of interest in a rapidly changing and knowledge-based society. Accordingly, literacy (basic and functional) provides the foundation for all kinds of learning. As such, it is the duty of every government and other relevant groups to address the literacy needs of all citizens, particularly the most deprived. There is a need too, Ouane argues, to go beyond the provision of basic skills and extend opportunities for learning further for life and work. But whether one speaks of the acquisition of basic literacy skills or more sophisticated life skills, Ouane asserts that what matters most is the quality rather than the mode of learning. Quality non-formal education is just as good as that obtained from formal schools.

Hakeem cautioned against too much reliance on formal systems only. He argued that the increasing importance of lifelong learning demands cannot be met by even the best formal system alone. To date, schools have not been reconfigured to meet these demands. How to reconcile learning arrangements within and outside the school system, create bridges, and acquire the competencies to keep on learning are challenges that need to be addressed. In this regard, it is imperative to develop synergy of school and non-formal learning and to establish their articulation through accreditation and equivalency programmes.

CLOSING CEREMONY

The Conference concluded with the closing remarks of the Minister of Education of China and the Director-General of UNESCO.